January 2019

Under The Sign Of Suicide

Theodore Emmanuel Prassinos
Wayne State University

UNDER THE SIGN OF SUICIDE

by

THEODORE EMMANUEL PRASSINOS

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2019

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved By:

_____

Advisor Date

_____

_____

_____

DEDICATION

For Leah

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Graduate Committee of the Wayne State University Department of English for accepting my proposal and for continuing to support my work throughout my graduate career in the forms of my assistantship, various travel and yearly grants, and fellowship. Thomas C. Rumble and Co., thank you. I thank the Wayne State University Humanities Center for their fellowships, and also Professors Maun and Pruchnic for offering me work opportunities toward the end. My committee has been indispensable in the creation of this dissertation: Professors Jonathan Flatley, renée hoogland, Sarika Chandra, and Dana Seitler. My master's advisors, Professors Nicki Tarulevicz and Wenqing Kang, and also Professor Drew Daniel have all emboldened me in ways I cannot overestimate. Two even taught me to cook. Members of my cohort, namely, Drs. Peter Marra and Vincent Haddad have provided me with valuable lessons, feedback, fellowship, and entertainment. John Landreville has been a careful, formidable, and valuable interlocutor. Jon Plumb, you are welcome at our place any time. The unreasonably generous empathy of Dr. Marcus Merritt has not only helped me recognize myself but continues to help me recognize myself. I would like to thank my family, especially the women: Robin Schlatterbeck, Leah Boslaugh, also Charles Boslaugh, William Schlatterbeck, and Dino Prassinos. Their support has taken many, crucial forms. Asha, I hope we may reunite. The friendship of Eric Gallippo, John Stiger, and my cousin-brother, Dean Sauer is unmatched. Although not cited, the curiosity, playfulness, solicitude, and mere presence of Addie, Zurich, Karl, Henry, and Pam have pushed my dumb body over many hurdles. Kimberly Sue Dalton, thank you.

And lastly, as Spit For Athena would have it, "God Bless the Suicides…"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ii

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 “A Mysterious Antithesis”: Capitalism and Suicidality 28

Chapter 2 “A Kind of Mimesis of Death”: Modern Suicidality as Critical Mimesis 54

Chapter 3 The Affective Value of Suicidal Fantasy: Feeling the “Insane Truth” in *Mrs. Dalloway* 94

Chapter 4 Suicidal Fugitivity: *Another Country* and its “Powers of Darkness” 157

Coda “Until Further Notice…” 188

References 193

Abstract 213

Autobiographical Statement 215

INTRODUCTION

> One could make a remarkable collection of quotations from famous authors and of poems written by despairing people preparing for their death with a certain ostentation. During the marvelously cold-blooded moment which follows the decision to die, a kind of infectious enthusiasm is exhaled from these souls and flows on to paper, even among classes which are bereft of all education. While they compose themselves for the sacrifice, whose depth they are pondering, all their strength is concentrated so much as to gush out in a warm and characteristic expression.
>
> Jacques Peuchet, quoted in Karl Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 1846

We find in modern literature an intense and sustained preoccupation with suicide. In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigailov shoots himself. In *Demons*, Kirillov follows suit while Stavrogin, like Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, hangs. In "The Judgment" and "The Bridge," Franz Kafka's protagonists drown themselves while in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith impales himself on a fence. In *The Waves*, Rhoda jumps off a cliff. Within the United States, we find Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Salinger's Seymour Glass and Teddy McArdle. Miller's Willy Loman ends his life by car crash. In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Tod Clifton suffers suicide-by-cop while in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Clare jumps out a window? Perhaps. Maybe she's pushed? We aren't sure, but suicide cannot be excluded. Both James Baldwin and Toni Morrison open novels with a protagonist's suicide. This list is not exhaustive. Suffice it to say, writers of our modern era have been preoccupied with suicide.[1]

Yet modernist representations of suicide distinguish themselves from romantic ones. Unlike Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, for instance, modernist writers like Dostoevsky, Woolf, and Baldwin, for instance, do not represent suicide as a gesture toward some romantic achievement of selfhood or toward some fantasy of individual transcendence of life's cruel circumstances. In this regard, Dostoevsky's *Demons* may be described as the first modernist

suicide novel because it directly critiques dominant European discourses about human subjects as objects of scientific knowledge that came to influence Russian thought toward the end of the nineteenth century. Although Kirillov's suicide might be framed as romantic, insofar as the "duty" of his suicide is to "proclaim self-will to the fullest point" in the service of recognizing that "there is no God," thereby "open[ing] the door" to a new era of human development, Stavrogin's suicide cannot.[2] The circumstances surrounding Stavrogin's suicide and its fallout are quite different. As Dostoevsky closes his novel: "Our medical men, after the autopsy, completely and emphatically ruled out insanity."[3] While the predominance of romantic suicide had come to a close, mental illness had emerged a direct opponent for many modernist writers, ceasing to sufficiently explain the cause of suicide in our modern era.

Modernist representations of suicide offer reflections on one's situatedness within one's history, one's way of relating to and being-with others, and most importantly, one's response to the various forms of power under which we suffer capitalist modernity. This dissertation examines two propositions about modern representations of suicidality, neither of which ought to surprise anybody. Or, at least that's what I risk. Neither are new. They have been culled, extended, and developed, in turn, from the critical works of four theorists of modernity—Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Virginia Woolf, and James Baldwin—all of whom criticized modern capitalist power either directly or indirectly by way of representations of suicide.

First, this dissertation argues that the suicidality represented in much of modernist literature rehearses contradictions rooted in the capital relation. Such contradictions are found not only within the immediate processes of production and circulation, but also within the various institutions that interpellate subjects into bourgeois ideology. By suicidality, I mean representations of corporeal suicide, the act of purposefully ending one's life, and *also* various

forms of suicidal ideation, moments of imagining one's self-inflicted death or another's. And by "rehearsal," I mean mainly two things.

As a theatrical metaphor, a rehearsal presupposes a script or various scripts with which the performer is already familiar. Chapter one traces the bourgeois script that capitalist subjects are asked to embody and perform, one characterized by the absurd commodification of reified human energy.

Day in and day out, we are asked to rehearse, to re-enact, to re-present ourselves to one another and to ourselves in various scenes in which our "value" is, as Marx argues, "fixed in advance."[4] Instead of seeing our activity as something that makes us human, as the very source of our humanity and our capacity to connect both with others and with the world around us, capitalism forces us to view our energy as a "thing" that must be sold in exchange for the resources we need to survive. As if we were commodities, something Marx came to call "dead-labour," we then rehearse our circumscribed roles in their creation and find our "value" realized only in relation to them. In many ways, as Boots Riley has it, we are to "Stick to the Script," as if our rehearsals, bound as they are to the capital relation, are themselves those of dead labor.[5] We then only see the effect return to us as "dead" in the form of the commodity itself. Thus, the modern subject is surrounded not by signs of life-affirming activity, but instead by "dead labour," and modernist suicidality is a way of rehearsing this deadening scene of estrangement.

But, of course, we're not commodities. We are commodif*ied*, and our rehearsals of our bourgeois scripts are performances practiced repeatedly in the service of maintaining and expanding the function of the capital relation. It's exhausting. And this performative nature of rehearsal is apt to describe suicidality. As we will see, the suicidal figures examined in this dissertation often do not end their lives with one decisive suicidal episode. Modernist suicidality

is not punctual or heroic in this way. Instead, modernist suicidal characters re-rehearse their social roles in the form of suicidal ideation that punctuates, interacts with, and alters the diegetic nature of the narrative in critical ways. In this regard, suicidality in modernist literature is recursive. As Michel Foucault has it, "there is no more beautiful form of conduct which, as a result, merits reflection with such great attention, than suicide. It would be a case of working on one's suicide for all of one's life."[6] The recursive character of rehearsal, its performative nature, and the ways in which through each performance we repeat, re-enact, and re-present the absurdity of the capital relation in different moments, situations, and in various social scenes provides us with opportunities to re-engage with the bourgeois absurdities of capitalism, making real for us our condition of estrangement under it.

Which is to say, this dissertation contends that modernist representations of suicidal rehearsal amplify our modern condition of estrangement exacerbated by industrial capitalism in the middle nineteenth century and intensified throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By amplify, I mean that our structural estrangement under capitalism has not only fueled our tendency toward thinking about our own self-inflicted death, but that suicidality extends and intensifies the logic of estrangement under capitalism onto bodily sites of fatalistic self-estrangement. In short, suicide self-estranges us from our structural estrangement itself. We must contend with the fact that suicide holds this power, itself a power amplified by the many contradictions of our life under capitalism.

By acknowledging suicidality in terms of the organization of our social lives under capitalism we may resist the predominant biopolitical tendency to frame suicide as a mere personal problem. As Ian Marsh writes, "suicide is now read, almost always, as a tragedy, one caused primarily by pathological processes internal to the individual that require expert diagnosis

and management" in the service of "a compulsory ontology of pathology in relation to suicide."[7] By acknowledging suicide as a social problem, we may open a space to challenge discourses about suicide in the mental health sciences that otherwise preclude suicidality as reflecting what is problematic and depressing about modern social life in the service of imagining it differently.

Secondly, this dissertation argues that representations of suicidality invite us to imagine new forms of social reproduction—our creative energy, our capacity for creative action, for affection, affiliation, and freedom—in short, all the things that make life worth living. As Friedrich Nietzsche insisted, for instance, "[t]he thought of suicide is a powerful comfort: it helps one through many a dreadful night."[8] Or, as Walter Benjamin wrote: "In a dream I took my life with a gun. When it went off, I did not wake up but saw myself lying for a while as a corpse. Only then did I wake."[9] Neither calls upon suicide in terms of morbidity. Rather, both highlight suicidal thinking as a life-affirming practice. This dissertation privileges and amplifies the lively tendency found in suicidal representation throughout modernist literature.

By acknowledging representations of suicidality as an active mode of social engagement, we may challenge our tendency to think of it as a rejection of or escape from each other or our world, on the one hand, and on the other, we may avow such representations as a method of imagining new forms of social reproduction, the conditions of possibility for which might already be here. As Donald Winnicott might insist, we may encounter a potentiality within our world "waiting to be created," a potentiality that's already there.[10] In sum, representations of suicidality stage dynamic, sensuous affirmations of our creativity fueled by, yet resisting our lived estrangement under modern capitalist power with which we may better strive to imagine, create, and live in more critical and productive ways.

*

By drawing out the criticality of suicidality and its representations, however, we cannot but confront its messy difficulties. And to be sure, in no way does this dissertation look to exhaust ontological and epistemic issues related to suicide.[11] Rather, I would like to show how modernism anticipates and responds to a set of key difficulties explored by others throughout the long twentieth century. The first concerns critical differences between examining acts of corporeal suicide versus various forms of suicidal ideation.

In *Cruising Utopia*, for instance, José Muñoz examines the aesthetics of the dancer Fred Herko's 1964 suicide. After a bath in the apartment of his friend, Johnny Dodd, Herko performed a nude dance to Mozart's Coronation Mass in C Major concluding in what Dodd recounted as a perfect jeté through the window down toward Cornelia Street. In contrast to normative ideas of surplus value associated with, as Muñoz describes, the "functionalism of capitalist flows," he privileges the value of Herko's a-capitalist "aesthetic excess" immanent in his suicidal performance. Yet toward the end of his chapter, Muñoz reflects, offering us a caveat about the implications of a politics of suicide. He writes, to "write or conjecture about suicide as a queer act, a performance of radical negativity, utopian in its negation of death as ultimate uncontrollable finitude, and *not* to think about what it symbolizes for a larger collectivity would be remiss."[12] And of course he is right; corporeal suicide often has destructive effects on the groups in which a person lived, loved, and connected. While tending to the critical value of suicidal performance, it would be irresponsible to suggest a positive politics of material, corporeal suicide. In light of the difficulties of such acts—acts which situate, as does capitalism itself, life in-the-balance—this dissertation examines something different, something I approach not only as lively, but also as obvious. As I said from the outset, nothing here ought to surprise us.

In thinking of the key concepts about what might be critical about the life-and-death stakes of modern suicidality, I have been inspired by Karl Marx's almost extempore question in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In one of his conversations about the estranged relationship of the worker to the activity of labor, Marx asks, "for what is life but activity?"[13] By "life," what he means of course is one's "physical and mental energy." In relation to suicidality, I am interested in all the activity that appears to lead up to such an end. Which is to say, where the moment of corporeal suicide marks an end to one's life, what about the diverse set of non-fatal acts I simply call suicidal activity—suicidal daydreaming, fantasy, and planning all the way to acts of non-fatal physical violence against one's body, each and all conscious or otherwise? Moreover, what about modern suicidality's literary representation—not only the writerly acts of producing such representations, but also the readerly acts of encountering them?

My question is simple: Is not all this, too, lively activity? Consider, as Maurice Blanchot has it, the "attention to minutiae often symptomatic in those who are about to die" figured in the suicidal characters found throughout modernist writing? What of "the love for details, the patient, maniacal concern for the most mediocre realities"?[14] What of, for instance, the ways in which Alexei Kirillov's suicidality drives Dostoevsky's *Demons* forward with disparate and fleeting affects and ideas that come together at various moments in the form of a question?

During one of many scenes in which Dostoevsky's cast of revolutionaries struggle to enact their mysterious plans, Kirillov is interrupted from a moment of suicidal ideation by Shatov who reminds Kirillov of their more immediate concerns: "'Ah, yes,' [Kirillov] remembered suddenly, as if tearing himself away with effort, and only for a moment, from some idea that held him fascinated, 'yes…an old woman, right? I remember; I went; the old woman will come, only not now. Take the pillow. Anything else? Yes…Wait, Shatov, do you ever have

moments of eternal harmony?'" Not only is Kirillov's moment of suicidal non sequitur humorous in its display of detail—"Take the pillow"? His explanation for his distraction, fallen on deaf ears, is poignant:

> Kirillov came to himself and—strangely—began to speak even far more coherently than he usually spoke; one could see that he had long been formulating it all, and perhaps had written it down:
>
> "There are seconds, they come only five or six at a time, and you suddenly feel the presence of eternal harmony, fully achieved. It is nothing earthly; not that it's heavenly, but man cannot endure it in his earthly state. One must change physically or die. The feeling is clear and indisputable. As if you suddenly sense the whole of nature and suddenly say: yes, this is true. God, when he was creating the world, said at the end of each day of creation: 'Yes, this is true, this is good.' This…this is not tenderheartedness, but simply joy. You don't forgive anything, because there's no longer anything to forgive. You don't really love—oh, what is here is higher than love! What's most frightening is that it's so terribly clear, and there's such joy. If it were longer than five seconds—the soul couldn't endure it and would vanish. In those five seconds I live my life through, and for them I would give my whole life, because it's worth it."

In the conversation that follows, Shatov tries to diagnose Kirillov and convince him that his encounter with some alternate temporality is symptomatic of the aura experienced by epileptics, something from which Dostoevsky himself suffered, or enjoyed, as it were. Shatov warns, "Watch out, Kirillov, I've heard that this is precisely how the falling sickness starts…Watch out, Kirillov, it's the falling sickness!," to which Kirillov responds, chuckling softly, reminding Shatov that he is not to worry, for Kirillov is planning to kill himself: "It won't have time."[15] Modernist writers frame such moments, rich with detail, that demand further analysis.

Or in another way, what of Jacques Peuchet, as the epigraph suggests, who writes of the "warm and characteristic expression," that "kind of infectious enthusiasm" expressed "by despairing people preparing for their death"? What about, for instance, the felicitous effect of the suicidal fantasies of Septimus Warren Smith as he sits in Regents Park (developed further in chapter three)?

> He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at

> the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallowing swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made our of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere…
>
> He would turn around, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation—[16]

Both Dostoevsky and Woolf understood the aesthetic value of suicidal activity and the worlds that can be imagined from within such moments—expressions of felicitous solicitude. I want this dissertation to amplify our encounters with those worlds. What of that mode of activity, the liveliness inspired by entertaining one's own or another's death by suicide? Oughtn't that too be thought a lively activity?

Throughout the modern literature this dissertation examines, I am interested in the critical, aesthetic value of suicidal thinking and imagining. In sum, this dissertation is interested in suicidal activity as a mode-of-being-modern. It is not, of course, that to be modern, we must kill ourselves. Rather, it is that there is something critically and aesthetically valuable about suicidal activity and the signification of suicidality. As Benjamin has it in his later work, "modernity must stand under the sign of suicide."

*

The second difficulty I would like to address about the study of suicide is a contemporary one whose legacy stems from a long material history situated at the intersection of capitalism, on the one hand, and the biopolitical discourse of the mental health sciences on the other. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx gestures toward everyday life outside the production and circulation processes of capitalism, highlighting the ways in which, when confronted by various institutions, people are met with contempt.

> Political economy therefore does not recognize the unoccupied worker, the working man in so far as he is outside this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are *figures* which exist not *for it*, but only for other eyes—for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc. Nebulous figures which do not belong within the province of political economy. Therefore as far as political economy is concerned, the requirements of the worker can be narrowed down to one: the *need to support him while he is working* and prevent the *race of workers* from dying out.[17]

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault extends further an examination of our conditions of life "outside [the] work relationship," as Marx suggests. Spotlighting various forms of regulation from within institutions such as the hospital, the prison, the school, and from within scenes of modern discourse involving race and sexuality, Foucault argues that such regulatory forms "incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organize the forces under it."[18] Foucault argues that in the historical shift from juridical power to modernized forms of biopower, modern power seeks to manage, administer, and control life, rather than threaten death.

Foucault reads the development of regulatory forces of biopower alongside developments in capitalist modes of production in a mutually reinforcing way. As he writes, the "adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the differential allocation of profit, were made possible in part by the exercise of bio-power in its many forms and modes of application." Foucault argues, "bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism."[19] And while speaking about modern biopower, the idea of suicide was at the forefront of Foucault's mind.

In his final section of *The History of Sexuality,* "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault foregrounds his examination of modern power by remarking, "death is power's limit: the moment that escapes it."[20] Foucault gestures toward the historical relationship between power and death through which, in the modern era, suicide began to take center stage. As he writes,

> It is not surprising that suicide…became, in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die…was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.[21]

Inasmuch as this new form of power was about the administration of life—disciplining the body, especially its biological and mental processes in the service of capital—death, then, became a newly compelling form of resistance to it such that suicide described an escape from such power. Social scientists sought to make suicide itself into an object of knowledge.[22] Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychiatric and sociological sciences name two significant regulatory institutions of power that have dominated the meaning of "*le mal du siècle*" with which modernist writers responded, contended with, and critiqued.[23] And although Foucault only briefly discusses these forces in terms of suicide, historical scholarship on the conceptual modernization of suicide extends his claims whose *raison d'être* we still feel today.[24]

In the United States, as of 2017, suicide has been one of the second-leading causes of death among people aged 10-34, and fourth among those 35-54.[25] Suicide is clearly a problem. And the biopolitical problem surrounding discourse on suicide is tied to it. The problem is two-fold, concerning the tension created by resisting stigma, on the one hand, while forestalling risk on the other. Anyone who's listened to American public talk radio in the month of September, for instance, will know that the common idea about suicide prevention is that we need to resist the stigma surrounding suicide by insisting upon a productive conversation about it in the service of mitigating its frequency. However helpful this may be for some, for others, there's a catch.

Suicidal subjects are called upon to generate language about their suicidality that is then used to fuel biopolitical, pro-capitalist ideologies of subjection at the expense of alternate formulations. When suicidal subjects are called upon to voice their concerns, those concerns are funneled into discourses that preclude the freedom and creativity to determine the meaning of

their own suicidality while reinforcing discourses dominated by the compulsory ontology of pathology mentioned from the outset. In short, a person cannot entertain ending one's life, a sickness does.

By lodging the agency of suicidality only as something pathological, mental health care professionals limit the voices of the very people with whom they try to come to terms. As Lisa Lieberman writes, those in the medical sciences historically have "felt no qualms about disregarding the stated motivations of potential suicides in order to rid them of their delusions."[26] By using the vocabulary of contemporary mental health science, we are left hearing a compulsory chorus of passive victims of some sort of pathological self-destruction. The biopolitical message is clear: It's OK to be sick. Ascent to pathology supersedes fear of stigma.

Which leads me to the second bit. By lodging the agency of suicidality in terms of some pathogen, not only do we tend to remain blind to the value of alternative logics of suicidal subjects, but we simultaneously tend to frame that pathogen in terms of the stuff of contagion. Suicidality comes to name a bug we can catch.[27]

One of the most insistent takes on suicide-as-contagion is found in Jennifer Michael Hecht's *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Arguments Against It*, whose otherwise heartfelt contribution to the discourse on suicide-prevention indeed stands apart. In her book, Hecht responds to the devastating loss of two of her close friends. Hecht suspects a connection between the two suicides, the second one two years after the first, and in her historical account of suicide, she describes phenomena understood in sociological and epidemiological study as "suicidal clusters," various moments throughout history during which we indeed observe waves of suicides.[28] Hecht writes, "whether you call it contagion, suicidal clusters, or sociocultural modeling, our social sciences demonstrate that suicide causes more suicide, both among those

who knew the person and among the strangers who somehow identified with the victim." What's more, Hecht is so convinced about suicide as a contagion that she tries to convince her readers that "suicidal influence is strong enough that a suicide might also be considered a homicide."[29] Her work, like so many others in the field of suicidology, is painfully moralistic. For however uncomfortable it is to witness a writer describe her two close friends as murderers, I would also like to highlight that there is another sort of discomfort found in her work with regard to suicidal ideation.

Throughout her otherwise well-researched book about suicide and its prevention, Hecht acknowledges, yet dismisses the value of suicidal ideation as a preventative measure against corporeal suicide itself. Of suicidal ideation, she writes,

> Sometimes when a person is feeling very bad and perhaps very scared, it can be a comfort to know that if she ever comes to a place where the pain is too much, she would have an out. I have no wish to deprive anyone of consolation, especially since most people whom the option would comfort are unlikely ever to follow through with the act…Maybe such thoughts are harmless, but maybe they are not. Would it not be better, and more useful, for that fearful person to comfort herself by remembering that the intelligence and strength that got her through past trials are apt to get her through further trials as well?[30]

By suggesting that "most people whom the option would comfort are unlikely ever to follow through with the act," Hecht acknowledges the potential value of suicidal ideation for a suicidal subject. And while I am grateful for the shout out, Hecht's contempt for the value of suicidal ideation outshines her otherwise sharp observation. For although she suggests that suicidal ideation might prove "harmless," nowhere does she suggest that it might prove helpful. Nowhere in her work can suicidal activity be understood itself as a mitigating factor for the frequency of corporeal suicide.

Hecht's stance, here, is muted. Her book, from which this passage comes, itself has a history. In the painful events that led her to this passage, she has written other dismissive and condescending sentences about the value of suicidal ideation. In the wake of her friends'

suicides, Hecht took to a blog, The Best American Poetry, and published in January 2010 what she describes as an "open-letter essay," titled "On Suicide." In the essay, Hecht casually proclaims, "I'm issuing a rule. You are not allowed to kill yourself." I admire her boldness! In addition to her proscription, however, Hecht then insists to her readers, "you are going to like this," and offers a behavioral prescription to whom she assumes may be her potentially suicidal readers, again, one we are supposed to "like." She writes, "next time you are seriously considering suicide you can dismiss it quickly and go play a video game."[31]

While I am convinced of Hecht's good intentions in desiring a sort of modern prohibition against that which caused her pain while searching for anything at all for a suicidal person to do rather than engage in suicidality, her prescription risks a sort of daftness, whose glib tenor, especially for a suicidal person, may infuriate. This is precisely the sort of approach Donald Winnicott abhorred when he wrote,

> It is no good offering cheer to a depressed person or jogging [them] up and down, offering sweet-meats and pointing to the trees and saying: 'See the lovely shimmering green leaves.' To the depressed person the tree looks dead and the leaves are still. Or there are no leaves and there is only the black and blasted heath and the barren landscape. We only make fools of ourselves if we offer good cheer.[32]

Rather than tell the suicidal person how to behave or what to think, or not, oughtn't we first acknowledge, as had Winnicott, that symptoms are only problematic when they don't work for somebody?[33] All of which is to say, of the calls to speak suicide's name, a stigma still remains, namely, we are not supposed to think about suicide. The predominant idea is that there is nothing productive to say from the position of the suicidal subject other than something regretful. Or, in yet another way, the discourse on suicide and suicidal ideation suggests that we have nothing to learn from the suicidality of the suicidal subject other than something pathological. This particular stigma insists that speech acts about suicide must respond to and reify the abjection of suicidality.

*

By resisting stigma while forestalling risk, the biopolitical abjection of the critical voices of suicidality functions as a powerful mechanism of repressive control that simultaneously produces an active mute, or troublesome blind spot. I have found this blind spot best illuminated, and as such resisted, by Drew Daniel, whose comments on the demand for different lines of inquiry into suicidal ideation have amplified my own ability to speak and influenced the mode of address this dissertation takes.

In response to and on the very day of Anthony Bourdain's death, Daniel worried about the challenges of his own academic work on suicide. He writes:

> As some of you know, I'm writing a book about suicide. This means that every time there's a massively publicized suicide, I have to reflect again about why I keep going with this project and the risks of that. It's hard to talk about and that is part of why I am working on it. Here's some of my recent worrying at the topic: The standard alibi when we want to write about a subject, and especially a painful and violent topic, is to claim that our first and foremost goals are compassion and understanding. Thus the critic is valorized as an ethical agent replacing ignorance with insight, cruelty with clarity. But suicide radiates certain distortion effects that trouble this critical narrative by pitting understanding and compassion against each other. Chiefly, to articulate why someone would want to kill themselves is to potentially increase the risk that someone else will kill themselves. To talk about suicide at all is to risk "romanticizing" the subject for an imaginary someone who is thus constituted as vulnerable. Talking someone off a ledge becomes the paradigm for public speech about suicide; the other is framed as at risk, in need of manipulation away from their own projected desires and tendencies. This is more than a little paternalizing, and, worse, it surrenders a subject to protocols that reify the control of a "chemocratic" administered world in which the pathologization and medicalization of suicide has become an irrefutable conversation-stopper. These normative assumptions stop the full exploration of suicide, and [make] certain statements off-limits. Some would respond that if the result is that one less person commits suicide, then that outcome would justify such cordon-ing off of the topic. But when the subject is the history of representations of suicide, the critical exposition of suicidal ideation requires that we inhabit its dark nest of images, ideas, and assumptions.[34]

Of all that is admirable in Daniel's thinking—the self-awareness of the critic, the compassionate consideration of whom he would describe as self-killers and others like them, the contempt for pathologization and medicalization, and the imperative to keep thinking—what is most notable is the way in which Daniel acknowledges that we have more yet to learn about suicidality. Amongst the calls to speak suicide's name, few ever call upon the suicidal subject to speak

through and over the biopolitics about suicide from within one's suicidal ideation. Few ever call upon us to speak of that "dark nest of images, ideas, and assumptions." And almost no one insists that we "inhabit" them in an effort to understand them. Which is to say, not only does Daniel acknowledge the pedagogical value of suicidal ideation—what the suicidality of suicidal subjects can teach us. He also understands that value as something better understood by way of our social relation, by way of our solicitude of, toward, and for one another. His call to "inhabit" the histories of suicidality, its "dark nest of images, ideas, and assumptions," presupposes that we all can play a part in better understanding and contending with corporeal suicide. In sum, Daniel's rejoinder frames the burden of understanding suicidality as something we all share, for his call names a requirement for compassionately understanding the ways in which "suicides remind us of the constraints built into our freedom."

*

In many ways, I want this dissertation to tell a story, one whose mode of address is influenced not only by Daniel's sensitivities, but also by the concept found in Benjamin. As he writes: "A story does not aim to convey an event per se, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds the event in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the trace of the storyteller, much the way an earthen vessel bears the trace of the potter's hand."[35]

As I said from the outset, what I have to say in this dissertation oughtn't surprise anybody—anybody who knows me. I inhabit and have been inhabiting those dark nests of images, ideas, and assumptions since my middle teens. I have driven at, and past, those trees. I have made sure the coasts have been clear, positioning my various cars in front of those various walls, poles, and dumpsters. I have even mapped out those interstate bridge abutments

unprotected from those in our lot who may drive. I have loaded and chambered those little, dangerous things into those other dangerous, little machines. I have stared at the currents and eddies. I have even fantasized, upon running out of eggs, especially on my budget, violent trips to grocery stores set in motion by the need to secure those missing ingredients for my partner's dinner cooling on the countertop. I have fallen asleep too many times to count to the noun phrase, 'a bullet through my head.' I have been, am, and by all indications, will continue to be symptomatic of that which I study. Yet throughout my suicidal activity, I cannot but be inspired by the words of other fellow travelers, fictional or otherwise.

On August 10, 2018, for instance, Richard Russell, a baggage handler, commandeered his employer's Embraer Q400 airplane and took off from the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, alone. Just over an hour later, he landed what had become *his plane* on Ketron Island in the Puget Sound, effectively ending his life. In the interim, air traffic control contacted Russell in an effort to understand his motives and ultimately, to coerce Russell to bring the plane down on their terms. From within his suicidal performance, enjoying all the views of the Puget Sound from above, Russell responded, "Yeah, I'm not quite ready to bring it down just yet." Taking in "all the sights" during his "moment of serenity," Russell even flirts with air traffic control, asking after the cite of an event he'd recently heard about in the news. He exclaims: "Hey! I want the coordinates of that orca with the…you know…the mama orca with the baby? I wanna go see that..." He even asked for advice on how to perform some specific maneuvers before completing, successfully, a series of aerial acrobatics.[36] In the joyous moments before his death, Russell's suicidal activity, like that of so many others, amplified him.

Which is to say, I would like to highlight the ways in which suicidal activity can reveal a vast worldness. For suicidal activity—my fantasies of escape from our cruel historical conditions

of social reproduction—has reconnected me to the potential for a world that might already be there, if only our relations to it were activated differently. By way of my suicidal mode of engagement, the social protocols of normative, capitalist engagement have momentarily fallen away. As Marx has written, the "properties of a thing do not arise from its relation to other things, they are, on the contrary, merely *activated* by such relations."[37] I argue that suicidality describes an alternate mode of activation—activating a way of re-imagining our relationship to materiality and to one another—through which we may encounter our worlds otherwise.

Like Septimus, as I have encountered that tree, the tree "brandished," ceasing to be the city's tree planted on that tree lawn. Rather the tree exhibits the shape, texture, and materiality of its bark.[38] In anticipation of my decreased proximity to the wall of the big box store, that concrete wall ceases to function as some unit of mere fixed capital. Likewise, the pole ceases to mediate mere, commodified electrification, while the dumpster's chipped paint presents itself not as some component of cost. Rather, I have been struck by images of the binding capabilities of cement, the curiosity of circuitry, and what my bumper's mark would contribute to the waste of capitalization, the archive of scars monumentalized on that vessel of constant capital. Of the interstate bridge abutment? The threat of cold-war kabooms dissolve into an appreciation of our deployment of physics—our ruse on gravity. A fucking egg? How ludicrous it is to feel trumped by a single-cell ingredient I cannot afford—that particular ingredient that would satisfactorily complete my partner's workday, setting the stage for yet another, the potency of that re-potentialized ovum sought after to reproduce our sociality?

My suicidal activity has offered me an alternate mode of sensuous engagement, not only with our materiality, but also, and especially, with our solicitude. The expression on my dog's face as I chamber the round asks after a sniff, of which I oblige, making sure she familiarizes

herself with that brass, that lead, the scent of that poison permeating the chamber, all in the service of straightening that tilted head known of courageous dogs struggling to confront their own fears. But then I anticipate the effect of that sound—the effect for which I will not prime her, let alone her potential encounter with my corpse. I mean, while alone, I anticipate what my body might appear like swirling around in circles in that eddy. I have wondered whether I'd appear to those who find me as peacefully as I would like. But what of the risk of presenting a different image in the minds of my captors? Were I to kill myself, I'd damn sure get it right, you know? My anticipation has set in motion such anxieties, and from within those moments fraught with anxiety, I realize how little any of it is about me.

Heidegger seemed to know this too. In a passage I've not seen referenced enough, he wrote of the value of the anticipation of our death that suicidality can make available:

> *Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself…in an impassioned* **freedom toward death**—*a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they', and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious*.[39]

And of course, Heidegger argues that such anxiety also names care. For it is difficult to deny that whatever I have imagined suicide might do *for* me, it might also do something else, something different, *to* others. And again, I am reminded of my fellow traveler, Richard Russell, who exclaimed to his air traffic controller during his suicidal flight, "I'm sorry about this. I hope it doesn't ruin your day."[40] Or better yet, as MC Ride insists in his aesthetic representation of suicidality-as-solicitude, "All the nights I don't die for you/Wouldn't believe how many nights I ain't died for you on GP."[41] If only such a principle could be generalized.

Yet voicing my own suicidality is not the unsurprising part, or rather, the unsurprising part that I risk. As Daniel writes, the "protocols of censure or evasion are incompatible with the sympathetic investments that" "literary critical interpretations…require on their way to synthetic judgments." For apprehending the value of my own suicidality has made me attentive to those of

others in such ways that I no longer sing some kind of suicidal solo-act, but rather risk, in this dissertation, narrating a story about an age-old chorus of suicidality found throughout modernist literature. In this dissertation, I am not alone, and there's less risk here.

*

"Under the Sign of Suicide" highlights the ways in which representations of suicidality in modernist literature indicate the degree to which capitalist modernity has been felt as so totalizing and complete that efforts to imagine escaping from such powerful forces has invited fantastically violent escapes from life itself. Yet by reading a little more closely and paying attention to the varied, yet subtle conditions of possibility for the amplification of suicidality under capitalism, we may understand modern suicidality as a mode of perception of our modern world, on the one hand, and on the other, as a mode of productive performance—a rehearsal—that invites us to imagine how we might begin to repair our broken relation to this world.

Although developed more thoroughly in chapter two, these two operations—perception and production—name what Benjamin describes as the mimetic faculty, a theoretical concept central to my thinking.[42] Benjamin argues that the mimetic faculty is a basic human capacity whose operations perceive and produce similarities. At its most innocuous, Benjamin invites us to imagine the child miming the function of some object, a "windmill."[43] We encounter the child's arms, stretched out, beginning to rotate. We may laugh. We may play along, as well, reminding the child how windy it is today in an effort to amplify the child-windmill's performance—and enjoyment. And ours. But in the process, we may also become more aware of something, a risk. We may warn the child-windmill to be careful not to damage the blades, or those gears. Our response may be playful, but we know the child's mimetic performance has drawn our attention to the health of the child's rotator cuffs. Which is to say, mimetic

productions can remind of our humane materiality. We are asked to mime machines all the time. But through that mimicry, we can remind ourselves that we are still, indeed, embodied people.

And we mime a lot. Yet the lot of mimetic centers and mimetic objects may be difficult to identify as such. As Benjamin writes, "not only are the objects of this mimetic force innumerable, but the same thing may be said of the subjects, of the mimetic centers that may be numerous within every being."[44] What he means is that everything exists in a relation of similarity. Everything is in a condition of being-similar in one way or another, and he wants to attune us to those mimetic centers rather than have us struggle with lines of incommensurability, on the one hand, and equivalence and exchangeability, on the other. What's more, Benjamin argues that not all mimetic productions are obvious to us, nor innocuous. What happens, for instance, when we mime a problem, a contradiction, or all the forms of nefarious relations we encounter throughout our daily lives under capitalism? What happens when we mime the egregious horrors of the bourgeoisie? Or a loss? By tending to the ways in which the mimetic faculty plays a part in the rehearsals our interactions with various objects, scenes, situations, problems, contradictions, and on and on, we must simultaneously remind ourselves of our relationships to the world that situate us within our lived histories in critical ways. Our close proximity to our mimeses, however, may make this difficult. We sometimes require critical distance in the service of productive criticism.

An acknowledgement of the critical value of the mimetic faculty can be made vivid, however, by tending to the aesthetic products made possible by its various operations throughout history. We have an archive. Although set in motion by their various engagements with the world, the mimetic productions of modernist writers offer us something distinct, allowing us to read their productions as discrete performance-objects through which we may learn something.

Literary productions establish for us a critical distance from our own mimetic performances such that they can invite us—through our own mimetic reception—to better analyze, evaluate, and ultimately better understand the various ways in which different social problems are imbricated in different mimetic productions themselves. Which is to say, modernist literature names a valuable resource for identifying the critical projects in which our mimetic faculties may participate.

The chapters that compose this dissertation are connected by a shared preoccupation with deathly and suicidal thought images whose externalization and objectification in literary form make available to readers an opportunity to encounter, inhabit, analyze, and evaluate the ways in which our liveliness, framed through deathly and suicidal imagery, may be imagined in new, more critical and productive ways.

Chapters one and two are intimately related, as both set up a more theoretical approach to the historical conditions of possibility for modernist representations of suicidality, on the one hand, and on the other, set up the terms by which chapters three and four then explore aesthetic expressions of the criticality of suicidality in modernist fiction.

Chapter one examines works by and attributed to Karl Marx and argues that modern suicidality follows a similar course as our estrangement under capitalism. Marx briefly examined suicide as a social problem in his 1845 translation, "Peuchet: On Suicide." Yet it is in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* where he emphasizes the ways in which we affectively encounter capitalism on a more subjective level, on the one hand, and it is throughout *Capital* where he mediates the structural mechanisms by which people have become estranged on the other. By drawing from each, I put in conversation our more subjective experience of capitalism with those of our structural economic conditions, all in the service of highlighting the

ways in which persistent deathly and suicidal thought-images function as a way of tracing our experience under capitalism as it has moved throughout history—the ways in which we encounter, as Marx insists, the "rule of things over man, of dead labor over the living." By examining the history of capitalism in terms of estrangement, we may better understand the ways in which the commodification of reified human activity that makes capitalism possible also sets in motion the appearance of an "I" that labors, a mimetic reproduction of dead labor misidentified as our corporeal bodies upon which suicidality tends to direct its aggression. In short, chapter one argues that our suicidality rehearses the contradictions bound up in the capital relation through which we may avow the violent conditions of our estranged life under capitalism.

Chapter two draws out the dissertation's most significant theoretical claims. Inspired by Walter Benjamin, whose own suicidal activity influenced his later writing, I develop further Benjamin's work with the mimetic faculty and trace the ways in which Charles Baudelaire, one of Benjamin's protagonists, engages in suicidal mimeses that exhibit an allegorical function, revealing the absurdity of the commodification of reified human activity, on the one hand, while giving lie to the affective apprehension of death implicit in our experience of capitalist modernity, on the other. I argue that Baudelaire's mimetic immersion within the Paris Arcades names a critical mimesis of the deathly logic of the capital relation drawn out in chapter one. By approaching suicidality as an allegorical, critical mimesis, we may better understand suicidality within our lived histories under capitalism; we may better acknowledge the ways in which the allegorical value of suicidal activity affirms our humanity; and we may help mitigate the frequency of suicide itself by redirecting our creative energy in the service of its critical portrayal.

Chapters three and four examine such critical portrayals by analyzing two key modernist novels whose representations of suicide stake claims in the changing and localized materialization of power and resistance in terms of class, gender & sexuality, and race.

Chapter three examines Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and highlights the relationship between Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway's suicidal mimesis which take the form of fantasy. Septimus, a queer, working-class, shell-shocked veteran of the European war, struggles to engage with predominant biopolitical prescriptions in relation to his suicidality. Against his doctors' best wishes, he engages in suicidal fantasies that mimic his involvement in the Great War in strikingly therapeutic ways that then only further invite and exacerbate medical surveillance and control. Although his suicidal mimeses provide him with affective empowerment, Septimus eventually kills himself in the face of intensified medical pressure, an event through which Clarissa identifies and subsequently reflects on her own bourgeois life, mired in biopolitical surveillance. Where keeping suicidal fantasy close in mind momentarily helps Septimus, I argue that Clarissa's own suicidal mimeses have become her method of psychic and affective survival in the face of her own losses, her key to her being-alive.

Chapter four examines James Baldwin's *Another Country*. From the outset, readers are invited to accompany Rufus Scott as he engages in suicidal ideation. Wandering the streets of New York, readers quickly realize that Rufus—a jazz musician—is out of work, out of friends, and too humiliated to face his family in Harlem. Most importantly, we realize Rufus is improvising from within a mimetic immersion organized by various forces of heteronormative, white supremacy through which he internalizes his blackness and queerness as a problem. Despite his improvisational, suicidal mimeses, Rufus' experience with the violence of normativity builds up around him, making it difficult for him to find the value of his own life.

Within this white-supremacist, heteronormative world, readers accompany Rufus as he climbs atop the George Washington Bridge. And with his "eyes toward heaven," Rufus asks, "Ain't I your baby, too?" Rufus' suicide names not only a mimetic figuration of the violence of white supremacy from within capitalist modernity, but also a strong critique of that world itself. Rufus' suicidality stands as an imperative to imagine *another* world, or "another country," as Baldwin's title suggests.

*

In closing, while drafting this dissertation I have had to wager what I must imagine as an unsurprising risk, one that has helped me speak to you. While my suicidal activity in no small part informs the presentation of this writing, this dissertation tells more than a mere story. It also wagers an assumption about its audience based on an observation in Marx. In his 1844 manuscripts, Marx writes, "in so far as [people], and hence also [their] feelings, etc., are *human*, the affirmation of [an] object by another is also [one's] own gratification."[45] Which is to say, if I have found a value in suicidal activity amplified by modernist literature, what about others?

What about you?

Might I risk such an assumption? I mean, I already have. But might I risk pretending, at least, that more people tend to engage in suicidal activity than we may otherwise tend to acknowledge? And, might I risk that we probably tend to like it, at least a little—at least some bits of it? The part, every now and again, when we affirm our sensuous engagement with the world, our liveliness, and our solicitude? I know I like that bit. It's helped me stick around.

I am reminded of *Naked Lunch*, in which William S. Burroughs repeatedly asks, in a not dissimilar context, "Wouldn't you?"[46] I mean, in the face of suffering, yet surviving our lived, forced (self-)estrangement under capitalist modes of production, circulation, and distribution;

and in addition, in the face of suffering and surviving the various mechanisms of biopower that organize our lives, wouldn't you think about suicide, your own or another's? Or, perhaps more strongly, haven't you? Or, won't you?

You have my sympathies. And I beg your pardon alongside those of the corporeal suicides, as all of this is quite messy.

But I wager that those who have engaged in suicidal activity have something to teach us—that we may learn from those of our lot. Again, "for what is life but activity?" So, what about suicidal activity? Despite the pain, or precisely because of suicidal reactions to it, oughtn't that activity be thought lively? And mightn't that activity, framed as a lively one, help mitigate that pain?

I like these kinds of questions, because among other things, they demonstrate the value of thinking in auxiliary modes. Questions like these can help us by way of the auxiliary function of their verbs, also sometimes called modal verbs. Modal verbs express necessity and/or possibility, and in the face of the most predominant, modern mode of production, modal verbs like these—would, have, will, may, might, ought, and on and on—especially when combined with suicide, enable an encounter that may help us avow the necessity of thinking about our liveliness in new ways, namely, in the service of imagining and creating other, possible modes of social reproduction. For suicidal activity, perhaps surprisingly, I wager, names one mode of lively activity under capitalism that may help us point toward other, better modes of production, perhaps some less suicidal.

I can only anticipate.

Again, all of this is quite messy.

But I'd gladly risk the painful part of my tendency toward suicidal activity, which is to say, our suicidal activity under capitalism, if only you and I could live.

Wouldn't you?

CHAPTER ONE

"A Mysterious Antithesis"
Capitalism and Suicidality

> The supersession [*Aufhebung*] of self-estrangement follows the same course as self-estrangement.
>
> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

I want that epigraph to read differently. As suicide itself names one form of self-estrangement, I want that epigraph to suggest that understanding our condition of estrangement under capitalism is necessary for contending with modern suicidality. Ultimately, I want it to say that our suicidality tends to follow a similar course as our estrangement under modern capitalism—that each phenomenon is connected. And while Karl Marx briefly examines suicide as a social problem of estrangement in his 1845 article, "Peuchet: On Suicide," the epigraph comes from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. For it is there where he emphasizes more thoroughly the ways in which we affectively encounter capitalism on a more subjective level. *Capital*, then, mediates more carefully the structural mechanisms of estrangement in the modern era. By drawing from each, I look to put into conversation the tendencies of our more subjective experience of capitalism, on the one hand, with those of our structural economic conditions, on the other, all in the service of highlighting the ways in which persistent deathly and suicidal thought-images function in anti-capitalist thought as a way of capturing how it has felt to suffer capitalism throughout its history. I argue that by examining the historical development of estrangement under capitalism, we may better understand the ways in which the reified human activity that makes capitalist production possible sets in motion the appearance of an *ad hominem* "I" that labors, a fantastical, bourgeois subjectivity misidentified as our corporeal bodies upon which our suicidality tends to direct its aggression. Our modern

tendency toward suicidality is a way of avowing the violent conditions of our estranged life under capitalism.

I am also, and perhaps more, interested in the ways in which we fall short of corporeal suicide, namely, our suicidal activity—nonfatal behavior characterized by suicidal daydreaming, fantasy, ideation, and planning, all the way to nonfatal acts of physical violence against one's body. I argue that literary moments of suicidal activity often reveal a somewhat surprising affirmation of the power to live, the power, even, of joy, as Spinoza might have it.[1] I am curious about the extent to which such moments of suicidal activity may be understood as modes of utopian thinking, imagining our conditions in the world other than they are in the service of material, social change. By way of illustration, I offer Marx's and Engel's slight, but illuminating analysis of Eugène Sue's character, Fleur de Marie, whose suicidal activity confirms her estrangement under capitalism on a more subjective level, but also functions as a lively mode of being-in-the-world that helps her stay in her world. This chapter is interested in the ways in which suicidal activity may draw our attention to our social structures while revealing a relatively unexamined way of reconnecting with our worlds. I argue that modern suicidal activity can function not only as a way of confirming our collective estrangement. More importantly, suicidal activity can also function as a de-reifying affirmation of the possibility of imagining new forms of social reproduction.

ENTFREMDUNG & SUICIDE

…because each is a stranger to himself and all are strangers to one another.

Karl Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 1845

In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx asks, "for what is life but activity?," a question whose volume has tended to deafen us toward the necessity of answering in the affirmative, as if we haven't been able to listen.[2] Embedded in this simple, rhetorical question (Hey, look what I did?), and its necessary affirmation (Oh, how lovely!), is what I understand as Marx's approach to value in general. Value names our enjoyment of objectified human activity, powered by life's energy, reflected back to us from within our worlds. At times, this reflection appears to us in the form of an affirmation by another (Oh, how lovely!). At others, it appears to us by way of our historically sensuous apprehension of our worlds themselves, as Marx famously stated, "The *senses* have therefore become *theoreticians* in their immediate praxis."[3]

And, of course, value is more than that. Or, rather, the character of value can manifest in different ways. It depends on its mode of production. And what I mean is that, throughout his work, Marx lucidly defines value as the historical externalization and objectification of human activity, a seemingly innocuous process capable of nefarious manipulation. Slavery names one mode of that nefariousness, as does feudalism. Capitalism, of course, names yet another. In other words, in his more mature work, which takes capitalism as its focus, Marx defines the character of value not only as the externalization and objectification of human activity, but as the nefarious effect of labor-power. Labor-power, in other words, is Marx's translated idiom for that which produces value under capitalism. As such, value names "nothing other than objectified labour" produced by "self-acting, value-creating labour-power, living labour."[4] Marx argues, value "appears in all forms in the shape of a thing, be it an object or be it a relation mediated through the object."[5] Yet under capitalist modes of production, this relation has taken aberrant forms. Value has not only become objectified in objects, but also fetishized in the commodity form, as if

the commodity itself generates its own value, masking its cause. In short, capitalism names an aberrant mode of objectification, the effects from which we have become estranged.

And to be sure, by estrangement, I mean to emphasize less the effects of the innocuous activity of externalization and objectification, or the more problematic conditions of alienation (*Entäusserung*), as labor had become more formally subsumed under capital.[6] Rather, I mean to emphasize estrangement (*Entfremdung*). As Benton explains, "*Entfremdung* suggests more strongly than *Entäusserung* that man is opposed by an alien power which he himself has produced but which now governs him."[7] Yet, before unpacking that suggestion, I would like to argue that embedded within conditions of estrangement is a key to understanding modern suicidality.

*

In the middle 1840s, Marx too was preoccupied with such connections. In *1844*, Marx had begun highlighting the subjective effects of our structural estrangement under capitalist modes of production. For Marx, estrangement manifests in four ways: workers find themselves estranged from the products of our activity, from productive activity itself, from our own humanity, and from each other. And in each section of "Estranged Labour" in which Marx draws out estrangement's four-part materialization, we find estrangement described in ways that resonate with death and suicidality. Marx describes estrangement from the products of labor as a "loss of reality;" from productive activity as "self-sacrifice;" from humanity as a "tear[ing] away" from one's "own body;" and from one another as a process in which our "vitality" stands "as a sacrifice of life."[8] In each of his four analyses, Marx's language sets in mind deathly, suicidal thought-images that, I argue, have become compelling and precise ways to characterize our affective encounter with capitalist exploitation.

By 1845, just one year later, Marx examined corporeal suicides themselves most explicitly as historical sites of criticality vis-à-vis our estrangement under capitalism. “Peuchet: On Suicide” is an inspiringly odd document.[9]

Unlike Marx’s other short articles, “Peuchet: On Suicide” functions as both a critical article and a translation of the French critic, revolutionary, physician, economist, police administrator, and police archivist, Jacques Peuchet’s 1838 memoir, *Mémoires tirés des archives de la police de Paris, pour sevir à l’histoire de la morale et de la police, despuis Louis XIV jusqu’à nos jours*. Marx plays specifically with chapter fifty-eight, “Du suicide et de ses causes,” “Suicide and its causes.” By plays, I mean that in addition to offering a German translation, Marx also includes a brief introduction; he rearranges Peuchet’s original text; he adds italicized emphases; and he altogether changes some of Peuchet’s meanings here and there. At moments, he interjects with brief digressions. At others, he omits entire sentences and adds his own substitutions.[10] For instance, where Peuchet announces his purpose, “[w]ithout engaging in any theoretical investigation, I shall try to adduce facts,” Marx instead offers, “I found that any attempts short of a *total reform of the present order of society* would be in vain.”[11] Close enough! “Peuchet: On Suicide” is perhaps best understood, as Kevin Anderson writes, as an “edited” translation, to which I might add—*à la manière du matérialisme historique*.[12] Like many of Marx’s earlier works, it’s a fun read.

In Marx’s article, we learn that Peuchet’s position within the police administration asked him to respond to suicides as part of his responsibilities, and in his memoir, he wrote about a host of then contemporary suicides. He examines most specifically those of three young women and one young man. All were French bourgeoisie. The first details a daughter of a tailor who “rushed to the Seine” after being shamed by her family and neighbors for engaging in pre-marital sex

with her fiancé. The next, a young creole's sister-in-law, had also "drowned herself" after suffering years of confinement and torture on the behalf of her wealthy and jealous husband. The third Peuchet describes as a niece of a Paris banker who, after failing to secure the abortion of her married lover's fetus, "had slipped and fallen into a brook on the estate of her guardians at Villemomble and had drowned." And finally, a guard in the royal palace, after losing both his job and failing to secure any future prospects, despite his best efforts, "killed himself."[13] Peuchet does not disclose the man's method.

But rather than detail these incidents with the moral fervor of his contemporaries, Peuchet's characterization of these victims stood apart.[14] In addition to offering great detail about the social circumstances of each suicide, he describes all of the victims as exhibiting "this energetic driving force of personality" with an "infectious enthusiasm" and "excellent spirit." Peuchet continues, that maintaining a "greatness of soul," each testifies to the ways in which their suicides "rebel against the thought of occupying a place of honour among the hangmen." In short, Peuchet describes these suicides as embodying, albeit tragically, a critical "love of life itself" in stark contrast to then predominant French attitudes toward suicide.[15] As Peuchet describes:

> "Everything that has been said against suicide goes round and round in the same circle of ideas. People cite against it the decrees of Providence, but the existence of suicide is itself an open protest against her indecipherable decrees. They talk to us of our duties to this society without explaining or implementing our own claims on society, and finally they exalt the thousand times greater merit of overcoming pain rather than succumbing to it, a merit as sad as the prospects it opens up. In short, they make of suicide an act of cowardice, a crime against the law…and honour."[16]

Resisting the French tendency to moralize suicide at the time, Peuchet describes his intention, as mentioned above, to avoid "engaging in any theoretical investigation." Rather, he frankly states, "I shall try to adduce facts." And to the extent to which his memoir announces a motive for his

writing, we learn that he merely "wished to learn whether among the causes motivating [the suicides] there were any whose effect could be obviated."[17]

Peuchet was a sympathetic person. Marx agrees. He comments that Peuchet evinced "the warmth of life itself, broadness of view, refined subtlety, and bold originality of spirit, which one will seek in vain in any other nation."[18] Which is to say, "Peuchet: On Suicide" is inspiringly odd in another way. As Eric A. Plaut writes, "[w]hat most commonly stimulated [Marx] to write was disagreement with someone." "In contrast," Plaut continues, Marx's "view of Peuchet is clearly favorable."[19] Yet despite Peuchet's attempts to establish some critical, amoral distance from his subject, of course, this form of sympathy is not all we find. Peuchet indeed makes an argument—not surprisingly, a sympathetic one.

In the five moments where we may be tempted to adduce Peuchet's thesis, Marx's intervenes three times. In addition to the moment mentioned above where Marx speaks to the need for the "*total reform of the present order of society*," Peuchet argues that suicide "must be regarded as a symptom of the faulty organisation of our society."[20] In other words, for Peuchet, suicide was an expression of a social problem.[21] For Marx it was an expression of the social problem of estrangement examined in greater theoretical detail just months earlier, as we shall see. Roughly half-way through, Peuchet makes a similar claim, but with Marx's added, italicized emphasis: "The classification of the various causes of suicide would be the classification of the *very defects of our society*." The fourth is Peuchet's alone: "One perceives that for want of something better, suicide is the extreme resort against the evils of private life."[22] Marx, perhaps obviously, saw no reason to intervene.

And that fifth? If Peuchet's purpose, and by proxy, Marx's, was to expose the ways in which bourgeois social life sets in motion tendencies toward suicidality, then Marx's edited

translation extended the spirit of Peuchet's argument about French social life into German social and intellectual life as well. As Anderson sharply acknowledges, not only was Marx "moving toward…more empirically grounded investigation[s] of the real social and economic conditions of modern society." His edited translation also demonstrated to his German readers that "it is not only the workers, but the whole of bourgeois society that suffers under dehumanized social relations."[23] But in reframing the fifth of Peuchet's main arguments, I argue, Marx intervened most significantly and brings Peuchet's interests in corporeal suicide in harmony with his own.

Marx's translator writes, "[t]aken by Marx from the description of another case of suicide given by Peuchet," "Marx gave a free rendering" to Peuchet's claim and added its "concluding words."[24] Where Peuchet concludes that "[o]pinion [about suicide] is too much divided by people's isolation, too ignorant, too corrupt," Marx offers up its premise, "because each is a stranger to himself and all are strangers to one another."[25] Not only, then, had suicide named for Marx a symptomatic expression of our estrangement, but the discourses that inform and organize our understanding of suicidal activity itself demanded an avowal of our condition of estrangement under capitalist modes of production.

THE RULE OF DEAD LABOR OVER THE LIVING

> Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living.
>
> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, circa 1866

I want to return, now, to an earlier question, namely, how can externalized, objectified life-energy function as an alien power that governs us? In other words, how can an object and its structural processes of objectification come to appear as a subject, and vice versa? And what

does this have to do with our subjective experience of estrangement, and ultimately, deathly, suicidal thought-images?

Marx examined capitalism in its historical development, and observes, on the one hand, what he calls the "formal subsumption of labor under capital," an early development in that history.[26] As more and more production processes began to take capitalist shape, commodities increasingly came to name the form value has taken, both as use-value and exchange-value. Yet a most peculiar "irrationality" appeared in the process.[27] Capitalists fixed a price on that which produces value as if that value-producing power itself has a value as a commodity. Human labor-power, the wage, names "a magnitude fixed in advance"[28] both of production and circulation throughout the cycles of capitalism. To say the absolute least (and I feel absolutely foolish saying it), reification has been a problem. As a result, Marx argues, "the creative power of labour" itself has appeared to "possess the qualities of a thing," a quite unfortunate absurdity.[29] Workers have become reified through the dominant gaze and control of capitalists as mere variable capital.

Once purchased on the labor market, reified labor-power has then been put to use in the service of the capitalists who both own the means of production and have deployed reified human labor-power to enchant the means of production as they have seen fit. Workers have encountered little, if any, creative control over their creative activity such that they have come to feel less and less empowered as the value-producing agents they in fact are, and feel more and more "valuable" only in relation to the predominant, fetishized form value takes, namely, the commodity-form. Or worse yet, workers have felt "valuable" only in relation to that "special commodity" by which they have come to be treated by capitalists, as absurdly reified labor-power.[30] Not only, then, have workers become estranged from the products of their labor, as they have had no control over them nor their circulation. Workers also have become estranged from

their own productive activity itself. Suffice it to say, this tends to hurt. In other words, the reification of human activity has set in motion not only the appearance of an "I" that labors (reified labor-power), but also an "I" that comes back to us as a dead thing (the fetishized commodity). As Marx wrote in *1844*, labor constitutes a "loss of [one's] self."[31]

And what's worse, this has become a particularly lonely and violent game for workers. Compelled to offer for sale reified labor-power as legally "free" proprietors on competitive labor markets, workers have appeared as self-estranged from one another.[32] As Marx's earlier writings of *1844* suggest, the "competition among [workers] has become all the more considerable, unnatural, and violent."[33] By 1848, Marx and Engels wrote of workers' violent tendencies to "direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages."[34] And by the 1860s, Marx (again, with the help of Engels) began to write of such instances as expressions of various "industrial pathologies."[35] Suffice it to say, the history of capitalism, let alone History, illustrates well the ways in which reactionary violence too often misapprehends its target.

Under processes of the formal subsumption of labor under capital, commodities have appeared less vividly as the creative and productive effect (objectification) of a person's life-energy, but more and more mistakenly as some*thing* "external and accidental to the individual," a manifestation of their fetishization.[36] As capitalism has come to name the predominant mode of production, then, the concomitant way to encounter creative, value-producing power has been in relation to the production of the commodity-form, mere, fetishized artifacts haunted by irrationally reified labor-power. In short, to acknowledge value under capitalism has necessitated

some functional proximity to the commodity in its various fetishized or reified forms, what Marx, as early as the middle 1840s, began to describe in terms of death. In *1844*, Marx describes commodities as "dead capital."[37] He would soon alter his idiom to emphasize the position of workers in their relation to capital.

*

As capitalism expands and intensifies throughout history, Marx theorizes, on the other hand, a development whereby the formal subsumption of labor under capital normalizes, ushering in what he describes as the "real subsumption of labor under capital." Although capitalism has expanded and intensified unevenly, this has surely become the condition of our present (at the very least in the United States). Marx argues, "living labour does not realize itself in objective labour which thereby becomes its objective organ, but instead objective labour maintains and fortifies itself by drawing off living labour." Rather than continue to describe commodities as dead capital, however, Marx began more regularly to refer to commodities as "dead labour." More poignantly, he began to refer to the capital relation as a process driven by a deathly thought-image—a process he curiously describes as "dead labour over the living." And what's worse, Marx argues, labor has become "one of the *modes of existence* of capital."[38] The death of workers' life energy has come to function as an expression of the mode of existence of production itself. Under increasingly normalized capitalist modes of production in our modern world, humanity has ceased to be the "aim of production." Rather, the capitalist mode of production itself—a mode of production predicated on the death of workers' collective life energy—has increasingly appeared "as the aim of mankind."[39] Capital has appeared, then, to take the place of the subject while human beings and their lives' energy have merely appeared and are encountered as the "I" of reified death.

What is crucial to understand, and what I develop further in chapter two, is that under the real subsumption of labor under capital, within our present, "all the *social productive forces of labour*," our lives' energy, "appear as the *productive forces* of capital, as intrinsic attributes of capital," as dead labor.[40] Or in yet another way, all lively, creative activity has come to appear "as something independent of the workers and intrinsic to the conditions of production themselves," as dead labor over the living.[41] Described as the "mystification[s] of capital," this is where we may begin to observe the ways in which an alien power that people have produced has been experienced most intensely as a collectively-estranged specter that governs us.[42] In sum, if the bourgeois commodification of reified labor-power has absurdly insisted that labor-power, our lives' energy, is a thing, and if under the real subsumption of labor under capital all forces of our lives' energy have appeared as forces of capital, then we may most fully understand the ways in which we have become structurally estranged from our humanity—what Marx means when he describes the capital relation as "the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living."[43] Capitalism haunts us with the corpse of our collective death.

THE *AD HOMINEM* CAPITAL RELATION, OR, CAPITALISM: SUICIDAL FOR THE WHOLE OF MANKIND

> Far from leading to permanent peace, capitalism has led to two world wars and risks a third one, suicidal for the whole of mankind.
>
> Ernest Mandel, "Introduction," *Capital*, Volume III, 1981

Marx's deathly thought-images function as expressions of his historical patterns of *ad hominem* that transform throughout his writings. And although his *ad hominem* characterizations focus mostly on capitalists and capitalism, Marx's ghosts have taken many sides. "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism."[44] And while *ad hominem* is often understood in

argumentation as a way to attack a person rather than the intellectual position that that person may take, Marx's uses of *ad hominem* perform different rhetorical functions that I understand as expressions of the radicalism of his youth and the literary sophistication of his adult life. In his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, for instance, Marx wrote,

> The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical.[45]

By way of example, around the middle 1840s, Marx and Engels began to describe property owners as "vampires."[46] Marx and Engels sought simply to risk an assumption, namely, that the bourgeoisie had used their property as the means of production to which the life-force of social labor had been put to work, as another's blood to a vampire. In Marx's more mature writings, however, his use of *ad hominem* began to take more sophisticated shapes. With the publication of *Capital*, volume one in the middle-1860s, Marx continues to use the *ad hominem* "vampire" on three occasions.[47] Yet in each, he uses it not to characterize capitalists so much as capital itself in its fetishized, subject-appearance in more advanced stages of its development. To better understand the sophistication of Marx's *ad hominem*, it might be best to examine *ad hominem* itself.

Ad hominem functions as a transliteration of a late sixteenth-century Latin expression that literally means "to the person." The prefix "*ad-*" translates as the preposition "to," but can also suggest several meanings at once: a motion or direction toward something; an addition, increase, or intensification of something; or lastly, a reduction or a change into something. In its prepositional form, the *ad* of Marx's *ad hominem* gestures toward the historically changing appearance of the capital relation. As mentioned above, as capitalist modes of production both intensified and expanded throughout history, the products of human labor-power have appeared

to maintain and fortify themselves by drawing off living labor, as might a vampire to another's blood—which brings us to Marx's object-personification. *Hominem* literally translates as "person." As Marx began referring to capital as a vampire rather than capitalists, Marx plays with the ways in which, under capitalism, we encounter our world not as innocuous extensions of our own activity (objectification), but rather as menacingly oppositional, disembodied forces. Marx's *ad hominem* not only resonates with the historical appearance of the fetishized subject-character of capital, but it also functions as a savvier *ad hominem* idiom. For where capitalists are people, capital, like a vampire, is always-already a corpse. By risking the assumption of a vampiric, spectral place-holder, Marx's *ad hominem* contends with the ways in which capitalism has made its otherwise absent subject a problem for us. In other words, if the appearance of the "I" that labors names *ad hominem* the fetishized, subject character of reified human activity, then Marx's *ad hominem*, "vampire" functions in his later writing as his own literary idiom. It functions as his way of rhetorically re-fetishizing the deathly subject-character of always-already dead labor, or fetishized capital. And it will change shape, again.

Although volume three of *Capital* continues to describe capitalists and workers in *ad hominem* ways, as "embodiments and personifications of capital and wage-labour,"[48] the deathly thought-images begin to transform as volume three examines capitalism in more systematic ways. No longer do we read explicitly about capitalism's "*dramatis personae*" in such vivid language as we do in volume one. Which is to say, although Marx indeed examines capitalism as a process in the first two volumes, the capitalism about which we read in volume three is more than that of the activity of people within the factory or the market. No longer do we read about various manifestations of the "'free-trader *vulgaris*'"—the capitalist as "one who smirks self-importantly," "intent on business," while the "timid" worker "holds back, like someone who has

brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning."[49] The *ad hominem* of volume three details more the tendential, spectral motions between entire classes of actors and of broadly abstracted monetary functions. It focuses on the mystifications of capital themselves at their most abstract, systemic levels. It meditates on the commodity fetish at its peak. And although volume three doesn't explicitly say it, the logic of this disembodied, *ad hominem* subjectivity appears suicidal.

I can offer no more concise explanation of capitalism's *ad hominem* suicidality in volume three than by way of Ernest Mandel. He identifies its research question in a curiously laconic way, "Whither capitalism?"[50] Summing up the three main moves in volume three, i.e., the discovery of 1) the rate of profit, 2) the tendency towards the equalization of the rate of profit, and 3) the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit, Mandel writes:

> From his definition of the average rate of profit as the sum total of surplus-value produced during the process of production divided by the sum total of capital, Marx derives the central 'law of motion' of the capitalist mode of production. Since that part of capital which alone leads to the production of surplus-value (variable capital, used to buy labour-power) tends to become a smaller and smaller part of total capital, because of the fundamentally labour-saving tendency of technical progress – the gradual substitution of dead labour (machinery) for living labour – and because of the gradual increase of the value of raw materials in that of total output: since, in other words, the organic composition of capital in its value expression tends to increase, there is an inbuilt tendency for the average rate of profit to decline in the capitalist system.[51]

As capitalism has intensified and expanded, its vampiric blood-lust after surplus-value (especially surplus-profit) has simultaneously denied those who produce value from the outset—real, living, breathing people. Marx had suspected this tendency for a long time. In *1844*, Marx wrote, "So although political economy, whose principle is labour, appears to recognize man, it is in fact nothing more than the denial of man carried through to its logical conclusion."[52] And, as Mandel argues, capitalism names "a process which constantly realizes itself by negating itself"—as mentioned above, "suicidal for the whole of mankind."[53] In other words, if deathly thought-images functioned for Marx throughout his work between the 1840s and 1860s in some *ad*

hominem fashion for thinking about how capitalism intensifies and expands throughout history, then by the 1880s, I argue, suicidal thought-images more poignantly describe the *ad hominem* characterization of capitalism as expressed in *Capital*, volume three. By the 1880s, the logic of capitalism describes a disembodied, suicidal subjectivity.

*

Yet this requires a little de-mystification itself, as we of course know that history, unfortunately, has not played out this way. And, it is tempting to risk, following that younger Marx, a little unsophisticated *ad hominem*. If Marx observes, to be "radical is to grasp the root of the matter," and continues, but for "man the root is man himself," what, then, about people themselves—those embodiments of capital and personifications of wage-labor?[54] Haven't real, living, breathing capitalists invented and continue both to invent and deploy what volume three calls "counteracting influences" to the law of the tendential (suicidal) fall in the rate of profit, "checking and cancelling the effect of the general law and giving it simply the character of a tendency"? Which is to ask, haven't capitalists increased the exploitation of laborers by "prolonging the working day" and or by "making work more intense;"[55] haven't capitalists reduced wages below their "value" and don't they continually try to cheapen the elements of constant capital;[56] and as Mandel adds, haven't capitalists deployed measures spanning from simply finding new things to commodify all the way to engaging in colonial and imperial conquest, waging the violent wars associated with both;[57] and I would add, haven't capitalists also, by way of their political involvement, adjusted tax rates, interest rates, and increased the debt ceiling and government spending that those adjustments set in motion? Suffice it to say, haven't capitalists deployed mechanisms at their disposal to resuscitate capitalism's logical, suicidal tendencies euphemized to us as "crises?"[58]

Although Marx has demonstrated that the structural logic of the capital relation indeed names a violent relation both deadly and suicidal, the ways in which its various mystifications take shape make it difficult to see which actors engage in which acts of historical violence. In other words, it is easy to forget that the capital relation indeed names a relation.

For instance, in thinking about capitalism's suicidal, structural tendencies, I have long enjoyed the temptation to reframe these tendencies in different ways. I have wanted to say that capitalism cannot be suicidal, for it names *ad hominem* the mere fetishized appearance of the activity of a synthetic, self-same subject. In other words, it has no self-same subject to kill. And besides, under capitalism, our labor-power is always-already "freely" dead. But don't those capital*ists* reek of murder? Perhaps it's more entertaining as an exclamation? Capitalism, in its historical materialization, cannot be suicidal; but those capitalists sure do look murderous! Or better, perhaps they're necrophilic! But this, too, would be a mystification, as murder and necrophilia, too, name a relation. Which is to suggest, if capitalism, in its historical materialization, cannot be suicidal, and if capitalists, by definition, cannot be necrophilic murderers, then where does that leave us?

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher gestures toward the disembodied, fetishized subjectivity of capitalism while avowing its affective realization in people, as he reminds us of the nature of the capital relation. He writes, "[w]hat needs to be kept in mind is *both* that capitalism is a hyper-abstract impersonal structure *and* that it would be nothing without our co-operation."[59] Like Fisher, we in criticism tend to be really good at avowing a mystification, as Fisher writes of capitalism, "the ultimate cause-that-is-not-a-subject: Capital." We also tend to be really good at identifying impasses of various sorts, as has Fisher, that "it is only individuals that can be held ethically responsible for actions, and yet the cause of these [capitalists'] abuses and

errors is corporate, systemic."[60] But perhaps we can begin to learn a bit better from our tendencies toward *ad hominem*.

After acknowledging the demystification of capital's subject-appearance in peak Marx-y *ad hominem*, Fisher then describes the ways in which capitalism's mystifications feel. He writes: "Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie-maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labor is our own, *and the zombies it creates are us*."[61] Fisher's *ad hominem*, attributing to-the-person the character of a zombie, resonates. I feel it. And so too had Marx. In *1844*, Marx wrote of the feeling of laboring for a capitalist: "labour is *external* to the worker, i.e. does not belong to his essential being; …he therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind."[62] Or, perhaps more directly, we feel as if we have "become," as Marx insisted, "the tense essence of private property."[63] I understand Fisher and Marx, here, as suggesting that estrangement under capitalist modes of production has made the otherwise innocuous absent subject of innocuous objectification appear, *ad hominem*, as a problem not only *for* us, but *of* us. Our bodies don the corpse of the "I" that labors. It's no wonder that in that tension we often feel as if we are zombies—or worse yet, as if we are already dead.

*

But we are not dead. Rather than suggest *ad hominem* that we feel as if we are already dead, however, we sometimes try to offer evidence for such a claim. Sometimes we tend to suggest that we feel as if our lives aren't worth living. Or perhaps, we feel as if our lives have no value. Or another way, we feel as if we don't have a life to live—or worse yet, that we don't

have life, as Adorno writes, as if "there is life no longer."[64] And worst, sometimes we say we can't imagine life outside of its organization under capitalism.

I suspect that this feeling is often felt as the affective fodder that then sets in motion the *ad hominem* inference—we are already dead. And yes, some of us try to prove it. I suspect that those among us—those in our suicidal lot—may say things like this while we simultaneously sense the lie. We livelily pronounce our death! For saying things like this is the stuff of suicidal activity, and suicidal activity is a lively activity; our living, breathing utterances betray it. Yet this lie surely hurts.

Or in another way, to suggest that we are already dead, or that our lives don't have value, I argue, are also fantastical *ad hominem* expressions organized and exacerbated by our estrangement under capitalist modes of production. And it is not that there is some "who" or some "we who" speak these things—that there is some grand Being with whom we may be romantically reunited if only we could shed that corpse. As Marx writes, people "are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it."[65] It is rather that capitalism's aberrant processes of objectification have made our *humanity* appear *ad hominem* as a *problem of our Being*. For rather than engage in processes of mere objectification—(Hey, look what I did?) the innocuous activity of engaging with our world whose affirmations set in motion the innocuous solicitude of being-with one another (Oh, how lovely!)—we have encountered capitalism, aberrant processes of engaging with our world whose character sets in motion not only nefarious ways of being-with one another, but also necrophilic processes of fucking-with our humanity that invite the problem of Being itself. Suggesting that "*we feel* as if we are already dead" or "*we feel* as if our lives have no value" are *lively*, *affective exclamations of our shared humanity*. We feel! Or,

rather…Feeling! These lively exclamations, however, have become distorted as they are repeatedly mediated—rehearsed—through the corpse of abstract labor—human affects mumbled through the ignorant, bourgeois, *ad hominem* "I" of our fantastically inarticulate subjectivities produced by capitalism.

These subjectivities suggest we have no value, that we are already dead, and for good reason. We encounter them as suggestions from a corpse. As Marx suggests in a similar context, our experience of estrangement affects our "*human* relations to the world." And what he means is "our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving," and on and on. These media of sensuous relations, for Marx, enable "the *confirmation of human reality*." These sensuous relations, "*all* the physical and intellectual senses," mediate our being-with one another in our world. When they become estranged under capitalist modes of production, what they tend to confirm is the reality of the rule of our estrangement. They confirm that we feel as if we are already dead. And again, for good reason. As Marx provocatively claims, perhaps *ad hominem*, "[p]rivate property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital." And what's worse, "private property conceives all these immediate realizations of possession only as *means of life*; and the life they serve is the *life* of *private property*, labour and capitalization."[66] As mentioned above, the "rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living." Capitalism produces our shared corpse.

But we are not dead. Under capitalist modes of production, we merely encounter each other, ourselves, and our world as some-deadened-thing, as Heidegger might suggest, as something "present at hand."[67] We feel merely estranged, deadened, as if we're engaged in a present-progressive process of always-already resuscitating a corpse (self-care), or desecrating it

(suicide). If capitalism refuses to avow the human activity of its twin processes of reification and fetishization, then it simultaneously sets in motion a preoccupation with our very humanity as a problem of our being such that our affects seek a confirmation of the reality of our estrangement.

Modern suicide is a rehearsal. The suicidal "I" names, *ad hominem*, an "I" whose tendential function is to confirm our estrangement through another form of estrangement. In feeling the force of the absent cause in capitalism, we rehearse the bourgeois script by placing our bodies, misidentified as that *ad hominem* "I," at the absent center of our estrangement—a misidentified I, however, whose suicide is capable of eliminating our suffering. In many bourgeois ways, we realize ourselves by negating ourselves. Suicide names one way: it estranges us from our estrangement. Or, as Marx never quite said, suicidality tends to follow a similar course as our estrangement under modern capitalism.

But if private property has made us "so stupid and one-sided," what of the other side—the side that encounters our world-of-things, not as an ignorant bourgeois, but rather the side that encounters our world-of-things humanely?

FLEUR DE MARIE'S MYSTERIOUS ANTITHESES

> …but then I would gaze at the flowers and the sun and say to myself: the river will always be there and I am not yet seventeen years old.
>
> Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*, quoted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, The Holy Family*, 1845

Shortly after writing *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx and Engels wrote and published *The Holy Family.* In it, Marx and Engels examine several writings of the Young Hegelians and argue that their approach to criticism reflected a mere ideological, subjectivist, philosophical system.[68] Like much of early Marx and Engels, written from their then

developing fidelity to historical materialism, mixed with a fair share of *ad hominem* radicalism, it is a fun, albeit vertiginous read.

In chapter VIII, Marx and Engels criticize a work by Herr Szeliga, a pen name for F. Z. Zychlinski. He had written an article, "Eugène Sue: Die Geheimnisse von Paris," which lauds Sue's novel *Les mystères de Paris*, itself a "sentimental social fantasy" that traces the moralistic adventures of Rudolph, "Prince of Geroldstein." Disguised as a French worker, Rudolph takes under his protection both a working-class criminal, Chourineur and a prostitute, Marie. He attempts to reform each by way of some image of Christian piety.[69] For those unfamiliar, I will save the detail, as I think it is fair to say that we can anticipate where Marx and Engels land. There is, however, a specific moment in their critique that I would like to highlight.

As Marx and Engels approach the character of Marie, rather than maintain their critique of Szeliga, or even their critique of Sue by proxy, they make clear that they want Marie to speak for herself. In some ways they do. They provide several passages of her dialogue from the novel. In other ways they don't, as they intervene, offering their own theorizations about Marie's life activity. It's a rare moment of Marx's and Engels's literary criticism. Nonetheless, Marx and Engels insist, we shall "not follow Herr Szeliga in his further description of [Marie]." Rather, we shall "leave her the satisfaction…of constituting," they argue, "*the most decisive* antithesis to *everyone*, a mysterious antithesis."[70] It is Marie's "mysterious antithesis," or rather, her mysterious antitheses that, I would like to argue, exhibit the surprisingly reparative value of suicidal activity under conditions of estrangement.

The first of Marie's antitheses is obvious. Her life's energy names one unit of social labor reified in the service of private capital accumulation. She has nothing but her labor to sell, a prostitute "in bondage to the proprietress of the criminals' tavern." And while Marie, speaking

through and to the "I" that labors, at times "blames herself," Marx and Engels argue that Marie "considers her situation not as one she has freely created," but rather "as a fate she has not deserved." They frame her suffering as an effect of the "bad fortune" of her "inhuman surroundings."[71]

But Marie herself insists, "I have never done any harm to anyone." Which is to say, despite laboring for the capitalist proprietress of the tavern, Marie, like all of us, exhibits a second antithesis. She reserves some energy apart from her reification. She has a reserve on that other side. As Marx and Engels write, "she preserves a human nobleness of soul, a human unaffectedness and a human beauty that impress those around her, raise her to the level of a poetical flower of the criminal world and win for her the name of Fleur de Marie." No doubt, Fleur de Marie is estranged. Yet "in spite of her frailty," she "at once gives proof of vitality, energy, cheerfulness resilience of character—qualities which alone explain her human development in her *inhuman* situation."[72]

And she can "put up a fight." As evidence, Marx and Engels point out the ways in which "she does not appear as a defenceless lamb who surrenders without any resistance to overwhelming brutality." After being "ill-treated" by Chourineur, for instance, Fleur de Marie "defends herself with her scissors."[73] To emphasize further the humanity that Marx and Engels observe, I quote at length. In reference to the "good in me" that Fleur de Marie acknowledges that she sees in herself, Marx and Engels write,

> *Good* and *evil*, as Marie conceives them, are not the *moral abstractions* of good and evil. She is *good* because she has never caused *suffering* to anyone, she has always been *human* towards her inhuman surroundings…Her situation is *not good*, because it puts an unnatural constraint on her, because it is not the expression of her human impulses, not the fulfilment of her human desires; because it is full of torment and without joy…
>
> In *natural* surroundings, where the chains of bourgeois life fall away and she can freely manifest her own nature, Fleur de Marie bubbles over with love of life, with a wealth of feeling, with human joy at the beauty of nature; these show that her social position has only grazed the surface of her and is a mere misfortune, that she herself is neither good nor bad, but *human*.[74]

Marx's and Engels' repeated appeal to Fleur de Marie's humanity functions as reverberations of *1844*. The "unnatural constraint" Marie feels, the "torment" and lack of "joy" she suffers evince her estranged condition. Yet apart from her "I" that labors, Fleur de Marie maintains that reserve on the other side. For "her social position has only grazed the surface." Her "wealth of feeling," her affects, reveal that her social conditions, her "mere misfortune," names the effect of that aberrant mode of otherwise innocuous objectification from which she has become estranged. But she still maintains a capacity to "bubble over with love of life…with human joy at the beauty of nature." It is in her "*natural* surroundings" that she knows that "she herself is neither good nor bad, but *human*." And I would like to argue that despite her inhuman situation, Fleur de Marie retains what appears as a mysterious antithetical reserve, an affective affirmation amplified by the activity of her repeatedly suicidal past.

In reference, not to Szeliga, nor to Sue's novel itself, but rather to the character of Fleur de Marie herself, Marx and Engels illustrate her third antithesis, the surprising value of Fleur de Marie's lively suicidal activity, if only for a moment:

> Let us accompany Fleur de Marie on her first outing with Rudolph.
> "The consciousness of your terrible situation has probably often distressed you," Rudolph says, itching to moralise.
> "Yes," she replies, "more than once I looked over the embankment of the Seine; but then I would gaze at the flowers and the sun and say to myself: the river will always be there and I am not yet seventeen years old. Who can say?[75]

Fleur de Marie apprehends value from within her world. Rivers are, *prima facie*, enchanting things. Yet her encounter with her river names a common practice among the common French

throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. As Georges Minois points out, "drowning" had named one of the most common "means of death" for suicidal women throughout modern French history. And what's more, Minois continues, the "Paris statistics show" that "certain spots along the Seine were notorious for [such] drownings."[76] But for Fleur de Marie, this practice names something more than that which can be reflected back by dead data from the social sciences. For it is not once that she has "looked over the embankment of the Seine," but "more than once." She has engaged in suicidal activity *as a lively practice*—a rehearsal—a reoccurring affective encounter with her river, organized, informed, and set in motion, I argue, by her estrangement under capitalist modes of production. Yet her senses, as Marx would say, have become *theoreticians* in their immediate, suicidal praxis. And Fleur de Marie's suicidal theoreticians have amplified her, setting in motion a seeking-after not only the confirmation of her "terrible situation," as if she needs to be reminded, but a seeking-after an affirmation of their theory of the value of the most mundane, yet beautiful materiality, a theory of "the flowers and the sun"—an innocuously humane reflection of her being-in-the-world. And all Fleur de Marie can simply and humanely ask is, "Who can say?"

*

I like Fleur de Marie. And I think we all should like Fleur de Marie. She can teach us something. I think she can teach us that we can indeed feel valuable as producers and observers of value ought. What's more, however, she can teach us that that value isn't often made real or realized in an acknowledgement from within our world under capitalism, especially in the ways in which we ourselves indeed encounter value in it. Her oscillation between sensing "the good" in herself while avowing the absence of such acknowledgement from within her world, "Who can say?" names an intensity of those difficult moments that can't often be expressed in words,

or words that others understand, let alone hear. And, of course, as such, Fleur de Marie is suicidal.

Suicidal activity is best shared. And for those in our suicidal lot, I think that Fleur de Marie can teach us that what our suicidal activity sometimes asks after is both a confirmation and an affirmation that demands answers. Fleur de Marie asks after a confirmation of the difficulties of our shared estrangement under capitalism and an affirmation of the possibility to imagine new forms of value-creation, not only reflected back to us from within our world, but an affirmation of our solicitude reinforced by affirmations from others. For she is asking us. I mean, she is not alone.

Modern literature is replete with representations of suicidal moments that invite crucial questions, namely, can we approach suicidal activity in non-fatalistic terms? Can we engage in and encounter suicidal activity in ways that might slow down its momentum under capitalist modes of production? Or better yet, can we see that suicidal activity may amplify our being-in-the-world, while asking after a sensuous affirmation of our collective potentiality such that we might remain in our worlds differently? Perhaps even change it?

"Who can say," she innocently asks?

We can, Fleur de Marie!

We can!

The flowers and the sun are beautiful, and you are beautiful for pointing them out to us! And if you can spare them…

…May we please borrow your scissors.

CHAPTER TWO

"A Kind of Mimesis of Death"
Modern Suicidality as Critical Mimesis

> Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernity in the realm of the passions.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 1938

In chapter one, I argued that modern suicidality may be approached as a rehearsal of the contradictions bound up in the capital relation. And although such suicidal scenes are best understood in close relation to processes of the production and circulation of capital, no one's work invites us to consider modern suicidality as a rehearsal, as Hamacher and Wetters have it, of "this devastation of being in capitalism…in all of the structures, institutions, discourses, and nondiscursive experiences affected by it," like that of Walter Benjamin.[1]

By "invites," I am thinking along the lines of Michael W. Jennings who writes that "Benjamin counts on the 'expressive' capacity of his images."[2] Throughout much of his work, in which every seventh sentence could stand as a thesis in itself, seldom is Benjamin so straight-forward as he is, for instance, in his most famous essay. Calling for theses that define "the tendencies of the development of art under the present conditions of production," "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" argues that the social function of modern art is "to rehearse" the interplay between "nature and humanity" in the service of revolutionary "innervations of the collective."[3]

For all of the critical contention that revolves around Benjamin's art essay, this chapter is interested in exploring more specifically the place of suicidal imagery throughout his work as a key motif of the interplay between people and capitalist modernity that raises interesting

questions. For instance, how is thinking about suicide, imagining it, or feeling an attraction to it, or analyzing it all ways of negotiating, practicing, or even rehearsing a different relation to twentieth-century capitalist modernity? How does suicidality open up not just new ways of feeling and thinking about modernity, but also different modes of being within, or possibly without, modern capitalist economic and social relations? Suffice it to say, Benjamin's preoccupations about suicide are curious.

And this motif of suicide is not so obvious, as with Benjamin's other work, we are often left with his critical imagery. And it feels as if its expression is most inviting and compelling when we approach his lifework as if we were akin to Klee's *Angelus Novus*, caught in homogenous, empty time. We almost have no choice. As Benjamin's biographers write, it was typical for him to work "on several projects simultaneously," and many of Benjamin's key concepts bleed across his various works.[4] By meditating on his oeuvre as if it were a single, synchronic montage, various moments in Benjamin tend to flash up as if by way of those explosions that blast, as he would say, "a specific era out of the homogenous course of [his] history," "a specific life out of [his] era."[5] They are effective. I cannot imagine I am alone, for instance, when I confess that if not for reading his essays on history, I wouldn't feel confident discussing *mémoire involontaire*; or that if I hadn't read "The Task of the Critic" or "The Author as Producer," I would be lost in Kafka's *The Castle*, to say nothing of literary criticism. Yet most importantly, if not for his theory of the mimetic faculty, I wouldn't feel so ambivalently-alive, or "homesick for the world distorted in the state of similarity."[6] What I am after here is what it feels like to read Benjamin, to witness what he described as "all this writing…this activity in ten directions."[7]

Benjamin invites the most synchronic encounters—the capacity to perceive similarities—not only in the diachronic movement through any single work, but in those synchronic moments of reflective connectivity we encounter when we read any single work in the context of the whole. When we approach Benjamin's lifework as a montage, we enable ourselves to apprehend the syncopation of his theses as individual movements along a score whereby we encounter them, as he might have it, in their "the now of recognizability."[8] I think we encounter (and must encounter) Benjamin's thesis in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire"—that "modernity must stand under the sign of suicide"—in this way.[9] As Michael Jennings argues, the essay is "one of the most demanding of its reader, requiring not merely inordinate contributions of imagination and analysis, but a thorough knowledge of Benjamin's other work."[10]

To do so, this chapter highlights three key preoccupations that, I argue, punctuate Benjamin's life and work. I begin by describing his lifelong encounters and engagements with suicidality, those of his friends, and those of his own. Next, I highlight Benjamin's preoccupation with the ways in which we must understand, accommodate, and develop our capacities to perceive and produce similarities, what he calls the mimetic faculty. And lastly, I highlight the ways in which Benjamin explores Marx's theory of the historical subsumption of labor under capital as a framework for understanding encounters with capitalist modernity in art upon which suicide marks its signature.

This chapter argues that modern suicidality gets its power from imitating the deathly logic and lived experience of the capital relation whose rehearsal in modern art reveals the absurdity of the capitalist reification of human activity, on the one hand, while re-imagining the feeling of being-dead implicit in our reification under capitalism, on the other. As such, modern suicidality, as we will see, describes an attempt, at the level of mimesis, to re-enact, re-stage, re-

present, or rehearse the seemingly impenetrable totality of estranged life under capitalism through which we may reimagine, re-affirm, and possibly re-create new modes of social re-production.

SUICIDE AND BENJAMIN'S SUICIDAL ACTIVITY

> The destructive character lives from the feeling not that life is worth living, but that suicide is not worth the trouble.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," 1931

By late September 1940, not only had Walter Benjamin ended his life, but a life preoccupied with suicide and characterized by the curious literary productivity of suicidality had come to a close. This is not, however, so obvious. Nowhere, for instance, do we find an essay in Benjamin's lifework focused on theorizing suicide alone.[11] Rather, like that of Marx, suicidality appears throughout Benjamin's work as a thought-image that helps illuminate a critical relation to something else. Most significantly, in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin's appeal to the concept of suicide functions in the service of understanding something about modernity. For it is not that suicide must stand under the sign of modernity, as suicide is not an exclusively modern act. But rather "modernity must stand under the sign of suicide," that there is something about modernity such that suicide marks its signature. In light of such critical relationships, Benjamin's own encounters with the suicides of others and his own suicidal activity itself profoundly affected him and helped shape the production, the poignancy, and the critical nature of his later work.

Benjamin had been exposed to the act of suicide at an early age. In 1914, in an act of protest against the war, his two close friends, Fritz Heinle and Rika Seligson ended their lives in

double suicide. Benjamin was only twenty-two years old. Years later, as Eiland and Jennings suggest, the event found its way into *One-Way Street* and *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, albeit in "coded" form. Two years later, and just days before his twenty-fourth birthday, Benjamin's beloved aunt, Friederike Joseephi, ended her life. Eiland and Jennings note that both suicide (on his father's side) and Benjamin's own "long bouts of immobilizing depression" describe a "trait relatives noted elsewhere in his family tree."[12] These bouts reached suicidal crises-points in the leadup to his exile in 1933.

Throughout the middle months of 1931 and again in those of 1932, Benjamin's diary and personal communications reveal that he had been planning to end his life. Although preceded in 1929 by what his biographers describe as a "high point of productivity," Benjamin's affective life was complicated by his pending divorce from Dora initiated early in the year, the economic depression that followed the stock market crash of October, and the immanent rise of the National Socialists Party that would by 1933 ensure his exile.[13]

In the intervening years, Benjamin described his flirtations with suicide – his suicidal activity – as moments influenced by this confluence of forces. While his diary entries titled "May-June 1931" open with reference to his material crisis—"I'm going to save my remaining sheets of paper for a diary."—Benjamin's preoccupations came together in a mixture of resignation and tranquility. By May 1931, Benjamin was immersed in an ambivalent suicidal activity, codified as "fatigue," within which he found a curious power.

> I feel tired. Tired above all of the struggle, the struggle for money, of which I now have enough in reserve to enable me to stay here. But tired also of aspects of my personal life with which strictly speaking—apart from my economic situation—I have no reason to be dissatisfied. But the very sense of tranquility that has taken possession of me inwardly to a degree that has always been rare with me leads me to probe more deeply into the life I am now leading. And then this fatigue. It not only dredges up memories from the past; what is crucial is that of the events in my past which surface in my memory from time to time, it is the factors that make them moments of my life, make them mine, that have become clear, whereas previously I never gave them a thought. Last, this fatigue combines in a strange way with the causes of my dissatisfaction with my life. This

> dissatisfaction involves a growing aversion to, as well as a lack of confidence in, the methods I see chosen by people of my kind and my situation to assert control over the hopeless situation of cultural politics in Germany…And to the full measure of the ideas and impulses that preside over the writing of this diary, I need only hint at my growing willingness to take my own life. This willingness is not the product of a panic attack; but profound though its connection is with my exhaustion from my struggles on the economic front, it would not have been conceivable without my feeling of having lived a life whose dearest wishes had been granted, wishes that admittedly I have only now come to recognize as the original text on a page subsequently covered with the handwritten marks of my destiny.[14]

This passage is striking on several accounts. Like so many people throughout history who entertain suicide, Benjamin's economic life was unstable. By the early 1930s, the effects of the stock market crash of Fall 1929 were felt across Germany. As early as March 1930, Eiland and Jennings recount that "the number of unemployed in the country reached 3 million." And although Benjamin found employment here and there throughout the early-to-middle 1930s, his already dire economic condition was compounded by the effect of his divorce from Dora who had been a consistent source of emotional, intellectual, and financial support. And while their divorce threatened to alienate him from that support, his biographers also note that the divorce also "threatened to deprive him of his entire inheritance." It is at this time that Benjamin started to refer to his daily life, supported by paid work for various newspapers and radio broadcasts, in terms of his "makeshift existence."[15] Yet is it clear that in terms of those from whom he gathered emotional support, of those from whom he found consistent intellectual edification, and of those from whom he could rely on a stable source of income, Benjamin's life was fragmented.

What is most striking in the face of such fragmentation, however, is that despite his precarious survival, we can see that Benjamin's "fatigue" in May 1931 mobilized for him two concurrent and related phenomena: a feeling of composure, on the one hand, that then offered him, on the other, clarity about seemingly forgotten events from his past. Whatever those events may have been, Benjamin describes a productive observation: "The very sense of tranquility that has taken possession of me inwardly to a degree that has always been rare with me leads me to

probe more deeply into the life I am now leading." Benjamin's ambivalent suicidality of May 1931 functioned for him as a productive activity whereby moments from his lived history to which he otherwise "never gave…a thought" had "become clear."

As Benjamin's feelings about his makeshift existence intensified, so too had the way in which he talked about his suicidality. Where in May he wrote of his "growing willingness" to take his life, by August, his language reads more starkly. Noting another publication rejection, and with increasing pessimism about his professional options, Benjamin titled his diary, "Diary from August 7, 1931, to the Day of My Death." This, the beginning of the first paragraph, sets the scene:

> This diary does not promise to be very long. Today came the negative response from Anton Kippenberg, and this gives my plan the relevance that only futility can guarantee. I need to discover "a method that is just as convenient but somewhat less definitive," I said to [Inge] today. My hope of making any such discovery is fast disappearing. But if anything can strengthen still further the determination, indeed the peace of mind, with which I think of my intention, it must be the shrewd, dignified use to which I put my last days or weeks.[16]

However solemnly his entry begins, Benjamin again highlights a sense of tranquility related to his suicidality. "Indeed," he writes, "the peace of mind" that accompanied the planning of his suicide had also mobilized for him a desire to make use of what he describes as his last "days or weeks." However foreboding, it is difficult to deny that Benjamin's suicidal activity amplified his being-in-the-world, perhaps in a moment when it was most needed. And although his language reads less felicitously than it had in May, Benjamin further describes a sense of "reverie" upon thinking about suicide that found its way into, at least, the production of his journal. By November 1931, however, a brief meditation on suicide would come to punctuate, in the form of a cadence, the close of Benjamin's short work, "The Destructive Character:" "The destructive character lives from the feeling not that life is worth living, but that suicide is not worth the trouble."[17]

Commenting on his later work, Eiland and Jennings suggest that Benjamin's "imputation of 'exhaustion' to Baudelaire was as much projection as description."[18] In light of the way in which he framed the concept of suicide in his November essay, I think that something similar could be said about Benjamin's thoughts on his own potential corporeal suicide. In other words, from August 1931 until late September 1940, it appears that Benjamin felt that corporeal suicide simply wasn't worth the trouble.[19]

What is more interesting are the ways in which Benjamin described to his lifelong friend Gerhard Scholem the productivity set in motion by his suicidal activity of the early 1930s. Scholem had been familiar with Benjamin's situation.[20] In his letter of July 26, 1932, Benjamin returned to the topic of his suicidal thoughts, coded again as "fatigue," as it was the year prior.

> [A]t this very moment I am on my way to Speyer. There, in Poveromo, I will learn whether I must return to Germany in August or whether there is any way for me to extend my stay abroad. Even taking into account the circumstances you are familiar with, you still cannot begin to imagine just how averse I am to returning. To do so, you would need not only to have before you the letter in which the building-safety authorities demand I give up my apartment—because its condition fails to meet certain regulations—you would also need more than just a clear idea of how the reactionary movement you allude to has affected my work for radio. Above all, you would have to grasp the profound fatigue that has overcome me as a result of these very circumstances…Your remark that the chances of what you wish for me actually coming to pass are the smallest imaginable thus gains in significance. We would both be well advised to face up to these facts—in view of which the failure of your Palestine "intervention" was indeed fateful. And if I do so with a grimness verging on hopelessness, it is surely not for want of confidence in my resourcefulness in finding alternatives and subsidies. Rather, it is the developing of this resourcefulness, and the productivity that corresponds to it, that most seriously endangers every worthwhile project. The literary forms of expression that my thought has forged for itself over the last decade have been utterly conditioned by the preventive measures and antidotes with which I had to counter the disintegration constantly threatening my thought as a result of such contingencies.[21]

Scholem was privy to Benjamin's mood, especially the composure that accompanied his more intense moments of suicidal activity. For instance, Scholem reflected on a comment by Kitty Marx about Benjamin upon the day of their exile from Germany. In March 1933, Marx found Benjamin "remarkably self-possessed [and] free of the panic that was gripping so many." Eiland and Jennings write that Scholem suggested that Benjamin's composure "may have had to do with

his experience of near-suicide the year before." And although Scholem also suggested that Benjamin's composure "found stronger expression in the outward attitude he displayed to other people than in his letters," what is significant about Benjamin's suicidality in his letter to Scholem are the ways in which he describes a "resourcefulness" related to his "fatigue."[22] Resulting from his dire socio-economic and cultural circumstances, this resourcefulness manifested in two ways. On the one hand, the thought of corporeal suicide functioned for Benjamin in part as a "preventative measure and antidote" to his otherwise miserable makeshift existence. Like Nietzsche, who wrote, "the thought of suicide is a powerful comfort: it helps one through many a dreadful night," Benjamin had carried with him a potential "out" that tempered his nerves.[23] Yet what is more, his suicidal activity had also functioned, on the other hand, as a mechanism for the perception and production of many "literary forms of expression."

For Benjamin was writing about his suicidal *activity*, which can be a lively, embodied, affective and cognitive activity—an activity that at once depends upon our liveliness while posing that very liveliness at something at risk. Yet all too often, we encounter the fact of a suicide or the concept of suicide as some crass thing that is only ever defeating, as if suicide is some foregone conclusion framed as an act of which morbidity is all that can be spoken, thought, or theorized. Psychoanalysts are good at this. Often the concept comes at the close of a sentence, as Freud has written of the melancholic, "what is now holding sway in the super-ego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct, and in fact it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death, if the latter does not fend off its tyrant in time by the change round into mania;"[24] or Donald Winnicott, who offers the concept its own sentence, with emphasis! "There is much that could be said about the management of care of boys and girls who have these various disorders. Let me pick out one thing for special mention. *There will be suicides*."[25] And while affect

theorists are often more careful, once in a while we encounter similar sentences like this: “We genre flail so that we don’t fall through the cracks of heightened affective noise into despair, suicide, or psychosis.”[26] Yet it may be best, here, to follow another of Berlant’s suggestions that privileges how we as critics must “slow down” in an effort to capture the ways in which, as she writes, “the body slows down what’s going down [and helps clarify] the relation of living on to ongoing crises and loss.”[27] In other words, it might be best to mimic a characteristic of Benjamin’s own suicidal activity in an effort to understand its resourcefulness.

When we suffer traumas, time tends to feel altered. Within this time, affects are heightened, amplified in such a way that makes us able to, as Marx suggests, theorize. In his August 1931 entry, Benjamin wrote of the ways in which his suicidality altered his experience of time. For him, it was as if he were slowing down: “Incapable of action, I just lay on the sofa and read. Frequently, I fell into so deep a reverie that I forgot to turn the page.”[28] And as Berlant has shown, everyday trauma, or what she calls “crisis ordinariness,” “unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming.” Suffice it to say, the fragmented character of Benjamin’s everyday life marked an increasingly normalized encounter with crises. His suicidality, however, must have felt extraordinary. Yet, as Berlant continues, the “extraordinary always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure. In the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown.”[29] Of course it *can*. The suicidality that Benjamin confronted has confronted others differently. People kill themselves. Many, women historically, have drowned. But we are talking about suicidal activity, which is a lively activity. And Berlant’s metaphor for everyday trauma is apt. That treading-of-water itself describes a bodily movement whose immersion, literally, slows us down. As such, the traumatized must encounter the world differently, as if we had a choice.

Benjamin's suicidality not only slowed him down, but functioned as what Berlant, following Raymond Williams, might characterize as a "process of emergence."[30] Berlant writes that during such a process, "one moves around with a sense that the world is at once present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things."[31] As we have already seen from his diary entries, Benjamin had written that his suicidal activity "dredge[d] up" memories from his past, the effect of which "combine[d] in a strange way" both the "causes of dissatisfaction" with his life and his "feeling of having lived a life whose dearest wishes had been granted." Yet "what is crucial," Benjamin argues, are the ways in which his suicidal activity re-presented his lived history. As if presented with and having read a series of dialectical images, Benjamin writes, "that of the events in my past which surface in my memory from time to time, it is the factors that make them moments of my life, make them mine, that have become clear."

Benjamin's suicidality functioned for him as a re-enactment—a rehearsal—of his lived experience. Just as his life had become fragmented by the social forces that both surrounded him and with which he interacted, his suicidality also dredged up for him, in a fragmented fashion, historical events from his life. In this way, Benjamin's suicidal activity functioned for him as a mode of productive self-alienation. As Eiland and Jennings might suggest, suicidal activity, for Benjamin, set in motion his ability "to *see* [his] own alienation, and so to glimpse the fragmented, oppressive character of [his] history."[32] His suicidality rehearsed for him events from his past with which he found ways to clarify his situatedness within his lived history. What's more, I argue, Benjamin came to encounter his suicidal activity as an expression of his mimetic faculty, the literary forms of which he began to theorize, not so incidentally, at this very time.

CRITICAL MIMESIS

> Modern man can be touched by a pale shadow…on southern moonlit nights in which he feels, alive within himself, mimetic forces that he had thought long since dead, while nature, which possesses them all, transforms itself to resemble the moon.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "On Astrology," circa 1932

In the wake of his most intense suicidal activity, Benjamin began to theorize about the mimetic faculty, the human capacity to both perceive and produce similarities. In many ways, Benjamin's theory of the mimetic faculty may be understood as a development aligned with his work on allegory, on the one hand, and his theory of the dialectical image, on the other. As Miriam Hansen might argue, although non-synonymous, Benjamin's idioms "hook into each other" in various ways that offer a more comprehensive understanding of his theories.[33]

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin argues that allegorical modes of representation function whereby "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else." "With this possibility," he continues, "a destructive, yet just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance."[34] Yet by virtue of the configuration of its disparate objects, allegory flirts with its audience, inviting us to try to put the pieces back together. Any revelatory value, however, names a "redemption in downfall," as Eiland and Jennings have it. Allegory frames its objects as shattered, disconnected, or disassociated from one another—conditions that expose the myth of some unified, coherent totality. In a word, Eiland and Jennings argue that "allegorical works hold within themselves [this] *potential* purgative force."[35] In Benjamin's case, then, such a force becomes the burden and function of the reader and critic. In short, allegorical modes of

representation invite a reading practice in the service of generating meaning, however expulsive that meaning may be.

The idea of the dialectical image shares with allegory this invitation-to-read, yet in more specific encounters. In addition to artwork, we may encounter dialectical images anywhere and at any time, and the meaningful correspondences between disparate phenomena are bound up in a single image such that—and through our reading practice in any chance moment—we may encounter some historical significance. As Eiland and Jennings succinctly suggest, the dialectical image "is an image *read* if not literally seen, a historical constellation emerging suddenly—flashing up…though a correspondence of moments." In these ways, the dialectical image in Benjamin's theory is a bit more specific and also a bit more random, as our encounters with dialectical images are both historical and subject to chance. Again, following Eiland and Jennings, dialectical images function such that the "historical object reveals itself to a present day uniquely capable of recognizing it."[36] So, in short—you know—best of luck! But allegory and the dialectical image name only one part of the dialectic involved in the mimetic faculty. Where allegory and the dialectical image invite us to perceive similarities through reading, the mimetic faculty adds to it our capacity to produce them.

For Benjamin, the mimetic faculty names a basic human capacity. Hansen explores Benjamin's idiom and emphasizes its relational character. The "mimetic," she argues, "is not a category of representation," but rather a "*relational* practice."[37] In addition to its relationality, I would like to emphasize its active character. Or, I would like to emphasize that the mimetic faculty is an active function, as Marx may have had it, of our species-being.[38] In this regard, the mimetic faculty concerns not only the relation between subject and object, but the lively interplay of activity between subject and object.

By way of illustration, Benjamin offers us obvious examples; the child who plays "shopkeeper" or "teacher" mimics activity in a specific role. But children also mimic other activities, that of "a windmill and a train."[39] Benjamin situates such modes of mimicry in the "sensuous realm of similarity."[40] It is not difficult, for instance, to apprehend the children's arms as wings, their gate as propulsion. When their cheeks billow, we can hear the engines. 'Look at me!,' exclaims the talking airplane. Our smiles, should we be smiling, may share in the child's mimesis. In this way, our smiles are a product of our own mimetic faculty. For someone may ask, 'What's so funny?,' and we may respond, 'Look at that joyous airplane!' But do our smiles also mimic the airplane, in the event that we are smiling? Perhaps the upturned sides of our lips resemble the wings of an airplane? It's a bit difficult—a bit of a stretch. Which is to say, not only are mimetic objects difficult to pin down, but there are other modes of mimicry that are more difficult to perceive as such.

This is the stuff of which Benjamin describes as *nonsensuous* similarity. His modifier itself is difficult, as our understanding of the mimetic faculty depends in part upon our perception of similarities. In other words, understanding what Benjamin means by nonsensuous depends on one's perception of sensuousness. Following Marx's description of our "*human* relations to the world," I argue that our mimetic faculties depend on our "seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving," and on and on, as mentioned in chapter one.[41] Of course we encounter and produce similarities sensuously, as affect and cognition are linked. But our encounters and productions, as Hansen so clearly insists, are at times "not obvious" to us. In other words, nonsensuous similarities have ceased to be "coded in terms of conventional analogies."[42] Yes! Our smiles can be of the airplane, too; yet more likely, our smiles are of the joy of the child in the playful veil of the airplane.

But perhaps we aren't smiling. Perhaps our mimetic comportment takes shape otherwise. Perhaps we mime something else in our encounter with the talkative, child-airplane. Perhaps we aren't smiling because, although we may adore children and want children, we think better of it. Perhaps, we merely can't afford them. Perhaps we love the idea of children so much that we dare not bring them into our shitty world. Or, perhaps we aren't smiling because of specific worldly shit—because we've suffered some trauma—a plane crash or a train wreck. As Benjamin argues, "not only are the objects of this mimetic force innumerable, but the same thing may be said of subjects, of the mimetic centers that may be numerous within every being."[43] In short, in the presence of the child-airplane, not only may we mimic an object differently, but we may mimic a different object, perhaps something of a scene of trauma. Many of us who witness such mimicry may sense something's up. That much may be obvious. The mimetic object, however, might be more difficult to pin down. As such, we may ask, 'What's the matter?' And we may often hear back something veiled and opaque, 'Don't mind me. I'm a wreck.'[44]

Our mimetic faculty is a basic human capacity shaped by our histories. And while the shapes it takes may be obvious or otherwise, its historical character might be the most non-obvious thing about it. As Benjamin writes, "we have to reckon with the possibility that manifest configurations, mimetic resemblances, may once have existed where today we are no longer in a position even to guess at them."[45] This was a problem for Benjamin (let alone problematic for us all!). Hansen frames well Benjamin's concern: the mimetic faculty, she argues, "comes in to view only at the moment of its decay."[46]

I would like to be careful, however, not to exaggerate our understanding of decay. For Benjamin, the mimetic faculty had surely been under threat, as it is in our present moment. But it is not as if its capabilities have fully diminished from our lives either. The mimetic faculty is a

function of our species-being, and for it to disappear would simultaneously describe something akin to the collective death of one of our capacities as a species. Although possible, observations like these informed Benjamin in the midst of his most intense suicidal activity of the early 1930s, as he writes: "Modern man can be touched by a pale shadow of this on southern moonlit nights in which he feels, alive within himself, mimetic forces that he had thought long since dead, while nature, which possesses them all, transforms itself to resemble the moon."[47] And observations like these can be witnessed in Benjamin's slightly-later work as he carefully formulated his research questions surrounding mimeses—questions that concerned active processes: "Are we dealing with a dying out of the mimetic faculty, or rather perhaps with a transformation that has taken place within it?"[48]

For Benjamin, and for us, it is the latter, and with regard to our mimetic capacities, "the question," Benjamin continues, "is whether this can be developed and accommodated to an improved understanding."[49] What was at stake for Benjamin and is at stake for everybody is not merely acknowledging *that* we mime any more than theorizing *that which* we mime. As Benjamin writes, "the beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object…" What is most at stake is identifying the dehumanizing processes that wither away an essential human capacity in the service of resuscitating the value that Benjamin suspected the mimetic faculty makes available for us, namely, the value of contending with "the object *in* its veil."[50] Which is to say, Benjamin was interested in reading, analyzing, exposing, and resuscitating the critical value of mimesis in the face of the detritus of our estranged lives under capitalism. It is within that detritus that his preoccupations regarding the mimetic faculty found their historical specificity as he began to develop a theory of modern experience under capitalism.

BENJAMIN'S THEORY OF OUR EXPERIENCE OF CAPITALIST MODERNITY

> He lay on his bed racked with homesickness, homesick for the world distorted in the state of similarity, a world in which the true surrealist face of existence breaks through.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust," circa 1929 or 1934

Benjamin was really good at apprehending value through the detritus, spotlighting the there, there of humane activity in the face of the wreckage of our estranged life under capitalism. And in its greater context, Benjamin's claim about Proust, above, reveals the most pervasive of his own critical concepts. For if "mimicry," as Benjamin insists, is a "feature of [Proust's] entire creativity," then, I argue, Benjamin's own mimetic practices permeate his own lifework.[51] Yet the development of his theory about the mimetic faculty and its decay would be incomplete without a more historically nuanced theory of our experience of capitalist modernity itself.

"We have become impoverished," Benjamin states in his brief, 1933 essay, "Experience and Poverty."[52] Benjamin's *theory* of modern experience, however, began to take stronger shapes as he engaged more intensely with Marx's *Capital* around 1935, that, I argue, helped lay the groundwork upon which he developed his most significant and long-lasting theoretical claims.[53] For not only had Marx's critique of capitalism helped explain the structural forces of the decay of our humanity[54] of which the mimetic faculty names one part. Marx's critique also set in motion for Benjamin a nuanced focus on that which our mimetic faculties struggle to reveal. *Capital* had become indispensable for Benjamin's exploration of the ways in which our mimetic faculties have become weakened while they simultaneously reveal the possibility to understand, accommodate, and develop an ability, as Benjamin has it, "to preserve one's humanity in the face of the apparatus."[55]

In much of his writing, however, Benjamin's theoretical fidelities seem fickle. Rather than a "hard-line [Marxist] ideologue," Eiland and Jennings describe Benjamin as more of a "visionary insurrectionist," whose Marxism was "heuristic and experimental in nature."[56] Hansen's take is not dissimilar. In her conversation about the role of "play" in Benjamin's thinking, she distinguishes Benjamin from others associated with the Frankfurt School.[57] To illustrate, in reply to the written form of his 1935 exposé, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Adorno questioned some of Benjamin's intellectual fidelities. In what is now infamously known as the "Hornberg" letter of August 1935, Adorno critiques Benjamin's appeal to the explanatory power of psycho-social theory on the grounds that the theory and Benjamin's use of it in his draft article are both insufficiently dialectical. By way of response, Adorno offers a suggestion: "[O]nly a precise definition of the industrial form of the commodity as clearly distinct from the earlier form could fully yield the 'primal history' and ontology of the nineteenth century…The fetish concept of the commodity must be backed up, as you no doubt plan to do, by the relevant passages from its originator."[58] By 1939, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin had responded in kind, engaging most intensely with the historical development of the commodity form as framed in *Capital*, discussed more below. Yet if we approach several of his key writings between early 1936 through 1939 as a montage of intermediated preoccupations, then readers can see a sort of experimental menagerie in Benjamin's conceptual and theoretical work with anti-capitalist thought that intersects with his ongoing theorizations and illustrations of the mimetic faculty.

More specifically, Benjamin's experimentation takes shape within his citation practice. As far back as 1929, Benjamin had written, "quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out, armed, and relieve the idle stroller of his conviction."[59] Leland De la Durantaye

highlights Benjamin's fondness for such citation practices that he found in the work of Karl Kraus. De la Durantaye writes, "Benjamin singles him out for his diabolical skill in citation, and for his ability to make citations at once 'save and punish.'" And in many ways, Benjamin's own citations function as thieves whose sights are set on the productivity of such theft. In other ways, Benjamin's references are stealthier, as de la Durantaye examines what Benjamin called "the art of citing without quotation marks."[60] "There can be little doubt," he argues, that for Benjamin, 'the art of citing without quotation marks' was a provocative formula with provocative intent. There was an unquestionable measure of subversion in it, similar to that which Benjamin saw in surrealist *montage*." This had little to do with plagiarism. As de la Durantaye concludes, "Benjamin well knew and often observed, citing authorities can just as often be used to end a debate as to begin one."[61] Which is to say, Benjamin was keen on critical citation as a form of critical experimentation, and it is his work starting from 1935 in which I would like to highlight what I understand as one of the main preoccupations that underscore the ongoing vitality of his arguments. Namely, I would like to highlight the ways in which Benjamin identifies in whose service human productivity has functioned under capitalism, and the ways in which anti-capitalist thought grounds his exploration of the mimetic faculty to recast in whose service human productivity can and must then function.

*

In late 1935 and early 1936, Benjamin wrote the second version of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility" which laid the ground on which he continued to build his sense of experimental Marxism throughout several of his most key works. In the art essay, Benjamin theorizes two related aesthetic periods, idiomized in terms of first and second technology. In many ways, the period of first technology entertains a pre-capitalist, European aesthetic whose

production depicts "ritual" relationships between "humans and their environment," and whose "orientation and aims" functioned in the service of "cult value." Benjamin seems to emphasize that the benefactors and beneficiaries of such rituals were clergy-like—elite groups of people for whom the mere presence of art supersedes its exhibition across classes more broadly. In short, during the period in which first technology presided, art was produced primarily by and for people, albeit circulating among the parochial classes of elites.[62] On the other side, Benjamin examines aesthetics in terms of what he calls second technology whose processes of production had become influenced and organized under capitalist modes of production.[63] Although second technology expands the cult value of the first into broader scenes of "exhibition value" for the masses, as might be expected, the deployment of modern technology in the production of art as a commodity under capitalism has diminished the role of people.[64] As Benjamin argues, "whereas the former made the maximum possible use of human beings, the [second technology] reduces their use to the minimum."[65] We will see him pick this tragedy up in different ways in his later work.

At best, Benjamin's idioms are oblique. They identify and briefly describe two distinct periods of historical phenomena, but it is difficult to mobilize the concepts in productive ways on their own. Benjamin, too, may have been persuaded as such, influenced as he was, for better or worse, by Adorno. The concepts, for instance, are conspicuously absent in the third version of the essay. Yet in this second version, before moving onto his central argument Benjamin more carefully distinguishes second technology from the first in ways that line up with other, more established analytical categories. He writes, "the first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at the interplay between nature and humanity." The relevant point comes toward the end of the sentence such that second technology describes not only an

experimental, analytical expression of the dialects needed to understand our experience of modern capitalism, but it also identifies an experimental form of Benjamin's preoccupation with critical citation.[66] For despite its obliqueness, the concept of second technology aligns well with the anti-capitalist categories that frame both the second and third versions of Benjamin's essay from the outset. Paraphrasing Marx without direct citation, each essay opens with a gesture toward the cultural effects of the historical subsumption of labor under capital:

> When Marx undertook his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, that mode was in its infancy. Marx adopted an approach which gave his investigations prognostic value. Going back to the basic conditions of capitalist production, he presented them in a way which showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. What could be expected, it emerged, was not only an increasingly harsh exploitation of the proletariat but, ultimately, the creation of conditions which would make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself.
>
> Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than a half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only now be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements…They call for theses defining the tendencies of the development of art under the present conditions of production. The dialectic of these conditions of production is evident in the superstructure, no less than in the economy. Theses defining the developmental tendencies of art can therefore contribute to the political struggle in ways that it would be a mistake to underestimate.[67]

For Benjamin, at the heart of such political struggle is the need for a reappropriation of technology (constant capital/means of production) that capitalism has set in motion in the service of its own agenda, namely, the production and accumulation of surplus-value set in motion again as such, all at the expense of those whose labor-power enchant it with value, let alone those who fall victim to what Marx described as "the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation."[68] It is with regard to the method of reappropriation, however, where Benjamin's theory of the mimetic faculty takes its strongest shape in his art essay.

As mentioned from the outset, Benjamin's central argument in the second version of his art essay is that, primarily, modern artists, by way of their mimetic perception, "rehearse [the] interplay" between nature and humanity in the service of producing art objects capable of mobilizing revolutionary "innervations of the collective."[69] The conditions of possibility for the

social function of modern art involve not only our mimetic faculties, but also the intensification of the capitalist mode of production, idiomized as second technology, which invites its complement, namely, the ways in which capitalism, "deeply tied as [it is] to modern technology," names "the destruction of the conditions necessary for an adequate human experience," as Eiland and Jennings have it.[70] In short, it is clear that Benjamin understood well our conditions of estrangement under capitalism discussed in chapter one. But, as mentioned above, Benjamin was also particularly sensitive at apprehending value from within the detritus, avowing not only the nefarious character of the relations between classes, but also the ways in which our mimetic faculties, bound up in artistic production, can function as efforts toward meaningful social change.

And perhaps unsurprisingly, Benjamin's argument about our experience of capitalist modernity and his vision for a path forward takes shape in dialogue between its main text and its footnotes. For the main body of text emphasizes the pedagogical nature of our mimetic engagement with technology: Our engagements with technology as deployed under capitalism "*train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily*."[71] Yet it is in the footnote where we learn more about the historical, pedagogical lesson of our mimetic engagements with technology itself, namely, their efforts toward innervations in the service of revolutionary social change:

> Revolutions are innervations of the collective—or, more precisely, efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology. This second technology is a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing [*das Spiel*] with natural forces. Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach. For in revolutions, it is not only the second technology which asserts its claims vis-à-vis society. Because this technology aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action [*Spielraum*], immeasurably expanded. He does not yet know his way around this space. But already he registers his demands on it. For the more the collective makes the second technology its own, the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little

> they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology. In other words, it is the individual liberated by the liquidation of the first technology who stakes his claim. No sooner has the second technology secured its initial revolutionary gains than vital questions affecting the individual—questions of love and death which had been buried by the first technology—once again press for solutions.[72]

Benjamin was optimistic about our mimetic encounters with various objects, here identified as "technology." And although he hadn't cited it, the spirit of his footnote aligns well with an axiom in *Capital*: "[T]he properties of a thing do not arise from its relation to other things, they are, on the contrary, merely *activated* by such relations."[73] It is clear that Benjamin was after the activation of different social relations. And what I mean is, the character of our encounters with Benjamin's things, codified as second technology, have been organized and activated by capitalist modes of production at various registers. For not only can the term technology refer to individual technological objects, i.e., for Benjamin, in this essay, the motion picture camera. But technology can also refer to the transformational effect of the *activity* of a technological object in-use within a "system." At the systemic level, as Eiland and Jennings argue, the product of the motion picture camera can activate in the viewer "profound changes in the very structure of the human sensory apparatus."[74] Hansen's take extends this observation even farther: "Because of the technological nature of the filmic medium, as well as its collective mode of reception, film offers a chance—a second chance, a last chance—to bring the apparatus to social consciousness, to make it public."[75] More than preserving one's humanity in the face of the apparatus, Benjamin sights were set on the ways in which, through mimetic reappropriation, we may "make the vast technical apparatus of our time an object of human innervation."[76]

In an effort to illustrate our pedagogical encounters with technological objects at different registers—from within our personal use, from within scenes of the production process under capitalism, and from within greater cultural scenes of a product's circulation on the capitalist market—I am inspired, perhaps unsurprisingly, by Benjamin himself. For as he has famously

written, in Kafka, "each gesture is an event—one might even say a drama—in itself," and I read Benjamin's footnote, here, and his citations throughout his most influential essays, in a similar light.[77] They function as dramatic gestures that can make vivid the allegorical value of reading our mimetic faculties as laid out in the second version of his art essay.

In our everyday lives, our enjoyment of the use-value of an object is quite different when we encounter that object by way of its use-as-capital. I've been coerced to work, for instance, at a desk nearly every day and for many years at various rates of exploitation calculated by and to suit the domination of capitalist modes of production. In the concreteness of such labor, my awkward body has suffered the aches and pains of various misfits. Fed up, I finally saw my "scope for play" and built an awkward desk out of other desks. Drawing on my mimetic capacities, I perceived my situation in my world-of-things and produced an awkward desk to suit *my* awkward body. Like me, my desk performs awkwardly, yet it performs beautifully when activated as such, in-the-moment. As Benjamin writes, "art is a perfecting mimesis."[78] Yet, unlike Benjamin, it would be inaccurate to suggest that I "mastered" nature—to suggest that the desk works *for* me. For I know it works *with* me, and my "field of action [has] immeasurably expanded." By way of my mimetic production within my world-of-things, I have made my beautifully-awkward desk function as an extension of myself, as if my "organs" are "in" its "technology." As such, I have come to adore *my* desk.

Yet about once a month, when bills are due, I get scared and I begin to wonder about the ways in which the desk's exchange-value on the market may help me. In those moments, the character of my encounter with the desk changes from one of enjoyment into one organized and characterized by the painful, systematic expression of the effect of a nefarious social relation. Encountering my desk as a commodity, I encounter it as if I anticipate that that part of me might

be torn away from my body in the service of satisfying some other need to reproduce myself. I become estranged from the enjoyment not of *my* desk, but of *that* desk. Even in more lucrative months, I cannot enjoy my desk, as I know that I cannot get too attached. For I also know that I fear that one month, any coming month, the painful event that I only thus far anticipate, might be realized. My mimetic product, activated as it is by the social relations in which I find myself as a working-class subject, has taught me something about my historicity. As a working-class subject, I can create value. But my enjoyment of it is always-already at risk, limited, and estranged.

But my illustration is incomplete, for I encounter the value of my desk both in-use and in anticipation of its exchange, as something I'm told is "mine." As far as I understand, the stupid bourgeois political economist would insist that I "own" it, expressed in one way by my legal "freedom" to set it in motion as capital. But as we know, we don't always "own" the technology we encounter, are coerced to use, and are forced to suffer in the service of its "owners," namely capitalists. To illustrate that drama, I must draw from another scene of Benjamin's works within his montage.

Like his essay on Kafka, Benjamin's 1939, "On Some Motifs on Baudelaire" explores what appear as a thousand historical-cultural preoccupations at once: the decline in reception of lyric poetry; changes in the structure of experience of its readers; motions to produce meaningful experience in the face of, or as a response to, shock as a normative phenomenon of urban space; a collective emancipation from isolation within the conspicuous presence of the crowd, and on and on. Yet each preoccupation finds a theoretical ground that Marx had made available for him, reinforced, perhaps, by Adorno. In the following passage, Benjamin links the question of the historical transformation of modern European society to Marx's claims about the ways in which our productive activity has taken shape under capitalism. In short, within art, Benjamin was

again interested in cultural expressions of the historical subsumption of labor under capital. Yet this time, answering Adorno's call, he converses with *Capital* more directly as he discusses the effects of our engagement with technologies that we don't "own":

> Marx had good reason to stress the great fluidity of the connection between segments in manual labor. This connection appears to the factory worker on an assembly line in an independent, objectified form. The article being assembled comes within the worker's range of action independently of his volition, and moves away from him just as arbitrarily. "It is a common characteristic of all capitalist production…," wrote Marx, "that the worker does not make use of the working conditions. The working conditions make use of the worker; but it takes machinery to give this reversal a technologically concrete form." In working with machines, workers learn to coordinate "their own movements with the uniformly constant movement of an automaton…All machine work," says Marx…, "requires prior training of the workers." This training must be differentiated from practice. Practice, which was the sole determinant in handcrafting, still had a function in manufacturing. With practice as the basis, "each particular area of production finds its appropriate technical form in *experience* and *slowly* perfects it." To be sure, each area quickly crystallizes this form "as soon as a certain degree of maturity has been attained." On the other hand, this same system of manufacture produces "in every handicraft it appropriates a class of so-called unskilled laborers which the handicraft system strictly excluded. In developing a greatly simplified specialty to the point of virtuosity…it starts turning the lack of any development into a specialty. In addition to rankings, we get the simple division of workers into the skilled and the unskilled." The unskilled worker is the one most deeply degraded by machine training. His work has been sealed off from experience…[79]

As we follow the passage, it is not difficult to imagine, for instance, another drama—a historical scene of the subsumption of labor under capital in which we are pulled from the handicraft shop to work at some assembly line—assembling, whatever. Desks? In this process, the 'whatever' doesn't matter anymore than the abstractness of the labor of those who are coerced to set it in motion as capital. In our interactions with the machines, we mime the dead labor-power that has enchanted them with value and has set them in motion as constant capital for the capitalist. As each individual corpse-unit of another's dead labor passes into our proximity, it asks after the sacrifice the death of our own life's energy such that we then pass that new congealing corpse-product on by to the next victim. It is clear that our "historically unique collective…has its organs in the new technology," albeit in an estranged way. And it is also clear that the activity bound up in the form of labor under capital describes a suicidal mimesis.

But we haven't yet lost our sense of humor. We maintain that reserve on that other side, as we tend to joke that the *machines* have set it all in motion, as if *the machines* have an agenda. No doubt, machines play a significant, material role. But as mentioned above, we know our social relations are not the fault of the tools. 'Someone put on "Radio Friendly Unit Shifter," and let's pile 'em up. Teamwork makes the dream work!' Our acerbic smirks avow a truth, yet a truth that reflects a sort of violence. The visceral rhetoric of Marx is exemplary here, as his own gesture toward the mimetic re-capitulation of the bodily-organ-turned-subject reveals. As mentioned in chapter one, "Living labour does not realize itself in objective labour which thereby becomes its objective organ, but instead objective labour maintains and fortifies itself by drawing off living labor."[80] Estranged from our humanity, we encounter the otherwise lively mimesis of our activity transformed into a mere semblance of an organ that functions in the service of the greater, synthetic organism—capitalism—all in the service only of *its* health at the expense of our mimetic, yet affective suicide. What's at stake here are the ways in which human activity under capitalism has taken shape less as the mimetic extension and objectification of our organs for our greater social development, but rather as a transformational reversal of subject and object, ushering in another form of the fetishized subject-appearance of capital. As mentioned in chapter one, capitalism haunts us with the corpse of our collective death. That corpse names a product of our mimeses-turned-bourgeois, and although we might not yet "know" our "way around this space," our affective lives "register" our "demands on it." Yet, Benjamin was also keen to examine our mimetic immersion within processes of circulation. And it is with regard to circulation where we can witness the *criticality* of suicidal mimesis more vividly, as Benjamin theory of critical citation take shape in another way.

In "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in two key passages, Benjamin examines the intoxication of the flâneur, circulating within a crowd altogether immersed within the circulation of commodities themselves. On the one hand, Benjamin begins to set up a juxtaposition that "punishes" us for our fetishes in the service of "saving" us from our reification, at least intellectually. Which is to say, Benjamin's citation-thieves are productive. Intoxicated by our mimetic immersion within the circulation of commodities, Benjamin begins with the fetish, specifically the phantasmatic concept of the "commodity-soul:"

> If there were such a thing as a commodity-soul (a notion that Marx occasionally mentions in jest), it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would be bound to see every individual as a buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle.[81]

Benjamin highlights, here, the innocuous value-character of the products of human creative activity. Any product insofar as it is a "good" appears simply as that. My desk, for instance, is good insofar as its function performs some use-value for me. Yet, historically, and of course, presently, we have also encountered products as commodities where use-value names merely one side of the dialectical character of the commodity form. We encounter their utility compounded by their exchangeability, such that commodities appear to bear traces of a ghostly, human activity imprinted on or activated within them. This is what Marx means when he argues that commodities "transcend sensuousness."[82] And by no fault of their own (I mean, it's *our* fetish), commodities confront us with the most seductive of enchantments: 'Oh hey, Consumer. Pardon me, I don't know your name. But, as you can see, I've had you in mind. Tell me I'm pretty?' they ask, coquettishly. And we may graciously respond: 'Who, me? Whoa! Why thank you, Absorbant-Cotton-Dish-Towel-With-The-Loop-Sewn-On-Your-End-Which-Allows-Me-To-Hang-You-*Especially*-On-That-Hook-Near-The-Sink! Pity me! Good thing you're here, for all my stuff has gotten so wet!'—for instance. There can be an intimate empathy transmitted in the intoxication of such exchanges. The point of purchase, shall we be so privileged, can mark an

anticipatory and felicitous realization of some potential, empathetic interaction for us by imagining the function-in-use of some product. It can be really hot! All of which is to say, due to their use-values, there remains a there, there in the circulation and realization of the products of human activity set in motion by the value-producing power of human creativity, even in the face of the wreckage of capitalism.[83]

On the other hand, as he continues his argument, Benjamin sobers us up. Unlike his preoccupation with the "commodity-soul," which toys with the idea of the intoxicating nature of our fetishes, Benjamin's preoccupations about circulation become more historically specific and also more properly anthropocentric. His archetype is the flâneur, the idle stroller. And his protagonist is Baudelaire, whose flânerie coincides with his occupation as a man of letters whose avenues toward publication had undergone a transformation from circulation in literary journals toward that of the feuilleton section of the daily newspaper around the middle nineteenth century. Which is to say, by the middle nineteenth century in Paris, modes of literary production had begun, however loosely, to be subsumed under capital.

The feuilleton, as Benjamin has it, functioned as a cultural section of the newspaper featuring "short, abrupt news items," "city gossip," "theatrical intrigues," "the serial novel," and other "'things worth knowing'"—all surrounded, of course, by advertisements and funded by their revenue. Marking more than an advent in the mediation of European pop culture, and in addition to their "cheap elegance," Benjamin points out the ways in which the popularity of the feuilleton compelled literary producers into a mimetic "assimilation" within the scene-of-events offered in the feuilleton itself. As an immediate result, someone like Baudelaire, argues Benjamin, "spent his hours of idleness" "on the boulevards," circulating among all the

commodities, gossip, and nonsense, encountering it all as the stuff of the raw material necessary for literary production.[84]

> On the boulevard, he kept himself in readiness for the next incident, witticism, or rumor. There he unfolded the full drapery of his connections with the colleagues and the men-about-town, and he was as much dependent on their results as the cocottes were on their disguises…Building's walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; newsstands are his libraries; and café terraces are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done.[85]

Throughout the day, spread out amongst all the constant capital, Benjamin argues that his protagonist, Baudelaire "behaved as if he had learned from Marx that the value of a commodity is determined by the worktime needed from society to [re]produce it."[86] But Baudelaire also behaved in another way, as if he'd been trained by the capitalist to confront himself as the mere reified form of human-activity-turned-commodity. For Baudelaire, in effect, had become a laborer, mimicking the death of his life's energy.

As with the circulation of commodities, so too had gone Baudelaire, intoxicated within the marketplace. Miming the dead-labor, he's there, "surging in a stream of customers," and like the commodity, he's there "to find a buyer." But he's still a little tipsy. As Benjamin argues, "empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the flâneur abandons himself in the crowd." Yet what's more, Benjamin argues that "Baudelaire knew the true situation of the man of letters." As a person, merely miming the circulation of dead-labor, Benjamin argues that Baudelaire "possessed" a "sensitivity" "that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods," a sensitivity that invites both "pleasure and uneasiness" that has become necessary for our survival under capitalism.[87] And as Benjamin approaches one of the most striking passages in his Paris essay, he draws from Baudelaire's *Oeuvres* in the service of setting up a juxtaposition between Baudelaire's "pleasure" in the face of its "uneasiness." "The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of the enjoyment of the multiplication by number."[88] We can witness the former effect of Baudelaire's sensitivity in the beginning of the passage, that "mysterious

…enjoyment" set in motion by miming the circulation-effect of capitalism's "multiplication by number." It's illuminating. There's a mysterious pleasure, here, as capitalists have mystified the world. Within the marketplace, at the point of transaction, our purchase of the commodity realizes one form of the multiplication by number set in motion by way of human-energy. At the marketplace, we enjoy the celebration of the multiplication by number of the potential use-values the merchant capitalist makes available by way of exchange. And sure, what joy.

Yet such pleasure is not without its caveat. And as he continues his analysis, what is at play is Benjamin *reading* the allegorical value of Baudelaire's suicidal mimesis within the marketplace in the service of exposing the absurdity informed by Marx. On the one hand, workers, by way of the activation of their value-producing labor-power, in fact, *multiply* the value of constant capital, *x*, while capitalists, on the other hand, have offered in return mere wages, the mere price of commodified labor-power, *y,* as if its function were one of mere *addition*, rather than one of multiplication. Workers work for their wages, while capitalists accumulate the remaining surplus-value, euphemized as profits, made real for them by way of exchange on the market, yet another effect of the mysterious pleasure of the multiplication by number. Although activating his mimetic faculty, which can itself be a value-producing activity, Baudelaire mimes less the value-producing power or effect of human creative energy. What Baudelaire's mimesis emphasizes, rather, is the circulation of the effect of the commodification of reified human activity made possible by the subsumption of his human-energy under capitalism. In short, Baudelaire mimes the absurdity of the capital relation. And the image of Baudelaire that Benjamin makes vivid—his circulation within the crowd, hung-over, as if he too were a mere component of dead-labor—is sobering.

And as we encounter Benjamin's passage, we witness again a form of his critical citation, namely, the art of citing without quotation marks. Without citation, the expressive effect of Benjamin's imagery riffs on the synthetic death of our lives'-energy that makes "special" that historical irrationality of which Marx calls that "special commodity."[89] We feel the "chilly breath" of the effect of the commodification of reified human energy bound up in Baudelaire's poetic statement. The full passage reads:

> "The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of the enjoyment of the multiplication by number." But this statement becomes clear if one imagines it spoken not only from the viewpoint of a person but also from that of a commodity. To be sure, insofar as a person, as labor power is a commodity, there is no need for him to identify himself as such. The more conscious he becomes of his mode of existence, the mode imposed on him by the system of production, the more he proletarianizes himself, the more he will be gripped by the chilly breath of the commodity economy, and the less he will feel like empathizing with commodities.[90]

If there were such thing as a commodity-soul, and if it were the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, *and* if it could speak to us, what we would hear through its chilly breath would be the humane whisper of the laborer who set it in motion as dead-labor, the commodity: "*You beautiful mutherfucker, I am nothing more than the objectification of your dead labor-power. Now, let me dry your eyes, while you listen here. A person—you—simply, categorically, are not one of us. A person may be commodi*fied *in whole, as are the enslaved: A person's life-energy may be commodi*fied *in part as labor-power, as are the working class. But I'll be goddamned if I let you go away thinking it is nothing other than a fucking bourgeois travesty to think of, ontologically circumscribe, and coerce a person to be set in motion, in whole, or in part, as a fucking commodity. For I am dead-labor, and you are alive…Now, you go s i n g t h a t !*"

Marx has argued, unlike the commodity, "labour as the value-forming element cannot itself possess any value."[91] And here, Benjamin spotlights the ways in which Baudelaire's suicidal mimesis of the capital relation reveals for us through an expressive image of that "chilly

breath" the absurdity of the commodification of reified human activity that makes commodity production and circulation possible under capitalism. For Baudelaire engaged not only in suicidal mimesis, but in a *critical* suicidal mimesis.

*

The critical value of the mimetic faculty as found in the art essay depends upon our use of technology—a tool, a machine, a motion picture camera, art, and on and on. By way of our use of them and our practice with them, they train us such that it appears as if our "organs [are] in the new technology," as if they are extensions of ourselves.[92] As Eiland and Jennings argue, through our training with technology, we can acquire "new apperceptions and reactions," "profound changes in the very structure of the human sensory apparatus."[93] Through our active relationships with technologies, we expand, as Benjamin describes, our "scope for play," and this sense of play is what Hansen emphasizes more precisely.[94] By training us in the inter*play* between humanity and nature, Hansen argues that technology has "the potential to reverse, in the form of play, the catastrophic consequences of an already failed reception of technology."[95] What she means, of course, is that technology, as deployed by industrial capitalists, has functioned only in the service of capitalism itself. In short, capitalism has failed the value-producing power that makes it possible. Benjamin makes this clear in dialogue with *Capital* in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." Yet with our organs in the new technology, and by contemplating our scope for play, we may come to imagine—by way of our mimetic performances with it—the function of technology in the service of something else, perhaps even ourselves, our "unique historical collective," as Benjamin envisions.[96] Yet what is striking about Benjamin's treatment of the mimetic faculty in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" are the ways in which the logic of the deployment of technology as used by industrial capitalists

has found its way, through circulation and distribution, into our greater cultural milieux, infecting our behavior and poisoning our thinking.

As mentioned in chapter one, by the middle 1860s, Marx had come to describe the capitalist mode of production and circulation as "the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living."[97] By 1935, Benjamin began reading more thoroughly, *Capital*, as evinced throughout his own work between the middle-to-late 1930s. By the fall of 1938, Benjamin continued to theorize the mimetic faculty as a fundamental human capacity transformed by our experience of capitalist modernity, and he highlighted the literary work of Charles Baudelaire as an exemplar of mimetic experience under capitalism—the rule of dead labor over the living. And the extent to which Benjamin makes vivid the absurdities of the capital relation bound up in the criticality of Baudelaire's mimetic perception and production, readers can come to understand why Benjamin began to describe the works of Baudelaire as "a kind of mimesis of death."[98]

ANOTHER KIND OF MIMESIS OF DEATH

> The demolition of the autonomous, self-identical individual entails an analogous transformation of the collective.
>
> Miriem Bratu Hansen, "Mistaking the Moon for the Ball," 2012

From the outset, I argued that no one invites the thought of modern suicidality as a rehearsal of the capital relation like that Walter Benjamin. And throughout this chapter, I have tried to show the ways in which Benjamin, influenced by his own suicidality, theorized the transformation of the mimetic faculty under our experience of capitalist modernity such that we may come to understand the ways in which our mimetic perceptions and productions rehearse the

absurdity of our interplay with capitalism—the ways in which we rehearse the contradictions bound up in the capital relation.

For those in our suicidal lot, however, I am interested in scenes in which the stakes are more acute, yet no less significant. As Benjamin argues "the first material on which the mimetic faculty tested itself was the human body."[99] And even though, as he argues, "both the mimetic force and the mimetic mode of vision may have vanished from certain spheres, perhaps only to surface in others," I am interested in the ways in which the body still functions as a site of mimetic production.[100] Most specifically, I am interested in what happens to our bodies when we mime a loss of our humanity—when our mimetic faculties perceive and then *re*produce that loss. What forms might that take? How severe might they be? And what happens if we are losing our capacity even to perceive that we are capable of miming such losses, reinforced, as we are, by our circulation within socio-economic and political structures fueled by the very human-energies and capacities that that structure simultaneously insists we disavow in favor of the twin, dehumanizing absurdities of reification and fetishization? In other words, what happens if the stuff of capitalist realism appears as if it has become our material reality? And, of course, worst of all, like Fleur de Marie, what happens when our mimetic centers contend with losses that mobilize a mimetic production that not only recapitulates those losses, but begs for an avowal, fallen on deaf ears?

"Who can say?"

For those in our suicidal lot, what is at stake is not only our lives, but especially the extant liveliness that our mimeses, bound up in suicidality, both consistently exhibit, yet also put at risk. I would like to argue that that which is allegorized by way of suicidal, critical mimesis points to the beauty of our productive energy from within capitalist modes of production and

circulation. At stake is not only our ability to avow the historical character and transformation of our experience under capitalism, but the meaning of that experience itself from within the detritus of our historically situated present without which, I argue, we'd understand little of our suicidal lives and the value after which their expressions seek. As Hansen has argued, "Benjamin seeks to reactivate the abilities of the body as a medium in the service of imagining new forms of experience."[101] And I would like to conclude by suggesting that modern suicidality can describe our attempt, at the level of mimetic perception and production, to re-present to us the seemingly impenetrable totality of our shared estrangement under modern capitalism in the service of imagining, affirming, and possibly creating new forms of social reproduction.

*

While in no single work had he theorized suicidality alone, by tending to Benjamin's lifework as a montage, we encounter his thesis in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" as such. He argues, "Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide," and his statement strikes us as if it were a sort of flashpoint. It is as if Benjamin's thesis, as he writes elsewhere, "blasts…a specific work out of [his] lifework."[102] The blast, however, is delayed, as two claims about Baudelaire flank Benjamin's thesis while the imagery that follows detonates the explosion.

In his conversation about the significance of the working-class hero as the subject of *la modernité* in relation to works of antiquity, Benjamin draws from Baudelaire's "Salon de 1859," highlighting the detritus of capitalism which was never far from his mind. He quotes, "When I hear how a Raphael or a Veronese is glorified with the veiled intention of denigrating what came after them…I ask myself whether an achievement which must be rated *at least* equal to theirs…is not infinitely *more meritorious*, because it triumphed in a hostile atmosphere and

place." As if the 16th century weren't hostile, Benjamin argues that the resistance afforded to the "natural productive élan" of the working-class hero under capitalism is "out of all proportion to his strength," emphasizing the hostility through which the working-class subjects of modernity struggle to survive. With empathy to the working-class hero of modernity, Benjamin then delivers his thesis:

> It is understandable if a person becomes exhausted and takes refuge in death. Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernity in the realm of the passions.[103]

To be sure, what is heroic about the working-class subjects of modernity is their passion, not their corporeal suicides. Benjamin knew that, as his thesis insists, "Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic *passion*," the "achievement of modernity in the realm of the *passions*" (my emphasis). In other words, it is simply that in the face of capitalism, working-class suicidality is all-too-often the shape that that heroic passion takes. This emphasis on suicidality over corporeal suicide is further emphasized in the way in which Benjamin sort of clumsily asks after the source of the value of acknowledging working-class suicidality. "Do the dregs of society supply the heroes of the big city? Or is the hero the poet who fashions his work from such material?"[104] What's at play, again, is Benjamin reading Baudelaire's mimetic faculty—his ability to perceive and produce similarities. As Benjamin argues: "For the modern hero is no hero; he is the *portrayer* of heroes."[105] In grammatical obfuscation, it is precisely the mimetic faculty that informs Benjamin's claim about who's who. Is the modern hero the suicidal, working-class subject? Or is the modern hero the portrayer of such subjectivities? And it is in his answer where a flash of his mimesis shines through again, for "[t]he theory of the modern admits both."[106]

Benjamin perceived a similarity between Baudelaire's poetic production and the coercive forces of capitalism, and then reorganized nearly nine decades of historical evidence that

mediates that similarity at the site of suicide itself. That is, substantiating that to which Baudelaire merely gestured in "Salon de 1846," Benjamin grounds the heroic élan of the modern working-class with specific reference to a spate of then contemporary suicides.[107] Georges Minois makes this vivid: "The annual mean number of suicides for the whole of France rose from 1,827 for the years 1826-30 to 2,931 during 1841-45," and as "the moralist took fright," Minois continues, their "works on suicide proliferated during the July Monarchy."[108] Yet rather than moralize, Benjamin amplifies the significance of suicide, framing it as a collective preoccupation. He argues, "[a]round that time, the *idea* of suicide became familiar to the working masses…[and] [s]omeone like Baudelaire could very well have viewed suicide as the only heroic act still available to the *multitudes maladives* of the cities in reactionary times." Returning to Baudelaire's "Salon de 1846," Benjamin further emphasizes a sense of collectivity surrounding the idea of suicide, reminding us that it is as if "[w]e are all attendants at some kind of funeral."[109]

Benjamin was fond of the expressive, revelatory value of physiognomy. And I would like to argue that in the few pages that follow his thesis in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin's expressive imagery takes its most effective form. From high atop the church of Sacré-Coeur, Benjamin references Léon Daudet's observations of Paris.

> From above, one looks down on this agglomeration of palaces, monuments, houses, and barracks, and one gets the feeling that they are destined for catastrophe, or several catastrophes—natural or social…I have spent hours on Fourvières with a view of Lyons, on Notre-Dame de la Garde with a view of Marseilles, on Sacré-Coeur with a view of Paris…What becomes most apparent from these heights is a threat. The agglomerations of human beings are threatening…A man needs work—that is correct. But he has other needs, too…Among his other needs is suicide, something that is inherent in him and the society which forms him, and it is stronger than his drive for self-preservation. Thus, when one stands on Sacré-Coeur, Fourvières, and Notre-Dame de la Garde and looks down, one is surprised that Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles are still there.[110]

By imagining modernity's suicidal physiognomy in the late 1930s in relation to Daudet's thought-image of 1929, Benjamin returns to Baudelaire, and writes, "This is the face that the

passion moderne which Baudelaire recognized in suicide has received in this century."[111] If Fleur de Marie asks after both a confirmation of our estranged life under capitalism and an affirmation of the possibility to imagine new modes of social reproduction by posing a simple, yet painfully humane question, "Who can say?," then the expression of surprise immanent in the physiognomy of Benjamin's Face-of-Suicidal-Modernity wagers a statement on the assumption of a similar question that amplifies his thesis about Baudelaire, which is really Benjamin's own. For not only must modernity stand under the sign of suicide, but in the face of our strangled forms of resistance to capitalism, it is *surprising* that we are even still here—that we even still exist. For the question posed from Benjamin's physiognomic suicidal expression seems to read, *Oughtn't we be surprised that we all haven't yet killed ourselves?*

*

To live modernity is to survive a catastrophe. Yet in the face of our wreckage, there is a joy in the question of Benjamin's Face-of-Suicidal-Modernity reminiscent of a common form of greeting in Chinese, "吃了吗 (Chī le ma)?" The meaning of 吃了吗 translates as, "Have you eaten?"[112] One could imagine the poignancy of such a greeting when food has become scarce, for instance, during the Long March. Yet, it is a felicitous greeting. In its care is also reflected an acknowledgement of an otherwise quite normal need, for what is more normal than our need for food?

I have often imagined a similar greeting, but I've never felt comfortable enough to open a conversation with it. I mean, often when people ask me how I am doing, I respond with something like, "Well, I chose life today." It's never not been met with a smile, as if not only *I* have been recognized, but an acknowledgment of a *shared condition* has been recognized as

well. It's as if, when I respond this way, I've met a fellow traveler whose physiognomy confirms its implication, and I feel less alone.

But how fucking joyous it would be for me—and maybe for those in our suicidal lot—perhaps for you, too, were when we meet one another, we respond to the greeting, "Have you entertained your suicide lately?" with something equally felicitous, "I'm doing great! Thanks for asking."

By approaching suicidality as critical mimesis, we may better situate those in our suicidal lot within our lived histories under capitalist modernity, we may better understand the ways in which the critical value of suicidal activity invites us to imagine new forms of social reproduction, and we may help mitigate the frequency of suicide itself by redirecting our tendencies toward corporeal suicide in the service of critical art, as had Baudelaire, or criticism, as had Benjamin.

Until then, I'm afraid, the resonance emanating from Benjamin's curiously-titled reflection, "Closed for Alterations" will appear as a mystery.

> In a dream, I took my life with a gun. When it went off, I did not wake up but saw myself lying for a while as a corpse. Only then did I wake.[113]

CHAPTER THREE

The Affective Value of Suicidal Fantasy: Feeling the "Insane Truth" in *Mrs. Dalloway*

[T]he moderns had never written anything
one wanted to read about death, she thought;
and turned.

Virginia Woolf, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," 1923

Where Walter Benjamin's work with suicidality invites us out of the industrial factory and into scenes of our mimetic immersion amongst the circulation and distribution of commodities more broadly, the following two chapters analyze each character's situatedness within capitalist modernity in different ways. The mimeses are as diverse as the characters' lived historicities from within the world of each novel, and as such, the mimetic objects of their casts of characters are more difficult to pin down. In the present chapter, Septimus Smith's suicidal mimeses re-present a loss on the site of his body epiphenomenal to the development of capitalism. Clarissa Dalloway's suicidal mimeses are more externalized and take the shape of a re-staging of a specific historical scene of loss from within her bourgeois culture. Both mimeses, however, are situated within scenes made possible under capitalism, as each is characterized by our estrangement from one another and our greater humanity in general.

*

Virginia Woolf was fond of thinking about death. She often wrote about death in her diary, and in 1922, Woolf drafted an entry whose import would exceed its occasion, "I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual."[1] Woolf suspected a value in death, a value for which she sought confirmation in others. "I like, I see, to question people about death," she wrote.[2] Death was to Woolf a lingering question, and she amplified the question of the value

of death in her 1923 story, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street," a short story tracing Clarissa Dalloway's morning errands throughout metropolitan London.

Woolf framed the value of death as one that gives rise to potentiality, a cognitive suspicion about death accompanied by an affective empowerment. Woolf framed the value of thinking about death as a force or a particular kind of affective power that connects Clarissa to and situates her within the world around her. The full passage reads as follows:

> She mounted the little hill lightly. The air stirred with energy. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Piccadilly and Arlington Street and the Mall seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, upon waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To ride; to dance; she had adored all that. Or going on long walks in the country, talking, about books, what to do with one's life, for young people were amazingly priggish—oh, the things one had said! But one had conviction. Middle age is the devil. People like Jack'll never know that, she thought; for he never once thought of death, never, they said, knew he was dying. And now can never mourn—how did it go?—a head grown grey…From the contagion of the world's slow stain,…have drunk their cup a round or two before….From the contagion of the world's slow stain! She held herself upright.

The narrator sets the "divine vitality" by which Clarissa is empowered and connected to her world in obverse relation to that of Jack, a man who "never once thought of death." Through Jack, yet in relation to Clarissa, Woolf suggests that thinking about death can set in motion an ability to mourn while alluding both to Percy Bysshe Shelley's "An Elegy on the Death of John Keats"[3] and to Omar Khayyam's "The Rubaiyat," two poems whose motifs engage issues of mourning the death of another, the value of which seems clear.

The loss of another can give rise to a host of painful feelings, or even numbness characterized by a withdrawal from the world; as Freud suggested, experiences of loss can inaugurate a subsequent "loss of interest in the outside world," an "inhibition of all activity." Through mourning, we are brought back into association with the world around us.[4] Yet Woolf's short story extends her understanding of mourning, or rather, mimetically turns that sense of mourning inward. For although Jack "never once thought of death," he also never "knew *he* was

dying" (my emphasis). Here Woolf's inward turn raises interesting questions. If Clarissa encounters an affective value while thinking about death in relation to a man who has not thought of his own, had she, then, been thinking about *her* own death? Is that which empowers Clarissa's affective engagement with her world, a power to hold "herself upright," an effect of miming her own death in the service of mourning?

Quite characteristically, Woolf's work raises these questions, yet resists offering any clear answers. Rather, the narrator reveals her thoughts and affect to us by way of continued allusions to poetry, albeit this time mixed with reference to William Shakespeare. "For all the great things one must go to the past, she thought. From the contagion of the world's slow stain…Fear no more the heat o' the sun….And now can never mourn, can never mourn, she repeated." Clarissa's thoughts about death and mourning repeatedly "ran in her head," the narrator insists, as a "test of great poetry." Like Benjamin's preoccupation with play in his art essay, Woolf framed the aesthetic value of thinking about death as a question, a "test," an open question to be repeatedly posed in the service of seeking affirmation.

Throughout drafting the palimpsestic texts that would become *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's thematic preoccupations about the affective value of thinking about death began to take more focused shapes. As she continued to experiment, Woolf reported in her diary what was then to her only a premonition. On September 6, 1922, during her initial drafting stages she wrote, "Anyhow, nature obligingly supplies me with the illusion that I am about to write something good: something rich, & deep, & fluent & hard as nails, while bright as diamonds."[5] Woolf had just finished "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" on September 2nd and was to begin another connected story, "The Prime Minister," to be completed by October 12th. Sometime between September 6th and October 14th, however, her preoccupations about death had crystallized into

more concrete themes as she then announced, “Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book; & I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side—something like that. Septimus Smith?—is that a good name?”[6] Knowing she wanted to develop further the themes of the affective value of thinking about death taken up in her short story, Woolf envisioned a mimetic double to Clarissa in Septimus, another figure for thinking and feeling something not only about death, but more specifically about his own through suicide. As Woolf’s thematic preoccupations about death began to extend into issues surrounding suicide, however, she continued to explore ways in which to frame her preoccupations in the form of an open question.

Woolf imagined what was to become her fourth novel as a “*study*” of insanity and suicide, yet the appositional phrase that follows within her diary entry extends that study to one of “the *world*,” the world “seen by the sane & the insane *side by side*” (my emphasis). Woolf sought to stage her study of whom she came to refer to as her doubled protagonists not only as one whose focus highlights two characters who inhabit the same world. She also framed them such that their apprehension of the possibility of death and suicide connects them to their worlds. As her early manuscript notations of October 16, 1922 reveal, Woolf wanted to portray her doubled protagonists’ preoccupations about death, particularly one’s own, in a subtle, yet striking way that emphasizes that which they share. “Mrs. D. Seeing the truth. S.S. seeing the insane truth.”[7] Woolf used this language in her manuscript notations. The closest, most analogous language we find in *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, comes by way of the novel’s narrator, describing, on the one hand, Clarissa as enraptured by “something central that permeated,” holding her “diamond, something infinitely precious” whose “radiance burnt through” like a “revelation,” a “religious feeling.” On the other, Septimus, apprehends some “supreme secret,”

or "secret signal," "a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world," a "message hidden in the beauty of words"—the object in its veil.[8]

And again, Woolf resisted disclosing any stable answers about Clarissa's "truth" or Septimus' "insane truth." Rather, as we found in her short story, *Mrs. Dalloway* poses these themes as open questions, as the narrator asks, "what did it mean to her, this thing called life?," and "what was his message?" "Why seek truths and deliver messages…?"[9]

Woolf framed *Mrs. Dalloway* as a study, a term that calls to mind approaches suggestive of, for instance, exploration, investigation, examination, and inquiry, all subject to affirmation, and the texts that together make up *Mrs. Dalloway* pose a host of curious questions this chapter takes up, questions such as, what is the truth Clarissa sees? What of Septimus' insane truth? Are the meanings of these truths different? In what ways does Woolf formally explore what it means to "see" these truths? Is Septimus' vision different than Clarissa's? Or more specifically, if, as I argue, "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" celebrates the aesthetic value of Clarissa's tendency to think about death, perhaps even her own, does *Mrs. Dalloway* then celebrate the affective value of thinking about one's own death through suicide? What, if anything, could be the affective value of thinking about one's own suicide? And lastly, as an extension from Woolf's aesthetic concerns, if she imagined her fourth novel as an effort to "to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense," how can an affective value of thinking about one's own suicide, an act that takes one's active ability to engage with the world absolutely, function as a political critique?[10]

By examining the palimpsestic texts that became *Mrs. Dalloway*, texts examined by a host of various scholars in a host of various different ways,[11] this chapter takes up a series of questions related to Woolf's that ask after a better understanding of the ways in which Woolf

understood her preoccupations about death and suicide, how those preoccupations found their form in her writing, and ultimately, what Woolf can teach us about her early twentieth-century experience and, perhaps, our own in the twenty-first.

THE TRUTH, THE INSANE TRUTH

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.
>
> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925

Since June 1922, Woolf had been anxious in anticipation of the publication and reception of her third novel, *Jacob's Room*. She had been contending with critiques that described her fiction as "impossible," critiques routinely received at the time from mostly male friends, reviewers, and literary critics who suggested that she struggled to narrate reality.[12] Throughout her diary, Woolf often anticipated criticism of her work as an engagement in mere "graceful fantasy" written "without much bearing upon real life."[13] At times she even seemed to have internalized such criticism, asking, "Have I the power of conveying the true reality?" In the face of her doubts, however, Woolf resisted declaring firm claims about reality, acknowledging, "I insubstantiate, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality—its cheapness. But to get further."[14] She wanted "to think out Mrs Dalloway," "to foresee this book better than the others, & get the utmost out of it."[15] In the process she worried about exploring "almost too many ideas." She knew she wanted to "give life & death, sanity & insanity," figured in her doubled, yet different protagonists, Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway, an aristocratic housewife, mother, and socialite on the one

hand, and Septimus Warren Smith, a working-class veteran, clerk, husband, and self-educated poet on the other.[16]

Yet despite their obvious differences, Woolf also linked Clarissa and Septimus in significant ways. Both Clarissa and Septimus, for instance, struggle to come to terms with their shared same-sex desire.[17] Where Clarissa contends with "this question of love…this falling in love with women," specifically her life-long friend Sally Seton, Septimus struggles to come to terms with his feelings for his officer, Evans, killed in the Great War.[18]

In her manuscript notations, however, Woolf's formal contentions about staging reality began to overlap with her thematic preoccupations about death and suicide explored in her short story. She became more curious about the effect of what she came to pose as this "strange" reality, the curiously oblique focal point of Clarissa's "truth" and Septimus' "insane truth"—the effect of which I develop as the affective value of entertaining the possibility of death, specifically one's own through suicide.[19]

In August 1923, Woolf came closest to pinning down her fourth novel's most significant motif, a motif that binds her doubled protagonists in the most fundamental ways.

Staged in the form of a sort of strangled hypothesis, Woolf reflected, almost in verse:

> There must be a reality which is
> not in human beings at all. What about
> death for instance? But what is death?
> Strange if that were the reality.[20]

Her hypothesis, "There must be a reality…," proposes an extant condition. Yet this condition, she wrote, "…is not in human beings at all." Woolf suggested, here, an absence internal to human subjectivity, and I argue, this absence describes in part what Woolf meant by the "truth" she wanted Clarissa to see. As the epigraph to this section suggests, Woolf positioned that "thing there was that mattered," some materialization, at a "centre," yet that central thing "evaded

them," giving rise to sensations of "the impossibility of reaching the centre." Although Woolf portrayed that "thing" central to subjectivity as an absence, her notation then frames a sort of research question that gives shape and character to that absence, or perhaps, proposes a medium that betrays that absence, Clarissa's "truth." "What about death for instance?," Woolf asks. Here Woolf expands Clarissa's "truth," the absence central to subjectivity, as revealed by death, a phenomenon that presupposes life, a presupposition that suggests a relationship between death and subjectivity. To sum up her hypothesis, I understand Woolf to have been curious about what it means to suggest that death reveals the absence central to subjectivity, her "strange" curiosity, the "truth" she wanted Clarissa to see.

In Woolf's manuscript notations, it is tempting to misread her language—"I want to *give* life & death…;" "Mrs. D. *seeing* the truth…;" "*There must be a reality*…" (my emphasis). Such notations suggest a desire for her novel to disclose a metaphysical truth or set of truths, something cognitive. While at times Woolf too seemed tempted in this way, as some of the strikeouts in her manuscript notations suggest, "~~Really the truth is that,~~" her novel is less interested in cognitive phenomena or metaphysical truths, as such.[21] In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf became less interested in theorizing what death *is* than she had in exploring how death *functions*, death's productive, affective materialization. Taken in turn, Jacques Derrida's concerns about both textuality and death may be instructive here, and also shed some light the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* frames its motif in the service of an open question, her study about death and suicide.

As mentioned above, *Mrs. Dalloway* describes its most significant motif as a "message hidden in the beauty of words." Similarly, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida examines issues of textuality or figurality and argues that the meanings of signs, symbols, and signifying practices

are always-already unstable and undetermined by way of a signifying deferral, the *a priori* operation of textuality itself. Derrida describes this textual operation as differance, an operation prior to and simultaneously inaugurating a desire for presence. Referring to the sign as the supplement, Derrida argues,

> The concept of the supplement and the theory of writing designate textuality itself…in an indefinitely multiplied structure—*en abyme* [*in an abyss*]—to employ the current phrase. And we shall see that this abyss is not a happy or unhappy accident…[T]he indefinite process of supplementarity has always already *infiltrated* presence…Representation *in the abyss* of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.[22]

Born from an abyss, Derrida argues that the desire to signify a presence also "carries in itself the destiny of its non-satisfaction," similar to Benjamin's work with allegory. The operation of textuality, he insists, "tricks with a gesture of effacement" marked by the supplement itself – a substitute. In other words, in language, we are never in the presence of the signified itself. In language, we encounter only symbols that efface presence. It is in this way that we can understand Derrida's claim that "differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible."[23]

By acknowledging the play of differance, we can better understand the ways in which Woolf's gestures toward truths are not themselves metaphysical truths, nor metaphysical theorizations. Nor can they disclose presence; Woolf understood this. Rather, *Mrs. Dalloway* stages an engagement with the play of desire by way of the deferral of signification. *Mrs. Dalloway*'s narrator asks, for instance, not after truth of the message of the aeroplane– "the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly—" – but asks rather "why not enter in?"[24] *Mrs. Dalloway* invites us not into a theory of what death is, but rather into the playful

operation of textuality that conditions and fuels our sensory suspicions about the question of the strange function of death.

But what of death? Why death? What is death's strange function? And how can death function in the service of our lives?

Derrida was also concerned about the function of death—what death makes possible. His concern had been amplified in the wake of the death of his long-time friend, Paul de Man that led to a series of three lectures transcribed and published as, *Memoires for Paul de Man*. Derrida wrote that "Paul de Man was a thinker of affirmation," specifically a doubled affirmation made possible by an apperception upon encountering the possibility of the death of another, on the one hand, that, on the other, initiates the possibility of what Derrida referred to as a vow, a recursive, performative practice made upon acknowledging death's social function.[25] De Man's "affirmation and vow," what Derrida describes as a "yes, yes," can help us better understand the cognitive dimensions of Woolf's "strange" hypothesis. Death reveals the absence central to subjectivity, while simultaneously illuminating the doubleness of Clarissa and Septimus, their truth and insane truth, "seen," as Woolf put it, "side by side."

What I would like to develop below, however, are the ways in which Woolf's novel doubly extend de Man's cognitive affirmations about death. For where Derrida describes de Man as a "thinker" of affirmation, I argue *Mrs. Dalloway* invites readers into a world of affective experiences conditioned not only by a cognitive suspicion about death, but affective experiences conditioned by and preoccupied with suicide in particular. In other words, where de Man's affirmations cognitively reveal the social function of death, *Mrs. Dalloway* privileges suicide's psychic and affective components that connect us, I argue, to the world around us, inaugurating a sort of solicitude.

What I would like to develop are the ways in which Septimus' mimetic fantasies about the Great War reveal and extend the mechanics of de Man's first affirmation about the effects of the death of another into the psychic and affective world of suicide. It is within his specifically suicidal affective experiences, I argue, where we begin to understand what Woolf approached as Septimus' "insane truth." Namely, Septimus' suicidal thoughts, feelings, and fantasies function in the service of a solicitude with, toward, and for the objects and people that surround him. I argue that Septimus' suicidal mimeses enable him to come to terms with the death of his friend and lover, Evans, in ways that implicate Septimus himself. Yet where Woolf framed Septimus' struggle partially in terms of cognition—for Septimus, who had "lately" been "taken from life to death," "*knew* the truth! He *knew* everything! That man, his friend who was killed, Evans, had come"—Woolf besets Septimus' suicidal struggle of coming-to-knowledge against an intense backdrop of affective engagement.[26] Although prior to his heightened suicidal fantasies we learn that "he could not *feel*," after embracing his suicidal fantasies we learn that, "He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this *relief*, of this *joy*…"[27] By focusing on the ways in which Septimus' suicidal fantasies give rise both to his ability to feel and to his desire to communicate those feelings, we can come to see the ways in which the effect of Clarissa's ability to have "felt herself everywhere," namely, her psychic, affective attachment to the world around her, "not 'here, here, here'…but everywhere" registers as a *post hoc* experience of having already encountered the affective value of thinking about death.[28] Yet during the novel's climactic moment when Clarissa learns of and responds to the news of Septimus' suicide by way of her own suicidal fantasy in particular, we witness Clarissa's empowered return to her party reveal a fidelity to de Man's second affirmation, his vow—a performative alliance made with Woolf's strange reality, with the effect of the psychic and

affective materialization of what suicidal thinking and feeling make possible. By acknowledging the relationships between thinking about suicide and feeling that which suicide makes possible, we can better understand the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* asks after an affirmation of Septimus and Clarissa's doubled truths, specifically, what I would like to develop below as the phantasmatic question of feeling "the insane truth"—the affective value of suicidal fantasy.

*

The unprecedented death of the Great War prefigures the affective world of *Mrs. Dalloway*, set in "This," the "late age of the world's experience," experiences that the novel's narrator reveals, "had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears."[29] Yet death prefigures Septimus' experience in more particular ways. For although Septimus "had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death"—"He was right there"—the "last shells" that had "missed him" had not, however, missed his officer, friend, and lover, Evans.[30] Septimus' encounter with Evans' death becomes one with which he struggles to come to terms. For "something failed him; he could not feel."[31] "So he was deserted…[H]e was quite alone," "condemned," as the novel suggests, to solitude.[32]

Derrida examines what he calls that "terrible solitude which is mine or ours at the death of the other," and argues, however, that that solitude "is what constitutes that relationship to self which we call 'me,' 'us,' 'between us,' 'subjectivity,' 'intersubjectivity,' 'memory.'" There can be no "I" in the absence of the possibility of death; "the *possibility* of death 'happens,' so to speak, 'before' these different instances, and makes them possible." What's more, implicated in the possible death of another, Derrida argues, is our own; "Or, more precisely, the possibility of the death of the other *as* mine or ours in-forms any relation to the other."[33] It is in such ways that Derrida framed de Man's first "yes," an affirmation that subjectivity is made possible by

encounters with the possibility of death, that "strange" reality woven throughout Woolf's fourth novel. And it is in such ways that death constitutes precisely whom we call Septimus, as Woolf framed his preoccupation with death, specifically his own by way of suicide, in terms of subjectivity; "[T]hey were 'people' now," Woolf wrote, "because Septimus had said, 'I will kill myself.'"[34] Septimus' suicidal mimeses mobilize thoughts and feelings that characterize his strangled path toward acknowledging both Evans' death and coming to terms with his own subjectivity, de Man's first affirmation—the ability to acknowledge the other in the social relation figured as "I."

But how? How does death function in the service of subjectivity? And how does subjectivity invite the possibility of suicide? Psychoanalytic theorizations about subject formation can help us better hear the ways in which Septimus resonates as a figure for the relationship between death, subjectivity, and suicide throughout the novel. That resonance, however, begins to sound more dissonant as we approach de Man's vow, what I argue characterizes the ways in which Clarissa comes to her own affirmation, as we shall learn.

Similarly to that of de Man and Derrida, issues of loss and death are imbricated within scenes of what Freud initially understood as melancholic subject formation. Yet Freud's theorizations about melancholic psychic topography also shares an interest with *Mrs. Dalloway*'s focus on suicide.

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud examines affective responses to loss, and argues that the prolongation of painful mourning affects associated with melancholia mark the effects of unavowable loss. In other words, where the process of mourning acknowledges an object-cathexis and its loss, its death, so to speak, melancholia cannot. Through that which Woolf offhandedly voices as Septimus' "deferred effects of shell shock," his phantasmatic visions and

dreams, Septimus' most significant lost object is positioned just out of sight.[35] "White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!;" "Evans answered from behind the tree." For as we come to learn within his fantasies, "[Septimus] could not look upon the dead."[36]

Yet it is not so much that Septimus had not known that Evans had been killed in the war. As mentioned above, "[h]e was right there." He "watched" the shells that killed Evans "explode" (*MD* 86). It is more that Septimus struggles to come to terms with what he had lost, as Freud insisted, even though the melancholic may be able to name "*whom*" he or she has lost, he or she may not know "*what*" he or she has lost "in" the lost object.[37] It is in these ways that melancholia, in Freud's view, may name an unavowable loss of a cathected object, a loss of an unavowably cathected object, or both.

Woolf characterizes what Septimus lost in relation to Evans as "some very profound interest that unites them" (*TH* 109), "the affection of his officer," the sensation that "[t]hey had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other."[38] Freud observes, as well, that one of the symptoms associated with such unavowability may take shape as a denial of any loss whatsoever. The repeated disclosure that Septimus "could not feel" throughout most of the novel reveals a form of such denial in relation to his lost object-cathexis. It is not that Septimus could not feel anything at all. In fact, Woolf makes clear in her manuscript notations that "Septimus should pass through all extremes of feeling & happiness & unhappiness—intensity."[39] Septimus' inability to feel, rather, suggests that he struggles to feel that which he lost in Evans in particular. For at the moment of Evans' death, we learn that Septimus, "far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably."[40] Septimus' inability to

process his feelings of loss in the aftermath of Evans' death forestalls access to mourning his trauma. Septimus thus instead felt, as we have learned, "condemned," feelings associated with melancholia that interested Freud and play a strong part in his theory of the formation of the psychic topography itself.

Freud theorizes that in the event of melancholic loss, the libido cannot redirect its cathexis to another object but rather sets up what he describes as an internal world whereby the ego takes the place of the unavowable lost object, or object-cathexis, by way of identification. Simultaneously, that identification is beset by the formation of a critical agency that takes the ego, idealized as the unavowable lost object, as its object of condemnation. In this earlier work, Freud examines melancholic subject formation, or melancholia, as a mood disorder and presupposed the existence of the ego prior to any unavowable loss. It is in this way that Freud describes through metaphor, "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego."[41] The ego preexisted the shadow's cast.

By 1923, however, Freud begins to open ways in which to understand loss as constitutive of the ego. Rather than the shadow of the lost object falling upon a preexisting ego, in "The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego Ideal)," Freud makes the case for the ego as a precipitate, that it is "possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices."[42] What is of special interest presently, however, are the similarities between the ways in which de Man's first affirmation and Freudian subject formation name an archive of lost objects, an archive of the social function of death figured in the formation of an "I." But what does this subject formation, this psychic topography brought on by loss and death have to do with the possibility of suicide? How is suicide simultaneously made possible in the very inauguration of the subject?

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud also theorizes the ways in which scenes of violence become incorporated into a psychic topography, initiating what he thought was the possibility of suicide. He argues that within scenes of unavowable loss, the object-cathexis “has thus undergone a double vicissitude.” On the one side, part of the object-cathexis “has regressed to identification,” idealized in the ego, mentioned above. The other side, the critical agency, however, becomes violent, as Freud described, “has been carried back to the stage of sadism.”[43] The violence of the critical agency, Freud argues, explains a tendency toward “a lowering of the self-regarding feelings,” “self-reproaches and self-revilings,” and “expectations of punishment”—in short, a “disturbance of self-regard” otherwise “absent in mourning.”[44]

Freud’s theorizations about subject formation, specifically the violence associated with a critical agency, led him to suspect that he had “solved the riddle of the tendency to suicide.” The riddle, for Freud, suggests that “we cannot conceive how [the] ego can consent to its own destruction[,]…[that] we have never been able to explain what interplay of forces can carry such a purpose through to execution.” It is this riddle, Freud wrote, that “makes melancholia so interesting—and so dangerous.” He continues,

> The analysis of melancholia now shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object—if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object…Thus in regression from narcissistic object-choice [in other words, in suicide] the object has, it is true, been got rid of, but it has nevertheless proved more powerful than the ego itself.[45]

In sum, what Freud’s observations and theorizations suggest, here, is that the violence of suicide is a violence set in motion upon encountering scenes of unavowable loss such that, and for a host of possible reasons, through an inability to avow the loss of an object of cathexis, that object or object-cathexis becomes internalized and idealized as the ego upon which a critical agency repeatedly rehearses the violence constitutive of the object’s initial death. The repeated rehearsal of that violence found in heightened intensities in suicidal daydreams, visions, fantasies, et cetera

names a violence whose aim takes as its target the unavowable lost object of cathexis, yet gets displaced, however, onto an idealized substitute figured by the ego itself that if not recognized as such, may become displaced yet again onto one's own body in the unfortunate event of some forms of corporeal suicide.

Following Freud, the double vicissitude of the incorporation at the heart of subject formation makes possible a subject/object dialectic such that that which acts and is acted upon appear identical, a dialectic that suicidal fantasy can help demystify, as we shall see. At first glance, this appearance makes clear the lucidity of, for instance, Septimus' simple sentence, "I will kill myself" – subject, copula, self-same object.[46] Yet by understanding this dialectic, we may also understand various critical remarks about suicide posed from those historically associated with psychoanalytic thought, for instance, remarks by André Breton, "Suicide is a poorly made word: what kills is not identical to what is killed."[47] Or, for instance Blanchot, "when I kill myself, perhaps it is 'I" who does the killing, but it is not done to me."[48] Such observations indicate a fidelity to the absence internal to subjectivity, an absence dominated by the masquerade of the "I" within a psychic topography under capitalism.

But what of Woolf? How did Woolf contend with Septimus' subjectivity fraught by a subject/object dialectic? If in Septimus' suicidal fantasies his critical agency rehearses the conditions of the death of his lost object on and figured by his ego, then what shapes do those fantasies take? Or more specifically, if Woolf's novel extends the psychic topography of subjectivity into its materialization in affect, where does that motion toward affect leave Septimus?

During the drafting processes of what Woolf describes as "the mad scene at Regent's Park," a scene she confesses she wrote by slowing her pace at the time to a mere "50 words a

morning," she struggled.[49] What follows are two juxtaposed passages, one from Woolf's manuscript notations, the next from the American publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*. In this scene, Septimus engages with what readers encounter as his most vivid suicidal fantasy in which the narrator describes the event of his phantasmatic suicide as a transition between waking, sleeping, and re-awakening, saturated with rich reference to materiality. What is particularly interesting about the manuscript notations are the ways in which Woolf's strikeouts both continually privilege affect over cognition ("~~thinks~~ feels," "~~sees~~ feels"). What's more, they simultaneously illustrate a sketch that negotiates positioning Septimus as the speaker in the first-person "I" versus framing him by way of the third-person "he." In other words, Woolf contends with the subject/object dialectic by framing Septimus in terms of his affective experience mediated by the narrative voice. At moments, Woolf even relies on the infinitive, avoiding the subject altogether ("To trust, ~~to yield, to fight no more~~"). In her manuscript draft below, Woolf begins in the third-person, moves into a struggle with the first, only to return to the third, placing emphasis on Septimus from the perspective of an observer. These third-/first-/third-person shifts, momentarily interrupted by infinitives, nonetheless gesture toward Woolf's struggle to negotiate the subject/object dialectic fraught within subjectivity, a struggle characteristic of and heightened during strikingly affective suicidal moments.

> …he withdraws; he vanishes into the snow; the roses
> hang about him; the roses (I have roses on my bedroom wall
> paper) ~~they~~ cluster, ~~thick~~ & ~~those~~ the thick musk roses, the
> ~~his~~ & if I ~~sleep now,~~ let you go now, said Septimus, I shall
> ~~I am absolutely safe now. This music;~~ I can have you
> again. ~~I~~
>
> To trust, ~~to yield, to fight no more,~~ no more bothering
> even to remember; {now, couched there on the back of nature,
> upheld ~~in her arms,~~ by her, let me} that's ~~is my next stage~~…
> ~~Now I will wake, he~~ said. ~~Now I have passed through~~ death.
> ~~he said.~~ I ~~am dead~~ have passed through death, he said.
> ~~But~~ I still hear the old man playing by the public house.
> So I am the first to ~~conquer~~ cross.
>
> ~~Now I will wake, he said.~~

He lay, like a drowned sailor, tossed on to the shore; & ~~for the first~~
~~time in the whole world, the dead were alive; He could hear the shepard boy piping. through the mist.~~
~~He could~~ I have passed through death, he said. I am the first to cross. ~~And I can~~ He could hear the shepherd boy piping ~~through~~ in Regents Park; as before waking. The birds, the milk carts, sound through a veil, sound ~~frail. plaintive. joyful, let~~ joined in a melody ~~which in~~ the ~~can~~ & then, still ~~in~~ asleep, the sleeper ~~thinks~~ feels himself drawing towards ~~the~~ life, hearing more & more truly, recognizing, & yet ~~still~~ everything still sounds ~~louder,~~ a little stronger, a little ~~more~~ richer, ~~& a queer excitement begins as if it concealed something.~~ than usual, as if each cry & chirp were the prelude ~~the opening.~~ & draws nearer & nearer to the shore, & ~~sees~~ feels stir in him the extraordinary excitement of landing, & is yet half afraid, so now, Septimus drew towards life, & felt himself about to ~~awaken in~~ open his eyes.

He had only to open his eyes…[50]

In this, her draft of one of Septimus' suicidal fantasies, Woolf accompanies her formal struggle characterized by such shifts in voice and verb form with a heightened, intensely aesthetic portrayal of materiality. The "snow;" the "cluster" of "roses" that give texture and shape to the wall paper, Septimus' immediate yet phantasmatic surroundings; the feeling of being "upheld" in nature's "arms;" his heightened sense of hearing the "shepherd boy piping," of hearing the "birds, the milk carts;" hearing these "still sounds," sounds that register "a little stronger, a little richer," a little richer "than usual," all mark the heightened, intensified materiality, the "~~queer excitement~~," "the extraordinary excitement" of his suicidal moment.

As mentioned in the introduction, Blanchot wrote, "Hence the attention to minutiae often symptomatic in those who are about to die—the love for details, the patient, maniacal concern for the most mediocre realities."[51] Woolf privileges these for Septimus, as she so respectfully insists, "That everything should sing to Septimus."[52] It is clear Woolf understood something different about suicidality.

Before moving onto her finalized draft, it is important to note that as Woolf continued drafting her manuscript, she had been preoccupied with her formal presentation. She was concerned to develop a formal practice, a literary style capable of representing psychic realities, insisting, the "psychology should be done very realistically."[53] At the same time, however, Woolf criticizes literary methods that tended to psychologize characters, what she referred to as "this new method of *giving* the psychology."[54] Woolf was less interested in self-consciously presenting character psyches as types, pathological or otherwise. Much like Foucault, who criticized, albeit in another context, what he called the "frozen countenance of the perversions,"[55] namely the psychologizing game of institutionalized psychology, Woolf was suspicious of such pathology. She wanted Septimus, for instance, to "see" a "hypocricy, & insincerity."[56]

Nor was she interested in staging characters, especially protagonists, who project from within some interior space monologues or soliloquies that, in effect, reify and valorize psychoanalytic structures. As Molly Hite observes, Woolf "tends to forgo strategies that would validate an attitude or opinion."[57] In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the narrator describes each protagonist in ways that resist stable identification. "She would not say of herself, I am this, I am that;"[58] where "he was on the whole, a border case, neither one thing nor the other."[59] Rather than stage character experience in such vulgar ways, Woolf was interested in something different. "One wants the *effect*," she argues, "of real life."[60]

In her diary, Woolf criticizes characterization by way of psychologizing techniques, contending, "it doesn't work. It doesn't tell us as much as some casual glance from the outside often tells."[61] Woolf wanted to develop and stage "casual glances," the presentation of which underscores her desire for her "characters…to be merely views."[62] Woolf remarks, "My idea is to have some ~~very [ ]~~ characters…much in relief."[63] Woolf's strikethrough, '~~very [ ]~~,' reflects her

critique about 'giving the psychology.' Instead, Woolf began to explore affective presentation. She began to insist that "feelings should be treated…as poetry, not psychology," perhaps offering the "impression of a play: only in narrative," something more opaque and subject to interpretation.[64] In her manuscript notations, she frames her preoccupation about characterization, again, in the form of a question that intensifies the play-like quality of the novel: "The Question is whether the inside of the mind is both Mrs. D. & S.S. can be made luminous—that is to say the stuff of the book—lights on it coming from external sources."[65]

Much like the action of players on a stage, Woolf's preoccupation with psychological and affective exploration and experimentation became a matter of stylized perspective. At times in her drafting, Woolf envisioned portraying her "casual glances" from the perspective other characters. Woolf imagined, for instance, that Septimus "must be seen by someone. His wife?...He is only real insofar as she sees him."[66] Likewise with his double, "Mrs D. must be seen by other people."[67] At others times during novel's development Woolf imagined a more obscure observer framed in ways related to the play-like design she desired. She asks, "Why not have an observer in the street at each critical point who acts the part of chorus—some nameless person?"[68] In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the narrator is alluded to as "one of those spectral presences," a "solitary traveller" who mediates between both Woolf's characters and her readers as the narrative develops.[69] It became the role of the narrator to mediate these "critical points," Woolf's intervals, interludes, the casual glances throughout the novel. All of which is to say, by framing her scenes in such ways, Woolf privileges not only subject, nor only object, but rather the interplay between subject and object.

And we can see in the passage below the ways in which Woolf's shift from the sketch in her manuscript draft to her more focused, finalized novel privileges Septimus as a character on a

stage, lit, as she desired, from "external sources." And perhaps more specifically, Woolf's more concise deployment of free-indirect narration, here, sharply emphasizes Septimus' suicidal action within his fantasy, only to return to the third-person, reminding readers that this is an account mediated by another, an account always subject to the open question of interpretation: "*I* leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, *he thought*…" "*I* have been dead and yet am now alive…*he begged*…" The full, finalized passage reads as follows:

> …Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He had his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house.
>
> But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead and yet am now alive, but let me rest still; he begged (he was talking to himself again—it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.
>
> He had only to open his eyes…[70]

As Woolf's formal narrative technique sharpened, so too had her focus on the ability of suicide to heighten Septimus' affective, sensory perception of material reality, a heightened emphasis of which Woolf spread throughout the novel. Yet here, specifically, the "sounds" speaking to Septimus in their "chatter" that grow "louder and louder," the "sun growing hotter," all gesture toward "something tremendous about to happen." That as if voiced in some "queer harmony," some immanent disclosure would reveal itself if Septimus were "only to open his eyes."

As if that were so easy.

Throughout Septimus' fantasies, the narrator repeatedly suggests that he only had "to open his eyes," reinforcing both the fact of the problem of Septimus' unavowability and the necessity for acknowledging Evans' death, an acknowledgement that would demystify the subject/object dialectic figured at the center of his subjectivity. As Freud argues, therapeutic detachment from an unavowable lost object of cathexis requires bringing the reality of the loss to

consciousness such that the subject can properly grieve the loss through the work of mourning. Freud theorizes that that problematic attachment is released into mourning when "the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the [lost] object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished" ("MM" 255). Where the unavowable loss of the initial object of cathexis marked its first death, then severing the attachment to that unavowable lost object-cathexis marks the necessity for its second, freeing the otherwise blockage of cathectic energy.[71]

Freud's theory, however, invites concerns. What, for instance, are the stakes of that second death? In other words, if the event of the first unavowable death sets in motion the creation of a death that becomes internalized and idealized in the figure of the ego itself, then doesn't severing the attachment to that unavowable dead object at the outset of mourning violently implicate its double figured by the ego? Or posed in another way, if the ego itself is constituted by and functions as a figure for the unavowable death of lost objects of cathexes—their substitutes that always-already efface the presence of those objects of cathexes—then doesn't the practice of bringing to consciousness and avowing the death of lost objects of cathexes name a practice that effaces the ego itself?

While we will revisit these issues later with regard to de Man's second affirmation, what is important here with regard to Septimus concerns the subject/object dialectic figured at the center of subjectivity. As mentioned above, it is the "double vicissitude" at the heart of subject formation that precipitates Septimus' ability to take himself as an object of condemnation. But it is here, at the outset of the work of mourning that we also witness a process that names a doubly painful effacement, that by killing off his lost object, Septimus feels as if he is killing off

himself. This process is mimetic. Septimus has been misapprehending the absence central to himself for its dialectical substitutes figured in his psychic topography.

It is in such ways that mourning the death of another feels as if we are mourning the death of ourselves. Or perhaps in another way, we can understand better the ways in which mourning may itself feel like a suicidal practice. And it is in such ways that we can better understand how difficult it must be to "only" have to open one's eyes. Woolf makes clear that the stakes of mourning feel quite high. Yet at the same time, as we see above, Septimus begins to feel and speak, albeit in the third-person, free-indirect form, as if such a process is at play. Here, Woolf's otherwise common-place grammatical form, however, takes on a new meaning as she makes explicit the subject "I" at the outset of the sentence, only to conspicuously erase that subject in its closing clause. "I have been dead, and yet am now alive." Liveliness, for Woolf, effaces the subject, a process both painful, yet freeing.

Septimus' violent, suicidal fantasies also function in the service of acknowledging the loss of his object of attachment, Evans, for it is through Septimus' suicidal fantasies that Evans appears to him. Woolf frames her passage as an "ode to Time" while simultaneously calling on the specificity of Thessaly as a location of a sort of hallowed ground of lost objects. In so doing, Woolf privileges another observation vivid in Freud, namely that "in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail."[72] What's more, we can see the ways in which Woolf extends and intensifies Clarissa's affective experiences explored in "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" in Septimus' suicidal fantasy. In her short story, Woolf accompanies Clarissa's affective empowerment upon thinking about death with changes in her physical comportment; Clarissa's tendency to hold "herself upright," to sit "very upright," indexes various manifestations of the ways in which thinking about death sets in motion her ability to have

"turned," to have found ways to re-engage with the world around her. With Septimus, we see a similar "turn around," an affective re-empowerment coupled with changes in his bodily comportment, his liveliness. For Septimus' re-empowered ability to feel, his "relief," his "joy," is precisely what gives rise, quite literally, to his physical re-animation. As the narrator informs us, "Septimus cried, raising his hand…raising his hand like some colossal figure…;" "Septimus half rose from his chair." The full passage reads as follows:

> The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. They were waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—
>
> "For God's sake don't come!" Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.
>
> But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hands (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees the light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole—…
>
> The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation—[73]

It is tempting to understand the up shot of Septimus' therapeutic moment of suicidal fantasy, here, in terms that speak only to Septimus' ability to avow the loss of Evans in the service of his, Septimus', own relief. In other words, it is tempting to understand that he has only been preoccupied with that of which he otherwise could not avow, Evans' place in the formation of his, Septimus', subjectivity. And this is no doubt crucial. Septimus' "relief," his "joy" at having begun to come to terms with that which was haunting him ("It was Evans!") marks a significant payoff, as the narrator insists, "Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more. He was not afraid."[74] It is precisely Septimus' vividly suicidal fantasy that inaugurates his ability to demystify the subject/object dialectic figured at the center of his subjectivity, setting in motion

his ability to begin to mourn the loss of Evans, a process after which we find "him smiling." "He was happy then." He feels that "he knew the truth. He knew everything! That man, his friend who was killed, Evans, had come, he said."[75] Yet Septimus' suicidal fantasy also sets in motion an affective empowerment that spreads beyond its occasion.

Septimus' suicidal fantasy revitalizes his ability to encounter the totality of the stuff that surrounds him. As Heidegger may have suggested, what was once merely present-at-hand to Septimus has transformed into the stuff of readiness-to-hand.[76] Where once "the gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes" presented itself "as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames," after Septimus' suicidal fantasy, the narrator reveals, "Every power poured its treasures on his head…"[77] As Septimus begins to re-awaken to the world of the novel from within the world of his fantasy, the narrator discloses,

> He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then, gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. And so, gathering courage, he looked at the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort; at the mantelpiece, with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All were still; all were real.[78]

Woolf celebrates, here, the intensified affective engagement with materiality that Septimus' suicidal fantasy makes available for him in his waking life. It empowers Septimus, I argue, to feel the reality of the world around him. And in many ways, Woolf's portrayal of the role of fantasy, especially Septimus' affective re-empowered engagement in the wake of his suicidal fantasy, presciently anticipated further, mid-century theoretical observations within psychoanalysis.

Donald Winnicott was interested in aggression often found in illusions, fantasies, and even play to the extent that they connect one to the world. Winnicott argues, "Fantasy is more primitive than reality, and the enrichment of fantasy with the world's riches depends on the

experience of illusion."[79] What's more, rather than focus on the ways in which fantasy makes clear some metaphysical reality of the real, a distaste we also have explored in Woolf, Winnicott, like Woolf, was concerned more with the ways in which aggressive fantasies function in the service of feeling the reality of the world around us. If the material of the fantasy outlasts the aggression by and through which it suffers, that material begins to feel real to whom the fantasy belongs. It is in such ways that, for Winnicott, fantasies, particularly aggressive fantasies, function in the service of a sort of affective reality-testing. In many ways such fantasies must precede feeling anything as real at all.

His writings are replete with such emphases on feeling, as Adam Phillips observes, "It was, for Winnicott, not a question of what was real about human beings—which would presuppose a known essence—but of what, for each person, 'gives the feeling of real.' This could only be found by each person for himself."[80] For Septimus, what sets in motion not only his heightened sense of materiality, but also a heightened sense of that which feels materially real, is precisely his violent, suicidal fantasies.

And thus describes part of Septimus' "insane truth." Suicidal fantasies can function in the service of our affective re-engagement in the wake of death. Yet understanding Septimus' affective re-empowered engagement would be incomplete, however, without returning to the ways in which Woolf privileges the social function of his suicidal fantasies.

In the immediate aftermath of Septimus' affective re-awakening to the world of the novel, detailed in part above, we are taken into a shared moment between Septimus and his wife, Lucrezia, a moment as strikingly intimate as it is brief, a moment conspicuously underexamined in the scholarship on *Mrs. Dalloway*. As Septimus begins to re-engage with the objects in the room in light of his newly, re-empowered ability to feel, he begins to re-engage with Rezia as

she fashions a hat for Mrs. Peters, their neighbor's daughter with whom Rezia had recently been at odds. The hat was to be a gift, a token of amends. As Septimus begins to ask after some minute details concerning Mrs. Peters, he begins to focus his attention on his wife. Just as cautiously as he re-engages with the objects in his immediate environment, he re-engages with Rezia, another "other" constitutive of his totality of involvements. After asking after what Mr. Peters (Mrs. Peters' husband) does for a living, Woolf writes,

> "Ah," said Rezia, trying to remember. She thought Mrs. Filmer had said that he travelled for some company. "Just now he is in Hull," she said.
>
> "Just now!" She said that with her Italian accent. She said that herself. He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no, there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, with the pursed lips that women have, the set, the melancholy expression, when sewing. But there was nothing terrible about it, he assured himself, looking a second time, a third time at her face, her hands, for what was frightening or disgusting in her as she sat there in broad daylight, sewing? Mrs. Peters had a spiteful tongue. Mr. Peters was in Hull. Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress, and Mr. Peters was in Hull? Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers.[81]

The brevity of this fleeting intimate moment between Septimus and Rezia registers Septimus' cautious re-entry into feeling the reality, not only of Evans' death and the materiality of objects within his immediate surroundings, but feeling the reality of others, of the people around him, Mrs. Peters, Mr. Peters, his wife, Rezia. And however cautiously Septimus' affective re-engagement takes shape, this brief moment of exchange between him and his wife begins to give rise to a change in his mood. For as the above passage discloses, Septimus "had a sense;" a sense, I argue, that marks the affective value of his suicidal fantasies.

As the brief, momentary scene develops and Rezia prepares the hat for Mrs. Peters, Septimus observes and takes note, "'It's too small for Mrs. Peters.'" The minute, banal, mundane event of crafting a hat, possibly the most insignificant and dryly-reported event of a novel otherwise richly-saturated with material aesthetics, now, in the aftermath of Septimus' suicidal

fantasy reveals for Rezia an entire world of significance. As the narrator discloses, "For the first time for days he was speaking as he used to do!" Septimus, finding the occasion ripe for a few playful slights suggests that the hat resembles "an organ grinder's monkey's hat," or, after Rezia makes an adjustment, that "Now the poor woman" might look like "a pig at a fair."

Septimus' playful jokes affect Rezia, Septimus' only real confidant, in ways that amplify the significance of their shared moment. "How it rejoiced her that! Not for weeks had they laughed like this together, poking fun privately like married people." And it is in this scene that the narrator, discussed more below, begins to feel most present to us. In a rare moment of address, the narrator explains to the audience the moment's meaning. "What she meant was that if Mrs. Filmer had come in, or Mrs. Peters or anybody they would not have understood what she and Septimus were laughing at…Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!"[82]

For Septimus, the significance of the moment registers not only as moment of shared intimacy between him and his wife, but in the materiality of the hat itself, one of the novel's most particularly modernist gestures, as well as one of its most painful. "It is wonderful," Septimus insists. "Never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters' hat." And for Rezia, "it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had become himself then, he had laughed then. They had been alone together. Always she would like that hat."[83] Woolf's verbal motion, from the modal auxiliary, "would always," to the past perfect "had become," "had laughed," "had been alone," and again back to the modal auxiliary, "would like," both privileges and valorizes the intense, affective complexity within the historicity of the moment while suspending and expanding the significance of the memory of that moment within the materiality of a hat monumentalized by the immanent materialization of Septimus' corporeal suicide.

Derrida observes, "our 'own' mortality is not dissociated from, but rather also conditions [the] rhetoric of faithful memory," a mortality in the service of memory that can function to "recall us to an affirmation of the other."[84] Septimus' "insane truth" teaches us of a potentiality and possibility, that through suicidal fantasy we may come to recognize and feel not simply the reality of unavowable losses, nor the reality of mere objects. What Septimus also teaches us is that suicidal fantasy can return us to the inevitability of our difference from ourselves, the absence internal to subjectivity set in motion by the possibility of the death of another and the possibility of our own—the social relation figured in the possibility of an "I." Yet most importantly, suicidal fantasy can help us privilege that which is most important to us, namely, a solicitude with, toward, and for other people. And it is this privileging of other people that brings us to our figure for de Man's second affirmation, his vow, Clarissa.

*

As I've mentioned, the death of Paul de Man marked the occasion for Derrida's *Memoires for Paul de Man*, the three transcribed lectures performed in the service of the memory of his friend. Yet to do justice to de Man's memory also asked that Derrida develop the ways in which de Man's thinking functions as a rejoinder to Freud's. De Man's rejoinder responds to a problem that Derrida criticized as Freud's "obsessive triumph."[85] Freud argued that, "carried out bit by bit" and "at great expense of time and cathectic energy," the work of mourning withdraws the libido's attachments to lost objects in the service of reattachment to others.[86] While the work of mourning, here, was ancillary to his more significant focus on the mechanics the psychic topography, Freud nonetheless claims that the work of mourning "overcomes" the loss of the object.[87] Or if not put strongly enough, Freud writes, "The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed, the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."[88] Such marks Freud's

"obsessive triumph," a practice of mourning interpreted by Derrida as a practice that appeals to "closure," "resolution," "totalization," and the possibility of "coming into being" as oneself. As if through the work of mourning, one could become present to oneself.[89]

Derrida criticizes this "'normal' 'work of mourning,'" on the grounds that Freud's theorizations belie differance, the operation of figurality.[90] Although he doesn't explicitly pose it, Derrida's critique responds to an implied question of the status of the Freudian subject after an avowal of lost object-cathexes. Namely, that through the work of mourning, what then becomes of the ego, a question posed above? In other words, what transformation, if any, takes place after such an evacuation, as if such an evacuation were possible?

While de Man and Derrida acknowledges that the possibility of death inaugurates subjectivity—de Man's first affirmation—Derrida reminds us that the possibility to imagine an "I" is an effect of the function of figurality always-already formed in relation that "precludes," as he insists, "any anamnesic totalization of self."[91] Rather, he continues, "we are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself. This specular reflection never closes in on itself."[92] In this way, we can understand the problem with Rezia's otherwise innocent claim that Septimus "had become himself" rather than acknowledge the absence internal to his subjectivity figured by an identification with the other.

Nonetheless, Derrida argues, here, that the work of mourning cannot, as Freud argues, set in motion a "free" and "uninhibited" subject by virtue of the fact that subjectivity itself always-already presupposes the play of differance, the function of figurality. Similarly, Woolf's strikeouts again resonate here, as her manuscript notations highlight her contention with developing Septimus' fate, "~~His resolution.~~"[93] By way of reference to de Man, Derrida reminds

us, "'at the very moment we claim…escape,'" we belie the "fatal necessity of 'reentering a system of tropes.'"[94] And such marks Derrida's critique of Freud's "obsessive triumph."

In response, Derrida offers a rejoinder. He framed de Man's second affirmation in terms of a recursive, performative function related to the acknowledgement of de Man's first, that death names the absence internal to subjectivity. In response to Freud's impossible appeal to resolution, Derrida argued, "as soon as the gathering of Being and totalizing memory" are acknowledged as "impossible, we recognize the fatality of this tropological dislocation... And this fatality is the law, or let us say instead, the law of the law: the moment when the authority of the law comes to take turns with, as if it were its own supplement, the impossible gathering of Being."[95]

Thus, what de Man's second affirmation discloses to us is not just a simple, single reminder of the function of figurality manifested in the "I." It invites us to make a vow that reminds us of the necessity of acknowledging the recursive function of the relatedness to one another within the figurality of subjectivity itself. De Man's doubled affirmation emphasizes the possibility of a recursive, performative, re-acknowledgement of the other in social formation, a fidelity to the function of differance in the service of what Derrida describes as an "alliance"—a fidelity to, and an alliance made and performatively re-made in the service of the memory of the other.

As mentioned above, Derrida describes de Man as a "thinker of affirmation," but what's more, Derrida insists that de Man "existed himself in memory of an affirmation and a vow," de Man's "yes, yes."[96] De Man's doubled affirmation marks, as Alison Bechdel might suggest, a "novel fusion of word and deed."[97] And Derrida's eulogy to Paul de Man, too, functions in the

spirit of de Man's memory. I quote at length to emphasize and illustrate Derrida's fidelity to and alliance with the memory of his friend:

> After the death of Paul de Man on December 21, a necessity became clear to me: I would never manage to prepare these lectures, I would have neither the strength nor the desire to do so, unless they left or gave the last word to my friend. Or at least, since that had become literally impossible, to friendship, to the unique and incomparable friendship that ours was for me, thanks to him. I could only speak *in memory of him*.
>
> *In memory of him:* these words cloud sight and thought. What is said, what is done, what is desired through these words: *in memory of*…?
>
> I will speak of the future, of what is bequeathed and promised to us by the work of Paul de Man. And, as you shall see, this future is not foreign to *his* memory; it keeps to what he said, thought, and affirmed *on the subject* of memory. Yes: affirmed. And I see this affirmation of memory, without which the friendship of which I am speaking would never have taken place, in the form of a ring or an *alliance*. This alliance is much more ancient, resistant, and secret than all those strategic or familial manifestations of alliance that it must actually make possible and to which it is never reduced…And we would understand nothing about what *comes to pass and takes place* if we did not account for this affirmation which comes to seal an alliance. An alliance which is not secret because it would be protected behind some clandestine, occult "cause" in want of power, but because the "yes," which is a non-active act, which states or describes nothing, which in itself neither manifests nor defines any content, this *yes* only commits, before and beyond everything else. And to do so, it must repeat itself to itself: *yes, yes*. It must preserve memory; it must commit itself to keeping its own memory; it must promise itself to itself; it must bind itself to memory for memory, if anything is ever to come from the future. This is the law, and this is what the performative category, in its current state, can merely approach, at the moment when "yes" is said, and "yes" to that "yes."[98]

De Man's second affirmation, his vow, names a performative repetition of his first. The performative vow thus "repeats itself to itself" in the service of "preserv[ing] memory," and "promise[s] itself to itself" in the form of the "seal of an alliance."[99] And perhaps most poignantly for our purposes, Derrida describes de Man's doubled affirmation much in the way Woolf describes her novel's most significant motif, its "insane truth."

Framed as the product of what Derrida describes as a "mad lucidity," de Man's doubled affirmation marks a gesture toward what appears as impossible, that the "I" is constituted by an absence taken up upon an acknowledgement of death that death prefigures subjectivity.[100] And what's more, Derrida acknowledges within the logic of de Man's "mad lucidity" an ethical

imperative, that the "impossible here is the other, such as [s/]he comes to us: as a mortal, to us mortals. And whom we love as such, affirming this to be good."[101]

What I would like to develop below are the ways in which, as I have been arguing, *Mrs. Dalloway* extends de Man's doubled, cognitive affirmations about death into its psychic and affective world, a world in which suicide figures so predominantly. Where Derrida argues that de Man's "mad lucidity" "gives or promises the *thinking* of the path, provokes the *thinking* of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable or unthought, indeed impossible,"[102] I argue that *Mrs. Dalloway* proposes its own psychic and affective "path" toward a suspicion about a "transcendental theory" that suggests that what accompanies the "horror of death" comes to be felt as "that unseen part of us, which spreads wide," an unseen part of us that can "survive" and "be recovered somehow attached to this person or that…perhaps."[103] This, the novel's most significantly modernist question about the affective value of thinking about death and suicide, is then revealed as the motive for the mimetic re-staging of Clarissa Dalloway's June parties. In other words, what I would like to develop are the ways in which Clarissa's June parties mark a repeated mimetic performance, a recursive staging of circumstances in the service of both asking after and affirming a psychic suspicion about the social function of death reinforced and amplified by an affective empowerment. In short, the question of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s transcendental theory materializes in, by, and through the mimetic re-staging of Clarissa's parties in ways that simultaneously disclose her desire to affirm a vow and seal an alliance with the affective value of thinking about death, specifically suicide, that all functions in the service of solicitude with, toward, and for others.

*

Where the ways in which death and suicide vividly prefigure Septimus' affective world, the ways in which death and suicide prefigure Clarissa's affect within the world of *Mrs. Dalloway* take more subtle forms. Where Septimus lost his friend, officer, and lover, Evans during the close of Europe's Great War, Clarissa suffers no such loss precisely in the ways Septimus has. Or, at least, readers do not witness so vividly the ways in which death so fundamentally marks her subjectivity. We do learn that Clarissa has, in fact, lost someone close to her, namely, her sister, Sylvia, "killed," as Knox-Shaw observes, "before [Clarissa's] eyes by a falling tree."[104] And we also learn that Clarissa loses the object of her same-sex desire, Sally Seton, to the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality, discussed more below. Sally, however, does not die. Yet there are other ways in which we come to learn of Clarissa's experiences with and attitude toward death whose subtlety marks its powerfully compelling manifestation in her affective life.

As argued from the outset, Woolf entertains the affective value of thinking about death in "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street." As Clarissa runs her morning errands, she repeatedly rehearses poetic verses about death and mourning whose effect provides her with a particular kind of affective power through which she feels connected with her outside world. What I would like to juxtapose are two related passages from Woolf's novel that expand, develop, and intensify the themes of the affective value of thinking about death explored in her short story. What is so striking about these passages, however, are the ways in which they each position affective intensities alongside, almost prior to, the cognitive suspicion they amplify, on the one hand, while on the other, each bookend what Woolf refers to as "the gradual increase of S's insanity" within the novels diegetic development.[105] Which is to say, *Mrs. Dalloway* formally links Septimus' psychic and affective suicidal struggle to Clarissa in ways that inform readers about

Clarissa's affective engagement with and cognitive suspicions about the social function of death that preoccupy her throughout the novel. And finally, the positioning of the following two passages around and alongside Septimus' suicidal struggle prime readers to encounter the ways in which the affective value of suicidal fantasy again materializes at the novel's close.

In the passage below, again tracing Clarissa's morning errands, we can see the ways in which from the outset of *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa has already been affectively empowered by experiences with death, experiences undisclosed to readers. What we encounter, rather, are their mimetic effect. Rather than making claims about "this" or "that" in terms of her "knowledge," Woolf places emphasis on Clarissa's "perpetual sense," her "feeling," what for Clarissa felt "absolutely absorbing." Clarissa's affective empowerment sets in motion a series of remembrances, as she "remembered…hosts of people," their "dancing," the "wagons plodding," and her drive "home across the Park." Yet these remembrances of her solicitude with others and the materiality of her environment then give rise to a powerfully significant question that heightens and amplifies that feeling of solicitude. Clarissa's affect precedes and amplifies her cognitive suspicion, as the narrator asks on her behalf, "Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking toward Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitable cease completely…?"

Here, from the outset of the novel, we witness the ways in which Clarissa already feels an affective solicitude toward her world, the explanation for which she suspects has to do with a "strange" reality, the reality of the social function of death. The passage reads in full:

> She had reached the Park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly.
>
> She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except

> memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.
>
> Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on. If you put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred. Devonshire House, Bath House, the house with the china cockatoo, she had seen them all lit up once; and remembered Sylvia, Fred, Sally Seton—such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the wagons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpentine. But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking toward Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.[106]

Derrida argues, "if death comes to the other, and comes to us through the other, then the friend no longer exists except *in* us, *between* us. [S/h]e lives only in us."[107] Similarly, here, we witness Clarissa's suspicions about the social function of death amplified by her affect that empowers her to acknowledge and feel "that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived," a memory of the other that "lived in each other." Not only does Clarissa suspect something curious about her experiences with death sometime in a past not disclosed to us, but *Mrs. Dalloway* also reveals that that suspicion is accompanied by an affective empowerment, something "consoling" about her belief "in death"—a cognitive suspicion about the social function of death accompanied and amplified by affective consolation, the dual components of Clarissa's "truth."

Clarissa's affective consolation, however, not only accompanies her thoughts about death, but her affective consolation also accompanies her thoughts about her own death in particular, "that *she* must inevitably cease completely" (my emphasis). As the narrator continues we learn of Clarissa's suicidal preoccupations more specifically: "Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement…;"[108] or her allusions to *Othello*, "'if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy.'"[109] Yet for however subtly Clarissa's suicidal

thoughts take shape regarding her own death, on the one hand, for readers, on the other, our attention to Clarissa's preoccupations with her own death only become heightened in relation to Septimus' more explicitly vivid suicidal fantasies mediated by way of what Woolf describes as the "pace" of the novel "all throughout the day"—the "gradually increasing…tension" of Septimus' struggle alongside the "approach" of Clarissa's "party."[110]

For what follows the passage examined above are precisely the various scenes that trace the development of Septimus' suicidal fantasies this chapter has examined. By developing the diegetic flow of Septimus' mimetic struggle to come to terms with the world around him, Woolf's portrayal of Septimus' suicidal fantasies both link us to and inform readers about Clarissa's preoccupations with the relationship between solicitude and death, not excluding her own. By the time readers approach the novel's most theoretically suggestive suspicion, examined below, we have already become conditioned by the affective value of Septimus' suicidal fantasies in ways that prime us to apprehend its import for Clarissa.

Framed as a sort of remembrance of solicitude itself, a flashback to the earlier passage, Woolf expands Clarissa's suspicions about the social function of death into what she refers to, here, as a "transcendental theory," one set in motion and amplified by a particularly curious affective relationship toward death. It is also within this passage where we most explicitly encounter Woolf's theory of the relationship between death and subjectivity. By contrasting "our apparitions, the part of us which appears" with "that unseen part of us, which spreads wide," Clarissa's theory registers a fidelity to the absence internal to a subjectivity set in motion by the possibility of death. And finally, we also encounter the novel's most focused theoretical preoccupation with the affective value of death, as Clarissa's theory suggests that thinking about

death, a theory diegetically prefigured and informed by Septimus' suicidal fantasies, can function in the service of an affective solicitude with, toward, and for the world around her.

> Clarissa once, going on top of an omnibus with him somewhere, Clarissa superficially at least, so easily moved, now in despair, now in the best of spirits, all aquiver in those days and such good company, spotting queer little scenes, names, people from the top of a bus, for they used to explore London and bring back bags full of treasures from the Caledonian market—Clarissa had a theory in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who complete them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind the counter—even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her skepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen must survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death…perhaps—perhaps.[111]

Similarly to the ways in which death sets in motion the intense, affective historicity of Septimus and Rezia's shared moment monumentalized within the materiality of a hat, here we encounter Woolf's more totalizing modernist gesture. Clarissa contends with her feeling of dissatisfaction in the face of London's expanded, intensified, and urbanized project of modernization wherein she feels increasingly unnoticed, unrecognized, and unknown. In so doing, Clarissa theorizes that death names the function, the binding force by which she has become empowered to have "felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here';…but everywhere," toward "people," "places," "even trees, or barns."[112] Death functions in the service of an affective solicitude with, toward, and for the world around her. And, of course, Woolf ended this, the most significant, modernist, theoretical suggestion of the novel, in the form of a question. The "perhaps—perhaps" both suspends a cognitive disclosure that fuels readers' sensory suspicions as we are invited into Clarissa's party alongside the novel's protagonists. As Woolf suggests of the diegetic flow of

Mrs. Dalloway, "All must bear finally upon the party at the end; which expresses life, in every variety & full of conviction: while S. dies."[113]

While Septimus' suicidal fantasies prime readers' to comprehend the import of the question ("perhaps—perhaps") of Clarissa's "transcendental theory," Peter Walsh has also been piquing our curiosities about another question within the novel, namely the motive for Clarissa's June parties. As Peter, Clarissa's most intimate confidant, repeatedly asks, "Oh these parties, he thought; Clarissa's parties. Why does she give these parties, he thought."[114] And as we come to learn, the novel's narrator feels less reticent to disclose possible answers. "What she liked was simply life. 'That's what I do it for,' she said, speaking aloud, to life."[115]

The narrator then expands Clarissa's explanation in response to an imagined question again posed by Peter: "But suppose Peter said to her, 'Yes, yes, but your parties—what's the *sense* of your parties?'"[116] Here Peter's imagined question asks after something different, not just an explanation, but an explanation that calls into play the relationship between affect—some "sense"—and "this thing she called life."[117] Framed as a sort of review of Clarissa's day, the narrator poses Clarissa's explanation for the "sense" of her parties as her "gift," as her "offering"—a gesture made toward and only completed by another's acceptance—"to combine, to create" in social formation. In other words, Clarissa's parties, her gestures, suggest a staging of her desire for a kind of affirmation of her offering acknowledged by and sealed upon its reception. "[B]ut to whom?" the narrator wonders. To whom does her offering serve? And the narrator replies, "An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps." By again deploying the adverb "perhaps," Woolf continues to defer the question of the motive for and the recipient of the gift of Clarissa's parties in ways that reinforce and re-fuel our sensory suspicions about the open question of their performative function. Nonetheless, Clarissa's parties are revealed, here, as a

sort of performative mechanism, a mimetic re-staging of circumstances rehearsed in the service of an affirmation.

And what is so striking, here, are the ways in which the open question of the relationship between her gift and life, on the one hand, indexes the relationship between death and solicitude characteristic of her transcendental theory, on the other, as the novel calls the meaning of death back into play:

> …Oh it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?
>
> An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of non-sense; and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.
>
> All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how every instant…[118]

The passage approaches what the narrator means by suggesting that Clarissa's party is to "expresses life, in every variety & full of conviction," as we learn that her "gift" is prefigured by a sharp focus on the social function of death—"How unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no on in the whole world would know how she had loved it all." Clarissa's parties name a recursive mechanism, a repeated form, a mimetic stage rehearsal in the service of affirming the affective value of thinking about the social function of death. By priming readers' curiosities about the affective value of thinking about the social function of death throughout the novel, first by way of Clarissa's sensory suspicions, next by way of Septimus' suicidal fantasies, and lastly by way of the relationship between the novel's transcendental theory and the performative occasion for Clarissa's parties, readers are primed for the occasion for Septimus, death's

apparition, and Clarissa, life's possessor, to cross paths upon which Clarissa might seal an alliance between death and life in the service of solicitude.

In the novel's most climactic scene, offered below, Clarissa learns of the news of Septimus' suicide and is then drawn into the "little room" adjacent to the action of her party where she can be alone with her feelings, as Derrida might have suggested, where she can allow herself the privacy to feel that "terrible solitude…at the death of the other." By re-inaugurating an occasion to entertain death, the news of Septimus' suicide sets in motion, again, Clarissa's engagement with her curiosity about the affective value of thinking about death that we have encountered throughout the novel. Only here, her feelings manifest in a different form. Clarissa begins to imagine and envision the events of Septimus' suicide in ways that recall Septimus' suicidal fantasies themselves. In other words, readers witness Clarissa, like Septimus, engage in her own fantasy informed by our familiarity with Septimus'. Much like the heightened encounters with materiality characteristic of Septimus' suicidal mimeses, discussed above, so too Clarissa envisions the ways in which "he had thrown himself from a window," how "the ground" had "flashed" up, how the ground in which had been set "the rusty spikes" pierced his falling body. Her vision continues to intensify materiality, like Septimus', emphasizing sound, the "thud, thud, thud in his brain" as Clarissa imagines Septimus' encounter with death, the "suffocation of blackness." Clarissa fantasized. "So she saw it." Clarissa's imaginary vision of Septimus's suicide, a young man with whom she never had the occasion to meet in person, then expands further into something more phantasmatic.

Similar to the ways in which Septimus fantasizes himself suffering the violence by which his lost object of cathexis had suffered, "falling through the sea, down, down into the flames," Clarissa begins to suspect that the events that she imagines had happened in Septimus' life are

somehow connected in some way to her own, that their experiences with entertaining death bind one another in some significant way.[119] By way of a repeated reference to an event in her own life, cited above, Clarissa remembers how she "once threw a shilling into the Serpentine." Yet, here, in relation to Septimus, her reference takes on a new meaning; a new meaning that conjures images of the gendered history of suicide, as Georges Minois has observed, drowning has been one of the most predominant methods by which women have historically ended their lives.[120]

As readers have been primed by Septimus' suicidal fantasies, the narrator guides us through Clarissa's brief, suicidal phantasmatic vision through which she feels that "[s]omehow it was *her* disaster—*her* disgrace. It was *her* punishment to *see sink and disappear*…"[121] Through imagining and fantasizing about the connections between Septimus' suicidal act and events in her own life, we witness Clarissa beginning to feel "somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself." And rather than on previous occasions upon which Clarissa had thought about death in ways that have given rise to her suspicions about its social function, it is here, through Clarissa's own phantasmatic vision that she begins to formulate, not mere suspicions, but more substantial claims, the affirmation of the social function of death for which this chapter has been arguing. Where Septimus' suicidal fantasies set in motion his ability to acknowledge his lost object of cathexis, to feel the reality of objects in his world, and most importantly, to re-engage with the people that surround him, we encounter Clarissa's affirmation as Woolf's critical scene begins its decent, and closes with the passage, the epigraph, that frames this section. The passage, with few omissions, reads:

> Sinking her voice, drawing Mrs. Dalloway into the shelter of a common femininity, a common pride in the illustrious qualities of husbands and their sad tendency to overwork, Lady Bradshaw (poor goose—one didn't dislike her) murmured how, "just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army." Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought.

> She went on, into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton. Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody…There was nobody. The party's splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery.
>
> What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!
>
> She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it all away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruptions, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.[122]

As suggested above, Derrida argues, "the possibility of the death of the other *as* mine or ours in-forms any relation to the other," namely the social relation figured in the possibility of an "I." And as Derrida desired for his lectures to give "the last word" to his "friend," Paul de Man, or even more so "to friendship" in the service of preserving memory itself in the form of a "seal of alliance," so too we witness an affirmation of Clarissa's seal of alliance with the memory of a friend she'd never met. Yet where Derrida describes de Man's "mad lucidity" as a cognitive "thinking of the path," Woolf enables us to see the ways in which Clarissa is led by a specifically affective encounter with Septimus, her affective encounter whereby "as always" "her body" passed "through it first." Clarissa's suicidal fantasy sets in motion an affective amplification by and through which, then, the "words came to her." Giving the last word, the last respectful, non-pathological word to her friend, Clarissa acknowledges that through his memory—a memory of a suicide that set in motion her own engagement with his "insane truth"—Septimus has empowered her to "feel the beauty," to "feel the fun…"—the surprisingly life-affirming, affective joy suicidal fantasy makes possible.[123]

As we come to the close of the passage, we encounter the words that seal her alliance with the affective value of suicidal fantasy, as Clarissa insists, "There was an embrace in death." It is precisely through Clarissa's suicidal fantasy that her affirmation of death's embrace empowers her to feel and acknowledge a solicitude with, towards, and for the other. As Derrida might have suggested, Clarissa's suicidal fantasy "commits" her, as the narrator insists, to "have to go back," as just as surely as Septimus died, "They went on living," as Clarissa performs her vow,

> She must go back to them…The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air…she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter.[124]

"And she came in from the little room," reentering and assembling within the fatal "system of tropes," Clarissa performs her solicitude made possible by her encounter with suicidal fantasy at her party, her social function.[125] *Mrs. Dalloway*'s climactic moment reveals a fidelity to de Man's second affirmation, his vow—Clarissa's performative alliance made with the memory of Septimus in the service of Woolf's strange reality, in the service of the psychic and affective materialization of what suicidal thinking and feeling make possible. Where we witness Septimus' psychic and affective suicidal re-engagement within the world of the novel alongside the diegetic flow of its present, we witness Clarissa's already in process, only then to be performatively re-affirmed on the occasion of her encounter with the insane truth of suicidal fantasy set in motion by and affirmed in the memory of Septimus' suicide at her party. It is not that Clarissa feels the affective value of thinking about death for the first time upon hearing about Septimus' suicide. It is rather that through her encounter with the insane truth of suicidal fantasy, Clarissa re-experiences, re-affirms, and continues to perform what she already suspects, namely, a solicitude with, toward, and for the other, the affective value of suicidal fantasy.

STAGING FANTASY AND THE BIOPOLITICAL CRISIS OF GRIEVING

> I am committed to a veritable cultural combat to remind people that there is no more beautiful form of conduct which, as a result, merits reflection with such great attention, than suicide. It would be a case of working on one's suicide for all of one's life.
>
> Michel Foucault, "Conversation avec Werner Schroeter," 1994[126]

Thus far, I have been risking reference to fantasy, in a sort of common-place way, as a form of mimesis. I have not defined the term, nor situated it within a theoretical trajectory. In other words, fantasy has taken shape as a sort of casual signifier for the daydreams or visions by and through which Septimus and Clarissa rehearse their shared preoccupations about death that amplify their affective relationship toward other people. It now becomes important, however, to better understand the ways in which the logic of fantasy functions within *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel, I argue, that itself functions in phantasmatic ways for its readers. As Woolf insists, "There should be some fun—."[127]

In *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis define fantasy as an "imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes."[128] What I would like to develop below are connections between the ways in which psychoanalytic theorizations frame fantasy as a staging of desire and the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* invites a desire in readers to entertain and witness the question of the insane truth about the affective value of suicidal fantasy, its potentiality for solicitude. I would also like to examine the ways in which the logic of fantasy's specifically defensive processes, its tendency to distort and forestall the fulfillment of desire, may also allow us to think about what Woolf described as her novel's effort "to criticize the social system." By understanding the ways in which fantasy functions within *Mrs. Dalloway* to invite readers to think about both other

people alongside that which interrupts, forestalls, or even precludes access to fulfilling their desires, I argue that *Mrs. Dalloway* helps us to re-encounter, re-imagine, and re-engage with the world around us in the service of social change.

Laplanche and Pontalis' "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" expands their focus on wish fulfillment and emphasizes the ways in which fantasies more broadly stage desire itself. Rather than marking the object and fulfillment of desire, as the brief definition above suggests, Laplanche and Pontalis argue that fantasy names a "setting," a sequence of events in which a subject appears "caught up."[129] Which is to say, they emphasize the ways in which the subject is "invariably present" within the sequence of a fantasy's scene-script, a script in which the subject "does in fact have a part to play," however frustrated by defensive processes, discussed later.[130]

As examined thus far, we have witnessed the various ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* stages desire for its various characters in terms of fantasy. Septimus suicidal fantasies register his unconscious desire to avow the loss of Evans that then sets in motion his amplified affective engagement in and with the world around him. Clarissa's repeated rehearsal of her June parties sets the stage for the occasion of her encounter with suicidal fantasy, revealing her unconscious desire to affirm and seal an alliance with her sensory suspicions about the social function of death. In their individual, yet connected fantasies, the "part" each "play" can be characterized as the fantasy's subject-protagonist – Septimus and Clarissa, the novel's doubled protagonists themselves.[131]

Yet what is so striking about the novel's form are the ways in which the desires it stages relate, connect, and overlap in ways that direct our own curiosities about various plot developments and potential resolutions in multiple directions. Woolf guides readers through digressions both within and between various scenes, at times at the sentence level, while at

others the paragraph level. We are taken from one character to another both within the narrative's present and through individual character histories by way of what Woolf describes as her "tunneling process," a method by which readers learn of the connectedness between characters and their shared pasts by "instalments" as needed.[132] As examined above, Woolf wanted to execute what she describes as "the effect of real life," the effect of an "incessant," "unbroken" texture connected by the "casual glances" from another's perspective in ways that provide the impression of a coherent, cohesive whole.[133] Yet the effect of Woolf's experimental narrative form begs a significant question: To whom do these impressions belong? From whose perspective do readers encounter the novel's "casual glances"? Are these causal glances themselves individual, phantasmatic scene-scripts that together make up a subject's more elaborate cohesive fantasy? And most importantly, if *Mrs. Dalloway* itself functions as staging of some subject's desire for readers to entertain the question of the affective value of suicidal fantasy, in what ways does the novel invite us to encounter this fantasy as our own?

While Laplanche and Pontalis argue that the subject might take the shape of a protagonist within a phantasmatic scene, they also argue that fantasies can frame a subject in positions of alterity across a "permutation of roles." The permutation of roles a subject can occupy, they argue, must take shape in the form of a "participant," as fantasies are undoubtedly subjective phenomena. But more interestingly for Woolf's formal purposes, Laplanche and Pontalis argued that a subject might assume a role within the action of a fantasy's script "as an observer."[134] And as we have learned, Woolf was curious about developing the effect of observation as a formal characteristic of narration, namely, that which in her manuscript notations she identifies as "an observer in the street."

Yet more than a mere observer, Woolf's narrator becomes who the novel alludes to as "one of those spectral presences" who at times appears to speak from within the subjectivity of individual characters. As Judith Butler has observed, fantasy names not an "activity *of* an already formed subject, but of the staging and dispersion of the subject across a variety of identificatory positions."[135] And although the identity of the novel's narrator escapes us, reinforcing the absence internal to subjectivity figured by the social function of death throughout the novel, we do, however, encounter the narrator's spectral presence in the form of an address. The novel's "spectral presence," I argue, takes the shape of a participant-observer within the novel-fantasy mediated to readers by way of its diegesis in ways that direct our attention elsewhere, not to the narrator, but to others, not excluding ourselves.

In other words, Woolf's phantasmatic participant-observer very intricately functions not only as a medium who speaks both about and on behalf of the various characters within their phantasmatic world, but the novel-fantasy's participant-observer also speaks to readers both on the behalf of characters through free indirect discourse and also to readers directly. Readers are addressed at various moments within the fantasy as "you," in ways that heighten our always-already observer-position as engagers of diegeses. Readers are first addressed directly as second-person addressees in a scene already examined above. From the outset of the novel wherein Clarissa runs her morning errands and asks herself "did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?," we encounter our first invitation into the fantasy's script as a heightened observer. The narrator begins with free indirect discourse revealing Clarissa's impression of herself, "Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought." The narrative then shifts to address readers directly, "If *you* put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred" (my emphasis). The narrator heightens reader's invitation to

imagine alongside the narrator, and perhaps alongside Clarissa herself, the ways in which Clarissa's "instinct" to know people has materialized in her past.

As we proceed through the novel, we encounter a variety of both free-indirect, and direct modes of address that continue to heighten our observer-participation and our desires for potential revelations within the novel-fantasy. Within particularly bold moments of second-person address, readers' curiosities are compounded, amplifying our desires for revelations. Set off parenthetically, our fantasy's narrator insists of Clarissa but directs toward us, "(*You* could always get her to own up if *you* took the trouble; she was honest.),"[136] to which readers might respond: "Wha—?! Own up to what? If we took what trouble? Have I missed something? Should I re-read? Just a moment, I'll go back…" Or take, for instance, another striking example of second-person address, here in its free-indirect form, found in the scene in which Septimus fantasizes a chorus commanding him to act, an oddly explicit moment indexing the relationship between suicidal fantasy and solicitude: "The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes." By addressing readers with the second-person "you" either on behalf of a character or on behalf of the narrator, readers are themselves invited into the phantasmatic scene-scripts whose participation we play as phantasmatic observer-participants, enhancing our otherwise ordinary observer status as mere readers of diegeses.

Yet there is another lingering question about our own observer role within a novel in which suicidal fantasy figures so predominantly. And that is, if *Mrs. Dalloway* valorizes the question of the affective value of suicidal fantasy, and if we are invited alongside its phantasmatic scene-script to participate as observers within its diegetic development, are we also then invited to fantasize about our own suicide? In other words, does *Mrs. Dalloway* invite us to engage in suicidal fantasy ourselves?

I am not certain I am in a position to wager an answer to this question, nor would I want to. To wager an answer to such a question would belie the subjective nature of fantasy itself. Rather, I am inclined to direct the question's focus toward the question of the function of suicidal fantasy itself, as Woolf had, to that which Woolf theorized suicidal fantasy makes possible. Rather than ask readers directly the extent to which the novel's suicidal fantasies articulate our own, the novel's suicidal fantasies ask that we direct our attention toward those who engage in them and toward those whom they serve. In other words, Woolf places emphasis on those for whom engaging in the insane truth of suicidal fantasy matters most, their subjects and their others.

Before moving onto the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* stages its fantasy's defensive mechanisms in the service of social critique, it is important to point out one last observation about *Mrs. Dalloway*'s phantasmatic form in relation to modernism more broadly. Butler examines the part of the subject-participant within scenes of fantasy in relation to loss, or as she describes it, a "separation" from an object of attachment. She emphasizes that fantasy originates from an initial separation from an object of attachment whereby fantasies function, then, "both *to cover* and *to contain* the separation" from the lost object, a "dissimulation."[137] In various ways, we have come to learn how *Mrs. Dalloway* stages its fantasies in relation to its characters, its narrator, and in relation to its readers. But in terms of its position in relation to the world in which in was published, *Mrs. Dalloway*'s phantasmatic form invites us to explore the ways in which solicitude itself had become an "object" of separation, an "object" of loss, a dead "object" desperately in need of resuscitation. Or perhaps more specifically, *Mrs. Dalloway*'s phantasmatic form invites us to explore the already-broken attachments we may have with, to, and for one

another that its emphasis on solicitude seeks to repair. In other words, such fantasy names a product of our condition of estrangement exacerbated under capitalism.

In the face of the fragmentation and alienation historically associated with projects of modernization itself, a solicitude with, toward, and for the other re-enters *Mrs. Dalloway*'s phantasmatic world as a lost object of cathexis for which it seeks avowal. In these ways, solicitude names a lost object-cathexis par excellence of modernity's social, aesthetic and political project for which Woolf's aesthetic contribution to literary modernism contends. And while it may be pithy to suggest that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel best re-read, and then best re-re-read, *ad infinitum*, its very form, a form that piques and re-piques our sensory suspicions about our lost cathexis toward solicitude and its possibility for recovery itself indexes its performative function. *Mrs. Dalloway* valorizes the question of the affective value of suicidal fantasy in the face of social loss that functions in the service of solicitude – a solicitude that becomes suicidal to neglect, and a function that "commits" us, as Derrida suggestes on the one hand, and Foucault alludes on the other, to a "veritable cultural combat" whose shape can manifest in our modern world as what Foucault describes as a "case of working on one's suicide for all of one's life."

*

We have been discussing the ways in which we encounter within our fantasies traces of the lived experience of the social losses that prefigure our subjectivities. Within fantasy we encounter an imaginary return of lost objects of cathexes, yet we also encounter mechanisms whose function within fantasy interrupt and forestall our access to those objects fueling our desire for them. As mentioned above, Laplanche and Pontalis argue that within a phantasmatic staging of our desire, the fulfillment of that desire is interrupted and forestalled by the presence

of what they describe as "defensive processes," the presence of mechanisms that distort or disrupt our access to fulfilling our desire within a fantasy's scene-script.

In Septimus' fantasies, we have witnessed, for example, the ways in which his unconscious desire for encountering his lover, Evans, had been repeatedly interrupted. The presence of the "railings" and "trees" behind which Evans was situated within Septimus' fantasies function as expressions of defensive processes that reemphasize his condition of unavowability, the ways in which Septimus "could not look upon the dead."

Psychoanalytic theories describe such distortions, somewhat ironically, as "defensive" in large part because such distortions function to protect the ego—an idealized figure for the unavowable lost object of cathexis itself—from re-experiencing the occasion for its loss that the fantasy may be rehearsing. The irony, of course, is that avowing the lost object of cathexis sets in motion our ability to come to terms with the pain associated with it, to identify the ways in which those lived experiences of separation, loss, and death have come to figure within our psychic topographies as the ego or the critical agency that takes the ego as its object of condemnation.

And this is one of the things so special about suicidal fantasy in particular. Where fantasy stages a rehearsal of one's desire *for* an unavowable lost object of cathexis, suicidal fantasy stages a more vivid rehearsal upon which one may more readily *avow* the lost object in its alterity, demystifying the subject/object dialectic at the heart of subjectivity. For in suicidal fantasy, as we have witnessed with Septimus, the violence constitutive of the death of the lost object is rehearsed on us, a violence whose proximity heightens, I argue, the possibility of recognizing the displacement of that violence from the initial lost object to its figure, our ego—perhaps the most stubborn expression of defensive processes. Suicidal fantasy can disclose that our losses may become us while revealing that we are never identical to them, but rather mere

bodies marked, as Jameson might say, by a "history" that "hurts."[138] Nonetheless, within a fantasy's scene-script, psychoanalytic theorizations suggest that our access to fulfilling the various desires they stage are beset by various barriers whose function prolongs our disavowal and simultaneously fuels the return of our desire for a lost object of cathexis accompanied by the pain of that loss.

What I would like to develop however, are the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* privileges its phantasmatic exposure in relation to its situatedness within the novel's world in such a way that fantasy itself becomes one of the mechanisms by which Woolf's readers can come to identify various social powers within the novel, and hopefully within our present, that function in the service of social control in ways that simultaneously prolong and exacerbate our suffering. In other words, I argue that if fantasies are beset by defensive processes that perpetuate our disavowal, and if suicidal fantasies more readily enable us to encounter, avow, and demystify the dialectic figured in our psychic topographies, *Mrs. Dalloway*'s dramatization of Septimus' suicidal fantasies also function to implicate harmful biopolitical behavioral prescriptions by and through which Septimus suffers in his waking life – prescriptions against which he resists by way of his corporeal suicide.

In the wake of announcing "I will kill myself," Septimus has been subjected to medical treatment and placed under the surveillance of his general practitioner, Dr. Holmes.[139] As Butler observes, "forms of social power emerge that regulate *what* losses will and will not be grieved"[140] Septimus' medical treatment reveals, however, the ways in which forms of social power emerge and regulate *how* our losses may or may not be grieved. As a result, Septimus undergoes a host of behavioral prescriptions, executed with the otherwise innocent help of his wife, that we witness from the outset of their introduction in the novel. As readers first approach

Septimus and Rezia, we are taken to Regent's Park, a place Rezia feels "she must take" Septimus in an effort to honor Dr. Holmes' prescription for Septimus to "take an interest in things outside himself."[141] While readers come to understand that Septimus is unconsciously preoccupied with other "things outside himself," namely, his painful experience in the war, those "things" escape the focus of his medical treatment. Rather than confront that by which he feels "condemned," or even ask after it, Dr. Holmes encourages Septimus and Rezia to engage in a host of distracting activities that might "make him notice real things." Dr. Holmes encourages Septimus and Rezia to "go to a music hall, play cricket—that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband."[142] While in Regent's Park, Woolf frames Septimus' treatment with no uncertain tone. "'Oh look,' [Rezia] implored him. But what was there to look at? A few sheep. That was all."[143]

The treatment is not working.

As mentioned in the introduction, Septimus is subject to a power that Foucault describes as biopower, the regulatory forms "working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organize the forces under it."[144] But what is new, and simultaneously irritating, about mechanisms of biopower, Foucault adds, is that such forms of power are "bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than…impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them." In other words, biopower's task is to monitor and administer life, to manage life often through behavioral prescriptions about which we are encouraged to feel some positive attachment. And although he doesn't say it, Foucault implies that biopower is an affective power. Dr. Holmes looks to valorize in Septimus' affect the biopolitical spirit with astoundingly patronizing condescension, "'So you're in a funk,' he said *agreeably*, sitting down by his patient's side;"[145] or "'Now what's all this about?' said Dr. Holmes *in the most amiable*

way in the world. 'Talking nonsense to frighten your wife?'"[146] Cricket! "[*T]hat was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband*." One can imagine Septimus' thousand-yard stare begin to focus on an object.

To make matters worse, Septimus then comes under the care of Sir William Bradshaw, Woolf's figure for neuroscience. Rezia's innocent optimism primes readers' doubts. "She thought his name sounded nice; he would cure Septimus at once."[147] As readers approach the occasion of Septimus' appointment with Sir William Bradshaw, however, we are taken by way of Woolf's "tunneling process" through a brief, casual glance into another expression of the operation of biopower found outside medical practice. We are simultaneously set up to encounter the juxtaposition between Septimus' repeated claim that "he could not feel," and the ways he is encouraged to feel about his position as an honored veteran. At the office where Septimus sells his commodified labor-power as a clerk, his boss, Mr. Brewer reflects on Septimus' service during the war. "They were proud of him; he had won crosses. 'You have done your duty…'"[148] This, only after being more thoroughly brought back to Septimus' experience in the war wherein we learn, "he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name."[149] By situating what we have already come to know about Septimus' preoccupations alongside the predominant impression of who Septimus appears to his public to be, the narrator playfully observes, "The War had taught him."[150] Which is to say, by presenting readers with casual glances into both Septimus' own psychic reality and the psychic realities of those that surround him, Woolf enables us to encounter the conflicting forces at play that make up Septimus' psychic and affective life of power as we are then introduced to Sir William Bradshaw.

While "Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him," yet still finds the occasion to prescribe, and charge for, Septimus' medical treatment, Sir William Bradshaw diagnoses Septimus with something more serious.[151] Compounding Mr. Brewer's comments, Sir William Bradshaw, the "priest of science," venerates Septimus' social position, "You served with great distinction in the War?"[152] And like a good scientist, Sir William Bradshaw records Septimus' reply,

> "The War?" the patient asked. The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed.[153]

Sir William Bradshaw pathologizes Septimus' response, "A serious symptom, to be noted on the card." And after securing from Rezia that she and Septimus "have nothing to worry you, no financial anxiety, nothing," Sir William Bradshaw then confirms that Septimus "was very seriously ill." Septimus would be prescribed "rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed" in a "delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after." To which Rezia responds, "Away from her? she asked."[154] Septimus was to be alone, alienated, by biopolitical design.

Woolf makes clear the irritating futility of these biopolitical mechanisms while poking fun at them in the process. Repeatedly Woolf calls into question the domineering scientific justification that functions to legitimate such biopolitical discourse throughout the novel: "(for one must be scientific, above all scientific);" "(for one must be scientific above all things);" and perhaps most critically toward Sir William Bradshaw himself, "To his patients he gave three-quarters of an hour and if in this exacting science which has to do with what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain—a doctor loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails."[155] And as we know, Sir William Bradshaw's "three-quarters of an hour" translates into "the very large fee," the monetary equivalent whose compiled sum, in relation to

his patient's, mustn't fall out of proportion.[156] For it is Septimus who suffers from, as Sir William would have it, "not having a sense of proportion," and it is Sir William Bradshaw who benefits.[157] By framing medical science in such an amusingly contemptuous way in the face of her otherwise intricate portrayal of what fundamentally concerns Septimus, Woolf's readers can begin to identify the ways in which Septimus' psychic and affective life of power has been historically controlled by the workplace, the military, and in the novel's present, by the biopolitics of medical science. And very much like the ways in which, in fantasy, a subject experiences the forestalling effects of defensive processes, Woolf makes clear the ways in which the biopolitical medical prescriptions Septimus suffers function both to prolong and exacerbate his suffering.

Septimus' subjection to such treatment is no mere fictive construction.. Both the occasion for Lady Bruton's lunch party and the conspicuous talk of the "Bill" regarding the "deferred effects of shell shock" spoken between Sir William Bradshaw and Richard at Clarissa's party function as figures for otherwise real-life legislation entertained by Parliament during the drafting processes of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Knox-Shaw's meticulous research examines what he describes as the "fierce controversy over the plight of afflicted ex-servicemen" in the wake of World War I. He continues, arguing,

> A storm had broken in Parliament only a fortnight before [Woolf envisaged Septimus as a character] over the announcement that, as from October 1, six hundred or so ex-servicemen in asylums were to forego their right to a pension under a now expired Royal Warrant and to be supported wholly under the provision of the Poor Law—on the grounds that their mental treatment was judged to have been due to causes other than the war. In two hard-hitting leaders (Sept. 27 and 29, 1922), *The Times* accused the government of transforming 'service patients' into 'pauper lunatics' and demanded an explanation of how the men concerned were ever accepted for service in the first place; and the point was further driven home when a former member of a recruiting board wrote in to declare that he had never heard of a certified lunatic being passed fit. What began as an attempt to a limited retrenchment on the part of the Ministry of Pensions gave the Labour opposition an opportunity to reopen the whole matter of state welfare for the victims of war, and the temperature of ensuing debates ran high.[158]

Knox-Shaw's research demonstrates the ways in which Parliament sought to mitigate state responsibility for the painful legacy of the war materialized in, among other things, veterans' mental health. Claiming that symptoms expressed by soldiers after the close of the war were symptoms with which these soldiers entered the war, we find what today we might call an argument about "pre-existing conditions." By virtue of such pre-existing conditions the government sought to skirt responsibility for veterans, leaving them to seek whatever help they could secure as paupers. Hence, Woolf's intent focus on Sir William Bradshaw's curiosities about the Smiths' financial stability.

Woolf's dramatizes the ways in which Septimus' very experience in the war functioned as a mechanism for his unavowabiltiy. While he has "won crosses" for his bravery, encouraging a stoic masculinity throughout his otherwise painful experiences encountering shelling, that very shelling took the life of his officer and lover in such a way that prevented its avowal. To be brave, to win the approval of his country, Septimus unconsciously comports himself with a reticence that would come to haunt him until the occasion of his suicidal fantasies. By virtue of Woolf's intricate narration, we can see the power relations play out between Septimus' own therapeutic trajectory versus the prescribed trajectory reigned down upon and functioning through him in his relationship with institutions of governmentality.

Septimus's corporeal suicide marks Woolf's critique of the very social system that produced him. And in its dramatization, absent is the heightened *aestheticized* materiality characteristic of his suicidal fantasies. Rather, Septimus encounters his heightened totality as a mere *totality-of-equipment*, as Heidegger might have had it. "Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread knife," the "gas fire," the "razors," won't do. "There remained only the window," the threshold through which Septimus would pass through, securing his escape.[159]

While Septimus' corporeal suicide marks the most significant form of Woolf's critique, he is not alone, as we know Septimus has a double.

Woolf was sensitive about class and gender. Where the Smiths "had to buy" their "roses…from a poor man in the street," as we know "Mrs. Dalloway…would buy the flowers herself" from a fashionable shop, rather than send her servant, Lucy.[160] Clarissa is aristocratic, married to a politician. She entertains aristocracy, even the prime minister, at least every year upon the repeated occasion of her June parties. Yet like Septimus, Clarissa too has been subject to the "medical gaze," a gaze we know, and Woolf knew, is a gendered one. Yet where throughout the novel we learn that Clarissa too must avoid "excitement" for fear that "it was bad for her heart," she fears no prescription of countryside quarantine.[161] Knox-Shaw comments on the relationship between Clarissa's class privilege and Woolf's own with regard to avoiding the threat of countryside quarantine. In September 1913, Woolf had tried to "kill herself" by way of what Knox-Shaw learned was a "nearly fatal overdose of veronal."[162] As "suicidal intension was sufficient grounds for certifying a patient," Knox-Shaw writes, Woolf was slated for the countryside. It was only by way of what Knox-Shaw describes as "special circumstances," namely, Woolf's class status and social connections, whereby she was released into the custody of her husband Leonard who subsequently agreed to take his wife "into the countryside" accompanied by himself and their hired "nurses."[163] Rather than be subject to state surveillance, Woolf was entrusted to its paternal substitute, her husband. Yet by situating Clarissa—wealthy, aristocratic, delicate—alongside Septimus—poor, working class, rigid—Woolf's dramatization critiques the social system by way of class and gender, inviting readers to contemplate the ways in which class and gender materialize in different ways for different people.

And finally, Clarissa and Septimus both share same-sex desires. Sally plays double to Septimus' Evans, compounding the doubleness of Clarissa and Septimus, rehearsed throughout the novel. And in each their own way, both Clarissa and Septimus are compelled by way of predominant biopolitical social prescriptions to suppress their same-sex desire and fall in line with the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. Where Septimus regrets "how he had married his wife without loving her," Clarissa longs for a "quality which could only exist between women," feeling a "presentiment of something bound to part them." When she and her girlfriends spoke of marriage in their youth. "They spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe."[164] In each their own way, both Clarissa and Septimus entertain the ways in which the novel suggests, "every one gives something up when they marry."[165] And of course, both are haunted by the implications of their socially influenced, compulsory heterosexual marriages. Where Septimus longs for the "affection" his officer and lover lost in a peculiarly hypermasculine scene of power, Clarissa longs for her "match burning in a crocus" upon "yielding to the charm of a woman."[166] In each their own way, and also in significantly shared ways, both Clarissa's and Septimus's lives function within the confines of biopolitical social prescriptions that preclude, forestall, and simultaneously intensify their feelings of misery in their present and a desire for something otherwise on some horizon.

Capitalism and biopower, I argue, name two modern forms of productive power, what Marx broadly described as effects of, the "real subsumption of labour under capital." In 1867, roughly sixty years prior to the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Marx commented on the relationships between capitalist modes of production, circulation, and distribution, on the one hand, and the function of institutions of science, on the other. He wrote:

> The *social* productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, *socialized* (i.e. collective) labour come into being through co-operation, division of labour within the workshop, the use of *machinery*, and in general the transformation of production by the

> conscious *use* of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of the *scale* corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialized labour that is capable of applying the *general* products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate process of production; and, conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production). This entire development of the productive forces of *socialized labour* (in contrast to the more or less isolated labour of individuals), and together with it the *use of science* (the general product of social development), in the *immediate process of production*, takes the form of the *productive power of capital*.[167]

It is by way of these "productive powers of capital" that we encounter biopower and its biopolitical interest in our lives. As Foucault observes, biopower is "without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism."[168] Much of biopolitics is culturally constructed nonsense, often backed, underwritten, justified, and naturalized by way of institutions that construct the very objects of analysis claimed to be under examination—bourgeois objectifications of people, who are then told what to do and how to feel about it. And matters can be otherwise.

Mrs. Dalloway exposes the dominance of and some of the mechanisms by which biopower functions alongside mechanisms of resistance. One of those mechanisms of resistance is suicidal fantasy. Heidegger argues, "The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, to existence—limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for *Dasein*."[169] The question of Clarissa's transcendental theory asks after some disclosure of some totality for a potentiality-for-Being, an anticipation of some such disclosure revealed by death in its suicidal form. As mentioned in the introduction, Heidegger also emphasizes anticipation when he observes, with his own emphasis,

> *Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself...in an impassioned* **freedom towards death**—*a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the "they", and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious*.[170]

That anxiety, Heidegger argues, "reveals itself as *care*," a care that can take the form of solicitude.[171] By dramatizing Septimus's and Clarissa's suicidal phantasmatic engagement in

their world, Woolf illustrates ways in which we can encounter within our fantasies traces of both the lived experience of our social losses and the social forces that inaugurate and perpetuate our subjectivities, phantasmatic encounters by which we can come to avow the function of each, and through which we can come to re-imagine our world in the service of solicitude for social change, change that may include mitigating the frequency of corporeal suicide through suicidal fantasy itself. The question of affirming the affective value of the insane truth of suicidal fantasy marks Woolf's gesture toward *Dasein,* to being-there-in-the-world. Woolf sensed this in October 1924, as she raced to her manuscript to recall and recite the "astounding fact" that had nearly escaped her as she "was interrupted" for some unknown reason. She didn't want to forget to note the closing sentence of her novel. "For there she was," to which Marx might add, though be her estranged.[172]

CHAPTER FOUR

Suicidal Fugitivity: *Another Country* and its "Powers of Darkness"

> When people no longer knew that a mystery could only be approached through form, people became—what the people of this time and place had become…They perished within their despised clay tenements, in isolation, passively, or actively together, in mobs, thirsting and seeking for, and eventually reeking of blood. Of rending and tearing there can never be any end, and God save the people for whom passion becomes impersonal!
>
> James Baldwin, *Another Country*, 1962

James Baldwin's 1962 novel, *Another Country* joins a long tradition in fiction of framing suicide both as a critique of the world as it is and as a way to imagine how we can begin to repair our broken relation to this world. What interests me most about Baldwin's approach to Rufus Scott's suicide, however, are the ways in which he frames Rufus' suicidal activity, namely, his capacity for and the activity of imagining his own death by way of suicide.

Apart from, for instance, Dostoevsky's Alexei Kirillov or Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith, whose suicidal ideation is made explicit from the outset of and materializes throughout *Demons* and *Mrs. Dalloway* respectively, Baldwin invites readers into the activity of Rufus' suicidal ideation in subtler, almost reticent ways. Readers may not be certain that Rufus has been entertaining his own death.

Although the narrator repeatedly alludes to the site of Rufus' suicide in terms of the "distant bridge" and the "faint murmur[s]" and "whistles on the river" in ways that "seemed to be calling [Rufus]," Baldwin frames Rufus' suicidal activity in ways less obvious to the genre of the suicide novel itself.[1] In so doing, Baldwin's narrative plays with what Berlant would describe as the stuff of an unforeclosed genre. In other words, Baldwin plays with readers' "affective expectation(s) of the experience of watching something unfold."[2] Readers may sense that something is up, but we aren't certain what Rufus is doing, where he is headed. Surely, he's

wandering, but it is difficult to anticipate that he may end up atop the George Washington Bridge.

By framing the activity of Rufus' present in such ways, Baldwin directs our attention to the character of Rufus' wandering throughout the streets of New York. And like we saw in Benjamin's diary entries and correspondence, we witness Rufus repeatedly encounter his surroundings in ways that set in motion fantastical remembrances. Yet Baldwin offers us more, namely, vignettes that inform us about Rufus' lived experience from within his short past. We learn of the ways in which Rufus' usual modes of survival—for instance, his jazz performance and his non-normative relationships—have historically kept him attached to his world. Yet we also learn that, despite his best efforts, his usual modes of survival have worn out.

By way of Rufus' remembrances, readers begin to understand his embeddedness in a world defined by hetero-masculinity and the color line—a world that has framed his queerness and blackness as both a spectacle and a problem. And as these conditions become more vivid, the world of the novel begins to feel more violent. Which is to say, throughout the intensification of Rufus' wandering and the remembrances it sets in motion, Baldwin makes visible the vicissitudes of Rufus' mimetic immersion within scenes of American violence.

Readers come across descriptions of Rufus' non-normative sexual encounters, for instance, in terms of "the *violence* of the deep," or in terms of an "unforeseen *violence* which frightened him a little." Readers find other routine behaviors suggestive of violence as well: the way in which Rufus "growled in his sleep and bared the white teeth in his dark face" in the dark movie theater; or the way he "turned, pulling up the collar" of his jacket as "the policeman passed him." Others begin to notice such violence as well, as Vivaldo later reflects on Rufus, suggesting that he had "never associated Rufus with violence,…but now he remembered how

Rufus played the drums." Each instance exemplifies the ways in which *Another Country* is shot through with moments in which Baldwin's rhetoric illuminates affective experiences of normative violence that, as a result, found Rufus "in hiding, really, for nearly a month."[3]

Such scenes exhibit what Fred Moten, borrowing from Nathaniel Mackey, would describe as Rufus' "fugitivity." Yet more than simply being on-the-run, constantly trying to escape the violence that surrounds him, Rufus' fugitivity takes place as a series of moments-in-action. As Jack Halberstam describes Moten's idiom, "fugitivity is not only escape,…[i]t is a being in motion that has learned that…there are spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned."[4] Which is to say, Rufus' fugitivity names a mode of survival that I would like to develop more specifically as suicidal fugitivity, embodying another of Moten's concepts about radical black performance, namely, the role of improvisation. Moten writes,

> This movement cuts and augments the primal. If we return again and again to a certain passion, a passionate response to passionate utterance, horn-voice-horn over percussion, a protest, an objection, it is because it is more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on; it is the ongoing performance, the prefigurative scene of a (re)appropriation—the deconstruction and reconstruction, the improvisational recording and revaluation—of value, of the theory of value, of the theories of value.[5]

However estranged from his usual modes of survival, Rufus is not wholly disconnected from nor disinterested in productive potentialities. As Rufus wanders the streets of New York, we learn that he had been "*thinking* of going downtown and waking up Vivaldo," and that he "*thought* of walking up to Harlem" to visit his sister, Ida. In fits and starts, Rufus gestures towards re-engaging with his friends, with his fellow musicians, and with his sister, all of whom had played a significant part in keeping him connected to his world. And along the way, we begin to suspect that Rufus is improvising. Which is to say, in addition to Rufus' status-as-fugitive, we also learn of the dynamic potentialities made possible from his improvisation within his suicidal fugitivity

that function not only in the service of his survival, but also in the service of something greater. As Baldwin writes, the "most impenetrable of mysteries moved in this darkness for less than a second, hinting of reconciliation."[6]

And most importantly, as argued in chapter one, suicidality is best when it's shared. Yet as Baldwin's narrative makes vivid Rufus' lived history and productive potentiality, no other character throughout the novel is keyed in to the substance of Rufus' mode of fugitivity in terms of suicidality. Within the world of the novel, the event of Rufus' suicidal fugitivity and corporeal suicide fall on deaf ears. Yet Baldwin's narrative mode of address, as Benjamin would argue, "embeds the event" of Rufus' suicide in the "life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience" to Baldwin's reader.[7] Baldwin's take on the suicide novel functions, then, not only as one of many modes of recognition for readers, but also, as Virginia Jackson argues, as one of many "modes of cultural creation" that can serve as "a shaping force in lived experience" for other people.[8] In other words, by understanding the ways in which suicidal fugitivity can function as a mode of social activity, intensifying our affectivity and situating us within our lived histories, we may be able to re-appropriate its value in the service of social change, forestalling our tendency toward corporeal suicide itself.

After exploring Baldwin's mid-century preoccupations with genres of black social life and his critical commentary on literary aesthetics in the early 1960s, this chapter examines several scenes throughout *Another Country*'s long first chapter that illuminate the ways in which the activity of the last night of Rufus' life highlights the social value of suicidal fugitivity, what suicidal fugitivity makes visible, and the ways in which we all may become more sensitive to its secret potentialities in the face of what too often transforms into the fatal risk of suicide itself. Yet, most specifically, Baldwin's novel makes vivid the imperative to understand suicidality, as

mentioned above, as something that is best shared. As Baldwin has written, "Perhaps such secrets, the secrets of everyone, were only expressed when the person laboriously dragged them into the light of the world, imposed them on the world, and made them part of the world's experience."[9]

ALL OF THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

And who has not dreamed of violence?

James Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," 1960

Rufus' suicidality names a product of Baldwin's aesthetic preoccupations with mid-century genres of black social life in the face of the color-line and white power. More specifically, I argue, the potentialities surrounding Rufus' suicidal fugitivity illustrate one aesthetic expression of Baldwin's idiom, "the powers of darkness," drawn out below, that amplify the stakes of our own contemporary thinking about genres, as Berlant and Jackson would have it, as modes of both recognition and cultural creation.

Throughout the middle twentieth century, James Baldwin was preoccupied with genre perhaps best illustrated in his contentious essays on the subject, especially when they referenced Richard Wright. Although Baldwin admired Wright, he had been at odds with Wright's work for much of his adult life. Baldwin's "quarrel" with Wright began with the publication of his 1949 essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel." In his essay, Baldwin criticizes what he calls "novels of oppression written by Negroes" on the grounds that they tended merely to "add a raging, near-paranoiac postscript" to the sentimental and glib likes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[10] Of Wright's *Native Son* in particular, Baldwin writes,

> Below the surface of this novel there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses. And, indeed, within this web of lust and fury, black and white can only thrust and counter-thrust, long for each other's slow, exquisite death; death by torture, acid, knives and burning; the thrust, the counter-thrust, the longing making the heavier that cloud which blinds and suffocates them both, so that they go down into the pit together. Thus has the cage betrayed us all, this moment, our life, turned to nothing through our terrible attempts to insure it. For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth. But our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult—that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.[11]

Baldwin argues that *Native Son*, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is replete with reification. Simultaneously, however, Baldwin's essay announces an urgency to explore new literary genres that "make a further journey…to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth." By "truth," Baldwin is thinking of aesthetic genres more capable of "devotion" to what he describes as the "indefinable, unpredictable" activity of "human being[s]."[12] Baldwin's emphasis on indefinability and unpredictability, here, are reminiscent of Marx. Where Marx famously asked, "for what is life but activity?," Baldwin seems preoccupied with amplifying aesthetic genres, making them capable of representing that surplus of human activity and creativity that powers us.[13] As José Esteban Muñoz has said, channeling Bloch, "surplus becomes that thing in the aesthetic that exceeds the functionalism of capitalist flows."[14] Baldwin is after a "(re)appropriation…of value, of the theory of value, of the theories of value," as Moten has it. In short, Baldwin is interested in more.

Twelve years later, and shortly after the death of Richard Wright, Baldwin published another essay, "Alas, Poor Richard," that functions as a eulogy, or a "memoir" as Baldwin has

it.[15] Like in his earlier essay, Baldwin again explores the inadequacy of then contemporary literature to confront and contend with issues of the color-line and white supremacy.

Here, however, he tries to be more generous. Baldwin's main theme, that any "real writer is always shifting and changing and searching," announces a potentiality for literature that spans the essay's three sections while building a sort of vociferous crescendo that highlights that which inspired in Baldwin the important place of Wright's work for him from his youth. On the one hand, he writes that as a young man, he admired in Wright's work its ability to have "expressed…the sorrow, the rage, and the murderous bitterness which," as Baldwin confesses, "was eating up my life and the lives of those around me." Wright expressed a pain that inspired Baldwin by way of dramatizations of racial violence. Wright's work functioned as "an immense liberation and revelation" for Baldwin, and he describes Wright as his "ally," "witness, and alas!," his "father."[16]

Yet on the other hand, Baldwin's comments throughout the essay become more and more punctuated by a syncopated and aggressive sense of contempt in the service of fashioning "one of the severest criticisms that can be leveled against [Wright]." Baldwin emphasizes Wright's limitations, namely, his literary inadequacy to comment on violence, to wield it, and to inspire through his writing any productive potentialities that violence may set in motion. Baldwin argues that in Wright's work, the "violence…is gratuitous and compulsive."[17] As Benjamin might have it, in Wright, mimetic immersion reveals the object of mimesis, yet falls short on revealing any potential value from within the mimetic production itself.

Baldwin extends his critique, insisting that Wright never seemed to examine the historical conditions of possibility for racial violence in his work. Rather, he merely reported on them. "The violence is gratuitous and compulsive because the root of the violence is never examined."

Baldwin concludes, "Richard did not really know much about the present dimensions and complexity of the Negro problem [in the U.S.], and," what's worse, he "did not want to know."[18]

Although Baldwin had admired "how accurately" and "deeply" black social life had been "conveyed" throughout Wright's work, his essay clamors after that excess, that power—the value in mimetic production that can be disclosed and produced if marshaled in the service of historical change. In the face of their personal "quarrel," and within their broader, shared milieux both in the U.S. and in Paris, Baldwin maintains that Wright "paid a price," a "hidden, terrible price." Baldwin argues that Wright sought various forms of "exile" in his "ways of thought," in his "work," and more generally in his "ways of life" so much so that "Richard was able, at last, to live in Paris exactly as he would have lived, had he been a white man, here in America."[19] Baldwin's comments aside, surely no one can blame Wright. Who wouldn't be tempted to seek exile in the face of the American color-line enforced by white power?

As the essay comes to its fever pitch, Baldwin seeks after an avowal of the violent affects and fantasies borne of encounters with white power all in the service of mining these violent affects and fantasies for their potential to help imagine, create, and motor new conditions of possibility for humanity writ large. Moving from a question, to a series of statements, and ultimately to what I read as a form of aesthetic and political manifesto, Baldwin's polemic begins to exceed vitriol. It begins to flirt with virulence. In short, Baldwin's comments mime violence:

> For who has not hated his black brother? Simply *because* he is black, *because* he is brother. And who has not dreamed of violence? That fantastical violence which will drown in blood, wash away in blood, not only generation upon generation of horror, but which will also release one from the individual horror, carried everywhere in the heart. Which of us has overcome his past? And the past of a Negro is blood dripping down through the leaves, gouged-out eyeballs, the sex torn from its socket and severed with a knife. But this past is not special to the Negro. This horror is also the past, and the everlasting potential, or temptation, of the human race. If we do not know this, it seems to me, we know nothing about ourselves, nothing about each other; to have accepted this is also to have found a source of strength—source of all our power. But one must first accept this paradox, with joy.[20]

And it only intensifies from there, as Baldwin then draws out the stakes of his argument – the stakes of "ignoring," or worse yet, the stakes of "turning away from" the potentialities of this "fantastical violence." Baldwin continues, "I am suggesting that one of the prices an American Negro pays—or can pay—for what is called his 'acceptance' [under white power] is a profound, almost ineradicable self-hatred" that "corrupts every aspect of his living."[21] He is saying this about his friend. "Alas, Poor Richard" is an uncomfortable read. Yet although occasioned by Wright's literary legacy, Baldwin's argument is larger than his personal quarrel with Wright. For it is about the potential to imagine and create aesthetic genres capable of contending with white power.

Baldwin had long been preoccupied with what he called "novels of oppression," the "protest novel" or the "racial manifesto," all various genres of black social life. He had also been long preoccupied with the power of literature as well, arguing that it is the "power of revelation which is the business of the novelist." And although Baldwin had before described such revelatory powers in terms of "darkness," here in 1961, he argues after an aesthetic genre capable of exposing the conditions of possibility for racial violence through powerful mimetic reappropriations of fantastical violence itself.[22] Baldwin describes the aesthetic potential he refers to here as the "paradox" of the "everlasting potential" of the "fantastical violence" of "all of the powers of darkness," and I read Baldwin's idiom as a motion toward creating aesthetic genres of black social life capable of revealing a fantastically violent mode of lived experience, putting it on display, and making recognizable both its conditions of possibility and its productive potentiality for social change. Baldwin was interested in critical mimesis.

What is at play here are the ways in which affect signals both a power to be affected, and a power to affect. As Michael Hardt has argued within the Spinozan tradition, "being affected

by…external sources, is not a weakness but a strength, a power." The "power to be affected," Hardt continues, can function as a gauge of one's "capacity to be really in the world, to register and feel its diverse powers," for better or for worse.[23] The powers of darkness name a power to be affected as a starting point—as a "source" of our strength. They name a will-to-avow all kinds of violence that invariably come "first." They precede formal creation. By vigilantly acknowledging our experience of and capacity for violence, we can avow our lived histories *as in fact violent*.

They also name a power to affect. By way of aesthetically reappropriating our experiences of violence, not only in response to white power, but also in response to the interconnected forces of political economy, misogyny, and homophobia, we can begin affecting and conceptualizing modes of survival in the service of creating avenues for social change amidst the ordinary, everyday, normative powers of capitalism.

Yet perhaps most importantly, Baldwin argues that we must approach the paradox of all of the powers of darkness "with joy." I read Baldwin's appeal to joy, here, in the Spinozan sense. By making visible and avowing our experience of and capacity for violence, we expand and intensify our power to affect and be affected, lest we "never" be "at peace again," and remain "out of touch" with ourselves "forever."[24] For Baldwin, the stakes are high.

By tracing the ways in which Baldwin frames Rufus's suicidal ideation as one expression of the "everlasting potential" of "the fantastical violence" of "all of the powers of darkness," and its stakes, the remainder of this chapter addresses a series of questions about *Another Country* that privilege the value of Rufus' suicidal ideation in their development and name that which readers witness Rufus take with him to the Hudson. Namely, how does Baldwin dramatize the fantastical violence of Rufus' powers of darkness? What, if anything, can mark a value to the

product of those powers? And, how can we understand Rufus' suicidal fugitivity as a performance of the value of the lived experience of black life only then lost in his lonely corporeal suicide?

In this regard, I follow Berlant's call to "slow down" and track the "resonances" of Rufus' powers of darkness "across many scenes" that take shape within the novel's long first chapter.[25] Yet throughout the novel, the demand to avow the productive functions of all of the powers of darkness mark the most significant pattern of behavior in the novel's struggle to find alternative genres of being with one another. Throughout the ordinary struggles dramatized in the narrative, suicidal fugitivity holds a particularly important place functioning both as a symptom of a waning of forms of sociality within a crisis while gesturing toward the productive value of fantastical violence itself in the service of imagining and creating alternative social possibilities, formations, and structures, all in the face of, as Baldwin insists, "the few hopes we have of surviving the wilderness which lies before us now."[26]

RUFUS' SUICIDAL FUGITIVITY: REVERBERATIONS OF THE FANTASTICAL VIOLENCE OF ALL OF THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

> Perhaps the world is darker and therefore more real than we have allowed ourselves to believe.
>
> James Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," 1960

Before examining the texture and function of Rufus' powers of darkness, namely, his suicidal fugitivity, I would like to highlight the ways in which *Another Country* makes visible vicissitudes of affective experiences of violence in ways that may be gathered up in the service of tracking the power of normativity while seeking after new modes of survival within capitalist modernity. At stake, then, is the wide range of phenomena that Baldwin approaches in terms of

violence. Where violence, as a concept, predominantly describes behavior that tends toward purposefully causing pain, damage, or death to someone or something, much of the novel's violence is quite familiar. The physical and emotional violence Rufus wields against Leona, or the domestic violence that Cass suffers at the hands of Richard are both cases-in-point. Most vividly, readers encounter Rufus' corporeal suicide, a violent event set in motion in the absence of finding more socially viable ways of valuing queer, black life in the face white power, the commodification of black art, and the otherwise inexorable pain of misogyny and homophobia. In short, in its many scenes, we recognize violence in familiar ways.

Readers also encounter, however, other experiences of violence that register in more subtle, yet powerful ways. We witness, for instance, an "extraordinary violence" in Cass' voice that "caused a few heads to turn;" or the way in which "the light," as Vivaldo and Ida ascend from the subway, "seemed to fall with an increased hardness, examining and inciting the city with *an unsparing violence*…;" or the way in which Eric is struck as he follows Yves through Paris as the "*violence of the music*…[fills] the soft, spring air;" or even the way Vivaldo and Cass encounter a "*violence* of cars, great trucks, green buses lumbering across town, and boys, dark boys, pushing wooden wagons full of clothes."[27] Baldwin's rhetoric is replete with references to violent affectivity that amplify the activity of the novel in ways less examined in scholarship. [28]

Kevin Ohi, for instance, investigates what he insists is the novel's "refusal to specify a scene or expression of localized grief."[29] I contend, however, that the entirety of the novel functions as that very traumatic scene whose expression is made visible, recognizable, and avowable to readers by way of its pervasive references to affective experiences of violence. Which is to say, other than the event of Rufus' suicide, there may be no single, localized

expression of grief, but surely readers encounter throughout the novel an affectivity organized and informed by countless moments of ordinary, everyday, flashpoints of trauma that constitute the collective crises of capitalist normativity. As Berlant has argued, "crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming."[30]

Baldwin's literary deployment of this latter vicissitude of violence tracks moments of affective intensity, specifically, the power to be affected. Yet Baldwin's is more nuanced than the precognitive sensory experience of our world found in the tradition of Spinoza's "affectus,"[31] or Deleuze's "intensity."[32] Rather, historical and cultural experiences of normativity are mediated by the novel's affective intensity. Which is to say, the vicissitudes of affective experiences of violence in *Another Country* function as a way to historically record and make recognizable for readers the damaging effects of normativity in its characters' lives as they scramble to find alternative modes of survival.

In each of the moments mentioned above, affective intensities register as violence in proximity to confrontations with normativity in its ordinary, everyday circulation. The extraordinary violence in Cass' voice indexes the extent to which she experiences the trauma of her failing, heteronormative marriage while entertaining the possibility of a nonmonogamous affair with Eric. Likewise, as Vivaldo and Ida resurface from the subway tunnel into the city streets they experience the traumatic, unsparing violence of the daylight shining on their interracial pairing. Eric's encounter with the traumatic violence of the music strikes him as he cruises after Yves through the streets of Paris. And yes, even the mundane circulation of traffic all register as traumatic violence as each seeks after non-normative modes of survival. Throughout the novel, readers encounter dramatizations of traumatic violence that archive our

power to be affected by white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia—in sum, our power to be affected by the modern, traumatic violence of normativity exacerbated under capitalism. Rufus', however, stand apart.

While the dramatization of Rufus' suicide that closes chapter one occurs in the novel's present, that present is informed through a series of Rufus' wandering remembrances set in motion by his suicidal fugitivity that function to inform readers of the lived experience of the violence of normativity. Rufus' remembrances give meaning to the opacity of his wandering throughout New York alongside other people, amidst the city traffic, and underneath the looming presence of its infrastructure. The first flashback occurs early in the chapter, as Baldwin invites readers to resonate alongside the fantastical violence of Rufus' historical mode of survival in various ways that make vivid his experience of having lost his mode as we return to the novel's present.

Rufus stops outside a jazz bar. While he is curious about heading in, he fears humiliation in light of his circumstances. He stands in mere proximity to the action. As a couple exits the bar, the "warmth, the smell, of people, whiskey, beer and smoke" set in motion a remembrance that, although centered around the memory of Leona, inform readers about a confluence of life-events from his past. As the narrator explains, "For to remember Leona was also—somehow—to remember…his mother,…his father,…his sister,…the streets of Harlem, the boys on the stoops, the girls behind the stairs on the roofs, the white policeman who had taught him how to hate…"[33] As Berlant might say, Rufus' remembrances mark a "gathering up" of his history, including "reflections" that both "mark its force" and trace the "expression involved in its circulation."[34] For Rufus, that expression is in part informed by a memory of receiving "his first set of drums—bought him by his father." Yet with this gift came an imperative about black modes of survival,

an imperative that announces the ways in which Rufus had remained attached to his world. Spoken by Rufus' memory of his father, yet implicating all of Harlem, Baldwin writes of "the beat:"

> *A nigger,* said his father, *lives his whole life, lives and dies according to a beat. Shit, he humps to that beat and the baby he throws up in there, well, he jumps to it and comes out nine months later like a goddamn tambourine*. The beat: hands, feet, tambourines, drums, pianos, laughter, curses, razor blades; the man stiffening with a laugh and a growl and a purr and the woman moistening and softening with a whisper and a sigh and a cry. The beat—in Harlem in the summertime one could almost see it, shaking above the pavements and the roof.[35]

If the fantastical violence of all of the powers of darkness names the method by which, Baldwin argues, we garner and marshal our strength, then the beat of Harlem names one of its historical modes of survival, having dictated the meter, tempo, and rhythm of Rufus' circulation. Although itself mediated by gender-normative power—with a laugh and a growl and a purr, with a whisper and a sigh and a cry—Rufus' beat carries with it a means for disrupting or "shaking up" normativity. Examined most immediately, is the aesthetic way in which Rufus had performed his survival on stage, as Vivaldo only later reflects, mentioned above, he had "never associated Rufus with violence,…but now he remembered how Rufus played the drums."[36]

Outside the jazz bar, as Rufus "began to walk, very slowly now, away from the music, with his hands in his pockets and his head down," we enter the flashback as he remembers a night some seven months prior, the night he met Leona. "It had been a good night." He was performing on drums in a jazz band who had been playing for an audience, the multitude, composed of "all kinds of people," "white and black, high and low, people who came for the music and people who spent their lives in joints for other reasons." Here, amongst the "musicians, who were his friends, who respected him," Rufus is an affective participant within a lively crowd.[37] And what's more, the members of this crowd are primed to encounter an aesthetic fantasy of racial harmony. As Baldwin writes, the "colored people were having a good

time because they sensed that, for whatever reason, this crowd was solidly with them; and the white people were having a good time because nobody was putting them down for being white." Inviting us into a remembered space of the lived experience of the beat of black survival, the "joint," as Baldwin insists, "was jumping:"

> There was some pot on the scene and [Rufus] was a little high. He was feeling great. And, during the last set, he came doubly alive because the saxophone player, who had been way out all night, took off on a terrific solo. He was a kid of about the same age as Rufus, from some insane place like Jersey City or Syracuse, but somewhere along the line he had discovered he could say it with a saxophone. He had a lot to say. He stood there, wide-legged, humping the air, filling his barrel chest, shivering in the rags of his twenty-odd years, and screaming through the horn *Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?* And, again, Do *you love me? Do you* love *me? Do you love* me? This, anyway, was the question Rufus heard, the same phrase, unbearably, endlessly, and variously repeated, with all of the force the boy had.[38]

Rufus' remembrance invites readers into a space of the lived experience of black survival, a space at once fantastically violent and aesthetically productive. More than a mere drug-fueled stage performance in which the band performs from "way out," gesturing toward some "insane place," this scene assumes the character of a fantasy in other key ways. As mentioned in chapter three, Laplanche and Pontalis describe fantasy as an "imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes." For Laplanche and Pontalis, fantasies function as "scripts" in and through which a protagonist can experience a "permutation of roles" that at once can take the shape of "participant" and "observer." Baldwin's scene of musical ensemble, here, is ripe for representing fantasy, for performing jazz music in an ensemble requires an intimate permutation of otherwise individual and improvisational musical scripts, a reciprocal form in and through which the protagonists both encounter the sounds of others while contributing their own, speaking back. And within this fantastical scene, Baldwin frames one of those rare moments in musical performance that few musicians encounter (yet we all, I hope, long for)—an aesthetic

moment of the intense joy of affective collectivity experienced when each performer feeds off of and also serves one another while their subjectivities blend together, and also, with the crowd.

While the saxophonist takes the lead, the narrator reinforces the ways in which the "men on the stand stayed with him, cool and at a little distance, adding and questioning and corroborating, holding it down" all the while knowing that "the [saxophonist] was blowing for every one of them." And just as this remembered scene enters Rufus's mind from his wandering present, he alludes to a past shared by the saxophonist himself. As Baldwin writes, the "boy was blowing with his lungs and guts out of his own short past; somewhere in that past, in the gutters or gang fights or gang shags; in the acrid room, on the sperm-stiffened blanket, behind marijuana or the needle, under the smell of piss in the precinct basement, he had received the blow from which he never would recover" (9). Baldwin emphasizes moments of the lived experience of black life from which the musical fantasy emerges in terms of violence—the gutters and the gang fights; the precinct basements—an appeal to police violence made vivid throughout Baldwin's work. Throughout this confluence of violence, the saxophonist had "received the blow" from which his repeated question emerges, "*Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?* And again, Do *you love me? Do you* love *me? Do you love* me?" The saxophonist's "voice" both speaks for the group, while registering the group's collective power to be affected.

And yet more than a question, Baldwin's syncopated italics constitutes an imperative: "Do…love…me." The imperative registers a desire for the power to affect set in motion by shared experiences of racial violence performatively reappropriated and directed toward an audience who "were being *assaulted* by the saxophonist" (my emphasis). In these ways the aesthetics of the musical stage performance carry with it a shared history of, and a fantastically violent polemical charge against racial violence marshaled in the service of imagining social

change. And the "joint" was "jumping," which is to say, the performative, fantastical violence wielded by the jazz ensemble embodies a criticality not lost on the crowd. As Judith Butler suggests, critical performance "depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered."[39] And Baldwin dramatizes precisely such a reception within the underground of the jazz club. As in the face of the ensemble's fantastical violence, he writes, the "silence of the listeners became strict with abruptly focused attention, cigarettes were unlit, and drinks stayed on the tables; and in all of the faces, even the most ruined and most dull, a curious, wary light appeared."[40] The change in the audiences' collective physiognomy (cigarettes were unlit! Drinks stayed on the tables!) indexes their confrontation with the band's aesthetic reappropriation of racial violence. The group's power to affect transforms into the audience's power to be affected. Through the affectively collective, fantastical reappropriation of violence, backed by Rufus's role as metronome—as the pace-setter, as the time-keeper, as the aesthetic historian of the productive, lived experience of black survival—the audiences' "focused attention" and their "curious" affect indexes their collective will-to-avow the fantastical violence of the beat of Harlem. The performance asks a question in an improvisational, violent mode to an audience who becomes affected, and through that affection, avows the aesthetic powers of darkness. In short, they loved it.

Rufus' participation in this fantastical space, namely a fugitive space "way out" toward which he "took off" made him come "doubly alive."[41] And I argue that Baldwin's musical fantasy scene dramatizes the powers of darkness by making recognizable the radical aesthetics of black social life formed from within the violently lived experience of black social survival. As Jared Sexton claims, black social life is "not" lived in the "world that the world lives in" but rather, black social life is "lived underground, in outer space."[42] Baldwin's is a call, here, to

encounter a fugitive space, an alternative, fantastical space formed through fantastical violence to which affects may attach in the absence of more readily available and viably-lived structural alternatives. And, as demonstrated not only by Rufus, and not only amongst his ensemble, but within the totality of the underground of the jazz club itself, this collectivity of Baldwin's unprecedented multitude engaged in this practice of a communal, fantastical, performatively productive violence with joy.

Baldwin's first flashback scene lays the ground for valuing an aesthetic product of the fantastical violence of all the powers of darkness backed by and experienced within the beat of survival in Harlem. By aesthetic product, I mean to characterize the jazz performance as what Laplanche and Pontalis describe in the "more restricted" sense of the French, "fantasme." Set apart from the German, "phantasie," which emphasizes the "world of imagination, its contents and the creative activity which animates it," the French, "fantasme," they argue, "refers to a specific imaginary production," one whose performance no less directs our attention to its world of creative activity, but one that nonetheless emphasizes an aesthetic product.[43] If in Baldwin's flashback scene we encounter the collectivity of the jazz performance as an aesthetic product of the fantastical violence of all the powers of darkness, then he begins to address the urgency of its reception as readers leave the fantastical space of non-normative survival and re-enter the material reality of Rufus' normative world. As Baldwin brings his readers back into the novel's present, we are taken through a syncopated mixture of various flashbacks whose acceleration begins to crystalize for us our understanding of the intensifying conditions of Rufus' crisis.

*

After he had just stepped down from stage in the Harlem jazz club, Rufus met Leona, a poor Southern white woman whose presence in the jazz club both surprised and intrigued him.

He was primed to improvise yet again. She agrees to accompany him to his friend's after-party. As they move with the crowd, and with "much erotic confusion," they "poured into the streets." No longer shielded by the protective atmosphere of the underground, the threat of violence disrupts Rufus' mood almost immediately. As the crowd disperses, "the policemen strolled by," and Rufus "suddenly realized that Leona would soon be the only white person left." The policemen function here not only as an affront to Rufus' blackness, but also to Rufus' and Leona's sexual viability, and this made him "uneasy and his uneasiness made him angry."[44] Readers witness a moment that registers Rufus' power to be affected by the violence of normativity, a violence that would reverberate throughout Rufus and Leona's short, strangled relationship.

As Rufus and Leona begin to build their non-normative relationship, they encounter few resources to maintain its viability. Readers witness the misery of their experience. After Vivaldo stops by Rufus' apartment, meeting Leona for the first time, the three head out on a walk in an effort to show Leona around. And as they had encountered the threat of policemen earlier upon exiting the protective cover of the jazz club, they immediately encounter, again, the violence of white power as they make their way out into the city.

> They encountered the big world when they went out into the Sunday streets. It stared unsympathetically out at them from the eyes of the passing people; and Rufus realized that he had not thought at all about this world and its power to hate and destroy. He had not thought at all about his future with Leona, for the reason that he had never considered they had one. Yet, here she was, clearly intending to stay if he would have her. But the price was high: trouble with the landlord, with the neighbors, with all the adolescents in the Village and all those who descended during the week ends.[45]

Rufus and Leona are subsumed into the violent power of their broader world, a world that receives them, their coupling, as itself a violent affront to normativity. The fantastical potentiality of their spaces of fugitive life is inexorably dismantled with every glance, sneer, and stare they encounter from within the suffocating violence of white power. Even though each is

open for new, non-normative potentialities, they encounter an absence of resources within their greater situatedness whose refusal to accept their arrangement drives up the price of their non-normative potential. In short, Baldwin makes visible the absence of genres through which Rufus and Leona may imagine a productive future.

And they find no resources between themselves, as Baldwin writes, "they had no equipment" with which to enter their world. Baldwin informs us of the ways in which Rufus' attachments to ideologies of gender normativity begin to transform into a material violence toward Leona. "'I love him,' [Leona] said, helplessly, 'I love him, I can't help it. No matter what he does to me. He's just lost and he beats me because he can't find nothing else to hit.'" Finding no way to gather and marshal resources, Rufus begins engaging in corporeal violence, using Leona, "in whatever way he felt would humiliate her most." And as we learn that "it was not love he felt during these acts of love," but rather a sense of having been "drained" and "utterly unsatisfied," Rufus begins to flee "from the raped white woman into the bars" in which he "began to pick fights with the white men." Rufus' violence disrupts Leona's workplace, and their violent arguments and fights find them evicted from a series of apartments. Finding no prospects for work and losing touch with his everyday modes of survival, Rufus struggles as the "eyes of his friends told him that he was falling," a realization that neither he nor Leona had the resources necessary to survive the violence of white power, nor the powers that fuel gender normativity manifested in his own hypermasculine behavior.[46]

In the absence of resources either within their greater environment or between themselves, Rufus struggles to conceptualize what is happening. "'I don't know up from down. I don't know what I'm doing no more.'"[47] Rufus has no genre through which to imagine a productive future with Leona, despite their desire for improvisation. In its absence, Rufus finds

in its place something much less helpful—indeed, something strikingly dangerous. Baldwin makes clear that where his multitude exhibited the "presence of some cancer which had been operating in them, invisibly, all along," that cancer "might, now, be operating in oneself," namely, in Rufus.[48] In the absence of any clear way in which to conceptualize what is happening, Rufus begins to pathologically internalize the causes of his experience of violence in ways that exacerbate the intensity of his crisis. "I guess there *is* something the matter with my head.'"[49] And as Baldwin brings readers, now, fully into the novel's present, after Leona's admission into Bellevue and subsequent transfer to yet another "home—down South somewhere,"[50] Rufus reflects on his violent history with Leona in conversation with Vivaldo, a reflection that makes vivid the intensity of Rufus' crisis crystalized within his sensorium. Baldwin writes,

> Yet, he was aware, perhaps for the first time in his life, that nothing would stop it, nothing: this was himself. Rufus was aware of every inch of Rufus. He was flesh: flesh, bone, muscle, fluid, orifices, hair, and skin. His body was controlled by laws he did not understand. Nor did he understand what force within this body had driven him into such a desolate place.[51]

Now, firmly situated within the novel's present alongside Rufus within his crisis, Baldwin's readers encounter the lonely, destructive ways in which Rufus pathologically lodges the conditions of possibility for his crisis within his own body, superseding the place of his usual modes of survival. As Ann Cvetkovich has argued, "depression is another manifestation of forms of biopower that produce…an even less visible form of violence that takes the form of minds and lives gradually shrinking into despair and hopelessness."[52] He's traded one historically black mode of survival for another, more problematic alternative. As Baldwin writes, "[Rufus] had fled, so he had thought, from the beat of Harlem, which was simply the beat of his own heart." The violent circulation of normative biopolitics overpowers both his engagement, however fraught, with his usual mode of survival and his non-normative potentiality. By dramatizing Rufus' participation in the violence of gender normativity coupled with his inability to gather the

resources necessary to understand his experience of the horrifying violence of biopower, Baldwin makes recognizable the otherwise "less visible" ways in which normativity can infiltrate non-normative potentialities and undermine their materialization from the outset. With his appeal to this circulation of normative violence, Baldwin writes, "whatever was coming had already begun,…the master switch had been thrown."[53] And we enter Rufus' final fantasy sequence in real-time as he and Vivaldo head out for pizza and drinks within the crisis of the novel's present.

*

Rufus' last experience of fantastical violence begins at Benno's alongside Vivaldo and the multitude as Rufus begins to experience his present in ways that "seemed terribly strange to him." Readers are invited within the contours of Rufus' improvisational fantasy from within his crisis, the experience of which manifests simultaneously as an intensification and a distancing that, Baldwin writes, "came in waves." "As though he remembered it from a dream," Rufus "recognized faces, gestures, [and] voices." Yet within his dreamlike state, "no one," however "looked his way." "[N]o one seemed…to recognize him." Which is to say, Rufus struggles to recognize himself. Rather than hearing the voices of the others, Baldwin writes, "[a] voice spoke *at* his ear." Within his experience, he appears disassociated from those around him. "The seats the others had occupied were like a *chasm* now between Rufus and the white boy and the white girl." He is at once materially present while fantastically elsewhere, in close proximity to some strange holding space, a space of his suicidal fugitivity. Rufus' experience of the air begins to intensify as the "air," Baldwin writes, "was close."[54] Rufus' fantastical experience from within his crisis is one in which he encounters an affectively intensified materiality—as Berlant argues, a "sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic."[55] Rufus' enigmatic waves

carry him away from that other company at the bar, washing him out into the streets of New York in which he experiences his newly discovered mode of suicidal survival.

Baldwin, again, in his syncopated style, punctuates Rufus' location within the city with an affectively intensified sense of materiality. As he "crossed Sheridan Square and walked slowly along West Fourth Street," Rufus's sense of proximity to those around him continues to expand. "He felt as removed from them, as he walked slowly along, as he might have felt from a fence, a farmhouse, a tree, seen from a train window: coming closer and closer, the details changing every instant as the eye picked them out; then pressing against the window with the urgency of a messenger or a child; then dropping away, diminishing, vanished, gone forever." As mentioned in chapter one, "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital."[56] As Baldwin writes, "it was not *his* fence, *his* farmhouse, or *his* tree."[57] Yet, rather than encounter the material aesthetic of Rufus' surroundings, he again encounters his world through the bourgeois sensorium influenced by capitalism.

Where Berlant argues for the value of the activity within our "impasse," the value of Rufus' activity is repeatedly forestalled by the circulation of normativity, as Baldwin continues marking Rufus' material location in terms of a potentiality to reconnect with his lived past only then washed over by the enigma of his present. As he "passed Cornelia Street," he remembers his friend Eric's old apartment, the "lamplight in the corners, Eric under the light, books falling over everything, and the bed unmade." Rufus and Eric had been lovers, and as if desiring to continue within the memory, Rufus' material present violently intervenes, "Eric—and he was on Sixth Avenue, traffic lights and the lights of taxis blazing around him." The normal circulation of traffic interferes and disrupts his sense of his own historicity. He has lost contact with the

productive potentialities of his material world. He wanders, as Berlant would have it, "dogpaddling around" the "traffic," the "taxis," "two girls and two boys," a "[h]alf a dozen men." Treading down the subway steps, Rufus changes his last five-dollar bill, and as he passes the turnstile, "people came, rushing and loud, pushing past him as though they were swimmers and he nothing but an upright pole in the water." Unable to reconnect to any material potentialities within his environment, we see that Rufus has attached to something else, a fantastical buoy that keeps him afloat. As he approaches the subway platform, the fantastical experience of his crisis intensifies as he is, again, struck by a memory from his past. Yet this memory evoked "something new." Something new "began to awaken in him." But rather than re-situate Rufus within his historicity, Baldwin writes, "it increased his distance; it increased his pain."[58] And we enter Rufus' last performance with the fantastical violence of all of the powers of darkness performed only to himself—intensifying the question of the necessity of the reception of suicidality.

Reminiscent of his scathing polemic against Richard Wright, Baldwin's dramatization of Rufus' last violent fantasy opens with a series of questions, moves towards a series of statements, and closes with an appeal to an affective experience of joy. It takes shape in two acts separated by a disjunction. I hear the violence of Baldwin's two-act fantasy as another reverberation of the everlasting potential of the fantastical violence of all of the powers of darkness—its potential to help us imagine and explore suicidal fugitivity as a mode of being in the world. But here the key has changed, or perhaps its mode; surely its seating arrangement. What I mean is that in Rufus' first fantasy his protagonist-position had been an active one. Within that fantasy we can clearly see from whom the fantastical violence emanates. In his last fantasy, however, we witness neither Rufus nor any member nor any configuration of members

of his multitude initiate its violence. We don't know with whom we are asked to contend. In this last fantasy the initial violence emanates from an abyss, from the "violence of the deep" which is always-already a potential, as Baldwin repeats, "It could happen. It could happen…" The abysmal, watery depths make us wonder to whom Baldwin poses his question? Nor within the fantasy do we witness any imaginary gesture toward the creation of new genres. Which is to say, where in his first fantasy we encounter the value of an aesthetic product shared with an audience, here, within his last improvisational fantasy we encounter both an absence of an audience which gives way to total annihilation—an evacuation of potentiality itself. And where the lived experience of violence makes possible its mimetic production as fantasy, we encounter, again, Rufus provoked by a memory. He recalls from his childhood the way in which he "had not dared to let go of [his mother's] hand" on that "dangerous" subway platform. Rufus waits, "alone with all these people," "in acquired calmness, for the train," and fantasizes:

> But suppose something, somewhere, failed, and the yellow lights went out and no one could see, any longer, the platform's edge? Suppose these beams fell down? He saw the train in the tunnel, rushing under water, the motorman gone mad, gone blind, unable to decipher the lights, and the tracks gleaming and snarling senselessly upward forever, the train never stopping and the people screaming at windows and doors and turning on each other with all the accumulated fury of their blasphemed lives, everything gone out of them but murder, breaking limb from limb and splashing in blood, with joy—for the first time, joy, joy, after such a long sentence in chains, leaping out to astound the world, to astound the world again. Or, the train in the tunnel, the water outside, the power failing, the walls coming in, and the water not rising like a flood but breaking like a wave over the heads of these people, filling their crying mouths, filling their eyes, their hair, tearing away their clothes and discovering the secrecy which only the water, by now, could use. It could happen. It could happen; and he would have loved to see it happen, even if he perished, too.[59]

One of Baldwin's powers of darkness names a will-to-avow our collective historical engagement in violence, and Rufus' fantastical reappropriation of violence, here, begs some questions. Namely, who comes to know and avow their collective engagement in violence? Whose potentiality for violence do we witness? And how can those disclosures set in motion potential

modes of survival and avenues toward social change? In short, what is the value of Rufus suicidal fantasy? I don't mean to be cavalier, but we know where he's headed.

I argue that the value of Rufus' violent fantasy takes shape, here, in the passage's first act, before the disjunction. The second sets in motion its risk. The fantasy's first act is a fantasy of usurpation and avowal. In the absence of the multitude's general will-to-avow their collective engagement in violence, Rufus fantasizes that the subway's structural collapse usurps that demand. Rather, the multitude's passive experience of violence manifests as an invitation-to-violence. And as they openly accept that invitation, they encounter, "*for the first time*," the joy of their acceptance and engagement in murder and dismemberment awash with blood. The value of the first act of Rufus' fantasy is that it makes visible the multitude's performative avowal of their historical deployment of violence, as their collective violence "leap[s] out to astound the world" of Rufus' fantasy. Or, as Baldwin insists, leaps out "to astound the world *again*."

The violence of the second act takes a different shape. If the first act functions as a fantasy of usurpation and avowal, then the second act extends that usurpation, annihilating the possibility for avowal. Within the second act, the violence simply evacuates the multitude leaving in their place a violence no one can avow, a violence "which," Baldwin writes, "only the water, by now, could use." Which is to say, the violence of the second act argues no agent but itself. In the absence of avowal, Rufus encounters no audience within his fantasy to witness his fantasy's disclosure. He's on an imagined stage with no captive audience. He is his only witness. In the absence of any avowal of violence, Rufus imagines no productive way to process his experience, let alone imagine ways of valuing his own life. He can only pathologically internalize, in biopolitical fashion, the causes for his experience of violence, as Rufus has claimed, "I guess there *is* something wrong with my head."[60] And what's more, it is *precisely* in

this second act where we encounter Rufus' most explicit motion toward suicide. Rufus would rather die alongside the multitude. He would encounter its materialization, "even if he perished, too," with joy. For "he would have *loved* to see it happen." His death would take with it the pain of the violence his only recourse has been to internalize rather than share.

As Baldwin continues to trace Rufus' train ride north, others continue to board the train. Yet rather than encounter this multitude as a collective potentiality, Rufus encounters them estranged from one another, as Baldwin writes, "chained together in time and in space, and by history,…all…in a hurry to get away from each other." Rather than tap any collective potentiality, Rufus declares, "We've been fucked for fair."

At 125th Street in Harlem it was "mainly black people who left." The train becomes "lighter," and Rufus "[s]uddenly he knew that he was never going home any more."[61] As he feels the violent presence of the whiteness, he begins to feel a connection to a place "far away from them." Rufus exits 178th Street, and as he approaches the George Washington Bridge, we again encounter his heightened sense of materiality. Although he did "not yet see the water. He felt it. …it was over there…"—another sensation Blanchot describes as a heightened "attention to the minutiae often symptomatic in those who are about to die."[62] As Rufus approaches the center of the bridge, he asks a question not dissimilar from that of his saxophonist, "Ain't I your baby, too?" But like in his fantasy, *no one is there to respond*. Dropping his head and looking "down at the water," we witness Rufus' mimetic apperception. "It was cold and the water would be cold. He was black and the water was black."[63]

Baldwin deployment of mimetic apprehension brings his readers to a painful affective and conceptual space. Within this space, readers encounter an overlap between the vicissitudes of violence, its concept, its lived experience, and its fantastical reappropriation, all fallen on deaf

ears. Finding no sociality to bear witness to the disclosure of Rufus' fantasy, Baldwin figures this space as a space of death—a racialized space of suicidal fugitivity, the vanishing point where Rufus' lived experience of the violence of white power intersects with his conceptualization of his blackness itself –"He was black and the water was black." Readers encounter Rufus' suicide as a figure for the paradoxical question of all of the powers of darkness—its productive potentialities shot through with its potentiality to reify a violation—the paradox Baldwin insists that we must "accept…with joy"? It's excruciating.

Of the many questions Fred Moten raises in his article, "The Case of Blackness," there is one that shares with Baldwin's this difficulty. Moten asks, "How can we fathom a social life that tends toward death, that enacts a kind of being-toward-death, and which, *because* of such a tendency and enactment, maintains a terribly beautiful vitality?"[64] Like Baldwin, Moten addresses his paradoxical question by exploring the overlap of spaces. He examines what he calls the "unstable zone" between, on the one hand, "the fact of blackness," namely, "the color black," its concept, and on the other, the "lived experience of the black." Moten argues that by considering that zone, we can begin to see the ways in which we mistake the lived experience of blackness for its concept.

And we see the ways in which Rufus' suicidal fugitivity, perhaps many of ours, resides in that zone between the lived experience of the violence of capitalist modernity and its internalized, biopolitically-reified tendency to mistake effects for causes. By paying attention to the value of Rufus' suicidal fugitivity with all its consistent appeals to its social nature, its appeals to a multitude within the sequences themselves, we can begin to see how it is possible to mistranslate—to mistake Rufus's violent suicide for a *mere* personal problem, a *mere* personal eradication, and at worst, something essentially black. Baldwin's representations of both suicidal

fugitivity and corporeal suicide present themselves more and more, here, as modes of social activity to which affects may attach in the absence of those who may bear witness to social scripts teaching us to better understand and value black experience.

Yet Baldwin asks us to encounter the paradox of the powers of darkness with joy, a difficult task for Rufus in the absence of an audience. Which is to say, where Rufus finds no sociality to bear witness to his fantasy's disclosure, Baldwin does. As insisted upon in chapter one, suicidality is best shared, and Baldwin's readers function as those to whom he offers his own mimetic reappropriation of all of the powers of darkness. Readers are invited to avow or disavow the power of their disclosure. As Baldwin later writes, "Perhaps such secrets, the secrets of everyone, were only expressed when the person laboriously dragged them into the light of the world, imposed them on the world, and made them part of the world's experience."[65]

The joy Baldwin invites readers to experience is a joy toward which Moten, too, gestures. Within radical black aesthetics, Moten argues that we find "the troubling of and the capacity for the rehabilitation of the human." Yet rather than some ontologically circumscribed, congealed scene of rehabilitation through which some reified subject may reemerge, Moten gestures toward a present-progressive "movement of becoming," as Marx would have it.[66] He writes,

> But perhaps only the dead can strive for the quickening power that animates what has been relegated to the pathological. Perhaps the dead are alive and escaping. Perhaps ontology is best understood as the imagination of this kind of escape as a kind of social gathering…Seen in this light, black(ness) is, in the dispossessive richness of its colors, beautiful.[67]

Moten's poetically syncopated use of the adverb "perhaps" stresses the uncertainty of the passage's suggestion—the uneasiness associated with the aestheticization of death. Yet through this uncertainty there remains a present-progressive potentiality of lively aesthetic re-imagining. His passage privileges a lively, ongoing question rather than some set of dead propositions—a question, I argue, whose timbre and resonance Baldwin has been sounding in relation to Rufus, a

question that may read: How can we resuscitate from the beauty of the dead that which may function not merely in the service of survival, but in the service of the present-progressive movement of becoming of new forms of social reproduction?

"Ain't I your baby, too?"

Rufus' suicidal fugitivity functions *not only* as a mimetic rehearsal of black estrangement under capitalism in the United States, and *not only* as a strong critique of that shitty world, but *also* as a figure for actively imagining the material conditions of possibility for a sociality on a horizon, perhaps one less fugitive, not to mention less suicidal. Rufus' suicidal fugitivity enunciates an imperative to imagine another world, or "another country," as the title of Baldwin's novel suggests, lest we disavow our potentiality and ignore, "perhaps," as Baldwin insists, the ways in which we are "darker and therefore more real than we have allowed ourselves to believe."[68]

CODA

"Until Further Notice…"

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to inhabit the liveliness of suicidal activity in an effort to highlight the ways in which its liveliness reveals an avowal of our condition of estrangement under capitalist modernity, on the one hand, and on the other, the ways in which suicidal activity—as a mode of being modern—amplifies our ability to imagine new modes and forms of social reproduction. Yet throughout all the scenes of suicidality this dissertation has examined, the suicidal protagonists return to their estranged lives, and die.

After expressing the aesthetic value of her suicidal past, for instance, Fleur de Marie is admitted to a life of servitude in a convent, only to be murdered. Septimus Warren Smith, after situating himself within his lived history by way of his suicidal fantasies, only suffers further biopolitical surveillance, and is impaled. Clarissa Dalloway, for all the affectivity her suicidality sets in motion, remains deadened within her estranged life as an aristocratic housewife, clinging to the idea of a sociality her world forbids her. And, of course, Rufus, whose suicidal fugitivity exemplifies that the only decent American mode-of-being is always-already queer and black, is recovered from the Hudson, while his secret flows onward to the Atlantic.

All of which is to say, even though we know that suicidal activity can make vivid the social conditions of our estrangement and the ways in which, under other conditions, we might mitigate our tendency toward modern suicidality itself, people still die.

Many of us kill ourselves, and it is difficult to maintain the aesthetic affectivity that suicidality makes available in the face of the wreckage of capitalist modernity. As such, moments of suicidal affectivity appear as aesthetic flashpoints. Their value is often evanescent, ephemeral, and difficult to maintain over time.

*

In light of such observations, I would like to close with two observations.

The first concerns a text published in *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1925 titled, "Is Suicide a Solution?"

The responses to this question are mixed. While many offer up some moralizing nonsense, as is to be expected, some evade the question altogether and address another of their own making. Others make problems with the question itself, marking the creative imagination that conversations about suicide set in motion. But then there is Antonin Artaud, whose response not only answers the question in earnest, but takes us further:

> No, suicide is still a hypothesis. I claim the right to doubt suicide the same way I doubt the rest of reality. For the instant and until further notice, one must horrifically doubt not existence, strictly speaking, which is within the grasp of pretty much anyone, but the internal undermining and the profound sensitivity of things, of acts, of reality. I believe in nothing to which I am not attached by the sensitivity of a thinking and meteoric cord, and even so I am lacking in a few too many meteors in action. The constructed and feeling existence of all men bothers me, and I resolutely abominate all reality. Suicide is nothing but the fabulous and far-off conquest of men who think straight, but the state itself is incomprehensible to me. The suicide of a neurasthenic lacks any representative value, but the mental state of a man who would have carefully determined his suicide, the material circumstances, and the moment of the pulling of the trigger is marvelous. I am ignorant of things, I am ignorant of everything concerning the human state; nothing of the world revolves for or in me. I suffer terribly from life. I can't attain any state. And it is absolutely certain that I have long been dead: I already committed suicide. That is to say, I was suicided. But what would you think of an anterior suicide, of a suicide that would make us go back to where we started, but to the other side of existence and not that of death. That one alone would be of value to me…[1]

Is suicide a solution? Artaud's answer is a resounding "No…" And to be sure, he means corporeal suicide. As he follows with, "Suicide is still a hypothesis," Artaud gestures toward something else, namely suicidality—the lively activity of entertaining ending one's own life. And while I can only sympathize with the neurasthenic, I can't help but agree with what follows: "The mental state of a man who would have carefully determined his suicide, the material circumstances, and the moment of the pulling of the trigger is marvelous." Insofar as such

suicidality mobilizes a sense of astonishment or wonder, it is surely marvelous, as the "mental state" of which Artaud writes is surely one of dynamism.

And as Artaud continues, his comments extend something even more humane. As Breton suggests, we hear something "human in them." Or, at least, we hear some humility resonant of Peuchet, as Artaud writes: "I am ignorant of things, I am ignorant of everything concerning the human state; nothing of the world revolves for or in me. I suffer terribly from life. I can't attain any state."

Artaud then explores a bit. Like Fleur de Marie, Clarissa Dalloway, and Rufus Scott, Artaud poses a question: "But what would you think of an anterior suicide, of a suicide that would make us go back to where we started, but to the other side of existence and not that of death[?] That one alone would be of value to me."

At first glance, Artaud's question appears naïve, as if there is some possibility for some blank slate—as if through suicide we could begin anew. Yet Artaud's poses his question on the heels of his own inhabitation of suicidality.

The Latin prefix, *sui*-, meaning "of oneself," set ahead of a derivative of *caedere*, "to kill," constitutes suicide as a self-reflexive act. Yet Artaud writes, "I have long been dead: I already committed suicide. That is to say, I was suicided." To frame the statement in the passive voice—I was suicided—is an especially poignant way to frame the subject and object of suicide, as it calls into question an absent agent of action, or group of agents. The effect is there, but the cause is opaque.

In short, Artaud knows that suicide is not merely a personal issue. It is a social one.

What's more, Artaud is after a conceptualization of suicidality as a productive activity that in any suicidal moment gestures not only backward, but also forward into a utopian future.

Artaud amplifies the vitality of his thesis into the stuff of a manifesto. When it comes to corporeal suicide, take no such action "until further notice." Suicidality, however, is a hypothesis through which we may continue to observe, analyze, and evaluate our worlds in the service of entertaining a better, more felicitous sociality.

Second, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx critiques our desire for a romanticized, bourgeois sociality. He reminds us of the estranged nature of our sociality under capitalism. Then, set off in parentheses, as some of his most striking comments are, he writes about the forms our "social bond" have taken throughout history:

> (It has been said and may be said that this is precisely the beauty and the greatness of it: this spontaneous interconnection, this material and mental metabolism which is independent of the knowing and willing of individuals, and which presupposes their reciprocal independence and indifference. And, certainly, this objective connection is preferable to the lack of any connection, or to a merely local connection resting on blood ties, or on primeval, natural or master-servant relations. Equally certain is it that individuals cannot gain mastery over their own social interconnections before they have created them. But it is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely *objective bond* as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing). This bond is their product. It is a historic product. It belongs to a specific phase of their development. The alien and independent character in which it presently exists *vis-à-vis* individuals proves only that the latter are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it. It is the bond natural to individuals within specific and limited relations of production. Universally developed individuals, whose social relations, as their own communal relations, are hence also subordinated to their own communal control, are no product of nature, but of history. The degree and the universality of the development of wealth where *this* individuality becomes possible supposes production on the basis of exchange values as a prior condition, whose universality produces not only the alienation of the individual from himself and from others, but also the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities. In earlier stages of development the single individual seems to be developed more fully, because he has not yet worked out his relationships in their fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end.)[2]

Under capitalist modes of production, circulation, and distribution, Marx suggests that we may all die estranged (as examined in *1844*) from the products of our creative activity, the enjoyment of our creative activity, from the enjoyment of our solicitude, and from our humanity itself.

I wrote this dissertation about people like me for other people like me. And although I would never call into question the ways in which corporeal suicide may function as a solution for one's individual suffering, I'll be damned if it solves anything for our fellow travelers, for our potential fellow travelers—for the collective.

As for the stuff of suicidal activity? That's another story. As Miriam Hansen has it, "the demolition of the autonomous, self-identical individual entails an analogous transformation of the collective."[3] And it is the transformation of *that bond* that we have not yet begun, on the basis of our social conditions, to enjoy.

So, fuck suicide.

Let's make our suicidality materialize, until further notice…

REFERENCES

Introduction

[1] The popular website, Wikipedia has been offering a daunting catalog of suicides in fiction for years. See, "List of Suicides in Fiction," *Wikipedia*, last modified August 21, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_suicides_in_fiction.
[2] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1995), 617-619. For more on the meaning of Kirilov's suicide, see Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 97; Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 8; Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 245n27.
[3] Dostoevsky, 678.
[4] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1991) (hereafter *C3*), 1011.
[5] *Sorry to Bother You*, directed by Boots Riley (2018; Twentieth Century Fox, 2018), DVD.
[6] Michel Foucault, quoted in and translated by Thomas Osborne, "'Fascinated Dispossession': Suicide and the Aesthetics of Freedom," *Economy and Society* 34, no. 2 (May 2005): 284.
[7] Ian Marsh, *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.
[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 281.
[9] Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, tran. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002) (hereafter *SW1*), 477.
[10] Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 119. I am indebted, as well, to Jonathan Flatley for the phrasing of this sentence. See, "(Radio On!)," *Avidly*, January 24, 2017, http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2017/01/24/radio-on/.
[11] It feels almost compulsory to say this. No one could exhaust the complications surrounding the purposeful ending of one's own life. Yet some travel far afield in a different direction. In his dissertation's examination of representations of suicide, Christopher Damien Chung says he tries to "account for as much textual and formal detail as possible without supposing that it expresses a unified meaning, speaks to an overarching theoretical or political concern, or defines a moral position. To suppose any of these possibilities," Chung continues, "is to produce yet another insensitive reading that, no matter how compassionate, rejects suicide's resistance to interpretation, forces meaning where none resides" (44). For however much I admire Chung's careful approach to a messy topic, it is my position that a claim about suicide's "resistance to interpretation" is itself a unifying claim about suicide's meaning. See "'Almost Unnamable': Suicide in the Modernist Novel" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 44.
[12] José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2009), 147 (my emphasis), 167.
[13] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992) (hereafter *1844*), 327.
[14] Blanchot, 104-105.
[15] Dostoevsky, 590-591.
[16] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (San Diego, New York, & London: Harcourt, Inc., 1981) (hereafter *MD*), 69-70.
[17] Marx, *1844*, 335.
[18] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 136.
[19] Foucault, 141.
[20] Foucault, 138.
[21] Foucault, 138-139.
[22] For the most significant *fin-de-siècle* sociological work on suicide, see Émile Durkheim, *On Suicide*, Trans. Robin Buss (New York & London: Penguin Books, 2006 [1897]).
[23] For more on the relationship between western science and Dostoevsky, see, Paperno. For the quoted passage, see 16.

[24] Critical historical scholarship on suicide and its changing meanings suggest that by lodging the responsibility of suicide in either sickness or moral destitution, science professionals deny those who engage with suicide the creativity to control, let alone have a voice in articulating, the meaning of his or her own life and death. For more on the criticality of suicide, see Lisa Lieberman, "Romanticism and the Culture of Suicide in Nineteenth-Century France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 3 (1991); George Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Lisa Lieberman, *Leaving You: The Cultural Meaning of Suicide* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Marsh, *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*; and Thomas Osborne, "'Fascinated Dispossession': Suicide and the Aesthetics of Freedom," *Economy and Society* 34, no. 2 (May 2005): 280-294. Both Marsh and Osborne's work stands apart, as each critically examines historical approaches to the problem of suicide in the medical sciences as a way to map the complex relationships between the production, dissemination and circulation of knowledge about suicide. Marsh's project is invested in exposing the historical contingencies at play in the construction of knowledge about suicide in the hopes of imagining alternative conceptual spaces outside of pathology in which new possibilities for thought and action may emerge. Osborne examines suicide as an aesthetic problem of the will permeated with moral, ethical, and social stakes.

[25] See, https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2017_1100w850h.jpg.

[26] Lieberman, 28.

[27] Ultimately, this tendency names the stuff of an analogy-gone-wrong. Waves of historical suicides have been described in the medical language of the epidemic that, at best can function in the service of a sharper argument about affective collectivities after which this dissertation seeks. For more on suicide-as-contagion, see Katherine Lynn Ryan, "Modernism's Suicidal Impulse: Psychic Contamination and the Crowd," (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2014) in which she writes, "A sense of the suicidal impulse as contagious and most likely to spread amidst the crowded urban environment is especially prominent in the period's scientific discourses, and this anxiety over public hygiene and population control emerges in a strand of modernist fiction that repeatedly portrays the suicidal subject as suffering from an intersubjective contagion rather than intrasubjective anomie. Thus challenging accepted critical narratives of urban suicide as the result of psychic isolation...suggests the necessity for a more epidemiological reading of self-destruction in modernist literature, and particularly point to affect as the source of modernism's psychic contamination" (vi).

[28] Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Arguments Against It* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013), 5, 26, 151.

[29] Hecht, 5.

[30] Hecht, 225.

[31] See, http://thebestamericanpoetry.typepad.com/the_best_american_poetry/2010/01/on-suicide-by-jennifer-michael-hecht.html

[32] D.W. Winnicott, "The Value of Depression," in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, eds. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, Madeleine Davis (New York & London: WW Norton & Co., 1986), 76-77.

[33] For more on Winnicott's non-pathologizing sensitivity, see Adam Phillips, *Donald Winnicott* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 48-55.

[34] I am grateful for Drew Daniel permitting my use of his post. See Drew Daniel, "As some of you know, I'm writing a book about suicide," *Facebook*, June 8, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/dr.drew.daniel.

[35] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002) (hereafter *SW4*), 316.

[36] Sander Lewis, "Full Audio (1 hr) of Raw ATC Transmissions from Richard 'Beebo' Russell - Stolen Plane (Subtitles)," *YouTube* video, 1:04:29, Posted [August 2018]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUt-W8Fcpyw.

[37] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990) (hereafter *C1*), 149 (my emphasis).

[38] The idiom "tree lawn" is a regionalism local to Northeast Ohio. For those unfamiliar, it is that space of municipal grass, crab grass, weeds, or whatever on which people are required to set trash on trash day.

[39] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 311.

[40] Lewis.

[41] Death Grips, "On GP," 2015, track 9 on *The Powers that B*, Death Grips.

[42] The concept of the mimetic faculty permeates Benjamin's work. For the most significant discussion of the mimetic faculty, however, see: Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," and "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and

Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999) (hereafter *SW2.2*) , 694-698, 720-722. The most thorough secondary work on the mimetic faculty in Benjamin is found in Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Mistaking the Moon for a Ball," in *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 132-162. For other work on the mimetic faculty, see, Susan Buck-Morss, "Dream World of Mass Culture," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 253-286; Matthew Potolsky, "Mimesis and Culture," in *Mimesis* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 136-156; Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2014), 388-390; and Jonathan Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 4-5, 4n8, 18-19, 100-101.

[43] Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," *SW2.2*, 720.

[44] Benjamin, "On Astrology," *SW2.*2, 684.

[45] Marx, *1844*, 375.

[46] See the refrain throughout William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959).

Chapter One

[1] See, Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996).
[2] Karl Marx, *1844*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books) (hereafter *1844* and *EW*), 327.
[3] My understanding of Marx's claim here is influenced by Gregor Benton, who argues that Marx was the first to disentangle objectification and alienation. Marx, Benton argues, "saw alienation rather as an aberrant form of objectification, which in itself is neither positive nor negative, but neutral. Alienation, for Marx, arises only under specific conditions – conditions under which man's objectification of his natural powers, e.g. through work, takes on forms which bring his human *essence* into conflict with his existence." See, "Glossary of Key Terms," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 429. For the quoted passage, see Marx, *1844*, 352.
[4] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1992) (hereafter *C2*), 299.
[5] Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 487.
[6] Benton makes clear Marx's differentia between the related concepts objectification, alienation, and estrangement (*Early Writings*, 429-432). Where objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) signifies mere processes of human activity, alienation (*Entäusserung*) signifies processes of congealing labor-power in the service of the capitalist in more obvious and "aberrant" ways (429). I understand processes of alienation, on the one hand, as one effect of labor's formal subsumption under capital (see, *C1*, 1019-1023). I understand estrangement (*Entfremdung*), on the other hand, to name more strongly the effects of labor's real subsumption under capital (see *C1*, 1025).
[7] Marx, *Early Wrtings*, 430. I should also note that although estrangement presupposes a separation *from* the effect of an innocuous relation, the supersession of estrangement cannot suggest a *reuniting-with* or *return to* the effect of an innocuous relation of production. Rather, as Marx later writes, people "are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 162).
[8] Marx, *1844*, 324, 326, 329, 334.
[9] See, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Peuchet: On Suicide," in *Collected Works*, vol. 4, Marx and Engels, 1844-1845 (International Publishers, 1976), 597-612; also, Eric A. Plaut and Kevin Anderson, eds., *Marx on Suicide*, trans. Eric A. Plaut, Gabrielle Edgecomb, and Kevin Anderson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999.)
[10] For a longer description of Marx's editorial translation skills in "Peuchet: On Suicide," see Plaut and Anderson, 3-40.
[11] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 604, my italics.
[12] I am indebted to Samantha Wentling for help with this wordplay.
[13] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 605-606, 611.
[14] See, for instance, Minois, "From the French Revolution to the Twentieth Century, or, From Free Debate to Silence," in *History of Suicide* in which Minois argues "After the break of the French Revolution, the moral authorities (and even the political authorities), inflamed by a spirit of reaction and restoration, worked vigorously to return suicide to what they felt was its rightful place among acts that are forbidden and classified as counter to nature. But because those authorities were no longer able to coerce people into moral conformity, they moved repression of suicide inward, shifting it to the individual conscience. Their efforts were all the more effective when—surprisingly enough—the development of the humane sciences helped, quite involuntarily, to strengthen the individual and collective guilt complex regarding suicide" (314-315).
[15] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 603, 609, 610, 609, 604, 603.
[16] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 603.
[17] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 604.
[18] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 597.
[19] Plaut and Anderson, 30.
[20] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 598. The full passage reads, "The annual number of suicides, which is, as it were, normal and recurrent among us, must be regarded as a symptom of the faulty organisation of our society; for at times when industry is at a standstill and in crisis, in periods of dear food and hard winters, this symptom is always more conspicuous and assumes an epidemic character."
[21] So too had Durkheim, of course. For a more detailed gloss of the differences between Durkheim and Peuchet, see Plaut and Anderson, 29-40.

[22] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 610, 611.
[23] Plaut and Anderson, 10, 12. In addition, Anderson also argues that "Peuchet: On Suicide" demonstrates Marx's early interest in gender issues.
[24] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 609nb.
[25] Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," 609.
[26] Marx, *C1*, 1019-1023, 1025-1034.
[27] For more on this "irrationality," see Marx, *C2*, 113: "[An] irrationality consists in the fact that labour as the value-forming element cannot itself possess any value, and so a certain quantity of labour cannot have a value that is expressed in its price, in its equivalence with a certain definite quantity of money. We know, however, that wages are simply a disguised form, a form in which the price of a day's labour-power, for example, presents itself as the price of the labour set in motion in the course of a day by this labour-power, so that the value produced by this labour-power in six hours' labour, say, is expressed as the value of its twelve-hour functioning or labour."
[28] Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1991) (hereafter *C3*), 1011.
[29] Marx, *C1*, 1052.
[30] Marx, *C1*, 1052, 270.
[31] Marx, *1844*, 334, 327.
[32] In *1844*, Marx makes a different case for the estrangement of people from one another in terms of our "species-being" (327-330). Here I mean to emphasis the ways in which workers, compelled to sell their reified labor-power as a commodity on a "free" labor market, are forced to place themselves in opposition to one another in competition as a result of their material, economic conditions under capitalism. See for instance, Marx, *C1*, 270-272.
[33] Marx, *1844*, 285.
[34] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 88-89.
[35] Marx, *C1*, 484; see also 554.
[36] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 487.
[37] Marx, *1844*, 284, 298.
[38] Marx, *C1*, 988.
[39] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 487-488.
[40] Marx, *C1*, 1056; For more on the real subsumption of labor under capital, see *C1*, 1023-1025, 1034-1038.
[41] Marx, *C1*, 1052-1053.
[42] For more on the mystification of capital, see *C1*, 1052-1058.
[43] Marx, *C1*, 990.
[44] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 78.
[45] I am deeply indebted to Sean Lovitt for drawing my attention to this passage. See, Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, Marx and Engels, 1843-1844, (International Publishers, 1975), 182.
[46] See, for instance, Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (hereafter *HF*), 203, 526.
[47] See, Marx, *C1*, 342, 367, 415-416.
[48] Marx, *C3*, 1019-1020.
[49] Marx, *C1*, 280.
[50] Marx, *C3*, 11.
[51] Marx, *C3*, 30-31.
[52] Marx, *1844*, 342.
[53] Marx, *C3*, 20.
[54] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 182.
[55] Marx, *C3*, 339.
[56] Marx, *C3*, 342-347.
[57] Marx, *C3*, 81.
[58] Marx argues, "The *functions* fulfilled by the capitalist are no more than the functions of capital – vis. The valorization of value by absorbing living labour – executed *consciously* and *willingly*. The capitalist functions only as *personified* capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than *labour* personified." See, *C1*, 989. The ways in which the capital relation animates those it embodies is one thing, but it can never serve as an alibi for the conscious will of the capitalist.
[59] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester & Washington: 0 Books, 2009), 15.
[60] Fisher, 69-70.
[61] Fisher, 15 (my emphasis).

[62] Marx, *1844*, 326.
[63] Marx, *1844*, 342.
[64] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London & New York: Verso, 2005), 15. I am indebted to both John L. Stiger and Jonathan Flatley for helping frame this observation.
[65] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 162.
[66] Marx, *1844*, 351-352.
[67] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 102-107.
[68] See, Marx and Engels, *HF*, xvi-xix.
[69] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 687n20, 162.
[70] To be fair, here, Marx and Engels quote Szeliga as a form of critique of Szeliga's article itself. The full passage reads: "We shall not follow Herr Szeliga in his further description of Marguerite [Fleur de Marie]. We shall leave her the satisfaction, according to Herr Szeliga's prescription, of 'constituting *the most decisive* antithesis to *everyone*', a mysterious antithesis, as mysterious as the attributes of God" (168). Although rhetorically vertiginous, Marx and Engels are saying that Fleur de Marie indeed illustrates an antithesis. But rather than the antithesis that Szeliga's sees (the change in Marie's trajectory from work in a brothel to work in a convent), Marx and Engels, I argue, see a mysterious antithesis take shape in Marie's suicidal activity.
[71] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 168, 169-170.
[72] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 169nf, 168.
[73] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 168.
[74] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 169-170.
[75] Marx and Engels, *HF*, 169.
[76] Minois, *History of Suicide*, 280, 313.

Chapter Two

[1] Werner Hamacher and Kirk Wetters, "Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch "Capitalism as Religion,'" *Diacritics* 32, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2002): 97. The full passage reads, "This devastation of being in capitalism, in Capital Christianity and in all of the structures, institutions, discourses, and nondiscursive experiences affected by it, is, as Benjamin emphasizes, 'historically unprecedented and unheard of' (*das historisch Unerhörte*)."
[2] Michael W. Jennings, "Introduction," in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 12.
[3] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Works, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002) (hereafter *SW3*), 101, 107-108, 124n10. In many ways, I read the term "nature" in this essay as code for capitalism, as Benjamin's appeal to "the present conditions of production" point us directly to it. For more on Benjamin's critique of capitalism in the art essay see, Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014), 513; Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Mistaking the Moon for a Ball," in *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Thodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 129, 132-133, 139.
[4] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 367.
[5] Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *SW4*, 396.
[6] Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999) (hereafter *SW2.1*), 240.
[7] For more on Benjamin's unique style, see Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, "Introduction," in *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 3; for the quoted passage, see, 368.
[8] For more on the "now of recognizability," see, Benjamin, "Theory of Knowledge," in *SW1*, 276-277; *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), xii, 462-464, 473, 485-486, 867, 912, 917, 942.
[9] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 45.
[10] Benjamin *The Writer of Modern Life*, 10.
[11] There are, however, flashpoints, as this chapter highlights. As for secondary source material on Benjamin and suicide, most are biographical. The most helpful is Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. And although not his main focus, references to Benjamin's thesis from the "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" frame the introduction to Kevin Bell, *Ashes Taken for Fire: Aesthetic Modernism and the Critique of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1-33.
[12] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 70 (friends); 29, 683n15 (aunt); 127, 357-362, 377-379, 674-676, 5 (Benjamin's own).
[13] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 316, 314, 333-334.
[14] Benjamin, "May-June 1931," in *SW2.2*, 469-470.
[15] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 333-334.
[16] Benjamin, "Diary from August 7, 1931, to the Day of My Death," in *SW2.2*, 501.
[17] Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," in *SW2.2*, 542.
[18] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 617.
[19] This did not, however, prevent him from taking precautions. In their extensive biography, Eiland and Jennings highlight four individually addressed suicide notes and a will that Benjamin drafted in July 1932 as the situation in Germany worsened. Benjamin had neither mailed the letters, nor registered his will. See, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 378-379.
[20] Eiland and Jennings write, "In his letter of June 25 [1931] to Sholem he had raised the possibility that he would spend his birthday in Nice drinking a glass of 'festive wine' with 'a rather eccentric fellow (*skurrilen Burschen*) whose path has often crossed mine in the course of my various travels'—an unmistakable indication of the recurrence of his suicidal feelings." See, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 376-377.
[21] Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno, eds., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 395-396.
[22] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 393.
[23] Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 281.
[24] See, Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Joan Riviere (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 54-55.

[25] D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 245.
[26] Lauren Berlant, "Genre Flailing," *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*, 1, no. 2 (2018): 157.
[27] See, for instance, Berlant's own commentary on her own analysis as she writes, "Thus it is worth it for us to slow down to absorb her process of slowing down, maintaining balance," in *Cruel Optimism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), 83; for the quoted passage, see 5.
[28] Benjamin, "Diary from August 7, 1931, to the Day of My Death," in *SW2.2*, 501.
[29] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.
[30] Berlant *Cruel Optimism*, 7; For more on emergence, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-135.
[31] For more on Raymond Williams's concepts (dominant, residual, emergent, pre-emergent, and structures of feeling) see, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-135. For Berlant's concepts (crisis ordinariness, processes of emergence, and the impasse), see *Cruel Optimism*, 7, 4.
[32] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 229.
[33] Hansen's comment concerns, more specifically, Benjamin's idioms, "innervation," "the mimetic faculty," and "the optical unconscious." See, Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Mistaking the Moon for a Ball," in *Cinema and Experience*, 133.
[34] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London & New York: Verso, 1998), 175.
[35] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 230.
[36] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 289.
[37] The most thorough understanding of Benjamin's idiom is found in Hansen, "Mistaking the Moon for a Ball," in *Cinema and Experience*, 132-162. For the passage about the mimetic as a "*relational* practice," see 147 (her emphasis). For other work on the mimetic faculty, see, Susan Buck-Morss, "Dream World of Mass Culture," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 253-286; Matthew Potolsky, "Mimesis and Culture," in *Mimesis* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 136-156; Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 388-390; and Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol*, 4-5, 18-19, 100-101.
[38] Borrowing from Feuerbach, Marx's most vivid description of species-being coincides with many of Benjamin's preoccupations surrounding the mimetic faculty—our sensuously embodied relations with the world, a refusal the duality between subject and object, and, of course, historical change. In *1844*, Marx writes:

> Man as an objective sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being, and because he feels his suffering, he is a *passionate* being. Passion is man's essential power vigorously striving to attain its object.
>
> But man is not only a natural being; he is a *human* natural being; i.e. he is a being for himself and hence a *species-being*, as which he must confirm and realize himself both in his being and in his knowing. Consequently, *human* objects are not natural objects, as they immediately present themselves, nor is *human sense*, in its immediate and objective existence, *human* sensibility and human objectivity. Neither objective nor subjective nature is immediately present in a form adequate to the *human* being. And as everything natural must *come into being*, so man also has his process of origin in *history*. But for him history is a conscious process, and hence one which consciously supersedes itself. History is the true natural history of man. (391).

For further references, see, *1844*, 327-329, 351, 369, 386. For Marx's indebtedness to Feuerbach, see *Early Writings*, 431-432.
[39] Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," in *SW2.2*, 695; "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *SW2.2*, 720.
[40] Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *SW2.2*, 721.
[41] Marx, *1844*, 351.
[42] Hansen, 148.
[43] Benjamin, "On Astrology," in *SW2.2*, 684.
[44] Seldom, perhaps, do we encounter an expression that approaches avowal, as Daniel Johnston sings, "But I…live my broken dreams." See, vinceleers, "Daniel Johnston – I Live My Broken Dreams (FULL VERSION)," YouTube Video, 2:05, September 1, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICLXH8wdXhk.
[45] Benjamin, "On Astrology," in *SW2.2*, 685.
[46] Hansen, 147.
[47] Benjamin, "On Astrology," in *SW2.2*, 685.
[48] Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," in *SW2.2*, 696.
[49] Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," in *SW2.2*, 695-696.

[50] Benjamin, "The Significance of Beautiful Semblance" in *SW3*, 137 (my emphasis).
[51] I am indebted to Jonathan Flatley for pointing this out to me so clearly. See, for instance, *Like Andy Warhol*, 5n10. For Benjamin's reference to Proust, see, "On the Image of Proust," in *SW2.1*, 240-242.
[52] Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," in *SW2.2*, 735. I am indebted to Eiland and Jennings for pointing this simple, yet foundational essay out to me. See, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 513.
[53] Although Benjamin began engaging with Marxist anti-capitalist thought around 1929, I would suggest Benjamin's introduction to *Capital* was not so incidental in light of his years-long struggle to creatively respond to Adorno's criticisms found in their correspondences discussed more below. See, "Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *SW3*, 50-67; Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics* (Verso, 1980), 120-126; "Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 99-115. For Benjamin's reading of Marx in general, and *Capital*, see, Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 320, 502.
[54] For more see chapter one.
[55] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 111.
[56] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 9, 581.
[57] See, Hansen, 139: "Unlike Frankfurt School critiques of technology from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* through Habermas, Benjamin does not assume an instrumentalist trajectory from mythical cunning to capitalist-industrialist modernity."
[58] See, Theodor Adorno, "Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,'" in *SW3*, 57, 59.
[59] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, in *SW1*, 481.
[60] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 458.
[61] For more on this artform, see Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 145-147.
[62] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 107.
[63] I am focused, here, on the historical ways in which technology has functioned in the service of different groups of people. Although each acknowledge the role of capitalism in second technology, for a more *Technik*-focused account of first and second technology in Benjamin, see both Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 138-162 and Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 513-518.
[64] To be sure, what I suggest here can be found more thoroughly discussed in *C1* in terms of capitalism's tendency toward an increase in the organic composition of capital, 762-870.
[65] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art" in *SW3*, 107.
[66] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art" in *SW3*, 107-108.
[67] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 101; "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, Third Version," in *SW4*, 251-252.
[68] Marx, *C1*, 798. The full passage reads: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*."
[69] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 101, 107-108, 124n10.
[70] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 513.
[71] Of course Benjamin highlights film as his special technological focus. But we also know that his argument is not bound to film at the exclusion of other artforms, nor their technologies. See Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 108.
[72] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 124n10.
[73] Marx, *C1*, 149 (my emphasis).
[74] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 513.
[75] Hansen, 139.
[76] Benjamin, quoted in Hansen, 132. See also, Hansen, 322n1.
[77] Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *SW2.2*, 802.

[78] Benjamin, "The Significance of Beautiful Semblance," in *SW3*, 137.
[79] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 328-329; for the passage in Marx, see *C1*, 548-549.
[80] Marx, *C1*, 988.
[81] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 31.
[82] Marx, *C1*, 163. There are several vivid and playful passages (among all the others) in Marx regarding the commodity fetish. See, for example, *C1*, 163-164 (as dancing tables), 176-177 (as vocalizations), 1003-1004 (as autonomous powers endowed with a will and a soul).
[83] I mean to highlight, here, an observation in *Capital* I do not see cited often enough: "It is true that x can be changed into $x+\Delta x$ even in the absence of the capitalist process of production, but not if we *postulate* that the rival members of society confront each other as persons, that they deal with each other only as the *owners of commodities*, and that they come into contact with each other only in this capacity (this excludes slavery, etc.) And secondly, if we postulate further that the social product should be produced as a *commodity*. (This excludes all social formations in which the use-value is the main point as far as the immediate producers are concerned, and the excess produce at most is transformed into a commodity.)" See, Marx, *C1*, 976-977.
[84] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 13-14.
[85] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 14, 19.
[86] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 14.
[87] All quoted passages come from Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 17, 31, and 34.
[88] Baudelaire, cited in Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 33.
[89] Marx, *C1*, 270; See also, Marx, *C2*, 113.
[90] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 33.
[91] Marx, *C2*, 113. The full passage reads: "[An] irrationality consists in the fact that labour as the value-forming element cannot itself possess any value, and so a certain quantity of labour cannot have a value that is expressed in its price, in its equivalence with a certain definite quantity of money. We know, however, that wages are simply a disguised form, a form in which the price of a day's labour-power, for example, presents itself as the price of the labour set in motion in the course of a day by this labour-power, so that the value produced by this labour-power in six hours' labour, say, is expressed as the value of its twelve-hour functioning or labour."
[92] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 124n10.
[93] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, 513.
[94] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 124n10.
[95] Hansen, 139.
[96] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," in *SW3*, 124n10.
[97] Marx, *C1*, 990; for Marx's drafting of the appendix to *Capital*, see *C1*, 943.
[98] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 51.
[99] Benjamin, "The Knowledge That the First Material on Which the Mimetic Faculty Tested Itself," in *SW3*, 253.
[100] Benjamin, "On Astrology," in *SW2.2*, 684.
[101] Hansen, 140.
[102] Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *SW4*, 396.
[103] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 45.
[104] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 48.
[105] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 60 (my emphasis).
[106] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 48.
[107] Benjamin's work regarding the history of modern suicide is perhaps best found, as are many things, in *The Arcades Project*, especially Convolutes C, J, and a Social Movement.
[108] Minois, 315-316.
[109] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 45 (my emphasis), 46 (Benjamin's emphasis), 46.
[110] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 52.
[111] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 52.
[112] I am graciously indebted to both Wenqing Kang and Yanjiang Hu for our conversations about this greeting.
[113] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, in *SW1*, 477.

Chapter Three

[1] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two: 1920-1924*, Anne Oliver Bell, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978) (hereafter *D2*), 167.
[2] Woolf, *D2*, 167.
[3] John Keats died of consumption, misdiagnosed by his doctor, James Clark. In his final, reportedly excruciating days, Keats sought ways to obtain opium in an effort to end his insufferable illness, and of course, his life. While I can find no evidence that Woolf was aware of the circumstances of Keats' death, she nonetheless had become preoccupied with the value of thinking about death, specifically one's own, in anticipation of the publication and reception of her third novel, *Jacob's Room*. For more on Keats and his doctor, see Sue Brown, *Joseph Severn, A Life: The Rewards of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[4] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1914-1916) (hereafter "MM"), 244.
[5] Woolf, *D2*, 199.
[6] Woolf, *D2*, 207-08.
[7] Woolf, *"The Hours": The British Museum Manuscript of* Mrs. Dalloway, transcribed and ed., Helen M. Wussow (New York: Pace University Press, 2010) (hereafter *TH*), 412.
[8] Woolf, *MD*, 31, 35-36, 67, 88, 83, 88.
[9] Woolf, *MD*, 122, 98, 142.
[10] Woolf, *D2*, 248.
[11] Arthur F. Bethea, and Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis situate Woolf's novel in conversation with the changing roles of religion in twentieth-century public life. See, Arthur F. Bethea, "Septimus Smith, the War-Shattered Christ Substitute in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *The Explicator* 68, no. 4 (2010): 249-252; Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis, "Private Religion, Public Mourning, and *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Philology* 111, no. 1 (2013): 88-106. Katherine Lynn Ryan examines Woolf's work alongside crowd theory and affective contagion in the face of population increase. See, Katherine Lynn Ryan, "Modernism's Suicidal Impulse: Psychic Contamination and the Crowd" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2014.) Deborah Guth, Joseph Allen Boone, Christopher Damien Chung, Victor Brombert, and Molly Hite all approach *Mrs. Dalloway* in terms of Woolf's experimental narrative technique, spanning from mythico-literary modes (Guth), to the therapeutic value of narration (Bromert), to more opaque, experimental narration (Boone and Hite), to experimental narrative's foreclosure of meaning (Chung). See, Deborah Guth, "Rituals of Self-Deception: Clarissa Dalloway's Final Moment of Vision," *Twentieth Century Literature* 36, no. 1 (1990): 35-42; Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998; Christopher Damien Chung, "'Almost Unnamable': Suicide in the Modernist Novel" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008); Victor Brombert, "Virginia Woolf—"Death Is the Enemy," *The Hudson Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 429-444; Molly Hite, "Tonal Cues and Uncertain Values: Affect and Ethics in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Narrative* 18, no. 3 (2010): 249-275. Jean Thomson, Kaley Joyes, and Gabrielle Myers, all examine *Mrs. Dalloway* in terms of failures of modernity, namely epiphenomenal trauma, and the impossible struggle to recuperate war-fragmented psyches in the wake of World War I. See, Jean Thomson, "Virginia Woolf and the Case of Septimus Smith," *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* 23, no. 3 (2004): 55-71; Kaley Joyes, "Failed Witnessing in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 14 (2008): 69-89; Gabrielle Myers, "'Spread Like a Veil Upon a Rock': Septimus and the Trench Poets of World War I," *English* 60, no. 230 (2011): 212-228. And finally, Peter Knox-Shaw, Christine Froula, Yelena Furman, and Kathryn Van Wert all also study Woolf in terms of post-war trauma, yet in a reparative way. Rather than highlighting the impossibility of recuperation in the face of failures and losses, each of these scholars approach *Mrs. Dalloway* in ways that illuminate the pedagogical value of Woolf's work. Knox-Shaw's archival work examines post-World War I British legal proceedings concerning shell-shocked veterans, pin-pointing the ways in which Woolf's reader must approach Septimus Warren Smith from a more critical, sympathetic position. Froula approaches *Mrs. Dalloway* as a communal post-war elegy for a traumatized Europe, calling attention to the ways in which Woolf asks her readers to imagine a better future after the war. Furman details the historical and literary influence of Fyodor Dostoevsky in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, putting in conversation intertextual relationships between Dostoevsky's Nikolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin and Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith. And Van Wert's meticulously-researched archival work scours through early drafts of Woolf's *"The Hours": The British Museum Manuscript of* Mrs. Dalloway and draws out the ways in which Woolf's early characterization of Septimus offered a much more detailed back-story than the shell-shocked veteran of *Mrs. Dalloway*, complicating the status of Woolf's novel as a post-war elegy, and opening a space to re-imagine Woolf's preoccupations at the time. See, Peter Knox-

Shaw, "The Otherness of Septimus Warren Smith," *The Durham University Journal* 87, no. 1 (1995): 99-110; Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Yelena Furman, "Translating Dostoevskii, Writing a Novel of One's Own: The Place of 'Stavrogin's Confession' in the Creation of *Mrs. Dalloway*," *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 4 (2009): 1081-1097; Kathryn Van Wert, "The Early Life of Septimus Smith," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 71-89.

[12] Woolf, *D2*, 178.

[13] Woolf, *D2*, 199.

[14] Woolf, *D2*, 248.

[15] Woolf, *D2*, 209.

[16] Woolf, *D2*, 248.

[17] For the most thorough examination of the ways in which both Clarissa and Septimus' same-sex sexuality materialize throughout the novel, see, Julie Abraham, "Virginia Woolf and the Sexual Histories of Literature," in *Are Girls Necessary?: Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York & London: Routledge, 1996). Yet while Clarissa and Septimus' same-sex preoccupations no doubt play a significant role within the development of *Mrs. Dalloway*, this chapter's focus privileges what I argue is a more totalizing preoccupation, namely the affective value of thinking about death and suicide, no doubt influenced by, among other things, same-sex desire.

[18] Woolf, *MD*, 32.

[19] Woolf, *TH*, 425.

[20] Woolf, *TH*, 425.

[21] Woolf, *TH*, 412.

[22] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) (hereafter *OG*), 163-164.

[23] Derrida, *OG*, 143, 163.

[24] Woolf, *MD*, 28.

[25] Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, revised edition, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) (hereafter *MPdM*), 21.

[26] Woolf, *MD*, 25, 140 (my emphasis).

[27] Woolf, *MD*, 86, 70 (my emphasis).

[28] Woolf, *MD*, 152.

[29] Woolf, *MD*, 9.

[30] Woolf, *MD*, 86.

[31] Woolf, *MD*, 87.

[32] Woolf, *MD*, 92.

[33] Derrida, *MPdM*, 33.

[34] Woolf, *MD*, 16.

[35] Woolf, *MD*, 183.

[36] Woolf, *MD*, 25, 70.

[37] Freud, "MM," 245.

[38] Woolf, *MD*, 86.

[39] Woolf, *TH*, 417.

[40] Woolf, *MD*, 86.

[41] Freud, "MM," 249.

[42] Freud, "The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego Ideal)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1923-1925), 29. Both Judith Butler and Jonathan Flatley examine the history of Freud's theorizations along these lines, specifically the possibility of ego-formation as conditioned by loss. Butler observes, "melancholia refuses to acknowledge loss, and in this sense 'preserves' its lost objects as psychic effects." "Considered closely," Butler argues, Freud makes clear "that there can be no ego without melancholia, that the ego's loss is constitutive." Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*: *Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 182, 171. Flatley also examines Freud's work, arguing that Freud placed "the melancholic mechanism at the very origin of subject formation," that the ego is "constituted by…losses" and "contains, like an archive or archeological site," the history of lost objects such that "our losses become us." Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 49. Although de Man and Derrida did not write explicitly of psychoanalytic theorizations of melancholia, their theorizations about death and subjectivity evoked these psychoanalytic theories of ego-formation, as Derrida suggested of mourning: "[The work of mourning] entails

a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them" (*MPdM* 34).
[43] Freud, "MM," 251-52.
[44] Freud, "MM," 244.
[45] Freud, "MM," 252.
[46] Woolf, *MD*, 16.
[47] See André Breton's response in "Is Suicide a Solution?," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 2, (1925).
[48] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 107.
[49] Woolf, *D2*, 272.
[50] Woolf, *TH*, 60-62.
[51] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 104-05.
[52] Woolf, *TH*, 419.
[53] Woolf, *TH*, 420.
[54] Woolf, *D2*, 203 (my emphasis).
[55] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 48.
[56] Woolf, *TH*, 425.
[57] Hite, 252.
[58] Woolf, *MD*, 9.
[59] Woolf, *MD*, 84.
[60] Woolf, *TH*, 420 (my emphasis).
[61] Woolf, *D2*, 203.
[62] Woolf, *D2*, 265.
[63] Woolf, *TH*, 411.
[64] Woolf, *TH*, 423, 412.
[65] Woolf, *TH*, 412.
[66] Woolf, *TH*, 416.
[67] Woolf, *TH*, 420.
[68] Woolf, *TH*, 419.
[69] Woolf, *MD*, 56.
[70] Woolf, *MD*, 68-69.
[71] I am deeply indebted to the wording of Judith Butler's similar claim in *The Psychic Life of Power*. "For the melancholic, breaking the attachment constitutes a second loss of the object" (192).
[72] While Molly Hoff suggests Woolf's "ode" alludes to Milton's, we can see the ways in which Woolf's focus on time also privileges Freud's with regard to mourning. Yet I am indebted to Huff's connection between Woolf's appeal to Thessaly and the historical significance of Thessaly with regard to mourning. For more, see Molly Huff, *Virginia Woolf's* Mrs. Dalloway: *Invisible Presences* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2009), 116; for Freud, see "MM," 252.
[73] Woolf, *MD*, 69-70.
[74] Woolf, *MD*, 139.
[75] Woolf, *MD*, 140.
[76] See chapters one through three of part one, division one of Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65-148.
[77] Woolf, *MD*, 15, 139.
[78] Woolf, *MD*, 142.
[79] Donald Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975 [1945]), 153.
[80] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 127. Although it is unreasonable to offer every instance of Winnicott's preference for affect over cognition and metaphysics, for some key passages, see Winnicott, "Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites" and Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self," in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1965 [1960]) from which the above and following passages originate: "I suggest that an important basis for ego development lies in this area of the individual's communicating with subjective phenomena, which alone gives the *feeling* of real" (188 my emphasis); "The infant's ego is building up strength and in consequence is getting towards a state in which id-demands will be *felt* as part of the self, and not as environmental" (141 my emphasis); "The best example I can give is that of a middle-aged woman who…had the *feeling* all her life that she had not started to exist, and that she

had always been looking for a means of getting to her True Self" (142 my emphasis); "When I had said that I recognized his non-existence he *felt* that he had been communicated with for the first time" (151). Also, Winnicott, *The Location of Cultural Experience*," in *Playing and Reality* (London & New York: Routledge Classics: 1971 [1967]) in which Winnicott wrote: "We now see that it is not instinctual satisfaction that makes a baby begin to be, *to feel* that life is real, to find life worth living" (133 my emphasis); "The potential space happens only *in relation to a feeling of confidence* on the part of the baby, that is, confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected" (135 Winnicott's emphasis).

[81] Woolf, *MD*, 142-143.
[82] Woolf, *MD*, 143.
[83] Woolf, *MD*, 144.
[84] Derrida, *MPdM*, 39.
[85] Derrida, *MPdM*, 38.
[86] Freud, "MM," 245.
[87] Freud, "MM," 255.
[88] Freud, "MM," 245.
[89] Derrida, *MPdM*, 38; de Man, cited in *MPdM*, 24-25.
[90] Derrida, *MPdM*, 38, 34.
[91] Derrida, *MPdM*, 24.
[92] Derrida, *MPdM*, 28.
[93] Woolf, *TH*, 23.
[94] Derrida, *MPdM*, 25.
[95] Derrida, *MPdM*, 24.
[96] Derrida, *MPdM*, 21.
[97] Allison Bechdel, *Funhome: A Family Tragicomic* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2007), 80.
[98] Derrida, *MPdM*, 19-20.
[99] Derrida, *MPdM*, 39.
[100] Derrida, *MPdM*, 129.
[101] Derrida, *MPdM*, 32.
[102] Derrida*, MPdM*, 132 (my emphasis).
[103] Woolf, *MD*, 153.
[104] Knox-Shaw, 106.
[105] Woolf, *TH*, 412.
[106] Woolf, *MD*, 9.
[107] Derrida, *MPdM*, 28.
[108] Woolf, *MD*, 10.
[109] Woolf, *MD*, 35, 184.
[110] Woolf, *TH*, 415, 412.
[111] Woolf, *MD*, 152-153.
[112] I am indebted to both Fredric Jameson and Jonathan Flatley for this claim. For more on modernity, modernization, and modernism, see Jameson *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Flatley, *Affective Mapping*.
[113] Woolf, *TH*, 415.
[114] Woolf, *MD*, 48.
[115] Woolf, *MD*, 121.
[116] Woolf, *MD*, 121 (my emphasis).
[117] Woolf, *MD*, 122.
[118] Woolf, *MD*, 122.
[119] Woolf, *MD*, 142.
[120] Minois, *History of Suicide*, 280, 286.
[121] Woolf, *MD*, 185 (my emphasis).
[122] Woolf, *MD*, 183-184.
[123] Woolf, *MD*, 186.
[124] Woolf, *MD*, 186.

[125] Woolf, *MD*, 186.
[126] Foucault, quoted in and translated by Thomas Osborne, "'Fascinated Dispossession': Suicide and the Aesthetics of Freedom," *Economy and Society* 34, no. 2 (May 2005): 284.
[127] Woolf, *TH*, 411.
[128] J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973) (hereafter *LPA*), 281; While Laplanche and Pontalis discuss the distinctions between 'phantasie' (German) and 'fantasme' (French) that influence the distinction between phantasy and fantasy in English, I use the English term fantasy for convenience.
[129] Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49, no. 1 (1968): 17.
[130] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analsysis*, 284.
[131] Albeit not the focus of this chapter, we can also see the ways in which other characters' desires take shape as well; Peter Walsh's involvements, for instance index his desire for Clarissa, or for some clumsy solicitude with women in general; Doris Kilman's attachments toward Elizabeth reveals a host of anxieties and desires about class and sexuality; and also, Lady Burton, Dr. Holmes and Sir Bradshaw's actions throughout the novel reveal their shared desire for power, be it personal, professional, or political. While the novel's ancillary characters do not so vividly engage with fantasy in particular, nonetheless, *Mrs. Dalloway* stages a rehearsal whose diegesis piques our curiosities about the potential affirmation and fulfillment of its characters' individual and sometimes shared desires.
[132] Woolf, *D2*, 272.
[133] Woolf, *TH*, 415.
[134] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 284.
[135] Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011), 204n.
[136] Woolf, *MD*, 76 (my emphasis).
[137] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 204n.
[138] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 102.
[139] Woolf, *MD*, 17.
[140] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 183 (my emphasis).
[141] Woolf, *MD*, 16, 21.
[142] Woolf, *MD*, 25.
[143] Woolf, *MD*, 26.
[144] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 136.
[145] Woolf, *MD*, 92.
[146] Woolf, *MD*, 93 (my emphasis).
[147] Woolf, *MD*, 83.
[148] Woolf, *MD*, 88.
[149] Woolf, *MD*, 86.
[150] Woolf, *MD*, 86.
[151] Woolf, *MD*, 23.
[152] Woolf, *MD*, 94, 96.
[153] Woolf, *MD*, 96.
[154] Woolf, *MD*, 96.
[155] Woolf, *MD*, 22, 58, 99.
[156] Woolf, *MD*, 94.
[157] Woolf, *MD*, 96.
[158] Knox-Shaw, 99-100.
[159] Woolf, *MD*, 149.
[160] Woolf, *MD*, 93, 3.
[161] Woolf, *MD*, 121.
[162] Woolf, *D2*, 283n.
[163] Knox-Shaw, 101-102.
[164] Woolf, *MD*, 91, 34.
[165] In addition to Julie Abraham's brilliant work, cited above, for more on the history of same-sex sexual desire, see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), and Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual*

Metropolis, 1918-1957 (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). For the quoted passage, see *MD*, 66.
[166] Woolf, *MD*, 32.
[167] Marx, *C1*, 1024.
[168] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 140-141.
[169] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 277.
[170] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311.
[171] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 277.
[172] Woolf, *MD*, 194.

Chapter Four

[1] James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage International, 1993 [1962]) (hereafter *AC*), 11, 17, 70, 20.
[2] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), 6.
[3] Baldwin, *AC*, 21, 46 (my emphasis), 3, 66, 5.
[4] Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 11. For more on fugitivity, see, Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (University of Iowa Press, 2018), 181-198; Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177-218.
[5] Moten, *In the Break*, 14.
[6] Baldwin, *AC*, 3, 41 (my emphasis), 54.
[7] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *SW4*, 316.
[8] Virginia Jackson, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (April 12, 2015), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/function-criticism-present-time/#!.
[9] Baldwin, *AC*, 121.
[10] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: The Library of America, 1998) (hereafter *CE*), 11.
[11] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *CE*, 18.
[12] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *CE*, 12, 13.
[13] Marx, *1844*, 327.
[14] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 147.
[15] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 252.
[16] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 247, 253.
[17] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 251.
[18] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 251, 266.
[19] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 248, 267.
[20] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE,* 266-267.
[21] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 267.
[22] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *CE* 13.
[23] The trick, then, for Hardt, is to find ways of "discovering the means" of privileging those affective experiences that are helpful while forestalling or precluding those that harm us. See, Michael Hardt, "The Power to be Affected," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 3 (2015): 215-216.
[24] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 267.
[25] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 12.
[26] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 268.
[27] Baldwin, *AC*, 275, 142 (my emphasis), 216 (my emphasis), 109-110 (my emphasis).
[28] Critics have approached the question of *Another Country*'s seeking-after form in a variety of ways. Set apart from more comparative works that discuss Baldwin's influences (See, Theodore L Gross, "The Idealism of Negro Literature in America," *Phylon* 30, no. 1 (1969): 5-10; Maria R. Bloshteyn, "Rage and Revolt: Dostoevsky and Three African-American Writers," *Comparative Literature Studies* 38, no 4 (2001): 277-309), scholarship on *Another Country* tends towards several predominant varieties that circulate around the extent to which we see productive changes within the lives of its characters. Some critics tend, on the one side, to read a gesture toward some promise or achievement of some subjectivity capable of transcending sexual, racial, or national identity either within the textual world of the novel itself (See, Michael F. Lynch, "Beyond Guilt and Innocence: Redemptive Suffering and Love in Baldwin's *Another Country*" *Obsidian II* 7, no. 1-2 (1992); Ernesto Javier Martínez, "Dying to Know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin's *Another Country*" *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (2009): 782-797), or within the broader, extra-textual world of the its publication (See, Sarah Beebe Fryer, "Retreat from Experience: Despair and Suicide in James Baldwin's Novels," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 19, no. 1 (1986): 21-28). On the other side, however, some critics highlight the privileged status of struggle, blockage, and foreclosure in *Another Country* that emphasizes the impossibility for the transcendence of the subject. And again, we find arguments whose stakes either remain within the world of the text (See, Kevin Ohi, "'I'm not the Boy You Want': Sexuality, 'Race,' and Thwarted Revelation in Baldwin's *Another Country*," *African American Review* 33, no. 2 (1999): 261-281; Amy Reddinger, "'Just Enough for the City': Limitations of Space in Baldwin's *Another Country*," *African American Review* 43, no. 1 (2009): 117-130), or extend out into and concern our broader material

world (See, Robert Scott, "Rhetoric, Black Power, and Baldwin's 'Another Country,'" *Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 1 (1970): 21-34; Stefanie Dunning, "Parallel Perversions: Interracial and Same Sexuality in James Baldwin's *Another Country*," *MELUS* 26, no. 4 (2001); Katy Ryan, "Falling in Public: Larsen's *Passing*, McCarthy's *The Group*, and Baldwin's *Another Country*," *Studies in the Novel* 36, no. 1 (2004): 95-119; Keith Mitchell, "Locating the South and Jim Crow Violence in James Baldwin's *Another Country* and William Gardner Smith's *The Last of the Conquerors*," *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 9, no. 2 (2008): 26-42). While circulating primarily around the novel's other characters, their own struggles, and their (im)possibilities, the lion's share of scholarship on *Another Country* reads Rufus as either a figure for some grand sacrifice, or for an absolute foreclosure of possibility. My scholarship is different.

[29] Ohi, 271. Kevin Ohi persuasively examines the ways in which the novel's characters struggle to mourn Rufus' suicide, "looking for the secret locked in his heart and sealed away in his death," a secret neither they, nor Ohi, I argue, can identify (275). For Ohi, this unavowable secret is "nowhere specified," but rather assumes a purely structural function within the novel, "one which gives the characters, like the novel itself, their coherence, and marks their unutterable sadness" (264). Which is to say, Ohi, borrowing from Abraham and Torok, reads Rufus' traumatic suicide and its function throughout the novel as a "figure of the crypt," a melancholically incorporated temporalization whose experience remains unspeakable, unavowable for its other characters (278). Rather than witness some extravagant "unveiling of a self" that Ohi correctly criticizes within the broader academic work on Baldwin, he argues that readers encounter "only [a] process of unveiling" "the lack at the center of all subjectivity" which, by and large, is persuasive (279, 280). As readers proceed throughout the novel, we encounter Cass and Richard's struggle to navigate viable ways in which to maintain their heteropatriarchical marriage, Vivaldo and Ida's struggle to navigate viable ways to maintain their interracial arrangement, and Eric and Yves' struggle to navigate what for Eric amounts to his inability to "decide" how he wants to sexually navigate his immanent reunion with Yves by the close of the novel. Along the way, nowhere do readers encounter an "unveiling of a self" capable of navigating its way out of what becomes for each character a shared position within their collective impasse. The gesture monumentalized within the novel's title, Ohi argues, thus gestures "not" toward some "utopia to which we can escape to freedom," but rather functions as a play on the "sustaining illusion that such an impossible utopia might be possible." Rather than to a place of reconciliation, Ohi argues that Baldwin directs us to a place of mourning, the place of "the crypt within and without the text" that we should look for Baldwin's social critique (280). I imagine my argument as a rejoinder to Ohi's that emphasizes the ways in which violence and trauma pervade the novel's action.

[30] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10; For more on the ordinariness of affective life, see Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2005) and *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2012); Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012); Ann Cvetkovich *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012).

[31] See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).

[32] Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza," (lecture, Vinvennes, January 24, 1978), available at Les Cours De Gilles Deleuze, http://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/14.

[33] Baldwin, *AC*, 6.

[34] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 81-82.

[35] Baldwin, *AC*, 6-7.

[36] Baldwin, *AC*, 66.

[37] Baldwin, *AC*, 6, 8, 5.

[38] Baldwin, *AC*, 8.

[39] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 189).

[40] Baldwin, *AC*, 8.

[41] Baldwin, *AC*, 8.

[42] Jared Sexton, "The Social life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," In*Tensions Journal*, no. 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 28.

[43] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 281.

[44] Baldwin, *AC*, 10-11.

[45] Baldwin, *AC*, 27-28.

[46] Baldwin, *AC*, 60, 59, 53.

[47] Baldwin, *AC*, 66.

[48] Baldwin, *AC*, 29.
[49] Baldwin, *AC*, 67.
[50] Baldwin, *AC*, 78.
[51] Baldwin, *AC*, 54.
[52] Cvetkovich, 13.
[53] Baldwin, *AC*, 6, 70-71.
[54] Baldwin, *AC*, 73, 78, 73 (my emphasis), 82 (my emphasis), 75.
[55] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.
[56] Marx, *1844*, 351-352.
[57] Baldwin, *AC*, 84 (my emphasis).
[58] Baldwin, *AC*, 84.
[59] Baldwin, *AC* , 85.
[60] Baldwin, *AC*, 67.
[61] Baldwin, *AC*, 86.
[62] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 104-105.
[63] Baldwin, *AC*, 87.
[64] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 188.
[65] Baldwin, *AC*, 112.
[66] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 211; Quoted passage from Marx, 214. For original, see Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.
[67] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 212.
[68] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *CE*, 267.

Coda

[1] "Is Suicide a Solution," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 2, (1925).
[2] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 161-162.
[3] Hansen, 140.

ABSTRACT

UNDER THE SIGN OF SUICIDE

by

THEODORE EMMANUEL PRASSINOS

DECEMBER 2019

Advisor: Dr. Jonathan Flatley

Major: English

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

"Under the Sign of Suicide," examines modernist writers' intense and sustained preoccupation with and representations of suicide. Beyond numerous essays on the topic, we also find many fictional characters such as Fyodor Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov and Kirilov both taken by gunshot, Stavrogin and Smerdyakov both by hanging. We also find Franz Kafka's George Bendemann who takes his life by drowning, and Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith by impaling, Her character, Rhoda, dies off a cliff. In American literature, we find Edna Pontellier, Quentin Compson, Clare Kendry, Semour Glass, Teddy McArdle, Willy Loman, Tod Clifton, and on and on. This list is surely not exhaustive. And yet while at first glance modernism's preoccupation with suicide may appear disturbing, distasteful, or at worst, morbid, my dissertation wagers a surprisingly counter-intuitive gesture. I argue that representations of suicide in modernist literature (specifically works by Walter Benjamin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Virginia Woolf, and James Baldwin) function not in terms of some pathological exhibitionism, or perhaps worse, as some stigma-prone practice about which we must remain silent. Rather, I argue that by reading a little more closely and by paying attention to the varied yet subtle conditions of suicide's possibility that we may understand that suicide functions in modernist writing in two related

ways: first, as a critique of our modern world, and secondly, as a way to imagine how we could begin to repair our broken relation to this world. “Under the Sign of Suicide” inhabits the liveliness of suicidal activity in an effort to highlight the ways in which its liveliness reveals an avowal of our condition of estrangement under capitalist modernity, on the one hand, and on the other, the ways in which suicidal activity—as a mode of being modern—amplifies our ability to imagine new modes and forms of social reproduction. Which is to say, modernist representations of suicide invite readers to imagine how our world needs to change. In short, rather than perpetuate various stigmas of silence surrounding suicide and suicidal behavior, my dissertation addresses the question, what might happen when we listen to suicidal voices?

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Prior to entering the PhD program in the Department of English at Wayne State University in 2012, I received my BA (2009) and MA (2010) in History at Cleveland State University. This dissertation is the product of lifelong flirtations with suicide and suicidality set in motion most vividly in the Spring of 1996, encounters which have continued to inform, shape, and propel my broader interests in knowledge, power, and alternate, better, forms of solicitude.