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My dissertation examines how contemporary American writers have revived and revised literary sentimentalism to fashion their engagement with publicized scenes of suffering, to critique dominant narratives of national identity, and—in some cases—to offer alternate notions of publicness built on fellow-feeling. I propose that much American literature of the 1990s and early post-millennium—texts often characterized as postmodern—evinces a profound, yet veiled investment in sentimentalism’s characteristic mode of affective pedagogy. In the texts examined here (including works by Philip Roth, Anna Deavere Smith, John Edgar Wideman, Chang-Rae Lee, Jonathan Safran Foer, John Updike, and Don DeLillo), one encounters a recurrent mode of affective engagement: a suffering figure is spectacularly exposed, sometimes “directly” to the reader but much more often through an intermediary figure whose sympathetic, affective, and/or diagnostic reaction to the suffering pedagogically models ideal affective responses for the reader. One also encounters many of the tropes and topoi characteristic of sentimentalism in the 19th century: a metaphoric linking of domestic, familial spaces for the space of the nation, sustained grief for the lost child, and the possibility of a redemptive community established through fellow feeling. Popular American culture has never set aside its investments in the power of sympathy, the guile of sentiment, and the lure of the endearingly oppressed, but the intertextual recovery of sentimentalism’s pedagogical modes, tropes, and topoi by writers renowned for their sophistication, experimentation, and reflexiveness would seem more remarkable. Indeed, this

resurrection of an aesthetic mode built on feeling goes directly against the diagnosis of Fredric Jameson, who declared famously that postmodern culture is characterized by a “waning of affect” (10). On the contrary, because many “postmodern” writers in the post Cold War period have made use of the performative power of sympathetic witness and reengaged with the nineteenth-century sentimental tradition, I maintain that, if anything, the cultural power of affect has been magnified and inflamed. Thus, this dissertation studies the ways in which many contemporary American writers, writers customarily thought of as literary, academic, and postmodern, have borrowed much from a discourse generally considered popular and debased, have employed sentimentalism’s tropes for their power, modified its affective pedagogy for their political purposes, and revised many of its assumptions about the power of sympathetic witnessing.

I attempt to elucidate these literary reengagements and give shape to my broader inquiry by situating them in relation to scenes of urban crisis, ruin, and unrest—that is, by reading them in relation to the changes characterizing American cities during the post-Cold War period and in the years immediately preceding it. Following the implementation of neoliberal austerity in the late 1970s, a process of deindustrialization and social stratification that had begun in the 1960s rapidly accelerated. During this period, urban life in America was marked by the increasing immiseration of the underclass, the massive influx of new immigrants from Asia and Central America, conflict over scant resources, and an escalation of tensions between the highest and lowest elements in society. Using urban conflict to contextualize these postmodern revisions of sentimentalism is not an arbitrary choice; I follow the lead of the texts

themselves. In each chapter, I consider how these authors bring the power of sympathetic witness and the hope of a coherent social body built of fellow-feeling—bring, in short, the power of sentimentalism—to bear on scenes of urban tension, strife, and ruin. The net is cast wide enough to include the relative banality of anti-immigrant chauvinism alongside the spectacular explosion of the 1992 Los Angeles riots as well as the smoldering urban ruin left in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Though these events and circumstances differ in vast and important ways, each can be thought of as fiery evidence against narratives of America's pastoral unity, coherence, and placid omnipotence. The writers who responded to these sites of turmoil made use of sentimentalism's power and investment in sympathetic projection to engage candidly with the suffering of others, to pedagogically mold the affective responses of their readers, and to suggest the existence of a social body to which both sufferer, witness, and reader belong. However, these texts reveal a persistent ambivalence over sympathy: its nature, its power, and its political provenance. Furthermore, because many of these authors model emotional engagement and witness through the figure of the writer, their scrutiny of the politics of sympathy is inseparable from their performative duplication of it. Thus their ambivalence about the community of fellow feeling goes into the text's performance and reception. Reading these authors for their thematic treatment of America's politics of feeling necessarily leads to reading their modes of sentimental ambivalence performatively. The reading practice governing this study therefore reveals the ways in which these writers entangle the publics they address in powerful sympathetic bonds while nevertheless calling into question what power feeling really has.

PURSUIING UNHAPPINESS: CITY, SPACE, AND
SENTIMENTALISM IN POST-COLD WAR
AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION: SENTIMENT, SPACE, AND CITY

My dissertation examines how contemporary American writers have revived and revised literary sentimentalism to fashion their engagement with publicized scenes of suffering, to critique dominant narratives of national identity, and—in some cases—to offer alternate notions of publicness built on fellow feeling. I propose that much American literature of the 1990s and early post-millennium—texts often characterized as postmodern—evinces a profound, yet veiled investment in sentimentalism’s characteristic mode of affective pedagogy. In the texts examined here (including works by Philip Roth, Anna Deavere Smith, John Edgar Wideman, Chang-Rae Lee, Jonathan Safran Foer, John Updike, and Don DeLillo), one encounters a recurrent mode of affective engagement: a suffering figure is spectacularly exposed, sometimes “directly” to the reader but much more often through an intermediary figure whose sympathetic, affective, and/or diagnostic reaction to the suffering pedagogically models ideal affective responses for the reader. One also encounters many of the tropes and topoi characteristic of sentimentalism in the 19th century: a metaphoric linking of domestic, familial spaces for the space of the nation, sustained grief for the lost child, and the possibility of a redemptive community established through fellow feeling. Popular American culture and politics have never set aside their investments in the power of sympathy, the guile of sentiment, and the lure of the endearingly oppressed. Indeed, the years considered by this

study bore witness to numerous iterations of public sentimentalism: era-defining declarations such as Bill Clinton's "I feel your pain," Rodney King's "Can we all just get along?" the popularity of victim's rights legal discourse, and the rise of what critic Eva Illouz calls "the glamour or misery" fashioned by the rise of talk shows such as Oprah Winfrey's (240). What seems more remarkable, and what this study concentrated on, is the intertextual recovery of sentimentalism's pedagogical modes, tropes, and topoi by writers renowned for their sophistication, experimentation, and reflexiveness. Indeed, these postmodern deployments of an aesthetic mode built on feeling goes directly against the diagnosis of Fredric Jameson, who declared famously that postmodern culture is characterized by a "waning of affect" (10). On the contrary, because many postmodern writers have made use of the performative power of sympathetic witness and reengaged with the nineteenth-century sentimentalist tradition, I maintain that, if anything, the cultural power of affect has been magnified and inflamed in the years since the end of the Cold War. While sentimentalism continued to percolate in the broader culture of postmodernity, the object of this study is the literary work of authors who were at once members and observers of this culture. In Linda Hutcheon's terms, these postmodern works are capable of a "complicitous critique" of postmodernity (13). In other words, while their work sometimes employs the repertoire dominant within the culture to which they belong, it is also often capable of dexterously revising and critiquing its dominance. Thus, this dissertation studies the ways in which many contemporary American writers, writers customarily thought of as literary, academic, and postmodern, have borrowed much from a discourse generally considered popular and debased. As my readings

demonstrate, they have employed sentimentalism's tropes for their power, modified its affective pedagogy for their political purposes, and abandoned or revised many of its assumptions about the power of sympathetic witnessing.

I attempt to elucidate these literary reengagements and give shape to my broader inquiry by situating them in relation to scenes of urban crisis, ruin, and unrest—that is, by reading them in relation to the changes characterizing American cities during the post-Cold War period and in the years immediately preceding it. Following the implementation of neoliberal austerity in the late 1970s, a process of deindustrialization and social stratification that had begun in the 1960s rapidly accelerated. During this period, urban life in America was marked by the increasing immiseration of the underclass, the massive influx of new immigrants from Asia and Central America, conflict over scant resources, and an escalation of tensions between the highest and lowest elements in society. Using urban conflict to contextualize these postmodern revisions of sentimentalism is not an arbitrary choice; I follow the lead of the texts themselves. In each chapter, I consider how these authors bring the power of sympathetic witness and the hope of a coherent social body built of fellow feeling—bring, in short, the power of sentimentalism—to bear on scenes of urban tension, strife, and ruin. I acknowledge these scenes of urban conflict vary significantly in magnitude and in kind. The net is cast wide enough to include the relative banality of anti-immigrant chauvinism alongside the spectacular explosion of the 1992 Los Angeles riots as well as the smoldering urban ruin left in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Though these events and circumstances differ in substantial and important ways, each can be

thought of as fiery evidence against narratives of America's pastoral unity, coherence, and placid omnipotence.

Writers who responded to these sites of turmoil made use of sentimentalism's power and investment in sympathetic projection to engage candidly with the suffering of others, to pedagogically mold the affective responses of their readers, and to suggest the existence of a social body to which both sufferer, witness, and reader belong. However, these texts reveal a persistent ambivalence over sympathy: its nature, its power, and its political provenance. One notes the use of the dilapidated, ruined, or conflict-ridden city as a metaphor for national domestic space, but alongside this dystopian image of the broken social body lies another: the social body conjured by the network of fellow feeling implicit in their texts. This second, more hopeful spatial valance for nation and community can function either as an ideological patch on conflict or a sign of utopian potential. Furthermore, because many of these authors model emotional engagement and witness through the figure of the writer, their scrutiny of the politics of sympathy is inseparable from their performative duplication of it. Thus their ambivalence about the community of fellow feeling goes all the way down, so to speak, into the text's performance and reception. Reading these authors for their thematic treatment of America's politics of feeling necessarily leads to reading their modes of sentimental ambivalence performatively. The reading practice governing this study therefore reveals the ways in which these writers entangle the publics they address in powerful sympathetic bonds while nevertheless calling into question what power feeling really has.

Recovering the legacy of sentimentalism in contemporary culture is difficult in

part because of the problem of definition and categorization. Before the inquiry can begin in earnest, one must ask whether sentimentalism is a philosophy, literary genre, ethical practice, aesthetic transgression, or something else altogether. If, with Shirley Samuels, we define sentimentalism as "a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer," then we have at least started to move away from the term's pejorative valance as an aesthetic judgment of poor quality (Samuels 4). Such a value-free definition, while wide enough to take on all comers, does not give a sense of the complex philosophical ideas that have historically motivated those "cultural practices." Therefore, I use the term sentimentalism to designate an approach to the nexus of ethical, aesthetic, and emotional practices that emerged historically out of philosophical texts from the Scottish Enlightenment, especially the writings of Frances Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, and which then developed as a primarily literary sensibility in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and America. Because this study is concerned with how sentimentalism is being revised by writers roughly contemporary, however, it cannot relegate itself to such a historical definition, and must therefore, make an effort to distill from history a structural sketch of its critical object.

Such a reduction should only be pondered warily, though, for the very dynamic I wish to examine within sentimentalism is its aesthetic and political capacity for mutation. The category problem mentioned above demonstrates the need to think about the cultural phenomenon differently. One important way in which this can be accomplished is to attend more thoughtfully to sentimentalism's spatial implications. Consequently, I

present a theorization of sentimentalism through a threefold process. First, I provide a judicious overview of its historical models—its roots in the Scottish enlightenment as a philosophy, then as a literary and cultural movement, offering along the way special attention to the critical conversation about these aspects of sentimentalism. Second, in the spirit of a Deleuzean preference of genetic over structural or categorical modes of classification, I sketch what I take to be sentimentalism's singularities, that is, those points of orientation to which it tends but which it need not meet. Finally, I suggest the ways in which sentimentalism functions as an aesthetic practice with distinctive spatio-political features and consequences, drawing on some of the foundational theorists of human geography—Yi-Fu Tuan, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Ed Soja—to sketch the developments characterizing American cities in recent decades and to which the writers of this study respond, concluding with a preview of the chapters to follow.

Philosophical Sentimentalism

Let us first consider the philosophical origins of sentimentalism, located by critical commonplace in the Scottish Enlightenment. The reasons for returning to these sources are multiple. First, doing so provides necessary background for my own elaboration of a performative model of sentimental witness. Second, understanding how sentimentalist philosophy spoke back to 17th and 18th century moral rationalist discourses enables some suggestive comparisons between their aims and those of writers working in a set of interpenetrating cultures which have effectively repudiated logocentric meta-narratives ordering them. Lastly, one must understand philosophical sentimentalism's ambivalent investment in human benevolence to appreciate the ambivalence of

postmodern sentimentalist revisers. I offer here a brief overview of the similarities and differences among the three most important theorists of sensibility in terms of how benevolent witness works and what kind of social body is implicitly projected in the thought of each. As I have noted, in eighteenth century Scotland, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, among others, attempted to produce an ethical system grounded in the bodily senses, in part as a repudiation of then dominant discourses of rationalism.

The earliest of these thinkers to put forward his ideas and yet least-heralded today is Hutcheson, who argued for the existence of a "moral sense" comparable to the storied five senses over the course of three treatises: the *Inquiry concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony and Design* (1725), the *Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil*, (1725), and the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections and Illustrations upon the Moral Sense* (1728). Without this moral sense, Hutcheson maintained, "no explication can be given of our ideas of morality" (Essay on Passions 255). The virtue of the idea was two-fold. First, it could avoid rationalist abstractions by grounding morality in the materiality of the body. The sense was not the measure of something external like "pleasures of harmony, taste, or smell," but the sensations it produced were nonetheless real and occurred within the observer "like all pleasure and pain, happiness or misery" (Essay on Passions 257). Second, "moral sense" could explain the existence of altruistic acts in a way that discourses viewing humans as self-interested rationalists could not. "Previous to any reasoning or meditation," Hutcheson reasoned, "we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and sorrow with them in their fortunes...without any consideration of

our own interest" (Moral Philosophy 14). Thus Hutcheson accomplished his de-rationation of moral philosophy by declaring an innate disinterestedness, a universal benevolence often repudiated by his followers, including all of the contemporary authors considered by this study.

Disinclined as the philosophers of sentiment were to elaborate the evidence of this universal sociability based on anything other than the senses, the feelings of cordiality and amiability were proffered as sufficient evidence that humans had been designed by their creator with the law of the heart. The consequences of Hutcheson's specific approach apropos social bodies are twofold and somewhat contradictory. First, he argues the power of affection is, as if it were a force field, inversely proportional to distance. Thus, distant bodies will always experience "weaker degrees of love" in relation to each other than will closer bodies (Inquiry Beauty 161). Conversely, "Love of benevolence, increases as the distance is diminish'd, and is strongest when bodys come to touch each other" (222). Yet Hutcheson also maintains the tendency toward benevolence is universal, "even toward the most distant parts of the species" (218). Indeed, this leads him to maintain that "traces of affection, decency, and moral sense" can be found among the natives of the British colonies, though they were "previously identified as savages" (Moral Philosophy 165). Thus, with Hutcheson, sentimentalism already exhibits some of the features that would prove most lasting, particularly the emphasis on feeling and the use of feeling's universality as a means of arguing (however implicitly) for the universal ethical equivalence of humans.

That David Hume rejected both the idea of a discrete moral sense and the idea of

absolute benevolence—holding that "[m]en are naturally selfish, or endow'd only with a confin'd generosity,"—attests to the wide variation of thought within this school (519). Nevertheless, Hume was deeply influenced by Hutcheson's emphasis on the role of the senses and passions in the production of ethics, with a particular emphasis on the power of sympathy. "The minds of men are mirrors to one another," he declares in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1740), such that the "animating principle of them [all other passions] is sympathy" (365, 363). Jettisoning all talk of a faculty that could deliver absolute moral knowledge while at the same time retaining the senses as epistemological foundations results in a moral system still bracingly skeptical. "Morality," for Hume, "is more properly felt than judg'd of; tho' this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea. [...] To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character" (470-1). It is characteristic of Hume's thought that one might mistake one's feelings for something else, for this kind of misrecognition and muddying of demarcation is precisely what Humean affect tends to produce.

Indeed, in Hume's thought, is often difficult to tell *who* is feeling something, for "[t]he passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts" (605). It is this powerful and transportive quality that allows habits of feeling to form the basis of society for, "[c]ustom and relation make us enter deeply into the sentiments of others," which our imagination absorbs so deeply that it can "operate as if [these passions were] originally our own" (389). Affect's spatial contagiousness explains why, despite his rejection of the

idea of a moral sense, Hume follows Hutcheson in arguing that "those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees" (365). In truth, this emphasis on proximity has a two-fold origin: first, the finite horizon of the senses, for "pity depends, in a great measure, on the contiguity, and even sight of the object" and, second, the dilution of filial blood, for "A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins, better than strangers" (483-484). Nonetheless, cultural likeness seems to be sufficient to affectively suture the feeling subject to his nation, for Hume tells us "[w]e love our country-men, our neighbors, those of the same trade, profession, and even name with ourselves," because "[e]very one of these relations is esteemed some tie, and gives a title to a share of our affection" (352). Cutting loose ethical engagement from the guarantee of a fixed universal moral faculty but not from the vicissitudes and finitude of feeling, Hume's sentimentalism is far more radically skeptical than Hutcheson's and, despite its mellow clubbiness, it strongly suggests an affective ethics may produce many social lacunas for all its contagious power.

The emphasis Hutcheson and Hume placed on passion and benevolent sympathy would prove incredibly influential in Europe and its colonies. Some scholars suggest the *American Declaration of Independence* is grounded in Hutcheson's moral framework, which Jefferson endorsed (Cogliano 142). Hutcheson and Hume also guided the thought of Adam Smith, who years before he wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), penned a treatise foundational to sentimentalist thinking—*Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). The two works at first seem quite different, but actually parallel one another in their shift

from interpersonal microanalysis to macroeconomic projection. Smith retained Hume's emphasis on the power of sympathy but, in Smith's thought, the emotion is rooted in imagination and representation: "the source of our fellow feeling for the misery of others [...] is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer," so that "we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels" (4). This image of sympathetic witness is decidedly not a matter of feeling leaping contagiously from one body to another, as with Hume, for as Smith notes, when we observe the newly-killed corpse of a "fellow-creature" "we put ourselves in his situation, as we enter, as it were, into his body, and in our imaginations, in some measure, animate anew the deformed and mangled carcase of the slain" (99). As he famously and emphatically declares,

Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. (3-4)

In order to function well then, sympathetic imagination must possess great power, both in its attention to the sufferer's case in "all its minutest incidents," as well as its capacity to transform the witness who is engaged imaginatively (22). When Smith argues that, in sympathy, "I consider what I should suffer if I was really you; and I not only change circumstances with you but I change persons and characters" one notes the neat correspondence between seeing a scene of suffering and reading about it (466). Smith's sympathy, the reading of another's torments by which one figuratively enters their body, differs from Aristotelian catharsis in that the reception of another's pain is not primarily a

matter of cleansing or purgation of affect, but a conformation and construction of community through affect.

To understand the social body conjured by Smith's sympathy, however, one must begin by noting that, because it retains rather than refuses the suffering of others, Smith's sympathy also contains within it the danger of excessive vulnerability and intimacy. To many present-day readers, there is a homoeroticism in Smith's account of imaginative consubstantiality, whereby one man enters into the body of others. As Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler write, "[f]or Smith and his eighteenth-century contemporaries, sensibility was an ideology motivated by a logic of affective androgyny, encompassing both the republican discourses of manly virtue and benevolent motherhood" (3). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has noted that the literary figure resulting from this tradition, the famous Man of Feeling, "dramatizes, embodies for an audience that both desires and cathartically identifies with him, a struggle of masculine identity with emotions or physical stigmata stereotyped as feminine" (146). In the context of the present study, concerned largely with works written by men, this aspect of sentimentalism has marked salience, particularly fictions written by Philip Roth and John Updike, whose investments in heterosexual masculinity often sit uneasily with their emphasis on imaginative compassion.

Returning to the historical context, one must note another, related tension within Smith's model: between particulars and generalities. The androgynous interpenetrating power of sympathy and the pleasure derivable from the exercise of this virtue thrives on detail and intimacy, but in a move anticipating the abstracted perspective of commerce he

offers years later in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith sees these interactions and refigurations of personality widening to an impersonal climate of affective ethical interaction, a god's eye view of the network of fellow feeling functioning unbeknownst to its participants, in a passage worth quoting at length:

Human society, when we contemplate it in a certain abstract and philosophical light, appears like a great, an immense machine whose regular and harmonious movements produce a thousand agreeable effects. As in any other beautiful and noble machine that was the production of human art, whatever tended to render its movements more smooth and easy, would derive a beauty from this effect, and, on the contrary, whatever tended to obstruct them would displease on that account: so virtue, which is, as it were, the fine polish to the wheels of society, necessarily pleases; while vice, like the vile rust, which makes them jar and grate upon one another, is as necessarily offensive. (463-464)

Sympathy becomes a basis for interpersonal, social, and even national coherence. The self-regulating affective mechanism Smith evokes is a sublime social body, a machine operating at close to equilibrium conditions, and yet he embeds within the metaphor the threat of social degradation: vice's rust. Moreover, there is no mode of universal sympathetic engagement in this vision; each element, by virtue of its natural affinities, fulfills its role and thus buttresses the health of the whole. The promiscuous imaginative transmutation of bodies noted above, therefore, is illusory, or at the very least bound up with the production of its own limits, without which differentiation of identities would cease to be possible. Smith is pragmatic about affective alliances, which "[t]hough they will never be unisons, they may be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required" (23). But, of course, concords have their limits.

Smith's shift from a mode of projecting vision into another's inner space to a way of seeing from some uninhabitable outer space signals another corollary distancing. Like Hutcheson and Hume, Smith's account of sociability, though grounded less in bodily senses than in imagination, stresses the enervation of feeling across distances. "Let us suppose," hypothesizes Smith, "that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake" (192). What, he asks, would be the reaction of a "man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world [...] upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity" (192)? Smith's claim, when set alongside his treatise's numerous attestations of compassion, is chilling:

If he was to lose his little finger to-morrow, he would not sleep to-night; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his brethren, and the destruction of that immense multitude seems plainly an object less interesting to him than this paltry misfortune of his own. (193)

Smith pits the comparatively petty dread of bodily loss against the power of abstract pity and counts petty dread the victor. While the spatial field of "human society" as he described it in the "immense machine" passage is, though depersonalized, a zone of imminence, plentitude, and self-presence, individual experiences of imaginative engagement are not nearly so capacious and, on a global scale, appear selfish to the point of cruelty. It is as if Smith, having built an enormous pyramid, wants to show it is, after all, composed of nothing but sand. Yet notice that this passage detailing the culpable

indifference of a "man of humanity" is itself written as a call to compensatory pity, a hyperbolic show of cruelty-by-complaisance calling for Smith's own reader to bridge a gap of feeling. This sentimental mourning for the loss of compassionate power is one of the mode's most sustaining tricks, as I demonstrate in later chapters.

Literary and Cultural Sentimentalism

The ideas of these Scottish Enlightenment thinkers helped to bring about what T.S. Eliot called the "dissociation of sensibility" from the late seventeenth century onward (64). As a literary culture, Joanna Dobson argues sentimentalism should be viewed as an "imaginative orientation [...] characterized by certain themes, stylistic features, and figurative conventions [...] that celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss" (266). Of the thematic characteristics of sentimental literature, Dobson writes, "the greatest threat is the tragedy of separation, of severed human ties: the death of a child, lost love, failed or disrupted family connections, distorted or unsympathetic community, or the loss of the hope of reunion and/or reconciliation in the hereafter" (267). A list of sentimental literature's most frequent tropes include scenes of shared redemptive crying, "abandoned wives, widows, orphaned children, and separated families; deathbed and graveyard scenes; [...] fantasies of reunions in heaven [...] and] keepsake imagery" (272-273). Samuel Richardson, whose *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748) epitomized the early sentimental novel, established several of its characteristic gestures, formal devices, and themes: the sympathetic identification of reader across class and gender lines, the epistolary mode, and the

seduction theme. Richardson's novels were incredibly popular and influential works, but they probably disseminated the doctrines of sentimentalism no more widely than had the much earlier essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, whose *Tattler* (1709-1711) and *Spectator* (1711-1712) established the man of feeling—mild, sensitive, and polite—as the proper mode for bourgeois masculinity long before Hutcheson put quill to parchment. Lawrence Sterne promulgated and satirized both the philosophy and mode of masculinity represented by sentiment in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). Here one must note that the British model of literary sentimentalism, broadly speaking, tended to be dominated by men—as authors and as sensitive protagonists. The trend reached its apogee with Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), which seems an extended revision of the type established earlier by Addison and Steele. Mackenzie takes as his protagonist a sensitive creature, full of benevolence, whose innocence is taken advantage of by a hardscrabble London. Mackenzie thus sentimentally mourns the loss of sentimental unity in a manner paralleling Smith's technique in the Chinese earthquake passage. In Europe, the vogue of sensibility is often said to end with the French Revolution, which occurred, according to conservatives like Burke, because of precisely this kind of embrace of passions, a hypothesis partially supported by contemporary studies like William Reddy's *The Navigation of Feeling*.

In America, the French Revolution did not end the culture of sentimentalism; on the contrary, an emphasis on the moral and salutary power of fellow feeling would suffuse American literature and culture for much of the nation's first century. After its

importation from Europe, it gained wide currency rapidly and, by the beginning of the nineteenth-century, sentimentalism had begun to inflect textual production in every sector of early American culture. As Elizabeth Barnes observes in, *States of Sympathy*, her study of the sentimental novel in the U.S.:

Sympathetic identification emerges in the eighteenth century as the definitive way of reading literature and human relations. [...] Examining philosophical and political texts alongside literary ones, we see the extent to which sentiment and sympathy pervade early national culture. In all three [philosophical, political, and literary] genres, sociopolitical issues are cast as family dramas, a maneuver that ultimately renders public policy an essentially private matter. (2)

America's first novel, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), follows Richardson in its epistolary mode, its use of the seduction theme, and quite obviously, its emphasis on sympathy's force. But, whereas, in Europe, men dominated sentimental literary culture, in America, the mode would become intensely associated with women's writing. From the 1820s to the Civil War and beyond, women writers used sentimental forms to negotiate around separate spheres ideology, which held that a masculine public space was counterbalanced by a feminine private space, arguing for social change with critiques based in private feeling. The social causes varied—the temperance movement, the abolition movement, advocacy for the claims of Native Americans—but most of the texts in this tradition placed a heavy emphasis on Christian soteriology and the power of women. Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) uses elements of sentimental tradition with strong advocacy for the role of women and rights of Native Americans. Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), exemplary of sentimentalism in Dobson's

terms, with its broken homes, its tender deathbed scene, and its emphasis on spiritual redemption through misery and suffering, is both protofeminist and moralistically Christian. These writers should not be thought of solely as "exemplars," however, for the work of each emphasizes differing elements within a gradually coalescing sentimentalist repertoire.

Accordingly, I have sought, where possible, to link contemporary manifestations of sentimentalism to specific iterations in the tradition. For example, one strand of the work of Lydia Sigourney, the "Sweet Singer of Hartford," and frequent target for anti-sentimentalist criticism, typifies the death-literature of sentimentalism, particularly the child elegy and the keepsake poem. Her "Death of an Infant," the most famous instance of the child elegy, the conventions of which I link to the work Jonathan Safran Foer, Philip Roth, and Chang-Rae Lee in the chapters that follow. More important to my reading of Lee's *Native Speaker* is the poetry of Walt Whitman. Though he is not widely spoken of as a sentimentalist, Whitman's writing should be understood as much in the context of his female contemporaries as the masculine pantheon of F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941). Like many of his female sentimentalist peers, Whitman wrote a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans* (1842), but his characteristic emphasis on sympathetic witness and affective fusion mark him yet more deeply as a member of this tradition, and it is this aspect of his work I seek to connect with Lee in chapter 3. In that same chapter, I link John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* to the most famous of American sentimentalists, Harriet Beecher Stowe, who employing nearly every distinctive element of the tradition for her particular mix of proto-feminist, Christian

moralist, and abolitionist purposes. Many of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* most famous scenes—the death of little Eva, Eliza crossing the frozen river with Harry swaddled, Tom's death, and Senator Bird's recognition of his own error via feeling—have come to serve as synecdoches of cultural sentimentalism more generally. As Jane Tompkins argues in *Sensational Designs*, Stowe's novel produced tremendous cultural change. Lincoln is said to have greeted Stowe by calling her "the little lady who started this big war," and it was that war which brought an end to America's period of high literary sentimentalism (Hanne 75). Crucial to my study, however, is the claim that the history of sentimental affective pedagogy continues as a powerful force to this day, but before sketching the ways in which it continues to operate, one must examine the reaction(s) against it.

Arguments over Sentimentalism

A reaction against sympathy's intimate intercourse of souls has been observed in early nineteenth-century American literature such as Hawthorne's attack on women "scribblers," but it is only in the second half of the nineteenth century with the rise of the realist aesthetic that sentimentalism fell into widespread critical disfavor (Boudreau 7-10). The reasons for this reaction against sentimentalism's embrace of shared affect are, of course, politically and aesthetically complex. Elizabeth White Nelson argues the "devastation of the Civil War called into question the persuasiveness of sentimental rhetoric," and that classes which had employed sentimental rhetoric for political gain, such as women, abolitionists, and African and Native Americans, became increasingly suspect (13). Indeed, the calamity of the war affected the American scene much as the French Revolution changed the European. Because sentimentalism was closely

associated with the writing of women in the US, however, its repudiation in later years is often inseparable from calls for the remasculinization of literature. While there is no space here to detail its successive derogation by realist and modernist writers such as James and Pound, there have been important studies of the continuing role of sentimentalism in the very writers who claimed to detest it. Gregg Camfield's *Sentimental Twain: Samuel Clemens and the Maze of Moral Philosophy* and Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* are two particularly excellent works in this line. The present study seeks to perform similar reconstitutive work on more contemporary texts written by writers who, in all likelihood, would loudly protest a description of their work as “sentimental.” As I hope to show, however, there is more to be gained by such a description than the pleasure of a counterintuitive claim. Seeking out the sentimental in these elite authors demonstrates how sentimentalism continues to provide a preferred mode of ethical and aesthetic engagement when rationalist schemes have been discredited.

Returning to the scholarly archive, one must acknowledge the derogation of sentimentalism has been continued, to a great extent, by means of the very critical conversation that renewed interest in it, a conversation beginning in earnest with what Laura Wexler has called the “Douglas-Tompkins debate” (9). In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas asserts that nineteenth-century sentimentalist writers jettisoned the tough community-based religious frame of thinking that was indigenous to the early colony and substituted it with a maudlin emotional individualism that was amenable to mass commodity culture and merely a “continuation of male hegemony in

different guises" (13). There is, doubtlessly, much merit to these claims. Despite the typical orientation of sentimentalist texts toward a larger community founded in shared fellow feeling, the moral individualism Douglas disdains is often quite evident in high sentimentalist texts. Recall that Stowe, at the end of her famous novel, replies to her own question "But, what can any individual do?" by declaring famously: "they can see to it that *they feel right*" (511). Douglas's argument, however, ignores the cultural power of nineteenth-century sentimentalist texts, a point sustained at length by Jane Tompkins in her *Sensational Designs*. Many women writers of the nineteenth century, Tompkins argued, deployed the compelling rhetoric of feeling for counter-hegemonic ends, most spectacularly in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Tompkins was not alone in her championing a reevaluation of sentimentalist writings. Nina Baym and Judith Fetterley were also instrumental in starting a scholarly movement resulting in the recovery of thousands of texts written by American women writers of the nineteenth century as well as the consequent reevaluation of the standing arguments against sentimentalist rhetoric.

The debate among feminists over the relative complicity or subversiveness of the American sentimentalist legacy ignited the critical conversation of which the present study is a part. As many critics have noted, being "for" or "against" a literary and cultural movement such as sentimentalism makes less sense than being committed to understanding its forms, beginnings, and consequences. The studies have been numerous and impressive: the essays collected in Shirley Samuel's *The Culture of Sentiment*, Paula Bennett's *Poets in the Public Sphere*, Julie Ellison's *Cato's Tears*, Lori Merish's

Sentimental Materialism, and Elizabeth Barnes's *States of Sympathy*, to name only a few of the historical and theoretical studies in an increasingly crowded discourse.

Nevertheless, while scholars such as June Howard, Joanna Dobson, and Karen Sanchez-Eppler have pressed to continue reclaiming the value of sentimental literature, the most influential arguments to emerge have tended to be critical of the tradition's political uses. For example, in his collection of essays, *Culture of Letters*, Richard Brodhead critiques the "disciplinary intimacy,"—the personalization and sentimentalization of authority figures over their charges—that, he claims, characterizes antebellum domestic novels (18-19). Similarly, in *Tender Violence*, her reading of turn-of-the-century photography, Laura Wexler reveals the ways in which the semiotics of domestic sentimentalism helped to normalize imperialist violence. Though such readings have influenced my own (particularly in seeing the insidious power of sympathy at work in the texts discussed in chapter 3), I have been at least as engaged with two critiques of the sentimentalization of suffering—those of Lauren Berlant and Wendy Brown—which focus as much on the present as on the past.

Berlant and Brown share a critical dissatisfaction with the centrality of violence and its specular recognition in the formation of political alliances, though the material terrains in which their critiques are fairly divergent. In *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Berlant objects to sentimentalism's political and ethical consequences primarily on two counts. First, the creation of "pain alliances" through narrative commodities are at best "ameliorative, a matter not of changing the fundamental terms that organize power, but of following the

elevated claims of vigilant sensitivity, virtue, and conscience,” and, at worst, it reiterates and normalizes the oppressive violence in an aestheticized, commodified relation (35). What Berlant finds paradigmatically wrong about the scene of sympathetic witness is, first, that it creates “an ideology of true feeling [that] cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain” and, second, the politics of personal feeling cannot address institutional injustices, so that the urge to produce “acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures” (41). She does, however, hold that the sentimental model is charged with continuing possibility and analyzes, under the rubric “postsentimental” or “countersentimental,” texts such as James Baldwin’s “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” which distinguish themselves from their predecessors by their use of “the powerful language of rageful truth-telling” as well as their refusal of “the fantastical optimism central to the sentimental narrative,” and the temptation to “make claims for the tactical efficacy of suffering and mourning” (Woodward 72, Berlant 57). In many ways, Berlant’s critique repeats Douglas’s unhappiness with sentimentalism’s individualism and commodification of feeling. Wendy Brown’s *States of Injury* is not concerned with sentimentalism but with racial, ethnic, and gender identities that are “invested in [their] own history of suffering” and cannot give up these investments “in the pursuit of an emancipatory democratic project” (55). In Brown’s view, this nursing of injury, of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, transforms political endeavors into a search for recognition instead of transformation and the self-overcoming of genuine freedom (76-77). In short, whereas Berlant rejects sentimentalism as a distraction from the processes of structural victimization, Brown finds the identitarian focus on victimization itself to be confining

and, ultimately, an outgrowth of liberalism's too-pallid logic, feigned attention, and real indifference.

Structure and Singularities of Sentiment

These two arguments, which I see as addressing two key limits in the sentimental model, have deeply influenced my reading of its structure. Brown and Berlant have forced me to attend to, on the one hand, the discrepancy between individualist calls to feeling and structural inequalities and, on the other, the limits on the universalism of any social body projected by and through representations of suffering. Indeed, in her diagnosis of its affective pedagogy, Berlant anticipates my own reading of sentimentalism's basic structure: a suffering figure is spectacularly exposed, sometimes "directly" to the reader but much more often through an intermediary figure whose sympathetic, affective, and/or diagnostic reaction to the suffering figure pedagogically models ideal affective responses for the reader. This tableau vivant is something like the "primal scene" of Judeo-Christian ethics, allowing for Brown's warning against the *ressentiment* into which cherishing such an image always threatens to devolve. Rooted, as I have shown, in the philosophies of Hume, Smith, and Hutcheson, the scene's moral valances flow from the notion that morals are based on direct experience and projected imagination—sight and empathetic projection—and thus follow the passions rather than abstracted reason. Furthermore, though Berlant does not recognize this explicitly, the sentimental scene has not only a procedural element—the emotional witness and sympathetic act—but also always projects an implied social body—a community responding to, though sometimes also responsible for, the suffering in question.

That the scene of suffering, real or imagined, is central to the establishment of a social body means that it will likely be subject to Brown's critique of identity categories founded in victimhood. However, this social body need not, as Berlant holds, be projected as unconflicted and non-hierarchical, as my readings will demonstrate. Nor does it have to presuppose a basic human benevolence, which she also seems to imply; indeed, many classic sentimentalist texts, such as Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, function affectively only by foregrounding general moral corruption and contrasting it with the sensitive soul whose affective experiences provide instruction. Beside these essentially minor objections and corrections, I must place a more substantive complaint. Both Brown and Berlant tend to read scenes of suffering and the social bodies they conjure as performing *in advance* all of the possible cultural, political, and aesthetic work of which they are capable. To an extent, this is the nature of a certain variety of theory, which abstracts underlying causes and offers determinative definitions for literary, cultural, and political phenomena. Yet, while they enumerate many of the likely failings of such "pain alliances," I disagree with the implication that every citation of this model will result in the same political and ethical effect, namely, a reduction to civic-minded liberalism's recognition, a recognition that, in their view, completely vitiates the power of imaginative care. Indeed, one reason its proponents might embrace an ethics based in feeling is precisely because of its capacity to test the standing, inert accounts of the good based on structural and rationalist discourses, that is, to use affective intuition to correct dominant fields of political, economic, and juridical power. Feeling can be a means of trying out and revising symbolic codifications via experiential and imaginative claims. It

is sentimentalism's openness to revision that most intrigues me, and it is why, in my own thinking, I have shifted from an approach emphasizing sentimentalism's structural, generic, or categorical properties to a genetic approach, focusing on how it has been, and can be, put to work differently in differing spaces.

Describing this shift in thought requires a momentary detour into the philosophical problem of determination, the conflicting views of Aristotle and Gilles Deleuze on the matter, followed by a brief analogy to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the habitus. In essence, the problem of determination concerns what kind of thing a particular something is, a way of answering the question: "What is X?" Without a doubt, the most dominant means of resolving the problem of determination in Western philosophy was devised by Aristotle, who framed the matter in terms of identities, categories, and subject-predicate relations (191-5). Two things can be the same, for Aristotle, in one of any ten categorical senses, the most important of which, for our purposes, is essence. If two things, "though exhibiting differences in kind" share the same essence, they may be predicated in the same genus, and in this sense are identical. Aristotle's is a mode of thinking in which a subject can be determined through the attachment of fixed predicates that can be ascribed to them and which can be, in theory, exhaustively identified and determined (191). Such a means of determination is, after all, an invaluable organizational tool, allowing for the precise categorization of materials, placing them in tidy piles of shared predicates, and for this reason, it came to influence not only the development of formal logic but of the earliest Western discourses in biology.

For all its utility, however, it remains a heuristic tool that can, in crucial ways, distort our view of what is being thus determined. In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze argues that Aristotle's view (and its variations throughout the Western philosophical tradition) ought to be jettisoned, at least from a philosophical perspective. Instead, he favors a genetic mode of determination, which he, following philosopher Salomon Maimon, designates as "differential" by analogy with the formula expressing the slope of a curve in Leibnizian calculus. In this line of argument, a thing is determinable only in relation to a set of other variable terms relevant to it. There is no transcendent or independent term--x--only a differential relation constitutive of X that is shifting in time. Thus: "Ideas appear in the form of a system of ideal connections—in other words, a system of differential relations between reciprocally determined genetic elements" (Difference 173-4). This model of thinking can be likened to how biological speciation works, for rather than really existing genera and species—like papers placed in transcendental files—there are in fact nothing but genetic variations of greater and lesser diversity, determinable primarily by the way in which their genetic instructions tend toward the production of shared attributes.

"Ideas are complexes of coexistence," writes Deleuze, and he uses the term "singularities," another idea borrowed from mathematics, to suggest the ways in which iterations of a thing or idea converge around certain possibilities more than others without being absolutely required to repeat one another (Difference 186, 190). Singularities are thus the relational arrangements of coexistence to which ideas trend or around which their most likely possibilities condense. I introduce this brief elucidation of

Deleuze's notion of differential determination to suggest that sentimentalism should not be thought of as a stable object of inquiry, at least not in the sense that we could then append an exhaustive set of predicates to it and go in search accordingly. Instead, sentimentalism is a set of affective relations structured around sights cathected with imaginative compassion, traceable but also highly flexible, and therefore sometimes, as with the texts to which I attend in this study, it can go unrecognized as such because scholars have decided, in advance, where it can occur and where it cannot.

Sentimentalism, thus, does not end at a specifiable historical moment, nor is it something that can be imported only into certain (pop cultural) contexts but not in other (high literary) realms where the difference is specifiable in advance, nor is it something that will behave invariably the same way wherever it is encountered, such that this behavior is its essence. In this emphasis on tendencies over determination through predication, my hope is to produce an idea of sentimentalism that is both meaningfully descriptive, and yet flexible enough to allow for variation across different iterations. A genetic determination of sentimentalism is a conceptual means of preserving the inventiveness of its cultural practitioners.

In this sense, it is much like a de-subjectivized version of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, which is "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (95). A set of received rules that enable social improvisations, the habitus, as a concept, allows Bourdieu to sidestep constructivist determinism as well as the kind of no-nothing existentialism that holds humans have complete freedom to act as they wish regardless of acculturation and social

pressures. Sentimentalism should be figured as just such a script from which one can depart, but on which one can also depend. The concept of sentimentalism I sketch here is the guiding principle in my consideration of these works, but the realization of its tendencies, or singularities, differs in each case. Thus, contained within the genetic material of sentimentalism are a set of assumptions and hopes about causality, space, cognition, and social ordering that shape, but do not govern, its use. Thus, to think sentimentalism genetically means, first, to think it capable of change, modification, permutation, and, second, to think it within a field of relations, which is to say, spatio-politically. Here then are sentimentalism's spatio-political singularities.

Affecting Space

As I mentioned above, in relation to Berlant and Brown, the sentimental model focuses on a specific, microcosmic scene of witnessed suffering, but from this scene (or scenes), by virtue of the repetition of feeling (in the witness, and then in the reader) a comprehensive, or transcendent, social body is conjured. By social body, I mean only a kind of imagined community *produced by* the relation of feeling, or conversely, a community is *defined against* such a relation. It is, like Benedict Anderson's conception of a nation as an imagined community, figured as "both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). In Anderson's influential view, every nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). The social bodies in question here, however, need not correspond with culturally established or readily legible communities such as state, ethnos, or polis, nor must it correspond only

with the network of readers as they figure their own “communion.” It can be a community to come, a community that should be present, and is not.

Its contours are textually determined by the repetition of affect. It is this repetition of affect, via imaginative projection, that constitutes sentimentalism’s rhizomatic network, which can be imagined as a horizontal force for equivalence and equalization. I sympathize; my body marks our sameness; our experiences are virtually, but not literally, interchangeable. The conjured social body is a sign of our affective and ethical equivalence. This sameness of feeling, which smuggles with it a claim to sameness of worth, can be plotted horizontally across mixed terrain to the point of an imagined universality of ethical value or worth. There is tremendous danger that, in the creation of an ethical equivalence, important differences will be collapsed or reduced. My reading of Anna Deavere Smith’s documentary theater in chapter 2 shows precisely how she manages to reconfigure the politics of sentimentalism through her art to produce a form of sympathy crafted *through* difference, not in spite of it, thus avoiding a threat inherent to the sentimentalist model. In that model, as Berlant’s critique implies, the original scene of fellow feeling establish itself on the basis of the sharp inequality of circumstance, a vertical structuring, between the injured and those protected from injury. But when she maintains that “an ideology of true feeling cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain,” she only touches on the truth, for the sentimental scene necessarily makes admittance of hierarchical difference (how else can suffering be figured?), but does so only to efface it as ethically irrelevant (Berlant 41). Thus, the sentimental scene carries with it two virtual elements, one involving production of a

horizontal equivalence of feeling while the other requires the elision of vertical hierarchies that divide or diminish feeling.

Because the scene of sympathetic witness carries with it these two virtual elements, one must attend to the imagined spaces that are produced by such scenes. Indeed, much work produced by scholars concerned with sentimentalism's relation to the domestic novel focuses on the attendant imagined spaces, though they (rightly) cast these explorations in terms of separate spheres ideology. Read in terms of spatiality, the domestic was an imagined place in which amoral publicness could be rectified via the rigors of feminine Christian feeling. Tompkins is thus a theorist of space as much a historian of the work that this literature performs. Senator Bird's encounter with Eliza in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a scene I read in greater detail in chapter 3 in conjunction with Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*, is a case in point. After Senator Bird admits to his wife's horror that he voted for the Fugitive Slave Act, which sanction those in the North who aid escaped slaves, the Birds are confronted with just such a slave woman, Eliza, and her son Harry, who have just crossed into Ohio and badly need assistance. The American legislature is figuratively reconvened in the Senator's den, where his wife dismisses it in favor of the fiat of the heart(h). To read the scene in this way registers the salience of separate spheres ideology, but also registers the emendation of that ideology as it intersects with other shifting geographical borders, one of which figures the conflict between economic modes, coded North and South, as billowing up into Ohio, into the houses of the otherwise independent and free who refuse to be enslaved by an invading law. In short, the student of sentimentalism must ask: what geographies are the most

salient for understanding the operation of sentiment in the present text—what borders are elided and what walls erected? Worth sketching here are three spatio-political tensions or ambiguities that plague the sentimentalist model and which I locate in specific contemporary texts.

The first is the way in which it fuses and confuses privacy and publicity. Recalling Berlant's articulation of sentimentalism's ambivalence, in which she prioritized the ways in which public action can contract into private feeling, one can instead say that sentimentalism is a discourse and practice in which the private and public open on each other and, in some crucial ways, lose their coherence. Hence, Berlant is right that sentimentalism risks privatizing what ought to be public responses and aestheticizing real world problems, but she is wrong not to recognize, as in Stowe, that so-called private ethical feeling can be used to address and correct public wrongs. Or, as in Edmund Burke's conservative revision of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, one can attempt to found the state's publicness on the strength of the family's privacy, and busy oneself with

binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bottom of our family affections; keeping inseparable and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchers, and our alters (49).

Though Burke's usage of it is ideological and reactionary, the logic of sentimentalism also carries with it the capacity to upturn such orthodoxies by putting what seems outside on the inside. Thus it can create in comfortable privileged subjects an interior self-critical nagging that can be nourished to the point of a productive shift in action.

Sentiment, in short, muddies the putative boundary between public and private, and does so with decidedly mixed ethical and political consequences. As I show in chapter 1, Roth domesticates a broiling *ressentiment* he sees dividing the larger American social body, with the result that he universalizes it—thus critiquing fictions of national unconflictedness. In a different way, the authors I consider in chapter 4 respond to the attacks of September 11, 2001 by domesticating the nation as a shaken family, an imaginative trope widely employed in the media to dispel confusion over historical narratives and suture viewers affectively to the imagined community of the nation.

This second example introduces another spatial ambiguity characteristic of sentimentalism, one that is an outgrowth of the first, namely, uncertainties about the expansiveness of imaginative projection. Ought the conjured social body be identified with a family, a novel's readership, a play's audience, a city, a nation, the world, or some oscillation between these bodies? To the extent that the conjured social body of fellow feeling coincides with the nation-state, then it makes sense to treat it more or less explicitly as an Andersonian imagined community. In fact, however, it is rare that the conjured body of sentimentalism's scenes of suffering corresponds so closely with the state, even when there is an evident attempt to connect them, as my readings of work by Roth, Foer, and Updike attest. Instead, their metaphoric correspondence carries with it a quality of superimposition. In this way, as I show in chapter 4, Updike's *Terrorist* can be converted by sympathy, both his own and the reader's, from murderous religiosity to teenage mediocrity, thus domesticating the global terrain of conflict between the U.S. and al-Qaeda to smaller zones of feeling—the nation's urban collapse, the rise of single

mother families—without ever making one identical to the next. The question raised by such a set of superimpositions is this: has global terrorism been domesticated in order to permit its readership to bridge otherwise vast cultural domains and come to understand the alienated passion of its attackers, or has the novel cast terrorism domestically in order to locate it as simply another element in the internal degradation of American families and cities? The first two ambiguities, then, are closely related: the first focuses on the uncertain direction in which the affections move, while the second concerns the unclear, or multiple parameters of the social body the scene of suffering consequently projects.

The third and final ambiguity I locate within the sentimentalist model is that it often projects (at least) two distinct and often contradictory social bodies: one coherent and sympathetically constituted and another obviously broken and conflicted. One can think of the disconnection between Adam Smith's "immense machine" and the indifference of a European man of sentiment to the Chinese earthquake (463). Terry Eagleton holds that sentimentalism is, in this sense, plainly ideological, for it figures the violent circumstances to which the witness sympathetically responds as the exception rather than the rule. For a middle class sentimentalist of the eighteenth century, "[i]deologically speaking, love and affection must be fundamental; empirically speaking, they are nothing of the kind" (40). The play between these poles of benevolence and corruption is central to how Roth's American Trilogy can at once critique as fantasy the pastoralism dominant among post-war suburbanites, *yet still* sentimentally mourn the loss of such a pastoralism through its imaginative projection, as I show in chapter 1. It might also be used to critique Anna Deavere Smith's theatrical practice, for if a largely white

Simi Valley jury is incapable of sympathizing with the beaten Rodney King, as for many they proved to be after the first trial of King's assailants, why should her theatrical collation of testimony about the beating and the riots that followed produce a different result in her audience? Yet, Smith's work demonstrates that such a critique will not always hold, for, as I show in chapter 2, with sufficient consciousness of form and place, the sentimental model can ignite a greater sense of affective and ethical equivalence while at the same time revealing the structural hierarchies that customarily impede a sense of parity. But even if the conflict between these two social bodies is a misfit that allows for the annulment of the laws of the land (the nation as it is) in favor of the law of the heart (the affective responses of readers or audience members), there is still a disconnect between the social body it projects and the social body to which it attends. For antebellum abolitionists such as Stowe, the latter broken body could be figured simplistically as a matter of North and South. For the period my study concerns, the most salient geography of conflict is within urban space itself.

Pitying the City

It is for this reason that I claim one cannot understand contemporary sentimentalism without also understanding American cities. Economically and ideologically, the greatest political conflicts in contemporary American culture occur between urban and suburban or exurban populations. In contemporary America, the division between city and non-city is one of the most predictable indicators of political divisions, a fact that the news media's color-coding of the Electoral College map into tidy red and blue entities typically erases. Cities are the locus for ideological conflicts, shifts

in the flow of capital, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the privileged site of the spectacular immiseration of minority populations. This reality explains why they have been used so consistently as a setting for sentimentally attended conflicts in the literature considered here. In order to complete my articulation of the relation between resurgent sentimentalism, urban struggle, and contemporary literature, however, I must start with the thread just established—namely, what I have called sentimentalism’s spatio-temporal singularities. Therefore, I begin this section by conjoining the last of those characteristics with contemporary theorizations of space, as exemplified in the thought of Yi-Fu Tuan and Henri Lefebvre. Following this theoretical model, I return to the historical specificities to which the authors considered by this study respond, namely, the urban processes altering American cities since the early 1970s, of which I can here provide only the faintest sketch. My reading of these processes is based on the influential work of David Harvey, who is at once a theorist of the political economy of space *and* a diagnostician of postmodern culture. Using Harvey’s theory will allow me to prepare for this study’s conclusion, which comes full circle to compare my own diagnosis of the relation between space, affect, and contemporary literature with that offered by Fredric Jameson in his influential 1984 essay, “Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism.”

Recall the spatial polarity described above as the third and last spatial ambiguity of sentimental witness—namely the paradoxical tension between specific sites of conflict, attended to by emotional projection, and the broad principle of an undifferentiated, smoothly functioning social body. I link this ambiguity to a now-

famous distinction between place and space, introduced into urban theory by humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in 1977, and subsequently revised by Henri Lefebvre. The explanatory usefulness of the distinction between space and place, as well as the way the distinction resituated development studies around the experience of living inhabitants, are the major legacies of Tuan's scholarly exploration of the relation between human emotions and space. In a formulation that has become famous, Tuan writes

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes places as we get to know it better and endow it with value. [...] The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for a location to be transformed into place. (Tuan 6)

Thus space is a uniform mechanical volume, a scientifically designated set of parameters otherwise empty, abstract, and ready to be filled with activity, while place is established, specific, emotionally colored, and characterized by the cessation of activity as well as the passive absorption of detail by the senses. It is not hard to see that the relationship between place and space roughly parallels the distinction I sketched above between the highly conflicted, emotional site of sympathetic witness—with all its narrative specificity and iconic suspension—and the abstract social body projected by such scenes. The parallel does not, in and of itself, add significantly to my reading of the political stakes of this ambiguity of sentimentalism, but if we add to Tuan's reading the contributions of Henri Lefebvre, the situation is remedied.

Lefebvre borrows and amends Tuan's distinction for his own Marxist reading of

the production of space. Lefebvre argues that, instead of place emerging out of space, as individuals grow more familiar with specific surroundings, space is produced ideologically through a “trialectical” interaction of material practices, disciplinary representations, and cultural products. In his view, the concept of space as an undifferentiated and homogeneous material is unnatural and ideological. Space, in this reading, is what is ready for use by capital, having been first tacitly owned by the state, and thus must be regulated and divided by its businessmen and bureaucrats.

The ideologically dominant tendency divides space up into parts and parcels in accordance with the division of labour. It bases its image of the forces occupying space on the idea that space is a passive receptacle. Thus, instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships that are inherent to it - relationships which introduce specific contradictions into production so echoing the contradiction between the private ownership and the means of production and the social character of the productive forces – we fall into the trap of treating space as space “in itself,” as such. (90)

Lefebvre’s point is that the ideology of space makes it appear homogenous, without value, mathematically extendible when in fact it is composed of specific places, ecologies, materials, and, after the process of urbanization, highly conflicted between the interests of various classes. The disjunction between the ideology of space and our lived environment corresponds with the ethical ambiguities and tensions at play in the performative model of sentimentalist witness. We will care for those within a place, but not in space. To further extrapolate from Lefebvre’s scheme, because space trades in abstractions, those outside the space of nation, wherever this entity is most salient, can be

easily relegated to statistical losses. That both national and supra-national geographies are emotionally conceived as spaces allows for other ideological fictions, particularly the illusion that American citizenship guarantees evenly distributed protection and care. In this sense, those domestic places of suffering that become visible and publicized—Rodney King’s beating, the Los Angeles riots, the damage of Hurricane Katrina—can be sentimentally attended to as a means of producing them *as exceptional* places in which human value has been degraded while the remaining American domestic space goes on functioning healthily. Such a view omits the degradations of urban immiseration, crime, and preventable disease in America’s civic spaces, to say nothing of the condition of the nation’s massive prison population.

The social body conjured by sentimental scenes can therefore function as space in Lefebvre’s ideological sense—producing an idea of harmonious interactions underlying a terrain that is in fact experientially riven with conflict over resources and concomitant suffering. Putting the ideas in relation to one another underscores the falseness of Francis Hutcheson’s claim that sentiments of fellow feeling diminish, wavelike, with increased distance. Sentimental connection is less a matter of geographical distance than relational place, for I can let my neighbor languish in misery just as easily as I can ignore the storied Chinese earthquake, so long as their suffering remains in a realm papered over by fond thoughts of my own and my cohort’s benevolence. As evidence of this parallel between ideologically and sentimentally constructed spaces, consider geographer Don Mitchell’s observation that the “territorial segregation” of populations based on ethnicity may have been legitimated originally by explicitly racist discourse, but is now simply

ignored, overshadowed by a “celebration of constrained diversity” (120). Mitchell maintains that

The diversity represented in shopping centres, megastructures, corporate plazas and (increasingly) in public parks is carefully constructed... a space of social practice that sorts and divides social groups according to the dictates of comfort and order rather than to those of political struggle... The strategies of urban and corporate planners classify and distribute various social strata and classes (other than the one that exercise hegemony) across the available territory, keeping them separate and prohibiting all contacts - these being replaced by signs (or images) of contact. (Mitchell 120)

In relation to Lefebvre’s theory, we can say that the sentimentalized social body conjured by the scene of suffering is an example of producing an ideological space from a geographic place. But, and this fact is critical for understanding sentimentalism’s mixed political potential, the affective space produced by scenes of sympathetic witness need not be ideologically regressive nor need it distract from an honest assessment of a given society’s actual state of care. It can be utopian as well, as even Lefebvre maintains (39). The projected social space of non-alienation as a mode of political risk and possibility, a sense certainly suggested in Tuan’s thinking, is also available within sentimentalism’s generative schemes. We simply have to attend to the particulars of the text, concentrate on the stakes of differences collapsed therein, and note the interests served by the scene of sympathetic witness. Indeed, one of the underlying claims of my study is that the authors I consider are each seeking to make a space in their work where real suffering and their reader can meet.

Obviously conceptualizing how and why real suffering occurs the way it does

presents an obstacle beyond the reckoning of this study, especially since the historical phenomena out of which these texts emerge owe to extremely complex and varied changes in American cities over the last thirty years. Therefore, humility demands some reticence. In my effort to grasp the big picture, however, I have been guided by the work of geographer David Harvey, who, in *The Limits of Capital* (1982) described the logic underlying urban shifts through a modified Marxian reading of capital's processes. Agreeing with Marx's basic claim that capitalism leads to crises of overaccumulation, as laborers are increasingly unable to afford the goods that they produce and for which they are insufficiently remunerated, Harvey suggests that two different "fixes" keep the system from collapsing into panic and revolt, or rather postpone such a collapse. The first of these is a temporal fix, whereby the profits accumulated from production are, instead of being reinvested directly in that production, are diverted to the financial sector, from which they are lent out on a much longer term, in the hopes that producing comparable rates of return without commodity gluts (Limits 324-325).

Closely related—indeed, perhaps inseparably so—is the spatial fix, which requires “the production of new spaces within which capitalist production can proceed (through infrastructural investment, for example, [and] the growth of trade and direct investment” (Limits 416-417, Condition 183). The ultimate result of the extension of spatio-temporal fixes, however, is simply the ever-*widening* production of increasingly uneven and violently shifting geographies of development and wealth. Over the course of decades of studies and texts, Harvey has argued that this economic system explains both the immiseration of the American urban underclass and the culture of

postmodernism, which he sees as an outgrowth neoliberal globalization. A further articulation of Harvey's views of urban development and culture will have to wait until, in my conclusion, I consider the narrative of change provided by his theorization in conjunction with Fredric Jameson's diagnosis of postmodern, suggesting finally that the authors of this study provide their readers with what Jameson calls "cognitive maps" for understanding our affective interrelation within the spaces produced by recent economic and urban changes.

In order to chart the highly varied spatial and political terrain within which each of these authors examines the sympathetic gaze, I rely heuristically on Edward R. Soja's "discourses on the postmetropolis" (xv). Soja, a notable urban theorist in his own right, produced a rough classification of "the different but interrelated schools of thought that have consolidated over the past few decades to make sense of the *new urbanization processes* affecting the world in the late twentieth century" (xv-xvi, italics original). In essence, Soja divides the massive bibliography of urban studies into the following clusters of "scholarly representations alternatively describ[ing] the postmetropolis" as

(1) a flexibly specialized Postfordist Industrial Metropolis; (2) a globalized city-region or Cosmopolis; (3) a postsuburban Exopolis [...]; (4) a Fractal City of intensified inequalities and social polarization; (5) a Carceral Archipelago of fortified cities and (6) a collection of hyperreal Simcities where daily life is increasingly played out as if it were a computer game. (xvi)

Though not each of these discourses is addressed by my study, I am indebted to Soja's classificatory convenience as well as his recommendations within the scholarly archive.

For the purposes of this study, deindustrialization leads to three related phenomena: first, “white flight” to the suburbs, a migration beginning before the advent of the automobile, but exponentially intensified by the racial desegregation of schools; second, the influx of cheap immigrant labor from Asia and Central America, populations now joining the downwardly mobile African-Americans and poor whites left in city centers; and, third, the increased carceral control of the state exerted on urban spaces after upwardly mobile populations left. I tackle each of these developments in my first three chapters. The fourth chapter, as noted above, considers the sentimental trends within the literature emerging from the attacks of September 11, 2001, a subject that may at first seem at odds with the concerns of the earlier chapters. Nevertheless, it too attempts to tackle an unavoidable, historically novel occurrence within urban development, that is, the natural outgrowth of Harvey’s spatio-temporal expansion: global conflict within a global city. By connecting the World Trade Center attacks to the urban crisis I do not mean to suggest that the threat of terrorism is reducible to class antagonism, a view that impoverishes historical specificity, begs the question of justification, and ignores crucial cultural and ideological causes. It would also be thoughtless, however, to ignore the connection between the rise of militant Islam and the American economy’s increasing implication in the Middle East’s resources, all part of enabling people like Swede Levov to commute from growing exurban towns like Old Rimrock to crumbling industrial cities like Newark.

The first chapter, then, reads Philip Roth’s American Trilogy (*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*) for the ways in which it reveals how the

logic of compassionate sentiment and bitter *ressentiment* become intermingled in the subjective experiences of white ex-urbanites who have fled from, but cannot fully abandon, cities whose industry historically underwrote their prosperity. Roth's novels both repeat and revise the sentimentalist tradition at two related levels: first, by the linking of familial and national domesticities and, second, through the trope of the compassionate observer, who serves as nexus of social feeling and textual performance. In each of the trilogy's novels, Roth dramatizes familial failure as coterminous with urban discord and national historical strife. In these novels, the agonized and racially divided inner city of Newark, NJ after the 1967 riots serves as a locus of suffering in a larger American domestic sphere in crisis. However, Roth sets against these crises of communal belonging the sympathetic capacities of his authorial stand-in, Nathan Zuckerman, who, in sentimental fashion, performatively models for his reader a redefined Americanness rooted in imaginative commiseration. The intermingling of selves in this commiseration mirrors Roth's depiction of Jewishness as liminal ethnicity, neither white nor non-white. I chart a reciprocal relation between white flight and the simultaneous sentimentalization and racialization of urban spaces. Here I draw on Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* and, to a lesser extent, on Soja's reading of America's ever increasing suburbanization in the form of what he calls "exopolis" or edge cities (250). Rejecting the pastoral escapism of suburban, or ex-urban, life, but also participating in the spatio-affective logic that undergirds white flight, Roth universalizes *ressentiment* to deconstruct collective identities and to figure Americanness as the intermittent, perhaps illusory, transcendence of victimhood. Roth repudiates the most obvious ideological

valances of the sentimentally unconflicted social body. He simultaneously jettisons the utopian elements so that his universalization of *ressentiment* is ultimately reactionary. Roth's texts both reflect and critique the larger cultural shift emphasizing victimhood that remapped antagonism into the national social space.

If the first chapter was concerned with the ways in which sentimentalism was implicated in the centrifugal disintegration and segregation of the social body along race and class lines, the second chapter is concerned with the centripetal forces inherent to sentimentalism's power of communal convocation. It examines the sentimental mode of affective pedagogy at work in three of Anna Deavere Smith's documentary plays—"Fires in the Mirror," "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992," and "House Arrest," which together form the bulk of her on-going dramatic project "On The Road: In Search of American Character." I contextualize Smith's sentimental art by placing it in relation to Soja's "Fractal city," an urban space of balkanized diversity that emerged when new waves of immigrants from Asia and Central America joined the largely poor blacks left in city centers. As in Roth's novels, Smith seeks to construct a notion of American belonging by focusing on urban communities devastated by class and ethnic unrest, taking up the complex aftermaths of the 1991 Crown Heights riots and the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Smith's dramatic technique—interviewing hundreds of citizens and community leaders and then performing their words herself in a one woman show—reterritorializes the body politic onto a body dramatic and seeks to reconfigure the blindly suffering city as its own audience, attending to the vicissitudes of its internal differences. While Roth and Smith repeat the structure and thematic concerns of nineteenth-century sentimentalism by

means of the same auto-referential structure—using the artist as model sympathetic witness—the consequences of their revision are vastly different politically and aesthetically. Smith spatially reconvenes the city to examine its diversity and its unequal power distribution through the conduit of her art and its use of sentimental witness.

In neither Roth's nor in Smith's case, however, is the use of sentimentalism intertextually explicit; instead, they redeploy and revise a mode of emotional connection that is, as it were, "in the air." In my third chapter, however, I consider novels by two authors who explicitly take up nineteenth century American sentimentalism to comment on urban racial strife in the late-twentieth century. Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*, two minority writers who draw more directly on nineteenth-century American sentimental nationalism (as embodied in Whitman's "The Sleepers," and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, respectively) to reveal, in the gaze of sympathy, a mode of hegemonic surveillance. Like Smith and Roth, Lee and Wideman use the figure of the writer to model affective responses for their own text's reception and to sketch a model of American belonging based on the capacity of fellow feeling. Moreover, both draw heavily on the pathos of the lost child, the Ur-trope of American sentimentalism, to figure a coterminous familial, municipal, and national loss. However, both Lee and Wideman consciously distance themselves from the sentimental tradition's assurances of social coherence based on shared feeling, revealing instead how ethnic partitions linger in civic sentimentalism's allegedly universal leveling. I contextualize this complex response—at once demanding sympathy and yet subjecting sympathetic vision to a hermeneutic of suspicion—by means of Soja's elucidation of the

Carceral city.

Having analyzed sentimental narratives that at once stage and soothe American conflict as a matter of domesticity and urban cohabitation, in the fourth chapter, I consider how such narratives have been extended in texts emerging from the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks—a much different urban ruin. Here I offer readings of novels by Don DeLillo, John Updike, and Jonathan Safran Foer. In these more recent works, instead of signifying a racialized space of internal conflict that requires the salve of active and imaginative sympathy from the citizen reader, the urban wasteland is a signifier of white, wounded masculinity and the configuration of fellow feeling is no longer a matter of active production but of passive infiltration. While this final chapter does not purport to survey the narratives surrounding 9/11 exhaustively, I argue that discussions of 9/11 can be enriched by reaching beyond trauma theory and by engaging with how important elements derived from the sentimental tradition continue to play a decisive role in dominant notions of American political cohesion. These writers engage with the challenge of thinking the changing role of affective witness within a global conflict and in relation to monumental suffering. I link this to the conceptual and affective uncertainties outlined by Soja's reading of the emergence of a "Cosmopolis," or truly global city.

In my conclusion, after reviewing how each author's use of sympathetic bonding carries with it a secret spacialization—a map of belonging and un-belonging in which the limits of sympathy territorially mark the nation's borders—I turn to the question of how these texts, which emerge from a historical period saturated with the ascendant

postulation of neoliberalism and globalization can lead us to a diagnosis of postmodern emotion. Having articulated the relation of sentiment to space, and drawn, however roughly, the urban discourses relevant to these writers, I briefly take up Fredric Jameson's claim that postmodern culture is characterized by a "waning of affect" (10). While this claim ignores the complex continuities between earlier representations and performances of feeling and those characteristic of the present, Jameson's famous essay anticipates the literary and cultural phenomena studied here with his notion of "cognitive mapping" (54). Though in many ways, Jameson's essay has proven prophetic, literary history has not bourn out his reductive reading of postmodern emotion. Indeed, it is worth thinking about how postmodernism's characteristic abandonment of modernist metanarratives repeats the anti-rationalist conditions that gave rise to the culture, philosophy, and literature of sentiment in the first place

CHAPTER II

RESSENTIMENTAL EDUCATION: PERFORMING SYMPATHY IN THE RUINS OF PHILIP ROTH'S AMERICA

Although it is fanciful to pretend that any single moment, fictional or otherwise, can justly express what Raymond Williams would call an entire era's "structure of feeling," but I might nonetheless nominate a scene from Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* as the model of the conflicting affective attitudes composing the muddle of civic feeling in late twentieth-century America, particularly the painful conflict between suburban ideals and urban realities (Williams 64). It is the moment when Seymour "Swede" Levov discovers that his fugitive daughter Merry, whom he has not seen since she began an anti-Vietnam-War bombing campaign, has been living in downtown Newark, NJ, just a few blocks from his workplace, the glove factory that has been the source of his family's fortune. The reunion is decidedly agonizing. The Swede struggles to accept the reality not merely that his daughter is a murderer (for he has lived in hopeful denial of this fact) but that she is also the victim of multiple rapes and beatings in the course of her fugitive years. Now a devout Jain literally unwilling to injure a fly, Merry lives amid "the warehouses, the rubble, the garbage, the debris" in fetid squatting grounds near a highway underpass, and the Swede focuses his feelings on his fears for her safety (239). "That underpass is a home for derelicts—for derelicts who do not play by your rules," he tells her, "[t]heir world is a ruthless world, Merry, a terrible world—a *violent* world" (249). "They won't harm me," she replies, "they know that I love them" (249). The

Swede is struck by what the narrator terms “the sentimental grandiosity of [her] self-deception,” for, he asks, “[w]hat does she see in the hopeless scurrings of these wretched people that could justify such an idea? Derelicts and love? To be a derelict living in an underpass is to have clobbered out of you a hundred times over the minutest *susceptibility* to love” (250). The Swede is unable to comprehend how this view of the derelicts might just as easily apply to his daughter, a person he has been unable to distinguish from these very derelicts as he passed them on his way to work for six months, a person who is both the murderer of four innocent people and the brutalized target of multiple rapes whom he desperately wants to shield from the urban menace around her. The pathos of this moment derives largely from the father’s incapacity to reconcile radically differing notions of his daughter, as both victimizer and victim. Linking *anagnorisis* to catharsis with violent gusto, Roth ends the scene with the Swede—dizzied by Merry’s story and nauseated by her fetid room and unwashed body—vomiting uncontrollably while he cries out “*Who are you!*” (266).

For the Swede at this moment, Merry is a not so much a person as a powerful affect transforming him—“the smell of everything organic breaking down [...] the smell of no coherence” (265). In the larger context of the novel, Merry is less a character than a sociological force: the “daughter who transports [the Swede] out of the longed-for American pastoral [...] and into the indigenous American berserk” (86). This scene, then, allegorizes a larger *anagnorisis*, a realization that the sentimental yearning for unity—a unified family, city, or nation—based in care for the suffering of others is, in fact, an incoherent fantasy. All that is available, the narrative would seem to suggest, is

ressentiment, a mode of affective antagonism produced by the capacity to create a putatively unbroken and blameless identity out of a moment of perceived victimization. And yet this scene of realization is itself sentimentally staged, a moment of a father's heartbreak suggesting a larger cultural suffering. This chapter seeks to articulate what Roth reveals to us about what I call *ressentimentality*—an unstable affective response at the fulcrum of racial resentment and liberal sympathy, the liminal space between utopian compassion and internecine conflicts and bitterness, a way of figuring national unity while at the same time disavowing it. While I probe the usefulness and limits of the concept of *ressentimentality* more rigorously below, here I use it as a way of understanding how Roth problematizes the affective and political status of victimhood. Why does he do so, and indeed, why should we be critically interested in his doing so? To answer this, one must consider the cultural milieu in which these novels intervene. Therefore, before proceeding into a reading of Roth's novels, I offer a brief elucidation of the inter-implicated, Moebius-strip-like relation between sentimental and ressentimental views of victimhood by tracing their use in the politics of race and urbanization from the civil rights movement to the victims' rights movement, and frame this movement in legal discourse within a description of how the relation between urban, suburban, and exurban spaces affected identity categories following the post-War period.

The movement of more affluent sectors of the population to the periphery of cities is longstanding part of the American tradition, preceding the advent of the car (Teaford 2). In the post-war era, the process was radically accelerated by the emergence of the automobile and the government's housing subsidies, which until Johnson's "war on

poverty” in every way favored suburban development (Jackson 190). As Kenneth T. Jackson, in his seminal study of the suburbs *Crabgrass Frontier* observed, the suburban trend in Newark had been driving away Newark’s most affluent for generations. Forty percent of the city’s attorneys lived in the suburbs in 1925; by 1965, the percentage had reached 78 percent (Jackson 275). In Jackson’s view, suburbanization was catalyzed by the development of the automobile, but “the polarization of urban neighborhoods by function, by income, and by race” was also crucial (274). These centrifugal forces led to the advent of planned communities like the “Levittowns,” the first truly mass-produced suburb constructed cheaply and unimaginative by the firm of Levitt & Sons, Inc between 1947 and 1951 (Jackson 234). From the beginning, this movement was tied to class and race, and the mass production of housing merely intensified the process of homogenization. The suburban homogenization of rural space was always double: at once the production of an architecturally uniform space amenable to grid-like reductions but also the manufacture of the illusion of a political union more ethnically homogenous than was actually the case. As William Levitt declared, apropos his uniformly white settlements: “We can solve a housing problem, or we can solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two” (qtd. in Jackson 241).

Whether or not developments like the Levittowns “solved” the housing problem is an open question. As Soja notes, the effective carpeting of peripheral urban spaces would eventually lead to vast swathes of it becoming suburbanized sprawling cities in their own right, becoming, like California’s Orange County, edge cities or “exopolis” (233). These evermore patulous zones of suburbanization meant that one had to settle farther and

farther out to distinguishing oneself from one's peers or to get away from the encroachments of neighbors. A. C. Sectorsky coined the term "exurbs" in 1955, describing them as the spotted settlements just beyond suburbia. As he describes it, just after World War II, "the biggest influx" of ex-urbanites fled into these hinterlands: people very much like the Swede: "junior executives, those who follow the market leaders, the up-and-coming eager beavers, men in their middle and late thirties, the ones who wanted to do the thing-to do" (21). Roth is interested in the emotional causes and effects of these retreats, considering Swede Levov's move into a historic colonial house near Old Rimrock, a rural village in New Jersey, as well as Zuckerman's parallel retirement to Berkshires. Indeed, Ralph Lombreglia's review of *American Pastoral* for the Atlantic correctly identifies the story as "the life of Job in exurbia." In some senses this is accurate, but it neglects the ways in which the emotional motivations for movements into pastoral periphery are bound up with what is being left behind: a population and built environment increasingly racialized, threatening, and abject.

While there are multiple sociological reasons for the massive shift in population known as "white flight," highest among them is the resistance of whites to the integration of public schools (Kruse, Lassiter). For those whites leaving the urban tenement life of their parents, the movement is almost always figured as an atomized achievement. Each migratory movement is viewed as an individual triumph in getting out of the slums, establishing a middle class home, and getting kids into "good schools": in Roth's words "the longed-for American pastoral" (86). In truth, however, these movements are better understood not as a matter of millions of separate Herculean economic efforts but as part

of the larger historical migratory movement of whites within the United States. But since the migration also transformed voting concentrations and the geography of revenue, several scholars have argued that white flight was "more than a physical relocation. It was a political revolution," forming the taproots of the Republican ascendancy (Kruse 6). Those now left behind—largely poorer non-whites left to the now “integrated” schools—were frequently blamed for the sorry state of affairs in the cities. Owing at least in part to this socioeconomic balkanization and reduction of metropolitan tax bases, poor services, heavy crime, and bad infrastructure became increasingly common in American cities, while the communities in these now declining cities felt themselves the targets of conspiratorial practices like block-busting.

Even as one reconsiders the historical and structural changes leading to this spatial segregation, one must not neglect the ways in these terrains come to be invested with emotion and meaning. The time of the city dips into a trough of the past, either the familial past, or the past of a racially coded primitivism. For some fleeing whites, the once hospitable city becomes an “urban jungle,” a place of anarchic revolution, and primordial humanity. Indeed, this is why Merry’s rebellion is so carefully coded as urban, for her childish regression doubles the riotous damage done to Newark. On the other hand, the time of the suburban and exurban periphery is caught up in its inhabitants’ own distractions, their sense of disconnection and private march toward death. A space of engagement exists between the past’s desuetude and the future’s deathwardness. Within the canon of Jewish-American literature, Saul Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* and Bernard Malamud’s *The Tenants* are notable examples of novels dealing with these

shifting attitudes, and resentments, and they stage the possible resolutions.

I argue that Roth's novels could, however, just as profitably be read in light of the emergence of victims' rights discourse, a legal mode of argument modeled on the juridical examples and rhetorical reverberations of the Civil Rights Movement. Few can doubt the powerful and often problematic role played by sentimentalist rhetoric by advocates for greater equality among the races in America from the Civil War through the Civil Rights movement and beyond. Martin Luther King, Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech would be only the most obvious example of its resonant use. In light of the near universal piety about the previously controversial King following his assassination, appeals to anti-desegregationist voters could not be voiced in openly racist terms, as they had been only years before, but instead had to be couched in more subtle forms: state's rights discourse, for example, or, more pertinently for the present study, fears of urban crime.¹ The victims' rights movement promulgated the view that the American legal system is more concerned with safeguarding the constitutional rights of alleged offenders than it is with the victims of the alleged offenses (Rentschler 220). The movement sought to institutionalize the recognition of new legal rights to crime victims *as victims*, as a coherent group, by bestowing on victims or their families the power to speak at sentencing hearings, to be present during the trial of defendants, and to be notified of the prison release of offenders (H.J. Res. 64). In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, individual states passed victim's rights amendments, notably "the silent landslide" of amendments in 1992, which perhaps owed to law-and-order sentiment after the Los Angeles riots ("Victims' rights" 30). By 2000, every state constitution had some version

of “victims’ rights,” but advocates still pressed for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution (House hearing 47). In an effort to outdo one another in toughness on crime, both Al Gore and George W. Bush supported the amendment during their Presidential race (Dao 24). After an extended effort in 2000, however, the amendment has been shelved because its advocates cannot agree on a clear formulation and jurisdiction (Palmer 991).

While it would be reductive to consider victims’ rights discourse merely as a way of talking about race through crime, it is clear that its supporters were largely “law-and-order” conservatives in favor of “stronger” retributive justice and that “light-skinned child murder victims” are the “paradigmatic victim in victims’ rights” (Rentschler 222, Dubber 189). As a set of political claims, Carrie A. Rentschler notes, the unusual quality of victims’ rights stems from the fact that its advocates

assert that the identity of “crime victim” constitutes a form of unrecognized cultural and political difference. Yet unlike most identity politics, victims’ rights activism’s calls for recognition tend not to be based on histories of social marginalization and class, race, and sexual oppression. While the U.S. movement emerged in part from second-wave feminist anti-rape and domestic violence activism, in its current, and hegemonic, incarnation within the field of crime-victim politics, the identity of crime victim has largely been unmoored from histories of oppression. (219-220)

Thus, what began as the sentimentalization of African American suffering by civil rights advocates becomes convertible as *ressentiment* into a conservative legal program.

Roth’s trilogy is characterized by a similarly slippery shift in its treatment of victimhood.

The novels powerfully critique the prospect of unconflictedness and idyllic time typical of sentimentalism but also partake of the sentimentalist tradition by linking familial and

national domesticities and through the trope of the compassionate observer, who serves as nexus of social feeling and textual performance. Furthermore, I claim, Roth aims to undo the logic of *ressentiment* by pluralizing it radically and thus achieving, by a perverse reverse, sentimentalism's universal ethos of shared pain and consequent grounds for solidarity. In doing so, however, Roth often plays into the very affective structures undergirding the pastoral impulse of white flight: the simultaneous ressentimentalization and racialization of urban spaces.

Roth's three novels, *American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000), are referred to, both by critical consensus and authorial statement, as a trilogy, though critics diverge productively about how to identify them as a single creative effort.² Some critics refer to the three novels as the Newark Trilogy, while most call it the American Trilogy, and that such a conflation is possible indicates the extent to which the shattered polis serves as a synecdoche for the larger nation, a point I pursue at some length below.³ The narrator of these novels, Nathan Zuckerman, is the protagonist in several previous Roth novels—*The Ghost Writer* (1979), *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), (the three of which were collected together with an epilogue, *The Prague Orgy*, to constitute the *Zuckerman Bound* (1985) cycle) as well as *The Counterlife* (1986). In the earlier novels, Roth had used Zuckerman as an authorial stand-in to explore a set of connected themes centering on the indeterminate relation between fiction and fact, the place of the writer in contemporary society, and the multiple fictions that go into making familial, ethnic, and personal identity.⁴ Though many of these themes continue in the later trilogy, Zuckerman himself

seems much changed in the nineties. The self-obsessed writer whose earlier confessions had nearly exhausting the mode of the confessional has, after a battle with prostate cancer, become more circumspect, leaving the bustle of Manhattan for the isolated Berkshires and preferring to tell the largely tragic stories of others rather than the erotic and ironic tales characteristic of his earlier books.

The first of these new tragic stories, *American Pastoral*, from which the opening scene of this chapter is taken, is the account of “Swede” Levov, a phenomenal athlete hero-worshipped by his peers at Weequahic High, including a younger Zuckerman, partly because his Olympian vigor seemed simultaneously to vindicate and transcend Jewish masculinity. The novel details the Swede’s entry into, and eventual fall from, the eponymous national idyll: he takes over his father’s Glove factory in Newark, marries the Irish-Catholic Dawn Dwyer, a former Miss New Jersey. The product of their union, Merry, grows up to be a Weatherman-like bomber during the Vietnam War, killing four people and shattering the Swede’s worldview forever. Roth continued the trilogy with *I Married a Communist*, in which Zuckerman’s former English teacher, Murray Ringold, conveys the sad story of his brother Ira, a man young Zuckerman had idolized as a father figure. During the 1940s and 50s, Ira, as “Iron Rinn,” starred on the radio program, *The Free and the Brave*, impersonating American patriotic luminaries like Abraham Lincoln, performances that prove ironic because this former Newark-born zinc miner is semi-secretly a doctrinaire Communist. Ira marries silent-film luminary Eve Frame, a closeted Jew turned anti-Semite, whose self-absorbed daughter, Sylphid, ultimately drives a wedge between Eve and Ira. Two of Eve’s self-righteous reactionary friends lead her

into writing a tell-all book exposing Ira as a Communist. Ringold's sad tale concludes with Ira dying full of enmity in a shack near an abandoned zinc mine, his career in ruins and his political dreams betrayed by Stalin's crimes. Roth completed the trilogy with *The Human Stain*, the story of Coleman "Silky" Silk, a Classics professor at Athena College, whose reputation is questioned when his use of the word "spooks" is construed as a racial epithet. Coleman had merely asked his class about two absentee students--"Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?" (Stain 6). When Coleman, who, unbeknownst to his colleagues, is a light-skinned African American passing as Jewish, refuses to be cowed by his colleagues' sanction and resigns from his position, his wife dies. Alone, with neither work nor spouse to occupy his remaining years, Coleman becomes entangled in an affair with Faunia Farley, a middle-aged janitor at Athena. This erotic complication leads to local scandal and eventual tragedy when Faunia's former husband, a Vietnam Vet with PTSD, kills them both by running them off the road into icy lake water. Such a swift summary exposes Roth's gambit, for were it not for the subtlety and gravitas of his presentation, these plots would be elaborate melodrama or farce, and it is to that mode of presentation which I now turn.

Strictly speaking, it is not Roth who is either subtle or grave, but Zuckerman. Within the logic of the American Trilogy, it is Zuckerman, Roth's presumed proxy, who presents these accounts of tragic lives, after having collected biographical facts from memory, rumor, and research, and then devising the rest based on his own conjecture. The results are remarkable, within Roth's or any oeuvre, for their compassionate presentation of character against a backdrop of national historical change. This

presentation depends on the sentimental tradition's distinctive affective pedagogy, in which a reader-proxy's sympathetic observation of another's unjustifiable suffering models an appropriate ethical response for readers, who in turn are meant to repeat with their own acts of sympathetic reading. By virtue of this repetition, the reader of traditional sentimental texts could partake in the natural (and usually national) community of fellow feeling projected by that text. However, Roth revises the mechanism of sympathetic identification in such a way that his corresponding vision of community is fundamentally *ressentimental*. As I have indicated above, I use this term to designate the affective fragmentation of the conjured social body into antagonistic factions built around competing iterations of suffering. To pursue this line of reasoning with the greatest possible clarity, I proceed through a series of interrelated claims in the following order.

First, I demonstrate that the American Trilogy represents a kind of sentimental education that both Zuckerman and Roth's reader undergo. In my view, this progressive trajectory linking fellow feeling and community should not be treated as mere camouflage for the more despairing vision posited alongside it, but instead critics should acknowledge that the novels derive a major portion of their power from their structural investment in compassionate imagining. Second, because Roth uses the figure of the writer as the model sympathetic witness, I analyze the mechanism of sympathetic identification proffered in the trilogy using the notions of performative and constative uses of language. Doing so allows for a lucid articulation of how Roth parses an aporia embedded in the logic of sentimental representation that troubles any notion of coherent

community emerging from it. Third, I trace the trilogy's projection of a national public space in which sentiment—the feeling of compassionate connection with suffering others—and *ressentiment*—the production of Manichean identities based on victimization and imagined revenge—are inextricably bound, due to the undecidability inherent in the scene of suffering. Roth universalizes, or sentimentalizes, *ressentiment*, so that no instance of social cohesion—family, city, party, or nation—escapes the ghost of antagonisms internal to it. Fourth, I analyze Roth's vision of America as a ressentimental domestic space linking iterations of divided families to the larger misfortunes of a viciously divided metropolis: Newark ruined by the race riots of 1967. The American Trilogy repeats what Leo Marx saw as a structured ambivalence common in the American literary tradition in which anti-urbanism strengthens the appeal of a pastoral withdrawal to rural spaces, a withdraw nonetheless figured as an inevitable failure. In Roth's context, this ambivalence plays out in racialized terms that, while deconstructing notions of pure communities and pure whiteness, relies on and reaffirms dehumanizing images of menacing black populations. If Roth shows both family and city as ressentimental compositions, he does so without abandoning his own resentments. I conclude by returning to the notion of performative sympathy to critique Roth's restrictive "authorization" of sentiment and its regressive political implications. However courageous Roth's antipastoralism is in confronting national nostalgias and naiveté about America's national future after the Cold War, the implied author exhibits much of the *ressentiment* he ironizes in his characters, wittingly or unwittingly repeating the logic undergirding white flight and victims' rights discourse. Worse, both his treatment of

African-Americans within the narratives of Newark's devastation, to say nothing of his depictions of women within patriarchal familial scenes,⁵ reiterate the terrified and belligerent reactions characteristic of the "white male backlash" increasingly emergent in the decade of the trilogy's composition.

Sentimental Miseducations?

The poignancy of Zuckerman's sympathy for the men he narrates is central to the high critical esteem in which the American Trilogy is held. Reviewers of *American Pastoral* frequently remarked upon the compassion that distinguished it from previous Roth novels.⁶ A most common way of figuring Zuckerman has been as a kind of Greek chorus, which is not surprising, given the tragic tone of the novels and the fact that their most dramatic events take place off-stage, separating Zuckerman from the fray.⁷ Without a doubt, they are theatrical in yet another way, for as Murray Ringold suggests, "we learn from Shakespeare that in telling a story you cannot relax your imaginative sympathy for any character" (Married 277). But this description of Zuckerman's role as civic bystander to a separate drama diminishes the extent to which he is intimately bound with the production of these sympathetic biographical accounts of "great men brought low" (Stain 18). Relying on his imaginative skills as a novelist, Zuckerman models for Roth's reader a mode of active, projective sympathy that, as in the traditional sentimental model, instructs the reader through its affective pedagogy to repeat the process and, in so doing, to constitute a virtual community built on fellow feeling. The sentimental model can be viewed as an extension of statements Roth himself has made about how "community is both subject and audience" for the contemporary novelist (Reading Myself 190). More

unusually, this affective pedagogy is doubly modeled, for Zuckerman himself seems to undergo a most unusual sentimental education as the novels proceed. Roth develops three motifs to indicate that Zuckerman undergoes such an education. First, by setting up an implicit relation between, on the one hand, the occupation of each novel's protagonist and, on the other, the mode of sympathetic design Zuckerman presents to his reader, Roth indicates that Zuckerman's sympathy is not mere fantastic projection on blank biographies but is a mode of affective learning from each specific life. Furthermore, by linking the novel's mode of sympathy to the subject's occupation, Roth implicitly forges a notion of sympathy as active work requiring effort and skill *and* underscores how Zuckerman's status as a writer offers readers a unique mode to imitate. Second, as the trilogy progresses, Zuckerman's original relation to each protagonist increases in affective intensity and moves forward in his own biographical time toward the novel's discourse-present. Third, as the trilogy progresses, Zuckerman is transformed from a reiteration of the American isolato, ruminating on a past and vanished community, to a man partially re-socialized, dislodged from seclusion and, at least conceivably, en route to serving as surrogate brother in an unlikely family reunion suggestive of a broader communal convergence.

Consider, first, how each novel's structure of sympathetic identification can be linked to its protagonist's profession, as if Zuckerman is not only learning about the characters he describes, but also learning from them and tailoring his responses to them accordingly. In *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman dons the guise of the outdated Swede Levov like one of the old-fashioned gloves produced by the Levov family at their Newark

Maid factory. The transition between the first person narration of Zuckerman and the focalization of the Swede occurs, without great fanfare, during a scene in which Zuckerman dances with an old classmate at a Weequahic High reunion. “So then,” begins Zuckerman, “I am out there on the floor with Joy, and [...] I am thinking of the Swede’s great fall and of how he must have imagined that it was founded on some failure of his own responsibility. There is where it must begin” (*Pastoral* 88). Importantly, after leaving him like this in the middle of a wistful dance, the novel never returns to Zuckerman’s own spatial-temporal story-world for any of its remaining three hundred pages. Instead, Zuckerman produces a carefully manicured mix of figural narration and free indirect discourse by which he “wears” the voice of the Swede.⁸ The text sustains the illusion of a complete immersion in the Swede’s world through highly focalized third person sentences, but it occasionally switches into first person so that the Swede appears to tell his own story. The Swede even seems occasionally to invoke his readers in a first person plural normative community—coded as white, bourgeois, and besieged by resentful others—as when he fumes against his daughter’s rebellion: “[y]ou hate us not because we’re reckless but because we’re prudent and sane and industrious and agree to abide by the law. You hate us because we haven’t failed,” though Roth’s reader knows this is, in fact, Zuckerman performing (*Pastoral* 210-214). This complex recital of layered voices compresses the implied perspectives of characters so that when the novel’s plaintive conclusion arrives, a conclusion that sharply forces a sympathetic response from the reader, that reader must also wonder about perspectival source of the questions:

They'll never recover. Everything is against them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!

And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs? (423)

The seemingly complete disintegration of the perspectival boundaries between the Swede, Zuckerman, and, behind him, Roth himself made many critics wonder whether Roth had undergone a neo-conservative conversion.⁹ Such a deduction dispenses with the novel's political complexity (Seymour Levov is a largely forbearing Democratic liberal, not a reactionary), but it also ignores the novel's own investment in the power of imaginative identification.¹⁰ If these novels evince a shift in Roth's politics toward conservatism, it would seem a very "compassionate" conservatism.

The motif linking the style of sympathetic engagement with the livelihood of the protagonist is further developed in *I Married A Communist*. Ira Ringold's career as a radio star neatly corresponds with the novel's basically dramatic form. *Married* consists largely of a quoted monologue in which Murray tells Ira's story, with sporadic interruptions by Zuckerman, either in voice or in thought. The second novel thus shares with *American Pastoral* a bifurcated narrative structure where a protagonist's biography, presented in the shifting and imaginatively projected narrative scenes, is embedded within a more contemporary dramatic scene, staged on the darkened deck of Zuckerman's Berkshire house (*Married* 320). The metaleptic, nested layering of imaginative projection (whereby Roth's reader understands Ira through Murray through Zuckerman through Roth) exposes a split within the representative logic of

sentimentalism, the rudiments of which can be sketched here, though I explicate this tension more extensively in my discussion of sympathy's performativity. On the one hand, this nested interlinking evokes the bonds of a sympathetic community, with each character performing acts of sympathy for another in a set of repetitions leading to the final sympathetic repetition in Roth's reader. This aesthetic structure corresponds with idyllic imagined communities of universal brotherhood based in fellow feeling.¹¹ On the other hand, this dramatic form evokes both the mode of gossiping hearsay and disingenuous role-playing that the novel suggests is characteristic of the public sphere. This second, negative valence casts a shadow on the sympathetic feelings between Ira, Murray, and Nathan by suggesting a cynical equivalence between sympathetic performance and theatrical persona—Ira Rinn performs as Lincoln, Ira Ringold as Iron Rinn, Murray as Ira, Zuckerman performs as Murray, and Roth performs as Zuckerman. Hence, while Roth uses the link between Zuckerman's presentation and Ira's profession to indicate the latter's empathetic development, this specific presentation carries with it doubts about sympathy's efficacy explored elsewhere in the trilogy.

The motivic connection between each protagonist's calling and its novel's respective presentation of sympathetic engagement is most fully developed in *The Human Stain*, since Coleman's career as a scholar of Greek and Roman classics parallels Zuckerman's own mythopoetic mode of story creation (devising knowing fictions to explain the unexplainable). Many critics have noted the numerous allusions to antiquity in this text, primarily emphasizing the novel's evocation of epic and tragic classics, but this misses the extent to which Coleman's transformation and the multiple projections of

Zuckerman seem Ovidian in their emphasis on metamorphosis.¹² More than in any previous work, Zuckerman employs focalization and free indirect discourse to perform as a wide variety of characters and their stories. Chief among these is Coleman's own story, imagining his various metamorphoses as a son, boxer, bohemian, disinheritor, lover, husband, father, and even friend. However, Zuckerman also interweaves his imaginative account of these changes with the stories of others, including Delphine Roux, Coleman's academic adversary who is imagined with a mix of sympathetic engagement and satire. Zuckerman also invents a furious and fulminating voice for the traumatized veteran Les Farley, a voice that some critics nevertheless considered canned and familiar.¹³ Whatever the originality of the character, Les's complete incapacity to feel the pain of others serves as a powerful foil to Zuckerman, whose performative compassion has never been more widely distributed than in *The Human Stain*. Zuckerman's expanded capacity to imagine the life of those quite different from himself is particularly evident in his projection into Faunia Farley. Like Coleman, Faunia is a secret-carrier, who invents a persona as an illiterate blue-collar plebian, shunning all traces of her upper-class origins. Like Les, Faunia is traumatized, in her case by early experiences of sexual abuse, by the death of her two children, and by her subsequent suicide attempts. Like Zuckerman, she is a creator of stories capable of imaginatively projecting into the perspective of others. One sees this in the long interior monologue in which she imagines the interior life of a crow (*Stain* 239-247). Or, again, in an episode where Faunia has agreed to clean up a hotel room after an unknown man has committed suicide, she, like Zuckerman, self-consciously invents a back-story for the man based on the evidence at hand (*Stain* 339).

In short, by continuing to tailor his mode of performative sympathy to the specific profession of each protagonist, Zuckerman is ultimately transformed *back* into being a teller of stories, an Ovidian chronicler of transformations, including his own.

Adding to this progressive “sentimental education” is an intensification of intimacy between Zuckerman and his principal subject in each book, as well as a temporal movement forward in biographical relation to Zuckerman. Together, these three progressive motifs work to piece together Zuckerman’s own story from the withdrawn isolato—impotent, divorced, backward-looking, and retired to the Berkshires—to an eventual return to Newark as a warily forward looking and partially re-socialized man. For most of the trilogy, Roth’s reader is likely to ask, as Murray Ringold does of Zuckerman: “Why do you live up there, alone like that? Why don’t you have the heart for the world?” (*Married* 315).¹⁴ Having a “heart for the world” is precisely what Zuckerman gains as the novels progress. In *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman’s knows the protagonist as a childhood acquaintance. In his youth, Zuckerman was unable to see past his own hero-worshipping projections onto Levov. Furthermore, when Zuckerman and Levov meet up as adults, the former entirely misinterprets the latter, eventually admitting, “I was wrong. Never more mistaken about anyone in my life” (*Pastoral* 39).

Zuckerman’s identification with Ira Ringold is much stronger than was his boyhood link to Swede Levov and, though most of the events in the second novel predate those of the first, the novel follows Zuckerman into young adulthood and in this manner develops and extends the vision of Zuckerman’s childhood in *American Pastoral*. Zuckerman had grown up under Ira Ringold’s tutelage and viewed him as a father figure, though he

ultimately shed this idolization of the star and his politics. Moreover, the affective intensity of Zuckerman's relation to Ira's story is underscored by his continuing friendship with Murray, who provides a more direct account of Ira than Zuckerman was able to draw from the Swede's brother.

The connection between Zuckerman and Coleman in *The Human Stain* is the most contemporaneous and by far the most intensive of the three: it is what the writer calls "fall[ing] into a serious friendship" (*Stain* 43). Indeed, Zuckerman acknowledges that he gushes about his friend in a boyish way, "in the way you [do] when you're a kid and you think you've found a soul mate in the new boy down the street and you feel yourself drawn by the force of the courtship and so act as you don't normally do and a lot more openly than you may even want to" (*Stain* 43). Language such as "act[ing] openly" and "force of the courtship" indicate Zuckerman's acknowledgement that such an intimacy between men, such "serious friendship," contains within it a profound homoeroticism, an affective versatility, which in turn (somewhat) destabilizes Zuckerman's persona in the earlier novels as masculinist womanizer. In Zuckerman's own view, their friendship is sealed when they teasingly dance the fox trot together to Sinatra's "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" (*Stain* 24-26). The eroticized affective bond between Zuckerman and Coleman reveals to the former his own increasing loneliness for an "entanglement with life" and, indeed, by the novel's end, he confesses to his readers, "Coleman Silk's life had become closer to me than my own" (*Stain* 44, 344). That the trilogy concludes with Zuckerman vowing to leave the Berkshires, heading toward East Orange, a largely African-American municipality adjoining downtown Newark, to take up his place as a

guest in the Silk household, dining with Coleman's brother and sister, indicates the extent to which Zuckerman's "experiment in radical seclusion" has failed (*Stain* 339, 44). The unsuccessful experiment of self-containment—of a pastoral withdraw into the exurbs—denotes the tentative triumph of the sentimental prospect of a community based in performative sympathetic identification, but Roth complicates this triumph of sociability through his persistent thematization of sympathy's difficulty, if not its impossibility.

Performing Feelings / Fictions

In Roth, sympathy is an active, performative craft, rather than a wholly passive or descriptive spectatorship. Part of this production is a matter of imagination, "I can't know," announces Zuckerman, reflecting on the motives of Coleman Silk, "[f]or better or worse, I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know [...] I imagine [...] I am forced to imagine" (*Stain* 213). But the sympathetic connection is also a form of observation, memory, and listening that gives access to the "innermost wrongness" in others and it is this "wrongness" that authorizes the imaginative endeavor in the first place. There is a tension in the American Trilogy over how character emerges that cannot be reduced to bland labels such as "intersubjectivity," and this tension can be illustrated in spatial terms. At one point, after listening to Murray's account of his brother Ira's self-destruction, Zuckerman reflects:

How deep our hearing goes! Think of all it means to *understand* from something that you simply hear. The godlikeness of having an ear! Is it not at least a *semidivine* phenomenon to be hurled into the innermost wrongness of a human existence by virtue of nothing more than sitting in the dark, listening to what is said? (*Married* 321)

The spatial and dynamic tropes—depth, hurling, innermost—assigned to the reception of understanding, to the hearing of what is there in others and their meanings, indicates the profound exteriority of those others and yet Roth also consistently underscores the extent to which sympathetic understanding is a function of conjecture and expressive invention. In a strange combination of exteriorized “fact” and interiorized “fiction” Zuckerman, like Roth, is always interacting with and listening to “that strange voice he invented” (*Stain* 243). By sharpening the reader’s sense of the indisputable materiality of other lives and the reality of their suffering by keen verisimilitude, while at the same time underscoring an observer’s obligation to perform the interiority of those they sympathize with, Roth creates a paradox that avoids the presumption that all suffering is the same and that any subjectivity can be an object of definitive knowledge. This paradox, whereby sympathy is at once a mode of involuntary transport into *others* and a mode of *self*-production can be usefully mapped onto the notions of performative and constative modes of utterance.

Introduced by philosopher J.L. Austin in posthumously published work, the notion of the performative has become a touchstone for many contemporary theoretical models of identity, particularly identities of gender and sexuality as pursued in the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. While I take up aspects of this “deeper” notion of performative identity later in this and other chapters, here I only wish to linger momentarily over the “shallower” meanings of identification and performativity.

Disillusioned with the positivist model of language that conceived all utterances either as statements attempting to represent the world or as nonsensical pseudo-statements, Austin

proposed that utterances also do performative work: speech acts can bring about changes in the world. Seen through the lens of the performative, a speaker “is *doing* something rather than merely saying something” (222). Austin’s examples of performative utterances—“I do” in the marriage ceremony, “I promise...” and so on—at once reveal the distinction between the constative element (a description of something which is either correct or incorrect) and the performative element (an action undertaken through a speech act which either works or “misfires”) (225). Austin maintains that the performative aspect of speech acts requires that “the convention invoked must exist and be accepted [...and that] the circumstances in which we purport to invoke this procedure must be appropriate for its invocation” (224-225). One must be in certain very particular circumstances for “I do” to enter one into the legally binding marriage contract. Performance requires appropriate contexts in order to succeed, but Austin maintains that performance can also fail in a more difficult, less observable way, as when one congratulates or promises, but does so insincerely. In this case, one’s intentions do not undo or negate the performative act, but instead make it “infelicitous” in Austin’s language (224). One can conceive of the problem of performative sympathy by imagining how the utterance, “I sympathize” can go wrong.

On its surface, “I sympathize” functions as “I congratulate” does, because failing to identify genuinely with the pain of another does not, in conversational circumstances, nullify the performance of attesting to a genuine identification, but only renders it somehow unhappy, were all the facts known. But on closer inspection, “I sympathize” describes a state of subjective affairs about one’s imaginative relationship to the pain of

another that can “go wrong” even if stated with sincerity in the proper circumstances. For, if I fail to imagine how it must be to experience the affects I believe you to be undergoing, in a way that actually does correspond to your experience of those affects, my sympathy has failed at a constative level, though neither you nor I can actually know of its failure. Put another way, the process of performing sympathy functions more or less felicitously in maintaining affective bonds but it always runs an epistemological risk as a constative statement, since one is attesting to one’s own unverifiable affective experience as well as those of another. Moreover, since the act of imaginative projection designated by “I sympathize with you” or any similar verbal attestation is, by its nature, not a generic act but one specific to “your” circumstances, performing sympathy always involves a necessary originality. The necessity of originality links it with artistic process but also would seem to attest to sympathy’s impossibility, since “I” should not be originating these feelings but copying them faithfully from “you.” In tracing this aporia, I follow Derrida’s reading of Austin in “Signature Event Context.” In Derrida’s view singular performatives—political, literary, or otherwise—always run against the general iterability of language: “Effects of signatures are the most common thing in the world. But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity” (20). Reading the sentimental scene of sympathetic reproduction through the idea of performativity clarifies the impossibility of the “rigorous purity” of sympathy: one cannot author imaginative emotional experiences that represent, in an accurate, constative way, the inner life of others.... and yet sympathy goes on doing its work.¹⁵ While Roth’s

novels are, as I have argued above, deeply invested in the force of sympathetic bonds, they are also consistently and fretfully preoccupied with the impossibility of those bonds.

Roth's texts perform Zuckerman's sympathy through their focalization of character, but they also attest to its difficulty by casting doubt on the constative veracity of this narration. With Zuckerman, Roth produces the sympathetic witness as split between an action—primarily aesthetic but also self-making and ethical—and an epistemological description of the inner lives of himself and others. Zuckerman's status as novelist links sympathy's logic to the logic of fiction, wherein truthfulness is held in abeyance while the performative relationship of reading is created and nurtured. Throughout the trilogy, one encounters an insistence that sympathetic projection and performance always involve a necessary but nonetheless problematic error. Moreover, the suffering of "getting it wrong" reduplicates epistemologically the textual problems facing Roth's readers, and therefore insinuates into the sentimental repetition of feeling the poison pill of uncertainty. Here, as in the case of Zuckerman's sentimental education, one senses a progressive understanding. Early in *American Pastoral*, the epistemological quandary seems mild, a problem of understanding "the regular guy," whose bland normativity seems to have no depth. Zuckerman is "willing to admit that [his] Swede was not the primary Swede," given that he was "working with traces," but he is simply agnostic as to whether or not he had "imagined an outright fantastical creature, lacking entirely the unique substantiality of the real thing" (*Pastoral* 76-77). One senses Zuckerman's shrugging sanguinity: "it's up for grabs," he asserts, "as to whose guess is more rigorous than whose" (*Pastoral* 77). Here the question is of proximity or rigor, but

not impossibility.

At other moments in the trilogy, however, the difficulty of correctly assessing the inner life of others takes on greater weight, partly because misjudging others opens one to betrayal. Reeling from the impact of his misfortunes, the Swede reflects that everyone, including himself, “flash signs,” “shouting ‘This is me! This is me!’” and that one can never judge this veracity, in others or in one’s self. “*They* believed their flashing signs too,” he ruminates, “[t]hey ought to be standing and shouting, ‘This *isn’t* me! This *isn’t* me!’ They would if they had any decency. ‘This *isn’t* me!’ Then you might know how to proceed though the flashing bullshit of this world” (*Pastoral* 410). The possibility of making radical error of affective imagining, in one’s self or in others, has high stakes both epistemologically and affectively, and Roth often employs a more profound and despairing register in which such “wrongness” is a mode of life. Zuckerman refers to this as “this terribly serious business of other people, which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous, so ill-equipped are we all to envision one another’s interior workings and invisible aims” (*Pastoral* 35). In this fashion, the trilogy contains within it a strain of profound epistemological and affective doubt analogous to that of the Calvinist doctrine so anathema to American sentimentalism. As Zuckerman bewails, “It’s all error [...] There’s only error. *There’s* the heart of the world. Nobody finds his life. That *is* life” (*Married* 319). This aporetic element, though recurrent, does not vitiate the novel’s investment in modes of relation closely allied to those prized by the sentimental tradition, which are central, as I have argued, to the performative power of Roth’s texts. Instead, the relentless risk of

constative error is the condition that requires the production of performative sympathy, even as it also opens the scene of suffering to multiple, competing interpretations—ressentimental readings.

Ressentimental Nation

Roth's trilogy is invested in a revision of sentimentalism that pluralizes suffering across an affective terrain and that seeks to show how sentiment—"feeling right"—shares a taproot with *ressentiment*. Roth achieves this, first and most obviously, by extending Zuckerman's performative sympathy to so many: Swede Levov, Ira Ringold, Murray Ringold, Coleman Silk, Delphine Roux, Les Farley, and Faunia Farley. While it is worth remarking that, although five of his individuals come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Roth lists unambiguously toward own privileged demographic—three are Jewish, all but two are male, all but one are nominally white—and this bias is a crucial factor in blunting the power of his trilogy to produce an affective geography commensurable to the broad nation his rhetoric evokes. His is not a representative sampling of America's heterogeneity, a fact made more obvious when compared to the diversity of voices in Anna Deavere Smith's work.¹⁶ Setting aside his biases for the moment, Roth distinctly marks the ground of human social interaction as one of plural suffering, and he does so in large part by examining the framework and consequences of the prosecutorial spirit. Roth's text dramatizes this "spirit" as being animated by what Nietzsche refers to as *ressentiment*, a mode of affective antagonism produced by the capacity to create a putatively unbroken and blameless identity out of a moment of perceived victimization.

Ressentiment, “the moralizing revenge of the powerless,” like sentimentalism, has its roots in scenes of often humiliating suffering (Brown 66). But as Nietzsche maintains:

[E]very sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit who is receptive to distress, --in short, for a living being upon whom he can release his emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other: because the release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntarily longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind. In my judgment, we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then to *anaesthetize pain through emotion* [...] to *anaesthetize* a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unbearable with a more violent emotion of any sort, and at least rid the consciousness of it for the moment, -- for this, one needs emotion, the wildest possible emotion and, in order to arouse it, the first available pretext. (Nietzsche 93, italics original)

Whatever one makes of Nietzsche’s “physiological” explanation or his general disdain for compassion, one sees at once how the sentimentalization of pain-scenes differs, at least on its surface, from the *ressentiment*-alization of those scenes. While both function through the excitation of affect and both reconfigure the field of social suffering to control the lines of difference that bisect that field, sentimentalism proposes a strengthened affective and ethical connection between individuals, a solidarity produced in the face of pain, that works by eliding differences between a sufferer and a witness. The ressentimental subject, having transformed injury into identity, finds itself on a Manichean difference between those who suffer blamelessly and those demonic others who inflict the subject’s suffering. The sentimental always presupposes that it performatively creates a ground of solidarity. Such a model is always in danger of complacency, for the imaginative projection may be a *false* creation designed to ease the

conscience of the spectator. Or worse, it may use the power difference in the sentimental scene, between sufferer and witness, to maintain secretly other power differences. But here, we have already entered the realm of the ressentimental, which always presupposes and performatively creates identities based on enmity and projective suspicion.

Wendy Brown argues that contemporary American culture, where individuals are “buffeted and controlled by global configurations of disciplinary and capitalist power [...] and are at the same time nakedly individuated, stripped of reprieve from relentless exposure and accountability for themselves,” combines to produce conditions perfect for *ressentiment*’s production (69). The late modern liberal subject is, in her view “[s]tarkly accountable yet dramatically impotent,” and therefore “quite literally seeth[ing] with *ressentiment*” (69). Apart from this unpleasant seething, *ressentiment* is bad for Brown because it produces politicized identities that “inscribe in the law and in other political registers its historical and present pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself” (66). *Ressentiment* and sentiment project opposing views of temporality and power. The latter imagines a past or future (or both) as a space of unconflicted fellow feeling and radically equivalent power distribution; sentiment is, in its simplified form, utopian or pastoral and tends to see present conflict as an exception that, if adequately publicized, will generate sufficient sympathetic reaction to correct. *Ressentiment*, however, internalizes the power disequilibrium of the past as an identity-marker, a way of being set apart from others for the future, but consequently past disequilibriums are reified and continue indefinitely.

Roth rejects the sentimental view of unconflictedness and idyllic time but also

undoes the logic of *ressentiment* by pluralizing it radically and consequently achieving, by a perverse reverse, sentimentalism's universal ethos of shared pain and consequent grounds for solidarity. Avoiding the entanglements of *ressentiment* is not possible, particularly not in Roth. In each novel in the trilogy, the pathos of the suffering figure is at least in part based on the transparent oversimplification of his perceived opponent, whom he inevitably fails to comprehend and imagines as a demonic force. An inhuman Merry destroys Swede Levov; demonic McCarthyism destroys both Ira and Murray Ringold; wretched Sylphid torments Eve Frame; and hysterical Political Correctness ruins Coleman Silk. Nonetheless, one might read these novels to foreground the way in which the labels produced by *ressentiment*, the self-idealization of victims and demonization of the guilty, results in a reduction of real complex internal difference bisecting these groups, difference to which Roth repeatedly draws our attention. In this way, while Zuckerman's compassion is extended primarily to men of *ressentiment* seething over wounds received at the hands of their inhuman persecutors, these persecutors are dimly revealed also to be creatures of *ressentiment*, coping with their injuries by making them badges of honor. The internal dynamics of the background figures ironize the foregrounded protagonists. Far from endorsing this culture of victimization, or merely dismissing it, Roth exposes it as the context in which real sympathetic identification must occur, if it is to occur at all.

Few characters in recent American literature better exemplify the power of *ressentiment* that *American Pastoral's* Merry Levov. A tidy synecdoche for the structure and violence of this power can be seen in the way her stammering transmogrifies into a

profane harangue. Zuckerman writes: “the impediment became the machete with which to mow all the bastard liars down,” as when she “snarls” at Lyndon Johnson’s televised image, “[y]ou f-f-fucking madman! You heartless mi-mi-mi-miserable m-monster!” (*Pastoral* 100). Doubtless, we are meant to take as a mark of the Swede’s heartbreaking forbearance that he defends his daughter’s vituperations to his wife by saying that while “[t]here may not be much subtlety in [Merry’s political position], [...]there is some thought behind it, there’s certainly a lot of emotion behind it, [and] there’s a lot of *compassion* behind it” (102).¹⁷ Merry and her friends also borrow explicitly from the language of sentiment to make *their* points, as when Rita Cohen remarks of the Swede’s Newark Maid factory, “I know what a plantation is, Mr. Legree—I mean, Mr. Levov” (*Pastoral* 135). Indeed, a mix of compassionate sentiment and *ressentiment* can be seen everywhere in Merry’s rhetoric, as when she says of New York’s radical groups that “[t]hey feel responsible when America b-blow[s] up Vietnamese villages [...] [t]hey feel responsible when America is b-blowing little b-babies to b-b-b-b-bits [...] But you don’t, and neither does Mother” (*Pastoral* 107).

Roth, who had himself traveled to Cambodia in 1970 and attacked American foreign policy in Southeast Asia with scathing irony¹⁸, is not dismissing the reality or injustice of the carnage thereby treating Merry’s response to it with some irony.¹⁹ He also ironizes the Swede’s reaction to televised images of suffering in Vietnam, as when he blames Merry’s rebellion on her viewing a broadcast of self-immolating Buddhist monks.

into their home on Arcady Hill Road the charred and blackened corpse on its back in that empty street. That was what had done it. Into their home the monk came to stay, the Buddhist monk calmly sitting out his burning up as though he were a man both fully alert and anesthetized. The television transmitting the immolation must have done it. If their set had happened to be tuned to another channel or turned off or broken, if they had all been out together as a family for the evening, Merry would never have seen what she shouldn't have seen and would never have done what she shouldn't have done. (126)

One must note here *both* the falseness of Merry's speaking on behalf of the Vietnamese *and* the Swede's absurd attribution of culpability to the dying monk, a prime example of Nietzsche's "looking for a culprit" for one's pain. One sees this same scheme of doubled *ressentiment* when the Swede, reading Merry's copy of Franz Fanon, blames the "committed Algerian woman" who "does not have the sensation of playing a role," but whose revolutionary fervor raises her "directly to the level of tragedy," for the Swede is convinced that such figures are responsible for his "New Jersey girl descend[ing] to the level of idiocy" (*Pastoral* 261, italics original). In each case, Merry has sentimentalized an oppressed identity to forge her moralistic purity, while the Swede in turn faults the *oppressed* for having influenced his daughter to shatter his sentimentalized view of her.

In *I Married a Communist*, Roth amply demonstrates that political *ressentiment*-alization has a long history. Ira Ringold, his brother tells us, was "a sucker for suffering" whose "self-conception was of being virtuous" (*Married* 181). "[H]umanity to Ira," says Murray, "was synonymous with hardship and calamity. Toward hardship, even its disreputable forms, the kinship was unbreakable" (69). Roth's reader must be capable of differentiating, on the one hand, the desirability of an ethics and politics accountable to the suffering of oppressed peoples, even one such as sentimentalism which affectively

grounds itself in such a scene of response, and on the other hand, the self-aggrandizing romanticism that views every setback as a “struggle of the disinherited up from the bottom [as] an irresistible lure” (69). The various narrators of the novel, Murray, Zuckerman, and Roth himself, all seem at pains to demonstrate that, in Ira’s case, the rhetoric of suffering humanity and the identification with the oppressed is a cover for his more brutal and vengeful desires. As Murray summarizes:

Look, once upon a time all Ira thought about was how to alleviate the effects of human cruelty. Everything was funneled through that. But after that book of hers came out, all he thought about was how to inflict it. [...] [W]hen he realized he’d lost [his reputation and status] and no longer had to live up to it, he shed [...] [a]ll that endless rhetoric. Going on and on when what this huge man really wanted to do was to lash out. The talk was the way to blunt those desires. (122-123)

Ira’s Communism is not, however, the only or even primary target of Roth’s attack in the novel, a distinction that properly belongs to Joseph McCarthy’s use of the theatrics of moral self-righteousness. According to Murray, McCarthy knows “the entertainment value of disgrace and how to feed the pleasures of paranoia. He took us back to our origins, back to the seventeenth century and the stocks. That’s how the country began: moral disgrace as public entertainment” (284). The idea that America was *founded* on these displays of theatricalized vengeance is part of what I read as the novels’ universalization of *ressentiment*. When sentiment ceases to be universalizable, the social field it imagines fragments into subsets of *ressentiment*, but if *ressentiment* is read as a universal condition of sufferers and those who sympathetically crave justice on their behalf, it becomes another mode of the sentimental. Given that *I Married a Communist*

is widely viewed as Roth's response to the publication of his ex-wife Claire Bloom's memoir, *Leaving a Doll's House*, this attack on theatricalized public disgrace carries with it a sour *ressentiment* of its own. Nonetheless, this should not eclipse the demonstration, continuous throughout the American Trilogy, showing how scenes of sentiment and of *ressentiment* inevitably converge, revealing a danger internal to the act of sympathy.

The exploration of the prosecutorial spirit fueled by *ressentiment* is nowhere clearer than in *The Human Stain*, a novel in which nearly all characters are shown to define themselves against others whom they blame for doing what they themselves furtively do. Coleman faults his adversaries because they mislabel him as a closet racist while he in fact mislabels himself; Delphine Roux faults Coleman for his inappropriate desire for a younger woman, while she in fact desires Coleman herself. While one should rightly look askance at the reduction of real political grievances to petty self-deception, Roth's novel offers more than a moralistic attack on moralistic hypocrisy. At its best, *The Human Stain* is an intensive attack on Manichean notions of conflict that divide the social field into "black and white" zones of victims and victimizers. Instead, I read Roth as more interested in revealing numerous acts of moral "passing." Reading the trilogy through the dialectical complications of ressentimentality should forcefully direct Roth's reader to reject the safety of Faunia's notion that, "[s]he knew all she needed to know about the history of the human race: the ruthless and the defenseless. She didn't need the dates and the names. The ruthless and the defenseless, there's the whole fucking deal" (*Stain* 240). The crude division of humans to victims and victimizers echoes a distinction crucial to the stability of Nietzsche's formulation of *ressentiment*, between "lambs" and

“birds of prey”: “There is nothing strange about the fact that lambs bear a grudge toward large birds of prey: but that is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs” (25-26). The novel, as part of what I read as Roth’s broader universalization, and hence sentimentalization, of *ressentiment*, rejects Faunia’s (and, with it, Nietzsche’s) reduction and sees this putatively objective division as an artifact of its own model of *ressentiment*.²⁰ Politically, this infinite multiplication of the victim-victimizer dyad has complex consequences. First, I show how it enables Roth’s critique of the sentimental American pastoral mode, which Roth treats as an alluring but basically dishonest erasure of difference and conflict. I see this critique at work at the level of family, body, and party. Second, I focus on the ambiguous but crucial case of ressentimentalized Newark, a space that commingles black and white suffering in a manner that reinforces racist differentiations of public pain. Third, in the final section of this chapter, I show how Roth’s universalization of ressentiment also aligns Roth’s critique with the reactionary political appropriation of multiculturalism’s mode of victim culture.

Antipastoral Ambivalence

Pastoralism and antipastoralism are at war everywhere in the American Trilogy. In this section, I offer an overview of three ways in which Roth critiques the pastoral dream of withdrawing into sentimental unconflictedness—at the level of the family, the political party, and the racialized body—in order to contextualize my analysis of how these thematized critiques of sentimental unconflictedness are at play, much more ambivalently, in Roth’s treatment of Newark. Roth’s engagement with the sentimental

retreat into the private space of the family is most obviously pursued in *American Pastoral*, as its title suggests, though critics have noted that Roth's critique of the pastoral here seems less total than elsewhere in his oeuvre, particularly in *The Counterlife*. Still, it is the dominant thematic tension in the text, as the Swede's life pursuit seems to be to attain the sentimental utopia of unconflictedness primarily through maintenance of the patriarchal family. The Swede repeats his father, choosing to take over the Newark Maid glove factory and perform the sentimental role of the good son, but he also tries to create a perfect American family by losing the distinctiveness of his Jewishness, marrying a Gentile pageant winner, and attempting to raise the proverbial "perfect child." The elision of tension between particularity and generality, which is what the Swede seeks, is at the heart of what Zuckerman (and with him Roth) seems to find reprehensibly misguided about this social type, as one senses in this description of Thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving, when everybody gets to eat the same thing, nobody sneaking off to eat funny stuff—no kugel, no gefilte fish, no bitter herbs, just one colossal turkey for two hundred and fifty million people—one colossal turkey feeds all. A moratorium on funny foods and funny ways and religious exclusivity, a moratorium on the three-thousand-year-old nostalgia of the Jews, a moratorium on Christ and the cross and the crucifixion for the Christians, when everyone in New Jersey and elsewhere can be more passive about their irrationalities than they are the rest of the year. A moratorium on all the grievances and resentments, and not only for the Dwyers and the Levovs but for everyone in America who is suspicious of everyone else. It is the American pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty-four hours. (402)

Here, the concluding sentence underscores those conflicts native to the social field in America generally. Within the metaphorical American family, they can only be very

temporarily deferred and only through a performance scripted to gloss over difference. The novel's pathos derives almost wholly from the unsustainability of such a performance. The figure of stuttering Merry, "the angry, rebarbative spitting-out daughter with no interest whatever in being the next successful Levov," demonstrates the extent to which, whatever his efforts, the Swede's dream of perfect assimilation into unconflicted social space, "his particular form of utopian thinking," is destined to be "blast[ed] to smithereens" by "the indigenous American berserk" (86). Roth uses familial destruction as an index of larger societal disintegration elsewhere in the trilogy. In *I Married a Communist*, Ira's marriage disintegrates largely because his wife Eve sentimentalizes and spoils her daughter Sylphid. *The Human Stain* ends on a vaguely hopeful note, as Zuckerman, as a kind of surrogate for Coleman Silk, travels to East Orange to join the Silk family table to meet Coleman's brother and sister.

Roth's evaluation of political pastoralism is pursued most obviously in *I Married a Communist*, where one can see that critical evaluation as an extension or permutation of the critique of family presented in *American Pastoral*. If Sylphid is Eve Frame's screen on which to project fantasies of a deodorized life, then the notion of universal brotherhood is Ira's. The pathos of this second misrepresentation is at its most acute when Zuckerman plays a record, given to him years earlier by Ira, of the Soviet Army Chorus and Band performing "Dubinushka," "a stirring, mournful, hymnlike folksong" (*Married* 73). While he and Murray listen to the song, Zuckerman reflects on the choral refrain—"Heave ho!"—and the pastoral lie that the notion of collective labor contains within it:

“Heave-ho! Heave-ho!” was out of a distant place and time, a spectral residue of those rapturous revolutionary days when everyone craving for change programmatically, naively—madly, unforgivably—underestimates how mankind mangles its noblest ideas and turns them into tragic farce. Heave-ho! Heave-ho! As though human wiliness, weakness, stupidity, and corruption didn’t stand a chance against the collective, against the might of the people pulling together to renew their lives and abolish injustice. Heave-ho. (*Married* 74-75)

This poignant disparagement of the possibility of utopian politics and its concession to innate human weakness repeats the conservative political realism encountered elsewhere in the novel, as when the former Communist Golstine attacks Ira’s attachment to universal brotherhood. In Golstine’s view, whatever its horrors, capitalism

works because it’s based on the truth about people’s selfishness, and [Communism] doesn’t work because it’s based on a fairy tale about people’s brotherhood. [...] we know what our brother is, don’t we? He’s a shit. And we know what our friend is, don’t we? He’s a semi-shit. And we are semi-shits. So how can it be wonderful?” (*Married* 95)

The novel seems at pains to demonstrate that at least Murray’s brother is “a shit,” for Ira’s self-righteousness, his ideological fervor, his hypocrisy, and his murderousness make him easily the least likable major character in the trilogy. But the younger Zuckerman associated Ira with America’s own sentimental liberatory culture as well, and by virtue of this association Roth avoids limiting his political critique to the easy target of Stalinism.

All of the characters—Zuckerman, Murray, and Ira—seem most deeply moved by

the figure of Lincoln, whom Ira resembles and plays. They are particularly stirred by the conclusion of Lincoln's second inaugural address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations" (18). This sentence, which Murray Ringold says is "as noble and beautiful a sentence as any American president, as any American *writer*, had ever written," and which he makes the young Zuckerman diagram, typifies the American sentimental discourse, both political and nonpolitical, of its era. The stated dearth of cruelty, the universality of charity, and the religiously endowed moral clarity, as well as the figures of the widow and orphan, and the fantasy of unconflictedness are all distinctive markers. That the novel's narrator and so many of its characters find this political rhetoric powerful is clear, and I suspect that Roth's reader, also, is meant to feel their own susceptibility to it. Nonetheless, Roth's texts view this messianic version of American political constitution as another pastoral fiction, though a singularly tempting one. Roth's own views of this discourse, if not of American national identity in general, can be considerably more critical. One observes this clearly when, in response to an interviewer asking if he believed that "with September 11, the United States lost its innocence," Roth fumed, "What innocence? That's so naïve. From 1668 to 1865 we had slavery in this country. Then from 1865 to 1955, a society marked by brutal segregation. What innocence? I don't really know what people are talking about" (Turlin 4). While Roth and his novels reject the sentimentalization of America's past, his ambivalent critique is

one centered on the African American experience: an historical narrative involving the liberatory heroism of Lincoln and the dismal, but ultimately progressive story of increasing equality for slaves and their descendents. Roth does not, in short, primarily figure American sentimental political utopianism as being underwritten by annihilative displacements (a conclusion more likely to be drawn had he focused on the history of Native Americans in the U.S.), but rather as a mode of thought that hypocritically conceals the violent suppression of (racial) difference.

Roth's critique of pastoralism, both within the trilogy and in earlier texts, is often plotted in terms of ethnicity and bodily markers. The body's innate imperfection, of course, is extensively thematized in *The Human Stain*, where Roth links repressive pieties about bodily wholesomeness with a repressive notion of whiteness as purity. The titular "stain" links, perhaps facilely, the impeachment hearings of 1998 (in which the semen stain on Lewinsky's dress became a matter of public stagings of shame), to the incontinence Zuckerman experiences after his prostate surgery, as well as to the "stain" of ethnic difference. All are conflated into "the human stain," which is, (at least as Zuckerman renders her) as Faunia meditates:

"...the human stain," she said, and without revulsion or contempt or condemnation. Not even with sadness. That's how it is—[...] we leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen—there's no other way to be here. Nothing to do with disobedience. Nothing to do with grace or salvation or redemption. It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. [...] It's why all the cleansing is a joke. A barbaric joke at that. The fantasy of purity is appalling" (*Stain* 242)

In his book's most famous, and most radical conceptual move, Roth links this fantasy of purity to the racially normative category of whiteness. Zuckerman underscores the constructedness of this category when he writes of Coleman that "your art was being a white man. Being, in your brother's words, 'more white than the whites.' That was your singular act of invention" (*Stain* 345). Some critics suggest that this passage valorizes Coleman's act of self-fashioning.²¹ Perhaps, but there is also ample evidence that Roth views such self-invention as another mode of utopianism. For Coleman, whiteness is a ticket to individual freedom with (or from) his society (*Stain* 120), but, at least as importantly, it is also a way of producing one's future and identity as *carte blanche*. The central scene in which Coleman repudiates his mother, echoing Merry's agonized repudiation of her father, begins as an act of sacrificial killing meant to eliminate conflictedness in Coleman's world by enabling his pastoral withdrawal—"murdering her on behalf of his exhilarating notion of freedom!" (138)—but it concludes with a reversal when his mother tells him, "You are white as snow and you think like a slave" (139), reversing Coleman's equation of whiteness and freedom and foregrounding conflicts internal to him. Though the novel sustains an antipastoral attack on the purity of whiteness, it does so with an ambivalence, characteristic of its treatment of other pastoralisms, but with more politically regressive results. Nowhere is this plainer than in the trilogy's representation of Newark.

One Big Unhappy Family

Roth's trilogy, like the other works in this study, employs the trope of the urban

ruin, here of Newark, NJ, as a ressentimental figure for America's contested identity. Using conflicted urban space as a metonym for the larger nation has no determinate political valance; representing cities as places where social conflicts of class and race are staged could be part of any naturalist or realist aesthetic, but it can also be symptomatic of an anti-urbanism common in much of American canonical literature, which works hand in hand with the pastoral mode. As Leo Marx suggests in his reading of this relationship in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Scarlet Letter*, "in each work a pastoral figure within a vision of an alluring alternative is set against the grim image of urban pain, oppression, and ugliness" (225). The terms of such a contrast clearly favor pastoral withdraw into the countryside/suburb, where maintaining the fantasy of sentimental unconflictedness is much easier, often with politically regressive results: "[b]y masking an upper-class sensibility in the garb of a shepherd or a working man the pastoralist tells us that differences between classes don't matter [...] [a belief that] reinforce[s] illusions of class harmony" (Marx 293). But as Marx also points out, a tremendous number of canonical American authors, including arch-pastoralist Thoreau, "increasingly have tended to compose pastoral romances of manifest failure. They continue to enact the retreat/quest, but it would seem that they do so chiefly in order to deny it, and the resulting state of mind is one of structured ambivalence" (222). This ambivalence repeats in Roth's texts by being refracted through the experiences of multiple characters.

However longstanding the play between anti-urbanism and failed pastoralism may be, the American Trilogy's fixation on Newark's dilapidation, as well as the other contemporary uses of the city considered in this study, takes on special meaning in the

years directly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many critics wondered why, precisely, Roth had reacted so belatedly to Newark's racial conflict, some thirty years after the fact.²² While the answer is doubtless overdetermined, one might concentrate on the role of cities in the broad postwar history Roth wishes to evoke, a historical moment conveyed well by the high school reunion speech Zuckerman pens: "To have lived—and in this country, and in our time, and as who we were. Astonishing" (*Pastoral* 44). In fact, for many living in the nation's metropolises, the post war period is inseparable from the decline of American cities, beginning in the mid-1940s. As Robert Beauregard argues:

The history of the United States after World War II is incomplete without reference to the fate of its once-mighty cities. Urban decline lurks behind every postwar story, appears in analyses of national and local economies, figures prominently in the evolution of federal, state, and municipal governments, and even surfaces as a major event in the history of the American family. Of the many traits that distinguish postwar America from the nearly two hundred years of history that preceded it, urban decline is one of the most salient. (4)

As I have suggested, the predominant pastoralism of the postwar period is white flight, as deindustrialization and the growth of service-based economies drove many businesses out of cities to seek areas of lower living costs, less congestion, cheaper labor, and more favorable tax rates, which in turn left many city centers decaying and racialized. As Liam Kennedy writes, as whites left and cities became increasingly Black and Latino, they became "more intensely psychologised as sites of racial anxieties, symbolic scenes of repression and conflict in which race is projected as a disturbing force of disorder" (7). After the 1992 Los Angeles riots, following fast on the nation's shift in self-perception to

being the world's only superpower, the notion of American domestic space—a sentimentalized vision linking familial and political valances—could not fail to address the nation's urban miasma.

As noted above, Newark is so central to the trilogy that some critics refer to it as the Newark trilogy, rather than the American Trilogy. All of its major characters—Zuckerman, the Swede, Ira and Murray, and Coleman—are Newark-born, and each character's relationship to the city complicates the trilogy's own. Moreover, although these urban representations are generally focalized through sometimes-unreflective characters, it is often tempting to attribute its frequent tendency to treat “the presence of blacks as a specter of fear” to Roth himself (Tanenbaum 40). Setting aside this possibility for the moment, I here want to analyze three movements in the trilogy in a manner roughly analogous to the temporal categories past, present, and future. First, Roth shows how nostalgic sentimentalization of Newark's past is a mode of self-forgetting that entails the abandonment of urban realities. One observes this both in Nathan Zuckerman's own relation to his childhood neighborhood and in Lou Levov's inability to connect his own excruciating life as a working immigrant with the experiences of his employees. One can add to these examples a third: Coleman's abandonment of his family in East Orange as a paradoxical act of “white flight.” A second, “present” moment can be traced through the perspectives of Swede Levov and Murray Ringold, in which Newark becomes a contested ground where ressentimental identities plot their own vulnerability, abandonment, and suffering. Both the Swede and Murray refuse to abandon Newark based on their own self-images, but this patronizing

faux-innocence and liberal guilt give way to racist fears and eventual full abandonment of urban Newark. Third, when Zuckerman returns to Newark, he thematically reverses Coleman's abandonment of it (as well as his own), constituting the possible ground of a sentimental reconstitution of the social, a moment explicated in this chapter's conclusion. What emerges from these three moments is an ambivalent pathos mourning a never-present sentimental cohesion of Newark while marking it as a space destroyed by ressentimental demonization, just as the familial spaces considered above proved to be. Nonetheless, Roth consistently achieves this effect at the expense of Newark's black residents, thus corroborating the affective logic of white flight.

Zuckerman's Newark experiences before his Berkshire retreat demonstrate the extent to which the coherence of the city's identity is dependent on familial coherence; more to the point, the *loss* of both city and family combine to evacuate individual identities of substance. As an author, Zuckerman had expounded on the Newark of his youth extensively in *Carnovsky*, a novel clearly meant to parallel Roth's own notorious *Portnoy's Complaint*, and was therefore already conscious of links between family and city. The connections are underscored, however, in the concluding episode of *Zuckerman Unbound*. After his father dies cursing Zuckerman for his betrayal of the family in fiction, and after his brother similarly forsakes him, Zuckerman, returning to New York from Newark Airport in a limousine, decides to revisit the house of his childhood, only to discover that his former neighbor is a slum (*Unbound* 221). "The building's front door was [...] torn from its hinges, and, to either side of the missing door, the large windows looking into the foyer had lost their glass and were boarded over," reflects Zuckerman.

“There was exposed wiring where once there had been two lamps to light your way in, and the entryway itself was upswept and littered with trash,” he reports, concluding, “[t]he building had become a slum” (*Unbound* 222). Zuckerman notes that “[e]xcept for the elderly trapped in nearby housing projects, the Jews had all vanished. So had almost everyone white” (*Unbound* 223). The current tenant of his former home, “a young black man, his head completely shaved,” sees Zuckerman in the limo and asks, ““Who you supposed to be?”” (*Unbound* 224). The writer’s reply—““No one””—is meant to demonstrate the extent to which Zuckerman’s identity has become “unbound.” He reflects to himself, “[y]ou are no longer any man’s son, you are no longer some good woman’s husband, you are no longer your brother’s brother, and you don’t come from anywhere anymore” (*Unbound* 224-225). In this fashion, Zuckerman borrows the immiseration of African-Americans in Newark to lend sharpness to his own personal pathos, even as that pathos is figured as a mode of *disconnection* from Newark, a pattern repeated in the American Trilogy. Moreover, it is the suspicion and indifference of the home’s current occupants, rather than Zuckerman himself, which are figured as the source of this communal disconnection, “[h]ad the fellow cared to ask, Zuckerman could without any trouble have told him the names of the three families who lived in the flats on each floor before World War II. But that wasn’t what this black man wished to know” (*Unbound* 224). Thus Newark, for Zuckerman, is a screen on which elegiac nostalgia may be projected but which also serves as a screen to hide the roots of his own self-fashioning abandonment of familial and communal concerns.

The Newark of Lou Levov is similarly split between a nostalgic past and a present

unaccountably submerged in racialized chaos, but his perspective is treated with much more evident irony. His sons tell Zuckerman that, before his death, the patriarch constantly complained of the city's post-riot changes: "his beloved old Newark, butchered to death by taxes, corruption, and race" (*Pastoral* 24). The last term in this series takes pride of place in Lou's complaints, and at least in part this seems to be because he comprehends the inevitability of taxes and corruption but is thoroughly confused by the culture and claims of the city's African Americans, as when he blames a "whole business going down the drain" on "that son of a bitch LeRoi Jones, that Peek-A-Boo-Boopy-Do, whatever the hell he calls himself in that godamn hat" (*Pastoral* 163). But Lou's race complaint runs much deeper than cultural misunderstanding. In one of the novel's more obvious ironic censures on the racialized discourse of characters with whom it otherwise sympathizes, Lou recounts an argument with a friend who maintains that "they ought to take the schvartzes and line 'em up and shoot 'em" (*Pastoral* 164). Lou objects that this is what Hitler did to Jews, but his interlocutor balks at the comparison, and the two become entangled in an argument particularly frustrating to Lou because "[t]hey are telling me to shoot the schvartzes and I am hollering no, and meanwhile I'm the one whose business they are ruining because they cannot make a glove that fits [...] I am arguing with them, *I am arguing against what I should be arguing for!*" (*Pastoral* 164). Lou's complicity in this pseudo-genocidal dehumanization of his employees and Newark's black population is part of a more general self-forgetting that figures his workforce as shrewdly thieving and decadently lazy, while failing to recall his own status as a racialized immigrant toiling in Newark's leather works decades

earlier:

The tannery that stank of both the slaughterhouse and the chemical plant from the soaking of flesh and the cooking of flesh and the dehairing and pickling and degreasing of hides, where round the clock in the summertime the blowers drying the thousands and thousands of hanging skins raised the temperature in the low-ceilinged dry room to a hundred and twenty degrees, where the vast vat rooms were dark as caves and flooded with swill, where brutish workingmen, heavily aproned, armed with hooks and staves, dragging and pushing overloaded wagons, wringing and hanging waterlogged skins, were driven like animals through the laborious storm that was a twelve-hour shift—a filthy, stinking place awash with water dyed red and black and blue and green, with hunks of skin all over the floor, everywhere pits of grease, hills of salt, barrels of solvent. (*Pastoral* 11-12)

While one may interpret this passage as a token of respect for the work ethic of a generation laboring in merciless conditions for its children's advantage, one cannot ignore its propulsive, heaving intimations of toil half-lit by an infernal glow, which gives the lie to nostalgic revisions about the city's past effulgence. When Lou scolds his son, "Seymour, this city isn't a city—it's a carcass! Get out!" the novel gives us abundant reason to understand that the carcass here has been decaying a long while (*Pastoral* 235). As with Zuckerman, Lou Levov transforms the urban immiseration of African Americans in Newark into his own resentimental loss, though in Lou's case, this process is more clearly treated with distancing irony.

The most extensive, complex, and problematic representation of Newark emerges from the perspective of the Swede, at least as Zuckerman imagines him. The Swede's view of Newark and the business he runs in it is inseparable from his resentimental identity as a wounded patriarch, betrayed by uncomprehending subalterns. The Swede

connects the revolt of his workers with his daughter's inexplicable rebellion: "First one colossal blow—seven months later, in February '68, the devastation of the next. The factory under siege, the daughter at large, and that took care of their future" (*Pastoral* 163). Such an attitude suggests Zuckerman's perspective is precisely the "paternal capitalism" Rita Cohen accused him of (*Pastoral* 135). This view is supported by the fact that one of the factory's employees, Vicki, stays with Levov during the riots telling him: "This is mine too. You just own it," a phrase seemingly calculated to offer the veneer of insubordination while actually downplaying continuing real differences in power (*Pastoral* 162). While, in my view, the novel holds the Swede's paternalism at an ironic remove, Roth complicates all readings of the broader economic and racial politics involved by placing much of novel's description of the 1967 riots in a lengthy, surreal episode in which, seated on his kitchen stool, the Swede deliriously imagines a visitation by Angela Davis, "St. Angela," who he is convinced holds the secret of his fugitive daughter's location.

He tells Angela how, after the riots, after living under siege with Vicky at his side, he was determined to stand alone and not leave Newark and abandon his black employees. He does not, of course tell her that he wouldn't have hesitated—and wouldn't still were it not for his fear that, if he should join the exodus of businesses not yet burned down, Merry would at least have her airtight case against him. *Victimizing black people and the working class and the poor for self-gain, out of filthy greed!* (162)

Passages such as this demonstrate how the novel often simultaneously 1.) reiterates neoconservative *ressentiment* and fear about racialized unrest, 2.) ironizes that

perspective as dishonest and self-serving, and 3.) ridicules as self-righteousness and despotic the ressentimental attacks of the New Left—“the utter otherworldliness of the ideal of St. Angela”—a satire anticipating Roth’s attack on Communist rhetoric in the trilogy’s second novel (*Pastoral* 165). Numerous examples of this dialectical texture of voice occur throughout, as when the Swede “decides to explain [...] that he is one of two white trustees (this is not true—the father of a friend is the trustee) of an antipoverty organization that meets regularly in Newark to promote the city’s comeback, which (also not true—how could it be?) he still believes in” (*Pastoral* 165). To Roth’s great credit, when his text is at its most complex, the ceaseless ironic impersonation of multiple *ressentimental* political rhetorics produces Newark as a chaotic cavalcade of contending, hyperbolic voices. To Roth’s discredit, however, these voices often serve to obscure the material realities of the events they describe in a pattern expressive of its own racialized *ressentiment*.

To see how such furtive *ressentiment* is embedded in the text, it is worth recalling the basic facts about Newark’s 1967 unrest, a riot that LIFE magazine called “a predictable insurrection,” because the conditions in the city were known to be “[m]ore grave and pressing than those of perhaps any other American city of the time” (qtd. in Hayden 5). Far from paradisiacal before the riots, Newark had the highest percentage of poor housing, the most crime per capita, and the greatest maternal mortality of any city in the nation, also ranking among the worst cities with regard to venereal disease, infant mortality, birth rate, unemployment and drug addiction (Hayden 5). The primary tension in the city was between business elites and the growing civil rights movement, a fact that

makes a meeting between Angela Davis and a person like the Swede oddly fitting. Business elites, not surprisingly, felt that the proper solution to the city's plight was a mix of job training and the restoration of space for prime business conditions, which included plans to develop a medical school in the middle of a downtown black neighborhood, a step designed, in the words of one Chamber of Commerce newsletter to "overwhelm the creeps" (qtd. in Hayden 6). Fear of the displacements sure to follow such a project as well as bitterness over having their political representation in municipal government blocked led to the pre-riot tensions among many black Newarkers, though initial violence did not begin until a black cab driver—one John Smith—received a set of broken ribs, a concussion, and a hernia during his arrest for "tailgating" (Hayden 9-10). As word spread of Smith's treatment, a crowd of angry unruly protesters gathered from the slums and projects outside the 4th Police precinct, throwing rocks and eventually two Molotov cocktails into the building. An escalation of reciprocal attacks led to four days of looting and violence in which twenty-one civilians, all black, were shot to death, most by riot police firing into crowds and apartment buildings, and one, it is alleged, of a bayonet wound (Hayden 76).

That so little of this is mentioned in Roth's description of the riots helps to explain how the novel, whatever its ironic layering of voices, effectively transfers the pathos of brutalization and economic collapse from blacks within Newark's slums to the white business elite who wished to drive them out. Some of this transference owes to the Swede's own limited zone of sympathy, as he is imagined, but the sympathetic investment in the Swede, based largely in the injustice of his family's collapse, bleeds

into sympathy for the fate of his family business. Their commingling is consistent throughout the text, as when, reeling from news of his daughter's rape, the Swede's focalized fulmination shifts to the novel's lengthiest description of the riots. Note how the rioters act with ideal strength and employable organization, merits lacking among Newark Maid workers, which subtly underscores that the passage begins securely focalized in the Swede:

Their strength is tremendous, their teamwork is flawless. The shattering of the glass windows is thrilling. The not paying for things is intoxicating. [...] In Newark's burning Mardi Gras streets, a force is released that feels redemptive, something purifying is happening, something spiritual and revolutionary perceptible to all. The surreal vision of household appliances out under the stars and agleam in the glow of the flames incinerating the Central ward promises the liberation of all mankind. [...] the old ways of suffering are burning blessedly away in the flames, never again to be resurrected, instead to be superseded, within only hours, by suffering that will be so gruesome, so monstrous, so unrelenting and abundant, that its abatement will take the next five hundred years. The fire this time—and next? After the fire? Nothing. Nothing in Newark ever again. (268-269)

The concluding allusion to James Baldwin's text marks this passage, and its bitter skepticism, as Zuckerman's (and perhaps Roth's) own. Roth's reader is left to provide background on "the old ways of suffering," which, by all accounts, were the effective causes of the riots. This tendency to erase conditioning motive is underscored in Swede's other mentions of Newark post-riot. What remains for the Swede is racialized fear, as attested by his descriptions of contemporary Newark, where black youths steal cars to joyride and pointlessly run over pedestrians (24-26). The reduction of inner city residents to faceless "predatory blacks roaming the Newark streets," may be a function of the

novel's characters, rather than Roth's own political perspective, but as I have demonstrated, subtle markers indicate their perspectives often coincide on this point (Boyers 40). Moreover, the occlusion of conditions motivating the riot and the transference of urban pathos to suburban Swede Levov only serves to undo the critique of pastoralism otherwise sustained in *American Pastoral*, by making white flight not only compulsory, but an agonized exodus resulting from victimization at the hands of racialized assailants.

This conclusion is supported by the ressentimental texture of Murray Ringold's explanation of his wife's death at the end of *I Married a Communist*. In the second novel, there is less dialectical negation of Murray's perspective; Murray's effort to stay in Newark as a teacher clearly represents a more heartfelt commitment to civic cohesion and equality than had the Swede's. "Even after the riots, when Newark emptied out," Murray relates to Zuckerman, "we stayed on Lehigh Avenue, the only white family that did stay" (316). Again, the specter of a white paternalistic pathos develops in Murray's description of his battles against classroom unruliness, for while "[b]arely able to hold down the mayhem, let alone teach," Murray is unable to abandon: "how could I run away? I was interested in respect being shown for these kids" (316-317). His desire to stay was unaffected by being mugged twice, a fact he now rues for, shortly after his second mugging, his wife Doris is murdered "[f]or a handbag with nothing in it" (317). Murray confides to Zuckerman his guilt over Doris' death, certain that even after abandoning "all the obvious delusions—religion, ideology, Communism—you're still left with the myth of your own goodness. Which is the final delusion" (317-318). As in *American*

Pastoral, separations between civic pathos and familial pathos are collapsed, but not into a sentimental bond—a term that would accurately describe Murray’s mantra: “I can’t betray my brother, I can’t betray my teaching, I can’t betray the disadvantaged of Newark” (317). Rather, the novel concludes with the racialized pandemonium of urban Newark becoming inseparable from personal, private trauma and loss. Once again, the bond is ressentimental and, once again, transforming black presences into shadowy menacing clichés of white paranoia produces the desired effect.

Authorizing America

Before considering how the conclusion of *The Human Stain* attempts to reconcile both the trilogy’s critique of whiteness with its racialized *ressentiment* over Newark’s destruction, let us return to the central schema of performative sympathy to understand how and where such a model would locate the privileged place of (res)sentiment. I have argued above that, while the performative dimensions of sympathy can produce affective solidarities without regard to epistemological certainty, that constative ambiguity about the experiences of others opens up the sympathetic witness to ethical fault, especially ressentimental projection. Further, I have shown how Roth’s novels are narratologically invested in the sentimental model of sympathetic witnessing while their thematic exploration of communal and familial conflict is governed by plural *ressentiment*, contradictory and competing scripts staging diverse subjects as wrongful victims. I have not, however, explored how, in Roth, the volatility of ressentimental force cannot be contained, and how contesting claims to virtue-by-means-of-suffering necessarily call into question the stability and privilege of the central witness, Zuckerman. Recall that, in

speech act theory, performative utterances require a speaker who is authorized to produce the effect in question: a presiding judge's decision performs effectively while the same language from the lips of a panhandler does nothing. Clearly Roth authors and authorizes Zuckerman as sympathetic witness but looking closer at the source of authorization is key. Whatever his claims about the risks of wrongness in imaginative projection, each of the novels is figured as *Zuckerman's* novel, though this is only made explicit in the trilogy's final pages. Thus the narrative logic of the trilogy is indistinguishable from Zuckerman self-authorizing as a sympathetic witness. Moreover his authority to speak, to project as a sympathetic witness, to attend to the suffering of others, is conferred at least in part by his invisibility as a nominally white man. Dilemmas over the right to write formed a predominant part of the first Zuckerman trilogy, in which the novelist's "betrayal" of the Jewish-American community as well as his family figured prominently. Even though the universalization of *ressentiment* ultimately produces texts that reinscribe white male privilege in the guise of yet another form of victimized identity, Roth attempts a sophisticated and subtle repudiation of white male privilege in the closing passage of *The Human Stain*.

First, I must acknowledge that the political disposition of *The Human Stain*, even more than the preceding novels, evinces a shift toward a politics of reaction. Roth's manifest disapproval of Kenneth Starr notwithstanding, his novel primarily excoriates multiculturalist and feminist appeals for greater sensitivity to continuing inequalities across race and gender divisions. The novel strenuously rejects what it calls the assertion of "incapacity as privilege," "[t]he privilegedness of [...] suffering," "de-virilizing pulpit

virtue-mongering,” and “the hyperdramatization of the pettiest emotions” (*Stain* 331, 234, 153, 147). To the extent that Roth maps his rejection of victim-identities onto the cultural critiques popularly referred to as “political correctness,” he strands his analysis on the isle of white male neo-conservative *ressentiment*.²³ Roth’s satire of the moralistic self-congratulation not infrequent in progressive circles is most stinging when he aligns it to tyrannizing proprieties of the past, proprieties like those that “H.L. Mencken identified with boobism, that Philip Wylie thought of as Momism, that the Europeans unhistorically call American Puritanism, that the likes of Ronald Reagan call America’s core values” (153). But this pose of ecumenical disdain from all models of decorum, be they in the form of “civic responsibility, WASP dignity, women’s rights, black pride, ethnic allegiance, or emotion-laden Jewish ethical sensitivity,” belies Roth’s investments in privileged frames of judgment by which the suffering of his protagonists can emerge legibly (153).

Perhaps the most egregious strategy Roth employs to establish these frames of judgment as objective is having Ernestine Silk, the only woman of color to speak at length in the trilogy, espouse them. She decries Urban Renewal plans, the abandonment of teaching agreed-upon classics, and the advent of Black History Month. Particularly excruciating is the last of these objections, formulated in the following comparison: “I liken having a Black History Month in February and concentrating study on that to milk that’s just about to go sour. You can still drink it, but it just doesn’t taste right” (329). As with Newark Maid’s Vicki, Ernestine is authorized to speak only to support the positions of the white man to whom she is speaking. In the earlier case, Vicki’s

appropriation had been another ironic indication of the Swede's own mendacious *ressentiment*. Aside from enabling the revelation of Coleman's race and corroborating Zuckerman's biases, Ernestine Silk is a cipher. If she is meant to bespeak a demographic widening of the novel's sympathetic projection, she only confirms the ethical danger of substituting one's self for another, a danger to which Roth seemed more alive in *American Pastoral*. This failure of Roth's trilogy ought not be minimized, for it cuts to the heart of Roth's ambitions.

Nevertheless, the trilogy's concluding scene does much to complicate any facile dismissal of the novel's racial politics. The scene begins with Zuckerman en route to a planned gathering with Coleman's brother and sister in East Orange, an assembly I take to represent the possibility of a reconstitution of Newark's broken social body as well as the divided family structure to which it has been persistently linked. Instead of concluding with this sentimental scene, however, the novel ends with Zuckerman meeting face to face with the novel's villain, Lester Farley, who is ice-fishing on a frozen lake.²⁴ A Vietnam veteran with posttraumatic stress disorder, Lester exemplifies the bifurcated status of white man as victim and victimizer, as well as the ultimate incoherence of identities based in these terms. His traumatization during the Vietnam War is ambivalent: Les was both a murderer of Vietnamese civilians *and* a young man watching as his friends were gruesomely dispatched. On his return, memories of these experiences continue to determine Les's actions, so that Roth's reader understands Les's vituperative racism and the physical abuse and eventual murder of his wife, Fauna, as consequences of his earlier brutalization. Importantly, Roth stresses that Les's

sympathetic capacities have been irreparably distorted, so that “I feel like I’ve been hit on the side of the head with a two-by-four when nothing is happening. Then something is happening, something fucking huge [here, the death of his two children], I don’t feel a fucking thing” (73). So complete is his numbness that, Les is unable to share in the cathartic experience of other soldiers during his pilgrimage to the Moving Wall, a touring miniaturization of the Vietnam Memorial. Hence, when Zuckerman confronts Lester on the iced-over lake, he confronts an embodiment of the human capacity to *lose* its capacity for fellow feeling, the very archetype of militant white *ressentiment*.

Furthermore, the “empty, ice-whitened stage” on which they meet underscores the lethality and barrenness of a pure whiteness, an unfeeling identity convinced of its own universality, covering an interior that is, in Les’s menacing words “*real* dark” (*Stain* 346, 358). For Zuckerman, the meeting is the precise reverse of the sentimental journey he has interrupted, for “it is as though we have encountered each other at the top of the world, two hidden brains mistrustfully ticking, mutual hatred and paranoia the only introspection there is anywhere” (*Stain* 351). The antipastoralism of Roth’s trilogy culminates in this monstrously threatening emblemization of white flight. “It’s just a beautiful area,” Les muses, “Just peace and quiet. And clean. It’s a clean place. Away from all the hustle and bustle and craziness that goes on” (*Stain* 347). Moreover, Roth stages the scene so that Zuckerman’s own authorization as a writer and sympathetic witness are at stake. When Les asks him what kind of writer he is, Zuckerman replies, “I write about people like you [...] Yes. People like you. Their problems” (356). Zuckerman intends to write a book, called *The Human Stain*, in which he reveals Les as

the murderer of Faunia and Coleman, an act of narration that will mean that “when [he] finished the book, [he] was going to have to go elsewhere to live” (360). That Roth ends his trilogy with a symbolic, though not explicit, repudiation of whiteness and the fantasies of purity, attests to his interest in problematizing the resentment of his own subject position. Nevertheless, the politics of representation continue to dog Roth’s work. His presentation of America as a diverse and conflicting group of affective identities resentimentally composed, while side-stepping the naïveté of both pastoral retreat and sentimental communion, draws an implicit equivalence between socioeconomic groups with radically divergent scales of grievances. This implied equivalence helps to maintain the normative invisibility of the white male author, to whom the authorization of sympathetic performance is still securely entrusted. In the novel’s final image, Zuckerman sees from a distance Les Farley on the ice lake and likens his shape to the X of an illiterate’s signature. This signatory X might also be imagined as the mark indicating that we, Roth’s reader, are to sign the concluding lines, and with them, sign off on the America that Zuckerman, and Roth, has presented. We should, instead, leave this space as blank as we find it.

Why did Roth return to the problem of Newark’s destruction in the mid-1990s? Could the fires of Los Angeles in 1992 have reminded him of that decades-old entanglement? If such literary biographical questions cannot, at present, be resolved, it may still be profitable to place his work in dialogue with literature emerging more explicitly from the upheavals of the early 1990s. In the next chapter, I analyze the

affective pedagogy of Anna Deavere Smith's theatrical work, much of which responds directly to the smoldering tensions and occasional explosions evident in American urban life in the last decade of millennium. Surprisingly, Roth and Smith's approaches to affective pedagogy share a great deal. Though tonally different, Roth's agony over the errors of sympathy and imaginative projection more generally parallels Smith's own abandonment of naïve mimetic notions of sympathetic commingling. Furthermore, though each stresses the impossibility of the exact reproduction of subjective positions, both seem to embrace the notion that art's great ethical virtue is in cultivating a capacity for imaginative projection. Lastly, both use the figure of the artist or writer as the hinge by which the door of sympathy swings. Nevertheless, where Roth's ressentimental leveling furtively reintroduces the priority of white patriarchy, Smith seems with each work more intent on revealing the historical terrain of power and challenging the ways in which urban populations are made voiceless by the most culturally dominant forms of mediation, of which one would have to reckon Roth one unusually sophisticated example. Moreover, Smith attends far more carefully to the urban realities characterizing her historical moment. In cities such as New York and Los Angeles, the historically singular influx of immigrants from Asian and Latin American severely eroded the salience of black-white racial dichotomies, dichotomies that still haunt Roth's works despite the ways in which Jewishness works as a deconstructive supplement. Smith's theater seeks to sentimentally attend to more recent divides and devastations

CHAPTER III

LITTLE LIFE SENTENCES: STAGING THE NATION IN ANNA DEEVERE SMITH'S SEARCH FOR AMERICAN CHARACTER

"It's like he's looking at me, doesn't see me, he's just looking right through me" (qtd. in Cannon 29). So spoke Sgt. Stacey Koon, during his first interview with Los Angeles Police Dept.'s Bureau of Internal Affairs, regarding his encounter with Rodney King, a young African American motorist with whom Koon's fate was quickly becoming entangled. The archival record of this exchange of glances, or rather the failure of any such exchange, bore considerable juridical significance, for it helped to support the claim that Koon, along with three other LAPD officers, had reason to believe that King was under the influence of phencyclidine (PCP) and thus dangerously insensible to pain. The evidential validity of this statement, the question of how much weight can be given to an officer of law's words and what his suspicions license, was at the heart of Koon's defense against charges that he had abused his position and used excessive force during King's arrest. The evidence appeared damning: together, Koon and Officer Laurence Powell had struck King with a total of thirty-one baton blows even after King had been shot with two separate Taser electroshock guns. All this transpired while another pair of officers, Timothy Wind and Theodore Briseno, landed intermittent blows to King's body and an additional six officers stood by with seeming indifference (Cannon 45). Jurors knew with certainty the number of baton blows and uniformed onlookers because George Holliday,

a bystander, recorded the March 3, 1991 beating from his apartment's patio. The video, repeatedly played for the remainder of the year on both local and national news sources, showed the cordon of officers illuminated by a helicopter's spotlight kicking and clubbing King's flailing body without any evident need to fear for their own safety and ostensibly incapable of seeing (or indifferent to) the prone man's agony. Nonetheless, twelve jurors deferred to Koon's impression, despite what their own eyes, via the Holliday video, told them, and acquitted Koon along with two other officers of all wrongdoing on April 29, 1992. What followed was the most costly civil unrest in American history and, I suggest, a consequent resurgence of sentimental tropes in popular and literary discourse to soothe differences figured as interior and domestic—internal divisions, inside the nation, in the inner cities.²⁵

Both in their nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century iterations, these sentimental tropes—the grieving parent, the abandoned child, and above all, the sympathetic witness who models an implicitly or explicitly endorsed response to suffering—were aimed at producing a coherent American identity. More precisely, in my reading, early American sentimentalism provided an important theoretical means of constructing a collective identity that could claim to transcend legalistic formulations of the nation-state without relying on aristocratic and religious justifications for governance. This mode of identification was based on the imaginative projection of another's pain in one's self such that suffering becomes the safeguard of social bonds. It is especially ironic, then, that this increased sentimentalization of American citizenship should be provoked by a spiral of violence marked at every turn by the repeated incapacity of

individuals to see another's pain. Koon saw King looking through, rather than at, him. Inasmuch as one deems them candid witnesses, Koon and his cohort saw in King's movements not the reflexive responses of a human being in agony, but rather the threatening and invulnerable resistance of a drug addict. The Simi Valley jurors, too, saw themselves in the figures of the police rather than in the crumpled shape of the twenty-five year old black man.²⁶

For cultural observers of the period, this persistent imaginative blindness to others might have seemed endemic; the phenomenon was an omnipresent yet also a surprising and counterintuitive fact in each of its (typically racialized) iterations. As frequently as they played Holliday's grainy footage, Los Angeles news channels broadcasted surveillance video of Soon Ja Du, a Korean American store owner, shooting Latasha Harlins in the back of the skull, killing the 15-year-old instantly in a dispute over a can of orange juice. When a California judge sentenced Soon to five years probation, four hundred hours of community service, and a \$500 fine rather than the 16 years of prison recommended by the case's jury, a similar incapacity to see one's self as another seemed at work (Perez-Pena 28). Finally, as the riots unfolded, many in Los Angeles's enraged multitude appeared thrilled by the suffering of the motorists and storeowners they targeted, even as news helicopters broadcast images of the din and confusion worldwide and news anchors dismissed crowds of protestors as "thugs," "hoodlums," and "creeps" (qtd. in Caldwell 162). For many, such palpable and violent divisions, such unsympathetic "incivility," seemed to require sentimental attendance to the pain of others as a means of making the social body whole. At a press conference on the third day of

rioting, Rodney King famously pleaded “Can we all get along? Can we get along? Can we stop making it, making it horrible for the older people and the kids?” (qtd. in Keyes 22). Similarly sentimental, if far more aloof, was socially conservative cant espoused by Vice President Dan Quayle, exemplified by his assertion that the riots sprang from a “breakdown of the family structure,” that is, a lack of family values (qtd. in Rosenthal A1).

Into this disoriented and conflicted landscape, the performer and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, on whose work this chapter focuses, attempted to intervene with acts as political as they were dramatic. To show how spectacular suffering produced similarly spectacular sentimentalism, in the following chapter I anatomize the mode of affective pedagogy at work in three of Anna Deavere Smith’s documentary plays—*Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, and *House Arrest*, which together form the bulk of her on-going dramatic project *On The Road: A Search of American Character*.²⁷ As Roth does in his late trilogy of novels, Smith seeks to construct a new notion of American belonging by focusing on urban communities devastated by class and ethnic unrest. In Smith’s case, however, the pertinent polis is not Newark, NJ, but rather the civic aftermath of the 1991 Crown Heights riot in Brooklyn, NY, and the 1992 riot in Los Angeles, CA.

In both cases, what Smith reveals and in a sense reconstitutes is what Edward Soja has called “the Fractal City,” fractal is anything contains in its parts self-similar objects of the whole, so that hierarchies within subsets exist (283). Soja employs this terms to suggest that cities should no longer be understood as being structured around

simple binaries—bourgeoisie and proletariat—or forming neat hierarchies—upper, middle, and lower classes neatly puddle—though the polarities in wealth have far from disappeared (265). Instead, Soja suggests that a “more polymorphous and fractured social geometry” have taken shape in which “multiple axes of differential power and status” produce a new “ethnic quilt” (265). This situation, in which ethnicity appeared to replace class when in fact it simply complicated it, emerged in this period because of a widening gap between rich and poor since the 1970s coupled with “a massive influx of poor immigrants providing cheap and weakly organized labor supplies” (269). According to influential sociologist William Julius Wilson, The result was that increasingly downwardly mobile African American communities—largely cut off from the productive edge of economic development and information technology spatially and educationally—were becoming a permanent urban underclass. Add to this situation entrepreneurial and migratory immigrants—Koreans and Latinos, for example—and ethnic niches left behind from earlier iterations of the city—Lubavitchers—and a distinctive, disjunctive *mélange* emerges. As Leo Chavez remarks, the recession and growing discontent over immigration lead to a public sector increasingly dominated by concerns over multiculturalism and race; in just three years, 1992 to 1994, eighteen of *Time*’s covers were dedicated to one or both of these subjects, accounting for the lion’s share of magazine covers for the whole of the 1990s (136). The rifts between and among immigrants and African Americans becomes a major subject in the media earlier, with journals such as the *New Republic* keying into comparatively smaller events such as the 5 May 1991 riots between African Americans and Latinos, even before the LA riots elevate

the matter (140). If the riots reflected on conflict between African Americans and immigrants, conservative whites were similarly disposed. Illustrative of this was the approval in 1994 of Prop 187, designed to prohibit illegal immigrations from using public services such as health care and public education (Soja 402). This politically, culturally and spatially divided social body seems the kind of balkanized space that is absolutely decentered, headless, and because of the animosities evident in the fight over resources and claims to cultural and legal legitimacy, impossible to give coherence to. Smith's dramatic technique—interviewing hundreds of citizens and community leaders and then performing their words herself in a one-woman show—reterritorializes the fractured body politic onto a body dramatic and seeks to reconfigure the blindly suffering city as its own audience, attending to the vicissitudes of its internal differences.

I pursue this reading through an argument structured around three related moments. First, to substantiate the claim that Smith's method engages with, and revises, the affective pedagogy of the sympathetic witness characteristic of sentimentalism, I elucidate the mode of identification on which hinges both her dramatic practice and cultural critique. Second, I read Smith's specific mode of affective identification across the terrain of identity politics, relying especially on the social ontology of Gilles Deleuze to sketch the consequences of Smith's sentimentalist revision to national and sub-national politics. Third, I read Smith's projection of social space, from the broken social body of the riot-torn city to the geographically broader spaces and historically deeper epochs of nation beyond it, and argue that Smith revises the conceptual structure of the sentimentalized nation—a community constituted by a repetition of fellow feeling—both

by prioritizing difference over sameness and by critiquing the role of structural inequities of power as well as in the social body and, autoreferentially, in her dramatic practice. While I offer a reading of Anna Deavere Smith's aesthetic practice that describes her dramatic effects more accurately, her theoretic orientation more capaciously, and her politics more historically, than have previous analyses, this reading also constitutes a paradigmatic example of how America's urban crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s helped to resurrect sentimental nationalism in creative interventions that often looked beyond the space of the nation.

Roth, Smith, and the Performative Turn

Before moving forward in this argument, however, I must place Smith's documentary theater in relation to my claims about Philip Roth's novels and contextualize her work within broader developments in both contemporary (largely American) theater and performance art. Despite their generic differences, Smith's dramatic work parallels Roth's trilogy in at least three important and related ways. First, Smith, like Roth, seeks to stage sympathetic identification as a creative performance, wherein the artist-observer must pursue affective mimesis by first directly acknowledging its impossibility or fictionality. In this respect both writers make use of the metafictional aspects of their texts for thematic ends. For Smith, a hypermimetic impersonation of the exact words, intonations, inflections, and mannerisms of her interview subjects-cum-theatrical-roles simultaneously accentuates her ability to listen and absorb their affect even as it marks her difference from them. Her audience, in turn, is figured as the observer, a role that places them in Smith's own position as interviewer-listener, in this

fashion repeating the affective pedagogical model of classic sentimentalism. In this basic structure, she and Roth are alike. Second, both Roth and Smith confront and dispel the promise of pastoral unconflictedness by taking the riot-gutted urban ruin as the *locus* of the American multitude. Both are vigorously anti-pastoral, using the locus of the city in the aftermath of a race riot to articulate a space of fragmentation and (mis)understanding that is at odds with the social field familiar to most sentimental narratives. Third, in a manner that is related to but distinct from the use of the riot-gutted ruin trope, both Smith and Roth pursue a national imaginary based on plural suffering rather than univocal true feeling. The seriality of these works insists on keeping open the object of the sympathetic gaze and in this way refuses the Manichean disconnection that sentimentalism traditionally produces through idealized depictions of sufferers.

There are, however, crucial differences between Roth's and Smith's efforts to model creative and civic sympathetic responses. In Smith's work, one encounters a more capacious sampling of characters, and, given the importance of pluralized suffering to both of their revisions of American belonging, this is an aesthetic difference with no mean consequences. Whereas Roth's texts ultimately ask their reader to "authorize" Zuckerman's mode of sympathetic presentation by figuratively signing himself or herself into the white male author's presentation of nation, Smith destabilizes this central figure of identification. She does so, in part, by virtue of her status as black woman, a subject position that doubly inverts the tacit racial and gender privileges underwriting Zuckerman's status as universal Man. Significantly, Smith offers a variety of characters, rather than a single narrator, to model sympathetic responses. By doing so, she subverts

the 'I', the single space of rational interiority ruling over the body politic in classic conceptions of political economy. In place of this 'I' Smith offers multiple selves; consequently the macrological body of the nation is founded not on atomistic, single beings agglomerated together to become a single full being, but rather multiple becomings in connection with yet more highly articulated becomings. She accomplishes this in several ways, and although I treat them in greater detail below, it is worth sketching them here. Smith displaces the priority of the single knowing "I" first at the (trans)script level, by focusing primarily on moments in which her subjects misspeak, stutter, or lose track of a thought. This method of selection has the effect of disclosing instances in which individuals "aren't themselves" because they are in the very activity of negotiating a new zone of identity, a new way of being themselves. Smith decenters the political subject at a second, documentary level, by parroting their voices and gestures as assiduously as possible in order to write their own difference from their gestures and actions and thus revealing internal difference in her presentation, between herself and those she re-presents. And finally, she pluralizes the political subject at the level of performance, by shifting between characters in reedited versions of her three published pieces, in that fashion suggesting that sympathetic performance reoccurs in multiple and ever-changing acts, destabilizing the notion of dramatic character.

One final difference between Smith and Roth must be registered: their explicit theorization of art's relation to the body politic. Smith's conception of the artist's role clearly shares some affinities with Roth, if my larger argument holds true, because both see in the artist the paradigmatic sympath. However, Smith sees the role of her theatrical

works as much more explicitly political and interventionist than does Roth, whose sympathy with modernist theorizations of art's autonomy have already been demonstrated in the figure of Leo Gluckman, in *I Married a Communist*, who sneered at the notion of art as a weapon "in the service of 'the people'?" (218). Smith is decidedly more open about her hopes for using aesthetic craft for collective, political projects. As she declares in her introduction to *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*:

I played *Twilight* in Los Angeles as a call to the community. I performed it at a time when the community had not yet resolved the problems. I wanted to be a part of their examination of the problems. I believe that solutions to these problems will call for the participation of large and eclectic groups of people [...] and [we must] encourage many more people to participate in the dialogue. (xxiv)

Such ambitions are reinforced by the fact that Smith invites her interview subjects to attend the opening performance of her plays for free, in this way (re)producing the metonymic structure of the city in her audience. However, the notion of "dialogue" at play in the above quotation risks being a complacent notion, not merely because it jars against the obvious fact that Smith's works are a series of monologues (although this is not a literalist quibble given how little her characters listen to one another). The other sense in which Smith's efforts to promote dialogue runs aground is embedded in the sentimentalist rhetoric of communicative and imaginative exchange as a basis for national belonging. As this chapter argues, addressing structural inequalities while working within this rhetoric is a challenge Smith does not always meet successfully.

Before moving forward in this argument, however, I must place Smith's

documentary theater in the context of broader developments in both American theater and performance art more broadly. Here it is helpful to envision her work as partaking in and contributing to three interrelated movements within contemporary theatrical aesthetics. The first of these lineages would foreground in Smith's work the role of the "communal subject" that is produced through a patchwork of monologues, linking her theater to later productions such as Diana Son's *R.A.W. ('Cause I'm a Woman)* (1993), Glenda Dickerson and Breena Clarke's *Re/membering Aunt Jemima: A Menstrual Show* (1994), and Madeline George's *The Most Massive Woman Wins* (1994).²⁸ Each of these works, which stage a sequence of more or less poetic monologues spoken by women and highlighting feminist issues, are doubtlessly influenced by the work of Ntozake Shange, particularly *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is not enuf*. Premiering in 1975 and occasioning heated exchanges, Shange's self-described "choreopoem" presents a range of African-American women's perspectives through a blend of poetry, music, dance and drama, all performed by seven nameless female dancers distinguished largely by the color of their clothing (Flowers 51). Smith's work is undeniably indebted to Shange's and, as if to acknowledge this, Smith places Shange as the first perspective staged in *Fires in the Mirror*. However, Smith seems less interested than these playwrights in distilling a coherent, unified communal voice, and she is far less intent on the identitarian politics which so infuse the work of Shange and her followers.

A second, related development in contemporary theater is the reemergence of documentary drama, or in Melissa Salz's term the "theater of testimony" (Salz 1-2). While the conscious incorporation of documented, recorded, or otherwise found text goes

back to Weimar Germany and Brecht's theater, the reemergence of this practice in contemporary drama is relatively recent. Smith's *On the Road* project, which was first staged in 1982, is its first prominent reincarnation. Another of documentary theater's progenitors, Emily Mann, authored the award-winning *Execution of Justice*, (1984) an ensemble play focused on the assassination of openly gay San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk and San Francisco mayor George Moscone in 1978. Mann based much of the play—which blends live performance, video, and taped voice—on transcripts from the trial of Milk's killer, Dan White (Hummler 84). A decade later, Mann would employ a method of interview and performance even closer to Smith's with her play *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1995), a docudrama drawn from interviews of witnesses to the murders of five anti-Ku Klux Klan protesters in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1979.

Far from being alone in the use of the documentary form, Smith and Mann have proved remarkably influential. Here, one must note Eve Ensler's *Necessary Targets* (1996) and the incredibly successful *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), which make use of multiple interviews presented in collage form. Similarly seminal is the work of Moises Kaufman, who with the Tectonic Theater Project, produced *The Laramie Project* (2000). One must add to these a host of similar works that place material drawn from documentary sources presented in fragmented monologues: Ping Chong's *Undesireable Elements*, Barbara Damashek's *Whereabouts Unknown*, Julie Crutcher and Vaughan McBride *Diggin In*, and Alan Buchman's *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004).

Placing Smith among these playwrights is neither original nor controversial, but

placing her works exclusively in these groups foregrounds the “literariness” of the work at the expense of its performative materiality. The way in which her theater literally, if temporarily, reterritorializes the community she engages can be better gauged if one connects Smith to more radical efforts to re-frame the experience of the contemporary city by reconceptualizing theatrical performance. Smith’s theatrical model should therefore be understood within the broader context of the “performative turn” in the visual and dramatic arts beginning in the early sixties. Following Erika Fischer-Lichte’s formulation, I conceive of “performance art” in this context as redefining two relationships with regard to the traditional work of art (17-18). First, the dichotomy between subject and object—audience and art—is destabilized. Second the art object’s semiocity—the capacity of the art object to gesture to some meaning beyond itself—is undermined by its materiality; that is, its “meaning” becomes less primary than its action, being, presence, effect, etc. An example of this trend worth considering with regard to Smith’s work is Deborah Warner’s site-specific performance installation *The Angel Project*. The project is a kind of theatrical treasure hunt in which the audience, broken into individual pedestrians, are given a guidebook leading them through dozens of installations in various apartments and businesses throughout a given city, each of which suggests poetically the presence or trace of angels (Oddey 18). Between each of these “angelic” sites, a ticket holder will interact with paid performers, or “Angels,” dressed otherwise anonymously, though one is never certain of who is part of the project and who is outside of it (Oddey 99). The solitariness of the walker is key to Warner’s project—which she understands as “a silent communion” producing “a poetic relationship with

[the] city” and which is, after completion, “your own rightful property” (qtd. in Gussow). While Warner’s stress on the individual observer is diametrically opposed to Smith’s orientation, Smith’s troubling of the material boundary between theater and city by confusing the difference between bystander and producer (in that any audience member may also be the source of the script) links her work to Warner’s investment in performatively linking urban subject with theatrical audience as well as an emphasis on the unheralded traces of suffering.

In Warner’s case, this suffering emerges in the interplay between the idea of “angel” and the spectral presence of 9/11 victims in downtown Manhattan. It is intriguing here to ponder the relation between Smith and what Maurya Wickstrom terms, in relation to Deborah Warner’s work, ethical materialism. In Wickstrom’s conception, ethical materialism is an insistence on “[t]he singularity of the material object, and our affective relation to it” (178) “This materialism” declares Wickstrom, “refuses the commensurate. It refuses the system in which all things, all people, and all relations are subordinated to a system of exchange and the circulation of power” (178). Obviously, Smith’s art requires substitution, actually foregrounding the artifice of the theatrical use of equivalence. Nonetheless, Smith’s work, like Warner’s, paradoxically stresses the singular and new and forces a new relation with the urban. I turn now to a fuller discussion of that method.

Sympathy, Agony, and Otherness in Stereo

Smith initially developed her signature dramatological technique—interviewing subjects, then memorizing and mimicking their recorded voices—as a pedagogical

method, a means of teaching the craft of acting to her students. This fact is fitting, for this technique would provide the basis for a broader affective pedagogy in her later, more formalized dramatic works, works in which she models for the audience an engaged, emotive listening to the suffering of others as a political practice. One should, however, trace the invention of Smith's method further back to another origin: a moment of cultural recognition she experienced, again fittingly, while watching a talk show. As she viewed an episode of Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show* in which Sofia Loren appeared, Smith was struck by the power and palpability of variant speech rhythms. Loren, says Smith,

managed to disrupt the whole show by just refusing to participate in the rhythm of the show. She was so quiet and in control, the show was so loud. She defied the whole language of the show. Then Joan Rivers came on and she was just bananas. All of her jokes were about how beautiful Sophia Loren was and how unattractive she was and she went on and on about this European beauty. And then the Hines brothers came on and tap danced. And I turned off the TV set and said, 'This is America.' A European beauty comes and suddenly we have no voice, no culture. A comedienne comes on and talks about the European beauty. And some black men come out and tap dance. (qtd. in Weinraub C15)

As this originating episode demonstrates unmistakably, the affective force and cultural power of Smith's practice is not rooted foremost in the reproduction of a set of individual idiosyncrasies coded as authentic, even though her attention to detail might otherwise suggest this. Instead, *On the Road: In Search of American Character*,—the larger work to which every Smith play adds—ought to be conceived as a multipart presentation of contrasting, differing specificities and performances that together conjure a larger, and

impersonal, set of social arrangements—otherness in stereo. One must therefore distinguish Smith’s art of impersonation from efforts to find the other in the self’s authentic emotional depths and further efforts to reduce differences, either between the self and its subjective other or across any social space. It is a model for sympathy *through* difference, not despite it.

Part of this inversion of the traditional model of sympathy owes to the method’s privileging of physical, rather than psychological, processes; it literalizes walking in another’s shoes. For Smith, impersonation was a means of circumnavigating the dominant psychological realist model, a “self-oriented method” that troubled Smith because it held that “characters live inside of you and that you create a character through a process of realizing your own similarity to a character” (xxvi). Instead, Smith’s counter-practice relies on the notion that the physical act of speech engages the rest of the body in “a kind of cooperative dance [...] [that is] a sketch of something [...] not fully revealed by the words alone” (xxv-xxvi). Smith’s conception of speech acts views bodily materiality and linguistic expression as separable but intimately related attributes of character so that, by “record[ing] part of that dance—that is, the spoken part—and reenact[ing] it, the rest of the body would follow” (xxv-xxvi). Smith does not seek to justify this view of the self and speech through aesthetic theorization, though she often employs the language of contemporary cultural theory to explain her projects; instead, she playfully attributes the efficacy of impersonation to her grandfather’s idea that “if I said a word often enough it would become me, the reenactment, or the reiteration of a person’s words would also teach me about that person” (xxvi). Hence, against the notion

frequently asserted by her critics that Smith's "astonishing plasticity, her complete submergence of self," leads to her "almost literal identification with various speakers," one best understands Smith's project not as a spectacle displaying accurate identification but rather as a practice in which bodies (including the audience's) engage with and become trained by disembodied affects (Rose G1).

Nonetheless, Smith also clearly expresses her desire that the practice do more than instruct self and audience; it also represents an effort to do justice to the subjects of performance in a way thought superior to other models of acting. Smith figures the method as a kind of possession in which others inhabit her body, claiming that if one "walk[s] in the speech of another," then the other's individuality can be experienced "viscerally" (xxvii). Using the body as a medium to express the incorporeal attributes of others is consonant with Smith's interests in how social "scripts" can be placed over the bodies of others and, through a process of inscription, serve to codify them. It is also, importantly, a method that eschews the artist's self as the framing device. Instead, at least in intention, "the frame of reference for the other would be the other" (xxvii). Smith's use of jargonic critical shorthand can obscure her aesthetic program by connecting vague phenomenological terms with clichés of social cooperation as when she asserts: "I am not the other and can never be the other [...] I can only try to bridge the gap" (Talk 53). Smith does, however, often serve as a lucid interpreter of her own work, standing off to the side of theatrical event and rhetorically guiding her interpreters, especially about the ways in which her method represents an important departure from the assumptions undergirding method acting. Method acting, according to her reading, is

“based on a very humanitarian assumption that we are all the same underneath. I don’t believe that. I’m interested in difference. I want to know who the character is, not who I am” (Talk 53). This kind of paratextual guidance, whether disseminated through interviews, theatrical reviews, or the prolegomena of production notes, allows Smith to suggest, prior to her performance, that her aim is not to parrot but to represent bodily a mode of listening that can be both an intervention and self-transformation, not self-repetition or an effort to faithfully copy the social worlds to which she attends.

In a manner distinctly sentimentalist, Smith’s work invokes the sympathetic witness trope at multiple levels. She first performs the role during the unstaged interview process, then stages these individuals—recast as *dramatis personae*—for an audience, the members of which repeat in her stead the sympathy implied in her careful attention and reservation of judgment. While I consider the spatial and political consequences of this process at greater length below, one must first note that Smith’s documentary theater exhibits a sentimentalist lineage at the level of characterization, by participating in the child elegy and by embedding intermittently characters engaged in imaginative and emotional sympathy. Both *Fires in the Mirror* and *House Arrest* are arranged so that they culminate emotionally in the monologue of a parent grieving for a dead infant: a conspicuous choice in each case. In the former play, Smith clearly has held the words of an anguished father, Carmel Cato, in reserve for dramatic effect. The play concludes with her performance of Cato’s inconsolable grief for his seven-year-old son, Gavin, who was struck and killed by a Hasidi driver in an accident that triggered the 1991 Crown Heights riots, as well as his fiery resentment of those in the Jewish community who

dismiss him “unless / I go to them with pity” (138). Since *Fires* takes the Crown Height riots and their aftermath as its subject, Smith’s inversion of chronology and insistence on the pathos of a child’s death is noteworthy, all the more so when one compares it to the play’s earlier sympathetic but far more ambivalent treatment of Norman Rosenbaum, whose brother, Yankel, was stabbed to death by black youths in the first hours of the riot.

Similarly, in *House Arrest*, a play otherwise preoccupied with the political theater surrounding President Clinton’s White House, Smith inserts an outwardly unconnected monologue in which one Paulette Jenkins tearily confesses to looking on while her husband beat to death their daughter, Myeshia, and then assisting in dumping Myeshia’s body on a highway shoulder. “My own chile / I let that happen to,” concludes Smith-as-Jenkins in affecting disbelief. One can and should read Smith’s decision to insert Jenkins’s testimony as an effort to connect this brutal domestic iteration of patriarchal power to national modes of authority and subjection, but one must not hastily pass over Smith’s use of the death of the infant trope for its affective strength. Unlike nineteenth-century sentimentalist’s child elegies, such as Lydia Sigourney’s “Death of an Infant,” in which the child’s piety and purity teach adults to defer to God’s will, Smith evokes scenes of child death to demonstrate the human capacity for *insensibility* while at the same moment resensitizing her audience.

The complex pathos whereby the refusal of sympathy itself becomes poignancy’s edge is integral to Smith’s project; the bulk of the characters in her plays rebuff emotional engagement with the suffering of others in order to consolidate their own identity. The specter of indifferent seeing, diametrically opposed by Smith’s

performative practice, haunts most of the social interactions to which she attends and provides the justification of the revised, emotive mode of witness Smith's method implicitly recommends. As if to underscore this, Smith includes in *House Arrest* a witticism by former presidential speechwriter Peggy Noonan on the media's mode of observation:

You remember in the 18th century, / in the 18th and 19th century / in the finer and more refined circles of England / it became habit to go to um, / homes for the mentally ill and go see the people there and be very / *moved* by their predicament? / It was a *weird* / sort of thing – / You wanted to go see the mad people and then feel. / Then I'm going to show all your friends / 'See how compassionate I am.' [. . .] / I am deeply *moved* / by the misery around me. [. . .] / *The-press-is-the-exact-opposite-of-that.* (*House Arrest* 56)

In Noonan's quip, the press's studied indifference (if not its *schadenfreude*) is the inversion of affective practice of the powerful during the age of sensibility; in both cases, however, the line dividing seer and seen is crucial to the maintenance of power relations and the identities that codify them. Neither of the practices comes off well, but both are plainly suggestive of the theatrical space which Smith and her audience occupy. For this reason, Noonan's opposition of contemporary mass media spectacles and the self-serving poverty tourism of the aristocracy is not a complete opposition. In both structures of seeing, the affective logic only serves to consolidate power differentials and identificatory roles based on them. Together, these two ways of seeing and feeling constitute the other of Smith's affective practice, for her dramatic work seeks to figure sympathetic witness as an agonizing shift in one's self-understanding.

Smith establishes this clearly in the characters she stages who do demonstrate the capacity to see themselves in others; these examples underscore that such a process is necessarily painful, partial, and requires a self alienation before any progress can be made. In *Twilight*, for example, Smith includes the ruminations of an anonymous white talent agent, who reacts to the riot's spectacle with self-examination:

“Do I do I deserve it?” / I thought me personally, uh, *no* / generically, maybe *so* /
/ Even though I I / what's provoked it / it was / the spark / was the verdict / which
was / *ab-surd!* / But that was just the *spark*. / This had been set / for years before.
/ But maybe, / not maybe, / but uh the / *system* / plays unequally / and the people
who were / the “they,” / who were burning down the Beverly Center, / had been
victims of the system / whether well intentioned or not. / Somebody got the short
shift / and they did / and I started to / absorb a little guilt, / and say uh / I deserve /
I deserve it.” (*Twilight* DPS 92-93)

This absorption of “a little guilt” may be dismissed as an instance of high-toned posturing, but one must note the way in which the speaker, through the process of understanding the other not merely as victimizer but also as victim, refigures himself as split, at once innocent--deserving of the fruits of his accomplishments--and culpable—because his accomplishments are built on systemic inequalities.

To similar effect, Smith stages the reflections of Young-Soon Han, whose liquor store was destroyed in the L.A. riots, but who felt “mixed feelings” when the black community celebrated immediately after the conviction of Lt. Powell and Sgt. Koon in Rodney King's civil rights trial.

I wasah swallowing the bitternessh. / Sitting here alone, and watching them. /

They became all hilarious. / (Three second pause.) / And uh, in a way I was happy for them, / and I felt glad for them, / at least they got something back, you know. / Just lets forget Korean victims or other victims / who are destroyed by them. / They have fought / for their rights / (One hit simultaneous with the word rights.) / over two centuries / (One hit simultaneous with centuries.) / and I have a lot of sympathy and understanding for them. / Because of their effort, and sacrificing, other minorities like / And Hispanic / or Asians / maybe we have to suffer more / by mainstream, / you know? / That's why I understand. / And then / I like to be part of their joyment. (*Twilight* DPS 168-169)

The disjointed, clipped English bears a fertile ambiguity whereby the “[a]nd then,” and “I like to” late in this quotation suggests at once that Han, in the moment of mixed feelings she presently recounts, came to share in the “joyment” of the black community, but also intimates that this moment of shared feeling is in the temporal distance, as in “then I would like to be a part of their enjoyment.” This temporal disjunction mirrors the affective and identificatory split Han undergoes here, again refiguring her own victimization in terms of the suffering experienced by those who wounded her. In this way, Smith embeds within her dramatic text pedagogical models for feeling what another feels.

The complex levels at which these affective and imaginative projections occur deserves attention. Here, Smith, an African American woman, performs as two subjects—white and Korean respectively—both of whom imaginatively perform a revision of themselves in light of a generic African American subject. Such reduplicative pedagogical models would seem to invite the use of analytic lenses such as those furnished by postcolonial and critical race theory, but Smith anticipates this maneuver and includes the language of academic theorists in her performance of the cacophonous

social Babel. In *Fires in the Mirror*, for example, Smith includes the ruminations of Angela Davis, who remarks that race “has become / an increasingly obsolete way / of constructing community / because it is based on / immutable biological / facts / in a pseudo-scientific way” (*Fires*, 29-30). Smith-as-Davis eschews “the old notion of coalition in which we anchor ourselves very solidly / in our / specific racialized communities, / and simply voice / our / solidarity with other people,” and instead calls for “ways of coming together” that do not reduce the “vastness of our many cultural heritages” or render “invisible all of our heterogeneity” (*Fires* 32). By including the words and thoughts of academic theorists like Davis, Smith underscores the pedagogical facet of her project, draws the academy into the aesthetic, civic, and national discourse her work produces, and also provides her audience with an embedded guide to her work. If her work charts the broken city, these voices function as legends to the map.

Smith capitalized on both her professional success and on the notoriety of the Los Angeles riots to draw more academic theorists into *Twilight*, for which Mike Davis, Cornel West, and Homi Bhabha provided interviews. The play's title derives, in part, from Bhabha's illustration of his notion of ambivalence. During his interview, Bhabha suggests "this twilight moment / is an in-between moment" in which "we learn that the hard outlines of what we see in daylight / that make it easy for us to order / daylight / disappear" and which therefore "allows us to see the intersections / of the event with a number of other things that daylight obscures for us" (*Twilight* Anchor 232-233). Smith echoes Bhabha's elusive thought by concluding her play with the words of Twilight Bey, the organizer of an L.A. gang truce. Bey explains that, for him, the word twilight denotes

himself in relation to others, that is, twilight as an admixture of his own dark complexion and the light of

knowledge and the wisdom of the world and understanding others. / And in order for me to be, a to be, a true human being. / I can't forever dwell in darkness. I can't forever dwell in the idea, just identifying with people like me, and understanding me and mine. / So twilight / is / that time / between day and night / limbo / I call it limbo. (*Twilight* DPS 171)

Among the characters in Smith's published work, a willingness, like Bey's, to leave the safe house of identity is rare (*Talk to Me* 23–24). Unlike works such as Roth's *American Trilogy* or classical sentimental texts, Smith's affective pedagogical model is more suffused into the medium than modeled in characters. As often as not, she focuses on individuals who refuse sympathy with others in order to consolidate their own identity. Nonetheless, the entwined voices of Bhabha and Bey here offer a single account of their present moment, an account that is a grim description of excruciating social collapse but also an expectant prescription to intermingle, to risk one's self in the space of others. Such sympathetic *mélange* is partially a matter of the affective vulnerability demonstrated by the anonymous talent agent and Young-Soon Han, but it is also a matter of crossing identificatory lines beyond the self's scale, especially at the level of race.

These crossings involve risk, particularly in Smith's case, for to dramatize the transgression of racial classification also entails its reinscription. Though the uniqueness of gesture is foregrounded in Smith's performance of character, a tension between specificity and generality haunts her work; a familiar dilemma—can one be a

representative speaker?—reemerges. This quandary beset Philip Roth’s American Trilogy, as I have shown, where Roth’s sentimentalism evinces an unreflective privileging of the white man writer figure, authorized to speak, imagine, and sympathize on behalf of a nation of others. One could be forgiven for thinking that, given the documentary orientation of Smith’s theater as well as her own marginalized subject position as black woman, that this issue would not press her as acutely. Indeed, Smith foregrounds the unique attributes of characters. Her performances are engaging precisely because of the sense of their studied investment in tic and quirk. “My overall goal” writes Smith, “was to show that no one acts like anyone else” (*Fires* xxx). In *Fires in the Mirror*, for example, Minister Conrad Mohammed’s method of striking the table where he is seated with individual sugar packets before opening them attests to the prominence Smith gives the singular (*Fires* 52-58). Similarly distinctive, in *Twilight*, is the breakneck, sportscaster-like parlance attorney Charles Lloyd employs while narrating security camera footage of Latasha Harlins being shot in the head, culminating in a breathless: “Isn’t that sad? / Isn’t human life cheap? / Let’s play it again” (*Twilight* DPS 40-41). Smith’s performance, her painstaking attendance to the rhythms, timbres, and gestures of both Mohammed and Lloyd corresponds nicely with her stated emphasis on the uniqueness of character. It would seem to follow that although both are black men about the same age, Smith would not treat them as interchangeable representatives of black masculinity. Nonetheless, even though their uniqueness is stressed, each *does* serve as stand-in for the communities to which they belong within their respective play’s juxtapositional logic.

The problem of being a token speaker repeats in her theatrical works because the placement of characters in the play always works to suggest their representativeness. Smith doubtlessly makes conscious use of this tension, but it also makes use of her. As a representative of the black community, for example, Minister Mohammad narrates a gruesomely vivid account of the abuses of slavery—the use of thumb screws in torture and the tearing of babies from the wombs of mothers— as evidence that they dwarf the suffering of the Jewish people in the Holocaust, even though, in Mohammad’s view, “[t]hat, uh, crime also stinks / in the nostrils of God” (*Fires* 54). Smith places his monologue just before her performance as author and editor Letty Cottin Pogrebin, who reads from her memoir, *Deborah, Golda, and Me*, the story of Isaac, a holocaust survivor with a harrowing tale. Because of Isaac’s Aryan features, his village council charges him with the duty of surviving at all costs to expose Nazi crimes. When his forged credentials are questioned, Isaac is forced to prove he is not a Jew by shepherding a trainload of his townspeople into the gas chambers. “Among those whom Isaac packed into the gas chambers that day,” reads Smith-as-Pogrebin, “dispassionately as if shoving a few more items into an overstuffed / closet / were his wife / and / two children” (*Fires* 61-62). Both Mohammed and Pogrebin, therefore, are made to serve as representative speakers on behalf of their respective communities, narrating the traumas of their tribes and also modeling a style of affective response to those traumas²⁹.

If Smith occasionally employs persons as metonyms for their community, she just as frequently mines the tension between type and instance, as a closer reading of Charles Lloyd’s case, in *Twilight* demonstrates. The logic of representation dictates that Lloyd,

as an African American man, ought to deplore Latasha Harlins' murder rather than legally defend Soon Ja Du, the store owner who shot her. Indeed, another *Twilight* character, Gina Rae, remonstrates Lloyd for this perceived betrayal of an ethnic belonging she figures as national—"I guess he just / Sold-his-card / He's not a card-carrying member / of our community or of us / as-a-nation-of-people-any-longer (42)." In this manner, Smith highlights how the logic of representation is at work in the racialized city, on the bodies of the play's subjects before her intervention. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Smith escapes making Lloyd a representative of the *failed* representative—the "sellout" or "Uncle Tom" identity Lloyd repudiates. Nor does it mean that her performance of affects coded as behavioral or linguistic markers of ethnicity escapes the most pernicious resonance of racialized mimicry: the stereotype.

This aspect of Smith's work has drawn much comment, as when, in his review of *Fires* for the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, Andrew Ferguson writes that Smith's presentation of Al Sharpton "sounded like Steppin Fetchit after a night of freebasing," and that her performance of a Lubavitcher woman's words "might have been a drag queen doing Barbara Streisand" (31). Ferguson's tangible relish in indulging the language of stereotype hints that he may have sought in Smith's work an opportunity to deploy it, and, indeed, although she acknowledges that sometimes such judgments are aesthetic appraisals, she attributes much of the negative reaction to "the unease we have about seeing difference displayed" (*Fires* xxxvii). "Mimicry is not character," she declares, "[c]haracter lives in the obvious gap between the real person and my attempt to seem like them [...] I try to close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us

[...] I am willing to display my own unlikeness” (*Fires* xxxvii-xxxviii). This must be unpacked, for Smith is not suggesting that the stereotypical racial markers themselves are elements of real difference displayed. Indeed, the ethnic stereotype is objectionable in part because it elides difference in the social bodies it supposedly conjures. On the contrary, she underscores that the audience’s discomfort is with the failure of her mimicry to coincide with the “original” racial marker. The obviousness of this failure, in a theatrical practice like blackface, is part of the discourse of racial superiority because the performer *cannot* be confused with the subject he mocks, and therefore the purity of his putatively superior identity is secured precisely by his failure to simulate the abject other convincingly.³⁰ The structural similarity in the representative logic of Smith and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century minstrelsy—the unwittingly shared method of displaying the (in)visible difference—ought not, however, lead us to conflate them in any politically significant manner. To borrow a Deleuzian quip, the difference that “makes a difference” between Smith’s work and minstrelsy—between the repudiation and replication of stereotypes—lies in the material structure that contextualizes the two dramatic practices: the machinic assemblage of Smith’s art (*Difference and Repetition* 28). Rather than being somehow complicit with violent ethnic image-disfigurements such as those in blackface and ethnic stereotyping, Smith’s method of cross-racial performance works to undo the categories that stabilize difference. This destabilization cuts deep, for Smith’s performance also undoes the notion of established demarcation of individual selves.

One can clarify Smith’s practice by the lights of Deleuze’s conception of the

simulacra. Although he takes up the concept from its place in Platonic philosophy, Deleuze uses the notion of simulacra to reverse Platonism's view of representation. In Deleuze's view, simulacra are not copies of copies, but are what put the order of original and copy into question. "The simulacrum is not a degraded copy," writes Deleuze, rather "[i]t harbors a positive which *denies the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*" (*Logic and Sense* 299). What Deleuze perceives in this concept is its manner of rendering "the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, the determination of the hierarchy impossible" (300). Deleuze's is not a sociological claim about reality dissolving into postmodern hyperreality, as with Jean Baudrillard; instead, Deleuze embraces the concept of the simulacrum because it reveals the underlying ontological multiplicity that emerges when the dominant Western philosophical apparatus fades.

Perceived through the lens of Deleuzian simulation, Smith's "willing[ness] to display her own unlikeness" becomes a sophisticated manner of producing an unsuspected sympathy, a link of sociability akin to the line of sentimental feeling running parallel to it in her work. Smith's performances, though they clearly depend on the model bodies and words of her interviewees speaking as themselves in unrehearsed "authentic" ways, undo the hierarchy separating herself as copy by underscoring the multiplicity, the contingency, and the performativity characterizing both interviewee and performer, thus exploding the conceptual scaffolding of racial, social, and gender idealities. But is this explosion just another way of claiming a universalism that is a subterranean nationalism? Is this model of simulating otherness merely reproducing the myth of American city as

melting pot? A fuller understanding and theorization of the broader scales of identification in Smith's theater are necessary in order to understand how her work figures city, civic society, and nation.

Resemblance, *Ressentiment*, Reassembly

That Smith staged Angela Davis's diagnosis of race—an "intransigent / rigid / notion" produced by colonialist racism, "not the other way around"—hints at the sociological lessons in which she wishes to tutor her audiences (*Fires*, 29-30). In these theatrical works, racial identity is an after-effect of power, the repercussion of an historical order imposed by the past on everyone, but not equally on all. Following many poststructuralist critiques, Smith's theater figures identity not as innate but as a historically contingent construction. To say this is to say little because so many contemporary theorists working within the humanities and arts take this understanding of identity as a given. The question I wish to resolve here is whether Smith's treatment of the relation between identity and difference is fundamentally dialectical or non-dialectical, that is, whether the social space she charts is one embroiled in contradiction and predicated on (mis)recognition or one in which power and becoming function in some other manner. While this may seem an exceedingly fine distinction, it has powerful consequences for how one understands the role of affect and spectacle in Smith's sentimentalist interventions.

If the arrangement, content, and performance of these plays were governed by a dialectical logic, the "cooperative dance" between actor and character Smith envisions would be a modification of the life and death struggle envisioned by G. W. F. Hegel or

the mirror stage theorized by Jacques Lacan, that is, it would be governed by the haunting phantasm of negation such that all identity would prove to be predicated on an underlying lack (Hegel 114). Individual differences from the model identity to which they are related would signify only a failed performance of one's subject position. On this reading, what they would reveal most about the urban turmoil they depict would be its pointlessness and inevitability. If, however, Smith's work can also be read productively through the non-dialectical philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, then we are in a better position to use the occasion of her plays to ask after the lines of power and affect in both the theater and among its real life *dramatis personae*.

There are, in fact, two moments of differentiation in Smith's inhabitation of characters: a negative and positive treatment of differentiation. To borrow a notion from Gestalt psychology, her performances possess "multistability": a tendency to shift back and forth between two possible modes of reception (Lehar 51). The relationship is not dichotomous, but rather oscillatory. Though simultaneous or immanent in any performance and in any scene, the oscillating modes of reception inhering in Smith's theatrical practice ought to be conceived of as logically consecutive. The first is a diagnostic, negative moment in which Smith's impersonation marks the *subject's* difference from *her*, so that we understand the subject's identity (as well as hers) as separated by a series of relational markers--she is black, her subject white, she is female, her subject male--precisely because she theatricalizes the swapping of these markers. This confirms difference, but in a sense that inscribes Smith and her subject with a relational negativity. Her transversal performance confirms, in this mode of reading, that

she is incapable of *truly being* others, of experiencing the pain of other people(s).³¹

The second level at which differentiation functions in Smith's performance is a productive moment in which her impersonation marks *her* difference from the *subject*, the audience's difference from her, and her own self-difference. The perception of self-difference as productive results in identity performances that hold out the possibility of proceeding otherwise. We must hold this possibility in abeyance, however, for Smith's embodiment only serves to show how such performances must always be original. They are repetitions that must produce differences that are relational without being oppositional. In essence, these performances reveal differences emerging by virtue of their being performed in time. Such performances stress the possibility that space can change, that the urban ruin can become the theater-turned-meeting-room—the feigned naïveté of belligerence or complicity can become an actual openness to the moment directly after the repeated show, the scene, the word has passed. “There is an inevitable tension in America,” Smith writes in her introduction to the published version of “Fires”:

It is in the tension of identity in motion, the tension of identity which is in contest with an old idea, but a resonant idea of America. It was developed initially, or so we are told, by men, by White men, but an idea which has in fact, been adapted by women and people of color. Can we guide that tension so that it is identity in motion [...]? (xxxiv)

Here, in language signaling the reappropriation of past texts, Smith appeals for a shift from oppositional antagonism to a dynamic, if uncertain, passage elsewhere. I identify the former with the division of identities based on dialectical *ressentiment* and mutual

wounding, and that latter with a non-dialectical process of self-differentiation and social recombination.

The “negative moment” of differentiation in Smith’s dramatic practice—the Gestalt axis in which she is *obviously not* who she impersonates—corresponds to the negative moment dividing ethnic, racial, and gender groups from one another in the city. Regarding these categories as negatively constituted is not the same as wishing to ban them magically from social recognition or yearning for collective colorblindness; colorblindness would only defang the critique of power disequilibrium I pursue here. Instead, the term “negative” functions to suggest that racial identity and difference function through a process of oppositional differentiation, such as those characterizing the philosophies of Hegel and post-Hegelians, such as Lacan. Indeed, many of the early segments of “Fires in the Mirror” could be neatly read as racialized versions of Lacan’s theory of mirror stage, that is, the process by which a child misrecognizes in others a coherence and a unity that he or she then imposes on the “self.”

Early in “Fires in the Mirror,” Smith includes the hesitant ruminations of an “Anonymous Girl” who notes: “When I look in the mirror... / I don’t know. / How did I find out I was Black... / (Tongue sound) / When I grew up and look in the mirror and saw I was Black. / When I look at my parents, / That’s how I knew I was Black. Look at my skin. You black?” (Fires 16). The teenager’s certainty about the meaning and presence of black identity, proof of which is as obvious as her own face in the mirror or the features of her parents, is belied by her inability to establish Smith’s racial status immediately. If Smith’s light complexion is the first source of confusion, when the

question is posed by Smith-as-Anonymous-Girl to a theatrical audience, the uncertainty is multiplied. This tempts, as I have noted, a Lacanian reading that sees identity constituted through an oppositional process and having, at its center, an unsolved, unlocatable lack. Such a dialectical account also resonates with a formulation, offered by playwright Ntozake Shange, in the first scene of “Fires.” Shange asserts the need to understand the self’s difference from its milieu in order to achieve self-understanding: “I am a part of my surroundings / and I become separate from them / and it’s being able to make those differentiations clearly / that let’s us have an identity” (Fires 3). As Shange continues, however, her definition departs from dialectical reversals: “and what’s inside our identity / is everything that’s ever happened to us. Everything that’s ever happened / to us as well as our responses to it “ (Fires 3). Modified by this second clause, the definition of identity is entangled in spatial otherness (milieu), in temporal otherness (the past), but also in the mysterious force of activity, response, and agency.

Though Smith’s interest in mirrors, mimicry, and recognition all suggest the use of a theory of identity closely related to the one authored by Hegel and updated by Lacan, Bhabha and others, the positive quantum of force in Shange’s definition of identity intimates the presence of something apart from the play of oppositions between identity and one’s surrounds. What this quantum *cannot* be becomes clear when Smith frames the difficulty of articulating a mode of identity that is not constituted through a differential process by using the words of director George C. Wolfe, shortly after staging Shange’s pronouncement. With Wolfe, we encounter a complex moment in which the effort to communicate indicates the impossibility of the assertion:

“I am – not – going – to place myself / (Pause.) / in relationship to your whiteness. / I will talk about your whiteness if we want to talk about that. / But I, / but what, / that which, / what I – / what am I saying? / My blackness does not resist – ex – re – / exist in relationship to your whiteness. / (Pause.) / You know / (Not really a question, more like a hum. Slight pause.) / it does not exist in relationship to – / it exists / it exists” (Fires 10-12).

Smith may relish the fecund equivocation Wolfe inadvertently makes between resistance and existence, for the claim that race has some ontological value certainly overstates her own views. Indeed, one of the play's thematic implications is that races exist because of resistances, power inequalities, and the codification of differences. Moreover, while the language of Wolfe's assertion does not preclude the possibility that what is in question is not racial identity but the materiality of the body--blackness as a matter of cells and melanin--Smith clearly rejects Wolfe's notion. She does so not because there are no material differences “underneath” linguistic assessment or because blackness can only be grasped as the contrary of whiteness. Instead, undoing the pernicious force of *ressentiment*, Smith engages with the specificity of bodies, actions, and words through a differential, but not oppositional process; when she attends to oppositions, it is to trace within them the forceful claims of allegiances and organizations more varied and variable than any dialectical schema can allow. Smith’s practice confirms that, for certain of its participants, racial and communal dialectics--the tendency of a group to define itself through oppositional logics--continue to possess vicious force. However, she does not structure her plays to uphold or echo this oppositional structure, but rather to undo it.

Before exploring how Smith’s work aims to *undo* this oppositional, negative

structure, we should glance at the ways in which her work *catalogues* the violent ills of that structure while also demonstrating its conceptual persistence. Reading race naturally (“I am this, not that” or “you are not what I am”) can, at best, make such identity categories rigid. More often, it licenses, consciously or subconsciously, the dehumanization of others. In a familiar turn of thinking, embedded in grammar itself, those outside the boundary of “us” become “them.” Smith’s plays contain many characters explaining or treating race in precisely this way. In *Twilight*, the combative Paul Park suggests that all African Americans are enjoined by God to defend their own (in this case, the accused assailants of Reginald Denny), declaring boldly: “[w]hen God calls you, this is what you gotta do. / You either stand or you fall. / You either be black or you die” (*Twilight* DPS 118). Evident in Park’s words is an aggressive and contradictory split in the racial oppositional logic. In his view, blackness is both descriptive and proscriptive. Here, race is both a categorical and intentional mode of being: a way of *not*-being someone else and a way of being-*against* someone else. However, the contradictory ambivalence of racial positioning, so evident in Park’s declaration, can be all the more severe for being passed over in silence, a complication Smith demonstrates in her performance of Judith Tur.

A ground reporter for LA News Service, Tur’s images of the 1992 riot became famous; during her interview with Smith, Tur narrated some of her raw video footage of the beginning of the unrest:

Anna, / This is the beginning of the riots. / And, uh, / this is the video we’re going to be giving you for the show. / Now watch this, Anna. / This is

absolutely, / I think, / disgraceful. / Here's a gang member. / Here... / This is / a live broadcast, by the way. / These poor... / He fell like a sack of potatoes. / I mean, real brave men, right? / Now these women here – / you'll see them later – / are taking pictures of this. / This is sick. [...] Okay, here's another animal / videotaping this guy. / These people have no heart. / These people don't deserve / to live. / Sorry for getting emotional, / but I mean this is not my United States anymore. / This is sicko. (*Twilight* DPS 84-86)

The irony jars, for Tur scorns those photographing and videotaping riot victims even as she herself records the tableau of victim and witness. Tur professes great feeling for those in the video she sees as victims—they are “poor,” “falling like sacks of potatoes,” and she is “emotional” seeing them—but those who, very much like herself, record the suffering of others without assisting, are “animals,” “sicko[s],” heartless, and insensible to what they see. By declaring that they “don't deserve / to live,” Tur doubly implicates herself, evincing the very callous indifference to others she locates in them. While Tur fails to mention race, it is racial (dis)identification that produces her contradictory disavowal of the onlooker's position. Though Tur's professional status separates her from the locals behind cameras she so disdains, that status stands in for the various other ways in which she holds herself as superior to the dark-colored slum denizens into whose hearts she claims to penetrate and see. Tur codes her sense of separation from those she sees as a moral, just as Park had, though her feeling of separation is doubled by a repudiation of nation: “this is not my United States anymore.” Tur's conflation of moral witness and national belonging is consonant with sentimentalism's logic, but in her view, racial others, incapable of fellow feeling, have effectively alienated her from the national body. With figures like Park and Tur, Smith makes obvious the commingled brutality

and absurdity of unexamined racial identification, whether posited as natural or passed over as if invisible.

While reading racial communities as a matter of historical rather than natural belonging illuminates the contingency of the category of race, it can also furtively reify group identity based on a collective humiliated debasement refigured as a virtue. Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment* addresses precisely this self-congratulatory recitation of victimhood and the value systems that flow from it. Though I read her as profoundly at odds with ressentimental identities, I must begin by acknowledging that Smith occasionally abets the reinstatement of racialized *ressentiment*. Her decision to place Pogrebin's Holocaust account after Mohammed's recitation of the horrors and degradations of slavery partakes in *ressentiment* even as it calls its usefulness into question. Mohammed explicitly invites the comparison because he thinks that the history of slavery represents a more profound suffering than does the Holocaust, while Pogrebin expresses to Smith her fears that "trotting out our Holocaust stories / too regularly [will] inure each other to the truth of /them" (Fires 59). Implied in both of these views, however, is the shared notion that this historical suffering is sacred—to be preserved and monumentalized—a view Smith's scene sequencing reinforces. Similarly, in *Twilight*, when Cornel West holds forth on the difference between the pathos of whites and that of blacks, he accentuates the exclusivity and perverse privilege of the latter:

if whites experienced black sadness... (*Pause.*) / It would be too overwhelming for them. (*Pause.*) / Very few white people could / actually take seriously, / black sadness and live the lives that / they livin' / livin' in denial / 'Oh it couldn't be that bad' / And they have their own form of sadness / Tends to be linked to / the

American Dream / But it's a very very very different kind of / Sadness. (*Twilight DPS* 108)

Though an astute cultural generalization—both directing attention to racialized power disequilibrium and vividly illustrating the incapacity for fellow feeling across those lines— West's judgment also reinforces the cultural value of suffering, not merely as a marker of continuing inequalities or of historical realities too little remembered, but as a sign of righteousness, an indicator of might. Furthermore, *ressentiment* polices the boundary between “them” and “us” all the more rigorously by insinuating into the opposition the hint that internal, affective experiences peculiar to each group constitute its essence, albeit a reactive, melancholic essence.

While Smith occasionally reinstates racialized *ressentiment*, far more frequently, she positions herself to one side of competing claims for historical injustices, recounting stories of suffering and implying the need to attend to such narratives but also refusing to adopt a stance of judgment in which grief is assuaged through adjudication. Thus, in remaining alert to the insidious consequences of racialized *ressentiment*, one need not dismiss the reality of the power struggle nor the possible creative work that may be produced out of the injuries emerging from those struggles. For example, in her staging of sculptor Rudy Salas, Sr.'s monologues, Smith emphasizes that, for many, racial resentments are based on historical wrongs endured by ancestors—Salas's father came to hate “gringos” when he fought for Poncho Villa against Pershing's army—but they are also based on racial violence occurring in the span of contemporary lives. Salas catalogues the ways in which, during the 1930s and 1940s, the white power structure in

Los Angeles mistreated him because of his ethnicity. In first grade, Salas announces, “they started telling me / I was inferior / because I was a Mexican! / And that’s where, / I knew from an early age / [...] / I realized I had an enemy / and that enemy-was-those-nice-white-teachers” (*Twilight* DPS 29-30). Salas recounts how, as “a zootsuiter” in 1942, he was arrested and then beaten by four police officers in a precinct basement; “from that day on,” Salas confides, “I I had a hate in me” (*Twilight* DPS 30). Smith performs Salas’s account of learning to hate his “enemy” to evince the trenchancy of racial antagonism in Los Angeles but to do so without dismissing or merely decrying that antagonism. Through Salas, her play seeks to contextualize the reaction of African Americans and Latinos to the Rodney King beating and subsequent trials as one injustice in an ongoing and long-standing series of injustices that extend for centuries. She does not, however, leave the matter there.

Instead, Smith rhetorically positions herself to one side of her interviewee’s claims for justice. She performs their monologues with an accuracy she touts but doing so while claiming diplomatic detachment. In interviews, Smith often claims impartiality, refusing the idea that because she is an African American, she unduly privileges the “side” of the black community. “I resist taking sides,” she says, “I know that’s disturbing for some people because somewhere, identity in us has to do with what side you’re on. [...] But I feel a big responsibility to the people who talk to me not to do this. I want to tell all sides of the story” (qtd. in Wolf). Furthermore, Smith sometimes uses the words of characters to insinuate the need for an arbitrator of wrongs (like herself), willing to listen without prejudice. For example, a clear affinity exists between Smith’s off-stage

claims to avoid “taking sides” and her staged monologue of Police commissioner Stanley Sheinbaum’s words. Sheinbaum’s willingness to meet with gangs, he explains, infuriated many in LAPD, who saw this meeting as a betrayal of his bureaucratic position: “at the end, / uh, / I knew I hadn’t won when they said, / ‘So which side are you on?’ / When I said, I said, it’s... / my answer was / ‘Why do I have to be on a side?’ / Yu, yuh, yeh know. / ‘Why do I have to be on a side? / There’s a problem here!’” (*Twilight* DPS 27-8). In this manner, paradoxically, Smith privileges a character’s words in order to suggest that she does not privilege a particular perspective in the conflicts with which her plays engage. While it is clear that genuine neutrality is impossible and probably undesirable, Smith’s gesture toward it is meant to underscore her desire to produce a space in which competing claims to unjust suffering can be aired to enable a future, more peaceful cohabitation.

Typically, then, Smith’s practice is to attend sentimentally to anguish without confirming its ressentimental value, a negotiation of feeling that requires the abandonment of the “safe houses of identity” (*Talk to Me* 23–24). The opposition of “us” versus “them” serves primarily to elide differences within such categories and therefore artificially fix stable subjective positions: as an individual, as a member of a particular ethnic group, or as a “human being”. As Deleuze argues in his study of Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is not peculiar to a specific group; rather, such “reactive” thinking grounds human psychology as such (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 34). *Ressentiment* is “the foundation of humanity in man. [...] The question is: are other perspectives available? Are there other ways of thinking, feeling and acting? In short, ‘Is there another

becoming?’” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 64). One way in which *ressentiment* can be circumvented is to embed otherness within the boundaries of the self, as Nietzsche seeks to do with his particular conceptualization of the friend. Paraphrasing Nietzsche-as-Zarathustra, Deleuze explains that the friend “is always the third person in between ‘I’ and ‘me’ who pushes me to overcome myself and to be overcome in order to live” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 6). Hence, “the friend” is a way of figuring a relation between otherness and selfhood that is not mere détente or languid amity; it is a kind of internal difference calling for hurtling beyond the self, the group, or the species. Likewise, Smith’s mode of sentimental engagement—attending to the other, and then interceding in the self *as* the other—represents an attempt to avoid reconfirming established identitarian categories, resentimental and otherwise.

Smith’s work does resist the regressus of dialectical *ressentiment* in at least two ways: by foregrounding a productive self-difference in the individuals she profiles and by suggesting that identitarian categories are based not on oppositional definitions but on territorial connections and markers that can be modified and reconfigured to produce new identities. I locate the first of these tendencies—revealing productive internal differences—in Smith’s predilection for focusing on moments of stuttering or difficult speech. Smith isolates moments in which people hesitate, stutter, change topics unexpectedly, and otherwise struggle to articulate their meaning, not to expose an inadequacy in their perspective, but rather to find in their speech the production of something new and unrehearsed. Such moments of change and newness are not characterized by dialectical reversibility in which one moment’s way of thinking is

contradicted by the next's, and it is certainly not characterized by the promise of a resolved, unchanging *telos* beckoning in the distance. Smith's interest in the halting stutter is about de-finalizing her own work—relinquishing authorial control and foregrounding the evanescence of personhood—as attested when, in her introduction to “Fires in the Mirror, she writes:

My goal was to create an atmosphere in which the interviewee would experience his/her own authorship. [. . .] everyone, in a given amount of time, will say something that is like poetry. The process of getting to that poetic moment is where ‘character’ lives. [...] The pursuit is frequently filled with *uhs* and *ums* and, in fact, the wrong words, if any words at all, and almost always what would be considered ‘bad grammar.’ I suppose much of communication could be narrowed down to ‘the point.’ This project is not about a point, it is about a route. It is *on* the road. (*Fires*, xxxii)

Note how Smith herself here “stammers,” effecting a change through varied repetition, shifting the aesthetic act from a matter of producing a static “atmosphere,” to a “process,” and, more vigorously, as a “pursuit.” Hesitance, drifting, stammering:³² this is how Smith negotiates the paradox of being and becoming, both in her presentation of character and her exposition of that presentation. The blunder out of smooth speech is the moment in which self-authorship occurs. Here becoming is not a sublation of being and nothingness, of identity and its negation, nor is it to be dismissed as so much shuffling through the symbolic order in a deluded attempt to escape one's position. Instead, variation *is* the position.

The second means by which Smith's dramatic art distances itself from dialectical *ressentiment* is its consistent hinting that identity should be understood as a matter of

competing claims to turf and of differential, but not oppositional, markers. Smith ferrets out unsuspected links between individuals within hostile groups, destabilizing their aggregate antagonism by emphasizing individual and sub-individual relations. Indeed, her own dramatic practice relies on the idea that identities can be conjured effectively by displaying the contours of her differences from her subject. This approximates Deleuze's rejection of Hegel's emphasis on difference as opposition, as when Deleuze declares that "[t]hose formulae according to which 'the object denies what it is not,' or distinguishes itself from everything that it is not,' are logical monsters (the Whole of everything which is not the object) in the service of identity (*Difference and Repetition* 49). Deleuze consistently emphasized that other means of aligning, connecting, and creating differences are required if one hopes to avoid the diminution of difference to echoic sameness: 'Dialectic thrives on oppositions because it is unaware of far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms: topological displacements, typological variations' (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 157). A consistent sub-theme of Smith's work is the citation of precisely such subtle displacements and variations; one should conceive of her particular *bricolage* of characters, traversed by unrecognized relationships, as an element in her effort to rethink imaginative and affective connection with others, to redefine the stakes and procedures of sympathy. If the conventional grammar of sentiment stages the merger of discrete passions, and with them separated persons, as objects in the mind of a privileged subject of feeling, the affect produced by Smith's work suggests a more jumbled, multi-textured, paratactic mix in which the assembling witness is either utterly absent or spectacularly multiplied.

One frequently cited example of Smith's interest in unpredicted points of relation is the "Hair" section of "Fires in the Mirror," in which Al Sharpton's and Rivkah Siegal's monologues are juxtaposed in order to demonstrate subterranean connections based on how, for both, hairstyle marks an allegiance to one imagined group and defiance of another. Sharpton tells Smith that he straightens his hair to betoken his intimate friendship with James Brown, whom he speaks of as a father figure. The slick, straightened coiffure Sharpton and Brown share, which was once favored by young African Americans because "it was acting like White folks," has since grown unpopular. Straightened hair therefore ceased to betoken black self-rejection and became, instead, Sharpton's assertion of a more local filial belonging, or as Sharpton avers "I don't really give a damn who doesn't understand it [...] it's me and James's thing" (*Fires* 21-22). Sharpton's monologue occurs just before that of Rivkah Siegal's, a monologue in which she explains the significance of keeping women's hair short in Lubavitcher custom and her consequent need to wear a wig. Though Siegal struggles with the embarrassment of explaining herself to non-Lubavitchers in her workplace as well as the distress in feeling somehow fake, she elects to continue to wear her hair closely cropped. Siegal's rationale for this decision, assumably owing to her devotion to both religion and religious community, goes unstated; what Smith underscores about the choice, therefore, is its dissonant blend of private and public consciousness as well as the simultaneous awkwardness and doggedness of Siegal's feelings of belonging. Juxtaposing these performances, which reveal the personal deliberation of Sharpton and Siegal over how their hair signifies in larger communities, shows how, for each, hairstyle expresses an

esoteric affiliation that is at once an encumbrance and a point of pride.

The theatrical juxtaposition produces a new element of their possible relation that not only destabilizes the opposition of black and Jewish (the dominant antagonism in the Crown Heights riots), but also modifies each of them in relation to the other (but only through Smith's mediation). As Tania Modleski notes of this moment:

At odds with their respective groups over the question of adopting the customs and styles that signal their difference from the dominant culture, the militant black minister and the Lubavitcher woman appear for a moment to have more in common with each other than with members of their own groups. (66)

A similar example of the structural principle by which Smith links unlikely persons through their unforeseen and unheralded similarities is the way in which hats mark identity for characters in "Fires," a tendency she discovered in her interviewing process as she notes in an explanatory message following the PBS film version of the play (*Fires in the Mirror*). From Ntozake Shange's African fillet, Rabbi Joseph Spielman's black fedora, the Malcolm X baseball cap on activist Henry Rice, to the Rasta tams on the anonymous Caribbean youths, Smith encountered the repeated, though differing, use of headwear to mark belonging. Smith encourages her audience to read these forceful assertions of belonging as being based, not primarily on oppositionality, but rather on an open-ended connectivity. Although such covert shared markers can be cognitively organized as "samenesses" and fitted within a dialectic of recognition and opposition, the connections unearthed are better figured as what Deleuze calls a line of flight between disparate characters and cultures which Smith's art produces.

To clarify this claim, and its consequences for my view of Smith as a sentimentalist reviser, I begin by noting that, before Smith links them, each of the hats and both of the atypical hairstyles are elements within an existing assemblage—involving various bodies, places of worship, texts, performances, and so on—that together function to produce working identities, such as Lubavitcher or Rastafarian. Here, though I borrow one Deleuzian term to explain another, I do so knowingly; Deleuze and Guattari developed this vocabulary to sidestep the conceptual tendency to talk about how things *are*, and instead stress how things *mutate* and *connect*. Deleuze writes:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns—different natures. Thus the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind. (*Deleuze and Parnet* 69)

Deleuze's understanding of the assemblage avoids the organismic metaphor, which figures social affiliations as relations of interiority—individuals within a social body. Rather than describe individual elements as organs belonging to a harmonious larger body that in turn justifies and regulates the healthy functioning of the elements,³³ the notion of assemblage figures its relations as a matter of exteriority and heterogeneity. The assemblage's terms do not *belong* together; they *function* together through a variety of connections.

Borrowing from a distinction from biological discourse, Deleuze speaks of assemblages in terms of three kinds of lines interlinking elements. A molar line relies on

binary oppositions to form sharply defined, tree-like “arborescent” systems; these tend toward immensity and are frequently allied with the State and other hierarchical legal relations. A molecular line is more liquefied, less distinctly limned, involving a “supple segmentarity” that allows for multiple combinations and improvisations, or in Deleuze’s terms “deterritorializations” and “reterritorializations” (*Plateaus* 205). A line of flight ruptures the other two lines and is capable of transforming the assemblages to which they belong. Returning to Smith, Sharpton’s legal and political identity as a black man constitutes a molar line linking his body to others in a raciological schema; his characteristic pompadour is a molecular line linking him to James Brown and Brown’s bold expropriation of “white” hair style for an unapologetically black persona. Smith produces, through her *bricoleur* performance of Sharpton, Siegel, and others, lines of flight that seek to affect and re-form the multiple assemblages of the city. To summarize: if we conceive of Smith’s dramatic practice as a dialectical process in which identities respond to and refract through each other—that is, to read Smith as a late Hegelian—then we are left with a melancholic elegizing for a lost, never available civic unity. If however, these communities are understood instead as Deleuzean assemblages, then modifications are always occurring at individual and subindividual levels that allow for new assemblages, political and otherwise. Smith’s own re-coordination of elements of the city aims at the production of the new (city) not the reproduction of the old (ruin). So the difference in our reading apparatus matters enormously.

Disorder Words and Political Theater

Having shown how Smith’s mode of sentimentalism circumnavigates Platonic

copy-model mimesis as well as dialectical and ressentimentally constituted identities, we are still left to articulate how these performances produce something new in relation to the city-subject she presents. In other words, if Smith seeks neither to capture the city in a microcosmic representation nor to resolve through reciprocal interplay social differences as if they were contradictions, what does her intervention do? In a word, Smith's performances produce modifications of the cultural assemblages—the urban centers—in which they occur at material and immaterial levels. The disjunctive subject-voices of each performance are made to resonate together, avoiding the mere mirror play of (failed) reproduction, and instead seeking to *produce* a difference in a cultural field already *constituted* by differences. The politicized concept and figure of speech rendering many bodies as one image, *E Pluribus Unum*, gives way to a figure revealing one to be many. Smith's sentimentalism is exceptional in that it relies on an internal, generative difference—rather than an implicit sameness—to produce novel transformations in material bodies: her own, her audience's, and those in the broader city. Instead of subjects apprehending their likeness to an abject object of suffering, a shift occurs at the level of reception in which the display of multiple suffering selves emphasizes both the role of power in the subject-positioning of all as well as foregrounding internal differences within selves that open up the possibility of change.

Here again, Deleuze provides a lens for conceptualizing Smith's documentary theater, for in both one encounters an image of language use that is irreducibly plural, de-centered, but also shot through with power claims and inequalities. For Deleuze, two types of assemblage are important from a human perspective: machinic assemblages,

composed of material bodies interacting and disconnecting, and the collective assemblage of enunciation, the speaking composite bodies that produce incorporeal transformations of bodies through language.³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari reject the idea that speech acts should be understood primarily as autonomous statements (*parole*), but they also refuse the notion of language as an airy self-sufficient system (*langue*) to which *parole* has traditionally been opposed. Instead, they proffer the concept of “the collective assemblage of enunciation,” a kind of multiform social body composed of bodies speaking together in which “there are no clear, distinctive contours,” (*Plateaus* 79). It is a conception that insists that language is both irreducibly and incorporeally social, *while also being* embedded in pragmatic, historical and material disputes. “The social character of enunciation is intrinsically founded only if one succeeds in demonstrating how enunciation in itself implies *collective assemblages*,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “[i]t then becomes clear that the statement is individuated, and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so” (79). The concept of the collective assemblage of enunciation is a way of circumventing the chicken-and-egg questions that language acts ordinarily invoke, questions which are in fact so many microcosmic reiterations of Platonic model-copy dilemmas.

The two coauthors saw the ideal instantiation of this collective assemblage of enunciation in the modernist literary technique of free indirect discourse.³⁵ “indirect discourse is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains all the voices present

within a single voice” (*Plateaus* 80). Similarly, Smith’s expropriation and editing of the material language of others is equally illustrative of the dialogic aspects of language that Deleuze and Guattari wish to highlight with this concept, though Smith’s is not impersonal as she is careful to provide attribution of characters by projecting names on the stage behind her. Staging a miscellany of subjects without prioritizing, plotting, or selecting protagonists, Smith produces the illusion of a multifarious speaking subject engaged in compound power struggles, antagonisms, and overlapped narrative arcs, all against the backdrop of a massive upheaval attesting to the fact of their sharing in a single social plane. Smith does not so much represent Deleuze’s collective assemblage of enunciation as she traces it in the words and subject positions of others. Here it is worth recalling that Deleuze and Guattari attempt to articulate how language is constituted by pragmatic power through the notion of “order words.” Expanding on a line of thought going back through Foucault to Nietzsche regarding the relation of power and knowledge, Deleuze and Guattari claim that a “schoolmistress instruct[ing] her students on a rule of grammar or arithmetic,” is not informing her students so much as she is “giving orders or commands” that confirm the hierarchical relations of teacher/student, textbook/thought, and academic discourse/apprentice participants (*Plateaus* 76). Hence her words—and, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, all words—“order” in two senses: they enjoin and divide; they both accuse and categorize. This conception of language, sweeping in its implications, seeks to highlight how the meaning-making power of language is sewn into (and productive of) the social dynamics and power arrangements in which that language occurs.³⁶

Order-words are not merely a subset of language (as in the imperative form), but instead show “every act that is linked to statements by a ‘social obligation’,” such that the only possible definition of language must be “the set of all order-words, implicit presuppositions, or speech acts current [...] at a given moment” (*Plateaus* 79). At its heart, the theoretical apparatus of order-words seeks to highlight how language *works on* the materiality of bodies, resources, and the built environment. “Language is not life,” declare the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*, “it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits. Every order-word, even a father's to his son, carries a little death sentence—a Judgment, as Kafka put it” (*Plateaus* 76). Using this understanding of language’s power to affect bodies and materials, one can see how Smith’s sentimental practice is an effort to wrest from the found, multivoiced syntax of various citizens “little life sentences,” commands that affect the audience affirmatively. Smith expropriates the speech acts of others, “repeats” them “perfectly,” but by deterritorializing these acts, she alters their pragmatic performative function without changing their linguistic meaning. She countermands their order(s) by recontextualizing them.

Smith's dramatic practice puts her audience into her position; in doing so, she transforms audience and subject. During their interviews with Smith, many of her subjects speak directly to her, calling her by her name, asking her questions, and referring to her race and gender. Smith, in turn, includes these moments in the script. The often-unsettling result is that, during her performance as others, Smith seems to speak to another version of herself. The audience takes up the interviewer's place, with the difference that they do not ask questions or respond verbally. Nonetheless, in its ideal

reception, the audience is engaged sympathetically with both interviewee and interviewer, projecting themselves mentally into both spaces and attending to the possible affective experience of both. This neatly updates sentimentalism's affective pedagogy, which requires precisely this kind of receptive repetition: someone suffers, while another engages imaginatively in that suffering, repeating it as if they too suffered. The first repetition of suffering in the sympathetic witness functions as a pedagogical as well as an ethical act, modeling for onlookers the correct response. An audience cooperative with sentimentalist logic must, so to speak, repeat the repetition of suffering.

In the case of Smith's multistable performance, with each character seeming interchangeably Smith and not-Smith, the audience should be understood as similarly multistable. The negative Gestalt occurs with the realization that, though the audience is *asked* to become Smith—that is, to become an attentive affective archivist reconnoitering the emotions of a vast swathe of citizenry—that, nevertheless, in this repetition, the audience *must fail* and understand its difference from Smith-the-interviewer, Smith-the-performer, and the interviewees. The positive Gestalt occurs with the audience's awareness of their own transformed capacity to listen; Smith's capacity to conjure others attests to the audience's capacity to be absorbed in that otherness. This alteration of reception emerges from, in Deleuzian terms, the power of order-words to produce incorporeal transformations in a particular milieu. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari take as an unsettling example of such incorporeal transformation the act of terrorists hijacking a plane, for by upending the authority structure on the plane through their speech, a passenger transforms himself into a terrorist, other "passengers into hostages,

and [...] the plane-body into a prison-body" (*Plateaus* 81). A similar transformation, though one with far more beneficial results, occurs in plays such as *Twilight*. Smith's habit of giving her interviewees tickets to her opening night makes the transformation all the more resonant. Her subjects see themselves being played by another with others, observing themselves through Smith's eyes through the eyes of the audience. Thus the reflexiveness of her work, a quality understood as characteristic of postmodernism, must be understood equally as a part of her sentimentalism.

By conceiving of these theatrical productions as assemblages producing material and immaterial transformations, one sees clearly the ways in which Smith's plays seek to recreate the polis in the theater, a reassembly as political as it is aesthetic. Consequently, in what remains of the chapter, I consider the implied politics of these works more critically by examining two interrelated tensions, two axes along which Smith's work moves. My discussion of the first of these axes—the disjunction between individual grievances and structural inequities—builds on our discussion of Smith's resistance to representation. In some sense, the strain between these two inheres in the sentimentalist form, for as Lauren Berlant avers, "when sentimentality meets politics, it uses personal stories to tell of structural effects, but in so doing it risks thwarting its very attempt to perform rhetorically a scene of pain that must be soothed politically" (641). However, Smith risks compounding this inherent tendency to "personalize" the political through her emphasis on the idiosyncratic. Rather than draft individuals as race representatives, as I have shown, Smith seeks to avoid the collapse of the singular into a dialectically conceived, fictitious whole. While this strategy succeeds in preserving particularity and

therefore does greater justice to individuals within a social field, it can hinder assessments of structural inequalities of power. Over the course of her three published documentary works, Smith demonstrates increasing cognizance of this shortcoming, but in modifying her dramaturgical technique to address it, she also runs up against another political difficulty: centralization of the representative spectacle, which is the second axis by which I analyze her political views. This latter tension is between the centralization of the body politic through spectacle versus its material segregation and fragmentation. Here, the political problem inheres not in sentimentalism's conceptual models, but in the very technique Smith has created. This second tension cannot be resolved but ought to be figured as ongoing and open as Smith's serialized dramatic project itself is.

Though I have argued that plays such as "Fires in the Mirror" should be assessed more for what they attempt *to do* than what they endeavor *to represent*, by reading her plays in relation to the historical events they depict, I see in Smith's work a progressive distrust of sentimentalism's view that personal stories can *sooth* structural disparities as well as a progressive interest in staging the power landscape in which social actors move. In "Fires," Smith emphasizes the personal rather than the structural. Doubtless there is an effort to convey the neighborhood milieu—the mix of Hasidim, African-Americans, and Caribbean-Americans—but the dramatic structure repeats the framing of much contemporary media coverage by ignoring the history of that neighborhood. Smith limits the dramatic event of the riots to the deaths of Gavin Cato and Yankel Rosenbaum, focusing on pleas for the dignity of all individual lives. The play "refuses to take sides" in that it acknowledges the injustice of both deaths, as well as the respective claims to

historical injury—the Holocaust and the institution of slavery—as if these were the most pertinent back-story to the conflict. What is missing is the more immediate history of racial conflict in New York, particularly in Crown Heights. Smith does not, for instance, contextualize the conflict by discussing the three racially motivated murders of black youths by white mobs—lynchings all but in name—in New York City in the 1980s that had progressively alienated race relations in the five boroughs.³⁷ Nor does she stage elements from the municipal power structure—Mayor Dinkins, who lost his reelection bid over his handling of the unrest, for example, or reporters from the *New York Times*, who covered the riot as a pogrom—but rather she stays at the level of the citizenry and community activists. Hence, even though the play acknowledges the importance of class differences and avoids reducing the conflict to a simplistic black-white antagonism, Smith does not seek to use “Fires” to address the most pertinent histories of power and violence but instead opts to treat the conflict in terms of “an eye for an eye.” In doing so, she develops the stage as a space for the soothing of a neighborhood standoff, a “facilitating environment” for the therapeutic airing of grievances (*Castelloe 207*).

With *Twilight*, Smith seems to have become more interested in the interplay of structural and individual affects than in the earlier play. This results partly from the larger canvas offered by Los Angeles, where it would have been difficult to avoid a measured evaluation of social standings. The Rodney King conflict entangled Korean-Americans and Latinos just as much as it did African-Americans or whites, and within each of these ethnic groups, Smith samples a wide variety of class backgrounds. Furthermore, *Twilight* is unmistakably more engaged than was “Fires,” with elements of the police apparatus,

political representatives, and media figures-- such as Police Chief Daryl Gates, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, and Senator Bill Bradley--who mediate, spin, and structure the play of conflicting calls for justice. Smith compounded this feeling of mediation and broadcast by including as props televisions playing footage of the riots. By acknowledging the ways in which her own theater and the mass media both function by disaggregating images from their original contexts, Smith begins to demonstrate a greater self-consciousness about her own spectacular status, a trend she builds on substantially in *House Arrest*. While these developments might also seem inevitable, in that the riots were sparked by a heavily publicized police brutality case, Smith's interest in bureaucratic and institutional figures is only one aspect of her widening lens, for she also is clearly more interested in the larger geography of belonging and retreat. Unlike Crown Heights, an urban space in which citizens semi-anonymously mix as pedestrians, with vastly different ethnicities domiciled often in the same buildings, Los Angeles's built environment famously divides its population along class lines. As Mike Davis's influential study, *City of Quartz* argues, L.A.'s new downtown, a series of linked privately owned megastructures connected by multilevel highways and access ramps all built in the early 1980s, was constructed to accommodate white-collar office workers and tourists and to keep out undesirable pedestrians from old downtown, populated almost entirely by Latinos, African-Americans, and the poor. Here, turf claims do not vacillate between peaceful coexistence and violent confrontations, but rather invasions and withdraws.

This increased interest in structural power disequilibrium, a disequilibrium that is

distributed spatially, continues with Smith's next play. In *House Arrest*, an often brilliant but eccentric examination of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Smith seems increasingly interested in the display of bodies, especially black bodies, as a source of questionable power. By extending her modus operandi and drawing material from historical texts, such as Early American newspapers, the poetry of Walt Whitman, and the journals of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, Smith moves beyond the critique of political culture within cities and explicitly attempts an examination of national character in the person of the president. Smith's first two plays had, however, already projected a national imaginary, as the title "In Search of American Character" suggests. In general, sentimentalism is inseparable from entrenched conceptual images of a larger ideal society at which the exchange of personal feeling only hints. Smith's specific use of sentimentalism suggests an understanding of nation that emphasizes a plurality of perspectives embroiled in conflict and disinclined to engage in dialogue. The dramatic structure Smith employs partially resonates with representative democracy's mode of governance, for she does not stage a swarm of bodies but rather single figures arguing the case for themselves and unseen peoples to whom they feel connected. Nevertheless, something in the play subverts such civic-minded proceduralism: the social body conjured is acephalous and profoundly unstable. In classical political conceptions of the State, the "head" of state representing the body politic doubles the individual "I," the rational interiority inside the cranium ruling over body. This "I" is subverted in Smith's work, where multiple impassioned selves replace it. After all, a riot may be justly understood as a social space in which power is violently uneven, but in which no one is in

charge. Finally, the ways in which *Fires* or *Twilight* constitute performative interventions over and above political representations suggest that the social body Smith conjures is not a *state* at all, but should be understood instead an *event*. “American character,” in Smith’s first two plays, is indeed “[o]n the road.” What makes *House Arrest*, different is the intimation that the nation may be traveling in circles.

After alerting her audience that *House Arrest* concerns the Lewinski affair through the monologues of Studs Terkel and George Stephanopolis, Smith moves sharply backward in time to the colonial era by presenting the monologue of Cinder Stanton, a historian at Jefferson’s Monticello manor. In it, Stanton expounds on Jefferson’s conscious use of the “Panoptic” system in his design of the estate in that Jefferson initially “bought everything he could see, / and then a hundred yards beyond the line of sight,” allowing for increased extension of sight once the house itself was constructed (21). Stanton is particularly interested in an ambiguity in the panopticon structure for, while Jefferson “certainly took measure so that he couldn’t be seen. / But / [...] / It’s interesting, just in relation to what you said in terms of modern / Presidents / That that word [panoptic] has a double meaning. / That they are all-seeing, / or being seen by everyone” (21). In this way, Smith introduces early into her play the panopticon, a spatial figure that will allow her to link a variety of historical regulative arrangements together to problematize the relation between visibility and power: a problematic haunting both sentimentalism (with its sympathetic witness) and the distribution of urban spaces (in which power and visibility often track proportionately). I will conclude my reading of Smith’s revision of sentimentalism by showing how she uses the image of the

panopticon to link her theatrical practice more intimately to the broader nation in a mode that critiques both. Specifically, Smith links (1) Jefferson's slave plantation's landscape, and metonymically the history of racial and gender oppression, (2) the media's fixation on President Clinton's affair, as an index of politics as a sideshow rather than substantive process of empowerment, (3) the surveillance power of the bureaucratic state over the bodies of its citizens, and (4) her own sentimental theatrical practice.

The panopticon is a schema of "generalized surveillance" for the improved exercise of power in which a mass of people may be observed, and know themselves observed by an unseen seer, who may in fact be absent but who nonetheless continues to exert power by the threat of his sight (Foucault 209). In his famous elucidation of the panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault emphasizes the doublesidedness of panopticism's knowledge-power structure as well as the fact that it represents an understanding in which power is immanent rather than transcendent. He notes that the panopticon structure "arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact" (206). Subjects internalize their own subjection with the suspicion that their actions are observed. In its earliest iterations, panopticism developed as an attempt to ascertain knowledge about individuals within plague-stricken villages to assist in maintaining an effective quarantine. Embedded in the panoptical structure, therefore, is also a historical desire to divide and catalogue the crowd, to organize a social body into atomized known objects. Accordingly panopticism maximizes power's reach—

minimizing those who exert it, maximizing those subjected to it, and extending the realm of control beyond physical coercion into thought itself—by isolating both the source and target of knowledge/power as potential spectacles.

Returning to *House Arrest*, one might begin by noting that Smith's play effectively contextualizes panopticism within the history of race and gender oppression focusing on its use by Jefferson, a founding father and symbol of American character. Jefferson's estate is structured on the principle of unseen-but-seeing power, and Smith links this fact to other elements in the statesman's life, especially the impassioned debate over his relationship with Sally Hemmings, one of his slaves. Smith compounds this already heated imbroglio by staging a reading from Jefferson's notebook in which he ruminates on the different nature of Africans, remarking on their "very strong and disagreeable odor," their more "ardent" sexuality—"a more eager desire, [rather] than a delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation"—their "much inferior" capacity for reason, all differences Jefferson takes to be "fixed in nature" (31). He concludes:

Their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to white in the endowments of body and mind. This unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people. When freed he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture. (31-32)

Given that Smith performed *House Arrest* in Washington, D.C. before a crowd of political insiders, including, on the opening night, President Clinton himself, one must remark both on this opening episode's pedagogical function as well as its clear attempt

épater le bourgeois. The play thus begins by conjuring American history as a temporal space defined, not by enlightened architects of procedural democracy, but by Enlightenment slave-owners who fathered children under coercive conditions. In short, Smith uses Monticello's panopticism to evoke America as a polity claiming equality while functioning as an oligarchy.

Such an historical approach to politics in the White House, in relation to the Lewinsky affair, is damning. Smith pursues this line of attack with the words of Christopher Hitchens, who condemns Clinton as a sexual predator and political opportunist, linking his liaison with Jennifer Flowers with his politicized refusal to stay the execution of a lobotomized man, Ricky Ray Rector, in Arkansas. Importantly, though Smith's play is consonant with the priorities of 1990s identity politics, it pursues identity categories not primarily as essences to be treasured but rather as systematically distributed sites in a field of power. The acidity of this approach is lightened to some extent by the fact that Smith also looks at *l'affair* Lewinsky as an unhelpful diversion from genuine politics, politics that might lead to the redress of the uneven exercises of power. To this end, she includes the views of Gary Hart, Judith Butler, Ed Bradley, Brian Palmer, Chris Vlasto, Walter Shapiro and Clinton himself in monologues that speak to the pointlessness of such "political theater." Consequently, the view of power that emerges most distinctly from the play is one of invasive probing, be it in the Jeffersonian panoptical form or the shape of Kenneth Starr.

The play often sidesteps the Lewinsky affair, however, to consider the less familiar casualties of power's exercise, with a particular emphasis on women of color.

Smith stages the ruminations of Anita Hill on the battery of threats, probes, and polygraph tests alongside the horrifying confession of Paulette Jenkins on abetting her violent boyfriend in the murder of her daughter. What links these two disparate figures, aside from their shared racial and gender identity, are the ways in which their subjection to interpersonal patriarchal probing, isolation, and mistreatment is either ignored or redoubled by the procedural, juridical power-structure. Thus, Smith is able to use the Jefferson-Hemmings debate, the Lewinsky affair, and the experiences of a variety of black women to suggest a link between, on the one hand, the intimate, sexual, “personal” dramas of power abuses based on racial and gender differences and, on the other, the impersonal spectacles of governance and governmentality. Memorably, Smith includes the story of Alexis Herman, U.S. Secretary of Labor under Clinton, who tells of how, at the age of five, she cowered in her father’s car while a group of Klansman, who had followed her father’s vehicle after a church meeting, beat him while his daughter listened to his cries. Herman narrates this story to illustrate why she found it unfathomable that she had been labeled a “Washington insider” by the media when Independent Council Kenneth Starr subpoenaed her. Her position, much like Smith’s, is to feel—as an affectively powerful aspect of her racial and gender identity—an alienation from power. This alienation is confirmed, her place within the governing bureaucracy notwithstanding, through the Starr investigation itself. The investigation is a process in which Herman is treated as a pawn in an entanglement of power, indistinguishably personal and procedural, that derives its power from its status as spectacle. Intriguingly then, Herman doubles for Smith—an affective and cultural outsider to power who is

nonetheless entangled within a structure of power she does not control. While *House Arrest* is primarily interested in larger political structures, we can discern, in the conflicted space Herman and Smith share, sentimentalism's mute suffering figure that is reinterpreted and repositioned in the sympathetic witness's eyes.

Smith's use of the panopticon structure demonstrates a form of autocritique that links the use of state, personal, and artistic power. Like a head of state, Smith has the power to see the audience and to see the community she presents in her play, and a complex set of powers—to re-form, categorize, record, distort, capture, or mesmerize those groups—is conferred by being in the center of spectacular nexus. Smith's practice is similar to the panopticon in that, at least theoretically, her theater produces unidirectional seeing: her interviewees are invited to attend her performances, but they cannot control how they will be presented. More pertinently, Smith's first two plays can be thought of as making the undifferentiated crowd knowable by atomizing it, cataloguing it, and organizing it into constituent parts, just as the earliest iterations of panoptic practice did with plague-stricken villages. In this way, Smith's play marks its complicity with the broader power structure in the case of both the Crown Heights unrest and the L.A. riots. Transforming these conflict ridden neighborhoods by engaging them in a therapeutic reconciliation may only serve to reinstate a status quo in which unequal powers continue their work unabated.

However, there are also important differences between the panopticon model of power and Smith's theatrical practice. One important difference is that Smith seeks a greater transparency of power's spectacle. By inviting her interviewees to her

performances, she seeks to make the community visible to itself, and therefore to redistribute knowledge/power rather than to horde it. Whereas the panoptical dissects the undifferentiated crowd into particles of knowledge—height, sex, wealth, Social Security number--Smith's practice does not reproduce the crowd in atomized form, but rather produces a new crowd that has been modified by an increased knowledge and affective absorption of itself. Indeed, her theater is not foremost a matter of ascertaining knowledge about the organization of the social body, but rather is a matter of being implicated within and affected by a social body without organs; it is a matter of entering into a new relation of force where one is redefined by the words, spectacle, and space in which one is placed. Smith makes the social body go through a series of deterritorializations and reterritorialisations, but does not attempt to fix them. The jumbled order of each production testifies to this as Smith tries to produce new effects and new contrasts, and as new audiences attend her performances the social body she affects is augmented and altered further. Smith's work should be conceived, in short, as a supplementary space of public commingling.

In order to advance a new interpretations of Smith's production of affects, and to hint at how we might read more productively the affective pedagogy I characterize as sentimentalist—sufferer, witness/model, and audience—I have, throughout this chapter, employed the thought of Deleuze in a rather schematic way. To do so is, of course, un-Deleuzian, for he encouraged and practiced a mode of thinking that unsettles *doxa* and seeks always to produce something new, but here newness might emerge relationally between theater and theory. Indeed, “between theater and theory” expresses the space of

sentimentalism tidely. Neither fish nor fowl, it is a philosophy *manqué*, scorned by nearly all those who deign to consider it: first, by the tastemakers of naturalism, realism, and modernism, and then again, for different reasons, by many of the scholars examining it in literary and cultural studies. Many of these critiques have been forceful, convincing, and often necessary; nonetheless, to continue to view sentimentalism's logic as always reducible to a critique of its power inequalities is to ignore the ways in which sentimental engagements can transform subject positions instead of merely reconfirming them. Here is where newness, rather than recognition, must be foregrounded. What I experience in both Smith's performances and Deleuze's sentences is an energetic effort to evoke the possibility of new social network, a novel form of *philia*, a friendship that would make us strangers to ourselves.

CHAPTER IV

SYMPATHETIC (RE)VISIONS:

SENTIMENTAL WITNESS IN JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN AND CHANG-RAE LEE

This chapter contemplates the ways in which two American novelists working in the early 1990s, John Edgar Wideman and Chang-Rae Lee—writers characteristically figured as postmodern—have engaged with the tradition of nineteenth-century sentimentalism intertextually both to produce and critique a notion of American belonging. Such an endeavor might easily annoy those who see in these otherwise very different novelists a shared aesthetic sophistication anathema to the maudlin, highly conventional excesses associated with the term sentimentalism. Furthermore, it may seem a scholarly extravagance to suggest that sentimentalism is capable of the double action of production and critique I claim it to possess. However, those familiar with the numerous lines of argument emerging out of the Douglas-Tompkins debate know that sentimentalism is, as Philip Fisher has argued in *Hard Facts*, “a politically radical technique,” that “trains and explicates new forms of feeling,” and in particular, extends consciousness to marginalized groups (Fisher 17-18). While at the same time sentimentalism is an affective logic that can bolster nationalist and imperialist projects, as argues Laura Wexler in her influential essay “Tender Violence” (16-17). This doubled aspect of sentimentalism derives from its central topos—the sympathetic witness. After all, as Laura Hinton argues, sympathy is “implicated as a particularly perverse, panopticon strategy,” in that “its spectator is supposed to be a moral authority moved by images: but

he is also like the faceless prison guard who reflects bureaucratic violence in the name of ‘reform’” (Hinton 16). Indeed, in the novels wherein Wideman and Lee confront the urban crisis most directly, each figures sympathy as both the ground for social regeneration and the parasitic and voyeuristic means by which collective identities are compromised and privacy and specificity are betrayed. But more than an ambivalence about sympathy’s power and relation to governance links these novels to the much-maligned cluster of texts labeled sentimentalist. Both Lee and Wideman invest heavily in the affective strategies of the child elegy as part of a more basic pedagogy to further the “extension of full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been socially withheld” (Fisher 92). Lastly, I offer this reading by means of two intertextual traces in the source texts, drawing me to consider how Lee’s *Native Speaker* demands that we reread Whitman, a poet who would doubtless desire exactly such a title; and how Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire* shows us what Stowe, the little lady who started the big war, can tell us about America’s post-war urban collapse, today’s “life among the lowly.”

But why this linking of urban space, sentimentalizing gaze, and menacing voyeurism? It is a constellation, as I have argued in the last chapter, characteristic of Anna Deavere Smith’s later theatrical works, which seem increasingly conscious of the Foucauldian power dynamics inherent to making a spectacle of the marginalized. Though more distantly than Smith, Roth also addresses the malignancy that lurks in some seemingly progressive universalisms, if not in a specifically urban context. Note his attack on the militancy behind the culture of victimization, on the murderous potential of the anti-war movement, and, most plainly, on the Stalinist betrayal of socialist idealism.

The best means of conceiving Wideman and Lee's shared concern and ambivalence about the politics of sympathy, however, would be to contextualize them within what Ed Soja, following Foucault, calls the emergence of "*carceral cities*, an archipelago of 'normalized enclosures' and fortified spaces that both voluntarily and involuntarily barricade individuals in visible and not-so-visible urban islands" (299). Soja rightly credits urban theorist Mike Davis, whom Anna Deavere Smith interviewed for *Twilight*, as the dominant intellectual force in the founding of this "discourse on the postmetropolis" (147). In *City of Quartz*, Davis offered a sharp critique of the "security-obsessed urbanism" he saw emerging in material changes in the structuring of social services, policing, and built environment (223). According to Davis, from the late 1970s forward, "on the bad edge of postmodernism," there is an increasing tendency in the forces shaping urban development to abandon "old liberalism's" hopes for the social integration of the economically marginal and instead "to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single comprehensive security effort" resulting in "fortress cities" where the poor are criminalized (223-4). What city planners mendaciously call "rescuing" blighted areas amounts to transforming them into "sadistic street environments" with pain-inducing "bum-proof benches," sprinkler systems designed to soak homeless sleepers, and razor-wire trash-cages; Davis even mentions an aborted measure in Phoenix to add cyanide to the garbage (232-233). Less polemical studies, such as Steve Herbert's *Policing Space*, a theorized study of how a single patrol division of the LAPD "makes and marks" its space, echo Davis (161). As part of a more comprehensive examination of police discourses, Herbert suggests that police construct

their own virtue by codifying their incursions into impoverished neighborhoods in consistently moral terms, constructing problem areas as “morally impure” zones, “cancers” wherein violence is “a fact of nature” and from which citizens-cum-vermin must be cleansed (147). In brief, what these theorists of new urban processes suggest is that bureaucratic operational officers of the contemporary American city (Los Angeles being the favored test site) increasingly see themselves engaged in a war against a sizeable portion of the citizenry often while continuing to employ the rhetoric of liberal amelioration, protection, and service.

The novels of both John Edgar Wideman and Chang-Rae Lee demonstrate a concern with this development and both attempt to address it through an aesthetic intervention. They do this by staging, to greater or lesser extent, *Philadelphia Fire* and *Native Speaker* around historical tragedies resulting from the violent hostility of municipal governments to a portion of the people inhabiting their cities. Both novels movingly call their readers to feel for the damage to the lives of many city dwellers based on what they see as the government’s persecutorial policies. Both novelists, however, go beyond the particulars of the historical wrong they locate; more deeply, they critique a mode of vision that conspires against the political and ethical equality of its citizenry while under the cover of concern and care. To lend profundity to this critique, to keep from descending into belle-lettristic exposé of local hypocrites in power, both reach back to literary antecedents in the American tradition, as if to juxtapose more sharply the adversarial policing of the nation’s present-day “tired, poor, and hungry” with its much-venerated ideals of political openness, economic opportunity, and social concern.

Suffused in the tense air of American cities of the late-1980s and early 1990s, *Philadelphia Fire* and *Native Speaker* sound a mordant line over “the bad edge of sentimentalism,” for the transformation of American cities in the postindustrial period into a carceral archipelago is only possible with the consent—sometimes tacit, sometimes vocal—of those who claim to feel otherwise.

A Stop Between Pity and Fear

Rhodes scholar, Iowa Writers’ Workshop fellow, and the only writer to have received two PEN/Faulkner awards for fiction, John Edgar Wideman has been called “the black Faulkner, the softcover Shakespeare” by Don Strachen in *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. Indeed, his ambitious style, with its frequent temporal and perspectival shifts as well as its transformation of contemporary vernaculars into dramatic music knowingly recalls Faulkner. The challenge his prose style represents to readers is compounded both by his embrace of postmodern metafictionality and his provocative political orientation, which steers to the side of Black Arts Movement-style nationalism but remains deeply influenced by that movement’s incendiary oppositional vigor. This is particularly true of Wideman’s unswerving resistance to the structural racism he sees condemning millions of black Americans to urban immiseration and mass imprisonment. In his treatment of urban conflict and the function of race within it, Wideman engages with the sentimentalist tradition both by confronting explicitly the value of the sympathetic vision³⁸ and by engaging intertextually with writers of nineteenth-century American sentimentalism such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Walt Whitman. Therefore, while Wideman is already viewed as a postmodern innovator and reviser of modernist

aesthetics, he should also be understood as a sentimental reviser—consciously engaging with this earlier tradition of thought and letters. Doubtless, rich results would flow from a lengthier study of how affective politics, visibility, and urban suffering relate across Wideman’s larger oeuvre, much of which ruminates on the lives and fortunes of the denizens of Homewood, the impoverished, largely black Pittsburgh neighborhood where he was raised. Here, however, I focus primarily on his novel *Philadelphia Fire*, both because it evinces most clearly the qualities I wish to highlight and because its critique of sympathetic vision parallels Lee’s in *Native Speaker*. In my reading of the text, Wideman writes *as if* sympathy is a corrupt modality of politics and feeling—a deeply flawed way of seeing—yet he nevertheless *seeks to model* its functioning through the figure of the writer. While Wideman’s novel repeatedly casts doubt on the possibility of a coherent affective community, on the efficacy of sympathetic vision, and on the sentimentalization of children, his work remains an effort to persuade its readership, through an aesthetic of sympathetic witness, to attend to urban misery ethically, personally, and emotionally in a manner consonant with sentimentalism’s logic.

That a split perspective on the power of sympathy characterizes *Philadelphia Fire* should not surprise its reader, given the numerous contradictions and divisions structuring the text. The novel’s first section relates the abortive efforts of Cudjoe, a black novelist who has been living as an expatriate on Mykonos, to locate Simba, a child lost after surviving the bombing of the MOVE organization in Philadelphia on May 13, 1985. This fictionalized exploration of the real-life violent confrontation between the city’s municipal government and a back-to-nature, Afrocentric cult ends abruptly halfway

through the novel, and in part two, Wideman writes under his own name, explicitly questioning his need for the Cudjoe persona. This second section complicates the lost child motif established in the first through the anecdote of Wideman's idealistic and doomed effort to stage an adapted version of *The Tempest* using all black children and, much more movingly, through Wideman's expressions of anguish over his own teenage son's imprisonment for murder. The novel concludes in a phantasmagoric crescendo shifting between three interrelated moments: a former MOVE member-turned-police-informant throws himself from a high-rise window, a homeless man named J.B. is set on fire by a gang of children, and Cudjoe visits a poorly attended memorial service for the eleven people killed in the MOVE bombing. One can easily be lost in such a narrative labyrinth, and so I, like Cudjoe, follow the thread of a single name.

The tension I divine in Wideman's text between incredulity toward sympathy's power on the one hand and a politicized insistence on sympathy's necessity on the other can be best explicated through an onomastic reading of Cudjoe, the novel's putative protagonist. His name contains divergent meanings leading to two distinct dilemmas facing him, Wideman, and implicitly, Wideman's reader. In my reading, the tension between these dilemmas is not resolved, thereby sustaining the intensity of the novel's affective and political injunctions. I connect the first onomastic valance of Cudjoe, which links the novel intertextually to Harriet Beecher Stowe, to Wideman's meditation on the inefficacy of sympathetic witness and sentimentalist assumptions about the benevolence and innocence of humans, particularly children.³⁹ This aspect of Cudjoe's identity speaks to how the sympathetic mode of relation, practiced inevitably in bad faith

or without the will to follow through on sympathy's demands, leads to complicity with the system of immiseration. In this view, the sympathetic gaze becomes a form of civic espionage, unwittingly shoring up an order that, at best, neglects its urban underclass and, at worst, targets them with lethal consequences.

The second valance of Cudjoe's name, linking him to the Jamaican Maroons who successfully fought British forces in the eighteenth-century, reveals another dilemma, seemingly opposed to the first: namely the temptation to retreat into defiant isolation and pastoral utopianism. The text figures such isolation as doomed in part because resistant closed societies are destined to be crushed by powerful, exploitative forces exterior to the resistant communal enclave, but the author also hints that such communities are themselves ingrown and cloistered. Furthermore, Wideman seems to suggest that such radical insularity, no matter how oppositional in intent, is but a reverberation of the utopian and pastoral modes of American nationalism, modes which underlie the very gentrification displacing America's urban underclass and the isolationalism justifying the neglect of the developing world. I mine the tensions in this name to reveal how Wideman arms himself with powerful visions of suffering and self-consciously seeks to publicize them to a reading public that the text itself figures as indifferent. Faithless in its own affective pedagogy, the book is an act of defiant failure. *Philadelphia Fire* is, ultimately, a book of grief—a knot composed of felt estrangements and the entangled difficulties of producing a community of fellow feeling. It is, surely, an expression, if not of so-called urban nihilism, then of the pathos of affective exhaustion. Nonetheless, it also refuses to disengage personal suffering from the city it considers and demands an

explosion of moral feeling in its reader, though it demonstrates little hope that the polity around it is capable of more than a passing acknowledgment

Wideman signals the importance of onomastic meaning in *Philadelphia Fire*'s first sentences, with Cudjoe envying Zivantias, a Mykonos islander "named for the moonshine his father cooked," because the former would have liked to have been "named for something his father or grandfather had done well. A name celebrating a deed. A name to stamp him, guide him" (3). On first blush, Cudjoe's envy is simply the first in a long series of yearnings for more sustaining links of filiation. Wideman, when pressed on the name's significance in interviews, avoids any explicit containment of its meaning, commenting that Cudjoe "was a very common name [...] that was used in slavery times. It's also a West African name day. It's an echo of its time" (qtd. in Olander 167). Wideman, nonetheless, coyly acknowledges that the choice was "a conscious thing" "point[ing] backward," which conforms with the investment in onomastic signification his fiction consistently demonstrates, from Orion in *Dambollah* to the ill-fated Cassandra in *Philadelphia Fire*. It is surprising, therefore, that no critics have pursued the matter further, for by linking Wideman's use of "Cudjoe" to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to Captain Cudjoe, the legendary Jamaican Maroon leader, one can answer the questions Wideman himself poses halfway through his text: "Why this Cudjoe, then? This airy other floating into the shape of my story. Why am I him when I tell certain parts? Why am I hiding from myself? Is he mirror or black hole?" (122)

The name appears at the darkened edges of the famous scene in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which, after being confronted by the runaway slaves

Eliza and her son Harry, Senator Byrd decides to follow his heart, ignore his legal duty, and assist the pair's northward movement. By foregrounding Stowe's Cudjoe in this scene, probably the scene most paradigmatic of sentimentalism's "doctrine of right feeling" in American literature,⁴⁰ one sees a crack running through the classic diagram of sentimental engagement.⁴¹ In Stowe's novel, Cudjoe is coded as a sympathetic helper of the powerless urchin, but he also represents a reaffirmation of black servility and continued subordination outside the spatiotemporal confines of slavery. Hence he is one of the split subjects of sentimental engagement. I will go on to show how Wideman's text presents a corresponding doubleness in the object of sentimental solicitousness: the child, who is at once an angelic lost object and a terrifying, diabolic threat. Finally, before moving to the second valance of Cudjoe's name, I will show how Wideman's novel further complicates the value of sympathetic witness, by linking it to spying, voyeurism, and sometimes cruel enjoyment of suffering others, precisely the opposite of the reaction anticipated by Stowe's text.

Recall that while Eliza and Harry plod through a winter squall having just crossed dangerously into Ohio, Stowe shifts her novel unexpectedly to an argument between Senator Bird and his wife, who is excoriating her husband for voting for the Fugitive Slave Law. The Senator insists that his wife's reaction, though based on noble sentiments, is ultimately "a matter of private feeling," and that "great public interests [are] involved," by which assumably he means the imbroglio of tensions leading to the Compromise of 1850, of which the law was but a part (144). Mrs. Bird dismisses her husband's rationalizations and upbraids him with a question: "would you now turn away

a poor, shivering, hungry creature from your door, because he was a runaway? Would you, now?" (144). At just this moment, they are made aware of Eliza and Harry, shivering, soaked and hungry in their kitchen. The vision of the mother and child challenges the Senator's civic resolve and, ultimately, he relents, proving the rightness of affective intuition over law. The implication is that the legal system—a product of rationalized compromises and the calculations of established powerful interests—is imperfect, but the very presence of need, the visibility of suffering, will draw the just into experiencing a change of heart.

Where is Cudjoe here? It is Cudjoe, the Birds' "black man-of-all-work," who "put[s] his head in at the door" "[a]t this critical juncture," when Mrs. Bird has pressed her husband most fully, calling in the wife to the kitchen where the soaked Eliza and Harry wait (145). It is "old Cudjoe" who physically attends to Harry, getting "the boy on his knee, [...] bus[il]ly pulling off his shoes and stockings, and chafing his little cold feet" (146). Furthermore, when Eliza and Mrs. Bird tearfully bond over their shared loss of children and the runaway mother states "I have lost two, one after another, -- left 'em buried there when I came away; and I had only this one left [...] he was all I had," it is Cudjoe who is conspicuously pained by the thought of Harry being sold away (149). The old servant "rub[s] his eyes very hard with his cuffs, and mak[es] a most uncommon variety of wry faces, occasionally respond[ing] in the same key [as the weeping domestic Aunt Dinah], with great fervor" (150). This Cudjoe will go on to assist Mr. Bird in carrying away Eliza and son in the snowstorm, struggling mightily to work their carriage wheels out of deepening ruts in the snow. He is a character so minor and peripheral in a

scene so famous that few if any of Stowe's commentators seem to notice him at all, and yet once we re-center the scene on him, the text's sentimental doctrine sours substantially.

The vague laboring status and servility of this briefly envisioned "black man-of-all-work" clearly parallels the status of the slaves of Mr. and Mrs. Shelby, Eliza's former master and mistress, who wrongly believed they have a benevolent relationship with their slaves. Cudjoe is an absent presence in the scene, deconstructing Stowe's own arguments for the moral and affective power of visibility over the logic of legalized oppression. When Cudjoe's face appears in the Bird's parlor door to announce the arrival of the runaways, he is not an object of efficacious sympathy, for the Birds, Stowe, or Stowe's reader. He might be rightly described as human furniture, a necessary element in the domestic space in which the Senator resides and in which the power of his agency is confirmed. While old Cudjoe is overwhelmed by feelings for Harry and stirred by Eliza's tale of lost children, he cannot produce change for those who need it. He does not attend to the mother and son himself, but instead reports their presence to his employer and awaits orders. He readily assists the Senator's flouting of the law, but is not invested with the capacity to violate the hierarchy of the Bird household. Therefore, it is not that some sights occasion a departure of the "law of the land" in favor of the "law of the heart," but rather that certain orders—legal and juridical—may be so upended while others—domestic and familial—cannot be. The pitiable sight can justify actions transgressing the letter of the law only on the condition that the viewer was empowered *a priori* to transgress. Stowe's Cudjoe, drawn forward in disheartened obedience, is a

figure of sympathy and solicitude but also of servility and the failure of sympathy's efficacy; he is both moved and inert. Once we set on him interpretively, Cudjoe becomes a demonstration that Stowe's affective soteriology—the transcendence of feeling over the violent force of law—fails even within the bounds of her own text. Reading Stowe's scene through Wideman's text, one can recognize in the nineteenth-century handyman his twentieth-century counterpart. Wideman's Cudjoe is invested with pity and fellow feeling for Simba, the lost child, but ultimately is relegated to reporting "the weight of arbitrary power rationalizing itself" while submitting to its force and logic (*Philadelphia* 113).

Such a helpless helper figure might resonate with Wideman for personal reasons, reasons he confronts creatively in his metafiction and memoirs. Indeed, this passage in Stowe is oddly echoed in the opening scene of Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers: A Memoir*. There Wideman describes how, in 1975, his youngest brother, Robby, a fugitive from the law since he had killed a man in an armed robbery three months before, arrived at Wideman's home one snowy afternoon in Laramie, Wyoming just as the writer had been composing an abortive letter to his sibling (*Brothers* 3-6). Wideman fed his brother and sent him on his way to Colorado, where Robby was eventually arrested. A similar scene, in which the demands of the law again chafed against the "law of the heart" would repeat eleven years later in 1986, when Wideman's second son, Jacob, appeared at his door asking for shelter. The sixteen-year-old had crossed several states as a fugitive after stabbing his classmate, Eric Andrew Kane, to death in his sleep on a fieldtrip in Flagstaff, Arizona (Norman 12). Wideman, after contacting his lawyer and developing a defense for the boy, turned his son over to the authorities; Jacob was held for two years, tried as

an adult, and given a twenty-five year sentence (“Given Life” 21). Wideman incorporates some of this experience into *Philadelphia Fire*, though here one encounters an anguished ambiance overshadowing a set of interrelated ruminations rather than a conventionally plotted and scenically framed memoir. In a metanarrative move whereby Wideman appears as himself, interrupting the story of Cudjoe, Wideman reflects on his son’s predicament, complaining that the presiding judge has ignored expert testimony indicating that Jacob suffers from schizophrenia. “Why is my son left alone to suffer and try to make sense of his imprisonment, the chaos of his personality, his terror and guilt?” (116) Wideman’s predicament, with regard to his brother and his son, mirrors the position of Stowe’s Cudjoe, who despite his powerful feelings of solicitousness and filiation must submit to the law dividing him from those he would treat as family. In one reflective moment, Wideman wonders about his mentally ill son’s experience—“[h]ow must it feel to be inhabited by more than one self?”—imaginatively surmising that, for Jacob, “[i]f there is ever an *I*, a *me*, beyond the separate roles he must play, its burden would be to register the damage, the confusion wrought by his condition” (110). The passage might double as a description of the helpless helper, and the ambiguities such a figure exposes in sympathy, its usefulness, and its object.

This ambiguity in the *subject* of sympathy affects the way the novel figures the *action* of sympathetic investment through vision, as I will argue below, but it also parallels the novel’s treatment of the *object* of sympathy. That object, represented primarily in the figure of the lost child, haunts and motivates Wideman’s novel much as it does Lee’s. Cudjoe speaks of “the child who is brother, son, a lost limb haunting him

since he read about the fire in a magazine,” whom he “must find [...] to be whole again” (7); of “these world hunger poster children” he encounters on Philadelphia’s streets who “silently beg to be something other than a disaster” (22); of the “ashy taste of incinerated children’s flesh” in the air around Osage street where the MOVE building was burned (28); and of “you my tragic lil Indians all in a row, in a line, circled like covered wagons on the Laramie Plains, while hostiles swirl around you, howling at the moon, faster and faster, tiger churning you to cocoa butter my lost Sambo children” (130). In each instance, Wideman mingles dejection with unremitting anger, an anger that leads magnetically back to the MOVE fire, as when Cudjoe provides “a list of atrocities that prove adults don’t give a fuck about kids [...] The lousy school system, abortion, lack of legal rights, child abuse, kiddie porn, kids’ bodies used to sell shit on TV, kids on death row, high infant mortality. In that list as one of the latest signs. Cause the fire burned up mostly kids” (91). That the lost child motif is another key aspect of its engagement with literary sentimentalism might well go without saying: Stowe’s little Harry is just one iteration of a topos endemic to the genre. However, Wideman directly engages the sentimentalized vision of the angelic, poor orphan *as sentimentalist topos* with his description of the statue depicting Charles Dickens and Little Nell, the doomed orphan protagonist in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, installed by Francis Edwin Elwell in 1902 in Philadelphia’s Clark Park. The statue places the writer high on an elevated plinth, while “Little Nell at his knee stares imploringly up at the great man’s distant face” from her place much lower on the footstall (28). The statue acknowledges, perhaps unwittingly, the inequality inherent in the gaze of sympathy and is suggestive of the ways in which the

author/witness figure is elevated above his object. Importantly, Wideman sees author and urchin as “separated and locked together by her gaze. Both figures larger than life, greener than the brittle grass. Both blind” (28). Though their inequality of power is emphasized, so is their shared helplessness.

Nevertheless, while the figure of Nell recalls the lost Simba (who is in fact called “Little Simmie” at one point), it also resonates ironically with the novel’s many other figurations of children as senselessly murderous, pointlessly cruel, usually as a function of their neglect by adults (17). Timbo, Cudjoe’s old friend who has become a city bureaucrat cynically pedaling the mayor’s agenda, complains that “[k]ids today are a bitch” because “[n]ow they kill anybody. Anything” (89). His description of them as “[c]old-blooded little devils [...] [d]ope dealing and contract killing and robbing and beating people in the neighborhood for drug money and full-scale turf wars with weapons like in Nam,” typified Wideman’s evocation of maniac children: abandoned and pitiable but also murderous, wild, and corrupt. These two identities are neatly collapsed when Cudjoe describes the debauched urban landscape with the following surrealistic equation: “the city is a faint tracery of blue, barely visible bloodlines in a newborn’s skull” (45). Children’s gangs named “Kid’s Krusade,” “Kaliban’s Kiddie Korp.,” and “Money Power Things” run rampant through the novel’s street scenes and each of Wideman’s narrators is struck with terror at the idea of a children’s revolt (88). Such an uprising—“The Children’s Hour”—seems inevitable because “[c]hildren have learned to hate us as much as we hate them” (187-188). Wideman caps this motif with the “ha ha ha” and “the pitter patter of little sneakers laughing,” when “little white boys” drench, JB, a sleeping

homeless man “in kerosene and throw[...] a match ha ha ha” in the novel’s penultimate scene (188). This affective ambivalence about the nature of the indigent child is neatly summed up when Cudjoe wonders to himself: “Wasn’t there a stop between pity and fear?” (60).

So pervasive is this meditation on sympathetic and unsympathetic vision, that the novel may usefully be described as an aesthetic effort to problematize the witness of urban suffering, for, depending on the moment, the text stresses sympathy’s difficulty, its failure to effect change, and yet also the desperate need for more of it in order to mitigate or forestall the cruelty of violent social antagonisms. Wideman foregrounds the fictionality of the sympathetic process in a surrealistic passage in which he catches himself staring into the mind of Melissa, his student:

At a small perfect skull, still growing, the bone porous so when I trepanned away a side wall my entrance was silent, cunning, a perfect cross section revealed, framed by the curve of the skull’s crown, a stage set under a proscenium arch. I sit, unobtrusive as a video camera at a keyhole and observe the goings-on. Melissa is at her kitchen table... (134)

Wideman goes on to “discover” that the pubescent Melissa lives in a disorderly world of maternal neglect and sexual threat, in an episode that illustrates of the parallel I have sought to demonstrate between postmodern autoreferentiality and sentimental affective pedagogy, in which the author serves as model sympathetic witness. That Wideman prefers to ground the metaphor in the language of theater and film—“proscenium arch,” “video camera,” and elsewhere when he refers to sympathetic projection as “zooming”—

rather than that of fiction can be partly explained by the passage's context. Wideman is seeking to cast Melissa in a play, after all. Nevertheless, it also corresponds to the novel's general emphasis on sympathy as an optical engagement, a key facet of how Wideman figures the experience's restrictiveness. The author concludes his exploration of the "aperture" in Melissa's mind by declaring that "this fakery, viewer and viewed connected temporarily by a hole in a skull, does not allow real questions back and forth. Look, don't talk. Talking is touching, is disturbing the scene. Keep your seats" (138). This passage reveals that it is not merely the detachment afforded by sight that makes imaginative projection "fakery," it is sympathy's aestheticization that renders it false. Wideman stresses this when concludes the passage with a disquieting address to his reader: "Don't upset the delicate balance of our fiction within hers within yours within whatever this is twisting and hissing and cracking like a churning rope" (138). Wideman's implication is that being engrossed in a *mise en abyme* of sympathetic visions, so long as the linkages of feeling do not produce material exchanges and actions, will only conclude with all perishing in the shared conflagration, once again echoing the MOVE bombing.

The episode typifies Wideman's insistence on the inadequacy of sympathetic vision to address the suffering it registers, an insistence that exists in tension with the call for feeling the book itself represents. Sometimes the inadequacy of sympathy owes to the feeling subject's finitude, as when Cudjoe acknowledges that "[h]e couldn't make things right for the hollow-eyed, big-bellied children even if he had a thousand pockets and dumped silver from every one," but nonetheless his "eyes [are] stinging from shame at

having everything and nothing to give” (22). More often, however, Wideman casts suspicion on the possibility of sympathetic engagement, especially via language, fictionality, and the book-commodity form. “Words fail me because there are no words for what’s happening,” Wideman confesses, “I am a witness. All I know is that everything I could say about what I’m seeing is easy, obvious and, therefore, doesn’t count for much except to locate me, outside, record my perplexity” (118). Furthermore, while his alter ego begins the effort to find Simba convinced that a book about the bombing will “do something about the silence” in which urban miseries and dehumanization are engulfed (19), Cudjoe ends by chiding himself that

This is an irresponsible way of looking at things. There may be survivors in the bar-b-qued city who require assistance. Better to light one little candle than to sit on one’s ass and write clever, irresponsible, fanciful accounts of what never happened, never will. Lend a hand. Set down your bucket. A siren screams. (167)

Philadelphia Fire’s frequent denigrations of the power of sympathetic vision, imaginative projection, and fictional representation are clearly forms of paradoxical self-chastisement. But as the passage above demonstrates, such urging is itself a textual performance, which in turn implicates Wideman’s reader and acts to urge her beyond the text. The book is an act of signification not unlike the siren’s call. In this respect, the novel might be read not a repudiation of the power of sympathy, but as a refinement of it and as an index of the desperate need for more of it, to mitigate or forestall the world’s cruelty. Indeed, with what might be thought of as exaggerated vigor, Wideman indicates that that cruelty reigns everywhere and that life in the city is characterized generally by

indifferent seeing. The cruelty of the children who set fire to JB (188), the indifference of television viewers to the spectacles of mass atrocities within and beyond their city (19), the impersonal calculations of corporatized academia jettisoning social work departments that are attempting to ameliorate the lot of Philadelphia's underclass (113), and the crowd of pedestrians swarming to see the grisly remains of a suicide (180), are just a few examples. One cannot extricate the text's attack on textual affective pedagogy as an indulgence from an intensification of its own affective pedagogy.

It may be for this reason that, just as I will demonstrate with regard to Lee, Wideman often figures witnessing as an act of spying or voyeurism. The topos of the sympathetic gaze as invasive, transgressive, or voyeuristic emerges early in Wideman's novel when Cudjoe admits to having learned "the parts of a woman's body" while caring for his grandmother. "Why was he supposed to look away from her nakedness when his aunts bathed her?" Cudjoe reasoned, "He loved her. Shared her secrets" (7). The scopophilia topos recurs when, near the novel's close, Cudjoe attends a memorial gathering for those killed in the Move bombing as "a spy, a noncombatant" (194). The voyeurism of Cudjoe/Wideman, however, is not always so metaphorical. Cudjoe confesses to masturbating unseen while he watched a colleague's daughter, Cassandra, swim at night on a visit to their family's beach house: "[v]iolating her privacy, [p]loaching the bloom of her young woman's body" (46). This act is complicated in memory by the fact that "Cassandra would be dead in nine months, a fiery crash in Mexico," and in his apostrophic apology to her father, Cudjoe rationalizes that "[h]e's spying on her because there's not much time, never enough time. He must learn her

secrets, save her” (65). This last phrase links the connection between Cudjoe and Cassandra with that between the young Cudjoe and his grandmother, while her fate makes her yet another of the novel’s many lost children. This association of pity, solicitation, and voyeurism repeats again late in the novel, when Wideman is troubled by how his own sexualized gaze is turned inadvertently to the swimming figure of the prepubescent friend of his children, and whom he is “bound to protect as a daughter” (124). In nearly each case, as with Dickens and Nell or Wideman and Melissa, the relationship is one of an adult male writer and a doomed woman-child, a troubling connection between pity and desire, just as the oscillation between pity and fear dominates the novel’s treatment for young men. In both cases, what repeats is an imaginative projection that involves distance rather than closeness, a distance that ultimately changes nothing.

Here again is Stowe’s Cudjoe, the useless observer of sympathy. Or, perhaps, one might say that such a figure is worse than useless: he is an informer to his master, an “evil little CIA covert operations motherfucker, Ariel,” from Wideman’s adaptation of *The Tempest* (144). In this way, the voyeurism repeats Wideman’s confrontation with himself as protective, solicitous, but also guilty and transgressing. If one connects this bifurcation in the novel’s treatment of children to its concern for the continuing role race plays in the inequitable distribution of urban goods, privileges, and protections, the dilemma is clarified. As Paul Gilroy writes in *There Ain’t No Black In the Union Jack*:

The idea that blacks comprise a problem, or more accurately a series of problems, is today expressed at the core of racist reasoning. It is closely related to a second

idea which is equally pernicious, just as popular and again integral to racial meanings. This defines blacks as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behavior in an active mode. The oscillation between black as problem and black as victim has become, today, the principal mechanism through which “race” is pushed outside history and into the realm of natural, inevitable events. (11)

Without reducing the knotty specificity of Wideman’s treatment of affective engagement into an allegory of racial identification, one might ask if the modes of solicitous but injurious vision that repeat throughout *Philadelphia Fire* do not track with the oscillating poles of racial meaning Gilroy observes.⁴² Approaching Wideman’s ambivalence toward sympathy’s power, necessity, and nature as consonant with an ambivalence about black identity as synonymous with victimization leads us in a new interpretive direction: the matter of agency, resistance, and the role of history. And, as if turning from Ariel to Caliban, we must finally shift to Cudjoe’s other onomastic father.

Captain Cudjoe, or Kojo, the famous Jamaican Maroon leader, would at first seem diametrically opposed to the “man-of-all-work” at the edge of Stowe’s novel, but a closer look at the historical record sheds light on their possible connection. A “desperate but surprisingly frequent” reaction to New World enslavement, flight or *marronage*, produced communities formed from runaways everywhere the institution of slavery spread (Price 1). Because these communities were internally united by their individual refusals to submit to white authority and, indeed, sometimes launched potent guerilla attacks on the plantations from which they had fled, they hold special significance—to descendents of the African Diaspora and many others—as historical emblems of the power of the oppressed to resist degrading, tyrannical order. The First Maroon War,

which began with the English occupation of Jamaica in 1655, incrementally increased in intensity over the course of eight-five years and concluded with fifteen years of massive revolts, which resulted in the British suing for peace in 1740 (Patterson 246). The Maroon leader to whom they came was Cudjoe “a bold, skillful and enterprising man” who led the Leeward Maroon communities in multiple raids against white traders in the Caribbean. For this reason he, out of all the early Maroon leaders, has been given the greatest importance “both [by] the Maroons themselves and those outsiders who have written about them” (Patterson 260, Bilby 213). Cudjoe successfully defended significant portions of Jamaica and was, by means of his treaty with the British, granted fifteen thousand acres of land to rule autonomously (Hurwitz 74-75). However, Cudjoe is not a figure of unalloyed heroism. After peace negotiations were completed, Cudjoe prostrated himself before Colonel Guthrie, the British representative, “embracing [his] legs, kissing his feet, and asking his pardon,” behavior which has continued to be viewed with some embarrassment by Maroon descendents (Patterson 271-272, 261). Moreover, Cudjoe agreed to join forces with the British against any other Maroon rebellions and to return future runaway slaves to the whites for compensation (Patterson 273). So the historical Cudjoe, as with Stowe’s fictional handyman, presents an ambivalent intertextual fore-figure. He signifies the promise of counter-hegemonic communities and also, to some extent, their betrayal.

Figuring the Maroon Cudjoe as an alter ego to Wideman’s—the ancestor he wishes he could be proud of and named after—produces the interpretive basis for a constellation of rebellious black men within the novel’s motivic structure. To the

Jamaican and Pennsylvanian Cudjoes one can add the transformed Caliban of Wideman's adaptation and, most importantly, the dreadlocked John Africa of MOVE. Each represents the aggressive utopian retreat from established order; each is the servant who connives to beat his master; and each has his (ex)isle: Sycorax's island, Mykonos, Jamaica, and the weedy gardens of MOVE's building, islanded on gray Osage Street. Within the logic of Wideman's text, one might say about each of these what MOVE survivor Margaret Jones says about John Africa: "even though he did it wrong, he was right" (14). Indeed, Wideman's highly selective presentation of the MOVE debacle has garnered much criticism, from among others Charles Johnson and Ishmael Reed, for Wideman ignores the organization's murder of a police officer in 1979, the belligerence of MOVE's members, the enmity of its neighbors due to MOVE's persistent role as neighborhood nuisance, and the official explanation that the Philadelphia Police Department's helicopter dropped, not a powerful incendiary bomb, but a targeted charge which accidentally caught fire to stores of kerosene MOVE apparently kept on their building's roof (Presson 109). Wideman glosses over some of the historical event's complexities in a way that nearly always works to the benefit of MOVE, both in *Philadelphia Fire* and in his short story "Fever," which links the 1986 disaster metaphorically to the outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia in the 1790s. Hence, it is understandable why a reader might conclude that the novel advocates, as a viable mode of resistance, the creation of a counter-hegemonic community like MOVE, a community echoing the defiant Maroons. Even if this is the case, however, Wideman does not seem hopeful about the prospects for the success of this resistance, particularly since it is

treated as a pastoral retreat from the city.

The communal retreats of the resistant Cudjoe figures share both a kind of utopianism and, correspondingly, an isolationism. In this, as Wideman is careful to suggest, they broadly echo qualities in the American society to which they are implicitly opposed. The utopianism is most obvious in *MOVE*, where incidentally it is linked to a sentimentalized notion of a universal family. "We all somebody's chillren," avers the *Book of Life*, Wideman's fictionalized version of *MOVE*'s holy text, "We all Eden born. Eden bound. All claim same two fader, mother. Who am so dirty take what him don't belong? Steal from bredder. Steal from son" (121). Wideman implicitly links *MOVE*'s pastoral notion of society to the texts that fashioned colonial American society's self-image. The novel takes its epigraph from William Penn's instructions that "every house be placed, if the Person pleases, in the middle of its platt ... so there may be ground on each side, for Gardens or Orchards or feilds, that it may be a greene Country Towne, which will never be burnt, and always be wholesome" (i). Hence, Penn's agrarian ideal of wide verdant growth around homes makes him, albeit unwittingly, *MOVE*'s patron saint.

Crucially, this pastoral ideal must also be linked to the predilections of the very urban development programs championed by Timbo and Mayor Goode:

All this mess around in here, warehouses, garages, shanties, all these eyesores got to go. When redevelopment's finished, a nice, uncluttered view of the art museum. [...] what we're trying to create here is our little version of Athens, you dig? Museum's the Acropolis up on the hill. [...] Modern urban living in the midst of certified culture. [...] You wouldn't believe the price of real estate. [...] The folks used to live here. [...] Some went north. A lot got pushed west. Landlords getting fat off that end too. (78)

The resistant utopianisms of the Cudjoe figures, Wideman hints, partake in and repeat the American national imaginary, where this fervor for communal reinvention has led not merely to dislocated urban populations during the late urban crisis but can be traced back to the earliest colonialist encounters. The novel's vision of the city is still "[h]aunted by Indian ghosts—Schuylkill, Manayunk, Wissahickon, Susquehanna, Moyamensing, Wingohocking, Tioga—the rivers bronzed in memory of their copper, flame-colored bodies, the tinsel of their names gilding the ruined city" (159). What I have been suggesting is simply that the justificatory discourses that aided the removal of Native Americans to make room for development in the shape of white settlements and which, albeit far less brutally, validates municipal policies that aim to expel citizens rather than serve and protect them, is of a piece with John Africa and what Timbo calls "his nouveau Rousseau or whatever the fuckism" (84). It is no accident that MOVE's Book of Life, which shifts hands throughout the text, ends up stolen by the gang of white children who set JB on fire for cheap amusement.

Finally, these pockets of black resistance are defined by their isolationism, a quality that again is shared with the broader American culture. This isolationism, which views those outside the communal enclave with suspicion or indifference, is obviously at play in the community of Leeward Maroons that Captain Cudjoe led in the eighteenth century, in as much as it agreed to return runaways and fight against other bands of Maroon resistance. And while MOVE was an organization far more open to new members, the frequent obscenity-laced tirades it broadcast via megaphone to the

surrounding neighborhood at all hours deriding their lifestyles bespeaks an oppositionality at odds with their universalist rhetoric. Wideman's Cudjoe has experienced this desire for retreat—"I lived on an island. Learned another language. Almost like a new life"—but such a movement is tied to irresponsible and selfish distanciation, linked to sight: "like a spectator from a distance watching my country kill itself" (130, 87). Yet the novel's evocation of urban chaos makes the desire for retreat often more intense: "To live on an island[...] To be the island. [...] Ah. Think of it. [...] To prosper you don't need another island beside you. You are complete" (146). However much the novel stages these visions of isolation as a viable alternative to urban miasma, the novel is also at pains to demonstrate that such a retreat to "sanctuary" is not only incompatible with the communal, universal vision inherent in the utopian desire, the retreat represents a kind of voluntary imprisonment. Consider the language Wideman employs in describing his son's captivity:

Playing mindless, repetitive games, locked in but also grateful for the cage of inactivity, the stasis that for a while can pass for peace, control, coherence. Sanctuary. A blessed oblivion consciously sought, an oasis between wrenching, explosive takeovers." (110)

Wideman's text insinuates that it may be impossible to differentiate between voluntarily chosen islands of exile and externally imposed detention. Attempting to find a safe place *outside* "the system" will result only in the fullest submission to its demands and an assignment to a cage *deep within* its wall.

I link this inversion of outside and inside to the novel's intermittent confrontation

with American indifference to suffering in the development world. The most obvious of these moments occurs when Wideman, writing under his own name, relates the experience of watching television footage of the MOVE bombing with his wife. The two “watch” and “[w]onder whose turn it is now,” certain that because “[w]hole city blocks [are] engulfed” “[i]t must be happening in another county. A war. A bombing raid. We’re watching a Third World shantytown where there’s no water, no machines to extinguish a fire” (100). Wideman deflates the clichés of audience attentiveness by stating that “[w]e’d be on the edge of our seats if we were on seats and not lounging in our waterbed in Laramie at 9:05 P.M. with nothing better to do than play spin-the-bottle sweepstakes of the dial” (100). By drawing attention to their bodily passivity and luxuriation, Wideman, perhaps banally, acknowledges the complacency inherent to the mere observation of televised spectacles of suffering, especially inasmuch as the suffering can be coded as outside one’s nation, neighborhood, or concern.

Wideman makes a similar point when he has Timbo relate his memory of Brazilian favelas, which he passed through in a limousine while “down in Rio for Carnival” (79). Timbo is struck by the enormity of the slum: “[M]iles of it. Talk bout tent city. These folks lucky if they got a rag to pull over they heads. Most of them just-plain-ass living on the ground. The ground, man. Stinks like bad meat. [...] Acres and acres of it, man. A garbage dump. A people dump” (79). What Timbo gleans from the experience initially is that “[b]ack in the good ole U.S. of A., we ain’t got real poor people” (79). However, as he further articulates this vision of “people jammed up so tight they shitting and pissing on top one another [and] Kids playing in open sewers,” the passage’s rhetorical

angle shifts to directly compare American and Brazilian poverties; though he was certain that it “[c]ouldn’t never get this bad back home in the land of opportunity and the bitch wit the torch,” Timbo is “[n]ot so sure now” (79-80). In both of these scenes, an inversion of expectation occurs in which the terrain of violence, immiseration, and poverty, terrain which has been figured as occurring exclusively outside the boundaries of the nation-state where it can be regretted but tolerated as unavoidable, is suddenly made continuous with the geography of inequality within the nation-state. Furthermore, in both cases, this inversion foregrounds the protective isolation of the viewer’s own positioning; they are islanded in a comfortable bourgeois home and limousine respectively. Both instances suggest that territorial divisions such as geographic and political boundaries do not alter the status of one’s ethical obligations but do produce an alteration in our felt sense of obligation.

This disjunction between ethical responsibility and emotional compunction necessitates that the novelist take up the work of affective instruction, drawing listeners and readers into an experiential understanding of their place within a system of universal ethical obligation: affective instruction I understand to be at sentimentalism’s core.

Wideman engages in such instruction often with eloquence that makes extended quotation especially tempting, as when Wideman addresses his reader directly, writing:

Who am I? One of you. With you in the ashes of this city we share. Or if you’re not in this city, another one like it. If not now, soon. Soon enough to make it worthwhile for you to imagine this one, where I am. Sometimes I’ve thought of myself, of you, of ourselves, as walled cities each of us a fortress, a citadel, pinpoints of something that is the inverse of light, all of us in our profusion spread like a map of stars, each of us fixed in our place on a canvas immense beyond

knowing, except that we know the immensity must be there to frame our loneliness, to separate us as far as we are separate each from each in the darkness. (120)

The pathos of this passage of direct address, which partakes of the same poetic topoi at play in the passage that closes *I Married a Community*, owes to the sharp juxtaposition of the dense “profusion” of consciousnesses with their impermeability and loneliness. This sublime metaphorical vista of star-beings provocatively declares a separation of consciousness—an affective separation demanding, in turn, that the passage’s reader bridge by listening to the address more intently and sharpening the intensity of their reception. Inasmuch as the passage is read well, it is read against itself. Wideman chooses to conclude his novel with the redoubled rhetoric of this kind of affective and textual incitement, when Cudjoe considers “recruit[ing] a crowd for the memorial service” (192) “Hey fellas,” Cudjoe apostrophizes the swell of urban passersby, “It’s all about you” (192).

Listen, brothers. If they offed them people on Osage yesterday just might be you today. Or tomorrow. Look at yourselves. If you’d appeared in the vicinity of 6221 Osage that day the bullets and bombs were flying, if you’d sauntered or hip-hopped or swooped down on the neighborhood [...] youall wouldn’t be congregating here on this corner, [...] No, brethren, you’d be burnt an boiled and blowed up like the rest, if you showed your bearded faces, your narrow behinds on Osage Avenue because that day in May the Man wasn’t playing. Huh uh. Taking no names. No prisoners. [...] C’mon. Follow me. Before they decide to sweep your corner clean.
Cudjoe nods. Nobody pays any attention.” (192-193)

The passage denarrates itself, at first presenting itself as actual speech and then

retroactively acknowledging its fictiveness. This self-erasure or sense of abortiveness exactly parallels the effect of the passage's, and indeed the novel's, affective pedagogy, which presents the viewer/reader/spectator of suffering as indifferent while all the more vigorously pressing for emotional responses from its readership, instructing them on how to better link their own suffering with the suffering of those outside their familial, communal, or national enclave.

Seeing the Fleshed Shape of the Need

By tracing the ghost of the Whitmanian imaginary in Chang-Rae Lee's breakthrough novel *Native Speaker*, I seek to show that the sentimental ambivalence traced above is not unique to Wideman but is rather detectable in other, quite different, novels. As this novel was published in the multiculturalist fervor of the mid-nineties, a moment in which the American canon and the dead white males roosting in its towers were under vociferous assault and in which a Korean-American novelist such as Lee might enjoy an almost fetishized approbation, Lee's conscious evocation of Whitman as a predecessor, suggested at once by the novel's epigraph, poses a question: why would a book hailed (however inaccurately) by the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* as "[a] novel of a newer, rawer immigrant experience," in an age particularly apt to prize work for its status as peripheral to a moldering canon begin with an invocation of one of that canon's most adored incumbents? This question puts the matter too forcefully, for both Whitman and academic multiculturalism share an exultant passion for ad hoc inclusion.

It is not, however, the Whitman of triumphant assurance, singing of cosmic transcendences already achieved, that courses through *Native Speaker*, but rather the

wavering voice that harmonizes with its own negation, that fears its own impossibility, and that proclaims its presence by means of an uncertain and unnerving question. Lee rewrites Whitman's sentimentalist legacy by suggesting that the poet's democratic "I," capable of encompassing the immense multiplicity of America, carries with it a sinister shadow, the invading "eye" of surveillance. *Native Speaker* gives shape to the play between these doubled aspects of the Whitmanian imaginary in the figure of one Henry Park, a spy, a man both belonging and betraying. The novel's conflicts, and Park's correspondent development as a character, are inextricably interwoven with a tension central to Whitman's *poesis* and I suggest that this intertextual relationship undergoes three phases, roughly dialectical, as *Native Speaker* quotes Whitman with a shifting tonality: first as travesty, then as a naïve commemoration, and finally as a sophisticated reiteration that retrieves from *Leaves of Grass* a wariness-in-hoping often lost in readings of Whitman. As if to announce his intention to approach Whitman obliquely, Lee selects as epigraph three lines culled from "The Sleepers," which seem atypical both in tone and style, their clipped, ambiguous syntax refusing Whitman's usual, easy parataxis:

I turn but do not extricate myself,
Confused, a past-reading, another,
But with darkness yet.

Drawing from these dense lines their full implication for both "The Sleepers" and *Native Speaker* is not a task that can be accomplished by single parsing. Rather, I will seek to allow their multiple valances to radiate from beneath an extended reading of both texts,

returning at chapter's end to draw out their consequences for how I understand Lee as a sentimentalist reviser. As I hope to show, characterizing the intertextual link between *Native Speaker* and "The Sleepers" has far-reaching consequences for how I understand Lee's project in relation to the nation, ethnicity, and the politics of multiculturalism.

In tracing the possible valences of Lee's epigraph, critics⁴³ have tended to treat Whitman as one might a party platform rather than the dynamic and conflicted poet evinced in "The Sleepers." This reduction and occlusion of nuance has a long history in Whitmanian scholarship, owing in no small part to Whitman's own later self-assessments, so that as *Leaves of Grass* entered the canon, it was accompanied, if not supplanted, by the poet's image: white-bearded and rustic, arms wide in a sanguine all-embracing pose. R. W. B. Lewis, deploring the process by which Whitman became "more mere representative than sovereign person," describes the reified image thus:

It, or he, was the representative—in nearly the conventional political sense—of a rather shallowly and narrowly conceived democratic culture: a hearty voice at the center of a bustling and progressive republic, a voice that saluted the pioneers, echoed the sound of America singing, itself sang songs of joy that foretold the future union of the nation and the world and the cosmos, [and] chanted the square deific...(99-100)

It is not surprising that scholarship on *Native Speaker* should be content with making reference to this shorthand Whitman: what Lewis here describes *is* an undeniable aspect of the poet's creative and political disposition and what links him most forcefully to the sentimentalist tradition. Understanding Whitman's relation to sentimentalism is crucial if one is to understand how Lee borrows from the poet's affective pedagogy.

Is Whitman a sentimentalist? By his own understanding of the term, the answer must be no, for he assures his reader in “Song of Myself” that he is “[n]o sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them” (l. 499). Furthermore, a long tradition in Whitman scholarship has sought to distinguish his work from sentimentalism, largely to maintain the latter category as an aesthetic waste bin characteristically maudlin, didactic, and perhaps most importantly, dominated by women writers. F.O. Matthiessen in *The American Renaissance* and R. W. B. Lewis in *The American Adam* both contrast the masculine writers Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman with sentimentalist works, which they equate with the domestic writings of women. This critical nostrum was perpetuated by Ann Douglas, whose study, *The Feminization of American Culture*, characterized sentimentality as a “debased religiosity,” the “sentimental peddling of Christian belief for its nostalgic value” (5). In opposition to sentimentalism, Douglas positioned Whitman, along with the other writers treated under the rubric American Renaissance, who in her view attempted to “re-educate, defy, and ignore a public addicted to the absorption of sentimental fare” (5). Yet a hard distinction between Whitman’s ethos and sentimentalism’s logic is untenable. As Mary Louise Kete maintains, Whitman’s poetry—both in its early and mature stages—continue to make central “the sentimental topoi of death, broken families, childhood innocence, and transcendent love,” as well as “[o]ther more formal factors,” including “his didacticism, his use of apostrophe, and his celebration of socially and politically marginal people” (626).⁴⁴ Furthermore, by the lights of the present study, Whitman should be thought of as an arch-sentimentalist, in that what I term the structural core of the philosophy of

sentiment—the affective pedagogy of the sympathetic witness—is crucial to Whitman’s mode of presenting a coherent social body, based in fellow feeling and presented through the force of his poetic intervention, as a *fait accompli*. Nonetheless, as I show, the aspects of Whitman that Lee’s text engages most tempers the grandiloquent hopefulness of the sentimental vision with trepidation. Ignoring the profound ambivalence and psychic turbulence patent in “The Sleepers,” as well as the complex ideological work it undertakes, serves only to conceal the sophistication of Lee’s allusion to a foundational figure in the American imaginary and his revision of sentimentalism’s characteristic mode of social feeling.

The poem that would become “The Sleepers” was first published without a title in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*. In the 1860 edition, it gains the title “Sleep-Chasings,” but numerous passages from the earlier version had been deleted.⁴⁵ By the time the poem had been given its present name, most of its demonstrably sexual segments, as well as its mentions of slavery, had been removed. This textual instability mirrors the variable terrain of the poem itself, across which its speaker steps haltingly at the poem’s beginning:

I wander all night in my vision,
Stepping with light feet...swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping,
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers;
wandering and confused...lost to myself...ill-assorted...contradictory. (1-4)

That the speaker calls himself contradictory and ill-assorted prepares us for the clashing elements to follow; segments of seemingly unrelated narratives are jarringly embedded in

a lyric rendering of a phantasmagoric nightscape. The counterpoint of shut and open eyes establishes Whitman's visionary as a kind of spy, who not only observes members of every class, gender, and ethnicity as they sleep unawares, but also actually invades their beds, enters into their dreams, and *becomes* them:

I go from bedside to bedside . . . I sleep close with the other sleepers, each in turn;
I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
And I become the other dreamers. (28-30)

At least two things should be noted about this gradual collapse of the boundary between self and other, which begins with an imagined movement between their beds, followed by a fellowship in sleep, then a sharing of consciousness, and lastly an unqualified fusion of identity: first, it is an equation of singular and plural selves, and second it is brought about through the agency of a single, spying self, whose own identity seems hollowed out to contain multitudes, but who is also uniquely privileged. Whitman's speaker will proceed through the poem, morphing through multiple identities in a long litany of selves, many of which are representative of America's disenfranchised—a slave, an aged woman, an immigrant—and yet the speaker abandons these identities as quickly as he assumes them. Moving under the cover of darkness, overrunning the consciousnesses of the sleeping multitudes, the poem's speaker seems at once benevolent and sinister, one minute passing his hand over the restless to heal their suffering and the next becoming the blank heart of death itself:

A shroud I see—and I am the shroud...I wrap a body and lie in the coffin;
It is dark here underground...it is not evil or pain here...it is blank here, for
reasons. (77-78)

At the center of “The Sleepers” is a figure whose identity, including his moral bearing, remains inscrutable, and yet whose transfigurations produce, via sentimental projection, the vast parameters of the American national character. The poetic conceit by which that character is reified becomes a kind of impersonation and assault, and the very capaciousness of national citizen-space exposes the void at its heart. As D. H. Lawrence quipped about Whitman in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, “All his privacy leaking out in a dribble, oozing into the universe” (174).

I find echoes of this aspect of Whitman’s poem in *Native Speaker*’s first sentence, which announces the personal crisis in the life of Henry Park, whose wife, Lelia, has deserted him: “The day my wife left she gave me a list of who I was” (1). The incongruity of plurality (“a list”) and singularity (“who I was”) intimates that the root of Henry’s crisis lays in both the multiplicity of his various selves—personal, professional, political—and the disjunctions between them. He, like Whitman’s visionary speaker, is “ill-assorted and contradictory.” The deliberate nature of the allusion to Whitman is made more apparent in the fact that Henry initially mistakes the Dear John list he receives from Lelia for poetry: “a love poem...an amnesty...dulcet verse” (5) “But I was wrong,” he states laconically, because in fact the list names him as a “stranger / follower / traitor / spy” (5). As in “The Sleepers,” that which was thought a testament to communion is recognized, paradoxically, as evidence of incompatibility and deeply

unbalanced power. The evidence of the list, the first of three inventories in *Native Speaker* that serve to evoke the catalogues in Whitman's poem, initially suggests that Lelia's alienation from her husband stems exclusively from her disapproval of his occupation, the nature of which he had kept hidden from her until after they had married. Henry, son of a first-generation Korean grocer, works for a private spying organization, Glimmer & Co., which caters largely to foreign governments intent on ferreting out their native dissidents residing in the US. In order to procure information on these subjects, Henry and his coworkers assume seemingly innocuous personas, relying heavily on their ethnic backgrounds as adequate cover: "Our work is but a string of serial identity" (33). This spy-work, an extrapolation of the dark inverse of Whitman's sentimental vision, is at the behest of the nation-state, securing supremacy over individual internal dissent; it represents the victory of univocality over plurality⁴⁶ and, in this sense, Henry's father is right when he takes his son to be a civil servant (57): he is hard at work on behalf of hygienic nationalisms.

But the crisis in Henry's life is deeper than his choice of work because, for Henry, acts of impersonation and spying are a vocation rather than an avocation; they require precisely those skills he had acquired as a hyphenated citizen, performing both his Korean and American identities as roles, rather than unaffected personalities. One can here an echo of Whitman's declaration, "I am the actor" (42), when Henry reflects on his suitability for spying:

I had always thought that I could be anyone, perhaps several anyones at once.
Dennis Hoagland and his private firm had conveniently appeared at the right time,

offering the perfect vocation for the person I was, someone who could reside in his one place and take half-steps out whenever he wished. For that I felt indebted to him for life. I found a sanction from our work, for I thought I had finally found my truest place in the culture. (127)

Because Henry's multiple and fluid professional selves also serve as a trope with which Lee explores the manifold and conflicting identities of hyphenated Americans—outsiders both at home and in the world, trying to conceal themselves in the guise of insiders—the allusion to Whitman seems all the more bitter. Lelia's list, which figures Henry as a "genre bug / Yellow peril: neo-American," hints at precisely this intersection of spying as profession and spying as mode-of-citizenship. The wandering "I" of the democratic vision has turned viral, infecting the deepest recesses of Henry's life, and leaving him, to himself and others, an inscrutable cipher, an impediment to the circulation of affect critical to sentimentalist conceptions of the social body.

Both the personal and professional crises in Henry's life are linked with his tendency to refuse disclosure of information—he is the privileged hoarder of the secrets he extracts from his subjects—and his "half-step" assumption of various roles. Indeed, Lee's reader eventually discovers, through a series of flashbacks, that Lelia's discontent in her marriage is based not only on Henry's occupation, but also on his posture of stoicism at the death of their son, Mitt, another of Henry's performances, which left Lelia alone with her unconcealed grief. We see this theme of role-playing occur again when Henry reflects on how his deceased father conceived of family, as well as his own experiences in the flux of familial roles:

My father, a Confucian of high order, would commend me for finally honoring that which is wholly accident. For him, all of life was a rigid matter of family. I know all about that fine and terrible ordering, how it variously casts you as the golden child, the slave-son or daughter, the venerable father, the long-dead god. (6-7)

Role-playing and identity performance become the means by which “that which is wholly accident,”—i.e., the contingency of national, ethnic, and familial identities—comes to be honored, believed, obeyed, and celebrated. Here, I follow James Kyung-Jin Lee, who argues that spying as Henry’s occupation and role-playing as Henry’s mode of being should not be seen in Manichean terms, where the former is thought corrupt while the latter is taken as a matter of benign necessity. Instead, both spying and performative being must be read as serving the same ideological ends:

Henry’s role as a spy is not a schizophrenic distraction from his private struggles to be the model father, son, and husband. Indeed, the assimilated Henry is crucial to his capacity to work as a spy, and thus serves perfectly as Lee’s emblem of a self-consciously, self-aware model minority. To this extent Henry is an Asian American Ariel, for like the voyeur, the spy’s task is to observe, record, and pass judgment on people and communities under surveillance.... Henry is Ariel with a paycheck, and these three identities reinforce one another because they all serve their respective Prosperos to defeat Caliban.” (247)

For James Kyung-Jin Lee, the novel critiques what he calls the model minority myth, whereby some minorities, like Koreans, are held up as proof of the American dream ideology, which in turn confirms that the impoverishment of other minorities, like that of African-Americans, is deserved (247). We can see how Lee’s treatment of role-

performance unites the seemingly benign gesture of acting out the role of the ideal husband, father, or son to simulations of national-belonging, to the practice of neo-colonialist shadowing, and finally, to the scopophilia and impersonation inherent in Whitman's sentimentalist vision of democratic unity. The dream and unrestricted empathic commingling imagined in the poem are being ironically refigured as insidious surveillance: the ideological exclusion and discipline of otherness in the guise of its inclusion. Or, to state the matter more forcefully, Lee reveals a violence that has always been present in Whitman's particular revision of the sentimentalist ethos: a violence of troping that collapses differences of power, experience, and suffering in the interest of national unity, that edits the nation's chorale to elide the voice of the slave, and that keeps its secret watch on an unwary populace. For Henry, as for Whitman's speaker, it is, indeed, "dark here underground."

But this is not the complete story, for Henry's allegiance to Glimmer & Company (and its ethnic espionage) is already in crisis when the novel begins. Henry's last job, in which he infiltrated "Filipino psychoanalyst [and] Marcos sympathizer" Emile Luzan's confidence by fronting himself as a patient, ended in disaster, when the spy began incorporating real elements from his life—particularly the death of his father and his son, Mitt—into his "legend," the biographical concoction Glimmer agents compose and memorize as cover. This interestingly suggests that the collapse of Henry's family—his suspension between dead generations—deranged the larger system of impersonation and role-playing on which his career depends. Shortly after Henry's boss, Dennis Hoagland, has him forcibly removed from the surveillance, Dr. Luzan drowns under suspicious

circumstances while boating off St. Thomas. Stinging with the knowledge of his own complicity in the death of a man with whom he had come to share an affective bond, Henry is wary of his next assignment: John Kwang, a Korean city councilman representing a diverse district in Queens with undeclared mayoral aspirations. With his newly uneasy relationship to Glimmer and his separation from Lelia, nearly all of the familial and professional types he has used to stage his identity are unavailable, leaving only the seemingly incompatible ethno-national roles of ‘Korean’ and ‘American.’ Lee uses the Kwang assignment, in which Henry’s other life-roles buckle as he begins to fall under the “ethnic pol’s” sway, to provide a second refiguring of Whitman’s night-vision, one I will refer to as naïve, which foregrounds the most hopeful and characteristically sentimental elements of “The Sleepers,” emphasizing the possible transcendence of difference offered by feeling. In these passages, the Whitmanian imaginary—the power and danger of a mobile, encompassing identity—shifts back from one of predatory espionage to democratic inclusiveness.

In Kwang, Henry encounters a figure that weds his heretofore-incompatible notions of what constitutes Korean and American identities. “Kwang was certainly arresting to me,” Henry declares, “[n]ot so much paternally, in that grim way my father always impressed himself on me [...] [instead] I would come to share a different difficulty with John Kwang” (139). Although Kwang clearly *does* represent something of a father figure to Henry, the politician captivates the spy primarily because he simultaneously repeats and transcends Park’s image of the Korean patriarch. Note in the following passage the explicit vacillation between Kwang as an actual, specific individual

and Kwang as an invented narrative, a trope to be believed in, or a story to be exploited, inversely paralleling the manner in which as Henry's legend begins to incorporate elements of his own biography:

I suppose it was a question of imagination. What I was able to see. Before I knew him, I had never conceived of someone like him. A Korean man, of his age, as a part of the vernacular. Not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family.... When Hoagland first mentioned Kwang's name... I thought I could peg him easily; were I an actor, I would have all the material I required for my beginning method. This is what Hoagland meant when he promised the assignment would be simple, that I'd just have to lurk close enough and witness the play of the story as we already knew it. For ours, finally, were just acts of verification...

I would tell a familiar story...A trope, which is just a way to believe. My necessary invention was John Kwang. (139-140)

The fictionality that Henry has always exploited for his espionage and familial role-playing, for his attempts to take in the confidence *of* others, here becomes a means by which he can transform his confidence *in* others. As he continues to work on the assignment, Henry's reports to Glimmer & Co. begin to depart from the unornamented factual style Hoagland prefers and slowly transform into more lyric compositions. As Henry moves into Kwang's inner circle, the regenerative powers of fiction, poesis, and myth⁴⁷ begin to eclipse their inherent capacity to deceive and betray.

Henry begins to see in Kwang a prototypical American "unafraid to speak the language like a Puritan and like a Chinaman and like every boat person in between" (304). The city councilman becomes a marker of Henry's hope that all ethnic identities can be sublated into the larger familial configuration in which the strength of Korean

filial structures comes to traverse and transcend lines of ethnicity and citizenship. This is, of course, the Whitmanian dream *par excellence*, one that figures more prominently in “The Sleepers” as it swells to its beatific, and yes, sentimental conclusion:

The Asiatic and African are hand in hand, the European and American are hand in hand,
Learned and unlearned are hand in hand...and male and female are hand in hand,
[...]
The white hair of the moth shines on the white wrist of the daughter,
The breath of the boy goes with the breath of the man...friend is inarmed by
friend, [...]
The call of the slave is one with the master’s call and the master salutes the slave,
(181-186)

This apposition and transcendence of oppositional representatives is typical of the poem’s larger movements⁴⁸ and it is echoed most clearly in the promise of the *ggeh* Kwang secretly establishes for the illegal immigrants in his district, a lottery system I take to be *Native Speaker*’s second evocation of Whitmanian inventory.

The *ggeh*, a Korean money club in which members pool resources incrementally so that each can enjoy rotating large sums of capital to use as investment, is the means by which Henry’s father received “his first infusion of capital” (50). As Henry becomes a more trusted campaign worker for Kwang, he takes on the duty of collecting money from the *ggeh*’s diverse participants. Importantly, the novel shifts into second-person address as Henry describes the process, including the reader into the open transactions by which insignificant individual sums swell into aggregate wealth and possibility: “In our *ggeh*, if you give a few dollars you can expect to receive a few hundred. The more you give, the

more you can ask for; everyone comes to learn what's a fair amount" (280). As the passage progresses, Lee has Henry take on a roomy paratactic rhythm evocative of Whitman's lengthy open breaths, anaphorically repeating "bring," imparting a sense of swelling accumulation:

Everything is in private, we deal like family, among ourselves, without chits or contracts. This is why I must see your face, hear your voice, make certain that you live how you say. It doesn't matter what your color is, whether your breath reeks of garlic or pork fat or chilis. Just bring your wife or your husband, bring your children. If you want a down payment on a store, bring the owner of the store you work in now. Bring your daughter who wants to attend Columbia, bring her transcripts and civics essay and have her bring her violin. Bring X rays of your mother who needs a new hip. I want to see the fleshed shape of the need, I want to know the blood you've lost, or that someone has stolen, or tricked from you, the blood you desperately want back from the world. (280-281)

Note Lee's embrace of the key attributes Whitman borrows from the sentimentalist tradition: the use of apostrophe, the explicit embrace of the marginalized and the despised, the need "to see the fleshed shape of the need" (281). Lee stages Park's integration into the *ggeh*'s maintenance as a mode of citizenship predicated on the sympathetic witnessing of others's pain. And yet, if the *ggeh* represents the achievement of a sentimental communion and the culmination of the democratic promise Kwang's image evokes for Henry, it is also the means of Kwang's downfall and the decimation of the community of immigrants seeking a small share in the America that Whitman sang and, as in the passage above, with which Lee movingly harmonizes. Under increasing pressure from Hoagland to produce dirt on Kwang, Henry relents and gives to Glimmer & Co. a copy of the *ggeh*'s ledger. He is unaware, however, that he has been gathering

information on behalf of the INS, who promptly arrest every member of the money club and ready them for deportation. The novel's initial view of the Whitmanian voyeur as sinister surveillance repeats in a tragic reprisal, a negation of the negation that insists on the continuing painful presence of the past: Henry's past, the pasts of the immigrants, the history of the nation. But the rise and fall of Kwang's *ggeh* is not the only naïve rereading of Whitmanian hope in the novel's middle section to end so painfully.

Henry's son Mitt represents the generative potential of transcending ethnic boundaries in a way far quieter and more private than the *ggeh*; nonetheless, in the use of this trope, Lee repeats Whitman and the sentimental tradition generally. Miscegenation, for the democratic poet, embodied the hope of ethnic transcendence, the means by which the *demos* of citizenship and the *ethnos* of blood and nativity could become one. As Karen Sánchez-Eppler⁴⁹ notes: “[i]n miscegenation Whitman find an extremely potent instance of mediation, a blatant demonstration that otherness can be reconciled, that the opposites of black and white can meet and blend” (929). Lee employs the historic hopes and dreads present in this trope both in his depiction of what Mitt signifies for Henry and in the novel's several sex scenes. In one flashback, Henry recalls a moment from Mitt's infancy when, after making love to his wife while the child slept beside them, “we lay quiet again, to make certain of his slumber, and then lifted him back between our hips into the bed, so heavy and alive with our mixed scent” (67). The coital sublation of opposites repeats the dark scene in “The Sleepers,” when the speaker inhabits the voice of a young woman as she has sex with a lover that is both sublunary man and embodiment of night. Note how moisture marks the lingering connection of transcended

otherness, just as Mitt's flesh and the mingled smells of Henry and Lelia do in the passage above:

I am she who adorned herself and folded her hair expectantly,
My truant lover has come and it is dark.
Double yourself and receive me in darkness,
Receive me and my lover too...he will not let me go without him.
I roll myself upon you as upon a bed...I resign myself to the dusk.
He who I call answers me and takes the place of my lover,
He rises with me silently from the bed.
Darkness you are gentler than my lover...his flesh was sweaty and panting,
I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me. (46-55)

This sexualized transcendence is echoed in the poem's beatific catalogue of apposition in which the speaker "swears they are all averaged now...one is no better than the other...Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, and perfect and clean the womb cohering" (150,160). But Mitt represents more than the apposition of sexual and ethnic difference. The novel explicitly comments on how his body represents a rupture with past categories: "his body's form, already so beautifully jumbled and subversive and historic. No one, I thought, had ever looked like that" (103). Mitt's singularity signifies that he cannot find easy equivalence in the ethnic calculus of the past, thus transcending it, but it is also, and by the same token, a cherished uniqueness that suffers from and, as the novel has it, is eventually extinguished in assimilation.

While visiting Henry's father at his suburban home, Mitt suffocates under a "dog pile" of white neighborhood kids. While the child's death is figured as an accident rather than a malicious racially motivated attack, Lee's reader cannot fail to notice that

symbolically Mitt's uniqueness (and the transcendence it is taken to represent) is irrevocably lost in the amassment of sameness. This incident, as well as the collapse of the *ggeh*, tease out from Whitman's promise that "[t]he diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite...they unite now" (178), a darker intimation (also implicit in the poem) that the ultimate unification of the diverse is in death. Furthermore, reading Mitt's death through Whitman as a sentimentalist offers a second critical boon. While, as Elizabeth A. Petrino notes in her consideration of the genre, the child elegy can be traced back to at least the seventeenth century, its nineteenth-century sentimentalist examples, more than their predecessors, stressed "the exemplary and pious nature of the dying child, who often teaches a lesson in holy living to its parents," specifically their death acts as "a testament to its faith in God's promise to prepare a place for it in heaven" (319). Worth considering, then, is how this mode of testimony-through-death was remolded in Whitman's "The Sleepers," such that death becomes a beneficent equalizer and the lesson to be learned from its operation is to maintain faith in the democratic social body.

If this reasoning holds, then one must ask what Mitt's surviving parents "learn" from his death. The novel's concluding pages, which find Lelia and Henry together in a multiethnic classroom, might suggest precisely the acceptance of American universalism through the sentimental sublimation of death. This is, however, only a partially the case, for Lee's novel figures the process of national unity to be one of on-going, often queasy-making, negotiation. Some time after their son's death, when Lelia and Henry have achieved an uneasy, but lasting reconciliation, their lovemaking is described in roughly physical, awkward terms. The transcendence of racial difference that was to Henry so

palpable in Mitt's form has, in the wake of his death, become a struggle, a site of exertion and sometimes incapacity, which I take to be indicative of *Native Speaker's* third rereading of Whitman, a knowing reiteration of how the promise of rapprochement always bears with its the risks of disaster:

I rolled on to her and grabbed at her at the wrists. The old carpet was threadbare against her back, my knees were scraping the rope webbing. I kissed her and she nibbled at my lips as I pulled away...She wanted me to push down on her harder. I couldn't, so then she turned us around and pushed down on me, the slightest grimace stealing across her face. Her body yawed above me, buoyed and restless. I held on by her flat hips angling her and helping her to let me in. Mixed-up memory, hunger. (230)

One notes that, in addition to the fact that the act is suspended in an uncertain jumbling of the past and the future (memory and hunger), Lelia's body is figured as a sea vessel, yawing and buoying. This image is a node in the novel's sea-faring motif—Lelia is a Mayflower American, Kwang speaks for every boat person from the first settlers to the most recent immigrants—a motif culminating in the wreck of the *Golden Venture*, an historical incident Lee integrates into his version of New York and which directly alludes to the passage of “the Sleepers” quoted in the novel's epigraph. I read, in this constellation of boating references (including Lelia's restless buoying), the locus of what Lee seeks in Whitman, the painful truth of continuing struggle and disaster over which the dream of national and international unity repeatedly climbs and to which it must repeatedly, perhaps ceaselessly, return.

In *Native Speaker*, the *Golden Venture* is never directly named⁵⁰, but the incident

takes on incredible importance as it is positioned directly before news of the burning of Kwang's main offices, the beginning of his downfall, on a news program Henry and Lelia watch, late in the novel:

The next story is about a small freighter that runs aground off Far Rockaway in the middle of the night. The boat carries around fifty Chinese men who have paid \$20,000 each to smugglers to ship them to America. Men are leaping from the dies of the boat, clinging to ropes dangling down into the water...The drowned are lined up on the dock beneath canvas tarps. (247)

This passage directly references the shipwreck section of "The Sleepers," which begins with a description of a "gigantic swimmer," struggling to swim ashore from the wreck:

I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the sea,
His brown hair lies close and even to his head...he strikes out with courageous arms...he urges himself with his legs.
I see his white body...I see his undaunted eyes; I hate the swift-running eddies that would dash him headforemost on the rocks. (ll. 81-84)

The poem's speaker—heretofore able to shift effortlessly between consciousnesses, leaping across distances and healing the weary—is powerless to assist him.⁵¹ The swimmer is dashed on unforgiving rocks "and out of sight is borne the brave corpse" (91). It is from the lines that follow that Lee culls his epigraph, signaling that the weight of this moment of incapacity, in which both the democratic "I," and the "eye" of surveillance are powerless to do more than witness, is central to the novel's revision of Whitman: "I turn but do not extricate myself; / Confused...a pastreading ... another, but

with darkness yet...I cannot aid with my wringing fingers” (92-93, 97). Here, the speaker turns his sympathetic vision from the scene, but is unable to disentangle his being from that of the giant swimmer. He has been con-fused with the dying man, made into “another,” but unable to see beyond the darkness of the swimmer’s fate.

This “pastreading” is precisely echoed in the “pastreading” Lee is engaged with for it suggests that the union of souls that Whitman envisions and Henry craves bears with it, or perhaps is founded on, fellow suffering⁵²: compassion in its most anguished sense. Little is left for the poem’s speaker to do but pile the unnamed bodies in the cold morning, a gruesome variation on poem’s use of inventory: “I search with the crowd...not one of the company is washed to us alive; / In the morning I help pick up the dead and lay them in rows in the barn” (97-100). Note that Lee’s choice of comparing a fictionalized version of the wreck of the *Golden Venture* to the wreck in “The Sleepers” is particularly apt, for the latter is based on the wreck of the *Mexico* which Whitman witnessed as a child and later recalled in *Specimen Days*:

Several light-houses on the shores east; a long history of wrecks tragedies, some even of late years. As a youngster, I was in the atmosphere and traditions of many of these wrecks—of one or two almost an observer. Off Hempstead beach for example, was the loss of the ship “Mexico” in 1840, (alluded to in “the Sleepers” in L. of G.). (“Specimen Days”)

Whitman in fact misremembers the date, for the *Mexico* in fact wrecked off Long Island in 1837⁵³, and this misinformation has been quoted again and again by Whitman scholars, beginning with F. O. Matthiessen’s influential *American Renaissance* (Mattheissen 72).

Getting the date wrong suggests that scholars have neglected to research the *Mexico's* story, for it in fact contained 200 Irish immigrants, who drowned in the freezing waters just off Hempstead, within sight of the promised land of America. This fact, in addition to harmonizing with the wreck of the *Golden Venture*, adds particular poignancy to a passage later in "The Sleepers," in which the speaker imagines immigrants of all backgrounds sailing to their homelands in their dreams, no longer exiles: "Elements merge in the night...ships make tacks in the dreams...the sailor sails...the exile returns home, / The fugitive returns unharmed...the immigrant is back beyond months and years; / The poor Irishman lives in the simple house of his childhood, with the well-known neighbors and faces, / They warmly welcome him..." (ll.142-145). Whitman does not choose to end his vision at the desolate moment of the shipwreck, but rather with the sentimental dream of reconciliation and warm return. Lee will repeat his predecessor in this gesture, suggesting that what remains important in Whitman's legacy is this dialectic between the painful failure of union and the tenuous but tenacious possibility of it.

I hear this complex and tragic moment, in which the self cannot attain complete union with the social but cannot refuse its pull, echo in *Native Speaker's* final passage. Henry, having abandoned his work with Glimmer & Co., joins Lelia in her work as a substitute teacher in an under-funded ESL class. It is clear from the narration that this work will do little to bring these students, mostly children of immigrants, into the fold of the American vernacular: "Lelia usually doesn't like this kind of work, even though it pays well, mostly because there are too many students in a class for her to make much difference" (348). One must note that, as with the strain of size in Whitman's vision, it is

the expansiveness and diversity of this mass of students that makes transformation and unification unlikely, if not impossible. The lingering importance of ethnic difference is also marked by the fact that Henry plays the “Speech Monster” who “gobble[s] up kids but [who] cower[s] when anyone repeats the day’s secret phrase, which Lelia has them practice earlier” (348). But Henry is a Speech Monster not only because Lelia continues to be the privileged white, “native” speaker, but because his previous *role-playing* of spy, secret chronicler of lives, and proxy of hygienic nationalism has been clearly marked as an abuse of language’s power,⁵⁴ even as that monstrous potential remains implicit in (even Whitman’s) language. Nonetheless, as the students file from the room, Lelia gives each a sticker with his or her name on it, declares that everyone has been a good citizen, and pronounces every student’s name, enveloping each with her language’s power:

Now she calls out each one as best as she can, taking care of every last pitch and accent, and I hear her speaking a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are. (349)

This *role calling*, the novel’s final reiteration of Whitmanian inventory, synthesizes every iteration previous to it, suggesting a sentimentalized democratic mingling that falls just short of transcendent synthesis. First, she is a part of the state’s apparatus, simultaneously monitoring its populace, indoctrinating them into the *mythos* of American belonging, and failing to provide for their educational needs, a neglect that can only result in their continuing exclusion from mainstream realms of American belonging. Second, Lelia’s *struggle* to pronounce each name, her efforts to educate these students in the face

of certain disappointment, repeats the admission of failure and the significance of compassion resonant in Whitman's wringing fingers. This failure is also present in the fact that their son, Mitt, whose mixed blood might have suggested an amalgamation of identity subduing all conflict, is dead and the class of foreign children simultaneously serves as substitute and cannot serve as substitute. Lastly, the novel's final passage does reverberate with the possibility that the many can become one, that the "dozen lovely and native languages" can be tallied by a single speaker, and that the names she calls out will be true. Here, Lelia becomes the Night-Mother of the last passage in "The Sleepers":

I stay awhile away O night, but I return to you again and love you;
Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?
I am not afraid...I have been well brought forward by you;
[...]
I will duly pass the day O my mother and duly return to you;
Not you will yield forth the dawn again more surely than you will yield forth me again,
Not the womb yields the babe in its time more surely than I shall be yielded from you in my time. (196-204).

For, in the image scheme of "The Sleepers," as with Wideman's novel, it is night that can offer the stage for difference-in-identity and the sublation of difference and this trope is invested with all the positive and negative valances envisioned in the poem: night as sinister cover of identity, night as the sphere of potent dreams, night as the harbinger of death, and, as in the passage above, night as the womb bearing forth the possibility of our shared and individual selves.⁵⁵ Lee, following Whitman, seeks to locate the American dream in the deepest interior of the American nightmare, and we do a disservice to both

the nineteenth-century poet and the twentieth-century novelist when we condense their texts and refigure them as ready-made, easily legible, known quantities. Lee becomes a writer of “raw immigrant experience,” deploying Whitman only to insert himself and his fellow Korean-Americans into the core of the American character for which Whitman is nothing but a prime exemplar, a poet who never doubted the rightness of assimilation or the compassionate force of America nationalism. If we are content to summarize them thus, we fail to read them at all; we do not call them by their names.

CHAPTER V
HOMELAND INSECURITIES:
DOMESTICATED TERROR AND SENTIMENTAL STOICISM
IN THE 9/11 NOVEL

The spectacle of September 11, 2001, seen from a critical vantage in which spatiality and affect are foregrounded, poses a parallel set of problems conceivable on scales of proximity and distance. The attack violently redoubles the idea of New York as a space of global convergence in which “worlds collide,” yet images of the destruction, and indeed, its annihilative force, place viewers at a distant remove. The present chapter focuses on efforts to “solve” this problem through cultural representations employing the structural logic of sentimentalism: investments in the healing powers of sympathy and the domestication of larger political antagonisms. While each of the previous chapters have tried to shed light on the role sentimentalism plays in reactions to the urban crises of the post-Cold-War era, the much different urban ruin produced by the World Trade Center’s devastation occasions a mode of sentimental engagement specific to it. Instead of signifying a racialized space of internal conflict that requires the salve of active and imaginative sympathy from the citizen reader, the urban wasteland of 9/11 is a signifier of white, wounded masculinity and the configuration of fellow feeling is no longer a matter of active production but of passive infiltration. This chapter briefly considers how representations of the attacks in the US media have attempted to conjure a coherent social body through the affective pedagogy of sentimentalism, and, more extensively, how such

affective strategies have been used and revised by three “9/11 novelists”: Jonathan Safran Foer, John Updike, and Don DeLillo. Before advancing to a fuller articulation of claims, however, let us clarify the problem as I have posed it.

We’re (Not) Victims

Borrowing a term from Ed Soja’s enumeration of “discourses on the postmetropolis,” New York City is the paradigmatic instance of Cosmopolis, or “the globalization of cityspace” (145, 189). If globalization is capable of having a home, it would be Manhattan. In Saskia Sassen’s influential account, New York has developed, since the early 1980s and more or less in parallel with London and Tokyo, as one of three “global cities.” Sassen employs this term to designate urban spaces where corporate headquarters and producer services (such as finance, insurance, and real estate services) have become so highly concentrated that these cities must be understood not as national or even regional sites of power, but rather as the focal “command points in the organization of the world economy” and, consequently, sites of colossally disproportionate capital accumulation (343-344). In the prescient thought of John Friedmann, whose work on “world cities” heavily influenced Sassen, such cities are not only sites for dramatic concentrations of the earth’s wealth, they are also points of destination for migrants from around the world (227). It is this mix of global capital and culture which has spurred some urban theorists—Leonie Sandercock and Engin Isin as well as Soja—to conceive of the advent of a Cosmopolis: “the metropolis unbound...still a polis, albeit a fragmented, sprawling, and global one” (Isin 123).

Probably no urban structure better illustrated the idea of cultural internationality

in the service of global capital flows than did the World Trade Center: in name, in purpose, in architectural style, and in the national diversity of those who worked within it. This very cosmopolitan breadth, however, creates a problem for comprehending what, in a symbolic sense, was attacked: a nation or a global system. That the attacks themselves were international in character—Saudi, Lebanese, and Egyptian militants trained in Kandahar, Hamburg, and Florida as part of a network with a global agenda—only exacerbates the difficulty of sensing the shape of the social bodies entangled by the event. For the many millions watching as footage of the attacks repeated in the weeks and months after the tower’s collapse, some narrative emplotment was required to explain their relation to these columns of smoke. Should the catastrophe be understood primarily as “blowback”—the unforeseen consequences of American covert operations in Asia? If so, was it a catastrophic meeting of the aforementioned international order with its own obverse, an inherent global disorder? Should the attacks be seen, therefore, as Jacques Derrida claimed, as another “autoimmunitary process,” in which the global body attacks itself (94)? Or, should it be figured instead as an exterior force overrunning a coherent political, cultural, and affective territory—the American homeland? In short, aside from the individuals who were murdered, for what were the viewers grieving?

To these questions, one must add another: is “grief” the most precise term available for the affective response of most news viewers? Though its severity may grate, there is more than shocking candor in Frank Lentricchia’s observation that

for most of us—the very greatest majority of us--the thousands slaughtered are abstract. We have no personal connections with them. We never really did, or

ever really will, grieve for them, though we may think we do so in the world made by Oprah, where human beings assume God's role of feeling everybody's pain.
(95)

If it is true that the most common responses involved some simulation, or performance of feeling, in addition to and perhaps indivisible from “authentic” feeling, I see no need to treat this affective self-agitation in exclusively disdainful terms. If we are among that vast majority of (mere) spectators to the September 11 scene of suffering, if we have no single particular love-object lost, we cannot help but grieve abstractly for the dead and volunteer sympathy for those gripped in primary grief. Yet the melancholic arousal and performance of affect, already oriented toward perpetual feeling, is compounded by messages underscoring terrifying vulnerability to invisible enemies.⁵⁶ We should also not, in an effort to forestall reflexive prejudice against “false” feeling, overcorrect and uncritically embrace the cultural moment's injunction to grieve *ad infinitum*. What Lentricchia caustically decries as the desire to “feel...everybody's pain,” should instead be seen as the complex legacy of American sentimentalism—by turns progressive and reactionary—which here as elsewhere, requires a mix of affective s(t)imulation, imaginative projection, and the conjuring of a shared social body.

As I have noted, the nature of the social body most relevant to the attacks of September 11 is ambiguous. An entry point here may be “homeland,” the Bush administration's preferred term for US territory, or more accurately, the term the administration adopted directly after the attacks on New York and Washington. The term's ignominious history, as William Safire sketches it, is redolent of nationalisms

fixated on ethnic purity and origin. Note its use by the first Zionist congress in 1897, its favor among the fascists of Germany and Austria in the 1920s, its use to distinguish the islands of Japan from the annexations of the Japanese empire, as well as its prominent place in the 1962 South African legislation that instituted and legitimated apartheid, separating tribes based on territorial origins (12). Whether or not the post-9/11 usage of the term remains burdened by these etymological roots in reaction is uncertain, but President Bush's choice of the term over "National" doubtlessly signifies a preference for a folksy *Gemeinschaft*, a conjured domestic space blending state with hearth. Much as the terms "fatherland" and "motherland" transform the relations of citizenship into ones of filiation, "homeland" evokes a familial bond; moreover, someone not belong to the "fatherland," "motherland," or "homeland" in question can employ the term only with some measure of cognitive dissonance or knowing irony. Yet, intriguingly, however much the term calls forth associations of rightful domestic order, belonging, and security, it necessarily bears—in a way that terms such as "nation" and "state" do not—the trace of dislocation, the specter of lands outside the home, and thus of possible external threats. One must always remake, restore, or secure a homeland.

This blending of household with nation, in a manner that seems ambivalently both *fait accompli* and arduous undertaking, recalls Amy Kaplan's reading of the role played by domestic sentimentalism in nineteenth-century American expansion. In "Manifest Domesticity," Kaplan argues that while the nineteenth-century's "culture of sentiment" may have empowered some women writers to address matters in the public sphere by figuring the nation as home, the "cult of domesticity" also erected a domestic vs. foreign

binary enabling imperialist discourses (581). The reason, according to Kaplan's argument, that the language of domesticity sanctioned imperialist, rather than simply protectionist or xenophobic policies, owes to its conceptual instability: it is both a state of affairs and an effortful process. Kaplan suggests that while

part of the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home [...] [t]he border between the domestic and foreign, [...] also deconstructs when we think of domesticity not as a static condition but as the process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, the alien. Domestic in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. (582)

While guarding against any temptation to collapse U.S. imperial expansion in the nineteenth-century with American foreign policy post-9/11, the ambivalence of Manhattan as a (post)national space and the corresponding instability of the assaulted "homeland" suggest that sentimental cultural investments following the attacks should be viewed with trepidation⁵⁷.

But what are these contemporary investments and to what extent do they parallel earlier incarnations of popular sentimentalism on which Kaplan bases her analysis? Mainstream American media evinced a tendency, in the months and early years following the attacks, to s(t)imulate proper affective responses by domesticating the narratives of suffering, making them a part of households: a matter of family rather than of global forces, ideologies, or resource conflicts. Peter N. Stearns's study of historical differences between American emotional reactions to the attack on Pearl Harbor and those arising

from September 11 reveals that, with regard to the latter attack, there was an astonishing increase in emphasis both on a sense of paralyzing fear as well as a tendency to “personalize” the event in terms of self, family, and children (42). Moreover, as Angharad N. Valdivia avers, “[o]ut of the ashes and stench of Ground Zero and the challenged national identity of a nation who thought of itself as unattackable and secure the mythical sign of woman once more carries the meaning of loss, victimhood, and nation” (97). To the extent that this is so, twenty-first century sentimental investments neatly parallel those Kaplan identifies in nineteenth-century domestic culture. Yet though she is right to note that the “whole nation identifies with these widows and mothers, despite the fact that many of them led lives that few of us could ever dream of,” Valdivia’s reading of the mass media’s affective investments neglect the US media’s emotion-laden treatment of masculine figures surrounding the disaster.

I would suggest that, in fact, the far more dominant means of suturing viewer sympathies to an imagined national body was the sentimentalization of the wounded white hero. Paradigmatic of the media’s sentimental investment in injured stoic masculinity are the numerous profiles of New York City’s fireman. Highly mediated public adoration of these figures reached such a pitch ultimately that it fomented violent resentments among the bureaucratic factions during the clean up of Ground Zero, according to William Langewiesche’s account in *American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center*. Most of the fireman who perished were in Langewiesche’s terms “normally brave—as people who are not cowards” but had no idea of the likelihood of the building’s collapse and, accordingly, were not engaged in “extraordinary heroism”

(156) Indeed, according to Langewiesche, at least one crew of fireman who died in the collapse arrived at the burning buildings and wasted no time before they began looting Trade Center shopping outlets (161). Nonetheless, the media fixated hagiographically on the fireman—those who died, those who survived, and those who wore the uniform—who could be invoked as “brawny, square-jawed men, with young wives and children—perfectly tragic figures, unreliant on microchips or machines” (157). Over and above the Port Authority (which lost its headquarters and suffered disproportionate employee casualties in the collapse) and the Police Department, the city’s fireman were treated as the wounded American heroes *par excellence*, and their collective acceptance of this mantle, and the privileges that come with it, led to a series of violent confrontations at the clean-up site itself over the comparative treatment of the dead (158). Many have commented on how this rhetoric of masculine heroism brought about a resurgence of machismo happily taken up by President Bush, Rudy Giuliani, and Donald Rumsfeld, the last of whom, at the age of seventy, was short-listed by *People* as one of the sexiest men alive in 2002.⁵⁸ To emphasize machismo’s ascendancy would, however, diminish a crucial point. The masculinity in the crux of sentiment linking sympathetic viewer to national body was not unreservedly macho; its texture involved a wounded stoicism that allowed the figure to be conduit for simultaneous but contradictory feelings of invincibility *and* humiliating victimization.

The figure of male suffering as a fulcrum for both sentimental emotional discharge and staged stoical containment has a long history. Julie Ellison has argued, in *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*, that the “positions of stoicism

and sensibility” of the man *of* feeling and the man *above* feeling have become “mutually generating” ever since this affective structure emerged in the late-seventeenth England as a correlate to a shift toward republican values among elite, politically active Englishmen. (42). When the suffering stoic republican is surrounded by his sympathetic friends—as is Cato by Juba in Addison’s play *Cato*—he must “fend[...] off the temptations of downward directed sympathy” (10). Cato, who “rejoices dry-eyed at his son’s honorable death,” weeps only for the fate of Rome (56). Yet this “transcendence of [personal] sorrow calls forth compensatory emotion in those around him,” such that the men of feeling, who tearfully witness, are moved to greater love for the republic (56). Ellison’s elucidation of the affective economy out of which the man of feeling emerges should be connected with what Rei Terada calls “the economy of pathos” whereby the apparent diminishment of feeling is capable of producing compensatory feeling: “Emotions arise from others’ subsidence, from reflection on emotions, and from the very absence of any particular thing to feel. [...] Any apparent ebbing of pathos makes more as well as less pathos: the less pathetic the end of pathos is, the more pathetic it is that it isn’t pathetic any more” (13-14). What Ellison and Terada illuminate, in their respectively historical-literary and theoretical veins of research, is the process by which the generation of feeling emerges out of its apparent loss. The victim/hero of September 11 functions as just such a productive point of vanishing.

Before proceeding into an extended reading of how 9/11 novelists such as Foer, Updike, and DeLillo engage with and revise the modes of sentimentalism proliferating after the attacks, one must consider the spatio-political consequences of domesticating

grief via white wounded masculinity. Here Lauren Berlant's critique of sentimental pedagogy clarifies. In the context of nineteenth-century sentimental literature, Berlant has demonstrated the ways in which the "ideology of true feeling" can be both ethically corrupt and politically regressive (41). For Berlant, the notion that all humans can bond over their capacity to suffer erases the ways in which privilege continues to mark the social field, such that suffering is deeply unequal despite the appearance of parity implied by fellow feeling (41). Uneven geographies of social suffering are not leveled, but rather hidden, by an insistence on imagining the social body via fellow feeling. In the case of September 11, this issue is especially fraught because so many of the thousands murdered were wealthy managerial Manhattanites, with all the region-specific privilege this suggests, and yet their sheer diversity of race, nationality and creed, as well as the dreadful enormity of their number suggest globality. I refer to this knot of sensitive concerns under the rubric "the privileges of mourning," and while this phrase risks appearing both contradictory and disdainful of indisputably genuine bereavement, it effectively suggests the ways in which elided structural differences in power link up with the exceptionality of the occasion of mourning and the prerogatives that are claimed in the name of grief's compelling intensity. As a small but important example, one can see this privilege at work in President Bush's historic Sept 21, 2001 address to the special session of Congress when he declared: "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them." While distinctions between a terrorist organization like Al Qaeda and much more peaceable variants of Islamic worship ought

to be loudly declared, what interests me is the link between the rhetorical slight of hand that makes Muslims and Arabs “friends” instead of constituent members of the American polity and the privilege of being the subject who demarcates “friend” from “enemy,” not to speak of the mortal consequences of this demarcation.

Novelists are not immune from this tendency, but much can be learned from the specific ways in which they deploy and revise the mode of sentimentalism I have sketched above. The authors I have selected engage with that mode in three interrelated ways. First, each conceives of the national trauma as a matter of broken homes, consequently domesticating the geopolitical stakes and confusions surrounding the conflict. Foer emplots September 11 from the point of view of a child whom it has orphaned and a woman whom it has widowed, focusing on the most customary figures of sympathy. Updike allegorizes the contending social forces in a pseudo-family productive of terrorist fervor but also capable of sympathetically educating it away. DeLillo, slippery as ever, takes up a family at once brought together and torn apart by the near-death of one its members in the South Tower’s collapse. Second, each novel, in quite distinct ways, invests in the logic of wounded masculinity sketched above whereby stoicism and sensibility mutually generate and ambivalently tangle. Sometimes, as in Foer, the stoic posture itself is mourned as lost, while elsewhere, in Updike, increased sensibility to the suffering of others paradoxically re-Oedipalizes the unruly affects that occasioned the teenage terrorist rebellion. Third and lastly, each prioritizes the role of sympathy and emotion-laden imaginative projection, often across vast cultural divides. The prioritization of sympathy in the individual novels is too complex to inventory here,

but before proceeding to readings in which I offer more subtle analyses of its use, I note here that, in each, sympathy is made to bridge and annul sites of alterity within the global polis, and by extension to fold in the emotional estrangement of even the terrorists who killed thousands. Consequently, sympathy is not merely a means of addressing and healing the wounds of the attack, or of “making the nation whole again” as the news media’s commentariat might have phrased it. Instead, it is a means of imagining a nation *beyond* the nation, an ambivalent spatial projection paralleling the doubled space of the global city sketched above. This evocation of sympathy’s power and the social body produced by it, however, is never presented without corresponding equivocation and doubt. The novels are haunted by the persistent insinuation that such a community of fellow feeling is, in fact, illusory, ineffective, or no longer possible. In an instance of Terada’s economy of pathos, the stimulated grief is doubled: first for those who have died and second for those who live on.

Feeling Everything

Jonathan Safran Foer’s choice of the naïf as narrator in the form of Oskar Schell for his 2005 novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, puts him in line with J.D. Salinger and Mark Twain, both of whom also used the naïve child-narrator to critique the sentimentality of their eras, while at the same time clandestinely repeating it for their own purposes. Foer seems to hint at this model of double-voiced narration, both expressing and denying embarrassing emotion with the first two of Oskar’s many fanciful pseudo-inventions:

What about a teakettle? What if the spout opened and closed when the steam came out, so it would become a mouth, and it could whistle pretty melodies, or do Shakespeare, or just crack up with me? I could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad's voice [...] Another good thing is that I could train my anus to talk when I farted. If I wanted to be extremely hilarious, I'd train it to say, "Wasn't me!" every time I made an incredibly bad fart. And if I ever made an incredibly bad fart in the Hall of Mirrors, which is in Versailles, which is outside of Paris, which is in France, obviously, my anus would say, "*Ce n'etais pas moi!*" (1).

This musing, offered on the novel's first page, establishes Oskar's immaturity through its syntax and subject matter and his precocity through the flaunted knowledge of French geography and language, but it also proposes a model of how interior compulsions, analogous to emotional intensities, can be relieved through a second voice in a paradoxical mix of embarrassed expression and concurrent denial. These proxy voices, with their abject commingling of orality and anality, are at once a means of expression (of art, of song, of memory), a method of relieving visceral bodily pressures, and a mode of repudiating ownership.

I take this to be a model of how Oskar's voice, and to a lesser extent those of his grandmother and grandfather, relates to Foer's own. Detailing their familial losses in the conflagration of the World Trade Center and, a generation before, in the firebombing of Dresden, its three narrators, Oskar Schell, his grandmother, and his estranged grandfather, Thomas Schell, Sr., offer remarkably demonstrative emotional accounts of their experiences, even if their diegetic behavior is more reticent. Asked by his psychiatrist, "What emotions are you feeling," Oskar responds characteristically: "All of them" (201). These candidly expressive narrators enable Foer to employ many of the

most affecting strategies of sentimentality both to move his audience and to confront openly the embarrassing experience of being overcome by grief. In many ways, the novel is irrefutably sentimental. These voices—like open wounds that speak—articulate intense and often self-pitying responses to their suffering as well as more hopeful sentiments of mutuality and love, redolent of the teary exchanges characteristic of Stowe. Less obviously, the novel offers a complex reengagement with the sentimental keepsake tradition, whereby material tokens are cathected with displaced affection and, ultimately, enable the recirculation of feeling required for the sentimental national economy. Foer, however, also subtly asserts a measure of authorial distance from this sentimentalism by attributing it to characters that he has written as fancifully neurotic, stunted, privileged, and willfully peculiar beings.⁵⁹ This unusual, meta-sentimental strategy positions readers to respond to character in ways that are simultaneously sympathetic and ironic, and, at least potentially, invites both sincere affective affirmation and a more judicious evaluation of character. This second, ironic leg of Foer's approach also allows for an oblique acknowledgement of how the Schell's socioeconomic privilege sets their pain at a distance from those who suffer under institutional violence and depravation, thereby partially addressing what I have termed the privileges of mourning. But, as I demonstrate in the following analysis, this self-conscious denial of feeling—this “wasn't me”—also carries with it the risk of implicitly reinscribing the missing voice of the perished paternal stoic as the normative goal of all emotional bearing. Furthermore, this ambivalent treatment of sentiment may serve to excuse Foer from any careful consideration of the political and ethical causes of the historic suffering he so vividly

evokes.

On its surface, Foer's text tracks remarkably well with the distinctive properties of nineteenth-century sentimentalism. As Joanna Dobson suggests, at its broadest, sentimentalism can be viewed as an "imaginative orientation [...] characterized by certain themes, stylistic features, and figurative conventions [...] that celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss" (266). Of the thematic characteristics of sentimental literature, Dobson writes, "the greatest threat is the tragedy of separation, of severed human ties: the death of a child, lost love, failed or disrupted family connections, distorted or unsympathetic community, or the loss of the hope of reunion and/or reconciliation in the hereafter" (267). A list of sentimental literature's most frequent tropes would include scenes of shared redemptive crying, "abandoned wives, widows, orphaned children, and separated families; deathbed and graveyard scenes; [...] fantasies of reunions in heaven [...] and] keepsake imagery" (272-273). The unusual emotionalism of Foer's novel, its particular kind of sentimentality, is evidenced by numerous instances throughout all three of its narrative threads. Consider the numerous scenes of weeping, often of the shared redemptive variety: the imagined Reservoir of Tears (38), Abby Black crying at the photo of an elephant's tear (96), Oskar's grandmother weeping over his absence (101); the centenarian A.R. Black crying at the sound of his own voice (168); Oskar's grandmother confessing that the "First time I cried in front of him [her husband] it felt like making love" (178), or when she begs him to reveal his crying face to her after she becomes pregnant (180-181); Anna's father weeping at the arrest of his Jewish friend, Simon

Goldberg, in Nazi Germany (209); and, most significantly, the climactic scene in which Oskar recounts his father's last message to William Black ("A tear went down his cheek and rested on his finger," 301). One must add to these tear-stippled moments Foer's treatment of the two historic scenes of massive suffering that, in addition to September 11, the novel depicts directly, namely, the firebombing of Dresden and the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. While the Dresden bombing constitutes a major event in the novel's subplot, the scene in which Oskar's grandfather assists in killing zoo animals to preclude their agony as well as forestall possible predation of humans works as a demonstrative supplement to sentimentally underscore the needless loss of human life (213). Likewise, the interview transcript of Tomoyasu, a Hiroshima survivor (which graphically details how her young daughter—with peeling skin and maggoty wounds—expired in her arms) repeats that Ur-trope of nineteenth-century sentimental poetry: a mother's grief at the death of her infant. Repeated displays of weeping and suffering are not, however, the only ways in which *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* marks its connection to the American sentimental tradition.

Foer's novel also displays a deep interest in the possibility of emotional interconnection, simultaneity, and sameness and in how this sameness might hold transcendent value. In many classic sentimental texts, this emotional interconnection is reified in the form of a keepsake, typified by the curls of hair Eva gives to her family and their slaves to remember her by in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As Dobson writes, the sentimental keepsake "was a potent and multivalenced remembrance, a material object upon which was played out symbolically an all-too-intimate acquaintance with the tragic evanescence

of human life” (274). Foer’s novel has at least two such sentimental artifacts: the several voice mail recordings left by Oskar’s father in the last hour before his death in the World Trade Center collapse and, less obviously, the enigmatic key labeled “Black” which sets Oskar on a quest to meet every Black in the phone book. This is, as Philippe Codde notes, “a transparent metaphor for the door that will presumably give access to his father's past” (244). However, Codde is too quick to suggest that the key is “a false lead that can reveal nothing about his father's last days [because] the key only divulges someone else's bereavement as it really belonged to someone else's deceased father” (244). I would instead argue that this second keepsake and the quest it occasions literalize the affective community structured around sympathetic identification. Through it, Foer is able to sentimentalize a city for which the only other adequate sign is the impersonal phone book. His peregrination throughout the city, inseparable from the novel’s development while at the same time quite obviously quixotic, exposes New York’s multiplicity even as it fails to lay bare the mystery motivating Oskar. The resultant affective community is what Oskar gains access to instead of some sought-after message from his lost father’s.

Nor is Oskar’s the only narrative in which such a community of affective interconnection is so vividly figured. In her autobiographical text entitled “My Feelings,” Oskar’s grandmother records a moment of dialogue between herself and her husband when he suggests, apropos her writing: “‘You could write about other people.’ ‘My life story is the story of everyone I’ve ever met.’ ‘You could write about your feelings.’ She asked, ‘Aren’t my life and my feelings the same thing?’” (130). This syllogistic equation

suggests an almost infinite plentitude of affective connections between others and the self, as if by consenting to narrate one existence, she would have agreed to tell them all. Surely this suggests primarily the difficulty of self-expression, but it also underscores the profound significance that Foer's novel accords to feeling as a transcendent, near-magical link between characters, the thematic interest in "intersubjective connectedness at the level of the body" characteristic of sentimental fiction (Noble 296). Moreover, Foer dots his text with numerous examples of uncanny simultaneous feeling: be Thomas Schell, Sr.'s conviction that he and his son are writing the same word at the same moment (208), Schell's encounter with Simon Goldberg in which he knows that their hearts "were trying to beat in unison" (279), or the moment in which Oskar's mother and grandmother are struck telepathically by knowledge of Thomas Shelling, Jr's death. Trust in the transcendence of feeling and its power to forge intersubjective connection suggests a sentimental genealogy, but Foer's novel has in fact a complex relationship to this proposition.

One can begin to outline this relation by noting Foer's subtle, partial disavowal of sentiment in the scenes cited above because few if any of these moments of interconnection can be differentiated from the projections of individual fantasy. Oskar's grandmother and grandfather might simply be imagining the reality and efficacy of these telepathic affective bonds, much as Oskar compulsively 'invents' similar reifications of feeling linking individual suffering to a collective, intersubjective 'heart.' For example, he imagines a "special drain...underneath every pillow in New York" feeding into a "Reservoir of Tears," the water level of which would be reported as indications of the

public mood by morning weathermen (38). Similarly, he conceives of tiny personal microphones and speakers playing each individual's pulse to all so that "you could hear everyone's heartbeat, and they could hear yours, sort of like sonar," and he goes on to imagine what would happen "if everyone's hearts would start to beat at the same time" (1). Each of these 'inventions' reveals a palpable desire to automate and depersonalize emotional states and engagements, as in the fantasy of a device that "knew everyone you knew and [...] could rate the people you knew by how much you loved them" and which could be linked to ambulances, enabling them to project custom tailored messages about the patients inside, such as "DON'T WORRY! [...] IT'S NOTHING MAJOR! [...] IT'S MAJOR!" or much more personally and direly, "GOODBYE! I LOVE YOU! GOODBYE! I LOVE YOU!" (72). Oskar's fanciful inventions allow Foer a means of subtly critiquing as fantasy the notion of unobstructed affect flowing between individuals without submission to communication's vicissitudes and the struggles of self-understanding. This is exceptionally clear in how Oskar's daydream of mood-revealing water--which in response to heart rate, body temperature, and "brain waves" would color one's skin according to one's frame of mind—becomes a fantasy about perfect emotional self-knowledge:

Another reason it would be a good invention is that there are so many times when you know you're feeling a lot of something, but you don't know what that something is. *Am I frustrated? Am I actually just panicky?* And that confusion changes your mood, it becomes your mood, and you become a confused, gray person. But with the special water, you could look at your orange hands and think, *I'm happy! That whole time I was actually happy! What a relief!* (163)

Foer uses Oskar's voice, his plaintive whimpers and childish inventiveness, as a means of implicitly suggesting the impossibility of a perfect sentimental communion wherein self and others are entirely emotionally self-present and self-transparent while at the same time sentimentally mourning the loss of this possibility.

This meta-sentimental approach stages the plangent reality of Oskar's suffering (and rhetorically demands a sentimental recognition of it) by demonstrating how emotion can never be a matter of plain designation (orange is happy; I am happy) and how the unfulfillable yearning for self-transparency (or, in strict correlation, the transparency of the feelings of others, of the lost and loved other) is itself a marker of emotion. One might think of this slippery process, this emergence, erasure, and consequent reemergence of feeling as being paralleled by the hundreds of pages of Oskar's grandmother's memoirs, entitled "My Feelings," which prove to be blank due to a missing ink ribbon and her "crummy" vision. Her feelings are, first, made manifest in the composition, then are figuratively erased by the fact of the missing ribbon, and yet are made present to Foer's reader in the "My Feelings" sections of the book. Yet another example of affect appearing *sous rature* occurs in Oskar's father's tale of how Central Park had been carefully transplanted onto Manhattan from its original place on a Sixth Borough of the city when it drifted out to sea. The Park, he asserts, still carries with it a spectral feeling which challenges even the most impassive, opening them out of their limited present and into both memory and hope:

Well, it's hard for anyone, even the most pessimistic of pessimists to spend more than a few minutes in Central Park without feeling that he or she is experiencing

some tense in addition to the present...[m]aybe we're just missing things we've lost, or hoping for what we want to come. Or maybe it's the residue of the dreams from that night the park was moved. Maybe we miss what those children had lost, and hope for what they hoped for. (222)

The passions of the living are merely the uncanny remainder of the passions of the dead. Each of these instances (in which the disappearance of feeling produces feeling) duplicates the way in which the disappearance of the loved object excites passion into being. Put differently, the affective rhetoric of Foer's novel, as well as many of its most engaging figurations, replays the loss at its center, the death of Thomas Schell, Jr. and, with him, all unjust deaths.⁶⁰

Foer attempts to assert the significance of individual griefs, loves, and compassions as well as the impermanence and opacity of these feelings, all while, and as a means toward, aesthetically exciting his reader's compassion for his characters. This parallels the novel's alternation between tropes that reify emotion states (and which lend plausibility to hopes for their permanence, significance, and communication) and tropes that enact emotion's erasure (signifying the non-efficacy of sympathetic connection). I read Foer's complex affective rhetoric as an emotional *mise en abyme* that calls to mind Rei Terada's notion of the economy of pathos, or "the recirculating infinity of feeling living on" as detailed above (13). Put briefly, Foer deploys patently sentimental techniques to arouse in his reader feelings commensurate with the losses of September 11, techniques that he in turn subtly ironizes, but this irony itself only serves to produce a second-order pathos, a suffering at the mocking of suffering. What purpose does this secondary pathos serve? One might suspect that Foer's irony is simply reflex, inherited,

and thus, in an odd way, naïve, but one can also read this *regressus* of irony and pathos as a means of mourning for the possibility of a genuine affective community, a nation, a species constituted and secured by right-feeling, by reticulated fellow feeling.

As I have suggested, this ironized pathos gives Foer the opportunity to sympathetically critique his characters, but it also at least theoretically permits him to critique the body politic that sentimental rhetoric figures. Foer's doubts about the possibility of community established on right sentiment are related to his lightheartedly ironic bearing toward Oskar, who is at once to be pitied the loss of his father and to be forgiven for his often-infantile self-centeredness. Although Updike and DeLillo, in their own ways, attend to the general affluence of World Trade Center victims, Foer's approach distinguishes him, for Oskar is clearly a child of the Upper West Side: over-indulged, dilettantish, by turns small-minded and sophisticated. He is off-handedly ethnocentric, a boy for whom Mexicans are lawnmowers (8); who jokes about how the Chinese squint (10). These largely trivial insensitivities play intriguingly against his confessed fear of Arabs, a prejudice about which is uncharacteristically self-conscious but which also clearly touches on the source of his own pain and self-pity (36).). In this way, Foer may be satirizing the regressive withdraw into racial and religious paranoia which sentimentalized reactions of grief to September 11 licensed. The novel's fullest consideration of just how privileged its protagonist is, however, pulls punches and ultimately demonstrates a complacent justification for inequity.

One sees this clearly in the episode of Oskar's visit to Ada Black, the "467th-richest person in the world." In what seems a self-forgetting effort to shame Ada for her

obscene wealth, Oskar asks “how it made her feel to know that there were homeless people and millionaires living in the same city” (149). She responds by pointing out his own privilege as an Upper West Sider and asks if the homeless might not need his coin collection more than he does. Oskar’s sense of his entitlement, even if it is invisible to himself, shows just after this conversation, when he patronizingly flatters Ada’s African-American maid, Gail, for which Ada rebukes him: “You were talking to her like she was a child...[t]here’s no shame in being a maid. She does a serious job, and I pay her well” (150). The scene ends with Ada confiding, “I know what I am...[e]ven if I don’t like what I am, I know what I am. My children like what they are, but they don’t know what they are. So tell me which is worse” (150-1). The context and tone of the scene are meant to incline us to take, more or less at face value, Ada’s putative respect for the seriousness of her servant’s work, the fact that she pays Gail well, and her confession of self-knowledge, and, in my view, this vitiates the critique of Oskar’s privilege. Foer leads his character into a scene in which he might realize that his power to linger in grief, to indulge in self-pity, and to follow his every caprice safely, is itself a privilege. Connected with this opportunity is the chance to engage his readers in self-reflection on their own standing within the privileges of grief, but instead he presents us with an avatar of Manhattan’s concentrated wealth that wears her cynicism winningly as a sign of her worldliness and even-handed poise. It is, in my reading, a moment misspent, but it is characteristic of the novel’s sometimes-pusillanimous retreat from the broader political dimensions of the slaughters he evokes.

Here I should address a potential counterargument to this slightly ungenerous

view of Foer's politics, namely the significance of Foer's decision to place the attacks of September 11 in a context of catastrophic historical suffering and to select, for that historical context, the American bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima, both of which involved the deliberate incineration of thousands of civilians by American bombers. In considering this choice, one must first loudly affirm that *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* ought not be construed as weighing the number and type of victim on September 11 against estimated casualties of America's geopolitical power abroad in order to justifying the terrorist attacks. One must then note what is circumnavigated by his selection of historical context. Foer does not detach the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center from history, as the shorthand designation "September 11" itself serves to do. Nor does he place the traumatic event against the losses of, say, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, which would have unquestionably raised specters of justification. He does not contextualize it either by evoking the genocidal slaughters of Rwanda, Srebrenica, East Timor, or Cambodia, any one of which might have suggested how cultural and ethnic prejudices, coincident with economic interests, make certain calamities seem more earth shattering to Western observers than others. Instead, Foer narrates September 11 alongside two slaughters, which are at once moments within a historically distant and "just" war *and also* American war crimes in a conflict central to the founding of the United States' global power. While this is an audacious choice, one must note that it sidesteps the particular motivations and psychology of the terrorists, areas of preoccupation in the distinctly more "political" September 11 novels of DeLillo and Updike. More importantly, it circumnavigates what Judith Butler has pointed out as

the globally uneven greivability of lives. Butler, noting how the obituaries of World Trade Center victims confer greivability on the dead but that this greivability is not extended to war casualties, avers: “The matter is not a simple one, for, if a life, is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not quality as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable” (34). Instead of attempting to either extend the zone of the sentimental circulation of feeling or to show its inherent boundaries, Foer’s novel asserts a universal circularity of death, described in narrow arcs of individual lives, and therefore it brackets from aesthetic concern all particular political motives or causes of violence as well as the broader social effects of that violence.⁶¹

By framing these moments of mass death entirely at the individual’s scale and by attending only to their effects on individuals, Foer repeats those aspects of sentimentality to which Laurent Berlant astutely objects when she writes:

Because the ideology of true feeling cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain, its cases become all jumbled together and the ethical imperative toward social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy. The political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures. (641)

Especially apt is Berlant’s observation of how sentimentality’s “cases become all jumbled together” for while Foer suggests how the World Trade Center, Dresden, and Hiroshima are alike in their infernal effects, this does nothing to clarify their circumstances and causes. The novel studiously avoids any of the difficult questions of motive, geopolitical causations, or how American privilege, economically and militarily,

sustains an uneven geography of corporeal vulnerability. Indeed, an intriguing parallel exists between globalization's dubious assertion of universal generalizability (an assertion undercut by the markedly uneven geographic distribution of its benefits) and sentimentalism's faux-universality, which gestures at a concern for all suffering and yet so restricts the scenes in which this concern is staged that its claims seem hollow. That colossal suffering cannot, in its awful sum, be fully represented is too easy an objection; its final unrepresentability does not license any and all appropriations of its affective power. The suffering of Oskar, or of his grandparents, is staged in historic, and historically, specific terms is certain, but the substance of their grief is familial, specific, even idiosyncratic, rather than existential or communal. To call upon mass-slaughters for these more localized affective aims raises serious aesthetic, ethical, and political questions.

Not least among these questions is, for whom does the novel actually mourn? Metonymically linking Manhattan's dead thousands with the specter of a wise paternal figure has profound political consequences. Thomas Schell, Jr., is a solid, temperate, bright, self-made, well-heeled liberal entrepreneur who, in addition to all of this, manages to be bravely calm in death. He is an idealized representative of a late-boomer yuppie and his bland self-possession is remarkably dissonant when held against the foibles and eccentricities of every other Schell. Add to this the flat blamelessness of Anna and her father, the novel's chief Dresden casualties and a clear pattern emerges. These rather sparsely imagined types are redolent of an idealized Caucasoid nuclear family in strict conformity to received gender, class and racial norms. The lost objects are doubly

mourned and doubly dignified paternal figures and a lovely, steady-eyed village maiden whose loss of virginity seems to only deepen her emotional innocence. The idealization of the dead, another sentimental legacy, is often an attempt to confer on objects of mourning precisely the dignity and decency unjustly taken from them. Whatever one thinks of this strategy, in this case, one has to note the distinctly traditionalist, if not conservative, cast of the idealization. One must ask: what order of identifications makes these lives highly grievable? To whose emotional deportment is Foer's reader being implicitly herded—that of the quirky, openhearted narrators or that of the unwavering vanquished patriarchs—and what are the political consequences for this instruction? “It's easy to be emotional,” says William Black, mourning his own father and commiserating with Oskar in the novel's climactic scene, “You can always make a scene [...] being reliable is something” (297). Given that, shortly after this is said, “making a scene” is precisely what William and Oskar do by narrating their losses to one another and weeping together, one might suspect that Foer sees Black's stoic platitudes as misguided and repressive, stifling the emotional exchanges and self-knowledge which make us human. In fact, however, this faith in the therapeutic powers of open emotional expression obscures the novel's equal, but far less hip, reverence for received modes of stoic masculinity. Updike's *Terrorist* and DeLillo's *Falling Man*, as I will show, also demonstrate a fascination with stoic masculinity, but their more direct treatment of subject allows them to critique the pose, though in different ways. The absent center of the novel, Thomas Schell, Jr., is the normative ballast offsetting its wilder, more effusive turns in Oskar's narration. Foer's version of Lacan's Name of the Father subtly, but

insistently, marks expressive emotion as a symptom of sheltered, emasculated, effeminate, and ultimately hysterical subjects.

Foer's novel outwardly flaunts its openness to idiosyncratic, ungovernable emotions; more than this, its own affective power thrives on this openness and the tantalizing possibility for therapeutic catharsis which emotionalism brings with it. Yet, paradoxically, it also performs nostalgic melancholic grief for a stoical father figure, the missing impassive center of the social body. What consequences does this have for its affective pedagogy, that is, for the way of being moved it represents? First, its sympathetic disposition toward its homodiegetic narrators seems to model a form of compassion repeated in the text, whether in the scenes of weeping noted above, or in less maudlin connections, as, say, between Oskar and Gerald, the limo driver. This allegorical or performative arrangement is the very definition of sentimentalist. By doing this, it implicitly invites us into a motley, ad hoc and unfinished affective community, represented diegetically in the random New Yorkers Oskar circulates among. That they are clearly unrelated but share the same surname is a shrewd metaphor for the pseudo-familial relation of affective belonging. Thus our compassion, extended to the singular Oskar, or his grandmother, or grandfather, begins to suggest a rhizomatic reticulation of decent feeling. Like Fo Black, who thinks that the "NY" of "I♥NY" is "*ny*," the Chinese word for "you," we begin by thinking we are conferring affection on one and discover we have given care to a million, to "everybody" (239). However, Foer subtly suggests the magic, or misunderstanding, by which this occurs and by which the reality of an affective community is constituted, might not work. If it did, how could humans exterminate each

other? How could the pathos at the center of this web of empathy come to pass? In its confrontation with this fact, Foer's text genuflects to the masculine poise and stoicism of Thomas Schell, Jr. but also indicates that it is vanished, no longer unattainable. Instead, we are offered Oskar's fantasies of time reversal—his flipbook levitating images of a WTC suicide—that can be read in either a proscriptive or a descriptive manner. Read proscriptively, as a part of Foer's work and words to us, it suggests that we must rearrange our representations in an act of art, which implies the capacity to release others from suffering, perhaps to reverse their suffering. Read descriptively, as Oskar's and America's fantasy, it intimates that we have regressed into a “would have been safe” consolatory fantasy of the world and of ourselves, in which the truth about our suffering and our innocence has been reversed. This concluding ambiguity repeats in miniature the novel's position in relation to its central character and the utopian promise of its own sentimental discourse.

Beyond Nice

In his review of Foer's novel, John Updike called the ending of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* “one of the most curious happy endings ever contrived, and unexpectedly moving” (138). It is telling that he should characterize it as a happy ending at all, for Updike is the only one of the novelists considered here who elected to end his text on an indisputably “happy” way. Such an ending is doubtlessly easier given that Updike, unlike Foer and DeLillo, chose to avoid a direct consideration of September 11 in his novel and instead focused on an entirely fictional terrorist plot set in New Jersey in the years immediately following the 2001 attacks. Yet Updike's hopeful emphasis on

the possibility of rebounding after the attacks characterizes even his note for the *New Yorker* in 2001, in which he describes watching the attacks. He and his wife were visiting family members in an apartment in Brooklyn Heights with a clear view of the towers when the planes struck and buildings fell “with a tinkling shiver and a groan of concussion distinct across the mile of air” (28). “We knew we had just witnessed thousands of deaths,” he writes of his feeling after the first tower fell and describes the entire experience as “a nightmare ballet” (28). Nevertheless, Updike’s stress is on the capacity of Americans to recover precisely because they are capable of seeing others as something more than generalizations shaped by resentments:

War is conducted with a fury that requires abstraction—that turns a plane full of peaceful passengers, children included, into a missile the faceless enemy deserves. The other side has abstractions; we have only the mundane duties of survivors—to pick up the pieces, to bury the dead, to take more precautions, to go on living. (28)

As if to dispel the “abstractions” clouding the figures of the attackers, Updike departed from his characteristic interest in things of the middle to take up the challenge of representing extremism. In interviews, the author seems hyperaware of the deep gulf separating him culturally, politically, and generationally from his novel’s protagonist, Ahmad, admitting his trepidation at the difficulty but assuring himself that “They can’t ask for a more sympathetic and, in a way, more loving portrait of a terrorist” (qtd. in McGrath, E2). Indeed, the novel’s evident faith in the powers of sympathy is precisely what suggests its sentimental pedigree.

Terrorist represents an effort to revisit the scene of terrorist violence and to resolve it aesthetically and, though he would have doubtlessly taken issue with the term, sentimentally. This involves redirecting powerful fears of exogenous terrorism—fears that envision acute, cataclysmic losses—onto more general, chronic fears of American self-diminishment: a *Weltschmerz*, or more accurately a *Staatschmerz*, owing to a crisis in paternity and solvable only through a sentimental reintegration of the social body, figured under the sign of miscegenation. Updike's elegiac mode never entirely overcomes his hopefulness, a disposition implicit both in his narrative's empathic immersion in his character's consciousnesses—via focalized free indirect discourse—as well as his characteristic dialectical approach to social conflict.⁶² His novel is sentimental in the sense that it presents a vision of social cohesiveness produced through sympathy—both the sympathy of the novelist for a terrorist youth and the sympathy that undoes that youth's deadly resolve. Updike also domesticates the problem of terrorism, treating it as a purist reaction of a permissiveness inherent to American society and therefore, ultimately, a matter of familial estrangement. To some extent, this is simply Updike's characteristic domestic realism, for much of his work considers massive cultural shifts in the nation refracted symbolically through representative families, the paradigmatic case being the tetralogy of Rabbit Angstrom novels. Even so, the effect of aesthetically domesticating the conflict between liberalism and Islamic fundamentalism, coupled with the novel's other contiguities with the sentimental tradition—most especially its strenuous emphasis on the power of imaginative sympathy—demand a reading that asks after its affective and spatio-political consequences. Furthermore, like the novels of Foer

and DeLillo, *Terrorist* is transfixed and moved by wounded stoic masculinity. Genuine sympathy, in this novel, requires the abandonment of a permissive sexuality Updike links to maternal, as opposed to paternal, figures. In this manner, Updike links the capacity for sympathetic engagement to a masculinity of emotional maturity requiring paradoxically the Oedipalization, or renunciation, of affect. While the novel concludes with an unmistakably sentimentalist emphasis on the humanizing and ethically saving force of sympathy, and indeed embodies such an effort at sympathy, it also bears with it ambivalence over sentimentalism's final ethical status.

It may seem strange to argue that *Terrorist* is either sentimental or a 9/11 novel, because it only glancingly confronts September 11's attacks and those moments in which it does are distinguished by studied emotional distance, as when Jack Levy, one of its two central characters, observes an Islamic imam as "a slight, impeccable man embodying a belief system that not many years ago managed the deaths of, among others, hundreds of commuters from northern New Jersey" (112). The decidedly regional disquiet over the hundreds of New Jersey dead, combined with the circumlocutionary avoidance of the phrase "September 11," suggest an intentional disinclination to recap the "event." In doing so, Updike immediately shrinks the scale, if not the stakes, of the conflict and, by virtue of this indirection, avoids focusing on grief per se, instead remapping the event onto a social field where he can scan its implicit lines of religious and ethnic difference. While *Terrorist's* two main characters only share a few scenes in the novel, they are structural foils for one another and Updike handles their differences in rather thoroughly oppositional way: Ahmad Ashmawy is an eighteen-year-old, virginal, half-Egyptian

Muslim, while Jack Levy is an aged, adulterous, Jewish atheist.⁶³ The two form an abortive father-and-son relation in which Ahmad, though a defiant youth, is rather too easily lead, and Jack, though a High School guidance counselor, seems incapable of guiding. Their eventual détente annuls their oppositionality and is thus a dialectical resolution of larger social tensions. By emplotting terrorism as a phenomenon of teenage alienation—with its familial and sexual vicissitudes—Updike sentimentally subdues and domesticates the otherness of Islamic terrorism, replanting it in more familiar soil both to understand empathetically its psychic economy and to describe it as a kind of autoimmunitary process embedded in America’s own contradictions.

However different Ahmad and Jack are from one another, one crucial problem which both share is an emotional sense that life may not be worth living, and in both cases, their list toward despair owes to an estrangement from their sexual roles and material bodies. For Ahmad, faith in the transcendence of Allah leads him to disparage the immanent world, a world he sees as ruled by unrestrained sexuality and empty materialism. To him, the words of the Koran “invade our human softness like a sword” (7). True spirit, in Ahmad’s view, entails the destruction of the flesh and the denial of sexual desire. Even though he finds the exposure of women’s bodies generally sinful (“Their bare bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and low-down purple tattoos, ask, *What else is there to see?*”), Ahmad is capable of fantasizing about their bodies while simultaneously imagining their punishment in hell, a means of expressing his sexuality and desire for control in a manner keeping with his American Protestant worldview (3). He envisions the “smooth body” of Joryleen, an African-American girl with whom he

timidly flirts, as “darker than caramel but paler than chocolate, roasting in that vault of flames and being scorched into blisters” (9). This type of sadistic fantasy recurs in moments of frustration, as when he remembers the members of a black Evangelical church as having “the singe of Hellfire on them like the brown skin on barbecued drumsticks,” just after he has a run-in with Joryleen’s boyfriend (17). It becomes clear that Ahmad’s devotion to Islam is in large part a means of negotiating the difficulties of adolescence by subjecting the complexities of the world to a Manichean reduction and sidestepping the relativism he finds rampant in American culture. However, religion is not simply a means of repressing his own sexuality, as is clear when he responds to Joryleen’s assertion that “hating your body is like hating yourself”: “Not *hate* your body [...] but not be a slave to it either. I look around me, and I see slaves—slaves to drugs, slaves to fads, slaves to television, slaves to the unholy, meaningless opinion of others” (73). Clearly, Ahmad’s Islam presents him with a means to critique both sexual mores and larger economic and social concerns. The result is a kind of religiously-infused mock-Marxism, as when he heatedly asserts: “All America wants of its citizens, your President has said, is for us to buy—to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men” (72). But, at least as frequently, the sexual and economic critiques overlap: “Look at television [...] how it’s always using sex to sell you things you don’t need” (38). Updike’s novel makes terrorism a threat internal to a masculinity in crisis.

Updike seems at pains to demonstrate that this gendered malaise is endemic in the nation and should not be thought of exclusively as a problem besetting an Arab

subculture, and the primary means by which he conveys this is through Jack Levy. “[T]rapped in a curriculum vitae as tight as a coffin,” Jack, a guidance councilor at Ahmad’s school, is also a man apart from that world and fond of opining on the its shortcoming though the terms of his critique and the nature of his isolation differ in causation from Ahmad’s. Whereas Ahmad is alienated by his belief, it is Jack’s disbelief—his atheistic dread of his approaching death and his present-day insignificance—that so separates him from his surrounds. He senses that his life is nearly over; Updike introduces him awaking with the “taste of dread is his mouth” and the understanding that his “sinister” dreams were “soaked through with the misery of the world” (19). If this seems over-dire, Updike quickly alerts us to the depths of this malaise, in a clowning but dark allusion to Dante distinctive to Jack’s focalization: “In the world’s dark forest he had missed the right path. But was there any right path? Or was being alive in itself the mistake?” (22). Jack typifies the moral relativism repellent to Ahmad, even as their respective alienations partake of a shared separation from the over-sexed and affluent lifestyle that television suggests constitutes the American mainstream:

He sees himself as a pathetic elderly figure on a shore, shouting out to a flotilla of the young as they slide into the fatal morass of the world—its dwindling resources, its disappearing freedoms, its merciless advertisements geared to a preposterous popular culture of eternal music and beer and impossibly thin and fit young females. (23)

This visualization of his own helplessness reveals how his professional failures as a guidance councilor are compounded by his sexual longings and frustrations, which he

attributes to his wife Beth's obesity. Consequently, both Jack's and Ahmad's affective disengagement from America (as represented by the fictional New Prospect, NJ) partially owe to their respective cosmologies and class alienations, but their isolation is determined, in the last instance, by sex.

The novel stages the threat of terrorism as a crisis of male potency, but that crisis is, in Updike's motivic terms, inseparable from American society's larger urban degradation. It is significant that *Terrorist* is set in the clearly symbolic fictional rust belt town of New Prospect. The town is oddly a mix of rusting postfordism and the verdant growth of developing world, in Jack's words "an old industrial burg dying on its feet and turning into a Third World jungle" (33). Throughout his work, Updike has been distinctly aware of the erosion of the manufacturing base, white flight, and consequent resegregation, and his reader senses a measure of both guilt (at the system's festering inequity) and fear (of violent reprisals small or great). The palpable diminishment of American urban health as well as the contiguity of this degradation with international entanglements is clear when Updike tells us that Jack "reads the dying, ad-starved local daily" filled with news "of Bush and Iraq and domestic murders in Queens and East Orange—murders even of children aged two or four or six, so young that struggling and crying out against their murderers, their parents, would seem to them blasphemy" (19). The pathos of bad news, national and international, seems an undivided fabric: a global matter. Therefore, even while Updike eschews the backdrop of Manhattan, he still stages his novel in the space of Cosmopolis, albeit an unhappy version: a decrepit city emblematic as much of the broader world as of America. Similarly, Ahmad's racial

status conveys a sense both of threat and recombinant mixing. As Jay Prosser notes, for Updike, “blackness stands as other, love or hatred, guilt or fear, a measure of white American consciousness” (76). Being the upshot of New Prospect’s urban *mélange* is but one of the ways in which Ahmad is ‘mixed,’ for he is “the product of a red-haired American mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student” (13). His mixed raced status connects him to Updike’s Tiger, the mixed race boy with whom Rabbit Angstrom plays basketball in the last minutes of his life (Rabbit 457), which in turn suggests he is what both *threatens* the white middle-America represented by Rabbit as well as what *will become* the next generation of America seekers. Updike discusses this future “soften[ing of] the color line” in his memoir, *Self-Consciousness*, addressing for a moment, Americans of color:

America is slowly becoming yours, I want to think, as much as it is anyone’s; already, out of the deepest disadvantage, black Americans have contributed heavily to what makes the United States a real country, with a style and a soulfulness no purely white country has” (195-196)

Updike’s desire for a society in which race is not a factor mitigating national belonging clearly emerges from an earnest anti-racism while, just as clearly, it partakes of racial essentialism: blackness signifies style and soul and America becomes a nation that is white, but not purely so. Nonetheless, it is significant that both Ahmad and Jack should represent a minimal difference from the white middle-American Updike is renown for representing, for in *Terrorist*, as in *Rabbit at Rest*, miscegenation is a sign of cross-cultural fertilization and a sign of the end of white culture. It is the source of both

frustration and hope, of conflict and resolution.

One can see how, in Updike's later novel, the terrorist threat is both repeated and safely subdued by figurative miscegenation, in a comic passage, when the Secretary of Homeland Security ruminates on being in fact the "Undersecretary of Women's Purses" (45). He imagines women's purses, in terms that link with a pattern of fear of the vaginal in Updike's fiction, as "sinkholes of confusion and sedimented treasure in whose depths any number of compact terrorist-weapons—retractable box-cutters, exploding sarin pellets, lipstick-shaped stun guns—could be secreted" (45). In Updike's novel, female sexuality becomes the source of a threat to national security. Hermione, the Secretary's assistant and Beth Levy's sister solves this problem by developing search protocols for "this crucial area of darkness," which include wooden sticks so that security officers will not "give offense with the rummaging touch of their naked hands" (45). Race is the source of the problem, for "[t]he majority of security personnel were recruited from the minorities, and many women, especially older women, recoiled from the intrusion of black or brown fingers into their purses" (45-46). Here national security becomes coercive interracial coupling, waking the "dozing giant of American racism, lulled by decades of official liberal singsong" (46). A repetition of this miscegenation occurs when Jack Levy begins an affair with Ahmad's white mother Terry. Although Jack's Jewish status marks him as nominally white, marrying him, in the sarcastic words of Beth's sister Hermione, was "the next-best thing" to marrying a Muslim, yet another link to Ahmad (131). The affair between Jack and Terry briefly resuscitates Jack's "last reason for joie du vivre," and thus solves his existential crisis (210). For Jack, Terry is whiter

than white, she is “Irish-white,” a phrase the text repeats no fewer than four times to describe her skin (116, 158, 170, 207). Penetrating this hyper-whiteness allows him to reconnect with, paradoxically, his own ethnic character as when he meditates: “*The Irish in her*, [...] That’s what he loves, that’s what he can’t do without. The moxie, the defiant spark of craziness people get if they’re sat on long enough—the Irish have it, the blacks and Jews have it, but it’s died in him” (207). In addition to bolstering Jack’s status as a pseudo-father to Ahmad, Jack’s liaison with Terry allows him to duplicate the racially coded and sexualized confrontation Updike seems to envision as central to American *Aufhebung*.

Terry symbolizes the American motherland that promiscuously mixes with all-comers, all immigrant suitors, and the over-indulgent, tolerant liberal who suckles an enemy at her breast. Given Updike’s seeming investment in miscegenation as political threat *and* hope, one should read the ground for this mixing as similarly ambivalent; she is a figure of innocent evil. Terry should be read as a local iteration of Updike’s long-standing mythicizing of woman as “primal Eve[s]” (Verduin 74). “Cast as ancillary to a devouring earth goddess,” avers Kathleen Verduin, “women in Updike’s work transmogrify into adversaries of a patriarchal religion that presumably demeans their natural prerogatives” (65). In their “tacit negation of Christian supernaturalism” Verduin suggests, Updike’s women blithely accept both promiscuous sex and death as “nature’s imperatives” (64-65). Terry clearly represents both: her promiscuity is the pivot on which Ahmad and Levy’s stories turn and her career as a nurse insinuates her comfort with death’s everydayness. That she is also a painter *manqué* indicates the generative

potential she represents, a power that is both necessary and dangerous to the men surrounding her. While Jack “resists [her] New Age side” (82), he thrills at her vitality. Against Jack’s identity as a guidance councilor, Terry represents a more open acceptance of life’s possibilities. “Your life isn’t something to be *controlled*,” she tells him, “We don’t control our breathing, our digestion, our heartbeat. Life is something to be lived. Let it *happen*” (91). Though Jack pulls energy from this insouciant vitalism, or rather because he does, Terry must reject him: “Don’t be a leech. I bet you’re a leech on Beth, too. Sucking, sucking the life out of a woman (208). The consequences for Ahmad are more profound, in as much as Terry represents the ground of his being; as he quotes from the Koran, “*Our mother is the Earth itself, from which we drew existence*” (241). But her carefree spirit and her basic irresponsibility mean that Ahmad’s ground is of doubtful dependability. As he confides to his friend Charlie: “She is a warm-natured woman, and no doubt cares for her hospital patients, but I think has as little talent for motherhood as a cat. Cats let the kittens suckle for a time and then treat them as enemies” (212). Although she is nonreligious, Ahmad sees her as a devotee and sacrificial victim of a competing faith; she is, he thinks “a victim of the American religion of freedom, freedom above all, though freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air” (167). Terry is, as Jack playfully reflects, “a wild one, a rule-breaker. Terri-ble. A holy Terror” (164).

By locating female sexual liberation as the founding wound leading to both Islam’s radicalization (Ahmad’s problem) and the disintegration of American sense of purpose (Jack’s problem), Updike inscribes terrorism into the bedroom in a manner

fundamentally misogynistic.⁶⁴ *Terrorist* stages the emergence of radical Islam—and metonymically America’s autoimmunitary disorder—as a problem of re-Oedipalization, that is, a problem owing to the initial absence of a father, which later requires the too-forceful renunciation of affection. In the absence of his father, Ahmad has to negate by dint of will his own interest in his mother’s proximate body:

For some years it has been awkward their bodies sharing the limited space of the apartment. Her ideas of healthy behavior include appearing before her son in her underwear or a summer nightie that allows the shadows of her private parts to show through [...] When he rebukes her attire as improper and provocative, she mocks and teases him as if he is flirting with her. (169)

Ahmad’s rejection of this body leads to his repression of all bodily desire and his replacement of paternity via Islam. He seems aware of this psychic maneuver himself, for “[h]e thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning” (99). Moreover, Islam conveniently requires women to “withdr[aw] into wrinkles and a proud shapelessness [where] an indecent confusion between a mother and a mate was not possible” (170). Were this the only way in which Updike’s novel made a scapegoat of female sexuality, one might choose to read it as a descriptive comment on radical Islam’s constitutive response to American sexual permissiveness. It was, after all, this aspect of American culture that so repulsed Sayyid Qutb, the progenitor of the strain of radical Islamic thought that in time influenced al-Qaeda as well as Updike’s fictional Sheikh Rashid (304).

However, nearly every character in the novel, aside from Terry, locates the failure of paternity, the diminishment of patriarchy, as the source of America's degradation and/or vulnerability. Men of the cloth, unsurprisingly, are among the loudest in this claim. The Evangelical pastor Ahmad observes in his visit to Joryleen's church proclaims in his impersonation of the weak sinners in his community: "we have our underage crackhead girlfriends to bear our illegitimate children that we can leave in a shoebox in at the disposal and recycling facility on the edge of town—don't send us up that hill, Lord" (60). Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad's imam, implicitly agrees: "The lack of fathers, the failure of paternity to keep men loyal to their homes, is one of the marks of this decadent and rootless society" (145). Jack opines similarly, in his tone-deaf way, to Terry about how "You see that in a lot of [...] black families, the kids idealizing the absent dad and directing all their anger at poor old Mom, who's knocking herself out trying to keep a roof over their heads" (89). When Terry takes offense and reproaches him, Jack grumbles to himself: "*Single moms*, he thinks. What a cutesy, sentimentalizing, semi-militant phrase" (89). Charlie Chehab, a complex character who appears to lure Ahmad into a terrorist plot and is later revealed to have been an undercover CIA agent, chimes in agreement, this time blaming irresponsible Hollywood celebrities: "these kid movie actors [...] make these poor black teen-age girls think it's just the thing, to bring a baby into the world without any father. Except Uncle Sam. He gets the bills, and no thanks from them: welfare's their right" (261). Again and again, the figure of the single mother is scorned as the source of American anomie.

In this respect, the missing paternal figure provides Updike with terrorism's

second American parentage, this time not in a re-Oedipalization via Islam, but rather in an a form of envy read as *ressentiment*. While I have examined *ressentiment* extensively in relation to Philip Roth's revision of sentimentalism as well as Anna Deavere Smith's diagnosis of group identities in contemporary urban space, Updike makes distinct use of it. In his novel *ressentiment* is the means by which the emotional disorder flowing from the crisis of paternity can be transformed (horribly) into a violent retributive agenda that justifies any death as the death of an evildoer. One sees this clearly in a scene, narrated via freed indirect discourse, in which Ahmad recalls an agonizing visit to a shopping emporium with his mother years earlier:

The spectacle revives a sensation buried in the folds of his childhood—the false joy of shopping, the tempting counterfeit lavishness of man-made plenty. He would go with his mother up the escalators and through the perfumed aisles of the last, failing emporium downtown [...] the mother and son were besieged on all sides by attractive, ingenious things they didn't need and could not afford, potential possessions that other Americans seemed to acquire without effort but that for them were impossible to squeeze for the salary of a husbandless nurse's aide. (151)

The hunger for the “man-made plenty” consumer goods, because unfulfillable, becomes a humiliating reminder of his father's absence and an almost public sign of his abandonment. This suggests that Ahmad becomes radicalized against American culture because of his social weakness and consumer envy. As Sianne Ngai points out, Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*, a “diseased passion” that “transforms social weakness from an undesirable situation one must struggle to overcome into a ‘blessedness’ or virtue,” collapses “genuine political impulses” and “private

dissatisfactions” into it in order to dismiss the former as the latter (Ngai 33, 128).

Importantly, Ngai suggests, “the feminization and moralization of envy have operated in collusion to suppress its potential as a means of recognizing and polemically responding to social inequality” (130).⁶⁵ This is particularly important for a reading of *Terrorist*’s affective diagnosis of terrorism, for it helps to explain why Updike consistently feminizes Ahmad, particularly for his slender body.

If to envy is to take up a feminized position in affective gender norms, Ahmad’s feminization underscores that his strident moral indignation is merely a form of *ressentiment*, a bitterness at being unable as yet to access America’s “man-made plenty” that marks him as unmanly. Tylenol Jones, Joryleen’s boyfriend and Ahmad’s high school adversary, hails Ahmad as: “You weird queer. You faggot” (16). Later, when Tylenol publicly confronts Ahmad over his attendance of Joryleen’s church, Ahmad’s corporeal vulnerability is distinctively feminized: “vulnerable, near-naked in his running shorts, [...] his long limbs bare, as beautiful, beauty being an affront to the brutes of the world” (97). That his self-perceived “beauty”—a function of his weakness—reveals those around him to be the “brutes of the world” is a model case of gendered *ressentiment* of the kind envisaged by Ngai. The altercation ends with Ahmad escaping unharmed, but as he leaves “there are whistles and hoots behind him, as if he is a white girl with pretty legs” (98). This might be taken as simply the homophobia omnipresent in American high schools were it not for the fact that adults in the novel also demonstrate anxiety over Ahmad’s sexual orientation. His “friend” Charlie Chehab jokes with him repeatedly about losing his virginity and eventually pays Joryleen to have sex with him; Terry, in a

hasty moment of self-reflection, wonders whether her promiscuity had affected Ahmad, thinking: “Maybe that’s why her own kid is queer, if he is” (165). Updike, always alive to the possibility of motivic oppositions, plays the *ressentiment* he signals by Ahmad’s womanly slenderness against a privileged corpulence, but what must be realized, apropos Ahmad’s feminization is that it is neither a given nor is it emotionally or politically value-free. By encoding Ahmad’s critique of inequalities inherent to global capitalism in terms marking him as feminized and sexually exposed, indeed by offering a critique appearing to flow from this exposure, Updike excites pity for him in a way that both minimizes the reality behind Ahmad’s critique (by transforming it into Nietzsche’s “vengefulness of the impotent” (37)) and bears out the novel’s consistent attribution of terrorism to female sexuality.

Updike employs a fat/thin opposition as a means of suggesting another autoimmunitary reversal in which leisure and consumption mortify the body. This obesity motif is one way in which the novel implicitly shares in Jack’s *Weltschmerz* and his elegizing of American exceptionalism. As Jack reflects on the deterioration of New Prospect, particularly the substitution of fast-food establishments for local groceries, he remarks to himself: “America is paved solid with fat and tar, a coast-to-coast tarbaby where we’re all stuck,” but those who seem most stuck are working-class whites (27). There is Jack’s wife Beth, “a whale of a woman giving off too much heat through her blubber” (20). Beth’s obese body becomes an abject entity; an odor rises from “the deep creases between rolls of fat, where dark pellets of sweat accumulate” (135). This repugnant surplus of flesh correlates to the material excess characteristic of late

capitalism as well as (punningly) to the “fleshiness” of sexual licentiousness. As such, Beth’s body becomes a symbol of self-destruction inherent in abundance: “the world has conspired to make her soft and overweight, insulate against the precision and danger that crackle wherever people truly rub against one another” (126). Ahmad’s feminine delicacy, when read within this motivic opposition, becomes an indication of his separateness from this other femininity, which denotes a self-victimization by means of one’s privilege. One sees this clearly in Sheikh Rashid’s admonition to Ahmad: “Do without these women of non-Heavenly flesh, this earthly baggage, these unclean hostages to fortune!! Travel light, straight into Paradise!” (108). Or again, when Ahmad contemplates the white sunbathers along the Jersey shore he notes how “the guts of the men sag hugely and the monstrous buttocks of the women seesaw painfully” (191), while a moment later, when he meets an Arab member of a terrorist sleeper cell, he approves of the man’s trim body: “There is a wiry tension to his whole body; his stomach is admirably flat” (191). Updike uses obesity to mark yet another way in which the promise of American consumer culture is self-consuming and self-defeating.

Updike punningly links this corporeal softness to a soft-heartedness American culture has putatively acquired (related to the parental permissiveness embodied by Terry) in recent decades that betrays its Puritan and Revolutionary legacies. Updike attributes Beth’s discomfort in her Shaker chair to the fact that “the Quakers and the Puritans [had] different philosophies about comfort and necessity,” presumably better, less relativistic philosophies (134). One can see how this nexus of fears about consumption and idleness elicits an inconsistent nostalgia in Jack for the laws of the very

“Third-World jungle” he fears has overtaken New Prospect:

To be on the safe side, they changed the label ‘capitalism’ to read ‘free enterprise,’ but it was still too much dog-eat-dog. Too many losers, and the winners winning too big. But if you don’t let the dogs fight it out, they’ll sleep all day in the kennel. The basic problem, the way I see it is, society tries to be decent, and decency cuts no ice in the state of nature. No ice whatsoever. We should all go back to being hunter-gatherers, with a hundred-percent employment rate, and a healthy amount of starvation. (136)

It is difficult to imagine a more contradictory critique of American society than to decry its unjust brutality and its unnatural decency simultaneously, but this contradiction flows from Updike’s ambivalent reaction to the idea of the American sentimental network. On the one hand, America once possessed a fierce and brutal vitality that connects New England’s ascetic and stoic past with, perversely, al-Qaeda; on the other hand, America is also figured as having been a peaceable egalitarian society bound by fellow feeling. The stark alternatives correspond to stereotypical gender identities and, while each has its desirable elements, neither seems fully available.

Having mapped political alternatives onto a scheme of bodies—fat and thin, male and female, promiscuous and chaste—Updike can draw connections between Ahmad’s drive to establish independence from his mother via terrorism and America’s war of independence, further strengthening the domestication of national narratives. All of the comparisons between al-Qaeda and Revolutionary America are embedded in the pontifications of Charlie Chehab, whose own bifurcated status as both terrorist rebel and CIA patriot echoes the unparsable contradictory loyalties of his rants. Nevertheless, the

values of many of his claims about Washington harmonize with concerns over America's excessive kindness and compassion, which I have established in the text. In the following crucial passage, Charlie compares George Washington to present-day terrorist organizations and, accordingly associates present-day America with the British Empire:

That was Georgie. He learned to take what came, to fight guerilla style: hit and hide. He retreated but he never gave up. He was the Ho Chi Minh of his day. We were like Hamas. We were Al-Qaida. [...] The British wanted [...] a model of pacification—winning hearts and minds, you've heard of that. They saw what they did on Long Island was counterproductive, recruiting more resistance, and were trying to play nice here, to woo the colonists back to the mother country. At Trenton, what Washington was saying to the British was, "This is real. This is beyond nice." (181)

Being beyond nice, being sufficiently merciless to achieve independence, reduplicates the logic of Jack Levy's "healthy amount of starvation," as well as the implicit renunciation of affection entailed in re-Oedipalization: separation from the mother-country. It entails the upturning of the rules by which the sentimental community coheres: one must make oneself pitiless in response to one's enemies and read their suffering as one's own victory instead of one's shared defeat. However, Charlie's historical homily, by writing American history as a process of self-betrayal, figures America's enemies as versions of itself, albeit former selves. In this way, at least, the defeat of one's enemies is one's own defeat. So while Charlie goes on to claim that "The jihad and the [American] Revolution waged the same kind of war, [...] the desperate and vicious war of the underdog claiming fouts by the fouts he has devised for his own benefit" (286), he has, wittingly or unwittingly, inscribed in the heart of Islamic fundamentalism the tenets of dried-eyed

American expediency.

These Hegelian inversions of identity, or recognitions of shared sameness across difference, also play out in the novel's conclusion and its sentimental reabsorbing of the outcast into an American community of affection. This community is established, and in terms at once sentimental and ironic, well before the novel's conclusion, during Ahmad's graduation ceremony. Jack, though an irrepressible cynic, always find himself moved by the Commencement ceremony. In the following musings, he employs precisely the rhetoric that characterizes the American sentimental civic religion, though throughout one senses his ironic edge:

Contribute to America, they are told. Take your places in the peaceful armies of democratic enterprise. Even as you strive to succeed, be kind to your fellow-man. Think, in spite of all the scandals of corporate malfeasance and political corruption with which the media daily dishearten and sicken us, of the common good. (110)

Jack Levy begins to tear up at the "docility of human beings, their basic willingness to please," and begins to weep fully when he imagines the graduating students walking slowly to shake their principal's hand as "Europe's Jews dressing up in their best clothes to be marched off to the death camps" (111). This pathos, madly exorbitant in its context, functions as a prelude to the would-be holocaust of the novel's conclusion. But unlike at the novel's end, this wave of sentimental dread, though powerful enough to draw Levy's tears, comes too late: Levy has had his opportunity to act on behalf of these students and now that semester's end concludes his duties, he is at liberty to feel without

consequence.

Unlike Levy's, Ahmad's sentimental conversion, the novel's climax, is effective and clearly endorsed by the text. Ahmad, with Jack Levy helpless at his side, drives his truck freighted with explosives in the Lincoln Tunnel but at the last moment decides not to detonate the charges, which would have destroyed the tunnel's walls and resulted in thousands of deaths by drowning. Updike's staging of Ahmad's change of heart is unmistakably sensational and sentimental: it works by a progressive set of emotional identifications the experience of which convinces Ahmad of the value of other lives. Though these values, and the sentimental means by which they are conveyed, are the novel's implicit emotional and ethical disposition, Updike does introduce ambiguities in this conclusion that effectively refuse complete closure. The sentimental conversation occurs through four interwoven sets of identifications: 1.) Ahmad's vision of a grassy slope at the entrance to the Tunnel sentimentally echoes earlier pastoral elements in the novel and initiate the power of pity; 2.) Ahmad confronts in Jack's despair an echo of his own, which in turn, drives him to renounce this despair in himself; 3.) Ahmad is moved by the children he observes in the Jersey tunnel who allow him therapeutically to revisit his childhood abandonment; and, 4.) Updike's deployment of the entomological motif culminates in an ambiguously sentimental dénouement. I trace them in a roughly chronological way, and one senses an authorial intent to build toward more sophisticated modes of reflexive sentimental identifications as the climax progresses, but they are best thought of as narrative durations braided together, sometimes awkwardly, often skillfully. What is to be noted here is how Updike repeatedly folds Ahmad's sentimental

recognitions onto themselves, so that, for his reader, they become recognitions of their own sentimentality. At the level of reception, this becomes at once a process of self-estrangement and self-implication.

In the first of these moments of affective identification, Ahmad has an eerie, sentiment-infused flash of connection with a “triangle” of grassy slope at the Lincoln Tunnel’s on-ramp, which echoes the novel’s pastoral motifs earlier focalized through Jack. Ahmad is surprised to find “trees and greenery” at the tunnel’s entrance and, fastens onto a small triangle of mown grass “that no one ever stands on or picnics on or has ever noticed before with eyes about to go blind,” thinking “*This is the last piece of earth I will ever see*” (297). Later, as the moment of decision approaches, Ahmad experiences a hallucinatory apparition of the embankment: “A shimmer like a heat mirage has possessed his mind’s eye: that triangle of tended yet unused grass hung above the tunnel mouth hangs in his mind. He had felt pity for it, so unvisited” (299). The land functions as, at the very least, a mirror for Ahmad’s own self-pity, which until this point has not been acutely engaged as he has been absorbed in the platitudes and pieties of preparing to be a martyr. This affective identification with land, with lawn, echoes Jack’s first scene in the book, when he nostalgically mourns the shift from “houses” to “housing” and the concomitant erasure of lawns: “within his memory back and side yards had once included flowering trees and vegetable gardens, clotheslines and swing sets, now a few scruffy bushes fight for carbon dioxide and damp soil between concrete walks and asphalt parking spaces stolen from what had been generous margins of grass” (26). While, as in Ahmad’s case, this pastoral elegiac projection neatly parallels Jack’s own

problem (not enough space from his wife Beth), neither of these moments should be read as entirely private, for these two reveries also are suggestive of the promise of unbounded American land and, before this, the Great Commons. The poignancy of its enclosure—the wholesale privatization of the commonweal—carries with it the beginnings of a movement toward a sociality of shared affection

The second identification occurs when Ahmad confronts in Jack's despair an echo of his own, which in turn, drives him to renounce this despair in himself. After hopping into Ahmad's truck's cabin to avert the planned disaster, Jack begins, to his own surprise, to urge on the suicidal bomber, at first clearly in anger and then with a genuine desire for self-annihilation. "I've become a drag on the world," he declared, "taking up space. Go ahead, push your fucking button" (304). Jack's despair repulses Ahmad, but his suicidal renunciation of the world tangibly echoes and hence defamiliarizes the young man's own, hastening Ahmad's change of heart. Updike depicts the climactic affective event—Ahmad's epiphany—as an imaginary spiritual explosion of creation:

Behold the semen you discharge: did you create it, or We? God does not want to destroy: it was He who made the world. The pattern of the wall tiles and of the exhaust-darkened tiles of the ceiling [...] explodes outward in Ahmad's mind's eye in a the gigantic fiat of Creation, one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness, God having willed the great transition from non-being to being. (306)

One could note how the italicized text, taken from the fifty-sixth sura of the Koran, figures creation as masculine dissemination, which here explodes in what would be the Lincoln Tunnel's figurative vagina, completing the motif of security through coital

supplement to female sexuality. Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, however, one might queer Updike by emphasizing the profound homosociality of the novel's plot, and this mode of sentimental education more generally—wherein Terry shuttles between the Muslim and Jew in order to defuse ethnic and religious tensions—thus emphasizing how the underlying homosexual tension at play in Ahmad's search for a father figure is unwittingly echoed in this conclusion for, after all, all three "mouths" of the tunnel are named for men, not women "(Manny, Moe, and *Jack*)," (297 italics mine) suggesting not procreative heterosexual coitus that plugs the dangerous void of female sexuality, but rather a secretive, conspiratorial, homosexual oral exchange (of words) while the world is none the wiser. This reading, though against the grain, is less far fetched than it seems, if we return to Julie Ellison's claim about the relation between stoic and sensible masculinities. Ellison insists these become "mutually generating" positions in the late-seventeenth century precisely to defuse homosocial tensions arising from a shift from monarchy to republicanism, a then-conspiratorial political mode requiring an intensification of fellow feeling but also a scheme in which dominance and submission are not mediated in advance.⁶⁶ In Updike's hands, Ahmad's progression to a tacit liberal humanism repeats this sexually vertiginous step.

Ahmad's third, and most powerful, sympathetic encounter intriguing troubles the distinction between pity for others and self-pity. Ahmad observes two black children in the Tunnel whose efforts to gain his acknowledgment move him by recalling his own childhood yearning for recognition from his father. Given my reading of the novel's racial politics, it is hard to miss the import of the sibling's race when in a maladroit bit of

indirect discourse we are told: “They are not neglectfully dressed but in the same carefully careless, ironically gaudy clothes that white children would be wearing on a family expedition. This black family was doing well, until Ahmad waved them ahead of him into line” (299). Clearly their apparel is meant to revise white-ward the children’s racial and class identification, reclassifying them as racially miscellaneous, like Ahmad, like America’s future: not white but in whiteness’s orbit. He estimates the girl’s age to be three, the age at which “his father turned his back on him and fled: he had often reflected that at three a child can talk, he can run, he is a person, he can plead and grieve and shed sore tears. He must have wept but remembers nothing of this time” (303). This re-visitation of the unremembered traumatic kernel returns us to the novel’s Freudian strain of affective diagnosis, so that Ahmad’s need for Oedipal closure can be effected by his sympathetic identification with a self-substitute: here, the young girl. After he changes his mind, “he lifts the fingers of his right hand from the steering wheel and waves them, like the legs of a beetle on its back. Recognized at last, the children smile, and Ahmad cannot but smile back” (307). While this sentimental moment of mutual, smiling acknowledgment passes when the children sense their safety and begin to make faces, Updike’s somewhat awkward insertion of the entomological motif into this scene confirms, as I conclude below, that what occurs here is as much a self-recognition—a means of confronting and caring for the self—as it is a recognition of the value of other lives. Updike has staged his conclusion in a way that makes the act of taking pity on those around him necessarily a form of redirected self-pity, and as *recognizable as such*. Ahmad loses his God because he comes to understand his forbearance on behalf of others

as form of leniency on himself.

This helps to make sense of the novel's concluding use of its entomological motif, a symbolic pattern that Updike establishes in the novel's earliest pages. Ahmad's mundane encounters with the crushed bodies of insects and worms on his walk to school become a way in which he can (safely?) ponder the likelihood of suffering's cosmic irrelevance: "The deaths of insects and worms, their bodies so quickly absorbed by earth and weeds and road tar, devilishly strive to tell Ahmad that his own death will be just as small and final" (5). This symbolic node wherein an abject insectile body conveys human smallness and defenselessness continues when Joryleen's preacher riffs on a biblical comparison between Israelites and grasshoppers, which he says, "live in the weed for a few quick days, in the hay of a meadow before it is cut, in the outfield of the baseball field where nobody ever hits the ball, and then are gone" (54). Sheikh Rashid figures unbelievers as insects to dehumanize them and bridles at the possibility of pitying them (which is, of course, a means of soliciting pity):

The cockroaches that slither out from the baseboard and from beneath the sink—do you pity them? The flies that buzz around the food on the table, walking on it with the dirty feet that have just danced on feces and carrion—do you pity them? [...] They would take over your table, your kitchen; they will settle into the very food as it passes into your mouth if you do not destroy them. They have no feelings. (77)

What is dishonest in pitying insects, then, is that it attributes to them what they do not have but which, by virtue of this, defines us, defines the human: feeling. In this way, Ahmad's imam undoes his metaphor's rhetorical strength, for the young man is certain

that “Joryleen, though an unbeliever, did have feelings” (77). By making feeling, from auto-affection to complex passion, the basis of ethical value, Shaikh Rashid undoes religious logic; it becomes clear that the distinction between earthly sensations and the movements of the soul is a matter of gradation, not opposition.

This clarifies a later moment in which Ahmad, the day before his planned suicide, observes an upturned beetle, which though “many a boy—Tylenol, for instance—would simply crush this irritating presence with his foot,” Ahmad squeamishly attempts to save (253). He is too late, however: the uprighted beetle squirms confusedly and then expires. “For five minutes that partake of the eternal,” we are told, “Ahmad watches” incapable of comprehending how, though “[i]t had been on its back in its death throws and now is dead, leaving behind a largeness that belongs not to this world. The experience, so strangely magnified, has been, Ahmad feels certain, supernatural” (254). Ahmad’s spiritualization of the most common form of death on Earth—that is, his sentimentalization of all suffering, carries with it the curious scalar inversion by which human suffering and desire is transmogrified and minimized to the insectile level. This is the inverted corollary of Shaikh Rashid’s unfortunate comparison: if ethics is a matter of mere feeling, then humans are undifferentiated and inseparable from the lowest forms of life. And so, after the sentimental delivery from catastrophic death and the seeming remediation of Ahmad’s character, this is the vision of Manhattan the novel offers:

All around them, up Eighth Avenue to Broadway, the great city crawls with people [...], all reduced by the towering structures around them to the size of insects, but scuttling, hurrying, intent in the milky morning sun upon some plan or scheme or hope they are hugging to themselves, their reason for living another

day, each one of them impaled live upon the pin of consciousness, fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation. That, and only that. (310)

Is this humanism from which the triumph has been cut? Is this a genuine reversal of sentimental logic? Isolate beings, self-occupied and homely—it would be a truly chilling reversal were it not in fact a return to a scene of suffering which the novel has assiduously pushed to the margins. “That and only that” is both what is there and what is lost in Manhattan, and Updike directs this pathos at his readers in a way which exactly parallels how Ahmad sees and takes pity on himself in the form of the young black girl in the Lincoln Tunnel. We are meant to return, imaginatively, to the scene of the (terrorist’s) crime, and there confront the unaccountably monumental smallness of the loss. This renunciation of the sentimental view of humankind, this ostensible reserve over September 11’s loss, becomes a more insistent call to feel and mourn.

Organic Shrapnel

Approaching the events of September 11 from the vantage of a single family, Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* domesticates 9/11 in the partial, knowing way in which Foer’s and Updike’s texts do. Just as Foer’s Schells and Updike’s uneasy triad of Ahmad, Levy, and Terry clearly function as synecdoches of the culture to which they belong, so too does DeLillo’s Neudecker family, such as it is. When Keith Neudecker escapes death by walking out of the collapsing South Tower at the novel’s beginning, he boards a cab and, without thinking, directs it to the address of his estranged wife, Lianne, thus rekindling their passion briefly and beginning what will ultimately prove a failed attempt to reunite

as a family. The possibility of a broader affective network—of survivors, of those in grief—is hinted at by Keith’s short-lived affair with Florence Givens, the woman whose briefcase he accidentally carries from the collapsing tower. This union too proves precarious and untenable; though they share their feelings, their feelings cannot be shared. The domestic and affective connections at the center of *Falling Man* are at once consolidated and ruptured by the horrific, historical attacks, and this doubled, contradictory motion of abortive cohesion and dispersal is precisely what the suggests has occurred at larger cultural levels. September 11, in this sense, simultaneously “brings us together” and “tears us apart.”

If the tragedy produces tensions between centrifugal and centripetal affective forces in the larger community, tantalizing with the possibility of new connections and an undivided social body, but finally unable to stabilize and make good on its intersubjective promise, then this owes, in part, to the instability of representations themselves, a theme running throughout DeLillo’s work. Therefore, in the analysis that follows, I begin by showing how, in DeLillo’s novel, representations of suffering—far from being a steady ground on which to build shared communal feeling or factual national narratives—are, though powerfully plangent, unstable and shifting fields characterized by projection and erasure. I then examine Lianne and Keith’s uneasy coupling as paradigmatic of the relation between stoic askesis and sympathetic openness to the feeling of others. Keith emblemizes the very figure—white, wounded male stoic—I have suggested was crucial to the consolidation of national feeling following September 11. DeLillo does not facilely sanction this mode of (un)emotional engagement; instead he offers a subtle

exploration of how such seeming impassivity is an attempt at communion, expression, and memorialization of loss. Ironically, though wounded stoicism is an effort to preserve a small, human core of volition and individuality in the face of impersonal disruptions, DeLillo suggests that it results in the complete erasure of personhood. Unsurprisingly, given the gendered stereotypes surrounding emotional styles, the contrary mode of emotional engagement—sympathetic projection—is emblemized in the novel by Lianne, a character keenly interested in understanding the feelings and suffering of others, including her husband Keith. DeLillo shows that sympathetic mimesis is often vital and successful; indeed the novel's subplot, focalized in the fictional 9/11 terrorist, Hammad, is an attempt to empathize with a figure few would pity. Yet, sympathy too has its own profound risks and failures: it may enable self-deception and the ultimate erasure of the self in the collective other. Therefore, DeLillo suggests that, like stoicism, sympathetic mimesis contains the material for its own negation, for it is the basis of collective emotions, and consequently the substance of the “us vs. them” binary underpinning dehumanization and alienation. If his doubled and parallel deconstruction of these two affective responses to the suffering of others suggests an exhausted resignation, this is at least partially tempered by DeLillo's resolute assertion of the persistence of our material vulnerability and corporeal interconnection. I conclude, therefore, on a note suggesting that, while a collective global feeling may be impossible, ours is one world.

First, let us consider the novel's problematization of representations of suffering. Neither of the two novels considered thus far represent September 11 as directly as does

DeLillo. But this assertion at once begs the question: what does it mean to represent such an event “directly”? Directly from what vantage? Does faithful representation mean the presentation of objective historical realities—a catalogue of the names of its dead, the tonnage of the building’s collapsed steel, the temperature of conflagration, the chemical composition of its ash—or is fidelity a question of collating subjective responses, recording the varied, contradicting, and fading memories of its survivors? The persistence of the subject/object split in Western philosophical thought bedevils the very notion of “the historical event,” since human events, no matter their objective reality, can only be defined as such by virtue of their (inter-)subjective import. What’s more, how suffering is depicted, how it is witnessed, has tremendous consequences on how sympathy functions. Indeed, one can say that DeLillo’s fictional treatment of September 11 complicates the subjective/objective divide by means of the question of feeling. Feeling, after all, is that odd slippery formation that, on one of its sides, interfaces with the empirical, indubitable world in the form of sensation and, on its other side, winds into the folds of personality in the form of emotion. Far from being a solution to the subject/object division, feeling becomes a battlefield on which this division can reinstate itself. On the one hand, the objective, inert world invades sensation and deadens it; on the other, subjective ideas of the world—regardless of their verifiability or fidelity to the material real—come to define that world. DeLillo approaches September 11, perhaps necessarily, by means of this epistemological and affective problem, attending both to how it plays out in the human body and in the “heart” of narration. I suggest that DeLillo’s novel problematizes representations of suffering in at least three ways—the

image of the Falling Man, media coverage of the event, and personal testimonies—but it is crucial at every turn to understand that DeLillo’s own novel—another *Falling Man*, another mediated treatment, another subjective declaration of experience—is implicated in each of these three.

DeLillo’s first means of exploring the problem of representing suffering emerges in the titular photograph, “Falling man,” and the fictional performance artist of the same name whose work responds to this artifact of aesthetic journalism. The picture, of one of the many hundreds of individuals who leapt to their death rather than be burned alive in the World Trade Center towers, captures an anonymous man in a business suit, frozen in eerie serenity, mid-air and upside down. Lianne’s reading of the photograph itself produces a split in reception, for there is a trace of artifice in its professional compositional framing and yet its ballistic affective power is unquestionable:

[T]he composition, she thought, darker stripes for the nearer tower, the north lighter for the other and the mass, the immensity of it, and the man set almost precisely between the rows of darker and light stripes. Headlong, free fall, she thought, and this picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific. (222)

When a performance artist begins to appear unannounced at different New York locales recreating the photograph by dressing like the anonymous dead man and suspending himself with the aid of an imperceptible safety harness, the reception he receives is also (though somewhat differently) split. “There were people shouting up at him, outraged by the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation,” Lianne notes, but then subtly shifts to

a consideration of what gives the subject its force: “It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we’d not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all” (33). Thus, the powers of the photograph and of the performance lie in their generalizability: the anonymity of the man, the way in which each spectator performs an empathetic substitution of his identity. The aestheticized suffering of this single figure, in the photograph and then in the seemingly unmediated form of the performer who quotes it, produces the “us all” to whom this vision of suffering belongs. One might think of this as the classic problem of sympathy: the simultaneous obviousness and mystery of another’s suffering.

It is an encounter that can result, too easily, in the erasure of the sufferer’s specific predicament and a substitutive focus on the feelings of the sympathetic witness. Three years after her encounter with the photo, Lianne happens on an obituary for the performance artist, one David Janiak, who has died of an apparent heart condition. But learning the details of the man’s life—of his origins, of how his brother assisted his act, or of his planned final and suicidal performance—only makes it more difficult to connect him as an individual with the figure she witnessed in his performances: “She tried to connect this man to the moment” when she had seen Falling Man, but “[t]here were no photographs of that fall. She was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and absorb” (223). She is unable to revise her memory of the performance to accommodate this new information because the central figure of suffering, the falling man, who gives a center to the scene in which he

performs and creates his audience through his act can have only a general and not an individual identity.⁶⁷ DeLillo's text suggests that the central problem of representing suffering, particularly aesthetically, is that it is always an imagining from without, precisely when it demands its audience to empathize and project themselves within. It hollows out the subject it seeks to understand and honor. DeLillo also takes the name "Falling Man" as his title, thus thrice removing it from the real anonymous suicide and underscoring the inevitability of aesthetic abstraction from reality. Because the title also refers to Keith Neudecker, DeLillo is signaling how our sympathetic engagement with this character is in a sense foreclosed by the inarticulable specificity of his suffering. But it also anticipates DeLillo's own inability to escape this logic in writing a "9/11 novel," in which he attempts to draw his reader into sympathetic identification.

DeLillo's treatment of the repeated television coverage partakes of a similar critique, suggesting how putatively objective news footage of the plane attacks cannot avoid being a space in which subjective fantasies are projected.⁶⁸ This fantastic projection helps to explain the novel's other critique of televisual mediation, namely the way in which it subverts and distorts one's intimate relationships and one's self-understanding more generally. The clearest instance of dangerous fantastic projection onto September 11's "event" occurs when Lianne's and Keith's son, Justin, creates with his friends the mysterious figure Bill Lawton, a confabulated double of Osama bin Laden, who threatens a second attack on New York, vowing "This time the towers will fall" (102). Though his parents delicately try to remind him that the towers have already fallen, Justin and his friends seem irreversibly submerged in their fantasy, which

ostensibly alleviates psychic tension by denying the collapse of the buildings but which paradoxically promises an even grimmer future. Keith and Lianne later note their own fantastic projections onto the news footage. In Lianne's recollection of the video "the skies [...] were dramas of cloud and sea storm," but when she encounters the video again, she sees that reality was "different, a clear sky that carried human terror in those streaking aircraft" (134). Keith's projection is subtler, but more intractable; "It still looks like an accident, the first one," he notes, but "by the time the second plane appears [...] we're all a little older and wiser" (135). Thus DeLillo underscores our capacity to take our fictions as reality.

The reverse of this, however, is equally possible, inasmuch as our reality, at moments of tremendous affective intensity, may seem more fictional than real. The attack's disagreeable reiteration of disaster movie conventions upset the boundary between fictional mediated projections and reality, which in turn subvert those relationships one thinks of as "the realest" and most natural. Hence, when Keith and Lianne are surprised by their own physical passion in the back of a taxi, Lianne murmurs, "*it's a movie, it's a movie*" (104). Or, similarly, after Keith's compulsive gambling increases the distance between the couple, Lianne is seized by the desire to see her husband in a televised poker game, even though he was in fact "twenty feet away at the desk in the next room reading back statements and signing checks." (213). In this later fantasy, her very being is transformed and mediated as she "imagine[s] herself in cartoon format, a total fool, hurrying to Justin's room, hair flying, and dragging him out of bed" (213). This motif subtly suggests the ways in which the very proof of September 11 as

event—the broadcasts that gripped hundreds of millions and made the spectacle truly global—itself remains stubbornly open to the renarrating fictions of its viewers. These fictions do more than contextualize the spectacle; they revise the one who watches. The sense that mediation pervades experience, a theme sounding throughout DeLillo’s work, has sharp consequences when we turn to how the affections function, for to be enveloped in ready-made narratives *or* to be uncertain about one’s own fantastic projection into such narrative explodes the coherence of the feeling self. Locating feeling in relation to the subject becomes the foremost difficulty, and because DeLillo’s novel is but another effort to narrate this horrific event, it is bound up in the very difficulty it exposes.

Falling Man confronts the problem of representing suffering in yet a third way, namely, the mode of personal testimony. Keith Neudecker proves essentially incapable of narrating his own escape from the burning tower; he has blocked a significant portion of his memories and reveals what he does recall in infrequent, terse reports. He prefers to listen to the account of Florence Givens, the woman whose briefcase he accidentally carries from the collapsing tower and with whom he begins a short-lived affair. But for Florence, too, narrating her narrow escape and the collapse of the buildings poses an emotional and ethical challenge: “I know I can’t sit here alive and safe and talk about falling down some stairs when all that terror, all those dead” (56). Crucially, Keith’s desire to hear Florence recite her memory of the trauma is connected with his desire to “try [...] to find himself in the crowd” she describes (59). He seeks an understanding of his own loss by means of her narrative; indeed, long after the affair has ended and his recollection of it dims, he remembers her “in the tower as she’d described it, in forced

march down the stairwell, and [he] thought he saw himself at times, in split instants, unshaped, a false memory too warped and fleeting to be false” (228). This is both the power and danger of narrative. It can preserve identity and connection but also overwhelm and distort it.

The work of narration is never complete because no self, no possessor of language, is capacious enough to make itself equal to the task. The “storyline” sessions Lianne moderates in which Alzheimer’s patients write short responses to prompts such as “Remembering my father” to improve their morale demonstrates this problem clearly (29). Lianne comes to know Anna C. and Omar H. in a manner commensurable with their truncated surnames. Their texts are produced in twenty-minute increments, at the mercy of their reticence and diseased memories. Nonetheless, this narrative work merits continuation for, as Lianne reflects when she is finally asked to narrate her own recollections of September 11: “For nearly two years now, ever since the storyline sessions began, with her marriage receding into the night sky, she’d listened to these men and women speak about their lives in funny, stinging, straightforward and moving ways, binding the trust among them” (126). And yet, once she enters into the autobiographical project, into the possibility of exteriorizing her interiority, she founders at its edges: “she almost told them about the brief case, the fact of its appearance and disappearance and what it meant if anything. [...] Wanted to tell them but did not. Tell them everything, say everything. She needed them to listen” (127-8). As in the other mediations discussed above, narrative reproduces the truth but with holes, gaps consciously and unconsciously produced, into which the reader must project. Beyond this one must note that the urge to

narrate, in this novel, itself emerges as a condition of loss. For the elderly members of the sessions, their memories are being lost; for Lianne, the prompt “Remembering my father,” would pose its own lacunas, because her father committed suicide to stave off his own dementia. DeLillo’s acknowledgement both of the problems of narrative mimesis and the power of other stories to overwhelm and replace our own profoundly affects the way in which we read his text. It pushes us to ask ourselves what meaning we expect his book to add to our own experience of this spectacular loss of life.

Having detailed the ways in which DeLillo figuratively repeats the problem of his own text’s production, I wish to show how the book diegetically and stylistically reveals two emotional styles, two means of coping with suffering, however it is represented: stoical askesis and sympathetic mimesis. By askesis, I mean, the (anti-)sentimentalism of a demonstrative cutting out or a flaunted elimination of feeling, precisely the unfeeling feeling Julie Ellison’s study of “the making of Anglo-American emotion” details. Here, stoical askesis is the attempt to anesthetize and block emotion, or to exert self-discipline and endure silently as a means of controlling what otherwise escapes the individual’s scope of control. Although this endurance of pain is fundamentally passive, as I have argued above, it is also culturally figured under a sign of masculinity and, through a paralogical association, is misread as a mode of activity, as vigorous pursuit of one’s own agency in the world over and above the obstacles of one’s own dangerous passions. Just as DeLillo displays his own investment in Lianne’s form of sympathetic mimesis by including within his novel an effort to understand the emotional experiences of the terrorist through fiction, so too does DeLillo’s text partake in some of the same qualities

characteristic of Keith's stoic reserve. At the level of technique, I associate Keith's attenuation of expression with DeLillo's well-established prose style, which owes to Hemingway in its laconic spaciousness. It is this arid, ironic, but often incantatory voice that allows DeLillo to avoid the charge of sentimentality, even as he narrates scenes of suffering that partake of elements from that tradition. In a sense, just as Ellison argues with regard to the mutual generation of stoic and sensible masculinities, one allows the other: a performed stoicism makes the furtive expression of male emotions safer, just as Keith is first able to recall "a waking image" of his friend Rumsey's death when he is put under anesthetic (22). Thematically, this askesis is most clearly visible in Keith's melancholic re-appropriation of the mundane ritual of a weekly poker night with his male buddies, "ready to sit and play, game-faced, testing the forces that govern events" (96). DeLillo wryly plays with the ambiguity of the ritual, for it is a means of socializing—of hosting friends, of imagining their perspective, of reading their tells—as well as a mode of intense competition, in which friendship is negated and all affect is papered over beneath the impassivity of the "poker-face."

Both aspects of the poker ritual, its severity and its conviviality, become sharpened as the group spontaneously begins to "reduce the dealer's options. [...] The banning of certain games started as a joke in the name of tradition and self-discipline but became effective over time" (96). The poker-askesis, both game and mode of self-punishment, is clearly coded as masculine, as when the group considers "narrow[ing] their intake to darkish liquors, to scotch, bourbon, brandy, the manlier tones and deeper and more intense distillations" (98). But this establishment of "structure out of willful

trivia,” is not simply a jovial diversion but a means of deepening the barely-sublimated antagonism at play on the table, for “with the shrinking of choice came the raising of stakes, which intensified the ceremony of check-writing for the long night’s losers” (98, 97). Consequently, the apparent impassivity of the poker-askesis is in fact an intensification of the affective experience, of both belonging and agonistic struggle:

All the action was somewhere behind the eyes, in naïve expectation and calculated deceit. Each man tried to entrap the others and fix limits to his own false dreams. [...] They used intuition and cold-war risk analysis. [...] They waited for the prescient moment, the time to make the bet based on the card they knew was coming. *Felt the queen and there it was.* They tossed in the chips and watched the eyes across the table. [...] There were elements of healthy challenge [...]. There were elements of one’s intent to shred the other’s gauzy manhood. (97)

Here the sentimental network of reticulated fellow feeling becomes interchangeable with the malevolent network conspiring against the subject’s manhood, a trope at least as old to American letters as Emersonian self-reliance. “Somewhere behind the eyes” allows for the mingling of calculation, motive, desire, aggression, anxieties over one’s own vulnerability, as well as the effort to identify with others, if only to understand them well enough to defeat them. And, just as sociality and its opposite are collapsed into one, so too cognition and sensation conjoin in this “feeling the queen.”

The paradoxical (anti)-sociality of poker before the attacks is mournfully repeated after them, for most of the participants in this Wednesday ritual die in the towers, making Keith’s later compulsive poker playing as much a mode of remembrance and memorialization as it is an increasingly isolating activity. After he abruptly cuts off his

affair with Florence, a relationship that allowed him to confront his traumatic experiences even if obliquely, Keith begins to compete in international poker competitions, an occupation that also pulls him from his revived marriage with Lianne. He finds himself “self-sequestered, as always, but with a spatial measure now, one of air miles and cites, a dimension of literal distance between himself and others” (212). The change is a compulsion, not a choice, but increasingly Keith sees his card playing as a mode of self-assertion, an exercise of his agency, and a substitute for his desire for violence: “Too bad I can’t join the army, “ he comments to Lianne, “[t]oo old, [...] or I could kill without penalty and then come home and be a family” (214). The reintegration of the domestic network of feeling can only be obtained, in this fantasy, by exporting retributive violence. His belligerence increases the more that plays, until he no longer sees playing as an attempt to win but instead a form of “invalidation,” a way of paining adversaries of his creation: “Make them bleed. Make them spill their precious looser’ blood” (230). But as noted above, this form of masculine, bellicose activity is also, and more profoundly, a form of passivity, a means of asserting an illusory control over the contingencies that govern all life and which emotion serve to navigate.

What is preserved in this affective withdraw is the hope for a coherent and consistent self, and here one does well to invest in Keith the full allegorical force connecting him, and other figures of white wounded stoicism following 9/11, to the mediated narratives about American identity following the attacks. Thus Keith avers:

It was finally who he was that counted, not luck or naked skill. It was strength of mind, mental edge, but not just that. There was something harder to name, a

narrowness of need or wish, or how a man's character determines his line of sight. These things would make him win but not too much, not winning of such proportions that he'd slip into someone else's skin. (227)

The governing fear is of identification: the threat to pure autonomy posed by any feeling, but especially fellow feeling. One must lose, occasionally, must make oneself endure the pain of loss to assure that one's choice is independent of the external world, apart from the rules that govern likelihood: "the choice of yes or no [...] the little binary pulse located behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are" (212). Here, what is "behind the eyes" has been sterilized of otherness, anticipation, and response, but this sterilization inadvertently kills what it sought to preserve. Keith dramatized his complete emotional askesis for the purification and preservation of subjectivity, but discovers that this exertion of discipline cleans him of personhood as well: "He wondered if he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot that understands two hundred voice commands, far-seeing, touch-sensitive but totally, rigidly controllable" (226). Keith's fate seems to imply the equivalence of total control and absolute enslavement, for to subdue one's emotions truly is to expunge the very quality that constructs subjective experience. At the table, Keith no longer studies players for tells; he "didn't care why they coughed or seemed bored or scratched a forearm. He studied the cards and knew the tendencies" (197). What began as a complex and knotty mode of identification, acknowledgment, and Hegelian struggle for recognition turns into an unhappy revision of a Deleuzian desire-machine *sans* desire, *sans* becoming. Ultimately, Keith's individual emotional response to his own corporeal vulnerability allegorically

tracts a broader cultural response, and thus DeLillo's novel offers an image of the nation, confronted by painful alterations, failing to imagine itself.

DeLillo confronts the novel's other emotional style, sympathetic mimesis, primarily through Lianne. As suggested above, however, the novel itself offers a performative corollary of the style in DeLillo's focalization of Hammad, a fictionalized September 11 hijacker. Sympathetic mimesis is the imaginative projection of one's own consciousness into another person, precisely what Keith fears in "slipping into someone else's skin." It is this imaginative projection that served, in the eighteenth-century, to define sentimentalism as a moral philosophy. As Adam Smith writes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation...[Our senses] never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations...By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations. (3-4)

It is this crossing over what the senses can deliver to us of other minds that provides sympathetic mimesis with its strength, but which also makes it dangerous for one might imagine wrongly or altogether lose the distinction between one's self and another. This erasure of distinction can lead to groupthink and us vs. them antagonisms. The last, but perhaps most severe problem associated with sympathetic mimesis, particularly as a theory of moral action, however, is the possibility of its spontaneous failure and/or its

systematic demolition.

Regardless of the failures and possibility difficulties of sympathy, the novel does occasionally invest in moments of its beneficial, healing success. One must begin by noting that not all of the moments of self-other connection need be airy imaginative affairs. Sex, too, can be a means of sympathetic commingling. Keith and Lianne re-initiate their marriage on precisely these terms: “She wanted contact and so did he” (35). His brief affair with Florence Givens also seems to operate on this logic; it is not merely a physical diversion, but a question of love for her. As he says to himself of the affair “There was emotion, yes, but generated by external conditions he could not control” (166). Hammad’s girlfriend, too, seems to be attempting to connect with him in this deep manner: “She wanted him to know her whole presence, inside and out” (82). Nonetheless, while the novel’s interest in the capacity for exploding the boundaries of the self through sex links up with its final affirmation of our bodies’ shared materiality, one must note that in none of the instances mentioned above is there a permanent connection made. Just as in the case with more imaginative projections, sex unites and comforts individuals in contingent, provisional, and not always successful ways.

Sympathetic connections are always—sometimes literally—a gamble, as is made explicit when Keith, resolving himself to come clean about his affair with Florence, attempts to mirror Lianne. Walking to meet her with his son, Keith begins by trying to telepathically anticipate what route she would take through the crowded streets on Manhattan, an almost impossible feat akin to what Martin calls “*Gedankenübertragung*, or the [telepathic] the broadcasting of thoughts” (191). As he feels his way to her on the

streets, however, he also attempts to imagine her reaction to the revelation of his affair:

He would tell her about Florence. She would get a steak knife and kill him.

He would tell her about Florence. She would enter a period of long and tortured withdrawal.

He would tell her about Florence. She would say, After we've renewed our marriage. She would say, After the terrifying day of the planes has brought us together again. How could the same terror? She would say, how could the same terror threaten everything we've felt for each other, everything I've felt these past weeks. (162)

In total, he imagines a dozen possible reactions. This diffracted, multiple and contradictory imagining has a clear parallel in Keith's approach to gambling, his effort to "know the tendencies." DeLillo resolves this scene of double imaginative effort in a curious but telling way. The empathetic anticipation of Lianne's reaction to his affair proves to be ineffective, or rather it serves as a substitute for the real revelation and subsequent conversation. But the more unlikely effort to read Lianne's mind and randomly predict her location among the crowds of Manhattan actually works. This reunion of the family, at once miraculous and inconsequential, forms a kind of climax to the novel, signaled in the language of this passage, depicting Lianne's surprised discovery of their faces in the crowd: "They were bright and undisguised, moving past people wedged in routine anonymity. The sky seemed so neat. They were bright with urgent life, that's why they were running, and she raised a hand so they might see her in the mass of faces, thirty-six days after the planes" (170). But this climax does not have permanent weight. The sentimental prospect of everlasting familial belonging is illusory.

DeLillo clearly suggests that domestic unity is untenable largely because of

Keith's ultimate unwillingness to share his interior feelings. He never confesses his relationship with Florence to Lianne, nor does he narrate for her the depth of his feelings of loss. This caginess marks a way in which he is deeply incompatible with Lianne, whose hunger for intimacy seems never ending:

This was the man who would not submit to her need for probing intimacy, overintimacy, the urge to ask, examine, delve, draw things out, trade secrets, tell everything. It was a need that had the body in it, hands, feet genitals, scummy odors, clotted dirt, even if it was all talk and sleepy murmur. (105)

Lianne's almost parasitic hunger for the suffering of others, so at odds with Keith's approach to self-disclosure, carries with it also a proprietary desire to be the sole possessor of knowledge about him, particularly his suffering. When acquaintances begin to call her soliciting news about Keith, each predictably eager to angle a closer relationship with the catastrophe he survived, Lianne is surprised by her own reaction: "She didn't want to believe she was being selfish in her guardianship of the survivor, determined to hold exclusive rights. This was where he wanted to be..." (20). An irreducible tension exists between this desire for privacy—for ownership over an emotional zone, either one's own individual realm of affection or constructed zones of belonging such as the family—and the effort to take in otherness which otherwise characterizes her: "She wanted to absorb everything, childlike, the dust of stray sensation, whatever she could breathe in from other people's pores. She used to think she was other people. Other people have truer lives" (105). Being at once one's self and one's other does not disentangle the knots of emotional conflict and misunderstanding that can arise

between them. It risks comprehensive self-alienation.

Far from facilely endorsing the mode of sympathetic mimesis over stoical askesis, DeLillo demonstrates the irreducible problems it too poses. First, sympathetic mirroring can be a profound obstacle to one's self-understanding. When Lianne witnesses a second performance of the Falling Man routine, which figuratively repeats the colossal trauma of September 11, she is overwhelmed and proves incapable of differentiating her own reactions from those around her: "This was too near and deep, too personal. All she wanted was a look, catch someone's eye, see what she herself was feeling" (163). Lianne is here seen in purely reactive terms, defining herself in relation to others. DeLillo clearly ties Lianne's incapacity to understand herself to this affective/epistemological problem with regard to art and fantastic projection. She cannot differentiate her absorption of the meaning of the art-act (and thus of the act of suffering it represents) from her projection onto it:

She wondered if this was his intention, to spread the word this was, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and the hijacked planes.
Or she was dreaming his intentions. She was making it up, stretched so tight across the moment that she could not think her own thoughts. (165)

The ambiguity Keith discovered in himself, the destruction of his core of being by means of the very process meant to preserve it, finds a corollary in this profoundly isolating uncertainty and self-estrangement. The very technique, which was meant to guarantee the honest engagement with the world, leaves one incapable of understanding even one's self.

DeLillo again shows this kind of self-alienation when Lianne examines her image in the mirror, “She stood in the bathroom looking in the mirror. The moment seemed false to her, a scene in a movie when a character tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror” (47). Intriguingly, this parallels and anticipates Hammad’s incapability of seeing himself in a mirror shortly before he embarks on his suicidal course: “He sat in a barber chair and looked in the mirror. He was not here, it was not him [...] He is thinking again, looking past the face in the mirror, which is not his, and waiting for the day too come, clear skies, light winds, when there is nothing left to think about” (175, 178). That Lianne and Hammad share this self-blindness indicates that DeLillo sees in sympathetic mimesis the seeds of its own undoing, for this kind of identification can lead, perhaps inevitably leads, to the construction of exclusive groups. By opening the self to communitarian affective belonging, one loses the capacity to stand apart and critique the community’s disposition.

In fact, even though (or perhaps because) her *emotional* modus operandi is the characteristically liberal openness to others, DeLillo takes pains to reveal that Lianne demonstrates many of the most malignant attributes of *politically* chauvinistic fears and hatreds. One can understand this paradox as an outgrowth of the privileges of mourning, for Lianne’s antipathies are clearly religious and racial, that is, they stem from a desire for vengeance against the Arab perpetrators of the attacks. DeLillo’s novel relates the kind of projection involved in emotional and aesthetic connection to the projection of evil onto a generic category of people. Lianne’s anxiety and anger over her neighbor’s playing of vaguely Middle Eastern music, even as she acknowledges its beauty, explodes

into a heated confrontation (70, 119-20). She seems incapable of controlling her antipathy, even as she understands it to be false and pathological: “They’re the ones who think alike, talk alike, eat the same food at the same time. *She knew this wasn’t true.* Say the same prayers, word for word, in the same prayer stance, day and night, following the arc of sun and moon” (68 italics mine). Lastly, when she has evidence that her mother’s lover, Martin was possibly a member of a Baader-Meinhof-style terrorist organization, Kommune One, Lianne is troubled by her willingness to accept him: “Maybe he was a terrorist but he was one of ours, she thought, and the thought chilled her, shamed her—one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white” (195).

DeLillo brilliantly illuminates the emotional mechanics of belonging and isolation at the heart of identification in a passage recalling Lianne’s trip to Cairo as a young student, worth quoting at length:

Those nearby saw her, smiled, some of them, and spoke to her, one or two, and she was forced to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they sent back to her. She became her face and features, her skin color, a white person, white her fundamental meaning, her state of being. This is who she was, not really but at the same time yes, exactly, why not. She was privileged, detached, self-involved, white. It was there in her face, educated, unknowing, scared. She felt all the bitter truth that stereotypes contain. The crowd was gifted at being a crowd. This was their truth. They were at home, she in the wave of bodies, the compressed mass. Being crowd, this was a religion in itself. (184-5)

Basing her identity on the reaction of others, their responsiveness, their willingness to smile or speak, leaves her vulnerable to redefinition. While this redefinition is potentially an enlightening one that would allow her to confront her cultural and racial privilege, a

privilege that has invisibly underwritten so much of her experience, yet it also becomes an instance in which the “bitter truth [of] stereotypes” are re-inscribed. Expelled from the crowd’s belonging, she can for the first time understand the dangers posed to the isolated individual by the crowd, but instead of extending this knowledge to her own identification with her culture, she attributes it to the other.

This partial extension of sympathetic identification, DeLillo suggests, can enable the most pathologically anti-social responses. The novel’s focalization of Hammad, a daring effort of DeLillo’s part to imagine the experiences and psychology of the September 11 terrorists, confirms this. Crucially, it is not that Hammad is incapable of identification. Indeed, he becomes “total brothers” with his jihadist cohorts (83). This conspiratorial brotherhood is founded in fellow feeling: “They felt things together, he and his brothers. They felt the claim of danger and isolation. They felt the magnetic effect of plot” (174). What is desired, then, is the infinite and complete expansion of this circle of fellow feeling so that no exception is permitted: “The world changes first in the mind of the man who wants to change it. The time is coming, our truth, our shame, and each man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation” (80). The relationship between conspiratorial belonging and the totalitarian erasure of the individual has been a preoccupying theme for DeLillo in several of his works, not least *Libra* and *Mao II*, but the roots of his treatment of Hammad are most clearly visible in his essay in *Harper’s*, December 2001, entitled “In the Ruins of the Future.” There, he imagines the terrorist in the supermarket, incapable of sympathetically identifying with those around him. “Does the sight of a woman pushing a stroller soften the man to her

humanity and vulnerability, and her child's as well, and all the people he is here to kill?" DeLillo asked rhetorically. "This is his edge, that he does not see her... There is no defenseless human at the end of his gaze" (34). This sentimental failure of the sentimental scene (the mother and her child being the tradition's foremost means of softening hearts), is repeated in *Falling Man* almost verbatim (171). But intriguingly, in the novelistic treatment, DeLillo implicates the imaginative identification integral to sentimentalism as being part of the creation of this deadly us vs. them, for, as Hammad's coconspirator, Amir (clearly Mohammed Atta) avers: "there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them" (176).

Consequently, for DeLillo both the control represented by stoical askesis and the affective connectivity represented by sympathy are necessary aspects of our emotional response to suffering. By dramatizing the malignant inversions each of which is capable if left unchecked, he implicitly argues for emotional sophistication on his reader's part. DeLillo's reader is asked to employ both restraint and compassion in order to navigate the emotional arcs and cultural diagnoses *Falling Man* contains. Nonetheless, the novel also suggests that a more immediate and less studied set of responses underlie both empathic identification and emotional self-restraint, namely the body's commingling with the world. The body represents a way of confronting polarities of interiority and exteriority; at the level of matter, there is no line strictly demarcating the shared spaces of intimate bodies, violent incursions, and global claims to sovereignty. Elizabeth Grosz's elucidation of Merleau-Ponty's complex conception of the flesh of the world is here helpful:

Merleau-Ponty suggests a notion of flesh as a designation of the world's capacity to turn in on itself through the living and the non-living as modes of their mutual entwinement and necessary interlinkage. The flesh of the world does not just clothe all—subjects, objects, and their relations—with its touch; it double back on itself, it reduplicates itself as the invisible underside of the visible. (125)

I connect this material reduplication of itself with the grotesque notion, mentioned briefly in *Falling Man* of organic shrapnel. While Keith is being treated for his injuries immediately after his escape from the burning towers, his doctor tells him of how the remains of suicide bombers can become organic shrapnel in their victim's bodies: "The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who's in striking range" (16). The grotesqueness of this image reduplicates our horror at the bomber himself; the process of weaponizing one's body seems the most profound and enigmatic betrayal of humanism. But viewed from a different angle, it can be treated as a metaphor of the ways in which our others, our enemies, are already embedded in ourselves. In this respect, the novel is a turning away from the figure of the social body—projected by the purist delusions of stoicism and the representational traps of sympathy—and a wary affirmation of our shared materiality and, consequently, shared global space.

Consider two climactic moments in which the corporeal becomes a site of discovery. The first occurs at the climax of Lianne's struggle with her grief over her mother's death and her consequent turn to religion for consolation. In a moment which

appears to be the culmination of a religious conversion, it occurs to Lianne that God's existence might be the profound source of human loneliness as well as the means by which this loneliness is assuaged, but then she realizes that this would-be dialogue with God was in fact her own neurological performance:

She was arguing with herself but it wasn't an argument, just the noise the brain makes.

She had normal morphology. Then one late night, undressing, she yanked a clean green T-shirt over sweat she smelled [...] it was just her, the body through and through. It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn't even something she smelled as much as knew. It was something she'd always known. [...] She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day. (236)

It is significant that DeLillo treats this moment not as a failed effort to transcend a state of spiritual poverty and isolation, but instead the realization of the reality of the world and a consequent rebirth, albeit one marked by the abandonment of her marital attachment. The second instance of corporeal "discovery" represents DeLillo's acknowledgment that the body is not simply the ever-rejuvenating site of becoming, but also the zone of agonizing pain, of fragility, vulnerability and death. It comes in the novel's concluding description of the destruction of the towers, when Keith confusedly attempts to save his mortally injured friend, Rumsey:

He found Rumsey in the smoke and dust, facedown in the rubble and bleeding badly. He tried to lift him and turn him [...]. He looked at Rumsey, who'd fallen away from him, upper body lax, face barely belonging. The whole business of being Rumsey was in shambles now. Keith held tight to the belt buckle. He

stood and looked at him and the man opened his eyes and died. (242-3)

Keith's traumatic realization of the fragility of human identity, the flimsiness of the "business of being" anyone, so quickly converted to shambles, comes when he "smelled something dismal and understood it was him, things sticking to his skin, dust particles, smoke, some kind of oily grit on his face and hands mixing with the body, slop, paste-like, with the blood and saliva and cold sweat, and it was himself he smelled, and Rumsey" (244). Rumsey's blood, sprayed onto his friend, awakens Keith to the feebleness of being, a feebleness which Keith spends the rest of his life attempting to deny. The fantasy that the body's limits can be transcended, in the afterlife of the jihadist or, far less ruinously, by the stoic's masterful control over himself, is revealed as the novel's ultimate object of pathos.

Having stretched sympathetic projection beyond its customary bounds and having critically assessed the treacherous terrain posed by representations of suffering, DeLillo seems to conclude warily that there is not an adequate form for the proper, imaginative, and ameliorative repetition of feeling, neither the promiscuous embrace of sympathy nor the protective retreat of stoicism. Yet he also emphasizes that the problem of confronting suffering is unavoidable, an obvious but oft-elided fact he emphasizes by repeating, at the beginning and end of the novel, his description of the World Trade Center attacks. A deconstructive shift occurs between DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins in the Future," (in which the terrorist's incapacity to sympathize was his strength) to his novel (in which sustained communal emotion—the family, the lovers, the poker players, the nation, even

the terrorist network—are all degrading, collapsing in on themselves or exploding outwards like the buildings at the center of his book). This is perhaps why the novel, for its elegiac fineness, is curiously unsatisfying, though nearly every passage read in isolation can achieve poignant strength. There is no cumulative forceful affective movement, but rather conflicting gusts like whirls of ashy air. If we began this chapter by looking at the way the popular media used the attacks to conjure coherent social bodies where there may have in fact been none, DeLillo's mournful attention to our material bodies, their fragility and vulnerability can remind us, in an odd sentimentalization, that we at least share that.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Having now considered specific iterations and revisions of sentimentalism within contemporary literature, I now turn to the task of accounting in the form of a sketch the relation between these revisions and the rise of postmodernism. In order to do so, I begin by reviewing David Harvey's account of the major political and economic shifts of the last thirty years that conditioned both the changes in urban space and, in his view, the corresponding emergence of postmodern culture. Following this, I turn to an earlier, related line of argument, offered in Fredric Jameson's influential *Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*, on the relation between feeling, spatio-political change, and culture. After having situated Jameson's claims in relation to my own, I take up his idea of "cognitive mapping" and use it to review very briefly a distilled formulation of the findings offered in these chapters. What is at stake here is understanding the modes of emotional engagement available to those writing, thinking, and living in a culture dominated by our contemporary philosophical assumptions, epistemological doubts, and spatio-economic practices—a culture broadly describable as postmodern.

Before going further, however, one must consider terminology. I take on the term "postmodern," to describe these artists with great reluctance, even though the term remains, however flaggingly, a critical touchstone for nearly all of the authors considered by this study. Indeed, the burden of previous diagnoses, celebrations, and condemnations with which "postmodern" is loaded only discourage its further use to describe these

writers. First, one must mark the gulf that exists between a culture that is postmodern and an aesthetic practice that goes by that name. My presentation of the views of Harvey and Jameson should contextualize broad changes in cultural belief and urban living relevant to these authors. To say that the work of the authors considered here cannot be separated from these shifts emphatically does not mean they should be blithely equated with them either. In short, these are postmodern writers, but their postmodernity stands in critical relation to that of the culture surrounding them. The problem of using the term is further complicated by the fact that the change in formal elements toward a characteristically postmodern aesthetic begins in a period decades before the parameters of my current study, that is, in the early 1960s—with John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy*, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, and Thomas Pynchon’s *V*, among other groundbreaking texts. Furthermore, the shift from a Keynesian to a neoliberal approach to political governance and economic distribution also occurs significantly after the initial emergence of a postmodern aesthetic in literature and culture. Therefore, while here I consider these authors as writing within a postmodern tradition, one must understand them as making use of a set of innovations—“a heightening of artifice, a delight in verbal play and formal manipulation of fictive elements, the widespread use of fantasy and surrealism, a tendency to present obviously fictive characters working out their destinies in languages of pure language, dream, or other fiction”—characteristic of an earlier period by grafting them to a more realist aesthetic, a trend within postmodernism that began in the 1970s (McCaffery xiii). Therefore, it may be better simply to suggest that these works are postmodern to the

extent that they 1.) reflect to a greater or lesser extent postmodernism's characteristic metafictional self-reflexivity, 2.) are conscious of their own positionality within the culture they describe and therefore largely eschew the impersonally hierarchical narrative distance characteristic of realism, and 3.) take as their subject individuals within a contemporary milieu who strain to locate elusive realities behind highly mediated representations. That such a set of qualities could, as aptly, describe some works characterized as modernist demonstrates the difficulty of classification in this case.

Let us then return to the material grounds out of which these texts emerge, for there we might be on slightly firmer ground. As I discussed in my introduction, influential geographer David Harvey has traced the manifold consequences of the urbanizing process—a process he sees as inseparable from capitalism— throughout his work, which cannot be surveyed here. Nonetheless, it is worth reviewing his assessment of the general consequences of our economic system, as well as the specific shape those consequences took in America's cities. For our purposes, at a most general and theoretical level, capitalism's spatial and temporal fixes result in three key consequences. First, the politico-economic processes he details result in the creation and expansion of cities, because dense cities are the social form most enabling to capitalism's structural needs. As Harvey avers urbanization will inevitably increase as

Vast concentrations of capital and labour [...] come together in metropolitan areas of incredible complexity, while transport and communication systems, stretched in far-flung nets around the globe, permit information and ideas as well as material goods and even labour power to move around with relative ease. Factories and fields, schools, churches, shopping centres and parks, roads and railways litter a landscape that has been indelibly and irreversibly carved out

according to the dictates of capitalism. (Limits 373)

Second, these evermore urban spaces are characterized by the geographical distribution and segmentation of populations based on ever intensifying social stratification. Third, the distances and times it takes to accumulate capital and circulate commodities shrinks, and, because our experience of distance and temporality follows suit, we feel an increasing “time-space compression” (Conditions 147). This explanation led him, in 1987’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*, to conclude that the resulting fragmentation and depthlessness of our experience of space and time under global capitalism conditioned the rise of postmodern culture. The postmodernism, here, is understood as a change in architecture, philosophy, visual arts, and narrative in which style, meaning, and value judgments all seemed somehow bereft of stable moorings in a rational worldview—and that are reflexively aware of this predicament. Abstractly speaking, therefore, the system Harvey describes would be characterized by the increasingly uneven distribution of economic suffering and a simultaneously mounting sense of sharing a single world. Within postmodernity, then, is a contradictory feeling of both the fragmentation of “worlds” (an increasing awareness of the juxtapositional gulfs between cultures, locales, and levels of privilege) and the interconnection or interpenetration of these multiple worlds in a sublime, global space. These two contradictory trends increase the necessity of both the sentimental soothing of pain and the explanatory projection of a coherent social body.

But what is the relation between postmodernity and the economic shifts producing

changes in urban living in the last thirty years? To understand Harvey's answer, we must shift from his elucidation of postmodern culture, which he sees as emerging initially between 1968 and 1972, to his polemic on the rise of neoliberalism and its effect on urban life (Condition 38). In brief, neoliberalism holds that social "well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms" while

State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, [...] the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort [...] state interventions [...] for their own benefit. (Neoliberal 2)

In other words, neoliberalism requires an abandonment or severe diminishment of state-based welfare protections and other Keynesian stimulation of demand because, on this view, no privileged place exists within a society from which to objectively judge social needs and their solutions. It is common knowledge that this line of argument, by dint of its most persuasive advocates—Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, in particular—came to shape the political rhetoric, the philosophical assumptions, and the governmental budgets of the vast majority of capitalist countries from the late 1970s well into the post-millennium. Harvey's contention, however, is that neoliberalism began in earnest in American cities, particularly in New York City in the 1970s (Neoliberal 45). After industrial restructuring and suburbanization eroded the economic base of many American cities, the resulting acute social unrest in the 1960s led the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to solve the problem through an "expansion of public employment and public provisions" (Neoliberal 45). In 1973, however, as one civil servant put it, "Nixon

has simply declared that the urban crisis is over" and sharply reduced the federal aid to the municipalities, with the result that within two years time in the midst of a recession, New York City fell woefully short of meeting its budget due to its service outlays (Neoliberal 45). The city was pushed into technical bankruptcy after President Ford and the city's financial institutions refused to roll over the debt, leading to the famous New York Daily News headline "Ford to City: Drop Dead" (Neoliberal 45-6). A group of investment bankers agreed to bail out the city on terms that gave them control of the city's budget "to implement wage freezes and cutbacks in public employment and social provision (education, public health, transport services)" (Neoliberal 45). The explicit goal of the bankers was to write a budget that would be, in the approving words of Ford's Secretary of the Treasury William Simon, "so punitive, the overall experience so painful, that no city, no political subdivision would ever be tempted to go down the same road" (Simon 151). As Sen. William Proxmire told Mayor Koch "It is cruel that it has to come out of the hide of the workers, but that's the way it is" (qtd. in Lichten 186). The immediate result, according to Harvey, was a manifest deterioration of both the social and physical infrastructure of the city: "daily life in New York became grueling and the civic atmosphere turned mean" but "demoralized, working-class New Yorkers reluctantly assented to the new realities" (Neoliberalism 46). Harvey's view is that this experiment in strategically imposed austerity was the pilot case for the neoliberal program, which would be enforced more broadly within the US, Britain, and then throughout the world (Neoliberal 48). Whether or not New York's case was as crucial as Harvey argues matters less than the fact that these policy shifts away from Keynesian liberalism's

emphasis on full employment and reducing the human costs of private enterprise through state expenditure lead to the political, economic, and cultural conditions to which the authors of this study respond. So if there long background of this study is sentimentalism's history, its shorter *durée* is the economic decline of American cities and the evisceration of its social protection network following the abandonment of Keynesian economics and embrace of neoliberal reforms.

Harvey attributes the rise of neoliberalism to class warfare, but this minimizes the ways in which the emergence of neoliberal budget priorities coincides with a broader loss of faith in Keynesian liberalism's technocratic acumen. Exemplary of this shift is the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, on March 16, 1972, which Charles Jencks declared to mark "the day Modern architecture died" (9). The massive building complex, designed by Minoru Yamasaki, who later went on to design the World Trade Center, had replaced the dilapidated slums of an extremely poor black ghetto of St. Louis in 1955. By the late 1960s, the projects had such low occupancy that they were effectively abandoned. The complex had deteriorated into a crumbling, crime-ridden neighborhood, with muggings and rapes common in the building's corridors (Patterson 336). Its architect lamented: "I never thought people were that destructive" (qtd. in Patterson 336). Jenck's attributes the significance he does to Pruitt-Igoe's demolition because it represents the repudiation and abandonment of "the most progressive ideals of CIAM (the Congress of International Modern Architects) [...] the intelligent planning of abstract space to promote healthy behavior" which the buildings represented, thus in his mind demonstrating that "the philosophies of Rationalism, Behaviorism, and

Pragmatism” were, however paradoxically, irrational (9). It was an abandonment of the hope that these compassionate ambitions could be realized that, for Jencks marked the moment as historically significant. In *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, Harvey sees postmodernism—this repudiation of “abstract, theoretical, [and] doctrinaire ideals” and embrace of “the vernacular landscapes” such as “suburbs and commercial strips”—as a function of capitalism’s logic. In this reading, he followed Fredric Jameson’s 1984 essay “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” Jameson’s essay is a particularly apt text on which to conclude our study, for Jameson sought to explain the relation between multinational capitalism and postmodern culture directly through the question of how it *feels* to inhabit new urban spaces. Therefore, I conclude with a brief critical appraisal of Jameson’s claim that postmodernity is characterized by a “waning of affect” and thus am able to address the selection of the authors for my study (10).

In his essay “Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism,” first published in the *New Left Review* in 1984 and subsequently reprinted in a book by the same name in 1991, Jameson argued that “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world” (5). Among its other distinctive attributes, Jameson claimed, postmodernism was characterized by “the waning of affect,” an affective experience that occurs because of a deconstruction of the depth vs. surface binary on which, he declares, the theory of emotional expression depends (10, 12). Though Jameson notes that it would be inaccurate to suggest that “all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity, has vanished” from postmodern images such as Andy Warhol’s

Diamond Dust Shoes, all that remains is “a strange compensatory decorative exhilaration” (10). The shift from modernism to postmodern emotional registers is therefore, for Jameson, an elimination of the pathos that Van Gogh produce via his image of badly worn peasant shoes or that Walker Evans and James Agee created with their *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (10). This loss of pathos owes to what Jameson considers to be postmodernism’s “radically antianthropomorphic” orientation, which in turn flows from an urban architectural aesthetic for which “the representation of space itself has come to be felt as incompatible with the representation of the body” (36). Postmodernism, in this view, is the end “of radical isolation and solitude, anomie, private revolt,” because “the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter’s fragmentation” (14).

Jameson’s claim about the modes of emotional engagement available within postmodern culture was—or at any rate has become in historical retrospect—terribly overstated. As the present study shows through an examination of characteristically postmodern literary texts—texts that are, by various turns and in variant degrees decentered, fragmentary, metaleptical, reflexive, conscious of their own positionality, suspicious of representational logic, and given to ironic intertextual appropriation—the arousal of pathos for political ends continues and, indeed, has been invigorated by the very spatial and economic changes Jameson notes. Though it would be churlish to fault a twenty-five year old essay for forecasting with insufficient precision all the emotional possibilities of a culture just emerging at the time of its composition, all continued use of vague terminology such as “waning” should be emphatically rejected. Such an approach

ignores the by-now-obviously complex way in which contemporary writers who work at the intersection of late realism and postmodern reflexivity make use of more traditional emotional forms for their political and aesthetic ends. To his credit, Jameson farsightedly notes that postmodern art and literature may yet produce works that re-conquer “a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories” (51). Jameson calls this “reconquest” of the relationship between subjective experience and real conditions “cognitive mapping,” and I suggest that we consider the resurgence and revision of sentimentalism by writers working within postmodern culture as precisely such an effort to locate us in relation to each other (51). When read in this light, the value of the present study—incomplete and imperfect though it is—lies not only in the prospect of a better articulation of sentimentalism and its legacy. Rather, because it examines in detail how the reflexivity characteristic of postmodern literature (its consciousness of the conditions of its own production and its status as fiction) works with and amends the affective pedagogy of sentimentalism (a mode often derided precisely for its too self-conscious production of feeling) it has also taken up the task of sketching postmodernism’s circuitous affective maps through the city. The function of reflexivity here calls to mind Linda Hutcheon’s observation apropos the best postmodern literature that

This self-reflexivity does not weaken, but on the contrary, strengthens and points to the direct level of historical engagement and reference of the text. Like many postmodern novels, this provisionality and uncertainty (and the willful and overt construction of meaning too) do not cast doubt upon their seriousness’, but rather

define the new postmodern seriousness that acknowledges the limits and powers of reporting or writing the past, recent or remote. (117)

Although the authors of the 9/11 novels considered here each domesticate the space of global conflict, s(t)imulate their reader's grief, and draw us into comprehensive communities of feeling, they also each embedded powerful ambivalences over the possibility of our sharing each other's world—ambivalences flowing from an autocritique of their own status as fictions. Philip Roth, Anna Deavere Smith, John Edgar Wideman, and Chang-Rae Lee each used the figure of the author—Zuckerman, Smith herself, Cudjoe, Wideman, Henry, writer of “legends,” as well as the historical figures of Stowe and Whitman—as a means of both modeling and critiquing sympathetic witness as a means of negotiating the deeply disjunctive social space of America. These writers provide us with emotional maps through worlds of deepening inequalities and perceptual disparities. They make us conscious of the fact that their maps are provisional, in some sense fictional, but they also can reveal to us the ways in which such maps are also necessary received and historical. They demonstrate the promises and problems of pain alliances, even as they draw us into one produced through their own textual performance. Thus, by having traced how the affective vocabulary of sentimentalism—an emotional repertoire that foregrounds mutuality and care—has taken shape in these individual literary texts *in relation to changes in urban processes* that were above all about austerity and the abandonment of state-based “care,” we have begun a fuller examination of the contradictory emotional modes demanded by postmodern space(s) than has been undertaken in literary studies heretofore

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NOTES

¹ For an engaging consideration of how this shift in the acceptability of racist discourse following King's assassination affected African American fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, consider Andrew Warnes's "In the shadow of the gun: African-American fiction and the anxieties of nostalgia."

² See Roth's interview with Charles McGrath: "Zuckerman's Alter Brain." *New York Times Book Review* 7 May 2000

³ For example of a critic preferring "Newark Trilogy," Kimmage, Michael. "In History's Grip: Philip Roth's 'Newark Trilogy'." *PhiN: Philologie im Netz* 32 (2005): 15-31. For the more common reference—American Trilogy—see Philip Abbot's Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan: democratic theory, populism, and Philip Roth's American Trilogy. *Canadian Review of American Studies* (37:3) 2007, 431-52., as well as Mark Shechner's Roth's American Trilogy. *The Cambridge companion to Philip Roth*. Parrish, Timothy, ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 142-57

⁴ For a brief, insightful account of the Zuckerman Bound trilogy, see Donald M. Kartiganer's "Zuckerman Bound: celebrant of silence." *The Cambridge companion to Philip Roth*. Parrish, Timothy, ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007: (35-54)

⁵ Marshall Bruce Gentry offers an intriguing reading of *American Pastoral* suggest that the novel critiques the patriarchal figure. While I follow Gentry's exploration of how

Roth's male talker's are often ironized rather than figures of pure sympathetic identification, I do not think that Roth offers an extended feminist rereading of himself.

⁶ For example, Michiko Kakutani's "A Postwar Paradise Shattered From Within," Kakutani, Michiko, "A Postwar Paradise Shattered from Within," in *New York Times*, April 15, 1997. C11, C14.

⁷ David Zucker, for instance, in "The Breath of the Dummy: Philip Roth's Nathan Zuckerman Trilogies," suggests that "Zuckerman [...] transforms himself into the chorus of three tragedies," whereas I would suggest, following Zucker's own argument that Roth is engaged in a complex literary ventriloquism through Zuckerman, that Zuckerman is often engaged in ventriloquisms of his own. Bonnie Lyons's "Philip Roth's American Tragedies" connects Zuckerman's role in the trilogy to Murray Krieger's description of the dramatic chorus as "a deconstructionist God, who saw chaos and said—not that it was good—but that it was and that he could tell it" (qtd in Lyon 126).

⁸ For an astute and persuasive reading of Roth's use of this technique in *American Pastoral* as well as his debts to Henry James in doing so, see Posnock 113-115.

⁹ See Norman Podhoretz's "The Adventures of Philip Roth." *Commentary*, 106.4 (1998): 25-36.

¹⁰ See especially, Tanenbaum, Laura. "Reading Roth's Sixties." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. 23 (2004): 41-54.

¹¹ The novel explores the relationship between empathy and collectivism explicitly and at great length. As Zuckerman recalls wondering in his youth: "Wasn't that what the

fascination with “the people” was really all about? What is it like to be them?” (*Married* 207).

¹² For an analysis of the use of Sophocles and the Oedipal myth in *The Human Stain*, see Rankine, Patrice D. "Passing as Tragedy: Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the Oedipus Myth, and the Self-Made Man." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 47.1 (Fall 2005): 101-112

¹³ See Lorrie Moore's review of *The Human Stain*, in which she writes, “Faunia's psychotic ex-husband and Vietnam veteran, whom Roth seems to construct from every available cliché of the Vietnam vet” (Moore 8)

¹⁴ Roth's 2007 novel, *Exit Ghost*, which takes up the Nathan Zuckerman persona once more, reveals that Zuckerman moved to the Berkshires after receiving a series of death threats from an angry reader, though the novel occasionally casts doubt on the neatness of this explanation as when “She” of Zuckerman's dialogue scenes suggests that “death threats don't explain the extreme things you've done with your life. [...] a man who sequesters himself, secludes himself the way you did, does so for a much larger reason.” [...] “What might that larger reason be?” “Escaping pain.” What pain?” “The pain of being present.” (*Exit Ghost* 136-167).

¹⁵ The way one views this problem always speaks to one's deeper methodological assumptions. A Deleuzean reading might see in the sympathetic model inherited from Adam Smith (i.e., that compassion is based in imaginative empathetic work) a contamination of the more non-representational view of sympathy held by Hume, wherein the replication of feeling outside our own direct affective experience is not so

ethically weighted. The substantial difference between these positions matters. In this particular exegetic case, since the model of sympathy on offer in the American Trilogy is clearly reduplicative (both in Zuckerman's projection and in the reception of the novels) and imaginative, a Derridean deconstruction of the representational logic of sentiment works best at revealing the stakes of Roth's affective investments.

¹⁶ In fairness to Roth, it is difficult to think of works comparable to Smith's in diversity of voice.

¹⁷ Though even such heartbreaking forbearance can be viewed as a ressentimental self-staging, performed by Zuckerman either to strengthen his affective links to the Swede or, more complexly, to undermine the illusion of his righteousness.

¹⁸ See "Cambodia: A Modest Proposal," where he writes "Who in his right mind would plunge this country of peasants into yet another battle for 'minds and hearts'? Who in his right mind would ever drop anything on these people other than food, medicine and clothing? And then it occurred to me: why do we try it? [...] To be sure, we have our winning ways: the free-fire zone, the relocation camp, the search-and-destroy mission, the defoliants, the napalm, etc. At times one wonders how they can possibly resist us—but these are inscrutable people." (*Reading Myself* 187-188)

¹⁹ Several critics have suggested that Roth is revisiting and self-critiquing his own rebellions during the 1960s through Merry Levov. See Timothy Parrish, "The End of Identity: Philip Roth's Jewish American Pastoral" (esp. 139-140) as well as Mark Shechner, who, in *Up Society's Ass, Copper: Rereading Philip Roth*, asks, "could Roth not say, 'Merry Levov c'est moi?'" (163).

²⁰ Fredric Jameson's discusses *ressentiment* as a nineteenth-century ideologeme in *The Political Unconscious* that, where he notes that "[w]hat is most striking about *ressentiment* is its unavoidably autoreferential structure [...] It may therefore be concluded that the theory of *ressentiment*, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and production of *ressentiment*'" (268).

To this we should certainly add Sedgwick's reading of sentiment and Nietzsche *ressentiment* as fundamentally interwoven for both involve—in her view—vicariation and misrepresentation: The *re-* prefix of *ressentiment* marks a space of degeneration and vicariousness: the nonsingularity of these laminates as *redoubling* of one's own motives, and the nonoriginality as *reflexes* of the impulses of others. Thus the sentimental misnaming, in the aftermath of the whole class of emotions and bonds which Nietzsche was the privileged analyst. [...] Sentimentality, insofar as it overlaps with *ressentiment* in a structure we would not be the first to call *ressentimentality*, represents modern emotion itself in Nietzsche's thought: modern emotion as vicariousness and misrepresentation, but also as sensation brought to the quick with an insulting closeness. (Epistemology 150)

Sedgwick posits a version of Jameson's observation of the vicious cycle of critique involved in the discourse of sentiment, concluding that "neither rehabilitation nor rubbishing, wholesale, is [...] possible [...] with these presentational meaning" of sentimentality, antisentimentality, or *ressentimentality*. Instead, "they stand for rhetorical—that is to say relational—figures [...] of concealment, obliquity, vicariousness, and renaming, and their ethical bearings can thus be discussed only in the multiple contexts of their writing and reading" (157). For her, each can be seen as "a

form of bad faith” or as “a figure of irrepressible desire and creativity” (157).

²¹ See Mark Maslan’s “The Faking of the Americans: Passing, Trauma, and National Identity in Philip Roth’s *Human Stain*,” where Maslan maintains that Roth intends us to read “Coleman’s renunciation of his past as evidence that he embodies America’s [tradition of self making]” (386) Maslan then problematizes founding a notion of community based in the heroic renunciation of community.

²² For an extended consideration both of the critical response to Roth’s revision of the 1960s as well as a subtle correction to the common views, see Laura Tanenbaum’s “Reading Roth’s Sixties” in *Studies in American Jewish Literature*.

²³ For an especially helpful reading of the resentimental roots of white backlash, see Jeffrey T. Nealon’s *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*, particularly pp. 138-164.

²⁴ Timothy Parrish’s insightful, “Becoming Black: Zuckerman’s Bifurcating self in *The Human Stain*,” earlier published in an altered version in *Contemporary Literature*, as an article entitled “The Invisible Man in Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*,” traces the relationship between Roth’s Coleman and Ralph Ellison’s life and fiction. As I do, Parrish makes much of the averted homecoming trip, by which, he suggests “Roth calls attention to his novel’s dangerous and risky ambition: to hazard one’s identity in a gesture of affiliation that abolishes the authenticity of race” (222).

²⁵ According to Melvin L. Oliver, James H. Johnson, Jr., and Walter C. Farrell, Jr. in “Anatomy of a Rebellion: A Political-Economic Analysis,” 16,291 people were arrested, 2,383 were injured, roughly 500 fires were set, and 52 people were killed (119).

Although this is fewer than the number of casualties--over 120 people--killed during the New York Draft Riots in 1863, the nominal cost of the property damage stemming from violence between 29 and 30 of April 1991 is estimated at \$1 billion (Oliver et al 119).

²⁶ For more on this point, see Judith Butler's essay "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia."

²⁷ Smith has continued her project after *House Arrest*, but at the time of this writing, none of these other projects have been published, though all are considered to be part of "In Search of American Character." Because she sometimes recycles interviews from previous projects into more recent incarnations, separation between projects is difficult. Nonetheless, Smith has performed at least two distinct dramatic entities in the years since *House Arrest*. The first of these, *Let Me Down Easy* focuses on the notion of grace and involves incidents of suffering as separate and topical as "the genocide in Rwanda, the tragedy of Katrina and the ailing American health-care system" (Isherwood G1). The second, *The Arizona Project*, focuses more exclusively on women in relation to the American judicial system.

²⁸ Here I follow Ryan M. Claycomb's superb "(Ch)oral History: Documentary Theatre, the Communal Subject and Progressive Politics." Claycomb argues that works following Shange, Smith, and Mann should be understood along the following lines: "These oral history plays take the discourse of history- and life-writing, and shift their discursive conceptions of the subject from the single protagonist to the greater community. This radical approach to subject formation not only disrupts the empowered status of the subject's authority, but also encourages the integration of the audience into a

tenuous sense of community created by the theatrical event itself" (95). My argument differs from Claybomb's in its emphasis on 1.) the literary-historical mode of sentimentalism, and 2.) Deleuzean ontology with its attendant conceptual tools: simulation, deterritorialization, and lines of flight.

²⁹ Other critics have noted this tension as when Gregory Jay observes, in "Other People's Holocausts: Trauma, Empathy, and Justice in Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*" that "Although Smith's mimicry of these idiosyncratic voices and gestures suggests their utter uniqueness, their carefully designed place in the text sets them up as representative types, or as testimonial voices embodying two different collective memories" (129). Jay also proffers an argument suggesting that Smith's dramatic practice involves what he calls "performative empathy." "Performative empathy," as Jay defines it, "is an 'acting out' that includes the cognitive dimension inherent to all emotions, but it is also a 'working through' that challenges us to understand the 'other' through a radical crossing of identity boundaries. Performative empathy helps us see the gaps between our own understanding and the perceptions of the subject whom we reenact" (124).

While I share much of Jay's views on Smith's practice, I go further by a.) historicizing the genre of sympathetic identification in which Smith intervenes, b.) theorizing the relation between Smith's acting practice and social commentary through a poststructuralist social ontology capable of grasping greater gradations of difference as well as the spatial consequences of those differences, and finally c.) linking this practice to broader socio-historic concerns, especially the urban crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Though I employed the term "performative sympathy" in my reading of Roth, I

more explicitly drew on the work of J. L. Austin and other theorists of the performative to articulate the limits and ingenuity of Roth's emotive poesis by using the notions constative, performative, and perlocutionary.

³⁰ Here I follow the arguments of several astute scholars who have remarked on the possible liaison between Smith's politically progressive theatrical work and the history of minstrel theater. Of particular note here are essays by Tania Modleski and Dorinne Konda. In "(Re)Visions of Race: Contemporary Race Theory and the Cultural Politics of Racial Crossover in Documentary Theatre," Konda points out that "most of the literature on crossracial identification, including the phenomenon of racial passing, remains within a black-white binary that still limits our ways of thinking about race" (83). Part of the confusion over Smith's performances, she suggests, is because American audiences are still unable to answer "[w]hat happens when the story is no longer one of black passing for white or the White Negro and minstrelsy, but people of color performing each other?" (83). But this question, while it ought to remain open, side steps how the stereotyped image—required for cross-performances like blackface but not interchangeable with it—contains an ambivalence that does not require the black-white binary to proliferate. In her essay "Doing Justice to the Subjects: Mimetic Art in a Multicultural Society: The Work of Anna Deavere Smith," Modleski offers a reading of Smith's use of the stereotype through Homi K. Bhabha: "Here we see the dual aspect of mimicry: its aggressive aspect, so obvious in minstrelsy, which reduces people to stereotypes and robs them of their complexity, and the utopian aspect Bhabha assigns to the mimicry--the promise of solidarity embedded in Smith's artistic practice of identifying with an 'other'"

whose differences are scrupulously observed and preserved. We have simultaneously imitation as theft and imitation as the sincerest form of flattery” (65).

³¹ Note how this negative “failure” to be others relates to the impossibility of sympathy as I explored it in Roth’s novels under the rubric of the constative, or descriptive level. There are differences as well. Given that Smith works with the quoted words of actual individuals, and that this fact is stressed, means that fictionality is probably not the best rubric for viewing her work. Another note: if, in this study, I use the term “failure” for the non-coincidence or perceived non-coincidence of a sufferer’s experience and the imaginative projection of another of that first experience, I do so for clarity and not out of censure.

³² Deleuze’s interesting in stammering as a mode of literary style is not unrelated, although neither is it an exact correspondence with Smith’s. Deleuze writes, of art that seeks after newness: “It’s easy to stammer, but making language itself stammer is a different affair; it involves placing all linguistic, and even nonlinguistic, elements in variation, both variables of expression and variables of content. A new form of redundancy, AND ... AND ... AND ... There has always been a struggle in language between the verb *être* (to be) and the conjunction *et* (and) between *est* and *et* (is and and [which in French are identical in pronunciation— Trans.])” (ATP 98). I link this ambivalence between being and conjunction to Smith’s own interest in the non-dialectical by which individuals produce their own style of being from hand-me-down blocks of language and idealized identities available to them.

³³Consider as roughly parallel Deleuze's rejection of the organistic metaphor and the critiques of urban ecology in urban theory. In his discipline-founding essay, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment," Robert E. Park argued that the city should be understood as a living organism, the interconnecting parts of which function together organically, and going so far as to term his method urban ecology. In American urban studies, this view remained pervasive from 1915, when Park first published his essay until the 1960s and 1970s, when a number of scholars and thinkers with diverse agendas began to question the assumptions of the Chicago School, who were roughly speaking Park's followers (Kleniewski 31-43). Paradigmatic of these critiques is the famous work of David Harvey, for whom urban spaces are a record of capital accumulation and class conflict.

³⁴ As I argue apropos of the notion of a head of state, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the collective assemblage of enunciation means that the stable subject that serves as representative speaker—monarch, prime minister, president, commissar—must be abandoned as a myth. "There isn't a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*," declare Deleuze and Guattari in their study of Kafka (Kafka 18). Or, again, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they declare that "[d]irect discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. [...] *I* is an order-word." (ATP 84)

³⁵ The difficult task of refusing the primacy of individual speech acts (*parole*) without affirming, much less prioritizing language as differential, bodiless system (*le langue*), is not always successfully managed by Deleuze and Guattari. However, the opposition of direct versus indirect discourse provides, in my view, at least one practicable model for thinking outside Saussure's influential binary.

³⁶ I should here note that this understanding of the relation between symbolic and material orders (between language and bodies) is opposed to neo-Marxist's notion of ideological interpolation. Largely, this is because, for Deleuze and Guattari, ideology requires structuralism's artificial conceptual separation (and more importantly, hierarchicalization) of actually interacting systems such as language and economics. "If the external pragmatics of nonlinguistic factors must be taken into consideration" in any theorization of language, Deleuze and Guattari reason, "it is because linguistics itself is inseparable from an internal pragmatics involving its own factors" (ATP 91). Deleuze and Guattari are abruptly explicit about the consequences of reading language in this manner: "Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been" (ATP 4). This is because, in their use of the word, "[a]n assemblage has neither base nor superstructure, neither deep structure nor superficial structure; it flattens all of its dimensions onto a single plane of consistency upon which reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out" (ATP 90). In short, this understanding of language refuses both the formalism that argues of language's autonomy from social power dynamics (economic positioning high among them), and also refuses the schismatic determinism of neo-Marxist readings that read

texts as merely symptomatic of the present mode of production. It attempts the difficult task of thinking language and power at once, on the same plane, on the same stage.

³⁷ Willie Turks beaten to death by a white mob in Brooklyn in 1982; Michael Griffith, chased onto a highway by a crowd of white youths who had beaten him and his friends and then run over him, in Howard Beach, Queens in 1986; Yusef Hawkins, suspected of dating a white girl, was shot twice in the chest by a white youth in a baseball-ball-wielding crowd of 30 in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, 1989.

³⁸ For a fuller consideration of the ethical and aesthetic valences of vision in Wideman's work, see Bonnie TuSmith's "Optical Tricksterism: Dissolving and Shapeshifting in the Works of John Edgar Wideman."

³⁹ Another very astute intertextual reading of the novel is offered by Leslie Lewis, who explains Wideman's metafictional shift nicely by reading in through James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, in "*Philadelphia Fire and The Fire Next Time: Wideman Responds to Baldwin*"

⁴⁰ Though it is arguable whether Wideman intends to allude to either of these figures is a matter of debate, of course, until he clarifies, although he does allude unmistakably to Stowe's novel when he compares Prospero to Simon Legree (131). Nonetheless, I hope to demonstrate that reading Wideman's *Cudjoe* through Stowe's proves an interpretive boon.

⁴¹ I take this to mean, here as elsewhere, when a sympathetic witness attends to another's suffering and, in so doing, pedagogically models for a second audience a correct affective engagement.

⁴² Wideman has demonstrated a deep and lasting concern with the ways in which racial identities in the United States are coarticulated through the process of ghettoization. Of note here in particular is Tyrone R. Simpson II's "“And the Arc of His Witness Explained Nothing”": Black Flanerie and Traumatic Photorealism in Wideman's *Two Cities*."

⁴³ I follow Liam Corley and Christian Moraru in their discussions of Whitman's place in *Native Speaker*, both of whom read Whitman as a rather invariant presence, a known quantity, at the edge of Lee's project. In his essay "“Just Another Ethnic Pol’: Literary Citizenship in Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*," Corley correctly observes that Whitman's canonical status permits Lee to engage metaphorically with the exclusion of ethnic writers from the highest ranks of literary estimation, but he altogether misreads and flattens Lee's sophisticated dialogue with "The Sleepers" when he writes:

Lee is not here invoking Whitman as an example of how an allseeing eye colonizes the subjects it surveys. Likewise, Whitman's role in my argument about *Native Speaker* and literary citizenship should not be construed as casting Whitman into the role of unproblematic touchstone of American literature and identity. This is, however, very nearly the way that Lee uses Whitman, but only, I think, in order to link Whitman to a revised understanding of American identity as inclusive of Asian American immigrants. (Corley 80)

On the contrary, I suggest that Lee is supremely conscious of the problematic nature of the Whitmanian gaze and, consequently, that we must read the novel as doing more than simply revising American identity to include its Asian minority. This difference in interpretation cuts to the heart of how spying and surveillance and their relationship to

national identity are to be understood in the novel. Moraru's "Spies, Sleepers, Multitudes," to some extent following Corley's cue, reads Park's progression as a move from a colonial espionage to a "cosmopolitan spying," an agon pitting a monolithic version of Whitman's empathetic voyeurism against Hoagland's corporate and neocolonialist espionage, a conflict in which Whitman proves the victor (24), though Moraru reads Whitman's poesis as being "creolized" in the process (3). My own reading seeks to address the ways in which Hoagland is a manifestation of the nationalist espionage *inherent to* Whitman's speaker and sentimental project.

⁴⁴ In this claim, Kete is explicitly following the work of Michael Lasser and M. J. Killingsworth, who in their separate articles have sought to demonstrate the role played by sentimentalism in the development of Whitman's homoerotic conception of camaradie as the root of a natural social cohesion.

⁴⁵ I will employ the original 1855 version of the poem for my analysis, both because it is crucial to my understanding of the poem's relation to the novel and because the vast majority of scholarship on the poem uses this version as subject-text. The punctuation in these quotations, particularly their use of ellipsis, reflects the choice of editors Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis and Robert Penn Warren to cleave as closely as possible to the earliest completed version.

⁴⁶ I strongly disagree with the argument that Henry's spying should be thought of primarily as an activity subversive to the nation state. Tina Chen's article "Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts in *Native Speaker* by Chang-Rae Lee," flirts with this position but my central argument is with Crystal Parikh's "Ethnic America Undercover:

The Intellectual and Moniority Discourse.” Parikh argues for this in his reading of the novel, comparing the ethnic spy to Said’s conception of the ethnic intellectual:

The figure of the ethnic spy, like the minority intellectual, challenges conventional models of knowledge-power relationships by calling into question the extent to which the material processes of race mediate the class and professional affiliations of intellectual and institutional power...[Lee’s novel] attests to Edward Said’s observation that “the intellectual is best and remorselessly challenged by the problem of loyalty” to national, religious, or ethnic communities. Knowledge production occurs within and against these ties, at once constituting and compromising them. (Parikh 251)

⁴⁷ I would like to suggest, as an aside, that the passage in Whitman’s poem in which George Washington weeps at the slaughter of the Delaware braves, pressing his tearful cheeks against the faces of his comrades, is echoed in *Native Speaker* when an abandoned Kwang, grieving the loss of the *ggeh*’s participants as well as his own political career, shields Henry with his “wide immigrant face.” I do not pursue this in the body of my essay, indeed I neglect the narrative arc of John Kwang’s rise and fall, largely because this territory has been covered well in Corley’s essay (see endnote 1), from which I here quote:

Whitman’s literary star has brought him from the margins of American literary studies to the center. Throughout *Native Speaker*, Lee performs an equivalent claim to universality that depends, as Whitman’s did, upon the narcissistic focus on the embodied self as the representative of humanity. Instead of escaping from

the particularly of a ‘wide immigrant face,’ Lee focuses upon it and the contradictions it presents to an American national culture that has repressed knowledge of its hybridity and the racially based categories subsumed within the concept of abstract citizenship. Through his narrative, Lee revises Whitman’s heritage of representative Americanness to include the immigrant as central” (Corley 73-74).

I think my reading of Kwang as Washington supplements Corley’s assertion rather nicely, but I am not content to reduce Whitman’s importance in Lee’s novel to a means by which Lee can symbolically engage with and enter into the canon, though that is clearly an aspect of the intertextual link.

⁴⁸ See Carol Z. Whelan’s “‘Do I Contradict Myself?’: Progression through Contraries in Walt Whitman’s ‘The Sleepers,’” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 10.1 (Summer 1992): 25–27. Whelan sees an overarching structure in this oppositional movement that in part corresponds to the dialectical revision I see in Lee’s novel:

‘The Sleepers’ progresses through a flexible pattern of opposites. Whitman’s familiar “I” oscillates between I-as-witness and I-as-Other through visions that move from I-as-singular to I-as-plural, young female to old widow, anonymous giant to historical giant, father to mother, night to day. If we include the poem’s two deleted sections the pattern is not disrupted: a young male’s voice follows the young female’s voice; later a black slave’s section follows the vision of a red squaw (contrasting gender, color and social state). This pattern suggests that under Whitman’s apparent disorder sleeps an organic coherence.” (25)

⁴⁹ In her essay “To Stand Between: A Political Perspective on Whitman's Poetics of Merger and Embodiment,” Karen Sánchez-Eppler reads Whitman’s temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*, as a story of closet miscegenation in which the protagonist is racially muddled as is the more explicitly creolized Margaret. Though Sánchez-Eppler is extrapolating the importance of miscegenation for Whitman from a text that does not directly confront miscegenated unions, one can surmise Whitman’s interest in the mingling of blood from his consistent interest in the synthesis of categories.

⁵⁰ Here I follow Corley’s explication of the shipwreck (see above), though one should also see Rachel C. Lee’s “Reading Contests and Contesting Reading: Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* and Ethnic New York,” for an excellent analysis of both the 1993 shipwreck and the political relationship between New York and *Native Speaker*.

⁵¹ Sánchez-Eppler reads this powerlessness as something of a ruse, belying the ways in which Whitman wills the death as a visceral, sexualized demonstration of his pity:

Whitman presents himself as willing the death the subsequent lines describe. Indeed, the entire description of the drowning occurs in the anticipatory formulations of the poet’s questions. At the moment of questioning violence, Whitman demonstrates the ways in which his poetry requires and is complicitous with the act of wounding. (937)

I think this overstates the matter, for by this logic any and all descriptions of death are complicitous with it. Whitman does sexualize the swimmer at least in part in order to ironically link the failure of union between swimmer and spectator to the success of union with the female lover and night. However, though I diverge from Sánchez-

Eppler's reading of these lines, her insight about the violence embedded in Whitman's poetics supports, rather than contradicts, my claims about the insidious aspects of Whitmanian espionage generally.

⁵² Tenney Nathanson suggests that the entire poem should be read as a conflict between erotic energies and the self-division and limitations inherent to language: "The troubled protagonist of Whitman's 1855 poem 'The Sleepers' is caught up in an often disturbing erotic economy his involvement is associated with writing and reading, in a difficult passage that seems to connect these activities with mediation and self-division" (102). I agree with his reading of the term "pastreading, in this context:

The past would presumably consist of the fragmented and seemingly foreign dream material the poem records, which seems to predate its individual embodiments. The poet himself would be simply the composite of all the erotic inscription he reads, enigmatic desires that tie him to others as functions of the same erotic writing or code; he would be a text, or a fragment of one. (104)

This helps to support my claim that Lee's pastreading is not different in kind from Whitman's; the novelist has read and rewritten the poet's desires and, in a sense, is just another fragment of a larger text.

⁵³ I do not have access to hard-copy records of the *Mexico*'s fate, but I determined the date of its destruction and the fate of its immigrant cargo from a triangulation of genealogical sources available on the web. Below is a full account of the ship's wreck as well as the near-synchronous wreck of the *Bristol*, which was also carrying Irish immigrants. Together, the two constitute the worst sea-faring disaster of the coast of

Long Island:

Raynor Rock Smith was a famous wrecking master before the United States Life Saving Service was established, and was in charge at many ship disasters, the most notable being on January 2, 1837 when the ships "Bristol" and "Mexico," both from Liverpool and carrying Irish emigrants, were stranded in heavy weather. All aboard the "Bristol", to the number of eighty perished, and of the one hundred and sixteen on the "Mexico" all but eight were drowned or frozen to death. The "Bristol" was wrecked at the westerly end of Long Beach, opposite East Rockaway, and the barque "Mexico," 300 tons burden, came ashore at Long Beach on the more easterly part, opposite Christian Hook (Oceanside).

About sixty of the dead from the "Mexico," all stiffly frozen, were brought from the beach, piled crosswise on wooden sleds, and placed in the barn of John Lott, at Hicks Neck until a plot in Old Sand Hill Cemetery at Pearsall's (Lynbrook), donated for the purpose by Peter T. Hewlett of East Rockaway, could be made ready for the burials. Lumber for the burial cases was furnished by Oliver S. Denton of East Rockaway. The monument which stands at the end of the trench grave was purchased and prepared at Sing Sing, New York, and brought to East Rockaway by sloop. ("Raynor Rock Smith")

⁵⁴ Lelia, on the other hand, is comparatively transparent, sharing her emotions openly in both the poems she composes and her comportment as a speaker; as she says of herself: "An average white girl has no mystery anymore, if she ever did" (10). Indeed, it is Lelia's openness and volubility that initially attracts Henry to her: "even before I took

measure of her face and her manner, the shape of her body, her indefinite scent, all of which occurred so instantly anyway, I noticed how closely I was listening to her. What I found was this: that she could really speak” (10). Lelia’s privilege as a speaker in the novel should not be reduced exclusively to her racial heritage, though this is indeed one of the implications. Importantly, she is an honest, forthright and compassionate speaker, someone for whom, as an example, the name of Henry’s Korean nanny is important, even though Henry himself does not know the woman’s name, and someone who writes a poem attempting to imagine the inner consciousness of Henry’s father after he has died.

⁵⁵ Mutlu Blasing points out this contradictory aspect of Whitman’s use of night, in his essay “The Sleepers: The Problem of the Self in Whitman,”:

In transcending identity, however, one negates the possibility of personal life at the same time that he transcends personal death. When consciousness rises above identity, time, space, and therefore death, the self as identity as the only possible concretization of consciousness has literally died. Accordingly, the night/darkness imagery reflects the paradoxical nature of self-transcendence, for the night signifies a force that is at once creative and destructive. (112)

While I agree with Blasing’s general insight, I tend to see this as a generative and honest paradox rather than a problem or fault.

⁵⁶ Judith Butler intuits and articulates a similar phenomenon which she refers to as the loss of “First Worldism,” but her definition of that loss, as “the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one’s own boundaries transgressed” (39).

Butler's argument persuasively suggests the ways in which mourning for September 11 victims can serve as the beginning of an ethical reconsideration of how corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally. Here, however, I am interested more in how September 11 produces a historically specific affective turmoil by foregrounding both the constructedness and the incongruity of personal, national, and global narratives of hierarchical belonging, justice, safety, and identity.

⁵⁷ Worth considering here are Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's remarks concerning sentimentality and the division of public and private spheres in her reading of (Ann Douglas's reading of) Melville's *Billy Budd*. There, she notes how sentimentality often functions as crossing this constructed boundary precisely by pretending not to: for instance, in the form of a suffering individual hiding his pain in a manner plain for all to see. As she reasons:

“Suppose for the moment, however, that we are willing to accept the definition implicit in Ann Douglas's work according to which sentimentality is the commingling of public and private realms, especially through—let us add—any rhetoric that claims to differentiate them conclusively. Under such a definition, Captain Vere is [...] consummately a sentimentalizing subject, an active wielder of the ruses of sentimentality for the satisfaction of needs that can be stably defined nether as public nor as private.” (Epistemology 120-1)

Although Sedgwick settles on a notion of sentimentality more complicated than this, one can here see clearly how sentimentality—based as it is on the universalization of individual acts of sympathetic identification with suffering others—will always serve to

both raise and raze the divisions of publicity and privacy, performance and innermost secrecy.

⁵⁸ For a fuller consideration of this trend, consider Elisabeth Ankar's "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11"

⁵⁹ Another important consideration in assessing Foer's motive in narrating through these eccentric, pitiful, and emotionally forthcoming characters might be found in Suzanne Keene's insight: "[Readers] may respond with greater empathy to an *unreal* situation and characters *because of the protective fictionality*, but still internalize the experience of empathy with possible later real-world responsiveness to others' needs" (220, italics mine). Thus foregrounding his character's fictionality while still repeating those tropes which the sentimental tradition has established as particularly effective allows Foer a greater access to his reader's empathic reaction while at the same time insinuating the subtle ironic distance detailed elsewhere in this chapter.

⁶⁰ In this sense, Oskar's playful narrative parallels the "children's play" Freud discusses in a much analyzed passage of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud observes his grandson coping with the periodic absence of the boy's mother by means of a linguistic game—fort and da—demonstrating that "there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (XVIII: 14-15, 17). One might add that, in a less quoted passage directly after the fort-da game, Freud describes how the boy, a year later, would vent his anger on toys by throwing them across the room and pronouncing "Go to the fwont!" that is, to the front, where the boy's father was current engaged in fighting World War I. According

to Freud, the boy “was far from regretting his [father’s] absence; on the contrary he made it quite clear that he had no desire to be disturbed in his sole possession of his mother” (XVIII: 16). Here one might pause to consider what consequences emerge from Foer’s choice to have Oskar’s *father* pass away.

⁶¹ This is not entirely unrelated to what Derrida, in reference to the September 11 attacks, calls the numerous “autoimmunitary” processes that link victim with victimizer: “As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (94). Derrida uses this term to connect numerous ironic reverses he takes to be related phenomena: the U.S. funded and trained the Mujahideen in Afghanistan before it turned against them; the U.S. media did the work of Mohammed Atta and bin Laden by broadcasting and replaying the destruction of the towers, and the U.S. aggression in response to the attacks will inevitably produce more attacks.

However, I do not collapse what I call Foer’s circularity of death with this notion of autoimmunity because the former makes no direct link (much less a quasi-suicidal one!) between American efforts to excise or monitor its other(s) and damage inflicted on the United States by terrorists. Foer’s cycle is far more universalized and politically defanged. See below for autoimmunitary fears in Updike and DeLillo.

⁶² This approach in Updike has been much noted, though it is worth pointing out that Updike’s dialectical approach often resists easy sublation. Typical of Updike is “a dialectical approach to religious issues in which defining oppositions do not resolve into a satisfying synthesis but rather remain in sustained tension and ambiguity” (Boswell 43)

⁶³ One can here view Jack Levy as another instance of Updike writing in what Sanford Pinsker calls “Jewish-American drag.” Pinsker argues that, for Updike, Henry Bech, as Jew is “the consummate outsider, [...] the ultimate Other. With Bech, Updike tries to imagine (perhaps “impersonate” is the better term) a character as far from himself [...] as possible” (92).

⁶⁴ It is worth pointing out that the threat of death in the Lincoln Tunnel, which is the goal of the novel’s terrorist plot *and* the original anxiety from which the book emerged (“That picture was the beginning,” he added. “The fear of the tunnel being blown up with me in it — the weight of the water crashing in.”), is also suggestive of mortal vulnerability in a vaginal space. For a fuller discussion of fears of the vagina in Updike, cf. Kathleen Verduin’s reading of the relation between the vaginal and Karth Barth’s *das Nichtige* in Updike’s *S*. (Verduin, 69)

⁶⁵ Ngai relies heavily on Fredric Jameson’s discussion of *ressentiment* as a nineteenth-century ideologeme. Jameson astutely notes, in *The Political Unconscious* that “[w]hat is not striking about *ressentiment* is its unavoidably autoreferential structure [...] It may therefore be concluded that the theory of *ressentiment*, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and production of *ressentiment*” (268).

To this we should certainly add Sedgwick’s reading of sentiment and Nietzsche *ressentiment* as fundamentally interwoven for both involve—in her view—vicariation and misrepresentation:

The *re-* prefix of *ressentiment* marks a space of degeneration and vicariousness: the nonsingularity of these laminates as *redoubling* of one’s own motives, and the

nonoriginality as *reflexes* of the impulses of others. Thus the sentimental misnaming, in the aftermath of the crucifixion, of its observers' sensuality and will-to-power *as* pity becomes the model for the whole class of emotions and bonds which Nietzsche was the privileged analyst.

[...]

Sentimentality, insofar as it overlaps with *ressentiment* in a structure we would not be the first to call ressentimentality, represents modern emotion itself in Nietzsche's thought: modern emotion as vicariousness and misrepresentation, but also as sensation brought to the quick with an insulting closeness. (Epistemology 150)

Sedgwick posits a version of Jameson's observation of the vicious cycle of critique involved in the discourse of sentiment, concluding that "neither rehabilitation nor rubbishing, wholesale, is [...] possible [...] with these presentational meaning" of sentimentality, antisentimentality, or ressentimentality. Instead, "they stand for rhetorical—that is to say relational—figures [...] of concealment, obliquity, vicariousness, and renaming, and their ethical bearings can thus be discussed only in the multiple contexts of their writing and reading" (157). For her, each can be seen as "a form of bad faith" or as "a figure of irrepressible desire and creativity" (157).

⁶⁶ Sedgwick claims that patriarchal order both depends on, and is destabilized by, male-male desire (or homosociality) such that this sociality has to be regulated by means of misogyny and homophobia. As she writes in *Between Men*: "in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire

and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (25)

⁶⁷ One might note that, far from being an exception, the Falling Man is part of a trend in Lianne’s life. Lianne repeatedly grapples with men she only half understands: Keith, whom she was attracted to for this reason (105); her father, whose suicide leaves her confused (40-1); her own son Justin, whose fictionalizing of Ben Lawton leaves her chilled; and Martin, her mother’s lover, whose possible alter ego as Ernst Hechinger, is never resolved.

⁶⁸ For a fuller consideration of the intersection of fantasy and September 11, see Žižek’s “Welcome to the Desert of the Real,” for, as he notes, the event was a space of fantasy even before it occurred: “The unthinkable that happened was the object of fantasy: in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise” (132).