Felt Spaces: Affective Communities in Late Twentieth- and Early Twenty-First-Century American Culture

by Peyton Meigs Joyce

BA in English, August 2003, George Mason University
MA in English, August 2009, Georgetown University

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Robert McRuer
Professor of English

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Peyton Meigs Joyce

Dissertation Research Committee:

Robert McRuer, Professor of English, Dissertation Director

Kavita Daiya, Associate Professor of English, Committee Member

Gayle Wald, Professor of English, Committee Member

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Abstract of Dissertation

Felt Spaces: Affective Communities in Late Twentieth- and Early Twenty-First-Century American Culture

Felt Spaces investigates marginal communities across a range of spaces and subjectivities that exist beyond the bounds of narratives of normalcy or progress. These communities, among them maquiladora workers on the Juárez-El Paso border, crystal meth users in rural Missouri, homeless men in New York City, and genderqueer punks in San Francisco, each fail to (and, at times, refuse to) participate in the normative demands of neoliberal capitalism, under which social, political, and economic forces resonate in the affective experience of everyday life. I mean affect to refer to the interplay of these forces through and between bodies but also, following Raymond Williams, the interplay of forces between bodies and the structures organizing contemporary existence. In conversation with recent works of queer theory and disability studies that expose alternative ways of being that challenge the constant call for normalcy, I argue that through the circulation of affective contact—represented in the texts themselves and also transmitted to their respective audiences—the works examined in this dissertation reveal the connections between seemingly confined narratives of economic dispossession and transnational capitalism. At times *Felt Spaces* traces the affective dimensions of how these groups are marginalized and raises questions of who is included in mainstream society and culture (and who is not), but more important, the chapters explore the alternative spaces and practices that these communities make for themselves within US culture and argue that these alternative felt spaces created through resistant practices of care, sustenance, and even joy offer openings into a more revolutionary community of resistance. In refusing to be bound by the lens of a specific community, my project complements current scholarship by drawing attention to affect as a source of potential community across

identities. My analysis attends to the commonalities these specific local experiences of the economic present bring to light and asks to what extent these critical affective relationships open—or mark the limits of—a space for ethics or justice.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract of Dissertation	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Wavering Smiles, Open Wounds, and the Ghosts That Haunt the Borderlands: Transnationalism and the All-Affected	14
Chapter 2: Uneasy Encounters with Dis-Integrated Bodies: Drug Users and Drug Economies in *Half Nelson* and *Winter's Bone*	55
Chapter 3: Let the Mad Man Play: Virtuosity, Affective Exchange, and Labor in Two Movements	94
Chapter 4: You Is Just Vibrations: Punk Practices of (De)control	134
Chapter 5: Counterattacks in a Spatial War: The Potential and the Limits of Squatting as a Communal Practice of Resistance	178
Conclusion: Framing Justice for the Multitude	217
Works Cited	232

Introduction

This dissertation examines the affective dimensions of a number of locales within the contemporary United States, uncovering the limits and potential of what I'm calling felt spaces. To distinguish a specific location as a felt space is perhaps unnecessary and may even seem tautological. All spaces are felt, through both a body's physical engagement with the material environment and the wider social and cultural resonances of the space itself, however it's defined: how a space makes you feel, what you feel about that feeling, and, ultimately, what you do with these feelings. The felt space of the United States has been hanging over my head the entire time I've been working on this project—figuratively, as the country has slipped from the increasingly uninspiring (but at least stable) neoliberalism of the Obama administration to the current Trump administration, in which everything feels uncertain, but also, quite literally, in a large woodcut print that sits on my mantle. Titled *America the Beautiful*, the print depicts a map of the United States. As a focal point in the room, the piece perhaps alludes to a nationalism that is not precisely felt—something my wife and I thought about before buying the work, as neither of us are given to patriotic displays. However, when we saw *America the Beautiful* at a craft fair in our old Washington, DC, neighborhood of Adams Morgan, we were struck by the detailed craftsmanship and the stark graphic impression the black-and-white test print made on us.

Until very recently, I hadn't given too much thought to the work. (It's sometimes difficult, after all, to critically engage with the things that have become incorporated into our everyday lives.) However, as a stared aimlessly at it from the couch while trying to finish this dissertation, it became clear that the print illustrates some of the tensions that this dissertation investigates. *America the Beautiful* is a product of a specific moment in US history. Meticulously hand-carved by Valerie Lueth and Paul Roden, the detailed print imagines what

its creators call "a topographical United States with no visible state boundaries." The overall effect is a unified national space marked by "select cities, notable landmarks [and] monuments, and regional geographic characteristics" ("America the Beautiful"). This positive national space is precisely the point. *America the Beautiful* was created for the Manifest Hope: DC gallery show held during President Obama's inauguration weekend, which recognized "artists who use their voices to amplify and motivate the grassroots movement that carried President-Elect Barack Obama to victory" ("Manifest Hope: DC"). As the artwork's descriptive materials explain, the piece attempts "to capture a positive, upbeat spirit of America." In this sense, it is an attempt to represent the United States as a felt space of the optimism circulating during this moment. Its artists suggest that the print "reads as a simultaneous narrative" of a version of American history "that speak[s] to our growth as adaptable, pioneering people." Of course, this pioneering spirit—represented through colonial sailing ships, log cabins, and what the descriptive materials breathlessly name "The railroad! Covered wagons!"—disguises as progress the violence of US imperialism, further emphasized by the depictions of major US cities, skyscrapers and monuments emerging from what is otherwise a veneration of the natural landscape. Although there are no people depicted in the print, there are also no representations of Native American life (save perhaps an igloo squeezed into the very top corner of Alaska), nor are there references to anything that might be construed as part of the wider racial history of the United States. It's unfair perhaps to criticize a self-described positive work of art for failing to address some of the nation's gravest sins. However, these erasures are notable for what they say about the ways that a positive national affect is constructed through exclusion.

As *America the Beautiful* demonstrates, the space of the nation itself inscribes and demands a national mood. Jonathan Flatley, following Heidegger, defines mood as "a kind

of affective atmosphere . . . in which intentions are formed, projects pursued, and particular affects can attach to particular objects" (19). "Our mood," he argues, "creates the world in which we exist at any given moment" (19). Raymond Williams calls this a structure of feeling, emphasizing "social experiences that are still in process" (132). Similarly, Lauren Berlant has focused extensively on what she calls "national sentimentality," a project under which "complex political conditions are reduced or refined into the discourses of dignity and of the authority of feeling" (*The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* 100). This affective public shares something of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" of the nation, in which, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each [individual nation], the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

Felt Spaces: Affective Communities in Late 20th and Early 21st Century American Culture begins from the recognition that this national affective space is produced in part through and by neoliberalism, the ideology that organizes much of economic, social, and cultural life in the US and elsewhere throughout the world. Throughout these chapters, I refer to neoliberalism as the dominant mode through which to understand a normative national subjectivity, a framework that Lisa Duggan reminds us hinges on "privatization and personal responsibility" (12). David Harvey explains that as an economic ideology, neoliberalism is "redistributive rather than generative," transferring wealth from the population at large to the upper class—what's become known as the one percent (34). Nationally, this has meant public social programs and services dismantled in favor of private vendors, regulations overturned in favor of corporate profits, public lands opened to private development, and workers' rights and job security subsumed by right to work laws and outsourcing, while globally, "Western financial and commercial interests [have been expanded] through the heavy-handed policies of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) . . ." (Giroux 6). As Duggan explains, this ideology has come to define everyday life through "the privatization of the costs of social reproduction, along with the care of human dependency needs, through personal responsibility exercised in the family and in civil society—thus shifting costs from state agencies to individuals and households" (14).

The other insidious aspect of neoliberalism, as Duggan and a number of other critics, including Sara Ahmed, Jasbir Puar, Robert McRuer, and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, have pointed out, is in the way it "organizes material and political life *in terms of* race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion" even as "the categories through which . . . neoliberalism classif[y] human activity and relationships *actively obscure* the connections among these organizing terms" (Duggan 3). In fact, "so pervasive has neoliberalism become," George Monbiot writes, "that we seldom even recognise it as an ideology." This dissertation is aligned with texts like Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*, McRuer's *Crip Theory*, and Mitchell's *The Biopolitics of Disability* that demonstrate how the neoliberal state incorporates certain difference in the name of multiculturalism while marking others as outside the pale of normative society as well as these texts' emphasis on the (perhaps limited) potential of these marginal(ized) communities to explore alternatives to the constrained conditions of everyday life under a neoliberal regime.

Felt Spaces investigates marginal communities across a range of spaces and subjectivities that exist beyond the bounds of narratives of normalcy or progress imagined in works like *America the Beautiful*. These communities, among them maquiladora workers on the Juárez-El Paso border, crystal meth users in rural Missouri, homeless men in New York City, and genderqueer punks in San Francisco, each fail to (and, at times, refuse to)

participate in the normative demands of neoliberal capitalism, under which social, political, and economic forces resonate in the affective experience of everyday life. I mean affect to refer to the interplay of these forces through and between bodies but also, following Raymond Williams, the interplay of forces between bodies and the structures organizing contemporary existence. In conversation with recent works of queer theory and disability studies that expose alternative ways of being that challenge the constant call for normalcy, I argue that through the circulation of affective contact—represented in the texts themselves and also transmitted to their respective audiences—the works examined in this dissertation reveal the connections between seemingly confined narratives of economic dispossession and transnational capitalism. At times *Felt Spaces* traces the affective dimensions of how these groups are marginalized and raises questions of who is included in mainstream society and culture (and who is not), but more importantly, the chapters explore the alternative spaces and practices that these communities make for themselves within US culture and argue that these alternative felt spaces created through resistant practices of care, sustenance, and even joy offer openings into a more revolutionary community of resistance. In refusing to be bound by the lens of a specific community, my project complements current scholarship by drawing attention to affect as a source of potential community across identities. My analysis attends to the commonalities these specific local experiences of the economic present bring to light and asks to what extent these critical affective relationships open—or mark the limits of—a space for ethics or justice.

In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg note, "There is no single, generalizable theory of affect; not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be" (3). Although affect theory has been applied to various theoretical modes from psychoanalysis to the genetic manipulation of biotechnology, for the purposes of this

project, I take as my focus contemporary affect theory that can be perhaps too neatly and generally divided into a discursive model and an embodied model. The discursive mode of affect theory originates largely in feminist and queer readings that consider the ways that emotions like happiness and shame circulate through public culture (and perhaps what alternative spaces of world making these feelings make available). Contrastingly, embodied theories of affect, derived from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's interpretation of Baruch Spinoza, focus on the experience of affect as intensity as registered (or not) across and throughout the body. The virtual body, Massumi notes, "is a realm of potential . . . [where] what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained" (30). Or as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put it more simply, "Affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking" (*Multitude* 108). The distinction between affect as emotion and affect as intensity is not so much a division as it is the result of differing theoretical lineages, and these modes can be productively put in conversation. Emotion is, as Brian Massumi has pointed out, nothing more than "the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience" (28) and "the capture and closure of affect" (35).

The difficulty of any project undertaking an affective analysis is how to talk about feelings while negotiating the distinctions between intensity and emotion. A brief examination of parallel inquiries into the affective response of a media consumer is instructive. In *Untimely Bollywood*, Amit Rai uses Deleuzo-Guattarian theory to examine the sensorial experiences of what he calls the "media assemblage." The media assemblage, Rai argues, "is a sensation machine, which taps directly and without mediation into the body's affects serially across specific media, entering into the synaptic arrangements of our

proprioreception, becoming self-causing, and in ways independent of the medium itself" (216). Although, as Rai, like Massumi points out, the affective experience of the media assemblage is in part virtual, and thus unrecognized, he emphasizes that media assemblages are "partly actualized events" that "articulate bodily dispositions and sensorial, thus linking populations across the fluxes of races, classes, genders, and sexualities" (216). That is to say, while the affective experience of the media assemblage might "happen before conscious experience," its "effects are nonetheless real in that potential tendencies can be actualized and can refunction the materialities and vectors of [a] field" (218).

Lisa Cartwright comes at the sensorial experience of media from a different yet complementary perspective. In her analysis of audience responses to film, Cartwright unpacks what she calls "moral spectatorship," an affective process in which a viewer makes an empathetic identification with the characters in a film (discussed in detail in chapter 1). Moral spectatorship is not simply a transfer of on-screen affects to the viewer. Rather, as Cartwright explains, the experience "comes from the force of the object ('you,' the image, the representation), and [the viewer's] reciprocal sense *that I recognize the feeling I perceive in your expression*" (24; author's emphasis)." While for Cartwright, moral spectatorship is ultimately a discursive argument about the ways that works "elicit moral responses" from an audience that include "a sense of responsibility for an other" (4), it begins in an embodied affective experience ("the force of the object"). Both Rai and Cartwright describe how affective intensities that begin in the virtual can create material effects, in part, as Cartwright explains, through their capture as emotional states. And of course, emotion is useful as a shorthand for discussing the work that indefinable intensities do and the ways that they make meaning, even if, as Rai makes clear, the capture of emotion is only ever partial, never fully containing the affective intensities at play or exhausting the potential of the experience. (As Massumi

points out, in this discursive closure, "something has always and again escaped. Something remains unactualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective" (35).) The affective body is then at once the virtual affective experiences of shifting intensities as well as the individual and social body cognizant of specific feelings and affective states. I argue that the affective resonance of an emotion (its uncaptured affective residue) opens the experience to the possibilities of feeling differently, beyond, or even counter to a discursive emotional state.

Throughout these chapters, I refer to more structured affective encounters, such as empathy (in chapter 1) and disgust and uneasiness (in chapter 2), as well as assemblages of intensity created through sex (chapter 3) and musical performance (chapters 3 and 4), paying close attention to moments when the affective resonance of an emotion exceeds or challenges that emotion. Affective intensity, registered on the level of the atmosphere, instead opens new pathways of thinking and feeling that might form a common ground from which to critique the present and (perhaps) create new alternatives. In this respect, affect theory supplements identity-based theories, such as LGBT theory, disability theory, and critical race theory by thinking of how to make productive connections beyond identity as well as to think through subjects who, to repurpose Robert McRuer are "not exactly comprehensible" as identities such as disabled or queer "as we have come to think we know them" (176). At the same time, these affective communities do not disregard difference. Quite the opposite. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, the radical promise of communities emerges through "the release and proliferation of . . . differences that do not mark social hierarchies" (*Commonwealth* 337). Rather than consolidating community around a specific identity, affective communities come together around what is common between them, without disregarding the importance of identity to members of a specific community.

In the opening of this introduction, I nod to a national affective space produced and inscribed by the material effects of neoliberalism. In *Felt Spaces*, I visit a range of local spaces where the promise of neoliberal progress has failed, from the borderlands of Texas to rural Missouri to punk clubs to squats in New York City and Los Angeles. By space, I refer to actually existing geographic locations but also mean something like what J. Jack Halberstam calls queer space: spaces of queer world making that exist "on the edges of logics of labor and production" and "outside the logic of capital accumulation" (10), or as Halberstam puts it, "the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned" (10). It is in these local spaces, Halberstam explains, that "alternatives to capitalism . . . already exist and are presently under construction" (12). While felt spaces begin in embodied affective intensities, they are most productive when marshaled toward a practice of community, a term, following Raymond Williams, I mean as the "more direct, more total and therefore more significant relationships" that are distinct from "the more formal, more abstract and therefore more instrumental relationships of state, or of society" (76). Community relationships are both more immediate than relationships based on social or political ideology and, in the examples I explore, in opposition to them, if only through the minute practices of everyday life.

These oppositional communities share something of Michael Warner's counterpublic, Lauren Berlant's intimate public, and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's proletarian public. As Warner explains, counterpublics are significant because they "can elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, … and can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship—meaning active participation in collective world making through publics of gender and sex" (57).

Berlant argues something similar: "In an intimate public one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present" (226). For Negt and Kluge, the proletarian public sphere exposes "oppressed relationships, for things and interests, which are not expressed," "a process of igniting solidarity among people who might otherwise have very different ideas" (121). Intimate publics, proletarian publics, and counterpublics speak to what is affectively held in common, particularly through the relationships that take place in the ordinary events of everyday life. In drawing on the affective energies behind these alternative practices, this dissertation is in conversation with works like Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), and J. Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), which argue for the centrality of affect in queer projects of world making. For each of these critics, negative affects produced by the failure (or refusal) to embody normative social structures, such as marriage and the family—structures which, as Ahmed notes "demand that we live our lives in the right way" (222)—become locations for collective resistance and critique that take the form of an alternative space. As Muñoz writes, "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). It is in this spirit that Hardt and Negri celebrate the power of the multitude: "an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common" (*Multitude* 100). "When the multitude works," they argue, "it produces autonomously and reproduces the entire world of life" (*Empire* 395).

The cultural products I investigate in *Felt Spaces* range from dense literary fiction such as Roberto Bolaño's *2666* to Hollywood films like *Winter's Bone* and *The Soloist* to hardcore

punk songs, and each chapter explores a specific milieu of contemporary US society and culture. Although the chapters are grounded in specific spaces and times—the earliest is set in the late eighties while the latest is set at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century—the concerns and practices I uncover spill over from one chapter to the next and thicken the representations of specific communities. Thus, issues of disability and race in rural meth users in chapter 2 inform the representation of homeless mad men in chapter 3, just as the productive potential of madness in these texts complements the affective communities formed in the hardcore punk scene. I begin by offering an example of how the creation and transmission of felt spaces might be put toward an ethical practice of community. In chapter 1, I analyze Cary Joji Fukunaga's film *Sin Nombre* and Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666*. I argue that Fukunaga's film inscribes a melodramatic narrative of the border, which Bolaño revises by implicating his audience in the economic and political systems of violence described in his novel. I repurpose Nancy Fraser's concept of an all-affected call for global justice to gesture to the ways that works like Bolaño's might partially materialize a transnational affective orientation toward justice. The concept of the all-affected haunts *Felt Spaces* as a whole, surreptitiously emerging as the characters within texts and the readers and viewers experiencing them encounter the debilitating circumstances of certain lives under neoliberalism.

The middle section of *Felt Spaces* considers the association of marginal subjectivities with disability in mainstream culture. Chapter 2 offers an analysis of two representations of (white) drug use in contemporary cinema, Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden's *Half Nelson* and Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone*. I argue that both films depend on problematic discourses of disability, articulated through the staging of affective responses to debilitated bodies. Despite these limited, problematic frames of meaning, I suggest that the films nonetheless gesture

toward an alternative form of communal engagement with capitalism. In chapter 3, I further investigate connections between disability, community, and capitalism through representations of homeless mad men. Weaving Paolo Virno's concept of virtuosity through the musical virtuosity of Nathaniel Ayers in Joe Wright's *The Soloist* and the virtuosic queer sexual expression of Mad Man Mike in Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*, I consider the limits of affective labor and the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of schizoanalysis as an alternative world-making practice. I also offer a critique of and corollary to Delany's concept of contact centered on madness as both a lived experience and critical concept.

Chapter 4 focuses more intently on embodied experience through the participation in a subcultural music scene. Specifically, I explore the tensions between the eighties straight edge movement described in Eleanor Henderson's *Ten Thousand Saints* and the nineties queercore movement described in Lynn Breedlove's *Godspeed* to argue that unique forms of queer intimacy and collective belonging emerge from embodied affective responses to punk music and in opposition to the demands of bodily discipline paradoxically enforced by punk subcultures.

Chapter 5 concludes with a meditation on how the intensities created through the resistant practices described throughout *Felt Spaces* might be deployed toward oppositional (even revolutionary) aims. Thinking through the politics and affects of squatting or occupying public space, I trace two actually existing moments of squatting in the nineties—a group of gutter punks in Los Angeles depicted in Penelope Spheeris's *Decline of Western Civilization: Part III* and the widespread squatting movement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan—before doubling back with two literary representations of squatting from the turn of the twenty-first century: Cari Luna's *The Revolution of Every Day* and Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*. These novels each illustrate the difficulty in imagining worlds outside of the

current neoliberal moment. However, despite (and perhaps because of) the brutal surveillance of and crack down on occupations, including the historically stable punk squats in New York and, in our current moment, the Standing Rock protest against the North Dakota Access Pipeline, squatting offers one means of considering the desire and practice of living differently. In a gesturing conclusion that draws on Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead*, I argue that the expansive alternative ways of life that occupation imagines continue to materialize, in multiple cultural representations, an all-affected view of social justice.

Wavering Smiles, Open Wounds, and the Ghosts That Haunt the Borderlands: Transnationalism and the All-Affected

The US-Mexican border es una herida abierta [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.—Gloria Anzaldúa

They made sure the obituaries / Showed pictures of smoke stacks.—At the Drive-In

In their introduction to the *Affect Theory Reader*, editors Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth ask, "So, what can an affect theory do?" (5). Gregg's and Seigworth's comment speaks to the difficulties and limitations when considering the material effects of embodied affect. As Lauren Berlant wryly points out in *Cruel Optimism*, "Shifts in affective atmosphere are not equal to changing the world" (116). At best, Berlant suggests, affect can "communicate the conditions under which a historical moment appears as a visceral moment" (16). Taking as a starting point Berlant's claim that affect might communicate the experience of the historical present, this chapter explores the critical potential of affective moments of recognition in which ordinary life is revealed to be implicated in and affected by the violence of transnational capitalism.

In what follows, I examine Cary Joji Fukunaga's film *Sin Nombre* and Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666*, works that are situated in and define in interesting ways the borderlands of the United States—both the material US-Mexico border that Gloria Anzaldúa calls an open wound (3) and the "decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call empire (*Empire* xii). Geographically, the works define a space that encompasses and moves beyond the northern and southern borders of Mexico, and both envision literal border crossings that emphasize the contrast between the Global North and the Global South. More importantly, these works trace what

Judith Butler calls the shifting topographies of the First and Third World, a space, Butler argues, where "what was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds, is [actually] a highly populated site, if not the very definition of the nation, confounding identity in what may well become an auspicious direction" (49). These texts lay out a vision of the borderlands as a productive site in which the ideological and affective distance between the "here" of the Global North and the "there" of the Global South collapses upon itself. I read this collapse as a potential openness that might lead to an affective recognition one's own implication in the historical moment of global capitalism. While staying attuned to Lauren Berlant's warning of the limited utility of affect toward claims for justice writ large, this recognition, I argue, can serve as the basis for an ethical identification with all those suffering under the exploitative conditions such a historical moment makes possible that is not limited by a melodramatic identification with this suffering.

The romance of transnational desire

Early on in Cary Joji Fukunaga's 2009 film *Sin Nombre*, protagonist Casper, a member of the street gang Mara Salvatrucha, more commonly known in the US as MS-13, sits with his girlfriend Martha Marlen in a tower overlooking La Bombilla, a train yard in Tapachula, Chiapas, that for many Central American immigrants serves as the point of departure for their journey across Mexico into the United States. In a brief conversation [here translated using the film's official subtitles], Casper and Martha Marlen imagine the transnational possibilities that the train represents. Casper first raises the question, asking, "See that train? It's ours [his gang's]. What would you say if I said we get on it and take it all the way to Texas? We could go to Six Flags." Casper and Martha Marlen are looking at each other during Casper's brief comment, but when Casper finishes speaking, both he and Martha

Marlen look away, as if imagining both the possibilities of this border crossing and the impossibility of putting such a plan into action: Casper cannot escape his ties to the gang, nor, the film suggests, can he truly cross the class (and perhaps racial[1]) divide that exists between himself and Martha Marlen, as even the conditional voice of Casper's question makes clear.

Martha explodes this moment of imaginative possibility by demanding of Casper, "Tell me you love me again," to which Casper acquiesces. Martha Marlen's appeal offers another possible future. Love, Martha Marlen suggests, papers over the social, economic, and political circumstances that make Casper's imaginary immigration desirable, even as Casper's gang's control over the immigration route forecloses the likelihood that Casper will be able to leave Chiapas (and the gang). Martha Marlen's demand for an expression of love elucidates the melodramatic ethics of Fukunaga's narrative in which romantic love minimizes the socioeconomic issues circulating in the borderlands of the Global North and South. In this narrative, the violence inherent in the economies of undocumented immigration occurs on the level of the individual and family, depoliticizing the issue by shifting any responsibility for this violence from a national and transnational state apparatus that includes both the Mexican and US governments to an easily vilified gang. While recognizing that Fukunaga's film may offer a fairly accurate representation of the experience of many Central American immigrants[2]—Mara Salvatrucha gangs are involved in human trafficking, and the train ride central to the film's plot is an actual immigration route—the melodramatic mode in which

[1] Casper presumably gets his name because he is the lightest skinned member of the gang. Of course, the issue of race and whiteness is different in a Latin American context. While US audiences may read Casper as white, in an interview with Sarah Cronin, Fukunaga notes that "in Honduras, [Edgar Flores, who plays Casper] is considered black, because although there are Latino people with darker skin than his, he's got these African features, and he has black blood, and that puts him in a weird lower class," while at the same time, Tenoch Huerta Mejía, who plays the leader of Casper's gang, is "too brown to be a leading man" in Mexico. However, as Fukunaga's interviews make clear, his film was always directed toward a US audience.

[2] In an interview with Shorts International, Fukunaga explains that during his research for the film, he made the same journey with a group of immigrants.

the film is framed makes ethical claims on its audience that distance the audience from any implication in the violence appearing on screen.

In an interview with Rebecca Murray, Fukunaga discusses his initial goals: "When we talked about it in the beginning it was just like we're not saying we're going to change the world there, we're not going to change people's minds. We're just hoping that if people come away with any kind of empathy or feeling for these characters, then we've done something special." Reviews of *Sin Nombre* suggest that Fukunaga was successful, calling it "a remarkable film, showing the incredible hardships people will endure in order to reach El Norte" (Ebert), a film that "shows [the audience] a world you never thought of, a way of thinking and a way of life you never imagined, and then, having shown it, to make you understand it in the common language of human emotion" (LaSalle), and "a powerful, wrenching thriller . . . [that] has a documentary-style realism about it and a haunting sense of the gauntlet faced by migrants, as well as the far-reaching implications of gang violence" (Puig). This critical response points to the presumed way that the melodramatic mode associates the ethical and the aesthetic: excessive feeling is created through the victimization of idealized characters, which in turn, leads to an empathetic response.

In a narrative that limits its focus to the dangers of the journey itself, Fukunaga presents an array of victims of the process of undocumented immigration—of gang violence, of violence by Mexican townspeople, of violence and exploitation by Mexican immigration officers—while also implicitly lamenting the destruction of the heterosexual family and its precursor, the romantic couple, as a result of immigration. The representation of Central American immigrants as victims forms the basis for the film's problematic melodramatic ethics which render the Central America a space of home and the United States a space of possibility, safety, and family—not to forget consumerism—while

relegating the entire length of Mexico to a space of violence. In an interview with Amy Kaufman, Fukunaga explains that his film is meant to show audiences immigration "from a human perspective, one which has nothing to do with politics or agendas about what immigration 'means' or what it 'should' be."[3] However, this depoliticized perspective bounded by the melodramatic mode limits the (presumed US) viewer's response to that of an outsider viewing violence from afar and untethers the narrative from a historical perspective that might critique the US economic and political policies that have led to or exacerbated the violence Fukunaga depicts as well as those that make immigration desirable.[4]

Melodrama and affective identification

In his defining study *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Peter Brooks explains that melodrama "mak[es] sense of experience" through prescribed systems of form and structure (xvii) that include "the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, [and] breathtaking peripety" (11–12). More generally, melodrama makes an ethical or moral claim through the virtuous subject's

[3] Fukunaga's film may be understood within the context of what Elizabeth S. Anker has termed the "human-rights bestseller": "Within the bestseller, not only does human misery become sensationalized but human rights violations are what seem to inspire the refraction of those victimized lives through the prism of Otherness in the first place. . . . In effect, human rights violations come to be rendered sublime—here in the classical sense that they elicit an alchemy of horror, wonder, and enthrallment" (*Fictions of Dignity* 39).

[4] In fact, the MS-13 gang is rooted in transnational flows. The gang was started in the eighties in Los Angeles by Central American immigrants, many from El Salvador, who had come to the US to escape civil war (the horrors of which were abetted by US economic and military aid). As the gang grew in number and visibility, members were arrested and, in many cases, deported back to their countries of origin, even though many were teenagers and young adults with no direct connection to these countries. Gangs like MS-13 flourished in Central America as more members were deported from the US under increasingly harsh anti-gang laws and local youths with few prospects joined up. At present, MS-13 groups operate throughout Central America and the US, with orders and communication passing back and forth. See "How the Street Gangs Took Central America" (Arana), "MS-13 Gang: The Story Behind One of the World's Most Brutal Street Gangs" (BBC News), "LA Violence Crosses the Line" (Kraul, et al), and "Time for a US Apology to El Salvador" (Bonner).

encounter with, and ultimate triumph over, evil.[5] Melodrama is effective precisely because it clearly and legibly produces through narrative and representation (and reproduces in its audience) commonly held assumptions of what subjects might be considered good or evil.[6] However, as Thomas Elsaesser argues in his influential essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," although melodrama is in part a working-through of social crises, it "has also resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and social terms," which has "meant ignorance of the properly social and political dimensions of these changes and their causality, and consequently it has encouraged increasingly escapist forms of mass entertainment" (72).

Melodrama communicates its morals through the (over)production of affect, what Brooks defines as a "mode of excess." In her work on melodrama and American culture, Linda Williams suggests that the moral or ethical results of a melodramatic production are quite limited. As Williams argues, the "black and white Manichaean polarities [of the melodramatic narrative] simplify and twist the real social and historical complexities of the problems addressed by melodrama. The melodramatic solution to the very real social and political issues raised by the form can only occur through a perverse process of victimization" (*Playing the Race Card* 42). Thus, for Williams, melodrama allows the ambiguous or challenging nature of realistic representation to be evaded through its "simplistic moral stereotyping" and its commitment to climactic action (40). In her

[5] A note on melodrama: Following Elsaesser, critics of melodrama have generally referred to it as a "historically and socially conditioned mode of experience" (74). Elena Lahr-Vivaz points out melodrama's "protean" character, which is "capable of assuming a variety of guises depending on the environment in which it is encountered" (11). As Elsaesser notes, these environments are tied to specific historic and social locations (as well as the medium through which they are transmitted). However, as Elisabeth R. Anker argues, melodrama is also "a genre of national political discourse . . . [that] casts politics, policies, and practices of citizenship within a moral economy that identifies the nation-state as a virtuous and innocent victim of villainous action (*Orgies of Feeling* 2).

[6] Linda Williams argues that the melodrama has been the defining genre in twentieth-century American culture and examines how US melodrama has upheld racist notions of threatening black men (*Playing the Race Card*), while Elisabeth Anker traces anti-Muslim melodramatic discourse in the US following 9/11 (*Orgies of Feeling*).

influential essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Williams investigates the claim that melodrama depends on an "involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen" (4). While Williams agrees that an identification with a character is necessary, she suggests that this "identification is neither fixed nor entirely passive." Rather, audience identification might "oscillate" between a passive identification with the victim and an active alternative identification with empowered characters (8). In *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*, Lisa Cartwright offers a more nuanced explanation of audience identification that emphasizes the ethical nature of spectatorship. Taking a psychoanalytic approach, Cartwright proposes "empathetic identification"[7]: a form of identification with characters on screen that, rather than mimicking on-screen affective responses, requires only a reflexive understanding of this affective state. That is, Cartwright argues, "my knowledge comes from the force of the object ('you,' the image, the representation), and my reciprocal sense that *I recognize the feeling I perceive in your expression*. 'You' move me to have feelings, but the feelings may not match your own" (24; author's italics). Cartwright attempts to account for the slipperiness of affective experience, in which there are many feelings and intensities at play. It is not necessary, and many times impossible, she argues, for a member of the audience to feel in the same way as a character on screen. What's important then is a recognition of a certain affective state, which causes a subsequent (but not equal) affective reaction in the audience.

Cartwright recognizes the perhaps problematic deployment of a moral identification, suggesting that this empathetic feeling—the basis for what she calls moral spectatorship—does not in itself counteract the limitations of the melodramatic narrative. While moral spectatorship begins in the bodily affective experience, for Cartwright, it is ultimately a

[7] Cartwright defines empathy as follows: "By 'empathy,' I mean the reflexive experience of awareness of the thoughts, emotions[,]. . . or concerns of an other or others" (23).

discursive argument about the ways that "texts interpellate [spectators] . . . in ways that [might] . . . elicit moral responses that . . . elicit a sense of responsibility for an other" (4). Certainly, as Williams and others have shown, the centrality of discourses of evil in melodramatic narratives can shore up problematic, even dangerous social and cultural ideologies. However, Cartwright demonstrates that in significant ways, the affective identification with a character can produce ethical feeling through the recognition of vulnerability, a process similar to Judith Butler's theorization in *Precarious Life* that an empathetic, and perhaps compassionate, connection with an other might form the basis for a global ethics based on the shared experience of suffering. "Despite our differences in location and history," Butler argues, "my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a 'we,' for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody" (20), although Butler cautions against an ethics that does not recognize the various historical and cultural forces that are specific to individual instances of suffering.

Empathy at the suffering of another is generally thought of as compassion—which Lauren Berlant reminds us "is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*" (*Compassion* 4; author's italics). Berlant explains that "compassion turns out not to be so effective or a good in itself" (9), as it "can as easily provide an alibi for an ethical or political betrayal as it can initiate a circuit of practical relief" (11). The connection that Butler and Cartwright argue for perhaps begins with something akin to compassion but goes a little deeper by foregrounding the distance between the represented character and its audience and teasing out the affective connections that remain. This third-hand identification is fairly removed from the represented affect. However, by being called to feel (something, anything) through a recognition of certain affects, Cartwright suggests that a work takes on an ethical dimension: "Spectators may also 'feel themselves into' those they can imagine not as

themselves but as *theirs* or, rather, as their responsibility. Moreover, they may imagine themselves as a 'we' that shares that responsibility" (236).

Border crossings and refusals

Sin Nombre opens with a slow zoom on a path through an autumn forest. When the camera cuts to an opposing shot of Casper staring listlessly at the image, it is revealed to be a picture covering the wall of Casper's bedroom. In his commentary, Fukunaga admits that this image is slightly heavy-handed.

> This particular piece with the pathway down the middle of it that seemed really fitting I think for what ended up becoming . . . [Casper's] storyline because it's on a wall and he can't go down the pathway, and it's sort of blocking his future. And I was never sure whether it was over-the-top imagery to start off with, but it was what I was, I guess, symbolically trying to go for there.

Symbolically, the picture as an imaginative space of potential is connected to the geographic and imagined space of the US in Casper's memory and projection of Texas, and importantly, one that Fukunaga connects to an idea of futurity and progress. However, Fukunaga also notes that Casper "will never go anywhere that actually looks like [the picture]. . . . It's really far from his world"—indicative of the film's metonymic representation of Mexico as a space of violence,[8] which is at odds with the many picturesque landscapes, from lush tropical jungle to snowcapped mountains, that Fukunaga and cinematographer Adriano Goldman lovingly lens over the course of the film.

The Mara Salvatrucha gang defines the violence that delimits both the physical and

[8] The film does document unexpected acts of kindness. In one town the train passes through, children toss fruit to the immigrants riding on top of the trains. However, this scene is later given a dark reflection when children in another town pelt the immigrants with rocks.

affective space of Casper's world. According to the film's melodramatic grammar, the gang is a representation of evil, perpetrating violence and the destruction of romantic and familial love.[9] This narrative humanizes Casper, in opposition to the rest of his gang, because he can love (correctly)—that is, his desires, both romantic and transnational, are deemed appropriate. When his gang finds out that Casper has been neglecting his duties at the train yard to spend time with Martha Marlen, Casper is beaten, and Martha Marlen, who has secretly followed Casper to the gang meeting, is accidently killed when gang leader Lil' Mago attempts to rape her. After Martha Marlen's death, Lil' Mago forces Casper to take the train north in order to rob the Central American immigrants. After Lil' Mago threatens Sayra, a Honduran migrant making the trip north with her estranged father, Casper kills Lil' Mago and over time becomes a protector of sorts to the immigrants as he attempts to make it across the border before he is caught by his gang.

Casper and Sayra enter into an intimate, if not explicitly romantic, relationship during the journey. As if to establish the connection between Martha Marlen and Sayra, as well as between romantic love and transnational opportunity, Casper reiterates his transnational desire to Sayra in a scene that mirrors Casper and Martha Marlen's conversation in La Bombilla. Following a scene set in the gang headquarters in Tapachula, the film abruptly cuts to a shot of an airplane carving a vapor trail across the frame as in a voice-over, Casper asks Sayra, "Ever been in one of those?" Sayra doesn't respond, and the film cuts to the group of migrants sitting on the rails of the train track, Sayra and Casper sitting apart to underscore the intimacy of this moment. Casper continues, "Me neither."

In contrast to the train, which over the course of the film is the site of violence and

[9] The gang itself is a parody of the virtuous family. Women and children exist within the social structure of MS-13 depicted by Fukunaga—in one disturbing scene, gang leader Lil' Mago holds his infant as he orders and observes the execution of a rival gang member—but romantic love and intimacy is decidedly absent.

exploitation, and—as the train can only transport immigrants across Mexico—is not itself a mode of border-crossing, the airplane, whose vapor trail mirrors the train tracks on which Casper and Sayra sit, marks the limits of what is available to subjects like Casper and Sayra. Casper continues with a memory of Texas: "Near a highway in Texas, I saw the factory where they make them. It had this huge sign like a globe, all lit up and bright. Man, I wanted to climb it."[10] The globe makes legible the transnational desires of the immigrants that are at once tied to geography and the free movement across space and the economic opportunity of the factory itself, all of which become associated with the United States. At the same time, as Casper's memory proves, these desires are often foreclosed. (In other words, although Casper wanted to climb it, he didn't (couldn't) and was likely deported.)

Casper's relationship with Martha Marlen haunts his pseudoromantic relationship with Sayra. Sayra is an idealized character, acceptable to all but the most conservative of viewers. Although Sayra makes the trip north with her uncle and her father Horacio, whom she hadn't seen since he immigrated 10 years before, she is initially opposed to, or at least strongly ambivalent about, the idea of immigrating. "Look," she says to her uncle, "I understand why you're doing this trip, but I still don't understand why I should. . . . If I wanted, I could go north on my own." Trying to convince her, her uncle responds, "Come with us. It won't be easy there, but at least we'll be together. There's nothing for you here [in Honduras]. Nothing." Although the economic aspects of immigration are alluded to here, the film implies that immigration is one way to shore up and repair the heterosexual family.[11] Sayra's mother is not mentioned in the film, but her father has a wife and children in New

[10] In one of the film's mysteries, Casper's never discusses the United States beyond these two conversations that suggest that Casper has been to Texas.

[11] Of course, this move of reunification is belied by a shot of Orlando's pregnant wife. While she never speaks and is only on screen for a few seconds, Orlando's wife suggests the fracturing of family in the child who, like Sayra, might not know her or his father.

Jersey. Later in the film, Horacio attempts to give Sayra the only picture he has of his new family, telling her "they're your family now too." Sayra rebuffs him, explaining, "I don't want a picture of *your* family" (my emphasis). However, although Horacio is killed when he falls beneath the train while trying to escape from police, when Sayra finally makes it to Texas, she calls Horacio's wife, recuperating (if incompletely) the family.

Sayra's ambivalence to immigration is necessary for the moral demands made by the film. If, as Peter Brooks suggests, melodrama becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a postsacred era" (15), the morals of *Sin Nombre* hold up the virtue of family for US audiences as something perhaps possible only within the space of the United States, here standing in for liberal democracy in general. The ethical dimension of *Sin Nombre*, what Cartwright would call the empathetic identification with Casper and Sayra, is a result of the idealization of these characters from a melodramatic perspective. Identification is made easy because Casper and Sayra embody what are generally put forward as universal qualities—romantic and familial love—and because the film reiterates and celebrates an idealized version of the United States as the only true space of liberal democracy and possibility.

However, this empathetic affective identification comes at the expense of a victimized female body that is ultimately redeemed by the twin institutions of the United States and the family. It is no surprise that the narrative is resolved at a payphone in the parking lot of a big-box retailer. Here, not just the space of the US but the literal space of consumerism itself becomes equated with safety and the family. After a harrowing encounter with the gang members on the shore of the Rio Bravo in which Casper is killed, Sayra crosses to the United States. An aerial shot shows Sayra walking across a grassy field. The shot slowly pulls back, revealing a road and a large shopping center containing a Sears, an

OfficeMax, a Sam's Club, and a Walmart. Sayra makes a collect call to her father's wife, Yesscenia. When Yesscenia answers, Sayra smiles, but just before the screen goes black, Sayra's smile wavers. I take the wavering smile, on the verge of breaking into tears, as indicative of the affective agenda of the film. The wavering smile, evoking both the happiness and safety Sayra feels standing in the United States and the sorrow of her journey, demands—and, I would argue, acheives—a moral recognition of the violence of immigration, inscribed on Sayra's body, even as it celebrates the possibilities now open as a result. That is, audiences feel what Cartwright calls a "sense of responsibility for an other" (4), whom Fukunaga means to representation Central American immigrants as a group, this is resolved through the perceived safety and economic resources of the United States as liberal democracy. According to the film's logic, the danger to Sayra is over, even though we know as an undocumented immigrant, she faces a number of challenges. However, in spite of this, the wavering smile also alludes to the audience's refusal to recognize its own implication in this violence, as American citizens, as consumers. (After all, many of the items sold in these stores are assembled right across the border.) Instead, the wavering smile, both happy and not, challenges the facile reading of redemption and closure, firmly delineating the border between the "here" of the United States to the "there" of Mexico and elsewhere.

Ciudad Juárez: Neoliberalism's open wound

Gloria Anzaldúa's description of the border as open wound emphasizes the violence that the First World enacts upon the Third. Roberto Bolaño's posthumous novel *2666* ruminates on this open wound made material in the fictional city of Santa Teresa, a stand-in for Ciudad Juárez—a locus of power in the global assemblage Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call empire. By narrating border crossings between the First and Third Worlds, *2666*

reveals the violence that is both a metaphorical representation of the exploitative practices of transnational capital and the literal and material effects of these practices embodied by borderland subjects. These crossings are the result of literary detective explorations, European intellectualism, United States sports writing, and personal and familial desire, but Bolaño's sprawling narrative is centered around a fictionalization of the infamous murders of hundreds of women in the Mexican border city of Juárez, in which, the novel explains, lies "the secret of the world" (348). Through descriptions of violence throughout modern history, from Spanish imperialism in the Americas to the Holocaust, Bolaño details the violence at the heart of the project of Western civilization, while the murders of women draw specific attention to the ways that this violence is tied to the neoliberalism's dependence on vulnerable subjects like the women who power Mexico's maquiladora industry.[12] In contrast to *Sin Nombre's* elision of external power, *2666* suggests that affective identification might be deployed as a critique of global capitalism that renegotiates the melodramatic depiction of the border and shortens the distance between audience and those represented. It does so by forcing an affective encounter with violence that marks a rupture with narrative itself.

Intolerable killings: Femicide in Ciudad Juárez

In 1993, the body of 16-year-old Angelica Luna Villalobos was found in the Altavista neighborhood of Cuidad Juárez, the Mexican city directly across the border from El Paso, Texas. Villalobos's murder was the first documented case in a pattern of homicides in Juárez

[12] See Joel Brenner, Jennifer Ross, Janie Simmons, and Sarah Zaidi's "Neoliberal Trade and Investment and the Health of *Maquiladora* Workers on the US-Mexico Border" for a detailed discussion of the conditions that led to the rise of maquiladora labor in Mexico and the debilitating corporeal effects of this labor on its workers.

that have come to be known as the *feminicidios* or femicides.[13] In the decade between 1993 and 2003, the years covered in *2666*, more than 250 women were murdered in Juárez,[14] and these murders have continued to the present.[15] Initially these murders went unreported in US

[13] Journalist Charles Bowden and New Mexico State research librarian Molly Molloy have criticized the focus on femicide in academia and the media for misrepresenting violence in Juárez. In *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*—based in part on Molloy's research—Bowden argues, "Over the past ten years of so, four hundred women have been found murdered, the majority of them victims of husbands and lovers and hardly mysterious cases. This number represents 10 or 12 percent of the official kill rate. . . . Focusing on the dead women enables Americans to ignore dead men, and ignoring the dead men enables the United States to ignore the failure of its free-trade schemes, which in Juárez are producing poor people and dead people faster than any other product" (13–14). Molloy also critiques the cottage industry of cultural representations of the murders. In a 2010 essay "A Perspective on the Murders of Human Beings (Women, Men & Children of Both Genders) in Ciudad Juárez," Molloy claims, "The products of some artists, film producers and fiction writers about the Juárez 'femicides' have often hijacked the sincere efforts of victims' relatives and activists in the border region and turned real stories into sensational accounts. Sex and violence always sells. The focus on gender-based homicides (femicides) has obscured the terrible reality of generalized violence in Juárez and its multiple causes that cannot be resolved nor explained by sensational theories." Journalist Robert Andrew Powell takes Bowden's and Molloy's arguments to the extreme in his amateurish Amazon Kindle single *The Dead Women of Juárez*, making the simplistic argument that "what happened to [the dead women of Juárez] . . . is what would be happening to a percentage of women in any city in the world where the government has given up on law and order." However, as Rupert Knox, a researcher for Amnesty International, argues in response to arguments like those made by Powell, Bowden, and Molloy, "That women are not being murdered at the same extreme high levels [as men] does not mean that there is not a continuing pattern of gender-based murders and abductions in Juárez" (qtd. in Powell). As Alice Driver points out, "Nobody in the field of femicide research disputes the fact that more men are murdered. However, there is much to be gained by recording and studying the particular patterns of violence against women" ("Femicide in Juárez is Not a Myth"). While recognizing that the femicides are only one aspect of the violence in Juárez, a city that posted a 3,622 victim murder rate in 2010 (the highest on record) (Driver, "Ending Feminicide" 40), this chapter does not focus on the murder of men—a large number of which are the result of an ongoing war for control of the narcotics economy; instead, I am interested in the ways that the femicides are deployed in literary works as a way of exposing what Bowden calls above the "failure of [the United State's] free-trade schemes." It is important to point out that neither Bowden nor Molloy deny that the femicides took place, nor do they disregard the importance of the activism that has taken place in response to the murders. Instead, both call for a more total and generalized accounting of Juárez's violence. And while opposed to the "femicide industry" that grew up around the Juárez murders, Bowden does admit that, culturally, "there is a difference" between drug violence and gender violence (Powell).

[14] 250 is a low estimate. As Alicia Gaspar de Alba writes, "No one really knows the exact number of victims" ("Poor Brown Female" 70). In a survey of homicide estimates from journalists, activist groups, and the Mexican attorney general's office, Gaspar de Alba cites figures ranging from 233 murders to 320 murders, with media reports suggesting as many as 500 victims (70-71). And as Gaspar de Alba reminds us, "None of these numbers include the hundreds of women and girls who have disappeared without a trace" (73), a number that the National Commission on Human Rights in Mexico estimates at 2,000 women (73). Julia Monárrez Fragoso, a professor and researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Juárez, places the number of murder women (from 1993 to 2016) at 1,604 (Driver, "Ending Femicide" 45).

[15] See the *New York Times* article "Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez:"

> The killings have continued, with a second wave even larger than the first. Even as overall violence here declines, new clusters of slain women are continually being discovered. Roughly 60 women and girls have been killed here so far this year; at least 100 have been reported missing over the past two years. And though the death toll for women so far this year is on track to fall below the high of 304 in 2010, state officials say there have already been more women killed in 2012 than in any year of the earlier so-called femicide era.

national news,[16] despite Juárez's position as a twin city to El Paso, Texas, but in the past fifteen years, a large body of work has been produced about the murders, from activist *testimonios* and protests[17] to academic conferences, papers, and monographs to popular culture narratives in film, literature, and music.[18]

The murders are horrifying not only because of the frequency at which they have been committed but also because of the sexual nature of the violence done to the victims. A 2003 Amnesty International report, *Intolerable Killings: 10 Years of Abductions and Murder of Women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua*, summarizes the violence:

> In the main, young women from poor backgrounds are abducted, held captive and sexually assaulted in a most ferocious manner before being murdered and left amongst rubble on wasteland. In some cases, their remains are found by passersby days or even years later. In other cases, the women are never found and their relatives have to live with the permanent anguish of never knowing what happened to them or where they are. (7)

As the report suggests, in many cases, victims were repeatedly raped, beaten, and mutilated before their bodies were dumped in the desert or in empty lots next to maquiladoras

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[16] Gaspar de Alba herself notes that although she had family in both El Paso and Juárez, she only found out about the murders after reading Sam Quiñones' 1998 short story "The Maquiladora Murders," "five years after the bodies began piling up in the desert" ("Introduction" 5).

[17] See Alice Driver's "We Want to Stay Alive": Ending Feminicide in Juárez, Mexico" and *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico*, Elva F. Orozco Mendoza's "Feminicide and the Funeralization of the City: On Thing Agency and Protest Politics in Ciudad Juárez," Teresa Rodriguez's *The Daughters of Juarez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border*, and Kathleen Staudt and Zulma Y. Méndez's *Courage, Resistance, and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization*.

[18] These works cover a range or genres, styles, and goals. The Juárez murders provide the background to works of detective fiction, such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2007), Stella Pope Duarte's *If I Die in Juárez* (2008), and Sam Hawken's *The Dead Women of Juárez* (2012). Teresa Rodriguez's nonfiction work *The Daughters of Juárez* provides a journalistic view of the murders and their subsequent investigations. Roberto Bolaño fictionalized the Juárez murders in his posthumous novel *2666*—the subject of this chapter. The Juárez murders have also been the subject of a range of documentary films—Lourdres Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* (2001)—and big budget films made on both sides of the border—most famously, *Bordertown* (2006); *The Virgin of Juárez* (2006); and *Backyard* (2009). The Juárez murders have also been the subject of various songs: "Juárez" by Tori Amos (1999), "Invalid Litter Dept." by At the Drive-In (2001), "Las Mujeres de Juárez" by Los Tigres del Norte (2004), and "Madera" by Los Jaguares (2005).

[assembly plants] and colonias [neighborhoods], most infamously Lomas de Poleo and Lote Bravo. Of the reported 370 femicides in Juárez up to 2003, 137 included sexual assault (7). The brutality and specificity of some of these sexual murders have led investigators, including famed FBI profiler Robert Ressler, to believe them the work of one or more serial killers.[19] Today, many of these murders remain unsolved.[20]

As horrifying as they are from any perspective, let alone as an indictment of the everyday gendered violence in Ciudad Juárez, the femicides lend themselves to both literal and metaphorical critiques of global capital: the murdered women are doubly victimized, first by the exploitative labor practices in the socioeconomic landscape of the US-Mexico borderlands and then by the violence that results from changing social and cultural gender roles that are themselves a reaction to the ongoing expansion of transnational capital acting on the border, which Gloria Anzaldúa has explored in detail:

Currently [Anzaldúa writes in 1987, although the trends she points out have only

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[19] According to journalist Diana Washington Valdez, in her 2002 exposé series on the murders, "Death Stalks the Border," "80 to 90 [homicides between 1993 and 2002] are believed to be victims of one or more serial killers." The serial killer hypothesis, long investigated by Mexican authorities, notoriously led to the conviction of Egyptian national Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif. Sharif Sharif was held in Mexican prisons from 1995 until his death in 2006. When the murders continued unabated during Sharif Sharif's incarceration, police put forward the theory that Sharif Sharif was paying members of the Los Rebeldes gang to commit murders. In 1999, four men, three of them bus drivers subcontracted by local maquiladoras, were charged with the murder of seven women. Following their arrest, special prosecutor Suly Ponce announced that Sharif Sharif paid the men $1,200 a month to murder four women every thirty days. Sharif Sharif died in prison in 2006, having been charged with only one homicide. Teresa Rodriguez's history of the murders and their investigation, *The Daughters of Juárez,* covers this history in more detail in the chapters "The Juárez Ripper" (43–74) and "Whoever Fights Monsters" (127–156).

[20] Molloy challenges this notion: "The majority of the cases of women murdered between 1993 and 2007 have been shown by both Mexican officials as well as by independent and NGO researchers closest to the data to be domestic violence cases: the killers are known and they were known to the victims. This does not in any way excuse the Mexican justice system for its inability and lack of will to definitely solve these crimes and to punish the killers with substantive sentences" ("A Perspective"). However, as Kathleen Staudt argues in *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez,* "The [unsolved serial] murders and everyday violence should be understood as interconnected. Violence against women is the overarching problem, whether by partners or strangers, serial killers or opportunistic predators" (34). At the same time, as Theresa Rodriguez's work makes clear, especially in the early years of the murders, improper crime scene procedures damaged evidence, and a system of corruption and ambivalence by the police led to scapegoating perpetrators and ignored cases.

become more calcified since the 1994 passage of NAFTA[21]], Mexico and her eighty million citizens are almost completely dependent on the US market. The Mexican government and wealthy growers are in partnership with such American conglomerates such as American Motors, IT&T and Du Pont which own factories called maquiladoras.[22] One-fourth of all Mexicans work at maquiladoras; most are young women. Next to oil, maquiladoras are Mexico's second greatest source of US dollars. Working eight to twelve hours a day to wire in backup lights in TV sets is not the Mexican way. While the women are in the maquiladoras, the children are left on their own. Many roam the street, become part of *cholo* gangs. The infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, is changing the Mexican way of life. (10)

As Anzaldúa points out, the subsequent gender imbalance in the workplace, in which women can more easily find work, has led to a changing culture that empowers young women, even as the maquiladora system promotes gender exploitation and violence. In "New Spaces of Gender Violence," Jacqui True argues that "young women maquiladora workers were treated as dispensable and constructed as 'cheap labor' relative to the men . . .

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[21] Academics apparently bear the burden of exposing this connection. Katherine Pantaleo's "Gendered Violence: An Analysis of the Maquiladora Murders," an analysis of published accounts of the murders between 1993 and 2007, is instructive. Pantaleo organizes her sources into three categories: newspaper narratives (18 sources), human rights narratives (6 sources), and academic narratives (11 sources). Examining sources, Pantaleo finds that "the newspaper and human rights narratives claim corruption of the criminal justice system as the most common causes of the murders, whereas the academic narratives claim NAFTA" (358).

[22] The industrialization of the US-Mexico border began officially in 1965 with the Border Industrialization Program, soon followed by the In-Bond Plant Program, or informally, the Maquiladora Program—For an in-depth overview of the early stages of the maquiladora program, see María Patricia Fernández-Kelly's 1983 anthropological study *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier*. Notably, maquiladoras are generally assembly plants rather than production facilities. Charles Bowden points out that

> [this] factory concept, called the twin-plant system, . . . was created . . . so that Americans could exploit cheap Mexican labor without paying high Mexican tariffs. Although the products that come from the factories are counted as Mexican exports (and thus figured into the Gross Domestic Product), nothing is actually made here. All the parts are shipped to Mexico from the United States and the workers assemble them and then ship them back. Economists figure that only 2 percent of 'material inputs used in *maquila* production come from Mexican suppliers. (77)

[which] inherently devalued the young women workers" (83).[23] As True suggests, this devaluation, along with a culture of masculine anxiety around changing gender roles, has encouraged gender violence in Ciudad Juárez, as Amnesty International's 2003 report explains.

> All the evidence seems to indicate that these young women are chosen by their killers because they are women who have no power within Chihuahuan society, itself characterized by high crime rates and public insecurity due to the fact that drugs trafficking and organized crime operate in the area. The women are usually workers from the maquiladoras set up by the multinational companies that control the economy of Ciudad Juárez as well as waitresses, workers in the informal economy or students. Many of them live in poverty, often with children to support. They are women who have no option but to travel alone on the long bus journeys that take them from the poor suburbs surrounding Ciudad Juárez to their place of work, study or leisure. (7)

Although written almost 20 years after Anzaldúa wrote her own critique of the border, the Amnesty International report paints an identical picture. In both instances, the exploitation of women by multinational companies that profit from the low wages they offer keeps young women in poverty while at the same time furthering the cultural powerlessness of these women that props up gender violence.

The connection between the murders and global capital has not been lost on those seeking to publicize the murders through cultural production. The femicides have been the source for a wide range of novels, films, and songs. In most cases, these narratives seek to

[23] Melissa Wright draws on Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics and Achille Mbembe corrective term necropolitics to examine how the Mexican state deploys narratives of violence to justify its "measures to protect the lives of Ciudad Juárez residents" (726).

raise awareness of the murders in the public sphere. The self-professed ethical goals of these works are buttressed by authorial claims of authenticity. Though the genres by which these works go about their goals are disparate—and though some are more fictionalized than others—an authentic representation of Ciudad Juárez at a specific moment in time (that can clearly be recognized as such) is central to each text, and this authentic representation is assumed to further the text's ethical reception. To give a few examples, *Bordertown* director Gregory Nava describes the goal of his film to take "social injustice and compel people to do something about it" (qtd. in Gerson); *Desert Blood* author Alicia Gaspar de Alba wants her work to "expose the horrors of this deadly crime wave as broadly as possible to English-speaking public, and to offer some conjecture, based on research, . . . some plausible explanation for the silence that has surrounded the murders" (*Desert Blood* vi); and journalist Teresa Rodriguez offers "a firsthand account of the atrocities against women" (xii) while also granting a voice to the victims and their families (294).

In general, these fictional narratives combine first-person testimony, usually from the families of victims, with reporting on the crimes to provide authentic locations, characters, and villains,[24] and many foreground the factual basis of the murders in introductory or closing statements.[25] The truth claims made by these works serve their self-stated purposes of circulating information about the murders, which were underreported outside of Juárez itself. [26] They also, as Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck suggest, play an important

[24] *Bordertown* director Gregory Nava "created a fictional story from scores of interviews . . . weav[ing] together the stories told by family members of the murdered young women into his "thriller-drama" (Gerson). Similarly, in the disclaimer that prefaces her novel *Desert Blood*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba makes clear that "the victims [described in her novel] are a composite of real-life victims" (v).

[25] Thus, the first sentence of Alicia Gaspar de Alba's disclaimer: "The serial crimes, or femicides, which are the subject of this novel, are true" (*Desert Blood* v). See also the notes preceding the end credits for the film *Backyard*, which list the number of murders in Juárez by year from 1993 until 2009, when the movie was released.

[26] Many works, such as *Bordertown*, *Desert Blood*, and *Backyard*, also call upon a feminist solidarity through the inclusion of strong female leads.

role in the memorialization of the victims and in making a justice claim. Volk and Schlotterbeck explain, "It is precisely because the state has failed so abjectly in stopping these murders that 'fictional' narratives have become both the site where victims are mourned and the means by which justice can be restored" (122).

In arguing that that "'fictional' narratives [can be] means by which justice can be restored," Volk and Schlotterbeck mean that the narratives—which are typically framed as detective narratives positing one or more perpetrators—provide a closure and redemption for the victims represented in the works. This usually occurs through a resolution to a crime narrative where perpetrators are captured, punished, or killed by protagonists. In most cases, these works indict the maquiladora system and transnational capital in the murders—producing a perpetrator from one of the common narratives put forward to explain the femicides—and then associating the perpetrator with multinational companies and border crossing. Thus, the 2006 Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas vehicle *Bordertown* implicates bus drivers for the murders[27]; in both the 2010 film *Backyard* and Stella Pope Duarte's 2008 novel *If I Die in Juárez*, a business man crosses from El Paso to murder young women, with the assistance of a gang connected to the drug trade[28]; and both Sam Hawken's 2012 novel *The Dead Women of Juárez* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's 2007 novel *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* implicate a gang of snuff film pornographers with ties to the drug trade and to

[27] *Bordertown* fictionalizes the March 18, 1999, attack on a 14-year-old maquiladora worker named Nancy by a local bus driver. In response, four bus drivers were arrested. Suly Ponce, the special prosecutor in charge of the murders, implicated the men in an "elaborate plot" masterminded by Abdel Sharif Sharif and an El Paso narcotraficante—See Teresa Rodriguez's *The Daughters of Juárez* (136–141).

[28] Abdel Sharif Sharif claimed at various times that "at least one high-ranking police officer was involved [with the murders], as well as two powerful drug lords and perhaps one or more businessmen from El Paso who commuted daily into Juárez" (Rodriguez, *The Daughters of Juárez* 106). In April 1996, nine members of the Juárez street gang Los Rebeldes were arrested and charged with killing women under orders from Sharif Sharif (59–61).

maquiladoras.[29] While the resolution offered by these works takes into account the transnational forces underlying the crimes, it can also further a melodramatic narrative demanding empathetic or compassionate identity with the murdered women that depends on affect at a distance. Although these works in many cases bolster feminist activism,[30] they risk reinforcing the border between the First and Third World through the sensationalized image of the victimized female.

Ghosts of global capital

Although the femicides lie at the heart of Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, in contrast to the works described above, Bolaño's narrative offers no conclusion in which a killer is brought to justice. Instead, the ghosts of the murdered women haunt the text, creating an open affective space that encourages readers to feel themselves implicated in the system of transnational capital that circulates around the murders without ever resolving this feeling into anything so easy as the redemption offered by a solved crime. By "returning to the scene of the crime" ("The Last Interview" 122), Bolaño collapses the melodramatic distance between the reader and the victim by renegotiating the affective demands the representation of the victimized women make on the reader. Thus, while Bolaño's narrative shares with many of the other texts on the femicides a commitment to exposing the ways that the murders are bound to the forces of neoliberal globalization, it employs an affective identification with the text that resituates the reader in relation to assumed conventions of the femicide narrative, subverting the melodramatic form by continually interrupting and foreclosing a linear narrative aimed at resolution and asking how justice can be restored

[29] Snuff films and illegal pornography, along with a black market organ trade and satanic ritual, were among the more sensational motives for the murders (Rodriguez, *The Daughters of Juárez* 252).
[30] In particular, activists have used International Women's Day and Eve Ensler's V-Day movement to raise international awareness of the murders.

despite the fact that perpetrators are nowhere to be found.

A full account of the sprawling plot of *2666* is impossible in the space permitted.[31] The novel is divided into five parts—"The Part About the Critics," "The Part About Amalfitano," "The Part About Fate," "The Part About the Crimes," and "The Part About Archimboldi"—each of which exists as a separate, although interlocking, narrative. "The Part About the Critics" follows four European literary critics as they search for German author Benno von Archimboldi, the subject of their critical work. This search eventually takes them to Santa Teresa. "The Part About Amalfitano" concerns a Spanish professor of philosophy at the University of Santa Teresa and his teenage daughter. In "The Part About Fate," Oscar Fate, a journalist for an African American magazine *Black Dawn*, travels to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match but becomes interested in the murders and finds himself embroiled in the dark underworld of Santa Teresa. "The Part About the Crimes" depicts 108 murders of women between 1993 and 1997 and their subsequent investigations. Finally, "The Part About Archimboldi" narrates the history of Benno von Archimboldi, from his youth in Germany to his participation in World War II as a German soldier to his writing career, and concludes with Archimboldi's departure for Santa Teresa, where his nephew has been held in prison for seven years, accused of being the mastermind behind the murders.

2666's most experimental section, "The Part About the Crimes," draws heavily on an archive of reporting about the crimes to cover the Juárez murders. Although Bolaño fictionalizes the facts of these murders, his narrative includes counterparts to accused

[31] In a brief vignette, Amalfitano, one of the main characters of Bolaño's *2666*, bemoans the fact that readers "inarguably prefe[r] minor [literary] works to major ones" (227). Amalfitano instead praises the "great, imperfect, torrential works, books that blaze paths into the unknown," books in which "the great masters struggle against that something. . .that terrifies us all, that something that cows us and spurs us on, amid blood and mortal wounds and stench" (227). *2666* is itself one of these "torrential works"; nearly 900 pages long, Bolaño bragged while writing it that it would be "the fattest novel in the world" (qtd. in Valdes 16).

murderers Abdel Sharif Sharif (Klaus Haas) and the Los Rebeldes gang (Los Bisontes), FBI profiler Robert Ressler (Albert Kessler), and reporter Sergio González Rodríguez (Sergio González) as well as the prevailing theories explaining the murderers' motives, such as the production of pornographic snuff films, the drug trade, one or more serial killers, perhaps originating in Central America or the United States, and most significantly, gendered violence—what one character names "gynophobia, which is the fear of women, and naturally afflicts only men" (382).[32] Incorporating only the slightest of police procedural plot—a plot that nonetheless manages to point out the failure on the part of the police to solve these murders and suggest the complicity of the police in a culture of gender violence—the 284-page chapter "The Part About the Crimes" consists largely of clinical descriptions of 108 murders of women between 1993 and 1997.

As Bolaño's English translator Natasha Wimmer reminds us, "Despite the novel's meticulous depiction of victims and killers and Bolaño's familiar obsession with geographical detail (especially topography and street names), Santa Teresa is above all a city of the imagination, the evocation of a state of mind" ("Notes toward an Annotated Edition of *2666*" 4) where, as González Rodríguez notes, "nothing [based on fact] is ever followed to the letter" (qtd. in Valdes 33). Bolaño created the descriptions based on information he was given by Mexican journalist Sergio González Rodríguez, whom Bolaño describes as "the person who knew most about this case" (*Between Parentheses* 231),[33] and although they are not

[32] It's the last that carries the most weight throughout the overarching narrative of "The Part about the Crimes," which follows investigations by Santa Teresa police officers Juan de Dios Martínez, Lalo Cura, and Epifanio Galindo, FBI profiler Albert Kessler, and journalist Sergio González, along with the prison experiences of accused murderer Klaus Haas, along with briefer narratives of others investigating the murders. Throughout the narrative, patriarchal violence erupts on both sides of the law, as police officers' misogynist jokes give way to the rape of arrested women in their cells, seemingly proving one officer's question about "how much of God's truth lay hidden in ordinary jokes" (553)

[33] Marcela Valdes fleshes out Bolaño's correspondence and friendship with González Rodríguez in "Alone Among the Ghosts." A fictionalized González Rodríguez appears in *2666* as the reporter Sergio González. Bolaño's English translator, Natasha Wimmer, emphasizes González Rodríguez's importance to 2666:

themselves descriptions of actual events, they accurately reflect the circumstances of specific murders.[34] This strategy sidesteps the truth claim made by other femicide narrative, subsuming the reality of the murders with the metaphorical trappings of fiction.[35]

Assembling the femicide machine

Criticism on *2666* has largely focused on "The Part About the Crimes," in particular with teasing out the connections between the femicides and the devaluing system of neoliberal capital.[36] In "The Impossible Closing: Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in Bolaño's *2666*," Grant Farred argues that the violence Bolaño depicts is "symptomatic of a larger globalized system of capital and genocide . . . that has been integral to the project of modernity, narrowly conceived, as the "tragic vision" of the last 500 years of history. It is for this reason that *2666* . . . is such an indictment of neoliberal capital" (691–692). Bolaño calls this system hell: "[Hell is] like Ciudad Juárez, our curse and mirror, a disturbing reflection of our frustrations, and our infamous interpretation of liberty and our desires" ("Last Interview" 114). Farred and Bolaño both point out the inconsistencies between the ideals of

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> In his depiction of the killings of women in Santa Teresa, Bolaño relies heavily on a book by reporter and writer Sergio González Rodríguez of the Mexico City daily *Reforma*, who later became a friend. Titled *Huesos en el Desierto* (*Bones in the Desert*), the book includes a logstyle accounting of the hundreds of women killed in Ciudad Juárez ("…23/09/02, Erika Pérez, 25 -30 years old, brown hair…28/08/02, Dora Alicia Martínez Mendoza, 34 years old, 35 stab wounds…"). The book also records the commentary of Robert K. Ressler, American serial killer expert and adviser on the Jonathan Demme film *The Silence of the Lambs*, and paints a portrait of a very tall Egyptian man with a US record of rape and assault, Abdul Latif Sharif Sharif, who was fingered as the serial killer. The two men are clearly models for 2666's Albert Kessler and Klaus Hass. ("Notes toward an Annotated Edition of *2666*" 4)

[34] Bolaño's novel is similar in this regard to Thomas Pynchon's *V.*, another encyclopedic novel whose center is a fictionalized account drawn from official reporting of horrific violence—in Pynchon's case, the genocide of the Herero in German South-West Africa.

[35] It is telling that out of 327 reviews on Amazon.com since 2008 (as of September 27, 2017), only 32 mention a connection to Juárez. More pertinently, a further three reviews clearly confuse Santa Teresa for a real city where the crimes took place.

[36] See Annabel Patterson's "Roberto Bolaño, 2666: Apocalypse in a Border Town," Laura Barberán Reinares's "Globalized Philomels: State Patriarchy, Transnational Capital, and the Fermicides on the US-Mexican Border in Roberto Bolaño's 2666," Shaj Mathew's "Ciudad Juárez in Roberto Bolaño's 2666: Mexico's Violent Cradle of Modernity," and Sol Peláez's "Counting Violence: Roberto Bolaño and 2666" for representative examples.

liberal society and the material effects of neoliberal capitalism, where, as Farred argues, "the language of human rights or economic justice has . . . little currency for the women of maquiladora, or women like them in other parts of the Global South" (704). Bolaño reiterates this diagnosis in *2666* as "the sad American mirror of wealth and poverty and constant useless metamorphosis, the mirror that sails and whose sails are pain" (206).

In the logic of transnational capital, maquiladoras represent progress and futurity. However, the attendant violence and exploitation belies this claim. In *2666,* Marco Antonio Guerra, son of the dean of the University of Santa Teresa, claims, "In my opinion this shithole has no future" (214), a comment that resonates with journalist Charles Bowden's claim that Juárez is "the laboratory of our future," referring to the United States and more generally, the system of transnational capitalism. Bowden explains that his comment is meant to criticize the economics of the border where "the rich [get] richer, the poor [get] poorer, and industrial growth produc[es] poverty faster than it distributes wealth" (61), and conflates this system to the murders of women: the future made possible by exploitative transnational capital, Bowden argues, "looks like the face of a murdered girl" (61). Bowden's claim marks the ways that the femicides signify metaphorically, but as I have tried to point out, the metaphorical and the literal are bound together, one always suggesting the other.

In his description of Boris Viskin's 2005 painting *Juárez,* Sergio González Rodríguez explains this connection:

> What might be metaphorical play acquires an urgent materiality, reflecting the banality of evil that turns a person into something less than a number—a dispossession close to absolute nothingness, a disposable piece, a preprogrammed serial wastage. To leave a raped, abused, half-naked woman's body in a garbage dump is to resignify the body within indifference and abjection. . . . Through it, the

> victim is reminded of her restricted status in domestic and industrial spheres; within the administration of dirt. (*The Femicide Machine* 92)

In *The Femicide Machine,* González Rodríguez uses the conceptual framework of the Deleuzean assemblage to explore the ways that various strategies of power intersect in Ciudad Juárez and more specifically, in the maquiladora. As González Rodríguez points out, the femicide machine is both "inscribed within" and a "parasite of . . . a particular structure of the neo-Fordist economy" that centers on the exploitative maquiladora system and the transnational circulation of power and money it entails (9). Farred, also drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's work, expands this critique, claiming that "the maquiladora is the über-rhizome of death, linking one unknown, overinhabited place (the city that promises 'almost full employment') with every other unknowable space of potential violence against women" (699).

Bolaño continuously draws attention to the connection between murdered women and the manufacture of products for a global market by associating the murders with maquiladoras. The description of the sixth murdered woman is indicative of the descriptions as a whole, so forgive me for quoting at length:

> The next month, in May, a dead woman was found in a dump between Colonia Las Flores and the General Sepúlveda industrial park. In the complex stood the buildings of four maquiladoras where household appliances were assembled. The electric towers that supplied power to the maquiladoras were new and painted silver. Next to them, among some low hills, were the roofs of shacks that had been built a little before the arrival of the maquiladoras, stretching all the way to the train tracks and across, along the edge of Colonia La Preciada. In the plaza there were six trees, one at each corner and two in the middle, so dusty they looked yellow. At one end of the

plaza was the stop for the buses that brought workers from different neighborhoods of Santa Teresa. Then it was a long walk along dirt roads to the gates where the guards checked the workers' passes, after which they were allowed into their various workplaces. Only one of the maquiladoras had a cafeteria. At the others the workers ate next to their machines or in small groups in a corner, talking and laughing until the siren sounded that signaled the end of lunch. Most were women. In the dump where the dead woman was found, the trash of the slum dwellers piled up along with the waste of the maquiladoras. The call informing the authorities of the discovery of the dead woman came from the manager of one of the plants. Multizone-West, a subsidiary of a multinational that manufactured TVs. The policemen who came to get her found three executives from the maquiladora waiting for them by the dump. Two were Mexican and the other was American. One of the Mexicans said they hoped the body would be removed as soon as possible. One of the policemen asked where the body was, while his partner called an ambulance. The three executives accompanied the policemen into the dump. The four of them held their noses, but when the American stopped holding his nose the Mexicans followed his example. The dead woman had dark skin and straight black hair past her shoulders. She was wearing a black sweatshirt and shorts. The four men stood looking at her. The American crouched down and moved the hair from her neck with a pen. It would be better if the gringo didn't touch her, said the policeman. I'm not touching her, said the American in Spanish. I just want to see her neck. The two Mexican executives crouched down and peered at the marks on the dead woman's neck. Then they got up and looked at their watches. The ambulance is taking a long time, said one of them. It'll be here in a second, said the policeman. Well, said one of the executives,

> you'll take care of everything, won't you? The policeman said yes, of course, and tucked the money the other man handed him into the pocket of his regulation pants. The dead woman spent that night in a refrigerated compartment in the Santa Teresa hospital and the next day one of the medical examiner's assistants performed the autopsy. She had been strangled. She had been raped. Vaginally and anally, noted the medical examiner's assistant. And she was five months pregnant. (358–359)

Household appliances and TVs take on new meaning when placed in the context of the maquiladora complex. While the murdered woman is mentioned in the first sentence, the entry itself focuses largely on a description of the location in which her body was found. Visually, the "new, silver" maquiladoras stand in direct opposition to the "shacks" of the slum that abuts it. The representation of the maquiladora as exceptional space is magnified by the corruption of the maquiladora executives. The maquiladora operates outside the confines of Mexican national law, as the American executive's refusal to follow police orders makes clear, and as such provides no possibility for justice on a national level. As both González Rodríguez and Farred argue, as a material expression of the exploitative effects of transnational capital, the maquiladora emphasizes the ways that US readers in particular might be implicated in the resulting violence. Farred points out that "the scene of death [referring to the femicides] is not only unknown and national, but unending and international, constituting the necropolitics of border crossing" (699), calling into account the systems of power over life and death on both sides of the border that accumulate in site of the maquiladora.

If, as Farred suggests, "the language of human rights or economic justice has . . . little currency for the women of maquiladora," a claim for justice might begin by recognizing that consumer capitalism depends upon these workers, a strategy that

anticapitalist groups, such as the Zapatistas, employ. Zapatista spokesman Subcomandante Marcos explains:

> Capitalism . . . hides behind the merchandise, so we don't see the exploitation that exists. . . . In the market, for example, . . . we see a device for listening to music like *cumbias*, *rancheras* or *corridos*, or whatever, and that is very good because it has good sound, but we do not see the worker in the maquiladora who struggled for many hours, putting the device together, while she is barely paid a pittance, lives far away from work, and spends a lot on the commute. In addition, she often runs the risk of being kidnapped, raped, and killed, as is happening to the women in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. (95–97)

Marcos's comment exposes the precarity of the maquiladora worker that makes consumer goods possible and contextualizes the exploitation inherent in neoliberal capitalism that allows the femicide machine to exist. The demand for justice Marcos implicitly makes is one of recognition of the ways that consumer culture is one line of power shoring up this exploitation.

Returning to the scene of the crime

Mónica Maristain: If you hadn't been a writer, what would you have been?

Roberto Bolaño: I should like to have been a homicide detective much better than being a writer. I am absolutely sure of that. A string of homicides. I'd have been someone who could come back to the scene of the crime alone, by night, and not be afraid of ghosts.

In the "Last Interview," Roberto Bolaño remarks that he "should like to have been a homicide detective much better than being a writer" (122). In her introduction to the collection of interviews of which this is a part, Marcela Valdes notes that "detective stories . . . were always passions of Bolaño's" (10), which Valdes attributes Bolaño's

"obsession" with "the motives and mechanics of violence" (10). Valdes points out that in all Bolaño's novels, save *2666*, "a triumphant ratiocinator" resolves the narrative conflict (33), but importantly, Bolaño does not predicate his desire to be a homicide detective on solving one of the "string of homicides he imagines." Instead, Bolaño's desire to revisit "the scene of the crime alone, by night, and not be afraid of ghosts" (122) suggests a careful meditation on murder that seeks some kind of understanding removed from traditional ghost stories (and detective stories, for that matter).

2666 in general, and especially "The Part about the Crimes," depends on this idea of return—again and again and again—to the scene of these crimes, not to elicit fear (a hallmark of both the detective and the serial killer genres) but to open one's self to the recognition that haunting brings. Alice Driver argues that "the repetition of violence [in *2666*] is . . . a case of form and function working together to reproduce a perceived reality—the indifference or inability of citizens to relate to such overwhelming violence. Bolaño exploits spectrality to get to the roots of horror, to the roots of a society that can witness the death of so many without ever really paying attention" (*Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* 93). However, Driver finds herself ambivalent about Bolaño's strategy, explaining that the novel, with its "the unrelenting descriptions of violence," "is so obsessed with sexual violence that [she] find[s] it discomforting" (91).

Driver's criticism points out the fine line between reporting violence and exploiting it through sensational images. Rosa-Linda Fregoso has suggested that images of the victims of femicide can be exploitative inasmuch as they shore up sensationalist narratives of border violence. In a critique of Bowden's *Juárez: Laboratory of the Future,* Fregoso aruges that Bowden's work—as well as that of the photojournalists whose images Bowden collects in his texts—"crosses the line from titillation and information" to reproduce the murdered

woman's body as fetish, a move that "adopts a misogynist gaze, enacting the symbolic violence of male rage" (15).[37] González Rodríguez addresses the ethics of atrocious images in his epilogue to *The Femicide Machine*, "Instructions for Taking Textual Photographs," which "reconstructs" the February 14, 2001, murder of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade and its subsequent investigation. Rather than including graphic photos of the murder, González Rodríguez publishes only the captions of the 20 relevant photos, subverting the sensational voyeuristic pleasure those images might produce. As González Rodríguez notes, "The written word can be employed as its own kind of illustration . . . Writing can create contexts and explanations that photographs (above all, the on-the-spot photographs of photojournalism) can't—or, generally speaking, don't—provide" (Interview with Josh Kun). González Rodríguez's method of taking textual photographs offers one way to work against the two prevailing representations of the Juárez murders: the fictional representations of the violence in genre novels and films and sensationalistic journalistic accounts—what González Rodríguez calls in an interview with Josh Kun "the reduction of the theme of violence to *la nota roja*, to media sensationalism (Manicheism, stereotypes)."

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag explains that the ethical force of a photograph depends on its distance from narrative. "Narratives can make us understand,"

[37] Bowden vehemently disagrees with Fregoso's critique. In a 2011 interview with Alice Driver, Bowden distances himself from editorial decisions about the photos chosen and captioned in his books. However, this in part sidesteps the issue of Bowden's sensationalistic reporting—the main focus of Fergoso's critique. Driver herself takes Bowden to task for his misogynistic use of the term 'whore' rather than 'prostitute' in his work. Likewise, Mexican journalist Sergio González Rodríguez critiques Bowden's work, explaining that Bowden

> reduces the US-Mexico border to a universe of assassins, blood, killings, war between narcos and politicians, all with heavy metal playing in the background. Unfortunately, many in Mexico have done the same. He's tended to negate the specific problem of violence against women and instead talk more generally about violence at the border, and violence against men. It's unacceptable to deny or minimize the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, which have been amply documented by US and Mexican experts and international organizations. To deny the killings is to be part of the killings. (Interview with Josh Kun)

Sontag explains, but "photographs do something else: they haunt us" (89),[38] and in this haunting lies the photograph's potential.

> Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget . . . Remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead. (115)

For Sontag, the haunting image can be put toward an ethics of human rights by memorializing the victims of violence. However, in her call to "let the atrocious images haunt us," Sontag also suggests that these depictions of violence might force an affective experience that gets at the very precarity of human experience. As Judith Butler, in her reading of Sontag, argues, the photograph "brings us close to an understanding of the fragility and mortality of human life, the stakes of death in the scene of politics" (825).

In her study of literary hauntings, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon details the affective resonance of being haunted. Gordon usefully points out that haunting is at once a personal experience of the social and material state of the world that is a subset of what Raymond Williams called a structure of feeling—an emergent social and material state describing the unfixity of the present and the "personal" (qtd. in Gordon 199). Gordon argues that while fear might be a component of the affective nature of haunting, the more significant reaction to haunting is an affective openness to an understanding of the historical context of ghosts themselves. Gordon explains,

[38] However, as Judith Butler reminds us, photographs still participate in narrative to the extent that their composition necessarily requires choices to be made on what to include (and not): "The photograph, in framing reality, is already interpreting what will count within the frame" ("Photography, War, Outrage" 823).

> Haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with . . . or where their oppressive nature is denied. . . . What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. (xvi)

Gordon's conceptualization of haunting pushes Sontag's ethical argument a bit further than that of simply recognizing and remember the violence that people are capable of. Letting the ghosts memorialized in the atrocious images haunt us is in itself an ethical act, Gordon suggests, because the recognition that occurs is not simply a recognition of violence perpetrated by another subject (and thus, at a distance from the viewer); instead, haunting turns acts of social violence into personal affective experiences—what Gordon calls "animated states" in which recognition of this violence occurs. As Gordon notes, "Haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done" (xvi).

Bolaño achieves this moment of haunting openness through his repetitive narration of the murders. The accounting of the murders is organized by month, and as the months pass, the descriptions take on a repetitive character and the descriptions are pared down to the key information.[39] González Rodríguez's stylistic template is evident in Bolaño's descriptions of the crimes. (see footnote 32 for a comparison of González Rodríguez's style).

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[39] Compare the description above with one of the last from the chapter:

> The next month, in May, a dead woman was found in a dump between Colonia Las Flores and the General Sepúlveda industrial park. In the complex stood the buildings of four maquiladoras where household appliances were assembled. . . .She had been strangled. She had been raped. Vaginally and anally, noted the medical examiner's assistant. And she was five months pregnant. (358–359)

> On November 16 [1997], the body of another woman was found on the back lot of the Kusai maquiladora, in Colonia San Bartolomé. . . . It just so happened that both the victim and her parents worked at the Kusai maquiladora. According to the medical examiners, the victim was raped several times before she died. (603–604)

Significantly, Bolaño does not imagine the murder itself. Instead, the representations offer textual photographs that return to the scene of the crime, documenting without narrativizing. The descriptions follow a formula that begins with the date and location on which a dead woman was found. A description of the location and of the body, as well as any pertinent information about the victim, usually follows, and the passage ends with the results of the medical examination. In most cases, the woman has been raped. The language of these sections also follows a pattern, descriptions of violence repeating again and again. Rape is referred to over 50 times and is specified as anal or vaginal rape over 15 times; 10 bodies are found with breasts or nipples severed or bitten off; the term "dead woman" or "dead women" occurs more than 45 times; and the term body almost 100 times regarding to a female murder victim. At over 300 pages describing 108 murders, this is not an easy read. At the same time, while the violence described in these accounts is horrific and shocking, the repetitive nature of the chapter supplements the horror of these acts with frustration and boredom. That is to say that while the ghosts Bolaño depicts continue to shock, a constant engagement with the ghosts allows the reader to encounter what Gordon calls "abusive systems of power" in a way that does not immediately correspond to an easily fixed genre.

Ghostly accumulation

A survey of reviews posted on *2666's* product page on Amazon suggests that "The Part About the Crimes" is the most challenging section of the novel. Many reviewers mention that the difficulty lies in the chapter's repetition of horrific subject matter that for many readers seems far removed from the novel's otherwise traditional narrative, leading to such scathing reviews as this one posted on January 4, 2010 (reproduced here exactly as published):

> I totally cannot comprehend what is so intriguing and fascinating about the unending detached accounts and descriptions of hundreds of murders of women. On xx date, the body of xxx was found, mutilated in the dumps. On another date, another body was found. On another date, another body of a mutilated woman was found……and it goes on and on and on and on for hundreds of pages!! What sick psychopath would enjoy this kind of never ending and super boring accounts of murdered women?? This is totally meaningless and irrelevant. How is this relevant to the entire story, if there is a story? (Amazon Customer)

An otherwise positive review on June 9, 2011, offers a calmer suggestion: "Skip part 4 entirely if you tire of it" (ML).

Significantly, while both reviewers question the relevancy of the material to "the entire story," they also categorize the affects produced by this chapter as boredom and exhaustion rather than shock or horror. These reviewers perhaps miss the point, but their comments do suggest the risks of Bolaño's ethical project. If the centrality of the murders exposes—albeit obliquely—the "secret of the world . . . hidden in them," it also underscores the difficulty of making ethical demands through literature, especially when these demands do not fit into prescribed narratives such as the melodrama. The first reviewer comes close to realizing the affective force of this chapter that is implicit in the question posed, "What sick psychopath would enjoy this kind of never ending [sic] and super boring accounts of murdered women?? [sic]."

The reviewers stage the tensions between what Roland Barthes has called "text of pleasure" and "texts of bliss." For Barthes, texts of pleasure are "linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading," while texts of bliss are uncomfortable: "the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the

reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (author's italics 14). Significantly, Barthes links texts of bliss to both repetition and boredom. Barthes argument also calls to mind one of Bolaño's character's criticism of readers who chose the comfort of lesser works to the "great, imperfect, torrential works . . . that blaze paths into the unknown," books in which "the great masters struggle against that something. . .that terrifies us all, that something that cows us and spurs us on, amid blood and mortal wounds and stench" (227). As Barthes suggests, the challenging nature of the text of bliss is to reach a moment of rupture with comfort itself. If "The Part About the Crimes" fails to be recognizable as an enjoyable narrative due to its repetitive nature, instead of critiquing this failure, we should ask what ethical possibilities the boredom and exhaustion make available.

In *Ugly Feelings*, Siane Ngai finds in negative affects such as boredom and fatigue the possibility for a renegotiated identification with a text. As Ngai points out, "The shocking and the boring prompt us to look for new strategies of affective engagement and to extend the circumstances under which engagement becomes possible" (262). Ngai uses a term of her own creation, stuplimity, to refer to this affective state. Stumplimity, Ngai writes, is "a concatenation of boredom and astonishment—a bringing together of what 'dulls' and what 'irritates' or agitates; of sharp, sudden excitation and prolonged desensitization, exhaustion, or fatigue . . . stuplimity is a tension that holds opposing affects together" (271). Although the primary and immediate effects of stuplimity echo the irritation the first reviewer felt when faced with Bolaño's accounting of the murders, Ngai suggests that engagement with stuplimity can lead to a greater investment in the work. She argues, "Though stuplimity begins with the dysphoria of shock and boredom, it might be said to culminate in something like the 'open feeling' of 'resisting being'—an indeterminate affective state that lacks the

punctuating 'point' of an individual emotion. In other words, the negative affect of stuplimity might be said to produce another affective state in its wake, a secondary feeling that seems strangely neutral, unqualified, 'open'" (284). There is something in this openness that is also in Gordon's conception of hauntedness. In both cases, the affected subject is open to what Gordon calls "a repressed or unresolved social violence . . . making itself known." Of course, as the Amazon reviews make clear, this openness is neither easily achieved nor guaranteed.

In the openness that occurs as a result of the haunting accounts of murder lies the ethical possibility of Bolaño's work. If the boredom and frustration experienced by a reader in the face of the haunting repetition of murdered women dislodges the pleasure of the text and leads to an affective identification that recognizes the way "a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known," the ethical significance lies in the way that this haunting implicates the reader in this social violence. The repeated descriptions of the murders emphasize that these women are victimized not only by their murderer but by the socioeconomic landscape in which they are embedded—a landscape, readers are reminded by Bolaño's repeated references to the products assembled as the various maquiladoras, in which they also inhabit as consumers. On its face, this affective identification isn't enough to serve as the basis for a transnational ethics. While Avery Gordon suggests that affective identification might "produc[e] a something-to-be-done" (xvi), this occurs in the "openings" that negative political feelings make possible. However, in a discussion of the political utility of affect, Lauren Berlant points out that while

> negative political feelings provide important openings for measuring injustice . . . their presence or absence isn't really evidence of anything. . . . This is why I work against the idea that emotions actually ground you somewhere in true

> justiceland. Emotion doesn't produce clarity but destabilizes you, messes you up, and makes you epistemologically incoherent. (Interview in *Cabinet*)

Berlant's comments underscore the difficulty inherent in a political deployment of affect, but as Ngai points out, it's just this destabilization that "provide[s] small subjects with . . . 'a little resistance' in their confrontations with larger systems" (294).

We are all affected.

Judith Butler's and Lisa Cartwright's theorizations of an affective community formed when the subject feels a responsibility for an other provides one way to consider the ethical potential of an affective identification. Nancy Fraser's concept of the all-affected connects the empathetic community Cartwright and Butler describe and a community explicitly established around a critique of the injustice inherent in larger systems of power. In "Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World," Fraser argues that we can no longer depend on formations like the nation-state to ensure justice and suggests that for issues of transnational justice the most effective policy would be the all-affected policy—the principle "that all those affected by a given social structure or institution have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it" (24). Fraser explains,

> What turns a collection of people into fellow subjects of justice is not geographical proximity but their coimbrication in a common structural or institutional framework, which sets the ground rules that govern their social interaction, thereby shaping their respective life possibilities in patterns of advantage and disadvantage. (24)

What Fraser implies is that once a subject understands him or herself as affected by a system of injustice, that person has the right to make a claim for justice. Because she is attempting to theorize an actually existing structure through which justice claims can be made in a global

framework, Fraser refers to material processes that affect transnational subjects.[40] However, I wish to expand Fraser's definition by collapsing this meaning with that of an affective identification with another. The empathetic mode, by definition, creates a coimbrication in a communal affective, if not institutional, framework, that can exist outside of geographic and identitarian borders. At the same time, as I have suggested in my reading of *2666*, being affected by injustice (in an emotional sense) might also lead to a recognition that one is also subjected (and thus affected) by the same unjust system.

More importantly, this identification depends upon a recognition that, to paraphrase Spinoza, one is affected by but also affects others. While this suggests the commonality possible between those subjected by neoliberal globalization, it also points out the ways that what otherwise seems like ordinary life to privileged First World subjects is located in an assemblage of the what Arjun Appadurai has called "global cultural flows" (296). As a theoretical framework with the primary purpose of cohering this recognition, the all-affected principle bridges the space between the transnational coalition based on a common feeling that both Fraser and Butler imagine and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's more overtly revolutionary concept of the multitude, "an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common" (*Multitude* 100). As Hardt and Negri continuously point out, "The multitude . . . most importantly produces cooperation, communication, forms of life, and social relationships" (*Multitude* 339). As a model of resistance, however, a multitude offers little in the way of assured results. Hardt and Negri argue, "The most we can say at this point

[40] Fraser has since revised her argument. Noting that an "all-affected principle" risks the claim that "Everyone is affected by everything" ("Abnormal Justice" 64), Fraser now proposes the "all subjected principle," which holds that "all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it" (65). While recognizing the clarity that Fraser's improved language offers to justice claims, what is gained in the term "all-affected" is a recognition of the connections between subjects, and between subjects and social, economic, and government structures.

is that the wide social diffusion and economic centrality of these practices of the common in our world provide conditions that make *possible* a project for the creation of a democracy based on free expression and life in common" (*Multitude* 202; authors' italics).

I'll return to the idea of the multitude of the all-affected in the conclusion, but for now, it's enough to point out that while it is clear that the experiences and feelings of exploited maquiladora workers in Mexico might have little in common with someone reading about these experiences in a high-brow work of literary fiction like *2666*, the affective demands of these texts endeavor to implicate the reader in the transnational structures of power that undergird not only the borderlands, but all systems of governance—a recognition of commonality that collapses the distance between reader and representation. In the chapters that follow, I examine the ways that representations from the margins such as these expose the failures of the neoliberal project—in the process, making implicit demands for considering how these subjects are affected by the practice of neoliberal capitalism on everyday life. However, as I hope to demonstrate, within these felt spaces exists a practice of community that works against these forces, and these resistant communities, I argue, foreground the commonality that Fraser suggests lies at the heart of an claim for justice. Justice in this instance can never be equivalent to a juridical claim for human rights. Instead, these representations imagine a justice that begins, as Subcommandante Marcos suggests, with (affective) recognition.

Uneasy Encounters with Dis-Integrated Bodies: Drug Users and Drug Economies in *Half Nelson* and *Winter's Bone*

This chapter examines two recent films concerning drug use and drug economies in the first decade of the twenty-first century in the United States: 2006's *Half Nelson* and 2009's *Winter's Bone*. In both films, drug use is linked to various failures of the neoliberal state. I argue that visual representations of the addict body depend on establishing a binary opposition between health and disease and between bodily stability and deterioration. To be clear, I do not want to minimize the very real damage drug use can do to users and their communities, nor the individual desire to stop using or the violence inherent in the drug trade. I am, however, critical of the representational strategies deployed by narratives concerning drug use that reduce the intersecting forces of race, place, class, and able-bodiedness into a vilification of the individual user connected to cultural conceptions of morality and criminality rather than of the systemic economic inequality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century United States that makes such worlds possible. At the same time, I am interested in locating instances of unease in the face of debilitated bodies (and worlds) that might open a space in which to question why these excessive bodies appear so challenging and uncover an ethical potential that recognizes the precariousness of certain lives in relation to the socioeconomic realities of our current era while exposing moments of alternative ways of living that challenge in small but important ways the limitations of everyday life under neoliberal capitalism. These moments are fleeting and peripheral but once grasped provide an uneasy perspective on the debilitated bodies and lives of those entangled in the drug trade.

Contemporary representations of drug users often portray their subjects in opposition to the normative morals of respectable society, a vilification that largely registers

visually through the deterioration of the drug user body. Culturally, the terms of drug use have generally located any causes and effects within individual psychological and moral failings, stigmatizing users by identifying them as what Erving Goffman calls "social deviants"—those "considered to be engaged in some kind of collective denial of the social order" (143–144). Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, examines the ways that conceptions of deviancy are socially constructed and are in part informed by what Alisse Waterson describes as sociological models "steeped in the history of medicalization and criminalization of drug use and users in the United States during [the twentieth] century" (14).[1] In *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics*, Curtis Marez makes the case that cultural representations of drug use create "a formative, structuring context for ideas and practices concerning race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation," a list to which I would add disability (4). In his important study, Marez exposes the dependence of representations of drug use and users on stereotypes of marginalized racial groups and the ways that these representations shore up colonialist, imperialist, and capitalist ideologies, in part through the passing of moral judgments that are themselves tied to uneasy affective responses to such representations. Marez's work, tightly focused as it is on the racial aspects of these representations, suggests the potential utility of a disability studies intervention that would further tease out the materiality of the drug user as characters that, to repurpose Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's comments of disabled characters more generally, "remain on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures . . . whose bodily configurations operate as spectacles, eliciting responses from other characters or producing rhetorical effects that

[1] Kate McCoy, an academic working on studies of drug use and treatment, explains that "with all the talk and supposed consensus regarding addiction as a disease, the presumption of moral failing continues to bind our policies and practices" (629). McCoy argues that rather than separate diagnoses, the disease model and the moral model implicate each other (629). To counter this, Waterson demands a more nuanced understanding of drug users that accounts for the "economic, political, and ideological forces [that shape] the nature and context of drug users' lives" (33).

depend on disability's cultural resonance" (9).

Disability studies has rigorously challenged common problematic representations of physical and mental disability but has yet to focus sustained critical attention on drug use and addiction specifically, perhaps because drug use occupies a gray area in the intersections of physical, mental, social, and moral impairment. Heavy drug use or addiction is included in the DSM-V as "substance use disorder" and often treated as a neurological disorder. However, the Americans with Disabilities Act does not cover drug users except in cases in which drug users have already completed rehabilitation and are no longer using,[2] and drug use is criminalized through processes that cannot be untethered from race but is also commonly understood as an individual moral failure that privileges personal pleasure above the common good.[3] Although disability studies has not so far engaged many questions connected to drug use, substance addiction, and debility, the affective turn that the field is arguably taking, with its consistent critique of neoliberal subjectivities and of the poverty of neoliberal representational economies, allows us as disability scholars to move in those directions.

By asking what critical analysis disability studies might offer a consideration of representations of drug users, I take up Robert McRuer's call in "Disability Nationalism for Crip Times" to examine "impairments . . . [that are] not exactly comprehensible as 'disabilities' as we have come to think we know them" (176). Such an approach is commensurate with the recent turn in disability studies toward a consideration of debility and capacity that might, as Jasbir Puar suggests, "destabilize[e] the seamless production of

[2] The official language states: "An individual who is currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs is not an "individual with a disability" when the employer acts on the basis of such use" ("Substance Abuse under the ADA").
[3] William Garriott's *Policing Methamphetamine: Narcopolitics in Rural America* usefully discusses the tensions between the criminalization of methamphetamine use and the medicalization of methamphetamine addiction.

abled-bodies in relation to disability" ("Prognosis Time" 166) to reveal the complex socioeconomic environments that, for instance, make drug use and the drug trade viable ways of life for subjects in the present moment. Although related, disability and debility emerge from different critical lineages. As Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin detail in their entry on the term in *Keywords for Disability Studies,* "disability" has a long and troubled history in legal, social, and cultural contexts. From a disability studies perspective, the term, which "encompasses a broad range of bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capacities" (1), often refers to both a political and social project of recognition in the public sphere[4] while also serving as the basis for a community from which to critique culturally established assumptions of able-bodiedness and normativity in general. Rather than a social or representational strategy based in identity, debility suggests what Joseph Fischel calls "the multifarious, statutorily imposed ways [people] are deprived, not only of a shot at the good life but often even of a livable life" (84–85). Puar has more recently focused attention on the ways that debility works as a supplement to disability, noting that debility "foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled . . . [and] comprehends those bodies that are sustained in a perpetual state of debilitation precisely through foreclosing the social, cultural, and political translation to disability" ("Hands Up, Don't Shoot!"). Puar theorizes debility as "a triangulation of the ability/disability binary," a means of exploring the limitations of disability as a representational strategy by recognizing that "some bodies may not be recognized as or identify as disabled, [but] they may well be debilitated, in part by being foreclosed access to legibility and resources as disabled," while others "may well be disabled but also

[4] In *The Biopolitics of Disability*, David Mitchell shows how certain disability subjectivities are incorporated into the neoliberal regime. Importantly, Mitchell argues for a consideration of the "ways in which disabled people's openly interdependent lives and crip/queer forms of embodiment provide alternative maps for living together in the deterritorialized, yet highly regulated spaces of biopolitics" (3).

capacitated."

David Mitchell cautions against a universalizing concept of debility, explaining how it can be put in service of the neoliberal project, in which "nearly all bodies are referenced as debilitated and in need of market commodities to shore up their beleaguered cognitive, physical, affective, and aesthetic shortcomings" (*Biopolitics of Disability* 12). Such a conception, Mitchell notes, "underpin[s] calls for dismantling the social model of disability, the principle that disability is in the environment rather than the person, and approaches that critique disability as a politically suspect identity category" (29). Mitchell's important critique refuses an easy correspondence between disability and debility, underscoring the continued importance of a social and cultural model of disability as an identity while leaving open the a space for what he calls "those occupying peripheral embodiments [who] cannot be adequately accommodated even under the most liberal, fluid, and flexible diversity doctrine given the in-built limits of community infrastructure, reasonable tolerance, limited economic resources, and traditional historical expectations about who will share the rapidly dwindling commonwealth represented by public and private spaces" (14). Mitchell's theorization here aligns with Puar's nuanced theorization of debility as third vector (along with disability and debility), both providing a framework for understanding the impairments McRuer describes as being "not exactly comprehensible" as disabilities by extending the important work of disability studies to the many ways that ravages of the current era are embodied.

Attention to the intersection of race, class, and ability that delineates representations of rural white poor drug users fits within the recent theoretical turn in disability studies that considers possible alternative forms of critique and community practiced by subjects marginalized not only by physical or mental impairment but by larger socioeconomic, political, and global forces that Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell call "the geopolitics of

disability." In their introduction to the 2010 special issue of *The Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, *The Geo-Politics of Disability*, Snyder and Mitchell suggest a reading of geopolitics that "draws upon identifications of shared predicaments of exclusion and isolation while also allowing ways of revaluing the demographics of disability as counterinsurgent opportunities to resist the dictates of ablenationalism"—what they call "alternative responses to transecting forces of globalization" (114). This important volume of *JLCDS* calls for a broadened consideration of the "transecting experiences of 'otherness' as raced, gendered, and sexed social inequities and the largely immobile status of constituents that disability studies would seek to represent" (119), a theoretical turn that Eli Clare envisioned in his seminal *Exile and Pride.* As McRuer suggests in the same volume, Clare's text, which connects disability studies to issues of whiteness, class, queer identity, and economic and environmental justice, asks its readers to "[comprehend] [disability studies] more capaciously as an epistemological field that makes it possible to know about or intervene in any political or cultural issue" ("Disability Nationalism in Crip Times" 164).

Representations of drug use, reflecting as they do anxieties about nonnormative pleasures, bodies, and lifestyles, rarely consider the drug trade as a response to local socioeconomic deprivation. Indeed, as Mitchell has recently pointed out, under the neoliberal regime, such a comprehensive understanding is occluded by a focus on personal accountability in which "those who don't adequately maintain their bodies are held personally responsible for their descent into the chaos of ill health and nonwell being" (*The Biopolitics of Disability* 102). A focus on debility then attends to the social, cultural, and economic conditions that undergird drug use and production as part of and a response to everyday life within a regime of neoliberal capital in which many subjects—drug user or not—contend with embodied experiences that mark them as outside of the bounds of

normative modes of being.

Beyond the bounds of progressive liberalism

Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden's critically lauded film *Half Nelson* is an interesting amalgam of the teaching and the drug genres. In keeping with the strictures of the teaching film, idealistic and effective teacher Dan Dunn (Ryan Gosling) has an easy rapport with his students—at one point, the parent of a former student thanks Dan for the impact his course made on the student's life—with methods that stand in direct opposition to the bureaucratic machinations of teaching to regimented standards, enforced by the school principal. (Dan focuses his middle-school American history course on dialectics.) At its best, the film challenges the generic conventions of the teaching film,[5] in which, to repurpose Gayatri Spivak, (in most cases white) middle-class teachers save poor brown children (from bad parents, from gang violence, from themselves),[6] in part by refusing a redemptive narrative from the perspective of the students. Instead, the film explores Dan's drug use, situating it easily within the body of films, such as *Drugstore Cowboy*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, *Trainspotting*, and *Requiem for a Dream*, that depict a downward spiral of drug use, with or without a redemptive rehabilitation. The genre's concerns with the body are clear: drug use manifests itself on the body of the user, and this bodily debilitation and degeneration comes to signify a social and

[5] This genre includes films such as *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *To Sir, with Love* (1967), and *Dead Poets Society* (1989), as well as the parody *High School High* (1996). This genre has also been critiqued in works such as the fourth season of HBO's critically acclaimed series *The Wire* (2006), which shares with *Half Nelson* a number of child actors, and the French documentary *The Class* (2008).

[6] Boden and Fleck pay lip service to the complicated racial dynamics of the narrative in a scene where Dan confronts drug dealer Frank and warns him to stay away from one of his students, Drey. Dan implores Frank to "do something good." Frank replies, perhaps understandably, "So now we back to the point of what is white is right, right?" Although Dan responds that "this has nothing to do with that," the subtext of the conversation, and indeed the entire film, is the complicated relationship between privilege, race, and social change. The scene ends with Dan exclaiming, "Fuck. . . . I'm supposed to do something, right? But what am I supposed to do?" In what becomes a repeated trope in the film, Dan's individual confusion and frustration over effecting social change occludes the larger structural issues that Frank's statement lays bare, returning the film's focus to the failure of the political left rather than a critique of issues that not only keep Frank in business, but make Frank's business one of the only viable options for Dan's students, Drey included.

moral degeneracy.

Not content to simply represent a realistic vision of drug use, the film stages Dan's debilitated body as a response to and metaphor for the failure of a specific mode of progressive liberalism, locating drug use within an individual experience that is tied to both American imperialism and the eight years of the Bush presidency. Late in the film, we witness a Dunn family dinner in which Dan, his brother and his brother's girlfriend, and his parents become more and more inebriated over the course of a long scene. The film is quite critical of the elder Dunn's drunkenness—Dan's father launches into a racist joke about Ebonics; his mother carries on a conversation with Dan while failing to register Dan's apparent need for connection—and the scene's focus on his parents drunkenness suggests a causal relationship to Dan's own drug use, although to be clear, the film does not make any claims for addiction as biologically or socially constructed; in fact, Fleck argues that such a reading is reductive and runs counter to the political message of the film. He explains, "When [people have lost the ability to think that they can make change in their communities and in the world], they go into denial and they start to use and abuse [drugs, including alcohol]" (Twitchfilm.com).

Fleck and Boden establish Dan's own sense of lost idealism early on in the film. After meeting a woman at a bar and taking her to a motel, Dan gives an extended monologue while he cuts and snorts lines of cocaine. Dan's critique of the Bush administration rehashes arguments familiar to many on the left (the presumed audience for low-budget independent films like *Half Nelson*)—during his animated speech, the camera cuts to a close-up of the woman, who appears extremely bored, perhaps a wink to the viewers, who likely feel the same listening to Dan's speech—but it is instructive of the ways that Dan associates his drug use with an affective experience of the present, particularly his inability to

effect change—itself indicative of a failure of liberal progressivism on the whole. Dan argues,

> Even after the Duelfe Report, right? Even after it says there are no weapons, there are no WMD programs. There is nothing. They do that Pippa study, the University of Maryland thing, and it turns out that 72 percent of [George W. Bush] supporters still believe there's WMDs. 75 percent still believe they're supporting Al-Qaeda, and so what the fuck do we do, you know? What do you do? What does one . . . I'm one man. What do I do, you know? [The film cuts to Dan cutting lines on a table with his credit card.] I used to be so fucked up. I used to be so fucked up. I was just out there, you know. But I fucking cleaned up. [Dan laughs.] I cleaned up . . . [Dan snorts a line of cocaine.] For the most part. I do it now to get by, but I can handle it. You know what I mean? I tried the rehab thing. I tried it. It didn't work, you know? It works for some people. My ex-girlfriend is getting married, so it works for some people, right? It didn't work for me. The kids keep me focused and I . . . [At this point, Dan trails off, before the scene cuts to Dan and the woman slow dancing.]

In his review of *Half Nelson* in the *Guardian*, Andrew Pulver complains, "Fleck and Boden themselves appear in thrall to the idea that the 'liberal dream' is automatically doomed—or perhaps this is simply the self-defeating position of any vaguely oppositional politics in the US these days." To be sure, Dan's pessimism is easily recognizable as a defining public feeling of the American left in the face of what Lauren Berlant has recently called "the fraying relation between post-Second World War state/economic practices and certain postwar fantasies of the good life endemic to liberal, social democratic, or relatively wealthy regions" (*Cruel Optimism* 15). For Berlant, this pessimism is an a/effect of the neoliberal dismantling of social supports and protections for both citizens and the

environment. By coupling drug use and addiction to the failure of the liberal left and representing it from a white middle-class perspective, Boden and Fleck obscure the impoverished environment in which drug use, and more importantly, the drug economy exist. In this sense, Fleck and Boden's insistence that Dan's addiction is linked to a Dan's affective experience of the failure of the radical left demonstrates the ways that the neoliberal regime has already been incorporated into American middle-class culture as inevitable, even by the left.[7]

As Dan segues from a critical frustration with the state of politics to a consideration of options for change—"So what the fuck do we do, you know? What do you do? . . . What do I do, you know?"—he works his way from a communal idea of change to an individual one, mirroring the neoliberal shift to individual responsibility. Likewise, Dan's conversation begins as a political rant and quickly moves to the realm of the individual and the domestic, as Dan discusses his failed attempts at rehab and his ex-girlfriend's impending marriage. Dan's understanding of his drug use within the domestic is part and parcel of the neoliberal move toward what Lisa Duggan calls "personal responsibility exercised in the family and in

[7] As David Harvey argues in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, "Neoliberalism [has] penetrated 'common-sense' understandings. The effect in many parts of the world has increasingly been to see it as a necessary, even wholly 'natural', way for the social order to be regulated" (40-41). Harvey's analysis of neoliberalism has been criticized for only attending to the economic characteristics of neoliberal governance rather than noting the wide-reaching social and cultural effects that occur hand in hand with such a system. Henry Giroux notes, "Harvey never refutes seriously the notion that neoliberal hegemony can be explained simply through an economic optic and consequently gives the relationship of politics, culture, and class scant analysis. If neoliberalism as theory and practice is deeply indebted to furthering market economy and its power structures, then it also recognizes the value of a cultural politics that has successfully mobilized a hegemonic discourse based on the assumption that the market is in a better position to decide matters than any genuine democracy" (*Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* 170). J. Jack Halberstam critiques Harvey's "single-minded focus on the history of the white working class and an abstract concept of capital" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 8). Halberstam calls for a more nuanced understanding of the uneven forces at play, especially in marginal communities, where resistances, refusals, and alternatives to the neoliberal regime might and do occur. At the same time, Halberstam demands an increased attention to the ways that various subjects experience neoliberalism differently and through different cultural contexts. As Lisa Duggan argues, "Because . . . the economy and the interests of business cannot really be abstracted from race and gender relations, from sexuality or other cleavages in the body politic, neoliberalism has assembled its projects and interests from the field of issues saturated with race, with gender, with sex, with religion, with ethnicity, and nationality. . . . Economic goals have been (must be) formulated in terms of the range of political and cultural meanings that shape the social body in a particular time and place" (xvi).

civil society" (*Twilight of Equality* 14). Dan's coupling of rehabilitation to marriage and domestic reproduction through the body of his ex-girlfriend also emphasizes what Robert McRuer has called the twin forces of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness.

As his drug use becomes heavier and more pronounced physically, and as Dan continues to cross the boundaries of respectability, viewers are persuaded to read Dan as a failure. Dan's failure at both rehabilitation and its subsequent domestic "success" signifies his failure as a good citizen and member of the community. As David Harvey notes, under neoliberalism, "individual success or failure [is] interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings . . . rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism)" (*A Brief History* 65). Thus, although the film suggests a larger political reason for Dan's drug use, Dan internalizes his affective political and public response as an individual failure, tied not only to his desire to effect political change but also to his presumed failure to live up to the demands of a presumed "good life" offered to the middle class, including good health and marriage.

Baseheads don't have friends.

Early in the film, drug use is clearly contextualized as a pleasurable social event[8]—Dan prepares to use powder cocaine in his apartment; he and two women use cocaine outside a bar where they have been dancing—and is not immediately marked as a significant aspect of the narrative. The first time Dan's drug use is explicitly represented on-screen plays out much differently. After coaching an after-school basketball game, Dan enters the empty women's bathroom to lock up. Instead, he sits in a stall and smokes crack cocaine. In

[8] As Fleck notes on the film's director commentary, "[The first time we see Dan high] he goes out and dances with girls. And that's something he likes to do when he gets high" (6:38).

contrast to the previous representations of drug use, here Dan's drug use carries negative connotations, established through the framing of the scene, an ever-present ominous hum from the HVAC system serving as the only soundtrack, and a shift from the warm, red-tinted bar scenes to a colder, blue palette. As Dan gets high, the camera presses into a tight shot, so close that his head is partially out of frame and out of focus. In the foreground, Dan's hands come into focus as he lights a crack pipe and inhales. With each hit he takes, the camera resets, pulling in and out of focus, as Dan slumps against the wall. The difference in tone from the previous scene of drug use at the bar is striking and suggests that when drug use is distanced from social interaction, it crosses a line of respectability—a reflection of the discourse around individual responsibility and failure with regard to drug use. Certainly, the technical aspects of this scene set the tone, but the narrative also leans on cultural narratives of crack that stand in opposition to parallel narratives of power cocaine.[9]

Even though, as Michelle Alexander notes in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, "Crack is pharmacologically almost identical to powder cocaine" (50), media representations of crack particularly during the so-called crack crisis of the eighties vilified crack and crack users, first by suggesting that crack cocaine was more addictive and more dangerous than powder cocaine and second by "reinforcing already prevalent racial stereotypes of black women as irresponsible, selfish 'welfare queens,' and black men as 'predators'—part of an inferior and criminal subculture" (51). The scapegoating of crack cocaine served to bolster Reagan's war on drugs and led to minimum mandatory sentences that greatly overshadowed those of powder cocaine—only now being overturned almost 20 years later—and, as Alexander points out, led to massive increases in incarceration rates of

[9] Fleck and Boden emphasize this early in the film, when Dan is too short on cash for an eighth gram of powder cocaine. His dealer asks him, "You want that other thing?" "That other thing" avoids naming crack immediately, deferring the affective resonance of Dan's use until the moment he first uses.

African Americans. Recently reported findings from a long-term study of full-term babies exposed to cocaine in utero—so-called "crack babies"—has shown that "poverty [rather than drug exposure proved] to be a key determining factor in how well children performed later in life" (McDonough).[10]

The image of Dan smoking crack counterposes the semiotics of crack cocaine as a black urban drug with Dan's white middle-class body. At first glance, the image of a white middle-class man smoking crack subverts the various narratives the film engages—the idealistic teacher and the racialized narrative of crack pushed by the war on drugs—upending the terms of these narratives. However, it does so only to the extent that Dan represents to the audience an unexpected individual anomaly; although the drug economy in the film, which includes both users and producers and sellers, is almost entirely populated by people of color,[11] the film's neither alters nor completely critiques what Alexander calls the ultimate image created by narratives of the crack era: that of "the black drug criminal" (102).

This scene is also notable as it establishes Dan's close relationship with his student Drey (Sharika Epps), setting up the film's defining relationship. While Dan is smoking crack,

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[10] These stereotypes of crack use have been debunked. A related *AlterNet* article, reposted by *Salon*, explains, "Despite racialized images of crack users, data from National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reveals that people reporting [crack] use in 1991 . . . were 52% white, 38% black, and 10% Hispanic. From a rational perspective, these numbers should not be surprising: whites are, after all, the majority, and have a long-standing tendency to use drugs at rates higher than blacks" (Gwynne). Further, "Even at the peak of crack's popularity, only between 10 and 20 percent of users became addicted—a rate similar to cocaine and other drugs. Users who do become addicted to crack are more affected by a combination of other factors, like a lack of positive reinforcement, financial stability, and a strong support network." However, beliefs about crack cocaine persist, largely the result of cultural representations stemming from the war on drugs, in which "a predictable 'us against them' frame was used in. . .news stories, with 'us' being white, suburban America, and 'them' being black Americans and a few corrupted whites" (Alexander 102).

[11] The film also problematically references the stereotype of the so-called "crack whore." In the film's denouement, Drey delivers crack to a hotel room where Dan, another man, and two women are partying. In contrast to previous moments of drug use as communal entertainment, this moment—meant in the film to document Dan's lowest moment [so far]—is explicitly racialized. Dan answers the door, but when he sees Drey, he immediately shuts it. The African American woman, clad only in a bra and panties, opens the door and calls for Drey to come back. The scene then cuts to inside the room. A rap video plays on the television, as the African American woman smokes crack. In the background, another man and woman, both white, are together on one of the hotel beds, further suggesting Dan's connection to the African American woman. The scene ends when Dan hands Drey money for the crack.

he hears a woman enter and use the bathroom. It seems at first as if Dan will escape notice, but on her way out the door, the woman opens the door. When Dan realizes it's Drey, he reacts in horror and shame, compounded by the immediate effects of his recent drug use. As Drey looks at Dan confused and disappointed, the camera cuts to a shot of Dan's face before moving down to Dan's hand, still clutching his glass crack pipe, and slowly pulling it into focus. Drey apologizes and tries to leave, but Dan calls her back and tries to stand. He slides back to the floor on on his back and asks Drey for some water, explaining, "I'm sorry. But I'm fine," a phrase the camera marks by focusing again on Dan's hand clutching the crack pipe. Drey begins to wipe Dan's brow with a wet paper towel, as he asks her, "Just don't go, ok. Just for a minute?" Dan places his hand over hers, centered in the scene, before cutting to a wide shot of Drey kneeling over Dan, Dan clutching her hand to his head.

If the immediate affective response to Dan's drug use depends on the power of circulating narratives about crack in popular culture, the scene associates these representations with a number of boundary crossings. The first, or course, is Dan's drug use. Over the course of the film, Dan uses more heavily and increasingly at school. Physically, Dan's appearance becomes disheveled and debilitated. (At one point, he gets a nose bleed while he is teaching after using cocaine during a break.) What was depicted early on as a recreational experience is cast in a criminal light, culminating in Dan's attempted rape of a fellow teacher he was casually dating. The second is Dan and Drey's friendship, which is central to the anxieties and ambivalences of the teaching narrative put forward by the film but is also informed by the affective resonance of Dan's drug use. The extent of Dan and Drey's relationship prior to their encounter in the bathroom is unclear, but this moment solidifies their friendship. Dan begins giving Drey rides home (including immediately following this incident), shares knowing glances across the classroom, and even on two

occasions allows Drey into his apartment, although Dan seems alternatingly uncomfortable and bemused by their relationship. The film partly depicts this relationship as Dan's attempt to keep Drey from getting involved in the drug economy,[12] but the close relationship they share that, at least on Drey's part, walking a thin line between feelings of friendship and romance, exposes the contradictions of Dan's actions, as it is founded on Drey's accommodation with the drug economy in her everyday life.

The affective resonance of the inappropriate relationship between student and teacher and between adult and child is always in play in the film. As drug dealer Frank says to Drey later in the film, "Don't you think you and teacher's relationship is a little. . .inappropriate?" The scene above draws on these anxieties from the start, emphasized through the sound of Drey using the bathroom, underscoring Dan's intrusion on a private space and raising the specter of sexual assault,[13] and the physical intimacy Dan and Drey share at the end of the scene, which, while not framed as romantic or sexual, is still outside the pale of appropriate teacher-student interaction. While the scene itself invokes a multiplicity of anxieties, its affective nature is more subdued. These are not moments of horror or disgust. Instead, Drey's comforting hand on Dan's brow during his moment of vulnerability is a tender moment, an inchoate intimate connection. At the same time, Dan's request that Drey stay, emphasized in the final shot of Dan's hands clutching Drey's to his face, marks a clear crossing of a boundary, leaving viewers uneasy.

I use unease to refer to the specific affective encounter with these moments of boundary crossing. As Sara Ahmed eloquently argues, good affects such as happiness work

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[12] At one point in the film, Dan confronts Frank, telling him to "do the right thing" and stay away from Drey. Of course, this narrative is too easy. Frank immediately calls Dan out, arguing that he is just reflecting a racist narrative of "what's white is right."

[13] The recent discriminatory "bathroom bills" are founded on the imaginary dangers of such boundary crossing. A proposed 2015 bill in Florida listed a number of potential "crimes against individuals using those facilities, including, but not limited to, assault, battery, molestation, rape, voyeurism, and exhibitionism" (Kasperkevic).

through "a shared orientation toward what is good" (*Promise of Happiness* 56). Unease is a recognition of moments where, as José Muñoz might say, normative modes of being go off script, where as Ahmed points out subjects are directed elsewhere from what is assumed to be good. As an affective mode, unease depends on and shores up established conceptions of normative behavior. Unlike traditional affective genres, such as the melodrama or the horror movie, *Half Nelson's* realist mode does not aim for large-scale affective reactions from its audience. Instead, unease registers as an affective placeholder of difference that, as Dilia Narduzzi points out with regard to negative affects in response to monstrous bodies more generally, "operates as a constitutive part of a sociocultural reproductive system that works to exclude nonnormative bodies" (72) that also suggests and encompasses the varied (and possibly conflicting) feelings produced through uneasy encounters.

Although uneasiness depends on a recognition of social norms, its affective resonance also complicates and thickens the relationship between an audience's understanding of these norms by focusing attention on these moments of transgression (or, from another perspective, escape). In the film, Dan's increasingly debilitating drug use runs parallel to Drey's attempt to navigate her everyday life, where her single mother works long hours as an EMT and her brother is in prison on drug charges. For Drey the drug economy is a simple fact of life that cannot be easily bifurcated into good and evil. Local dealer Frank takes Drey under his wing and begins grooming her to work for him. However, Frank also helps support Drey's family while her brother is in prison and seems to genuinely care about Drey. While getting a snack in a local fast-food restaurant, Frank lays bare the economic choices at the heart of the experiences of his and Drey's community. Frank and Drey are talking about Drey's brother, who was working for Frank when he was arrested. Frank asks Drey, "You ever think about working?" before mentioning that at one point he actually

worked in the restaurant they're eating at, making $150 a week. Frank's implicit point to Drey is that her options for work are limited and will never provide a living wage. Frank also highlights the difference between selling drugs and using them. Discussing Drey's friendship with Dan, Frank explains, "He's a basehead, alright, and baseheads don't have friends," flipping Dan's discomfort with Drey's relationship with Frank and asking the audience to do the same.

Unease has many objects and many trajectories. If part of a project of uneasiness is to make the boundaries of normativity legible by attending to the moments when they are breached, the intersecting lines of Dan's drug use, Drey's participation in the drug economy, and their friendship also make audiences uneasy through the ambiguity each provides. Dan's drug use is perhaps the easiest to vilify, but the film's juxtaposition of his use with the complementary economy that supports Drey and her mother complicates such a reading, supplementing it with narratives that the liberal progressivism Dan represents is unable to address in any effective way. At the same time, while audiences are expected to read Dan and Drey's relationship as a boundary crossing, the care with which this relationship is depicted comes close to challenging the very boundaries on which this unease depends.

The film's conclusion neutralizes these feelings of unease through a minor moment of rehabilitation. Dan has spent the previous night using drugs a motel room, during which he purchased crack from Drey, who was selling drugs for the first time. The next day, Dan is absent from school. Drey finds him at the hotel and helps him home, where Dan showers and shaves, rehabilitated in appearance if not in actual fact. Dan's recomposed and regenerated literally "clean" body offers a guardedly optimistic conclusion that gives hope to his chances for turning his life around. This rehabilitative narrative celebrates "getting clean" as the product of individual will and able-bodiedness, while occluding any and all critique of

a larger social dimension of drug use in the late twentieth century United States, or, as Eli Clare writes, an explanation of "how white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and ableism work in concert" (xiii). Significantly, the conclusion also demands that Drey rebuff Frank in favor of Dan, as Drey refuses a ride from Frank on her way to the motel. However, this conclusion remains ambivalent about Dan and Drey's friendship, as well as Dan's future job prospects (we see him rebuked several times by the school principal, and the film suggests he has been fired)—and indeed, the idea of rehabilitation itself. A shower and a shave clearly do not make up for Dan's behavior over the course of the film, nor do they suggest he is on a long-term path to "recovery." The film ends with Dan and Drey sitting (respectably far apart) on Dan's couch. Dan tells Drey a joke—a recurring motif in the film tied to romantic relationships—and although he screws up the punchline, they laugh together. Thus, the neutralization of unease through a rehabilitated gaze leaves room for a friendship that is still to all intents and purposes nonnormative. Although the film fades to black at this moment, this moment of friendship and care exposes an alternative possibility of intimacy, however small, that, like Drey's caring touch, revises the terms of normative relationships taken for granted.

Visceral encounters of images

In her experimental text *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart attempts to represent the affective valence of ordinary life through a seemingly unconnected collection of vignettes that together offer an impression of the "immanent moving forces" that animate daily routines and experiences (128). In one brief section, Stewart describes an encounter that takes place in "a place in the mountains where there is abject poverty and stereotypes so strong they thicken the air like a stench" (13). In the brief narrative, a "visiting preacher from

town" films a family defined as "the incarnation of mountain stereotype" (13–14). After the preacher shows the video to his congregation, teenagers from the church begin to harass the family, in what Stewart describes as "an escalating exchange . . . sparked by a visceral encounter of images," in which "the order of representation gives way to a more violently affective contact" (14). Scott Herring argues something similar in his reading of Michael Meads's *Eastaboga* series of "studio portraits of [an Alabama] town's 'redneck' boys" (99). Herring contends that viewers (he refers specifically to an urban gay audience) are made uneasy by Mead's unapologetic depiction of these bodies—bodies, Herring argues, "whose 'backwardness' fascinates, repels, and aggravates [these] spectators" (103). What Herring and Stewart make clear are the ways affective reactions to such representations escape the presumed discursive narrative in which they are emplotted, implying that thick stereotypes, like the ones that demarcate the family in her narrative, often appear intractable.

Stereotypical representations of poor rural whites in our current moment often include references to methamphetamine. Public conceptions of methamphetamine use are shaped by mass media representations that, like the video shown by Stewart's preacher and Meads's portraits, stage affective encounters with white rural poverty[14] and disability.[15] In contemporary narratives depicting methamphetamine use, such as the 2004 anti-meth

[14] Since the early 2000s, methamphetamine use has been closely associated with rural white poverty, as in Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* or David Pomes *Cook County*. However, as Nicholas L. Parson's *Meth Mania: A History of Methamphetamine* reminds us, methamphetamine has been linked to various groups during its 100-plus-year history, from asthmatics to housewives. Methamphetamine use in urban, gay communities also increased in the early 2000s, and news coverage was quick to connect drug use to fears of "dangerous sexual practices" and the spread of HIV and AIDS (Parsons 136). The specter of disability this coverage raises clearly connects to rural representations of methamphetamine use but lies outside the scope of this article.

[15] The visual contrast between health and debility has become the clearest marker of drug use, typified by the deterioration of the body, commonly depicting extreme emaciation, open sores caused by habitual scratching at "meth bugs," and the dental decay known as "meth mouth." These stereotypical signs of bodily degeneration have been continuously reproduced in mass media in anti-meth campaigns, in films like *Spun* (2002) and *The Salton Sea* (2002), and in the critically acclaimed television series *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013). *Breaking Bad* focuses more on the production of crystal methamphetamine rather than on its use. As such, stereotypical users are less frequently represented on the series. One notable exception is the season 2 episode, "Peekaboo," which focuses on a meth-addicted couple (one of whom is played by *Winter's Bone* actress Dale Dickey).

campaign Faces of Meth or Debra Granik's 2009 cinematic adaptation of Daniel Woodrell's novel *Winter's Bone*, deploy strategic "visceral encounters with otherness" (14) in which (seemingly) able-bodied, normative characters (and audiences) confront the spectacularized bodies of drug users, proffered as the sole source and perpetuation of the methamphetamine trade, and react in uneasy ways—shock, horror, and disgust among them. However, I argue, while Granik traffics in a problematic mode of representation that locates meth production and use beyond the limit of the respectable and appropriate body, the alternative forms of community and care depicted with documentary-like care allows an intervention into the audience's uneasy experience, complicating it through an attention to the thickened textures of ordinary life for the rural poor. In doing so, Granik's film offers viewers a "visceral encounter" with rural poverty and methamphetamine use that "compel[s] a closer look" at the socioeconomic structures that undergird the rural poor.

There is not one aspect of looking at meth that is mellow or benign.

In Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone*, 16-year-old Rhee Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence, in her breakthrough role) searches for her missing father, a member of the local methamphetamine industry in a small county in the Missouri Ozarks. Over the course of her rural-noir narrative, Granik focuses on the ways that ordinary life in this community is organized around the production and use of meth. Although her film stops short of claiming an antidrug message, implicitly in the film and argued more explicitly in her subsequent interviews, Granik outlines a discourse of drug use that aligns survival with physical and mental capacity against the disabling effects of methamphetamine, mirroring news coverage of the meth epidemic's "many innocent nonusers victimized by the drug" (Parsons 137).[16] In

[16] Granik's first film, *Down to the Bone*, also considered the effects of drug use on a working-class family.

her director's commentary, Granik argues that meth is "one of the greatest dangers to [Rhee's] family's existence," a position she elaborates in an interview with *The A.V. Club*: "In this film, [for Rhee] it's as much about deciding to separate [herself] from [the meth economy], to see that [her] dad and [her] uncle may have gotten caught up, and make a very active decision [not to get involved] . . . not from a moral high ground but from a survival instinct" (Adams).

In Granik's film, as in Daniel Woodrell's novel, Rhee's uncle Teardrop (John Hawkes) provides both Rhee and the film's audience entry to the meth industry of the local town. As if to emphasize the extent to which meth production and use has entered domestic life in the community, Teardrop is introduced in his kitchen. As the scene begins, Rhee sits at the kitchen table with Teardrop's girlfriend Victoria, explaining that she needs to "run [her] dad down to get him to show" at his court date. Off-screen, Teardrop gruffly cautions her, "You ought not do that. Don't go running after Jessup," warning Rhee against antagonizing the drug economy of the community by suggesting that they are behind her father's disappearance. The violence hinted at in Teardrop's warning is underscored by the visual cues of meth use on Teardrop's body. He enters the scene from a bedroom outside the frame, the camera capturing his incredibly skinny frame and gaunt face first in silhouette.

Woodrell's version of Teardrop's introduction includes biographical detail that even more clearly connects physical debility with criminality:

> Uncle Teardrop . . . had a lab go wrong and it had eaten the left ear off his head and burned a savage melted scar down his neck to the middle of his back. There wasn't enough ear nub remaining to hang sunglasses on. The hair around the ear was gone, too, and the scar on his neck showed above his collar. Three blue teardrops done in jailhouse ink fell in a row from the corner of the eye on his scarred side. Folks said

> the teardrops meant he'd three times done grisly prison deeds that needed doing but didn't need to be gabbed about. They said the teardrops told you everything you had to know about the man and the lost ear just repeated it. (17–18)

This description is notable for the progression in which Teardrop's body becomes marked and read as a literal palimpsest of the many facets of the methamphetamine industry in the rural US. The physical emaciation of drug use—earlier Woodrell explains Teardrop "had fidgeted his weight way down and become all muscle wires and bone knobs with a sunken belly" (17)—is reinscribed through the disabling marks of the drug trade itself, which are then overwritten again with the prison tattoos marking the violence Teardrop has committed, reflecting what William Garriott calls

> a dangerous conflation of moral, legal, and biological forms of deviance and difference. The use of the drug that began the addiction was construed as both an immoral and an illegal act that, in turn, set in motion the chronic and neurobiological condition of addiction. The addiction, then, embroiled the individual in further illegality, driving them into continued drug use and related criminal acts, eroding their physical and mental well-being in the process. (62)

In their study of disability representations in film, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder theorize the affective response to what they, following Linda Williams, call "body genres," arguing that "the designation of extreme sensations [in an audience of such films] might at best be characterized as a response to the 'excesses' of human bodies displayed on screen" ("Body Genres" 163). As Mitchell and Snyder point out, this affective response depends not on "a fact of [these] bodies [themselves] but rather a social investment in certain bodies' presumed proximity to abjectness" (163). The "extreme sensations" described by Mitchell and Snyder echo Stewart's "visceral encounter of images" of otherness, and suggest the

audience's uneasy response to meth users. Visual representations of drug users depend on the production of disgust and horror shaped by moral conceptions of drug use that associates bodily debility with social and moral degeneracy, what William Garriott calls "the sudden and progressive deterioration of the subject's body and the concomitant slide into criminality under the influence of drugs" (79). Granik explains the visual power of meth users in an interview: "There is not one aspect of looking at meth that is mellow or benign: what it does to a human being's body, their faces, their teeth. Everything about it is so vicious, and so dramatic and so relentless. There is basically not one bit of solace in that whole depiction of actual reality of it" (Moraitis). Many of Granik's characters embody the visual cues of meth addiction she describes about—emaciation, facial sores, bad teeth, and a general level of grime (or what Granik and cinematographer Michael McDonough more generously call in their commentary "patina")—and the film draws its affective power from encounters with these debilitated bodies. The representations of drug users in *Winter's Bone* reiterate and reinforce racial and class myths of white trash that already position Teardrop as abject. Rhee, I suggest, escapes such an immediate affective response because of her beauty and (over)emphasized able body.

A game of comparisons

Granik more firmly establishes the debilitating effects of meth use through a continued visual contrast between Teardrop and Rhee, framed by dialogic cuts, that makes explicit the incongruity between health and debility[17] and stresses the correlation of debility, criminality, and violence. The otherness of Teardrop's body, signified by its reflection of

[17] Granik also sets up this contrast with the character of Little Arthur (Kevin Breznahan). As with Teardrop, Little Arthur shows bodily signs of abuse, especially in his hands and teeth and sallow skin, compounded by his dirty clothing, as well as through his constant bodily movement. Again, Rhee provides visual contrast to this excessive body. In this case, Rhee by standing still.

common tropes of methamphetamine use that inscribe his body as monstrous, is confirmed through a visual opposition to Rhee's capacious body. Early in the scene, the camera alternates between shots of Rhee and shots of Teardrop. Because of his position relative to the camera, Teardrop's face stays shadowed and the focus of the scene becomes his hands, which are bruised, scabbed, and dirty, as they unconsciously load and unload a handgun. Rhee, in contrast, is lit by a soft, warm lamp, highlighting her clear skin and imparting what might be called a "healthy" glow. Teardrop walks around the table, until he is inches from the camera. This extreme close-up focuses on Teardrop's gaunt face, marked by a prominent scab on his forehead, dark circles under his eyes, and a broken blood vessel in his nose. As Rhee and Teardrop talk, the camera cuts between close-ups of their opposing faces until the scene culminates in a violent episode. Teardrop lunges at Rhee and grabs her face. The camera moves over Teardrop's back to capture Teardrop's dirty hands against Rhee's face. The claustrophobic scene evokes horror in large part through the spectacularity of Teardrop's body, which hinges on widespread beliefs about drug use but also on ideas about the monstrous body itself.

The representations Granik and Woodrell put forward derive from a set of stereotypical sketches of meth use that have coalesced during what is commonly known as "the meth epidemic."[18] Recent work underscores the relative lack of national publicity on crystal methamphetamine until 2005, when a wide range of articles and public service campaigns were published (Weisheit and White 2009; Reding 2009; Parsons 2014). As was the case for the "crack epidemic," narratives of the "meth epidemic" were responsible for consolidating a national imaginary of the meth user (Hart 2–5; Alexander 102), which, in the case of methamphetamine use, focused on the graphic visual representation of the effects

[18] Weisheit and White usefully unpack this term in "Does Methamphetamine Matter?" (1–24).

heavy long-term use has on the body. Public service campaigns[19] employ the horror genre, most commonly the zombie, as the frame through which the experience of meth use might be explained, understood, and countered, and in most, the debilitating effects of meth use are made legible through a comparison with a "drug free" body. This strategy was firmly established by the first of such public service campaigns, Faces of Meth, a collaboration between the Multnomah County, Oregon, Sheriff's Department and the *Oregonian*, created by deputy Bret King, which launched in December 2004 to support the *Oregonian's* five-part investigative report on methamphetamine.

To hear King tell it, Faces of Meth originated somewhat serendipitously when he began putting together a chronological series of mug shots of recent drug offenders and noticed that the pictures depicted what he calls meth's "distinct deteriorating effect on . . . physical appearance" ("The Meth Epidemic"). As King notes, "Some people [are documented in the arrest record] over a hundred times and I can look over a ten, fifteen, twenty year period and I can see how they deteriorated, how they changed" ("The Meth Epidemic"). The original photo series documents eight subjects—three women and five men—across a series of mug shots that ostensibly show the ravages of methamphetamine on the body over time. The *Oregonian* explains the campaign's strategy: "It's a game of comparisons. [The campaign] takes two mug shots of the same addicts, taken at different times, and shows them side by side. Some of the faces appear to be caving in, some are

[19] Disability theorists and activists have often critiqued the public service announcement as a genre for the limited and limiting narratives they put forward. To give just one example, in his latest book, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*, Eli Clare critiques the Sierra Club's campaign Beyond Coal, which imagines disability as tragedy. As Clare notes, the campaign is "only a single example in a long line of public health campaigns—against drunk driving, drug use, lead paint, asbestos, unsafe sex, and on and on—to use disability and chronic illness as cautionary tales" (location 996).

riddled with open sores, some stare up from dark bags under their eyes, looking lost and paranoid" (Rose).

The construction of the promotional materials for the Faces of Meth campaign demonstrates the purposeful consolidation of extreme imagery of methamphetamine users that distances these users from proper citizenship and corporeal integrity. Campaigns like Faces of Meth or the Montana Meth Project use what King admits are "the most extreme faces" and cases (Rose) which then become synonymous with meth use. As a result, the meth user is dehumanized—dismembered into a collection of grotesque body parts and reassembled into an antisocial monster that threatens the very fabric of society. The language the *Oregonian* uses exceeds the sensationalism of the pictures themselves, marking these bodies as deviant and disfigured to a further degree than most pictures suggest: only three pictures show subjects "riddled with sores." The remaining five subjects present varying degrees of weight loss and general dishevelment, which, by themselves, are not necessarily indicative of what *Newsweek* famously named in 2005 "the most dangerous drug in America" ("America's Most Dangerous Drug") but are rather, as methamphetamine researchers note, more likely the result of poverty, poor hygiene, and poor nutrition (Parsons 129; Weisheit and White 67-68). Perhaps recognizing the incongruity between the spectacularizing copy that calls methamphetamine use "the closest thing to being a living zombie"[20] and photos that in large part might be documenting rural poverty rather than drug use, the campaign poster prominently features only the three subjects displaying facial abscesses and includes less prominently the most spectacular of the remaining images.

[20] The subjects of the campaign have not given consent to be part of the campaign. Since the Multnomah Sheriff's Department mug shots are public records, no consent is needed. This raises questions regarding privacy and the spectacularization of nonnormative bodies, as Douglas J. Edwards, editor-in-chief of the trade magazine *Behavioral Healthcare* pointed out in an op-ed critical of the *Faces of Meth* campaign. He argues, "No matter how well-intentioned, this type of imagery—putting oddballs on display—helps to promote a stigma surrounding substance use disorders that has prevented them from receiving widespread support—and dollars—for treatment."

The success of the Faces of Meth campaign from a public relations perspective has led to multiple repurposings and revisions.[21] One iteration, the highly interactive website of the Meth Project, part of the Partnership at Drugfree.org, includes a clickable list of body-centered questions about meth on its main page, such as "Why do meth users have open sores?," "Will using meth change how I look?," and "What is 'Meth Mouth?'," among others. Clicking these questions leads to a variety of interactive educational games, complete with graphic pictures: "Will using meth change how I look?" leads the user to a game that requires pairing the mug shots King made available in the Faces of Meth project. Similarly, the Montana Meth Project won national attention for a series of television ads—by respected directors Tony Kaye, Darren Aronofsky, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Wally Pfister—that graphically depicted the dangers of using meth. In the 19 spots, which aired between 2005 and 2010, the visual iconography of methamphetamine use is connected to a wide range of sexual and domestic violence, theft, and general criminality. Because they are directed at teenagers, a central concept of the campaign is the deterioration of the teenage body, generally revealed in a close-up at the end of each 30-second commercial.

The website Rehabs.com pushes this idea to its melodramatic limit in an infographic titled "The Horrors of Methamphetamines."[22] Although the disclaimer at the top of page

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[21] In one of the stranger pairings, progressive magazine *Mother Jones* recycled the *Faces of Meth* campaign in support of its own reporting on the pharmaceutical industry's attempts to prevent the control of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which included a photo essay on methamphetamine production and use in central Appalachia.

[22] It should not be surprising that the most horrific poster deploys the visual rhetoric of meth use towards a for-profit private drug rehabilitation group. Rehabs.com is a "premium brand" of Recovery Brands, LLC, a company whose mission statement names them "the industry leader in qualified lead generation for the $4.5 billion dollar residential alcohol and drug addiction treatment industry." The company's business plan, involving "vertical, SEO and internet marketing," aims to become "the most trusted resourc[e] for those seeking addiction treatment and the service centers providing it." Recovery Brands has been critiqued for deceptive marketing practices (See Grohol, "The Seedy Underbelly of Rehab Centers' Online Marketing"), but its business model is more transparent than many of the rehab centers and placement organizations that use SEO and a network of shady tactics to get their ads to the top of Google's search results in hopes of taking advantage of those looking for help. In September of 2017, Google announced it would restrict ads from the worst offenders (Corkery). This is just one example among many of the ways that the drug trade generally, and

notes, "Addiction touches nearly every family, ravaging physical and mental health, relationships, and personal finances," the subsequent material focuses solely on the physical effects of methamphetamine use in the most extreme cases. Using a handy legend of symbols that evoke the deterioration of "Skin," "Facial Musculature and Fat," "Teeth and Gums," and "Increasing Estimated Age," the chart tracks deterioration over time, a move clearly borrowed from Faces of Meth. At the same time, the pictures included seem chosen to reflect monstrosity.[23] The first picture recalls the "living zombie" from the original poster, while the obvious dental damage suffered by another subject evokes vampire iconography. So offensive is this inforgraphic that the landing page on which it is hosted now includes a disclaimer about addiction and stigmatization. However, although the disclaimer notes that "some pieces of content, such as this one, may lead to stigmatization of addicts and do more harm than good," the site has made no changes to the infographic itself.

(They're just) white trash drugs.

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of methamphetamine is that mass media generally portrays it as "a white trash drug" (Keating qtd. in "Senate Asks Governor to

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drug users specifically, become incorporated into the neoliberal regime of privatization and individual responsibility. While the job of legal institutions, such as the police and the courts, becomes punishment, care must be sought out and paid for by the individual. As Arnold Chien, Margaret Connors, and Kenneth Fox point out, "By a variety of mechanisms, third-party payers have systematically excluded difficult, costly, or indigent patients, further straining the public facilities to which such patients then turn (as in other domains of the health-care system), while boosting the earnings of the for-profit institutions to unprecedented levels. On their own terms they have therefore succeeded, since their commitment is not to the general public but to shareholders" (*Dying for Growth* 311).

[23] In one shocking example, a woman's burned face is labeled "Skin," "Teeth and Gums," and "Increasing Estimated Age," despite the fact that all injuries appear to be the result of burns rather than drug use. Although the infographic provides no context, the woman, Heather Raybon, was involved in a 2004 meth lab explosion that caused the burns. Photos of Raybon circulated the internet in 2011 when she was arrested again on meth charges. A 2012 *Inside Edition* report moralizes the story: "In 2003, Raybon was a beautiful woman, but in 2004 her face became a hideous mask. Since then, Raybon has been arrested six times on meth charges and pleaded no contest each time. Sgt. Scott Haines told *Inside Edition*, 'She has gone through I don't know how many surgeries. The sad thing about it is that she has recently been involved in the same activities again'" ("Shake and Bake Meth Lab Dangers").

Apologize").[24] The phrase comes from an infamous 1999 address by then Oklahoma governor Frank Keating, in which he outlined the racial and class dynamics inherent in various moral panics of the War on Drugs: "It's a white trash drug. Methamphetamines largely are consumed by the lower socioeconomic element of white people, and I think we need to shame it" ("Senator Asks Governor to Apologize"). Keating's remarks make clear the extent to which the drug user as a criminal type defines the boundaries of respectable race and class.[25] In one of the only analyses of the Faces of Meth campaign, Travis Linnemann and Tyler Wall argue that part of the "abject horrors built into the imaginary of methamphetamine is . . . [about] defiling and polluting one's own body, a white body in particular, and giving up the esteemed value of white privilege and bourgeois sensibilities in general" (325). Cultural representations of polluted bodies, Mel Chen argues, advance "a perpetration of classed, ableist, and ruralized violence . . . [that] builds on the myth of rural and working-class degradation" (175).[26] In *Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, Susan Schweik suggests that the Unsightly Beggar Laws or Ugly Laws deployed a similar rhetoric. As Schweik points out, in the context of the Unsightly Beggar Laws, disability and drug use informed each other to the extent that "'disgust' [was] shaped at times by the ideals of the Temperance and Prohibition movements" (104).

As Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear have recently reminded us, "Disability related labels such as feeble-mindedness and mental illness were often seen as synonymous

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[24] John Hartigan and Matt Wray unpack the fraught term "white trash" in their respective monographs *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* and *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness.*

[25] Keating continued his comment by equating crystal meth with crack cocaine, which he defined as "a black trash drug."

[26] Chen is discussing the cultural semiotics of a children's toy labeled "Hillbilly Teeth." As Chen argues, "One could equally find alarm in its perpetration of classed, ableist, and ruralized violence in its identity as a toy . . . The extant class coding of the 'bad teeth' further builds on the myth of rural and working-class degradation by hinting at the acute dental issues that often accompany addiction to methamphetamines (aka 'meth mouth'). Methamphetamines are the most recognized drug problem in 'hillbilly country,' that is, the rural South and Midwest. The juxtaposition of Hillbilly and Teeth reminds us that both the urban gentrified center and the pastoral myths of the United States have their own white undersides" (175).

with bodies marked oppressively by race" (132), and this is especially true of early cultural representations of rural poor whites—largely turn-of-the-twentieth-century sociological research on so-called "hillbillies," such as Richard Dugdale's *The Jukes* (1877) and Henry H. Goddard's *The Kallikack Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeblemindedness* (1912)—which continue to influence cultural representations that mark white rural poor subjects morally, mentally, and physically aberrant.[27] In *Brilliant Imperfections: Grappling with Cure*, Eli Clare exposes the racial and gendered power dynamics that support eugenics in his extended reading of Carrie Buck, a woman who spent most of her life in the State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded in Lynchburg, Virginia, and was at the heart of the US Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, which found compulsory sterilization laws constitutional.

Representations of methamphetamine use draw on these myths for their affective power to shock, even though, as Carl Hart suggests, "the population most likely to use methamphetamine finds [these representations (Hart refers to PSAs specifically)] laughable because they exaggerate methamphetamine-related harmful effects." "These individuals," as Hart points out, "most likely know people who have used the drug, and the information presented in the advertisements is inconsistent with their own knowledge" (13). Research on the methamphetamine "epidemic" suggests a much lower prevalence of methamphetamine use in the United States, as well as lower rates of addiction and physical and mental damage from users (Hart 11–13; Parsons 125–133; Weisheit and White 83–84), challenging the spectacularity of mass media representations. In one telling example of the distance between cultural representations and actual drug use, William Garriott points out that the "prevalence of meth use in 'the people you'd never suspect'"—what he calls "'good kids' from 'good families'"—forced the local community Garriott studied to "decoupl[e] [methamphetamine

[27] John Boorman's 1972 film adaptation of James Dickey's novel *Deliverance* is perhaps the most infamous example.

use] from other types of deviance in the local imaginary" (83–84). Hart puts it more bluntly:

> There is no empirical evidence to support the claim that methamphetamine causes physical deformities. . . . The physical changes that occurred in the dramatic depictions of individuals before and after their methamphetamine use are more likely related to poor sleep habits, poor dental hygiene, poor nutrition and dietary practices, and media sensationalism. . . . The bottom line is that the overwhelming majority of methamphetamine users use the drug without problems. (11–12)

They all do now. You don't even have to say it.

Despite such problematic representations it is clear that methamphetamine use and production has damaged lives, particularly those in rural communities in the South and Midwest (Reding 2009; Weisheit and White 2009; Garriott 2011). The challenge is to disassociate methamphetamine use from the representational baggage of sensationalistic accounts and take into account the socioeconomic forces undergirding drug use in general to counter what Debra Granik calls "the haunted thinking" of rural communities affected by meth. According to Granik, these communities ask, "God, where did this scourge come from? How did it even take route in our community and why?" evading the economic conditions of rural communities that make methamphetamine production and use a viable (and desirable) way of life (Moraitis).

As was the case for the preacher's film in Kathleen Stewart's brief story, Granik's film cannot fully escape the stereotypical representations of rural white poverty that largely depend on a construction of the rural white body as debilitated or aberrant. However, an attention to debility asks what underlying forces these stereotypical representations might reveal, if only peripherally, when attention is focused not only on excessive bodies but on

the material conditions that organize their lives. As Nick Reding argues in his popular nonfiction work *Methland: The Death and Life of an American Town*, the rise of the rural "meth epidemic" worked in tandem with the decline of small American towns. Reding emphasizes "the link between a steady long-term rise in [methamphetamine use and production] and a steady long-term decline in the amount of work available in rural America's defining industries," arguing that in the face of a socioeconomic crisis, "the ability to make something in your basement that promised work, success, wealth, thinness, and happiness was not necessarily too good to be true" (53–54). In *Exile and Pride,* Eli Clare presents a similar example of what Margaret Connors and Kenneth Fox call "drug dealing [as] an entry-level opportunity for otherwise marginalized surplus labor" (311). When the logging and fishing industries dried up in his childhood rural Oregon hometown, jobs disappeared, and the rural poor had limited economic options. Under these circumstances, drug economies became viable (if barely) means of survival. Clare writes, "It is rumored that fishermen now pay their boat mortgages by running drugs—ferrying marijuana, crack, and cocaine from the freighters many miles out at sea back to the cannery where they are then picked up and driven inland" (36). As Reding's and Clare's comments suggest, the drug trade is, among many other things*,* produced by and a working-class response to these structures of inequity. Clare's critiques of economic dispossession and exhaustion under the regime of neoliberalism suggest one answer to the communities "haunted" by the incomprehensible "scourge" of methamphetamine. In this context, the scourge marking these communities is not the drug trade itself but rather the limiting circumstances of the contemporary United States. In Granik's film, after Rhee explains to someone that her father "cooks crank," the woman remarks, "Honey, they all do now. You don't even need to say it out loud."

It's significant that unlike the most recent and well-known meth narrative in popular

culture, AMC's *Breaking Bad*, a capitalist parable that explicitly positions the drug trade as the epitome of production and accumulation, *Winter's Bone* focuses on a community-wide dependence on meth production for survival in which all local jobs are related in some way to the meth industry. It is clear that drug economies are not easily understood as the kind of productive alternative to global capital. As Alisse Waterston notes in *Street Addicts in the Political Economy*, these economies are themselves implicated in this regime. However, the rural drug economy described in *Winter's Bone*, with its emphasis on community, begins to come close to what J. Jack Halberstam describes as "alternatives to capitalism that already exist and are presently under construction" found in "local [and nonmetropolitan]" contexts (12).

As Clare suggests, these communities are not without their problems (racism and homophobia chief among them). However, as was the case in *Half Nelson*, the accommodation these communities make with the drug trade and with drug use as a direct result of the debilitating conditions of neoliberal capitalism pushes audiences to reconsider the representational terms they have been offered throughout the film. While founded in disgust or horror, uneasy visual encounters with drug users open a space for audiences to be confronted with the "degrading" socioeconomic contexts that produce these debilitated bodies, associating the contingency of the able body with the contingency of economic capacity in our current moment.

Not so far

Although Granik deploys disability as a rhetorical device, this framing is disrupted by glimpses of the ways that these bodies (including Rhee's) are enmeshed in debilitating socioeconomic circumstances, calling into question the stakes of the visual binary the film

works so hard to establish. This opening of critical potential becomes apparent in a scene later in the film, which reiterates the visual language of capacity and debility before suggesting the contingency of life in this rural community. As the scene begins, Rhee is using her neighbors' log splitter to cut firewood when Teardrop approaches and engages her in conversation. At the end of the scene, Teardrop pulls out a bag of meth and snorts some off a key. He then offers the bag to Rhee, asking, "You get the taste for it yet?" as he waves the bag in Rhee's face. Rhee reacts with wide-eyed disgust and fear before responding derisively, "Not so far."

Granik notes in her commentary that "in terms of the film's representation of meth and its discussion, [this] scene is so critical . . . because [Rhee] is exposed to [meth] directly, and it's an absolutely specific choice, an act of will, an act of wisdom, a survival instinct, to keep it away." Granik implies that Rhee can (must?) refuse Teardrop's offer because she represents the potential of capacity.[28] However, Rhee's response, "Not so far," is more complex than Granik's own reading suggests. While Granik posits a "survival instinct" to keep away from drugs, the film continuously marks her economic contingency, questioning what survival looks like in practice. Rhee is already in an untenable economic situation: Her father is dead, her mother has a mental disability, and Rhee has dropped out of school to care for her siblings, even though she is not employed. There are no job prospects in town, and even Rhee's attempt to join the army for the signing bonus is denied. The only possible source of income outside of the meth industry discussed in the film or novel involves selling the family's only asset: a parcel of land handed down from generation to generation. Lauren Berlant calls the lived experience in such conditions "slow death," what she describes as "a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life" (*Cruel Optimism* 100) and

[28] Rhee's position is clearer in Woodrell's novel. When Teardrop asks Rhee, "You got the taste for it yet?," Rhee responds, "Hell, no" (67).

suggests that "in the scene of slow death, . . . agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making" (100). Drug use is one form of maintenance in response to the material conditions of life in their rural Missouri community. (Significantly, although characters, particularly Teardrop, use meth throughout the film, this use is never presented as pleasurable in itself.)

Teardrop underscores this by drawing a parallel between his drug use and the pharmaceutical industry.[29] Immediately after offering Rhee meth, Teardrop asks Rhee, "Them pills helping your Momma's mood any?" Rhee's mother is largely uncommunicative and spends most of her time sitting and staring, leaving Rhee to take care of her siblings. The film does not diagnose Rhee's mother's disability nor delve deeply into her as a character, although Woodrell's novel explains that Rhee's mother's mind "[broke] loose" four years previous when she found out about Rhee's father's girlfriend (30). Later in both the novel and Granik's film, this explanation is revised to imply that the meth trade and its concomitant violence is "just exactly the shit [Rhee's mother] went crazy to get away from" (85). The connection Teardrop makes between meth and pharmaceuticals suggest that both are (imperfect) methods to deal with ordinary life in rural Missouri. Teardrop's bodily debility and Rhee's mother's mental disability are both intertwined with the cultural economy of meth production and use. Rhee doesn't answer, but in some ways, the answer isn't necessary.[30]

As I have argued, while visual representations of meth produce horror, disgust, or shock through encounters with nonnormative bodies, they also make audiences uneasy with these subjects who are unable or indeed refuse to embody normative modes of being,

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[29] The recent "opioid crisis" explodes the distinction between illegal drugs and pharmaceuticals, particularly in the white rural US. 41 states are now suing pharma companies, blaming them aggressively pushing the prescription of opioids while downplaying their dangers (Noguchi).

[30] In Woodrell's novel, characters continually ask Rhee how her mother is doing. Rhee's answer to them is always the same: "Not better." Rhee's comment begs the question, what would make things better for her mother and everyone in the community bound up in the meth trade?

whether in the pursuit of pleasure (or even maintenance), as in the case of drug users, a living wage, as in the case of drug creators and sellers, or simply to survive the hardships of the present moment. This scene is critical not because it emphasizes Rhee's capacity but because it exposes Rhee's uneasy contingency to debility. While I've shown that unease can be neutralized, in part through a politics of rehabilitation, it also contains within it the potential to open a space within which to critique the normative terms it is instantiated through and against. This uneasy response is something like what Ato Quayson calls "aesthetic nervousness"—the "forms of anxiety, dissonance, and disorder" (255) created through an audience's encounter with representations of disability that force the normative subject into "the sudden recognition of [the] contingency [of the body]" (256). If we begin to consider Rhee not as a representation of bodily integrity and capacity (as Granik's visual framing suggests) but a contingent subject whose capaciousness only takes her so far, the uneasy stakes of the film refocus. Critical unease leans into the dissonance between a given representation and the narratives of what should be, refusing to fully dissipate through easy conclusions. Traditional representations of meth abuse and production are complicated by an affective ethics that, if only in a refracted way, considers how and why these bodies become debilitated and how they survive what Merill Singer calls in *Drugging the Poor* the "overt and hidden injuries and daily indignities of social marginalization, discrimination, and poverty" (15).

Eli Clare provides a critical framework to rethink survivability. While Clare himself left his rural Oregon community because of the bigotry and violence rural queer subjects face as well as the lack of jobs that would relegate him to inescapable poverty, he frames his departure as an exile. Exile emphasizes these dangers without negating the value in the forms of community and care made possible in rural small towns. In his tender description of white

rural poor communities, Clare offers a reading that rubs against the grain of contemporary narratives that relegate the rural poor to a criminal otherness. We get glimpses of this community in *Winter's Bone*, from the animals Rhee hunts to the food she and her family are given by their neighbors to the pleasure of an impromptu musical performance at a house party. And as Clare points out, the drug trade is also one of these alternatives.

Clare calls attention to the productive interdependencies and contradictions of "a rural, white, working-class culture that values neighbors rather than anonymity, that is both tremendously bigoted—particularly racist—and accepting of local eccentricity, that believes in self-sufficiency and depends on family—big extended families not necessarily created in the mold of the Christian right" (39). By locating his argument within the contradictions of these communities, Clare revises the expectations of what he calls "urban queer folks . . . [who would] cast [these rural white subjects] as over-the-top rednecks and homophobes" (34) by pointing out the "uneasy balance" of accommodation all subjects make. In a discussion of his aunt's African American girlfriend Barb, Clare explains how this accommodation runs both ways: Barb's queerness must remain unspoken, but Clare's family also accommodates difference by accepting Barb into the family and tempers what might otherwise be overt displays of racism. As Clare notes, this situation is not ideal but throughout his book stresses the importance of examining the complex reality of rural men and women who are forced to make difficult compromises in their struggle to survive, finding in this space of contradiction value that often goes unnoticed by traditional discussions of white rural subjects.

In his latest book, *Brilliant Imperfections: Grappling with Cure*, Clare argues for the importance of the "messier story" that embraces contradiction rather than attempting to fix them (175), naming this strategy "brilliant imperfection." As Clare explains, brilliant

imperfection is

> a way of knowing, understanding, and living with disability and chronic illness . . . [that] is rooted in the nonnegotiable value of body-mind difference. It resists the pressures of normal and abnormal. It defies the easy splitting of natural from unnatural. It has emerged from collective understandings and stubborn survivals. It is expressed in different ways by different communities. ("Introduction")

Clare's theorization is not an attempt to ameliorate uneasiness but to revel in it and consider the alternative forms of knowing, being, and feeling that it makes possible. Perhaps, as Clare suggests in his discussion of representations of loggers in the Pacific Northwest in *Exile and Pride*, this thickened understanding might also help turn attention to the role global capitalism has played in abetting this debilitation.

Although *Winter's Bone* creates its affective mood in part by visually contrasting Rhee with meth users and producers, the uneasy bodies of methamphetamine users are implicitly counterposed to a rural community that depicts an alternative to the limited possibilities of capitalism. It is significant that although Rhee refuses Teardrop's offer, she never directly stands against the drug economy itself, even though she is a victim of its violence. In fact, as the narrative suggests, such an opposition is beside the point. The drug economy permeates every aspect of life in Rhee's community, and as Clare points out above, survivability requires either exile or accommodation. Rhee accepts money and help from her uncle and neighbors, all of whom depend on the meth trade for their money, and throughout the film, she voices her refusal to work with the police. While perhaps Rhee's actions are motivated in part by fear, her interactions with the county sheriff show her disdain for the law in general, firmly locating her on the side of the informal drug economy, who are also, in many cases, her family. Survivability in this case requires that Rhee embrace these contradictions, in the

process exposing them to the audience, even as it refigures her as contingently debilitated, and uneasiness emerges from this threat to (and failure of) capaciousness.

What does it mean to read Rhee not as reproducing ableist notions of the body against the debilitated bodies of meth users but only as contingently embodying a capacity that seems very likely to slip away under the regime of neoliberal capital? This shift represents what Puar calls "a broader politics of debility that destabilizes the seamless production of abled-bodies in relation to disability . . . [and] deconstruct[s] the presumed, taken-for-granted capacities enabled status of abled-bodies" ("Prognosis Time" 166). Rural bodies are debilitated economically, temporally, and corporeally, and these visual representations suggest that the rural poor cannot conform to the demands of normative American citizenship. Our uneasy reactions to these bodies are determined by cultural conceptions of normative behaviors and ways of living, which in the case of independent film audiences, are largely coded as urban, middle class, and white. However, these brief moments of affective dissonance, while nothing like the prescriptive expressions of disgust or horror that shore up degrading racial and class-based stereotypes, do, in their small way reveal the contradictions at the heart such representations and expose a messier story of debility and survival.

Let the Mad Man Play: Virtuosity, Affective Exchange, and Labor in Two Movements

Modern man no longer communicates with the madman. . . . There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists.—Michel Foucault

Madmen don't simply create a world. They also create a political economy.—Felix Guattari

Throughout this chapter, I tease out the tensions between traditional understandings of virtuosity as an artistic performance of exceptional skill or ability and Paolo Virno's definition in *A Grammar of the Multitude* as "an activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into a finished product, or into an object which would survive the performance" (52). Virno's embodied virtuosity offers both a critique of the social and economic norms demanded by late capitalism and, in the most optimistic instance, a world-making operation founded through a communal practice of shared intensities. The figure of the homeless, mad, virtuosic performer is central to Steve Lopez's *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music*, as well as Joe Wright's cinematic adaptation, and Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*. In *The Soloist*, virtuosity serves as a form of affective, and to some degree economic, exchange, mediated through the madness of the main characters. By contrast, the virtuosic performance of orgiastic sex acts organized by Delany's eponymous Mad Man Mike expands the critical potentiality of these exchanges through an affective communal practice of crip world making that exposes, even if it cannot resolve, deficiencies in the present.

The madness of homelessness

In the brief preface that opens *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music*, journalist Steve Lopez describes his first encounter with Nathaniel Ayers, a homeless man whose friendship with Lopez became the basis for a series of articles in the *Los Angeles Times* (reworked into the book above and later adapted for the screen by

Susannah Grant in a film directed by Joe Wright): "I'm on foot in downtown Los Angeles, hustling back to the office with another deadline looming. That's when I see him. He's dressed in rags on a busy downtown street corner, playing Beethoven on a battered violin that looks like it's been pulled from a dumpster" (vii). While Lopez's image of the ragged busker obliquely references the complicated geographical relationship between the business center of "downtown Los Angeles" and the homeless population of the adjacent Skid Row, for Lopez, the ubiquity of homelessness in Los Angeles is not in itself newsworthy. Instead, what draws him to Ayers is the incongruity between Ayers's "grubby, soiled" appearance (vii) and Ayers's musical ability, Lopez's description implicitly suggesting that the latter negates the former.[1]

In Lopez's descriptions of Ayers, or as Lopez calls him, the "vagrant violinist" (vii), Ayers's musical ability imbues him with a "rumpled elegance" (vii) that differentiates and distances Ayers from the other homeless men and women Lopez presumably sees every day on his way to work, whom Lopez stigmatizes as criminals. When Ayers tells Lopez that he sleeps on the street in Skid Row, for instance, Lopez rhetorically imagines "how safe it can be for a man trying to reconnect with Tchaikovsky as drug dealers, prostitutes, and hustlers work streets teeming with the lame and the afflicted" (2), never once considering Ayers a member of any of these groups. Perhaps most tellingly, Lopez's invocation of the "lame and the afflicted" stresses the association between disability and homelessness,[2] even as his subsequent offhand disregard for the "drug-ravaged" or "raving mad" clearly illustrates the

[1] To his credit, Lopez emphasizes that his work as a journalist ultimately led him to engage Ayers rather than any sort of common feeling of compassion. Upon meeting Ayers, Lopez immediately thinks of the sensational story he will possibly write: "This guy could turn out to be a rare find in a city of undiscovered gems, fiddling away in the company of Beethoven. I would drop everything if I could, and spend a few hours pulling the story out of him" (viii).

[2] In "Mental Health Correlates of Past Homelessness in the National Comorbidity Study Replication," Greg A. Greenberg and Robert A. Rosenheck find that "about 20% to 50% of homeless adults suffer from a serious mental illness while approximately 50% to 80% have a history of substance use disorders" (1235).

ways in which homeless people (particularly those with disabilities) form the exterior limits of respectability (5). As Lopez's language suggests, cultural conceptions of homelessness, including those reproduced in public forums, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, produce what Michel Foucault calls "the distance through which modern man shores himself up against madness" (*History of Madness* xxxv). In *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States*, Craig Willse explains how the disciplining forces Foucault traces are turned toward the homeless as subjects of knowledge. He argues,

> In . . . popular and mass media productions, the homeless individual is rendered unmoored from the social and familial and also unmoored from their minds and the common morality and rationality thought to reside there, soldering a conceptual link between psychiatric disorder and urban disorder. The "mad homeless" are figured as less than persons. They are subhuman, animal-like in nature or appearance, parasitical. The mad homeless are also simultaneously figured as an excess of personhood—their bodies and possessions occupying too much inconvenient space, their bringing of the private practices of sleep and defecation into public spaces of subways, doorways, streets. These excesses and shortcomings of personhood have served to reinforce feelings of disgust and to sanction social abandonment. (95)

As Willse suggests, homelessness is always already associated with and contingent to mental disability, which is often diagnosed, medically or otherwise as schizophrenia. Representations of schizophrenia generally hinge on excessive physical performances. Allen Thiher argues that these representations structure the actual experiences of mental disability. In *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*, Thiher explains, "Medicine and literature offer models for madness to which the mad usually conform because they have no other way to give shape to their madness" (162). Psychologist Theodore Sarbin suggests that this

reflexive process is self-perpetuating. Sarbin claims that "schizophrenia [was] originally a metaphor created to help communicate about crazy behavior" and as such, should be considered a social construct rather than as a medical diagnostic category (qtd. in Prendergast "Rhetorics" 192), revealing in the process the discursive framework of western medicine that belies the presumed division between composed narrative and scientific fact.[3] In the social construction model of disability, embodied difference is not in and of itself problematic until it faces obstructions within the social world—a point Charmaine C. Williams and April A. Collins argue is particularly true of schizophrenia, where "the problems associated with schizophrenia are largely manifested in the social domain and include difficulties in relating to other people, problems pursuing employment or education, and problems functioning meaningfully in mainstream society" (297).

As Sarbin points out, terms like schizophrenia and mental illness are products of medical, social, and cultural meaning making. In response to the loaded medical and cultural terms of mental disability, disability studies theorist Margaret Price argues for a return to the term "madness," which she finds "achieves a flexibility that *mental illness* and *cognitive disability* do not: it unites notions of that 'central concept' through time and across cultures" (10; author's italics)—in a similar way to the term "queer." As Price suggests, such a focus exposes the cultural underpinnings of madness as a historical cultural concept, the central principle in Michel Foucault's lengthy *History of Madness*. Foucault traces madness from the division between reason and unreason in the Middle Ages to confinement and the creation of institutionalization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the modern medicalization of madness as a disease, in order to "try to recapture, in history, [the] degree

[3] This is the general thrust of Ethan Waters's *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche*, which details the ways that Western conceptions of disease and disorder have circulated throughout the world, reframing other culturally specific experiences of difference as sites for medical intervention, leading in many cases to less desirable outcomes.

zero of the history of madness when it was undifferentiated experience" (xxvii). To be clear, while Foucault describes madness as a discursive cultural concept, he does not discount disability as a material, embodied experience; rather, Foucault argues that mental disabilities, along with other diverse subjectivities, can only be understood through prevailing cultural perceptions. In *Mad for Foucault*, Lynne Huffer outlines the distinction between the material lived reality of madness and the ways that Foucault explains madness becomes shorthand for social and cultural processes of normativization through disciplinary and biopolitical means. As Huffer explains, Foucault

> is not denying the experience or the reality of madness itself. For Foucault, whose 1950s training in psychology involved observing psychotic patients, madness is unquestionably "real." But at issue for Foucault are the terms and perspectives that are culturally available to those whose experience differs from the norm—that is, those who come to be labeled as mad, including those who are named as sexual deviants. (151)

Throughout this chapter, I use the term mad to get at the intersecting forces at play in cultural representations of mental disabilities and move beyond medical diagnoses, particularly since the characters I examine each refuse such labels. Terms seeking to classify difference, such as feeblemindedness (discussed briefly in chapter 2) and schizophrenia, have often been tools used to control marginalized social groups in the mid- to late twentieth century, particularly through the linking of race with disability. In *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill*, Robert Whitaker traces the evolution of schizophrenia as a diagnostic category across the twentieth century. Whitaker notes that rather than a clear diagnostic category, "the symptoms used to justify a diagnosis of schizophrenia—feelings of being possessed, of extreme paranoia, and of having special

powers—were 'experienced frequently' by a fair number of people" (168). As a result, schizophrenia was widely misdiagnosed (according to one 1982 study Whitaker cites, by as much as 80 percent (169)), particularly among African Americans and the poor (170). in In "Controllin the Planet: a brief history of schizophrenia," Jonathan Metzl explains that the diagnosis of schizophrenia was a form of social control over threating populations of black men: "The second edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* . . . recast the paranoid subtype of schizophrenia as a disorder of masculinized belligerence . . . [which then] became a diagnosis disproportionately applied to African American men" (28–29).[4] Significantly, while the majority of mad figures in *The Soloist* and *The Mad Man* are African American, race figures in only obliquely, treated as one of a number of intersecting forces that locate the mad homeless subject as a marginal figure. In *The Soloist*, for instance, although Lopez rarely remarks on the racial dynamics of his relationship with Ayers, in a brief statement, Ayers connects his mental state to race, as he explains the onset of what would be diagnosed as schizophrenia: "I could not understand what was going on in New York at Juilliard. . . .I couldn't understand what the constant attack from people was all about. . . .I was all alone, no family, none of my people" (69). Ayers immediately clarifies that he meant "the black people" (69).

The redemptive power of music

Lopez's attempts to distance Ayers from the conventional markers of homelessness further stigmatize homelessness and the homeless people Lopez encounters by deploying

[4] Metzl continues, "For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, researchers 'discovered' that African American men were 'significantly more likely' than white men to receive schizophrenia diagnoses. And throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a host of articles from leading psychiatric and medical journals showed that doctors diagnosed the paranoid subtype of schizophrenia in African American men five to seven times more often than in white men" (28–29).

well-worn tropes that establish the "lame and afflicted" as beyond the boundaries of acceptability,[5] even as these tropes undergird the rehabilitative narrative Lopez employs as the frame for his story. By inserting himself into Ayers's life, Lopez hopes to rehabilitate the former student (getting a great human interest story for his column along the way).[6] To be fair, the rehabilitative narrative falls in Lopez's lap fully formed when he discovers that Ayers attended the Juilliard School, which as Frank Rich describes it is "an internationally recognized synonym for the pinnacle of artistic achievement." Lopez is "impressed," imagining Ayers "a major talent" (12)—although Lopez admits this only after verifying Ayers's attendance. However, in practice, Ayers's classical training establishes his difference from other homeless men and women. Lopez, for instance, is immediately struck by the fact that Ayers "doesn't appear to be playing for money" and is instead "play[ing] as if he's a student" (1), a subtle dog whistle that echoes discourses around panhandling or street begging (and their prohibition) in antihomeless propaganda which, as Susan Schweik points out, served as the basis for so-called "ugly laws" (*Ugly Laws* 122) and still govern anti-homeless ordinances today ("Kicked to the Curb" 5). Similarly, when describing his first encounters with Ayers, Lopez describes Ayers's talent: "He doesn't always hit every note, but it's abundantly clear that Nathaniel has been a student of music for many years" ("Violinist Has the World on Two Strings"). By situating Ayers as a down-on-his-luck artist, Lopez also neatly (at least in this first depiction) sidesteps any difficult discussions of the

[5] Lopez's column treats homeless people, save Ayers, as generic examples of a social problem. Wright's film attempts to mitigate this by employing homeless people in its cast. This offers the audience a contrast with Jaime Foxx's performance of disability and of homelessness that in one sense buttresses the authenticity of Foxx's performance but in another depicts the inscrutability and difference of the actual experience of homelessness, particularly for those who also have mental disabilities, distancing Foxx as an actor from the authentic experience he is trying to depict.

[6] A similar story played out in 2011. *Columbus Dispatch* videographer Doral Chenoweth recorded an interview with a homeless man named Ted Williams, a former radio announcer with a "golden voice." Chenoweth's interview went viral on YouTube and Williams became a media sensation. The success helped Williams find a job and a home (Blake).

economic, social, and cultural structures that engender homelessness.

Lopez's book and the collected articles in the *Los Angeles Times* on which it is based tend to fall back on limited conceptions of disability, mental illness, and urban homelessness. As Lopez quickly learns, Ayers himself is, to use Lopez's inflammatory language, "raving mad." This does not immediately preclude the rehabilitative narrative that Lopez believes structures his story. As Tobin Siebers explains, human-interest stories about people with disabilities often demand that their subjects display extraordinary ability or skill:

> Human-interest stories do not focus as a rule on people with disabilities who fail to show some extraordinary ability. . . . In each case, ability trumps disability, creating a morality tale about one person's journey from disease to cure, from inhumanity to humanity. These accounts . . . exaggerate the disability of their heroes, suggesting that it is a mask that can be easily removed to uncover the real human being beneath. But they also exaggerate in the process the connection between able-bodiedness and humanness, giving happy relief and assurance to those who consider themselves healthy. (16)

As Lopez freely admits, Ayers's technical virtuosity is the very reason Lopez is interested in his story. It both humanizes Ayers (by providing a contrast to his "dehumanizing" disability, emphasized by the stigmatizing discourse around homelessness) and comes to define his narrative. Lopez casts Ayers's life, and especially his disability, as a fall from normalcy and professional success as a musician, but as the title of Lopez's book implies, music is inextricably linked to what Lopez sees as Ayers's rehabilitation: at the time Lopez met Ayers, Ayers was what medical practitioners call noncompliant, and a large part of Lopez's narrative

documents Lopez's unsuccessful attempts to force a medical intervention upon Ayers.[7]

While Lopez's book and Wright's film trace Ayers's rehabilitation as a musician and as a productive member of society, they also offer Lopez's own narrative of redemption, which at times subsumes Ayers's own narrative. This is most evident in the Hollywood version, in which, in the grand tradition of the "white savior" film, Lopez becomes a better man because of his friendship with Ayers.[8] The film emphasizes Lopez's own transformation in its final scene, set at a performance by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Seated in the center balcony, Lopez, Ayers, and Ayers's sister (who has just been reunited with Ayers after a many-years-long separation) watch the performance. As the violins swell and the camera pans from Ayers's sister to Ayers to Lopez and back, Lopez offers a maudlin voice-over:

> Points West by Steve Lopez
>
> A year ago, I met a man who was down on his luck, and thought I might be able to help him. I don't know that I have. Yes, my friend Mr. Ayers now sleeps inside, and he has the key, he has a bed. But his mental state and his well-being are as precarious now as they were the day we met. There are people who tell me I've helped him . . . mental health experts who say that the simple act of being someone's friend can change his brain chemistry, improve his functioning in the world. I can't speak for Mr. Ayers in that regard. Maybe our friendship has helped him, but maybe not. I can, however, speak for myself. I can tell you that by witnessing Mr. Ayers's courage, his humility, his faith in the power of his art, I've learned the dignity of being loyal to

[7] Although Lopez attempts to fit his narratives into a traditional "overcoming" narrative of disability, he does candidly discuss his ignorance of models of disability outside the scope of a medical model. In his book, Lopez discusses a conversation he set up between two doctors representing, respectively, a recovery model and an interventionist medical model of treatment for schizophrenia (82–83).

[8] The film emphasizes this through some significant changes to Lopez as a character. The film revises Lopez's backstory, making him divorced and generally presenting him in a less flattering light at the beginning to emphasize his own rehabilitative arc.

something you believe in. Holding on to it. And above all else, believing without question that it will carry you home.

Putting aside the fact that Lopez forgets that his clearly stated early interest in Ayers was as fodder for his column, Lopez emphasizes those aspects of Ayer's life that best fit traditional conceptions of success—sleeping inside in a bed, for instance—while also continuing to locate disability as the threat to these normative pursuits. Ayers's "precarious mental state and well-being" is at odds with his artistic ability as a musician. This is not to diminish the act of locating housing for Ayers. As the Lamp Community, a nonprofit working with Los Angeles's homeless population, points out, "Housing [is] a prerequisite for coping with the debilitating challenges of mental illness, addiction, physical disability, chronic disease, and the trauma associated with 5, 10, even 20 years of homelessness" ("About Lamp"). But at the same time, Lopez's self-serving reference to the "mental health experts" who "tell [him] he's helped [Ayers]" establishes Lopez's (partially successful) rehabilitation of Ayers (while also nodding to the success of the disciplinary power of Western medicine), erasing Ayers's own feelings, experiences, and identity as a person with schizophrenia, which Lopez admits he can't speak to and to which Ayers does not get a chance to speak.[9] In many ways, Lopez's speech underscores his own rehabilitative narrative, in which, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have pointed out in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, a disabled character is deployed as a literary device to shore up the able-bodiedness of the main character.

[9] Lopez's book offers a more nuanced understanding of both his desire for and recognition of his inability to control Ayers's rehabilitation:

> I still can't quite let go of the possibility that there will be a breakthrough, that [Ayers] will sign on for treatment or be one of those rare people whose illness dramatically subsides in middle age. But the visit to Juilliard is a reminder that for nearly two-thirds of his life, Nathaniel has been in a grip no one has been able to break. Not music teachers, not doctors, not his mother. He has survived in his own way and on his own terms, sustained for decades by music. Reluctantly, I begin to confront my own limits and try to accept that although I can help him, I'm not ever going to heal him. Dr. Ragins has had it right all along. The best thing I can do for Nathaniel is be his friend. (236)

Crip virtuosity

Historically, the virtuoso has been associated with the performing arts, and musical performance specifically. The figure of the virtuoso consolidated in the nineteenth century around performer-composers such as Liszt (Osterweis 58) and, as Edward Said explains, was "a creation of the bourgeoisie and of the new autonomous, secular, and civic performing spaces" (267). In her study of the virtuoso, Susan Bernstein maps the complex cultural forces that create and define the virtuoso:

> [The virtuoso] is obstinately grounded in materiality and singularity. The virtuoso performance can never be dissociated from the time and space of its occurrence. . . . At the same time, champions of virtuosity claim that its technical mastery transcends the limitations of the technical, that its prestige consists in this ability to allow music to rise above its material instruments and merge with poetic ideality. (11)

The transcendence Bernstein details points to the affective nature of virtuosity as a practice of labor (the performance) and the communal experience of virtuosity that joins performer and audience. Such a performance can be considered what Maurizio Lazzarato calls "immaterial labor," which he explains includes "activities that are not normally recognized as 'work'—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, consumer opinion" (132). As Michael Hardt points out, immaterial labor—or as Hardt calls these activities, "affective labor" (89)—"has assumed a dominant position with respect to the other forms of labor in the global capitalist economy" (90). Although this labor simply defines a primary form of economic participation in the contemporary era, that has moved

from material production to communication, Lazzarato and Hardt suggest the potential revolutionary nature inherent in these practices. For Hardt, "Affective labor is itself and directly the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities" (89). As Lazzarato argues, "What the transformation of the product into a commodity cannot remove, then, is the character of the event, the open process of creation that is established between immaterial labor and the public and organized by communication" (144).

In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno recontextualizes virtuosity for the post-Fordist age of late capitalism, expanding its scope to cover all participants in the late capitalist economy. Virno begins with a traditional definition of virtuosity as "the special capabilities of a performing artist" whose activity "finds its own fulfillment . . . in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product . . . that would survive the performance . . . [and] exists only in the presence of an audience" (52), but like Lazzarato and Hardt, finds that the virtuosic performance marks the shift from production to communication in the post-Fordist era—"All wage labor [today]," Virno argues, "has something in common with the 'performance artist'" (68)—and suggests that affective labor can under certain conditions critically interrogate the structures of late capitalism and even, through a process of what he calls "defection" or "exit," "modif[y] the conditions within which the struggle takes place, rather than presupposing those conditions to be an unalterable horizon" (70). In his brief reading of Virno, José Esteban Muñoz imagines this process through what he calls queer virtuosity: queer performances that stage a "certain defection from our current system" (*Cruising Utopia* 178). Queer virtuosity offers what Muñoz, following Virno, calls "a going off script" that "debunks production-based systems of value that make work and even cultural production drudgery and alienated debasement" (178). Muñoz's argument about these explicitly queer performances aligns with Ariel

Osterweis's claim that virtuosic performances by people of color might reveal "virtuosity's inherent queerness" (54) and with what Judith Hamera refers to as the virtuoso as monster (148). Muñoz, Osterweis, and Hamera each make clear that a virtuosic performance by a marginal subject can be a political project that, as Virno argues, "alters the rules of the game and throws the adversary completely off balance" (70).

In cultural representations of mad virtuosic performance, excessive skill is tethered to the presumed excessive embodied experience of madness. In *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, Francois Dosse describes artist and Guattari acquaintance Jean-Jacques Lebel's visit to La Borde, the revolutionary psychiatric clinic headed by Guattari:

> When [Lebel] met the patients from the unusual psychiatric hospital, having just witnessed them crossing the theatrical boundary between madmen and actors,[10] he was transported. He was particularly amazed when a La Borde patient sat down at a piano and played like a virtuoso. Then the pianist got up, shot the audience a look resembling Antonin Artaud's, and shouted, "Finally I am someone." When this patient bared his inner abyss to the public, was it performance or was it therapy? (172)

Like Lopez, Lebel has difficulty coming to terms with the disabled performer. While the collapse of disability and virtuosity that Lebel experienced traces the limits of traditional conceptions of performance, it also leaves open the question of how to consider the performance itself. While I would argue that the distinction Lebel draws between performance and therapy isn't a particularly useful framework, it does point to a fissure in Lebel's own concept of both virtuosity and the psychiatric process itself that the disabled performer precipitates.

[10] Lebel likely refers to an annual tradition at La Borde, where patients and staff work together to put on a play. Filmmaker Nicolas Philibert's *Every Little Thing* covers the 1995 production.

In *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, Petra Kuppers explains that disabled performers—she refers to those with physical impairments specifically—must "negotiate two areas of cultural meaning: invisibility as an active member in the public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorization as passive consumer and victim in much of the popular imagination" (49). The disabled performer Kuppers describes is diametrically opposed to the virtuoso, whose hypervisability in the public is defined by an excess of ability rather than disability. However, as Muñoz, Osterweis, and Hamera suggest and as Lebel points out above, the virtuosity of the disabled performer questions the various forces at play in conceptions of virtuosity in general. This is not to say that disabled performers are not as technically accomplished as able-bodied virtuosos; as Tobin Seibers argues, such excessive technical ability is precisely the reason that disabled performers like Ayers become the subjects of human-interest stories.[11] Instead, these performances serve to crip virtuosity. By crip, I refer to the practice Robert McRuer calls a way of "collectively transforming (in ways that cannot necessarily be predicted in advance) . . . the substantive, material uses to which queer/disabled existence has been put by a system of compulsory able-bodiedness" (*Crip Theory* 32). As Kuppers points out, the crip virtuoso, a skilled performer in the traditional sense of the term, also levies a powerful critique against the normalizing and limiting forces that form the basis for what is commonly considered a "good" life. As Kuppers goes on to explain, through the encounters staged between performer and audience, disabled performance "challeng[es] dominant notions about 'suitable bodies' [and] . . . ideas about the hierarchy between (led) disabled people and (leading) non-disabled

[11] Technical skill may be considered, to rephrase Delueze, a "major language"—that is, the "proper" performance of a piece of classical music, for instance—and is, for Virno at least, beside the point. "Each one of us is, and has always been, a virtuoso," Virno claims, even if these performances have been "at times mediocre or awkward" (*A Grammar of the Multitude* 55). Unpacking Virno's comments, Shannon Jackson explains, "Virtuosity here is thus decidedly not unique and exceptional but democratized and awkward, something that all of us have the capacity to access" (17).

people" (56). In this context, Kuppers argues, "Disabled performance is seen as a political intervention, aimed at the whole community" (56). Disabled performance works might be considered akin to what Deleuze calls a "minor literature": "deterritorializing" performances that "a minority constructs within a major language" ("What Is a Minor Literature?" 16). Expanding on Deleuze, Samuel Delany argues that minor literature

> refracts, contests, and agonizes with this other "unbiased" literature, calls it to task, puts it in question, and, with violence, appropriates, desecrates, ignores, falls victim to, and brilliantly recuts the multiple facets of its conventions. (Interview with Takayuki Tatsumi 42–43)

As expressions of this crip virtuosity, Ayers's performances in *The Soloist* likewise interrogate and refuse the logic of the virtuoso, which Lopez continually uses to define him. The film gives us two general types of on-screen performances: informal performances in the public sphere of the type Lopez describes in his preface and formal performances, which include a practice with a Los Angeles Philharmonic cellist and an ill-conceived performance open to the public. While the latter frustrate this presumed virtuosity and often end in failure, the former suggest the affective potential of music and in the best case refigure the failed formal performance through crip virtuosity.

The success of his human-interest column about Ayers's helped Lopez procure a donated cello, which he gives to Ayers under the condition that Ayers keep the instrument at the Lamp Community. While Ayers initially opposes this plan—he does not want to be obliged to visit Lamp—the following day, he claims his cello and begins playing in Lamp's courtyard, where he is surrounded by a number of Lamp's customers. The visual grammar of the film makes clear that this performance is much more deeply affective than Ayers's earlier ones. Of course, within the film's rehabilitative narrative, the scene marks the moment when

Ayers, who has previously been playing an abused violin with only two strings, connects with his musical ability and training, a manifestation of technical ability that prompts a literal return to Ayers's past. With Ayers providing the soundtrack, the film flashes back to his time at Juilliard. We see Ayers performing in an orchestra shortly before signs of madness set it. Ayers begins to hear voices and is shown alone in the center balcony of a theater (a repeated motif). Shortly after, Ayers is once again performing in a large orchestra, but this time, his playing is disrupted by the voices he hears and his playing becomes erratic and discordant, reflecting Joseph N. Straus's argument in "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory" that "disability may enter into the musical body in the form of . . . a musical event . . . that threatens to destabilize the prevailing tonality" (30–31). The musical dissonance of Ayers final performance at Juilliard is both effect and metaphorization of his disability. Soundtracked by a collection of voices imploring Ayers to hide, he frantically escapes the orchestra and closes himself off in a dark closet—the final image of Ayers at Juilliard—before the camera cuts back to the Lamp courtyard. Ayers's performance is once again harmonious.

Although Ayers is playing for himself, the other men and women sitting in the courtyard, members of his unintended audience respond emotionally, nodding their heads or holding hands with or touching partners or friends. It's easy to criticize this scene for presenting music as a mode of rehabilitation—Lamp director David Carter (Nelsan Ellis) even tells Lopez in the next scene, "Man, I'll take [Ayers] any day. He quiets everyone down." However, such a reading too easily dismisses Ayers's subjective experience portrayed in the flashback as well as the varied affective experiences by his audience. Read in conjunction with the (failed) performances in Ayers's flashback, Ayers's Lamp performance restages the virtuoso performance, suggesting that the success of such performances lie not

in the perfect mastery of technique or the expression of a given piece of music (what Virno calls an end state) but in the affective community they establish. While none of the people watching Ayers play clap or celebrate his performance, the scene ends with a long shot of a woman sitting directly in front of Ayers, quietly watching. The woman seems to be moved by Ayers's performance. The camera then cuts to Ayers, who looks back at the camera. The scene leaves ambiguous whether anything is communicated in those glances—or, indeed, whether Ayers is even looking at the woman at all. Nevertheless, the framing implies that Ayers's playing bridges the distance between them.

This intimate virtuosity subverts the human-interest narrative of excessive skill that Siebers describes (the same narrative that Lopez forces by continuing to frame Ayers's story as one of future rehabilitation), offering a shadow crip narrative that serves as a rebuttal to Lopez's rehabilitative impulses. This narrative emphasizes the material experiences of mental disability offered without judgment or framing. As Wright notes in an interview, he "was interested in expressing an extreme reality. . . . [He] wanted to make a schizophrenic film and see if [he] could get away with it within the Hollywood system" (*TimeOut*). One of the ways Wright accomplishes this is by employing actual homeless men and women as background actors. The success of Wright's project is perfectly depicted in a series of scenes filmed at the Lamp Community. In one instance, the film documents Lamp clients candidly discussing their disability—in a moving monologue, one woman describes the comfort she finds in the voices she hears, subtly revising cultural conceptions of schizophrenia. Lopez also talks with the woman who watched Ayers's performance. In her wide-ranging conversation, she discusses her friendship with fellow Lamp client Petey before giving a long monologue linking moments from her past with, among other things, violence in a medical institution. However, this narrative exists in tension with Lopez's narrative arc, in which he must be

rehabilitated as a "good" man. While the woman talks, Lopez looks increasingly bored until he eventually (and rudely) breaks into laughter at her, saying, "You're fantastic."

While taking these men and women on their own terms runs counter to Lopez's journalistic aims, the crip narrative continuously challenges, in small ways, the medical narrative of rehabilitation. This is underscored in a key scene where Lopez is taken to task by Lamp director David Carter. When Lopez asks Carter, "So what does he have? Schizophrenia?" Carter refuses Lopez's insistence on diagnosis. He replies, "Man, I don't know," before explaining to Lopez that he doesn't "get too hung up on diagnosis." When Lopez pushes him to explain "how . . . you help someone without knowing what he has," Carter replies, "Look at these people. They've been diagnosed more than you can imagine. And as far as I can tell, it hasn't done them any good. . . . I'll tell you one thing he doesn't need: one more person telling him he *needs* medication,"[12] reflecting the Lamp Community's mission statement that emphasizes the importance of choice to customers with mental disabilities.

Ultimately, *The Soloist* cannot successfully balance or reconcile its opposing narratives—Roger Ebert calls the film "lost between [an Oscar-style] drama[13] and a serious,

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[12] In a later scene, Ayers also emotionally tells Lopez, "Man, I don't have schizophrenia." While Lopez has used Ayers's diagnosis to get him into a housing program, Ayers reacts violently, telling Lopez that he won't be "taken away" to an institution and that he can "take care of [him]self."

[13] As Ben Stiller's *Tropic Thunder* callously skewers, portraying disabilities is often a shortcut to an Oscar. In his article, "Welcome, Eddie Redmayne: Since 'Rain Man,' majority of Best Actor Oscar winners played sick or disabled" in the *Washington Post*, Justin Wm. Moyer finds that "14 of 27 Best Actors tackled characters facing significant mental or physical barriers to what many consider normal life." Tobin Siebers describes such performances as "disability drag":

> The advantage of disability drag is that it prompts audiences to embrace disability. Its disadvantage is that disability appears as a facade overlaying able-bodiedness. The use of able-bodied actors, whose bombastic performances represent their able-bodiedness as much as their pretense of disability, not only keeps disability out of public view but transforms its reality and its fundamental characteristics. It renders disability invisible because able-bodied people substitute for people with disabilities, similar to white performers who put on blackface at minstrel shows or to straight actors who play "fag" to bad comic effect. As a result, the audience perceives the disabled body as a sign of the acting abilities of the performer-the more disabled the character, the greater the ability of the actor. Disability drag also transforms disability by insinuating ability into its reality and representation. (18)

doleful film about mental illness." However, for all its flaws, the film successfully foregrounds the centrality of disability to Ayers's experience, offering a crip revision to Lopez's text that subverts the traditional Hollywood overcoming narratives. That is, even as Lopez attempts to position Ayers's "successful" virtuosity—that is, a masterful technical performance in an established venue of "high" art—as the culmination of his rehabilitation, Ayers continually frustrates Lopez's rehabilitative attempts. He is often late to events and appointments, is uninterested in assistance from the Lamp Community, and refuses to move into an apartment Lopez procures for him, asserting agency through a focus on the material experiences of both his madness and homelessness.

The Soloist ends with three title cards. The first two give a "where are they now" gloss of Ayers and Lopez, but the third simply states, "There are 90,000 homeless people on the streets of Greater Los Angeles." This final card fades to a montage of real-life Lamp clients, many of whom participated in the film as actors, along with the film's primary actors, dancing at the Lamp Community (in what appears to be an actual party rather than an outtake or a deleted scene from the film). Ella Taylor, reviewing the film for the *Village Voice* finds that the "parting shot of the dancing homeless . . . shamelessly exploits the very people [Wright] means to champion." Although it's important to point out the many aspects of the film that use homeless people to further the narrative's stigmatizing logic, I read the scene more generously. While the scene's focal point is a shot of Robert Downey Jr. and Jaime Foxx (in character) embracing, the emphasis of the scene is on the people surrounding them enjoying the party. The joyous scene of dancing upends the tropes of homelessness tracked elsewhere in the film and works in harmony with the earlier scene of Lamp customers listen to Ayers play, reflecting the affective power of music. It accomplishes this in part through its

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Foxx was not nominated for his performance in *The Soloist*, although he won an Oscar for his previous role as blind musician Ray Charles.

soundtrack, which is a continuation of the performance by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra (discussed earlier in the chapter), the final scene of the film proper. As the scene ends, the camera pans out on the audience, centering Ayers among a sea of well-dressed patrons in dresses and coats and ties, who are listening quietly and without what might easily be named pleasure. The camera pulls back farther, revealing the conductor and orchestra as the screen fades to black. The audio of the performance continues, eventually serving as the soundtrack to the dance party. While it's unlikely that the men and women are actually dancing to classical music, the juxtaposition of the two again recasts the orchestra's technical performance, as well as the staid response by the orchestra goers, transforming this experience through the physicality and joy expressed by the dancers that privileges the marginal experience of the (mad) homeless members of LA's Skid Row.

Schizoanalyses and cripistemologies

Postmodern critical theory has often employed madness, specifically schizophrenia, as a metaphorical concept to define and expose the boundaries of subjectivity under late capitalism. As Catherine Prendergast acerbically points out, "Without schizophrenics, postmodernity would struggle to limit its boundaries, for the schizophrenic in postmodern theory marks the point of departure from the modern, the Oedipal, the referential, the old" (236). Frederic Jameson draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue that schizophrenia offers an aesthetic model of postmodernity that represents the "breakdown of the signifying chain," in which "the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers," a state he relates to "joyous intensities" and "euphoria" (*Postmodernism* 26–27, 29). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari employ the schizophrenic to subvert what they saw as the crystallization of the Oedipus complex as psychiatry's primary mode of analysis, a move that

in a more general sense echoed the calcification of political, economic, and cultural life under late capitalism. In perhaps their most controversial statement, they claim that "the schizophrenic is closest to the beating heart of reality" (87) and that "schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency (246) that has the potential to work against the structure of capitalism from within. As they go on to argue,

> Capitalism only functions on condition that it inhabit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale. . . . Schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death. (*Anti-Oedipus* 246)

Taking the metaphor of schizophrenia as the point of departure for their new mode of analysis, which they call schizoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari privilege the multiplicity and alterity that their metaphorical schizophrenic represents, seeing this subjectivity as a potential site of opposition in large part through a focus on the affective experience of life. Guattari explains further:

> Schizoanalysis approaches all modalities of subjectivation in light of the mode of being in the world of psychosis. Alterity, as such, becomes the primary question. For example, what finds itself fragilized, cracked up, schizzed, in délire, or hallucinating when confronted with the status of the objective world, is the point of view of the other in me, the recognized body in articulation with the lived body and the felt body; these are the normalized coordinates of alterity which give their foundation to sensible evidence. (*Chaosmosis* 63–64)

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the schizophrenic in their analysis is not representative of the material experiences of schizophrenics. As the director of the experimental La Borde

clinic, psychiatrist Guattari engaged mental disability every day, even as he sought to revolutionize psychiatric practice, in particular the relationship between analyst and analysand. Guattari explains that "schizoanalysis obviously does not consist in miming schizophrenia, but in crossing, like it, the barriers of non-sense which prohibit access to a-signifying nuclei of subjectivation, the only way to shift petrified systems of modelization" (*Chaosmosis* 68).

While schizoanalysis might seem to share the same concerns and even tactics as a practice like crip virtuosity, it does so with a disregard for the actual lived experiences of madness. Catherine Prendergast dismantles postmodern theoretical arguments that herald the figure of the schizophrenic as shorthand for the decentralizing experience of life in late capitalism and as a potential site of escape at the expense of realistic portrayals of people with schizophrenia.[14] As Prendergast suggests, such a reading erases what she calls the "non-exceptional" schizophrenic in ordinary public life by "posit[ing] continually the rhetorical exceptionalism of schizophrenics" (238). In other words, "To see the 'ordinary' schizophrenic is, in short, to give up the stable schizophrenic" (243). What is lost in Delueze and Guattari's universal figure of the schizophrenic are the forms of knowledge that emerge

[14] In *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives,* Deleuze and Guattari biographer Francois Dosse takes umbrage with such critiques of schizoanalysis, arguing that "contrary to what some overly hasty readings might suggest, Deleuze and Guattari were not writing a defense of schizophrenia. They wanted to schizophrenize the unconscious to rid it of the Oedipal, familiast scaffolding of psychoanalytic practice" (199). Dosse continues, "The schizophrenia that Deleuze and Guattari were brandishing was not the illness of the same name. It was a universalizing program, a limitless process, a constantly reiterated ability to transgress limits, to carry out a release" (199). Of course, this universalizing move is exactly Prendergast's point of contention. Dosse also defends Deleuze and Guattari from charges of psychoanalytic ignorance: "It's absurd to claim, as some did when *Anti-Oedipus* was published, that its authors had no relationship to psychoanalytic practice and were merely promulgating some disconnected 'delirium.' La Borde and its practices are omnipresent in Guattari's thinking" (194). Although Guattari is clearly sympathetic to and experienced in treating patients with mental disabilities, in Dosse's biography, Deleuze comes across less positively. Jean-Pierre Muyard recounts Deleuze as saying, "I discuss psychosis and madness, but I don't know anything about it from the inside," before offering that Deleuze "was also phobic about deranged people and couldn't have spent even an hour at La Borde" (2). In another account, after a resident of La Borde sets fire to the chapel, Deleuze exclaims to filmmaker Alain Aptekman, "How can you stand those schizos?" (8). Aptekman remarks, "He couldn't bear the sight of crazy people" (8).

from specific locations of intersecting power that cannot be distilled into a generality like the experience of late capitalism, although certainly that is one aspect of it. In a roundtable considering cripistemology—a term coined by Merri Lisa Johnson that gets at the complicated and at times contradictory nature of disability as an (un)knowable subjectivity (Johnson and McRuer, "Introduction")—Carrie Sandahl argues that cripistemology must attend to "those who are completely socially marginalized, stigmatized, and hidden away in institutions (residential, prisons, etc.). What they know, how they know, and why it matters is most threatening to the status quo" ("Proliferating Cripestimologies" 157). Sandahl's remarks are a call to bring in voices beyond what she calls the "able-disabled"—those (like herself, she notes) who because of their ability to align most closely with social and cultural norms can "participate in mainstream culture" (157).

However, as Catherine Prendergast points out, "Given the present configuration of discourses on mental illness, the writing of schizophrenics can only be seen as a-rhetorical, simply as data," noting that even in the best case, "it is seen as music, as poetry, as some personal expression that has no bearing outside of itself, no transactionable currency" ("Rhetorics" 202). Such irrational discourse challenges the potential of contact and virtuosity itself, which for Virno is predicated on communication. In what follows, I examine forms of crip (and queer) virtuosity that reimagine schizoanalysis's inquiry into late capitalism, treating madness not (or not only) as a metaphorical construction of a universal experience of neoliberal subjects but as a material subjectivity that reveals the forces that, as Guattari explains, leave subjects "fragilized, cracked up, schizzed, in délire, or hallucinating when confronted with the status of the objective world" (68) while also critiquing the marginalizing forces at the heart of our culture and, at the same time, resisting this power.

The irrational limits of contact

If *The Soloist* attempts to enable a subversive crip virtuosity that counters the film's overarching rehabilitative narrative, Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man* associates crip virtuosity with a granular socioeconomic critique that foregrounds material experiences of homelessness, disability, and, more generally, everyday life two decades into the neoliberal project to illustrate both the political potentiality of virtuosity and its limits. Delany's 1994 pornographic novel explores gay New York City on the cusp of the AIDS crisis, expanding the account of these spaces Delany gives in his later "Times Square Blue," the first section of his *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Delany's title refers both to a fictional story by Timothy Hasler, the philosopher-author whose murder John Marr investigates over the course of the novel, and Mad Man Mike, "a homeless, quadroon ex-mental patient and sexual deviant" (429),[15] who was also Hasler's lover. In the driving narrative of Delany's novel, philosophy graduate student John Marr researches the life and works of Korean American philosopher and science fiction writer Timothy Hasler,[16] the focus of Marr's own dissertation. Rather than exceptional musical ability, in Delany's telling, virtuosity is a corporeal performance of sexuality quite literally on the margins, performed largely among a community of queer homeless men—emphasizes a culture of inequality that is both economic and intimate.

Hasler's key concepts, focused on the interrelation between "messy, informal systems" and "precise, hard-edged, tractable systems" (243), first draw Marr to the

[15] All citations are from the first edition of *The Mad Man* except where otherwise noted.
[16] The fictional Hasler is positioned in the text as one of the "Postmodern Masters of the American Academic World" of the late '80s and early '90s, a list that, as the novel points out, also includes real-life academic heavyweights like "Appiah, Baker, Eagleton, Felman, Gallup, Gates, Haraway, Jameson, Johnson, Rorty, Sedgewick, and Spivak" (243). Ray Davis argues that Richard Montauge provides the "nearest 'real life' model" for Hasler. While he states unambiguously that "Montague is not Hasler," Davis points to the "intriguing connections between Montague's [life and] work and [Hasler's]," which include philosophical preoccupation with grammars that define logical systems and tragic, unsolved deaths (182).

philosopher (through his advisor, Irvine Mossman), but Marr, who is black and gay, identifies with Hasler and becomes increasingly interested in his intimate life and the circumstances surrounding Hasler's tragic murder outside a New York City nightclub in 1973. Central to this investigation is Hasler's short story "The Mad Man," which is, as Marr discovers after a long investigation, a biographical work describing Hasler's sexual experiences with homeless men in New York City. Over the course of the novel, which is presented as Marr's autobiographical adaptation of Hasler's story, Marr uncovers (and acts out) Hasler's evolving sexual interests and encounters—extremely pornographic moments that take place, as Marr notes, in "a very odd part of the world . . . that lots of people would find simply deranged, disgusting, and without interest—even lots of gay men—no matter which of their friends had been caught up in it" (305). In such a world, sex occurs frequently and includes what Delany calls "sexual limit case[s]" (Interview with Robert F. Reid-Pharr 526): explicit mysophilic urophilia, coprophilia, and public sexual encounters with homeless men. Eventually, Marr's intimate encounters lead him to discover the identity and significance of "The Mad Man" and solve Hasler's murder.

Mary Catherine Foltz argues that "when discussing *The Mad Man*, other critics often list the various ways in which the novel can be read": as "a classic mystery," "a critique of the sterile and controlled philosophy of the academy," an account of gay life in New York City "as AIDS begins to impact the [city's] bathhouses, movie theatres and sexual culture" that is also "a narrative about the movement of desire in spite of a fear of death," and "a reflection on race and racism" (44), not to mention Marr's own reading of the text as "a love story" (333). Critical assessments of *The Mad Man* have focused on one or more of these narratives to examine waste and excrement (Foltz, Davis, Chase), utopia and apocalypse (Davidson), queer economies of pleasure (Haver), and even biographical accounts of

intimate encounters with homeless men (Harper). None has paid significant attention to mental disability, a glaring omission in analyses of a novel called *The Mad Man*. A disability studies focus on Delany's text turns attention from Marr and Hasler to the mad man himself, complicating Delany's argument about contact by articulating a subjective experience from the margins that at once demonstrates the potential and limitations of a practice of crip virtuosity.

In his prefatory disclaimer, Delany explains that the world of *The Mad Man* is to be "take[n] wholly as a pornotopic fantasy: a set of people, incidents, places, and relations among them that have never happened and could never happen for any number of surely self-evident reasons" (xiii).[17] And certainly, the novel works as a piece of very specific pornography. However, many of the sexual encounters Marr documents—especially those he recounts in a 68-page letter to a classmate that comprises the middle section of the novel—read as early drafts of Delany's 1996 essay "Times Square Blue," a chronicle of largely public sexual encounters in Times Square's pornographic movie houses in the years leading up to their closure during the AIDS crisis (what Delany calls an attempt to explain what "went on *in* those movie theaters" (*Times Square Red* xv).[18] While *The Mad Man* documents spaces within queer capitalist consumption—most notably New York gay club the Mineshaft, a Meatpacking District sex club as famous for the wet nights Marr documents as its A-list clientele, which included Robert Mapplethorpe, Rock Hudson, and Michel

[17] As Delany notes in an interview with Thomas L. Long, "'Pornotopia' is not the 'good sexual place.' . . . It's simply *the* 'sexual place'—the place where all can become (apocalyptically) sexual" (133).

[18] There is more to be done reading these works together. In many ways, *The Mad Man* seems to be a working-out of the biographical descriptions of public sex Delany describes in the more widely read *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, despite his claim to the contrary in the preface of *The Mad Man* that "no character, major or minor, is intended to represent any actual person, living or dead. (Correspondences are not only coincidental but preposterous.)" (xiii). This is most clear in the character Crazy Joey in *The Mad Man*, who appears to be a composite of two characters from *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*: Joey-Who-Needs-a-Bath and Joe (the mad masturbator). Besides the obvious parallel in names—Crazy Joey even tells Marr, "A couple of years ago, one guy used to call me Joey-who-needs-a bath." (273)—like Joey-Who-Needs-a-Bath and Joe, Crazy Joey constantly "fiddles" or "plays" with his dick (*Times Square* 44, *The Mad Man* 256).

Foucault (Fritscher)—it is largely concerned with Marr's sexual encounters with a number of homeless men.

As Guy Davidson points out, in *The Mad Man*, these encounters narratively stage "an especially forceful dramatization of [Delany's] thesis in *Times Square* that 'given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will'" (15–16). As Robert McRuer and Abby Wilkerson point out, such interclass contact is also, necessarily, contact with disability. In their gloss of *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, McRuer and Wilkerson note, "Unremarked in the text is the disability and disability consciousness that permeates it: not only does Delany himself use a cane for mobility, but he seeks out and comes into contact with people who embody behavioral, cognitive, physical, and sensory difference" (6). Delany's concept of contact usefully outlines a productive practice of affective encounters that cut across difference, and McRuer and Wilkerson offer a promising avenue of disability analysis in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. However, a closer read of the text complicates Delany's optimistic views about contact, at least with regard to the kinds of sensory and cognitive differences that could be considered madness. Specifically, although Delany does in fact seek out people with disabilities of all kinds, he problematically positions madness as a limit case to his thesis on contact.

In his account describing intimate encounters and public sex in Times Square porno theaters in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, Delany explains,

> Given the twenty-five to thirty years I went to the various theaters, I don't believe I encountered a greater amount of madness in the movies than I did outside. But going there allowed me to see that madness from a different perspective—and

> perhaps learn a little about it. Among the dozen or so tales that I've let stand for the range of my encounters there—the many, many hundreds, indeed thousands, now briefer or more extended—the following story may loom large. But, unlike the representative tales before and after them, [Larry and Joe, the two encounters Delany describes in detail] are the only cases of outright madness I encountered in the movies in a quarter of a century. (65)

At first glance, Delany's encounters with these two men meets the productive purpose of his theorization of contact. Certainly, Delany enters these experiences with good will[19] and makes an effort to get to know both Larry and Joe—and as he notes, gains from these encounters a different perspective on madness. However, Delany's earlier explanation of why the brief encounters in the movie theaters were so powerful is instructive: the "most important aspect" of these encounters, Delany writes, "was that mutual pleasure was exchanged . . . with people you had little in common with" (56). Although Delany seeks out contact with Larry and Joe, both of whom are game participants, in both instances, the two men's expressions of difference, which Delany calls madness, hinders the mutual pleasure that makes these encounters so appealing. Perhaps we should then call these encounters with Larry and Joe failed contact.[20]

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[19] Although Delany positions his interactions with Larry and Joe acts of curiosity rather than understanding or communication. When he sees Larry, who is compelled to stand up every few minutes with his pants down, Delany remarks, "Odd behavior has always intrigued me," before walking down and taking a seat beside him (61). With Joe, who is called "the mad masturbator" by the other patrons of the theater, Delany mentions that his

> own curiosity was articulated by two guys near the wall:
> "Who's that crazy man carrying on down front there?"
> "Him? You mean the Mad Masturbator—that's what the guys here call him. He started coming here a couple of weeks ago. He's harmless though."
> "He looks like he's . . . nuts!"
> "Well, yeah—that, too." (66)

Delany's curiosity is also underscored by the fact that the first time he sees Joe in the theater, Delany observes him rather than initiate conversation.

[20] Davidson links this failure to "the antisocial, anti-utopian elements within both sexual desire and the contemporary urban environment" (13).

When he initiates a conversation with Larry, Delany imagines this pleasurable exchange might even allay the expressions of Larry's madness. After some chitchat, Delany tells Larry, "What I had in mind was giving you a blow job—sucking your dick. I thought maybe something like that might relax you. . . . So I thought I'd ask. I'd only do it if you thought you'd like it. Or it would help you—" (63). Larry admits that he's not gay but tells Delany all the same, "You want to play with my dick, you can do that." Larry too is open to the idea—he explicitly reverses Delany's offer to address Delany's needs rather than his own ("You want") before admitting that the act would also be stimulating to him—but during the twenty-minute blowjob that follows, Larry "remain[s] soft" (64). Following this failure, the men fall into what Delany describes as "desultory conversation" about Larry's family and his experience in the hospital in Connecticut (64), underscoring the less-than-pleasurable result. Delany's experience with Joe is somewhat similar. After introducing himself, Delany and Joe engage in a brief conversation, during which Joe continues to masturbate and then piss on the floor of the theater. Joe then asks Delany, "You wanna do something with me? Suck on it? Jerk me off for a while, maybe? I mean, sure, go on, if you want. Go ahead—that'd be great. Maybe I could get a little rest—some sleep, you know?" (70). Delany jerks Joe off for ten minutes or so, as Joe falls asleep. Eventually, Delany notes, his "hand was becoming tired, so [he] stopped" (70). Joe immediately resumes jerking himself off but thanks Delany for helping him get even ten minutes of rest, and then they chat some more about his compulsion to masturbate.

On the face of it, these are both examples of the "pleasurable exchange" contact allows. Even if no one comes, the intimate acts lead to further conversation and perhaps shared understanding (at least on the part of Delany, who narrates these encounters). It's notable that in Delany's account of public sex, the only two men who don't come are those

he marks as mad. Perhaps this is simply as result of the inability of any narrative to fully encompass the thousands of sexual encounters Delany took part in over his years going to the theaters. And as he himself points out, "The encounters you remember [and by association write about] are, of course, the men who were a little different, a little strange, the odder denizens of the Venus, this particular cock, that particular smile" (89). However, it does implicitly highlight that these men are in some way much different than the others he meets—a fact illustrated by Delany's pivot in his passage discussing madness, in which he explains that these were the only two cases of madness he ever he encountered "in a quarter of a century" (65).

While contact certainly does not depend on a sexual encounter, the sexual encounters that Delany privileges in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* conclude, perhaps obviously, with orgasms. In fact, the other men Delany describes as embodying difference are notable for their remarkable orgasms. Arly, a man with one leg whom Delany becomes close enough with to meet outside of the theater, has to "come three or four times" in each encounter (50); likewise, Joey-Who-Needs-a-Bath, whose compulsion to "always fiddl[e] with his dick" (44) Delany associates with Joe later in the text (66), defines himself by his prodigious orgasms: "I love to come more than anything in the world. And I like people to see me come. I like them to know I'm coming. I like them to hear me come. I like them to love it that I'm coming, too!" (44–45). However, despite sharing with Joe a compulsion to masturbate, Delany does not suggest that Joey-Who-Needs-a-Bath is mad. Arly and Joey-Who-Needs-a-Bath are simply examples of "the hundreds on hundreds [of other men he] met there, who, whatever strangenesses [they] displayed, and often with sexualities even more intense than Joe's, were *not in any way like* [Joe or Larry]" (my emphasis 73).

Delany's descriptions of madness in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* work to

destigmatize one population—queer men seeking public sex—through the establishment of madness as a limit to the communal potential power of contact.[21] Pointedly, Delany often deploys stigmatizing language toward so-called mad men in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, whether from himself or his interlocutors, including "nutzo" (64), "crazy lunatic" (60), and "pretty close [to completely bug-fuck crazy]" (62).[22] (As McRuer and Wilkerson point out, Delany is much more sympathetic to Arly.) Delany offers a similar treatment of madness in *The Mad Man*, describing such characters as "Hasler's mad Korean-born mother" (24), a "crazy one-ball Puerto Rican" who threatens Marr in Riverside Park (50), and the "perfectly psychotic young man" who murdered Hasler. Marr often uses the term "mad" when referring to his unprotected sexual encounters, calls a hustler a "madman" after the hustler threatens him, and describes a (made-up) group of Haitian thieves "madmen!" Madness then becomes, pace Foucault, shorthand for a metaphorical break with the structures of proper or at least acceptable behavior.

In *The Mad Man*, Marr similarly deploys madness in order to recuperate the cultural representation and conception of (some) homeless subjects. After a character explains to Marr, "Our country's squares and avenues are full of [mad men], and they stand, filthy and

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[21] Importantly, for Delany contact does not constitute a formal community but is rather a fleeting encounter that nevertheless generates and is generated by communal feelings of "good will" (*Times Square Red* 111).

[22] In both *The Mad Man* and *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, Delany exposes the violence of medical knowledge on disability, which looms in both texts as forced institutionalization. Larry explains that he "was in the hospital up in Connecticut until two days ago. But they kicked [him] out" (62), and when Delany asks Joe if he's seen a doctor about his condition, Joe replies,

> Doctors? Oh, man, yeah. The last time they put me in the nut house, I thought they were going to throw away the damned key. . . .The doctors were talking about cutting some nerves inside my dick so I wouldn't feel anything when I choked my fucking chicken. (71)

Likewise, in *The Mad Man*, descriptions of actual (rather than metaphorical) madness are usually mediated by institutional disciplinary archipelagos of the police and hospital: Hasler's mother, "shocked into madness by the turn of events in the early fifties. . .died in an asylum in 1954" (11); Hasler himself "was the most self-tortured of hypochondriacs" (92) who "had an endless string of psychotherapists, of many schools and persuasions, from his twelfth year to his twenty-fifth," leading one critic to assume that Hasler "spent some weeks, if not months, in a mental hospital" (229–230). And like real-life counterpart Joe, Crazy Joey worries that authorities might "clap [his] ass in the crazy hospital again, for pullin' on [his] dick" (277). In fact, as Crazy Joey explains, his name refers to his history of institutionalization: "Out on the street, you been in the crazy hospital, and they call you 'crazy'" (273).

gibbering, barely able to hold out their cups, practically on every street corner," Marr replies, "If everyone I heard called mad around me really was, the world would run as a *very* odd machine. The fact is, not all those men and women *are* mad" (296–297). In his cutting retort, Marr cites statistics on the homeless population in New York: "About a third suffer from some form of mental problem. Another third suffer from drug and/or alcohol abuse. And a third are there because they haven't got any money and can't afford to be anywhere else" (296–297). Marr's rebuttal gives a more nuanced view of homelessness that also counters the stigmatizing interconnection of homelessness and madness with an underlying ethics of care, but his larger point that the majority of homeless people are not mad ultimately serves to position actual experiences of madness (along with drug use) as outside what Marr might call the systems of the world (which, presumably, are not so odd) while bringing the third group of homeless—which includes his love interest, Leaky Sowps—into the realm of respectability and acceptance.

The failure of contact in encounters with mad men is a result of the concept's dependence on rational discourse, in which two people seek out understanding and communication. Although he spends little time unpacking the implications of his brief descriptions of madness, Delany seems to suggest that despite his attempts at seeking contact, madness forecloses the life-fulfilling potential of these experiences, echoing Foucault's claims in *A History of Madness*, that "there is no [longer a] common language" for communicating with the madman" (xxviii). This is particularly true of schizophrenia, which, though not the subject of Delany's writing, has, as I have suggested in this chapter, been unevenly deployed as both a metonym for madness and a metaphor for life in late capitalism, as well as a racialized diagnosis applied to African American males in particular.

Thus, while Delany is empathetic to the mad men he meets—explaining through

other characters that men like Larry and Joe are "harmless" (66) and "don't hurt nobody" (68)—these mad men exemplify what David Mitchell has called the "discontinuity" of disabled subjectivities. However, as Mitchell argues, such discontinuity is productive, serving as the basis for disability movements that exist within "shared spaces of artificial coherency imposed from the outside" (*Biopolitics* 132). The discontinuity of contact (dis-contact?) suggest one way to productively read madness in Delany's texts, particularly *The Mad Man*, where these concerns are writ large. Though Delany positions madness as what William Haver calls "the outside that unworks the work of philosophy," Haver explains that this is an affirmative position (295). Madness, although it challenges the rational discourse on which Delany's concept of contact depends, is also, as *The Mad Man* illustrates, a deconstructive mode of alternative affective contact that both critiques rational structures of thought (philosophy, capitalism, etc.) and assembles new, transgressive modes of affective encounters in common.

Let the mad man play!

Delany cautions against reading *The Mad Man* as a realistic portrayal of homelessness, arguing that "no book could be that all-but-omits scenes of winter and does not deal with—indeed, focus on—the criminally inadequate attempts by the municipality to feed, clothe, and shelter these men, women, and children" (xiv). However, the novel obliquely engages public sphere narratives of homelessness in the eighties, portraying what John Fiske calls "the flesh-and-blood meanings of a policy that minimizes the role of the state in social life and maximizes the roles of capital and the market . . . [in which] the relationship of the homeless to the social order becomes not one of citizens whose rights and welfare are the concern of their government, but of social castoffs" (7). As John Fiske notes, it was "Reaganism in the

1980s [that] provided the semiotic and economic framework within which homelessness developed as both a concept and a social reality" (6). Delany offers a similar account that nods to Foucault's demarcation of the moment "the homosexual [became] a species" in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (43), "In the years between 1982 and 1986 . . . bums, hoboes, derelicts, and winos stopped being bums, hoboes, derelicts, and winos and became, rather, 'the homeless'" (*The Mad Man* 91). In keeping with the neoliberal turn toward personal responsibility, representations of homeless men and women often blamed homelessness on individuals' personal failings, which as Craig Willse points out, "depicted people living without shelter as, at best, lazy individuals who chose streets over homes, if not as feral beings poised at the edge of reason and civilization (53). Both Willse and Fiske suggest that cultural depictions of homelessness occlude the structural limitations that create and promote homelessness. As Fiske notes, "If the homeless population contains proportionally more of the mentally and physically dysfunctional than the population at large, it is because they are the most vulnerable to systematic depravation" (6). The homeless men in Delany's novel offer what Fiske calls in a different context "an alarming portrait of an expanding homeless problem, certainly more rooted in economy than in madness" (24), that revises the stigmatizing narrative of individual failure. This is, in part, represented through Marr's sexual encounters with homeless men, some of whom are also mad.

The narrative recuperates these representations of homelessness, particularly illustrated by Marr's relationship with Leaky Sowps, through positive pornographic sexual encounters. These mutually pleasurable experiences butt uncomfortably against madness, particularly through the character of Mad Man Mike—the ringleader of the group of homeless men Marr falls in with. Although Mad Man Mike makes only a few brief appearances in Delany's novel, he instigates the most excessively pornographic scenes in the

text through a game he has created. Although the novel associates Mike's madness with medical discourses that demarcate sexual difference as deviance (which the novel attempts in some ways to critique[23]), it locates expressions of this madness in a refusal of limits and rationality that is particularly tied to concepts of capitalist exchange that are reimagined through Mike's game. Here madness is not a metaphor exactly but a new orientation to the world that refuses "rational" concepts of normativity—shown throughout the text to be hollow. Marr's encounters with Mike's madness, like those Delany describes in the Times Square movie houses, resituate for him the terms of normative society and madness itself.

The game itself exists as a space of intimate affective potential in which this critique can be felt. Mad Man Mike's game essentially involves its players fucking "through all the combinations and permutations of everyone hooking up with everyone else" (441), obliging the novel's aim to untether stigmatization from what are commonly seen as "abhorrent" sex acts such as urolagnia and coprophagia—or at least supplementing it with desire—by presenting these acts as the products of communal desire "among people of good will" (442), Marr's literal citation of Delany's thesis on contact. Indeed, as Mary Catherine Foltz notes, acts like shit eating and piss drinking offer, for Marr and the homeless men he has sex with, a "pleasurable way to interact with that which we may previously have deemed abject" (54). Like that of the technical virtuoso, Mad Man Mike's performance—directing the play of his game and playing it himself—is imbued with excess. While sex acts occur frequently throughout the novel between Marr and a large cast of homeless men, the expansive possibilities of the sexual permutations and fetishes created by the game are marked by their

[23] Marr explains that Mad Man Mike is a "homeless, quadroon ex-mental patient and sexual deviant" (9463). Crazy Joey tells Marr, "Mad Man Mike, he says I'm just like him, when he was a kid" (5259).

limitlessness and lend the game its virtuosic character[24]: it is, to use Virno's words, a virtuosic sexual performance "without a script . . . that coincides . . . with pure and simple potential" (*Grammar* 66). And as Virno explains, such "unrestrained invention . . . alters the rules of the game and throws the adversary completely off balance" (70).

The game itself is a performance of economic exchange: somebody "bring[s] his penny over to somebody else and say[s], 'Here. . . ' and then could do . . . whatever he wanted with the guy" (441). The penny represents affective value that mediates the position of the homeless characters by giving them worth in a society that continuously reiterates that "they were worth nothing!" (456) and also reflects the value of the potentiality of the sexual act of ownership. In "Utopia and Apocalypse in Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man,*" Guy Davidson explains that Mike's game "both parodies and undermines the system of monetary exchange" (26). However, as Davidson points out, the game also deconstructs this system of labor, as over the course of the game, the players' pennies are redistributed at will, at times with no explanation, "attribut[ing] value to men deemed valueless in the economy of production and undercut[ting] the notion of value" (26). William Haver argues that in *The Mad Man* "the homeless do not enter an economy of labor [and] produce no value" (296). While this is true in a literal sense, within the context of the game, sex acts are in effect a form of affective labor, producing the intangible affects Michael Hardt describes: "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community" (Hardt 96). Under this messy, informal system, labor (which is to say, sex acts)

[24] Gameplay in Mad Man Mike's might be considered a practice of what Derrida calls freeplay in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"—"a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble" (236). Derrida's notion of play refers not to amusement—"Play is always lost when it seeks salvation in games," he notes ("Play" 1730)—a serious practice of deconstruction. However, "as soon as it comes into being and into language," Derrida explains, "play erases itself" (1729). When freeplay becomes meaning making that "seeks to decipher. . .a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay" (241), a turn to the center that "closes off the freeplay it opens up and makes possible" (224). As Derrida notes these positions are "absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy" (241).

is a purpose unto itself, as Virno would say, without an end state. As Hasler's notes explain in the text, "[Mad Man Mike] said that knowing somebody wanted you enough even to pay a penny for you meant you were not in the unenviable position of most people he knew living in the parks and the streets: i.e., no one . . . wanted them at all—to most people they were worth nothing!" (456). Mad Man Mike's virtuosic game is a defection—by defecation—of sorts, allowing for affective contact that grounds Virno's political communal practice—but importantly, one that emerges out of madness. Mad Man Mike's crip virtuosity exposes the failures and systemic depravation of capitalism but importantly, also stages a transformative practice that, to quote Virno, "alters the rules of the game" and "modifies the conditions within which the struggle takes place" (70).

While Mike's game engenders a resistant community through an intimate of virtuosic sex that is revolutionary in its madness, Marr constantly attempts to reinstate rationality on these encounters. Before the game begins, Marr, who by this point has participated in his share of what might be considered extreme sex acts, asks, "Why am I doing this? . . . Come on guys . . . *This is fucking crazy*" (416; author's emphasis). This line of questioning is repeated when Marr finds Joey, post-orgy, pissing all over his books. Marr yells at Joey and tells him he can't do things like that. Joey replies, "The Mad Man didn't tell me about that. I didn't understand that" (459). Marr unsuccessfully attempts to explain further: "Joey—you have to have some limits when you're doing stuff like this. . . . Didn't Mad Man Mike tell you about that—limits, I mean?"—but is met with only an "unhappy, questioning look" (459). Marr's concern with limits lays bare the division between rationality and madness in the novel, and his insistence on establishing boundaries around these elements (also evinced by the concluding romantic coupling with Leaky Sowps) proves the difficulty of apprehending the revolutionary potential of Mad Man Mike's message.

In his final meeting with Mad Man Mike, Marr attempts to tell Mike the name of Hasler's killer and get closure on the incident that led to Crazy Joey's murder, a contemporary counterpart to Hasler's murder 17 years earlier. Marr and Leaky Sowps travel to Mike's home in the tunnel under Riverside Park, and after a round of the Mad Man's game that leads to some rough group sex, Marr gets Mike alone and tells him everything he knows about Hasler's murder. But Marr still trying to put meaning to Mike's actions the night before, implores Mike to confirm his theories:

> "Is this how it happened?—after Tim took the knife in the chest that Franitz was trying to stick into you, and you were cut, you came back to Tim's place—the apartment downstairs from mine. Maybe the door was left open . . . ? . . . Maybe Tim had given you the key?" But it was my voice, now, reverberant within my own skull, that had grown so big. "After Tim was killed, you did pretty much the same thing downstairs at Tim's place as you did up at mine—all except jamming your dick in my face. You finished wrecking the place. You did it because you were mad, right? Because you were angry your friend had been killed—" I *know* I saw a pensiveness—a consideration, I'll even call it a connection, in those eyes, like pools of machine oil backed with verdigris—between Mike and me. But what does such knowledge mean? ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition)

Marr's attempts to insert reason into this interaction—emphasized by his leading questions and his invocation of knowledge—is also an attempt to read reason in Mad Man Mike. Thus, Marr "knows" he sees "consideration" in Mike's eyes. The first edition of *The Mad Man* emphasizes the division between the rationalization Marr wants and Mike's own experience: in response to Marr, Mike simply nods, looks puzzled, and says, "There wasn't nobody to come with no more. . . ." (497). In Delany's revised text, Mad Man Mike's

response circumscribes the boundaries of virtuosity as a critical practice: "That's when I learned . . . see, I learned it costs too much. To do that shit, out there where *you* are. Here it costs you a goddam' penny. Out there . . . " Mike's hand went up to rub the scar showing between his shirt rags. ". . . it costs you your fuckin' life! The little guy . . . I mean—there wasn't nobody to come with no more" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition). Perhaps slightly out of character, Mike's comments espouse a rational argument about the disciplining power of cultural norms, pointing to the discrepancy between value and cost in the real world where Mike's alternative practice of economic exchange is not viable. As he seems to suggest, alternative contestatory spaces created within regimes of power are always contingent.

> As Marr and Leaky walk away, Mike screams at Marr:
>
> "You know, I can *buy* that cocksucker from you, man! I got enough to pay for 'im!" . . . "I can buy that motherfuckin' cocksucker from you anytime I want! See? I got these—I got 'em right here!" Then he flung something—because something hit the back of my neck; and my shoulder; and my buttocks—

Marr and Leaky retreat, leaving Mike behind, "laugh[ing], sound soaring from falsetto to profundo. One hand high from when he'd hurled them, and, once more loose from his pants, his cock in his other fist—gripped hard enough to make him grimace, lifting slow, and with its inexorably repetitious upswing—he looked perfectly insane" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition). Marr tries to make sense of this encounter, "trying to figure our what had happened, what had been meaningful in it and what had been lunatic (trying to tame it . . .) and what that in it which was meaningful had meant" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition), but ultimately comes up short. As he notes, "With madmen such readings are always questionable" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition).

The Mad Man offers a happy ending of sorts founded in what Guy Davidson calls the "mutually transformative encounter" between Marr and Leaky Swops (29). This ending expresses the most productive aspects of Delany's thesis on contact. But while Leaky and Marr make a home together, Mad Man Mike remains at the margins of society. He never appears again in the first edition, but in the last few pages of the revised novel, Leaky explains that recently saw Mad Man Mike, who had a "dozen new people livin' down there with 'im," whom Leaky calls "funny" and "strange" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition). Although he and Mike "got to piss and shit on a white feller" and Leaky "got [his] dick sucked too," he explains to Marr and another couple, "It ain't like the little guy, here [Marr]. He's just about got me housebroke" ("Mirrors of Night," Kindle edition). Leaky's comments suggest the ways that certain lives are incorporated into "rational" systems while others, the mad men (and women), are refused entry. However, it is from the margins that these people might, to repurpose David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's argument, "envision a meaningful contrast of lifestyles, values, and investments adapted to life as discontinuity and contingency" (192).

You Is Just Vibrations: Punk Practices of (De)control

Theories of rock meaning can only be developed through rock practice, and rock practice involves a relationship between musicians and audiences in a particular cultural institution.—Simon Frith

I love hearing people sing along with bands—I think it's incredible. . . . There's few things that affect me more powerfully than a room full of people singing with a band.—Ian MacKaye

In Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, protagonist Janey stumbles upon Hilly Kristal's CBGB & OMFUG (commonly known as CBGB[1]), the now-closed club that played a central role in New York's punk scene. By the mid-eighties, the setting of Acker's novel, CBGB hosted many of New York's more aggressive hardcore punk bands. Over a brief few pages, Acker lays bare many of the intersecting forces at play when experiencing live music—punk in particular[2]:

> 'One night I wandered into a rock-n-roll club named CBGB's. The lights went boomp boomp boomp the drum went boomp boomp boomp the floor went boomp boomp boomp. Boomp boomp boomp entered my feet. Boomp boomp boomp entered my head. My body split into two bodies. I was the new world. I was pounding. Then there was these worms of bodies, white, covered by second-hand stinking guttered-up rags and knife-torn leather bands, moving sideways HORIZONTAL wriggling like worms who never made it to the snake-evolution stage, we only reproduce, we say, if you cut us apart with a knife, the slimy saxophone and the singer who's too burned out to stick a banana in his cock flows away all was gooky amorphous ambiguous nauseous undefined spystory no reality existed so why bother to do anything? BOOM BOOM was reality, slimy slimy

[1] The club, located in the Bowery, closed in 2008, a victim of gentrification on the Lower East Side. The location is now a John Varvatos store (complete with a version of CBGB's iconic awning). As a mark of its historical importance, the CBGB's awning recently sold at auction for $30,000 (Evans).

[2] In "Kathy Is a Punk Writer," Margaret Henderson traces Acker's connections to punk, concluding that "a major and primary source of Acker's punk image are her subcultural origins and affiliations. . . .Acker's punk persona has foundations in lived experience, and thus her past in the punk culture provides her with a potent narrative of the self" (539).

BOOM BOOM slimy slimy. . . . 'I didn't want anyone to notice me 'cause I was blind so I crawled under the splinters of the bar. The music stopped. A lot of feet passed by. Some of them accidently kicked me. One kicked me too hard. . . .

The music made it so you couldn't hear the words and the music itself was so loud music couldn't be heard

you weren't hearing

this is beyond hearing

you is just vibrations so there's no difference between self and music. (120–122)[3]

Acker's description foregrounds the embodied experience of the performance—the "boomp boomp boomp" of auditory and haptic response. And although Acker gives us the lyrics to the punk song Janey hears,[4] she makes it clear that the lyrics themselves do not necessarily matter to the meaning the music makes (nor, for that matter, do the trappings of the music itself, such as melody or technical accomplishment), since "the music made it so you couldn't hear the words and the music itself was so loud music couldn't be heard." In the space of this performance, music has moved beyond any kind of constitutive recognizable form into pure affective experience. In one of the more poetic descriptions of the affective resonance of music, and aggressive music in particular, Janey explains, "you weren't hearing / this is beyond hearing / you is just vibrations so there's no difference between self and music." Janey's description of her experience speaks to the deterritorializing effects of music. In *Frances Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze explains, "Music traverses our bodies in profound ways. . . . It strips bodies of their inertia,

[3] This chapter draws on texts from and about the punk scene, including novels, lyrics, zines, and interviews. As such, many of the works quoted take a liberal approach to structure, grammar, and capitalization.

[4] I've chosen not to quote the lyrics here for reasons of length, but rest assured that the "political music shit" (Janey's words) Acker describes covers some stereotypical themes common to eighties punk, among them the end of the world, terrorism, death, unhappiness, and a sexuality that, as Simon Frith, speaking generally about punk, notes, "reject[s] both romantic and permissive conventions" (*Sound Effects* 243).

of the materiality of their presence: it *disembodies* bodies" (47). Deleuze and Félix Guattari elsewhere call this disembodiment "becoming"—a process in which organized forms are deterritorialized, losing their individual identity and subjectivity as they become part of an assemblage that is best understood through the intensities passing through it. "Musical expression," Deleuze and Guattari explain, "is inseparable from a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal that constitute its content" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 299).

However, as Teresa Brennan points out in *The Transmission of Affect*, "Deleuze refers to music as a purely aural practice. In the space of a crowded club, musical performance affects on many levels" (5). Indeed, in Janey's description, the aural experience of music is just one aspect of a more expansive experience that begins with the physical space of the club itself (the moving floor) and includes both the singer and band and the audience—those "worms of bodies, white, covered by second-hand stinking guttered-up rags and knife-torn leather bands" who interact with Janey physically, particularly through acts of violence. However, the space of the live performance is also a Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage of sorts, in which audience, performer, and space itself are reconstituted into an affective presence that the term "scene" tries (and fails, as it always must) to recapture into meaning. The intensities made available in these moments form the basis of community—in the loosest sense of the term, as an experience in common—even as they are also mobilized in the service of the more formal structures of subculture.

Acker's brief description situates three lines of flight that the rest of the chapter will follow as it attempts to trace punk's intensities and think through the affective community that emerges through music, understood as both the individual experience of live musical performance and participation in a musical fan scene. In *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*, Josh Kun outlines what he calls "audiotopia—the space within and produced by a musical

element that offers the listener and/or the musician new maps for re-imagining the present social world" (22–23). Audiotopias, Kun argues, "are both sonic and social spaces where disparate identity-formations, cultures, and geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other as well as enter into relationships whose consequences for cultural identification are never predetermined" (23). Although as Kun makes clear, audiotopias are not in themselves physical spaces, being more akin to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, the maps they offer for those claiming membership (even simply through consumption) can extend to the physical spaces of the scene—especially in live performance venues where the sonic and the social converge.[5] However, the potentiality inherent in the experience of live music specifically offers one avenue for considering the communal, political, and ethical implications of punk rock.

The communities I've examined thus far in this dissertation have formed (or been created) through the debilitating processes of global neoliberal capitalism enacted on localities from the borderlands to the countryside to the city. As I have tried to show, the

[5] These spaces are not necessarily positive. Punk has often been criticized for its violence, enacted both externally and within the scene itself. Simon Frith offers one explanation of how the links between affective understandings of music and space can lead to physical violence:

> The street culture [embodied in rock and roll music] that fascinates the suburban young is a romanticized version of the culture of working-class peer groups. Powerless and pushed around at home, work, and school, young proletarians have to claim their own space, literally; they must 'magically' appropriate their material environment—streets and cafés and pubs and parks—from the 'outsiders' who, in reality, control them. For these teenagers a sense of class *is* a sense of place; it is *their* streets that must be defended, their streets on which status is won, on which 'them' and 'us' is made visible. (*Sound Effects* 218)

Sam McPheeters, writer and former singer for hardcore band Born Against, explains how this played out in the early eighties hardcore scene in New York City:

> As the scene coalesced in Reagan's first term, the New York hardcore scene—known in the shorthand of graffiti and knuckle tattoos as NYHC—injected class into the subculture in a way that no other city could. It was a world marinating in poverty and violence. The skinheads of New York weren't as uniformly racist as skinheads in other cities, but gay-bashing was merry sport, and bystander-bashing a close second. Punk shows in early-80s Manhattan were good places to witness and/or receive a savage beating.

And in an interview discussing the early days of NYHC, Harley Flanagan, a member of the influential band the Cro-Mags and scene lifer, remembers (and at the same time demonstrates) the violence McPheeters describes: "'I used to beat up all the artsy-fartsy faggots,' he said. 'But it wasn't because they were gay, it wasn't because they were arty. It was because I felt that I'd earned my way into that fuckin neighborhood, and I wasn't just gonna fuckin roll over and just let this neighborhood disappear'" (qtd. in Sanneh).

affective potential of people in these spaces emerges out of alternative practices of being in common from the margins, but these moments are rarely anything other than fleeting. In this chapter, I explore two punk scenes during a ten-year time period from the late eighties to the late nineties: the straight edge youth crew scene and the queercore scene. The punk subculture provides a similar staging ground for an oppositional ethics, with a few key differences. Clearly, unlike being poor or homeless, participating in the punk subculture is a choice that is tied to aspects of leisure time and consumer culture (although, as we will see in chapter 5, one that may also at times overlap with issues of poverty and homelessness). In fact, punk often wants to have it both ways: aspects of consumption—selling records, merchandise, and tickets to shows, for example—are central to the scene, but equally important is criticizing these very aspects and working against them through DIY practices, break-even pricing, and community support. Invariably, as soon as a band or scene becomes too popular, the cry of "punk is dead" goes up, and the cycle starts anew. Contradiction is inherent in punk, particularly in its celebration of marginality and critique of racism, sexism, and homophobia while often internally reproducing these very same attitudes. That is to say, while the message of punk is (at times) deeply political and contestatory, it is also disproved by the actions of its participants.

This chapter investigates some of these contradictions. Taking as my primary sources Eleanor Henderson's *Ten Thousand Saints* and Lynn Breedlove's *Godspeed*, I read punk largely in terms of music and its affective relation to the body—sonically, but also through the violence of the show, the bodily discipline espoused by straight edge punks, and the drug use described (and even celebrated) by Breedlove—and ask how these experiences, bound as they are to limited and at times even destructive postures, might also offer the potential for collective feeling that gestures toward a politics of resistance. This is not meant to necessarily

reflect the actual lived experience of individual participants in these overlapping subcultures. Instead, I look at the ways that these scenes are represented, both by participants and those from the outside looking in. In what follows, I explore the tensions around the demand for control expressed by the straight edge youth crew subculture, paying close attention to the ways in which individual control and regulation of the body becomes part of a system of discipline that punishes those who fail to adhere or refuse to adhere to the rules, and look for the spaces where control slips. I then turn to the later queercore scene to consider the possibilities of what I'll tentatively call decontrol—an embodied affective stance that emerges particularly within the context of the punk show.

A brief history of punk

Most accounts of punk cite its beginnings in the mid-seventies, with subcultures forming contemporaneously on both sides of the Atlantic. In London, the scene was loosely organized around Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's Chelsea boutique, SEX, and the Sex Pistols, the seminal band managed by McLaren, who played their first show at Saint Martin's School of Art in 1975; in New York City, it centered on performers like the Ramones, Television, Richard Hell, and Patti Smith, who played a small collection of clubs, including, most famously, CBGB. While there was a transatlantic exchange of punk culture in the late seventies and these bands all drew on the music of bands like the New York Dolls, the MC5, and the Stooges (now described as protopunk), British and American punk followed different paths. British punk was, as Dick Hebdige points out, "more self-consciously proletarian" than the music coming out of New York (*Subculture* 27),[6] which in

[6] Dick Hebdige describes the "dubious parentage" of early British punk as so: "Strands from David Bowie and glitter-rock were woven together with elements from American proto-punk (the Ramones, the Heartbreakers, Iggy Pop, Richard Hell), from that faction within London pub-rock (the 101-ers, the Gorillas, etc.) inspired by

its earliest incarnation was a collection of largely middle-class art school students.[7] While British punks sped up traditional rock forms and took pride in their amateurish ability, early US punks like Television, the Heartbreakers, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, and the Talking Heads united around a shared community of artistic production rather than a distinct sound. However, in both cases, punk music was a repudiation of contemporary mainstream pop rock of the seventies, and the scene—the fan community built around these bands—provided a safe space for marginal subjects disgusted with or left out of popular culture. As Ian MacKaye, of the influential US punk bands Minor Threat and Fugazi, explains,

> Punk rock in the beginning was so many different people who came from so many different places. They were all these outcasts, all these people who just did not fit in for various different reasons. Some people didn't fit in because they had troubles with their families; some people didn't fit in because of their sexuality; some didn't feel normal psychologically; some didn't feel normal politically. And all these sorts of margin walkers, these people who were outside, joined together and gathered under this new manifestation of the underground. ("Interview with Ian MacKaye" 38–39)

In one of the earliest investigations of punk, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige calls the first generation of punk one of a number of British subcultures that "[went] against the grain of a mainstream culture" (101). Coming out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and a practice of cultural studies focused on the intersection of Marxism and semiotics, Hebdige is largely concerned with locating punk within a historical context and unpacking the spectacular representational strategies of punk style, which he finds a visual signification of the anxieties of British everyday life

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the mod subculture of the sixties, from the Canvey Island '40s revival and the Southend r & b bands (Dr Feelgood, Lew Lewis, etc.), from northern soul and from reggae" (25).

[7] See Tony Rettman's *NYHC* for a detailed look at the early days of New York punk.

(especially for the working class), or an appropriation of "the rhetoric of crisis [of Britain in the late seventies] . . . translated . . . into tangible (and visible) terms" (87). According to this understanding, punk style attempted to purposely engender the types of affective responses, like disgust and horror, I've traced in marginal communities like drug users and the homeless. As Tavia Nyong'o points out in "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," punk style incorporated "the paraphernalia and symbols of various queer subcultures" to affectively communicate "a bad or rebellious attitude" (114). Early punk had a similar predilection for Nazi imagery.

While Hebdige traces the emergence of punk in the late seventies from Britain's anxious working class, Simon Frith locates punk within a broader history of rock and roll, considering it a (largely middle-class) youth culture. According to Frith's framework, youth cultures exist in opposition to their progenitors: youth culture is "a set of values different from those of an older generation; they saw themselves as 'rebelling against unreasonable ideas and conventional ways of doing things'" (*Sound Effects* 206). Of course, as John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts emphasize, youth subcultures "continue to exist within, and coexist with, the more inclusive culture of the class from which they spring" (101). However, they note, these "subcultures provided for a section of working-class youth (mainly boys) *one* strategy for negotiating their collective existence. But their highly ritualized and stylized form suggests that they were also *attempts at a solution* to that problematic experience" (104). Hebdige's and Frith's analyses underscore punk's contradiction as both a politically oppositional subculture, as Hebdige would have it, and a leisure-based youth subculture, for Frith, the tensions of which punk has struggled to resolve since its inception. This is particularly true of the US context, where punk quickly became a suburban middle-class youth subculture. At the same time, as Lawrence Grossberg notes,

both modes of analysis neglect a key aspect of musical subcultures—the music itself. The problem with "treating rock and roll as a 'representation' located within a context of class relationships," Grossberg argues, is that "neither one is able to account for the reality and the generality of the affective power of the music" ("Another Boring Day in Paradise" 312). Indeed, for both Hebdige and Frith, the musicality of these subcultures is less important than the cultural and economic signifiers that scaffold them.[8]

We need new noise.

Hedbidge deploys noise as a metaphor to explain punk's orientation away from mainstream society. In Hebdige's theorization, as a critical practice, noise "describe[s] the challenge to symbolic order that [resistant subcultural] styles are seen to constitute" (133). Noise comes out of an engagement with a normative culture that also suggests the contradictions inherent in the subcultures themselves. He argues,

> In order to communicate disorder, the appropriate language must first be selected, even if it is to be subverted. For punk to be dismissed as chaos, it had first to "make sense" as noise. . . . Subcultures represent "noise" (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. (88, 90)

While Hebdige's distinction between sound and noise is quite useful, it ignores the aural dimension of punk music completely, even as it deploys it as a metaphor. Rather than simply a metaphor, noise as an aural practice is, as many of punk's detractors have noted, the

[8] Frith explicitly makes this argument in *Sound Effects*: "What is the relationship between rock as style and rock as activity? Against the early adolescent theorists' descriptions of a transitional street culture, i.e., music as background, the subculturalists pitch a theory that is both more romantic and more political: style represents the experience of class oppression in the individual; the moment of refusal is the act of symbolic creation itself" (219).

foundation of punk music.

Frith describes what he calls the "shock effect" of punk music—that which "challenge[s] pop and rock conventions of romance, beauty, and ease" (*Sound Effects* 160) and notes the ease with which punk music is recuperated into traditional forms: "It soon became apparent," he writes, "that punk was constricted by its realist claims, by its use of melodic structures and a rhythmic base that were taken to tell-it-like-it-was just because they followed rock 'n' roll rules—the 4:4 beat, shouted vocals, rough guitar/bass/drums lineup" (Sound Effects 160). However, in *American Hardcore*, his exhaustive history of hardcore in the United States, Steven Blush explains how the second-generation of US punk, dubbed hardcore, whole-handedly embraced noise as a critical concept, based in part on the uneasy reproduction of the rules, underscoring the disjuncture between regulation and experimentation. He argues,

> Hardcore music was unique in that it focused on speed and anger—it was all about playing as fast as possible. The more talented bands occasionally implemented mixtures of mid and fast tempos. Hardcore guitarists—with their new-fashioned style of attack—ripped as fast as possible. Soloing represented traditional Rock bullshit and was thus strictly forbidden, so these bands developed previously unheard rhythmic styles. Singers belted out words in an abrasive, aggressive manner. Drummers played ultra-fast, in an elemental one-two-one-two. That insistence on quickness imposed limitations, which soon turned into assets. (44)

This expressive and affective power is part and parcel of gains in technology—especially amplification of sound, along with technology, such as guitar pedals, for increasing overdrive on an audio signal, distorting the guitar sounds. In *Noise Water Meat*, his monograph on the use of sound in the arts, Douglas Kahn, discussing modern art rather

than music, emphasizes the affective experiences this new technology made available to a listening audience:

> In the 1960s, the powerful means of amplification enforced an inability to speak and left the individual body performing in tandem with a new agency of sound. . . . Indeed, the entire notion of amplification may be looked upon as a vehicle of assault on habitual response based on 'who' you are, verbally. The self must now be defined in physical action, but it is no longer the embrace of a dancing partner that defines the physical self. Since amplified sound touches all, equally, partners need not embrace while dancing; sound becomes the real partner. (232–233)

In "Sound Ideas," Aden Evens complicates the tension between sound as meaning and noise as disorder:

> Noise [is] not a matter that gets formed but the matter of matter, not a vibration but a null space in which the vibration opens space. One can therefore hear only the effect of noise: one hears that there are sounds one does not hear. But noise's effect is not primarily negative. One hears also a positive effect of noise: to give force to music, to supply the implicated reserve of sense. Or, perhaps one only feels this effect, as the movement of music, as the contraction which makes music more than a sequence of unconnected sounds, and which draws breath into words, phrases, meanings. (178-179)

In Evens's theorization, sound and noise work together in a generative way. If, as Evens argues, noise "gives force to music," then the critical function of noise is not only as interference that disrupts but also productive engagements "orderly sound" that generates what Deleuze and Guattari might call new assemblages of music.

Punk emerged out of this context, a style of music that, especially in the turn to

hardcore in the early eighties, distilled the listening experience to aural (and physical) assaults on the body. Rather than (simply) an expression of punk performers' paucity of musical abilities—which, as José Muñoz argues, "signal[s] a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming" (*Cruising Utopia* 106)—noise opens a space for a critical reassessment of punk music that expands what Grossberg calls the "materiality of music." As Articles of Faith frontman Vic Bondi explains, the stakes of noise as a subversive strategy turn on a transformation of aural noise to noise in Hebdige's metaphorical sense: "What we were really getting at with the music was an implicit political threat. The dissonance, the disruption of the normal conventions of music were designed to, sort of by analogy, suggest the disruption and dissonance in normal conventions in behavior and politics" (qtd. in Blush 44).[9] If the sonic spaces of community are always contested by the bodily intensities created by the sounds themselves, noise can then be understood as what Deleuze calls a "deterritorialized sound" that "no longer belongs to a language of sense, even though it derives from it, nor is it an organized music or song, even though it might appear to be" (*Kafka* 21).

Masculine jostling

The early UK punk subculture Hebdige and Frith so carefully explored, as well as the art rock punk scene in New York, almost immediately encountered reactionary movements from those who were inspired by punk music but felt excluded from or disinterested in the scene in some way. By 1980, US punk bands such as Black Flag (LA), Bad Brains (DC), and Dead Kennedys (SF) were writing faster, shorter songs with louder vocals more often

[9] Of course, the affective community that coalesces around musical performance can also become a space for (re)producing terrible, violent ideologies. The privileged position of aggressive music within the white power movement is one obvious example.

shouted than sung, reinvigorating a US punk scene that to many of its young fans had begun to seem unattainable (in the musicianship and adventurousness of the New York scene especially) or irrelevant (as New Wave—the commercialization of punk's first wave—became more popular). The genre, hardcore,[10] was, as Steven Blush argues, "the suburban American response to the late-'70s Punk Rock revolution"[11] (14). In the early years of hardcore, various scenes codified around bands and styles: San Francisco was older and more political, LA was marked by violence outside of shows and a street-gang element particularly consolidated around the band Suicidal Tendencies, DC was younger and made up of upper-middle-class kids,[12] Boston skewed more blue-collar, and New York, in the early days of hardcore, "was regularly (and, often, fairly) criticized for its thuggery, its bigotry, its idiocy" (Sanneh).

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[10] The origin of the term is debatable. The oral history *American Hardcore* puts DOA's release *Hardcore 81* as "the first official use of the term," while DOA's Joey Shithead recalls seeing "hard core" used to describe Black Flag in an issue of the San Francisco-based magazine *Damaged* (18). Ian MacKaye suggests a DC origin of hardcore, rooted in a generational divide between first-generation punks and the younger punks just getting into the scene:

> When we first got into the punk scene, we were just stupid kids from the viewpoint of the 19-to-25-year-old punk. . . . We were just stupid little "teeny-punkers" to them, especially because of the fact that we weren't all druggies. They started calling us all this shit and I said, "Man, you think you're punk—well, we're *Hardcore* punks!" That's when the whole hardcore thing started. Before long, we started getting our own identity and were separating ourselves from the older bands. Our whole thing was to bust out in our own way. (qtd. in Anderson and Jenkins 75–76)

108's Vic Dicara puts it more plainly: "Defining hardcore is like defining falling in love—definitions really miss the point. You don't need a definition to know if you're in love or not—you just *know* it. You just feel real Hardcore when you experience it" (qtd. in Peterson 6). Hardcore music is rarely associated with hardcore porn, a term which, as Linda Williams notes, entered discourse in the 1957 Supreme Court case *United States v. Roth* (88), but the decision itself, in which Justice William Brennan defined hardcore pornography as "utterly without redeeming social importance" (qtd. in Williams 88), seems to have resonated, at least in terms of the way punk bands have staged their subculture in opposition to a mainstream culture that has often defined punk in a similar way, exemplified by the late-eighties New York hardcore band No Redeeming Social Value.

[11] This transition to hardcore is covered in a number of recent oral histories of local scenes, including Mark Anderson and Mark Jenkins's *Dance Of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital*, Steven Blush's *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*, Tony Rettman's *NYHC: New York Hardcore 1980–1990*, Jack Boulware and Silke Tudor's *Gimme Something Better: The Profound, Progressive, and Occasionally Pointless History of Bay Area Punk from Dead Kennedys to Green Day*, and Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen's *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of LA Punk*. Penelope Spheeris's documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization*, filmed between 1979 and 1980 captures this moment in LA, although as X's John Doe notes, Spheeris chose to selectively feature "the really hardcore bands, the element out of Huntington Beach . . . [that] everybody in the original [LA] scene hated . . . because it was all about uniformity and pointless violence" (qtd. in Spitz and Mullen 263).

[12] DC punks were called "Georgetown punks" after the tony district where they hung out, a derogatory name calling attention to their socioeconomic privilege (Anderson and Jenkins 55). (Ian MacKaye and Henry Rollins famously worked at the Georgetown Häagen-Dazs ice cream shop.)

From the start, hardcore was synonymous with violence, embodied in a new form of audience contact: slam dancing, which replaced the innocuous pogo as the main form of audience participation at punk shows. Black Flag roadie and early SST Records employee Steve "Mugger" Corbin details how slam dancing changed the audience dynamic at shows: "Pogoing . . . was kids just jumping up and down, and if you fell, somebody picked you up. Slamming, which started around the hardcore scene, was kids smashing into each other full-on football style with nobody picking you up anymore" (qtd. in Spitz and Mullen 199).[13] In *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital*, Ian MacKaye explains how slam dancing made its way to DC. At a Dead Kennedys/Circle Jerks/Flipper show in San Francisco, on his first tour of California with pre–Minor Threat band the Teen Idles, MacKaye and the rest of the DC punks in attendance were introduced to slam dancing by a group of Huntington Beach punks up from LA to support the Circle Jerks—a show Dead Kennedys singer Jello Biafra has called "'one of the most violent shows' he ever saw" (qtd. in Anderson and Jenkins 66). Henry Rollins, DC punk and eventual singer for Black Flag, simply calls it "the gig where it all went down" (66). As Mark Anderson and Mark Jenkins explain, "When the Teen Idles returned to DC, they brought all of it [hardcore style and dancing] back with them" (66). Later, the DC punks brought slam dancing into the burgeoning NY hardcore scene at a Black Flag show in a similar way, and in the process set into motion a seemingly endless rivalry in the eighties between DC and New York (and later Boston) over which scene was the toughest.[14]

Slam dancing drew a line in the sand. SST Records's Ray Farrell emphasizes the

[13] Although, as Dick Hebdige notes, "Admittedly [even in the first wave of punk] there was always a good deal of masculine jostling in front of the stage" (108).

[14] A feat Boston "won," mostly by continuing a commitment to masculine posing and violence well beyond shifts in punk trends. See the film *Boston Beatdown*—a collection of videotaped "fights" from punk shows (mostly incidents in which someone is singled out and beaten for a minor slight) interspersed with interviews from members of Boston straight edge crews like FSU (Friends Stand United, or more commonly, Fuck Shit Up).

exclusionary aspect of hardcore style: "Hardcore made it more like a sporting event than music—with like the worst Jocks you've ever seen. It excluded women. It became exclusionary only because it was violent—people couldn't handle the physicality" (qtd. in Blush 25). As Frith notes, exclusionary practices are central to subcultural communities (*Sound Effects* 262), although he is talking specifically about punk music's "shock effect" based on challenging the status quo through style and the music itself, which excluded so-called mainstream audiences. Hardcore internally partitioned the subculture, pushing out women, who were equal participants in punk's early days. As former DC punk Anne Bonafede explains, slam dancing "was too male-oriented. Around [the time of bands like] Minor Threat and SOA I started feeling really alienated from the scene. I used to love to go out to shows and dance but by then you couldn't really because you might get hurt seriously" (qtd. in Anderson and Jenkins 93). Joanne Gottleib and Gayle Wald call this violence part of "a long tradition of . . . rebellion being acted out at the expense and over the bodies of women" by "male punk and hardcore performers" (252).[15] And as Amy Pickering notes, those that stayed in the scene were often derided for "trying to be boys" (93).

Perhaps even more so than the first generation of punk bands, which were fairly diverse musically, hardcore has never really gone out of fashion. (Some of hardcore's original bands, like Agnostic Front and Cro-Mags, are still playing today.) But while there are any number of bands simply replicating the sounds of first-wave hardcore, hardcore also served

[15] Lynn Breedlove, singer for feminist hardcore band Tribe 8, uses humor to disidentify with the strictures of hardcore. In his novel *Godspeed*, Breedlove deflates such masculine poses: "The boys mosh in that outta-control marching cartoon of a badass strut. I always know when a show is punk as fuck because I'm laughing my ass off until it hurts" (*Godspeed* 144). See also DC posi-core band Good Clean Fun's "Song for the Ladies," which refreshingly avoids hardcore's tendency to mansplain by bringing in a chorus of women from the DC punk scene to each sing a line: "Times have changed, but you would never know / Not from looking at the people and their places at a show / So raise your voice, join the struggle for equality / My dream for the scene, one word: UNITY!"

as a point of departure for a number of later styles and scenes formed in reaction to the subculture's perceived failings. In the mid-eighties, in reaction to the violence and general stagnation of the hardcore scene, some DC punks, including MacKaye, transitioned to a new, more emotional, melodic sound (Anderson and Jenkins 180–194). Other hardcore bands, like Boston's SSD, were experimenting with heavy metal. In contrast, in New York City, a group of young punks who entered hardcore at the tail end of its first wave reimagined hardcore at its most basic. The resulting scene, called youth crew, doubled down on hardcore's jock mentality, turning what was already a violent, male-oriented scene into a conservative movement best described by a motto Youth of Today filched from the Boy Scouts: "physically strong, morally straight" ("Youth of Today"). In the nineties, hardcore and punk in general further fragmented into a number of subgenres that each espoused its own ideology. Among them, the riot grrrl movement brought feminist concerns to the forefront and made space for the women driven from the hardcore scene; queercore challenged homophobia within the scene; and the straight edge hardline scene voiced a militant, violent ecology-based ideology that was intolerant of sex in general and criticized for homophobia.

Out of step (with the world)

If punk names an affective bodily orientation, historically, these bodies were often fucked up, a fact that Steven Blush makes clear in *American Hardcore*:

> At the dawn of hardcore, drugs came cheap and plentiful. Not groovy drugs like pot and acid—the Punk scene sneered at anything linked to the Hippie legacy—but crap like Quaaludes (or "714s"), PCP ("angel dust") and speed
> ("Black Beauties"). . . . Most HC kids took drugs. California and Philly offered easy-

> to-find crystal meth.[16] Cocaine was everywhere—groups like TSOL and Gang Green indulged legendarily. New York kids got off on angel dust. The effect of all this shit on the music lies at the core of HC lore. Neurological damage only added to the dementia and intensity. (64–65)

In the early eighties, in opposition to what he saw as the worst parts of the punk scene (and youth culture in general), Minor Threat's Ian MacKaye coined the term straight edge to refer to a way of life that eschewed drinking and drug use. MacKaye elaborated his stance in the lyrics to the songs "Straight Edge" and "Out of Step":

> I'm a person just like you / but I've got better things to do / then sit around and fuck my head / hang out with the living dead / snort white shit up my nose / pass out at the shows / I don't even think about speed / that's something I just don't need / I've got the straight edge.—"Straight Edge"

> (I) Don't smoke / Don't drink / Don't fuck / At least I can fucking think.—"Out of Step (with the World)"

In interviews and discussions, MacKaye clearly defined straight edge as a personal decision rather than a movement.[17] However, MacKaye's straight edge ideals spread throughout the early-eighties hardcore scene—becoming particularly important (although in different ways) to Reno's 7 Seconds and Boston's SSD (Society System Decontrol)—although MacKaye suggests that this was "more of a punk rock movement or a hardcore punk movement or a

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[16] A fact affirmed by controversial singer of San Francisco's Fang Sam "Sammytown" McBride—a heroin user who would eventually be sentenced to six years in prison for strangling his girlfriend, Dixie Lee Carney, to death. He explains, "Speed was the drug of choice [in the Bay Area] back then [in the eighties] by the punk rockers, and a large percent of the population shot up. Especially in the East Bay. There was a lot of young kids all running around shooting speed and eating acid" (*Gimme Something Better* 158).

[17] MacKaye notes, "The first time I ever got the idea of a straight edge movement was when I met people who identified as the 'bent edge movement.' As far as I'm concerned, there was a countermovement before there was a movement" ("Interview with Ian MacKaye" 37).

kids' movement than a straight edge movement" ("Interview with Ian MacKaye" 37).[18]

Minor Threat's breakup in 1983 marked the end of the first wave of American hardcore (at least according to Paul Rachman and Steven Blush in their documentary *American Hardcore*), but straight edge went on to become a defining feature of a new wave of hardcore bands coming out of New York and suburban Connecticut in the mid-eighties—Youth of Today, Gorilla Biscuits, Bold, Judge, and Chain of Strength. The scene called itself youth crew, after a song by eminent band Youth of Today, and became known for, among other things, turning straight edge into a subculture of its own within the wider hardcore community and maintaining it through (sometimes violent) policing of the internal rules of straight edge. Youth of Today singer Ray Cappo explains, "We were into [the idea of] starting a [straight edge] movement because if I find a good idea then I don't want to keep it in the basement. Why not tell the world about it? . . . If you create something and get up on stage and say something [as MacKaye did] and people can appreciate it, whether or not you want to start a movement or not you're a spokesperson and people will follow you" (qtd. in Peterson 59). Cappo situates the youth crew scene as direct inheritors to Minor Threat's legacy but calls their version of straight edge "a punk attitude with conservative principles" in which the overarching ethos is "self-control" based on the idea that "rules are good."[19] Youth crew songs called for positive ideals such as unity and brotherhood but depended on an increasingly militant adherence to straight edge. Even its anti-drug message reflected the Reagan administration's "Just Say No" public service campaign, itself bound up in the War on Drugs.

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[18] Hear MacKaye using what Good Clean Fun's singer Issa Diao calls his "hardcore talking voice" to clarify the straight edge message of "Out of Step": "Listen, this is no set of rules / I'm not tellin' you what to do / All I'm saying is I'm bringing up / Three things that, are like, so important to the whole world / [that] I don't find much importance in [smoking, drinking, and fucking]"

[19] Like the first wave of hardcore, the youth crew movement also eventually dissipated (although the style continues today, with successive generations of youth crew bands mimicking the guidelines established by Youth of Today).

Youth crew music itself is reflective of larger goals of regulation and control, lending the songs a "formulaic" quality both sonically and lyrically (MacKaye qtd. in Lahickey 109). Cappo notes that this generic quality was in direct response to his feeling that "hardcore was getting too complicated": he explains, "We wanted to bring [hardcore] back to real simplicity, real hard music. . . . We wanted to make [Youth of Today] such a generic band" (qtd. in Lahickey 26). The formulaic music was matched by increasingly violent slam dancing at shows, leading Cappo to celebrate hardcore as "a full-contact sport" (33).[20] This was codified by the music itself, which took Minor Threat's sped-up riffs and added the breakdown—the part specifically designed for slam dancing, which MacKaye derisively calls "the mosh part in the middle"[21] (qtd. in Lahickey 108). Youth crew was the obvious transition from punks who acted like "jocks" (the way many of those in the scene refer to punks more interested in slam dancing than the music—see above) to punks who literally took on aspects of sports culture—youth crew sartorial style embodied "a clean-cut collegiate Beaver Cleaver-meets-Tony Hawk look," where Nikes, collegiate sweatshirts, and sports jerseys (and for a brief period, for some strange reason, worker gloves and enormous chains worn as belts) replaced the basic utilitarian outfit of jeans and a T-shirt (Lahickey ix–x),[22] thus emphasizing hardcore's transition from something more closely aligned with Hebdige's concept of an oppositional subculture to a suburban youth culture.

[20] The violence in the youth crew scene, both in and out of the pit, has been discussed elsewhere in detail. See O'Hara: *The Philosophy of Punk*, Lahickey: *All Ages*, Peterson: *Burning Fight*, Haenfler: *Straight Edge*, and Wood: *Straightedge Youth*.

[21] Walter Schreifels, a member of Youth of Today, Gorilla Biscuits, and Project X, among others, suggests that the breakdown was in part responsible for the perceived aggressiveness of New York hardcore: "There was a certain amount of self-assuredness to New York that could be confused with machismo, but it's just that New York hardcore had way better mosh parts" (qtd. in *NYHC* 207).

[22] MacKaye suggests that "the straight edge thing really appeals to a lot of jocks too" (qtd. in Lahickey 108).

I don't mean to suggest that straight edge is a valueless subculture.[23] As many in the straight edge scene have noted, straight edge provides a positive space for those who do not wish to participate in potentially risky behavior like drinking, drug use, or casual sex, and this is especially true of those who have been personally impacted by these behaviors. And to be clear, as Ross Haenfler argues,

> Straight edge is much more than dancing, and occasionally fighting, at hardcore shows or skirmishing with fraternity brothers. Claiming that sXe promotes attacks on innocent smokers is akin to saying that college athletics or the Air Force academy actively promotes rape based on a few highly publicized incidents. . . . To characterize sXe as a violent group or a gang simply does not reflect reality. (100)

Certainly, the majority of punks in the straight edge scene are unlikely to participate in the kind of violence described in the cultural narratives circulating within and around the straight edge subculture, and as a personal practice, straight edge emphasizes "healthy" decisions. However, Haenfler's wildly provocative examples of rape within college athletics and military academies run counter to his larger argument. Both athletic departments and military academies have been criticized for their culture of toxic masculinity that shores up rape culture. The proliferation of allegations of sexual assault and harassment across a number of industries underscore that the issue at hand is not only individual bad actors, as Haenfler would have it, but a masculine culture that accepts or even promotes violence, in part through culture representations celebrating these views.

The positive aspects of straight edge within the youth crew subculture of the late eighties existed in tension with the jock mentality that, at its most militant, depended upon

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[23] Ross Haenfler's *Straight Edge: Clean-Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change* and Robert T. Wood's *Straight Edge Youth: Complexity and Contradictions of a Subculture* both offer nuanced explorations of straight edge, paying particular attention to the drives and desires of individual participants.

an idealized masculinity tied to ideas about bodily control as well as the control of the scene itself through dominance and physical violence. Youth crew presents an overly explicit discourse of control[24] that, while not reflective of all participants in the subculture is at the very least well represented in (internal and external) cultural narratives describing it. The apotheosis of this attitude—or perhaps, if the songwriters are to be believed, its ultimate satirization[25]—is reflected in the song "Straight Edge Revenge" by Project X, a side project of Youth of Today's John Porcelly and John L. Hancock III. As the band page on Bridge Nine Records, which recently reissued Project X's *Straight Edge Revenge* EP, points out, "Straight Edge Revenge" was actually written for Youth of Today, but Ray Cappo refused to perform the song because of its militant lyrics. The lyrics—"I'm as straight as the line that you sniff up your nose, / And I'm as hard as the booze that you swill down your throat, / And I'm as bad as the shit you breathe into your lungs, / And I'll fuck you up as fast as the pill on your tongue / GO! / Straight Edge Revenge!"—exemplify the break between MacKaye's call for personal responsibility and the positive experience of one's body and community[26] and the scene policing that, while not an invention of youth crew,[27] became one

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[24] Of course, all subcultures depend on regulatory control in some form. Dick Hebdige argues that "the internal structure of any particular subculture is characterized by an extreme orderliness" (113) but maintains hope for the "subversive value" of subcultures, "even if," he argues, in final analysis, they are . . . just the darker side of sets of regulations" (3). Punk in general has often been critiqued as conformity dressed as individualism. Frith unwittingly levels the charge made against young punks' cult of individuality since the dawn of time: "If group identity is part of teenage culture for conventional reasons . . . then even people with an ideology of individual taste become a group of individualists and need the symbols and friends and institutions to assert themselves as a group" (208). And even at its most extreme, punk style, like subcultural style in general, has always depended on a "uniform"—whether it be bondage or athletic gear—and relatively stable conceptions of what constitutes the subculture (musically, unquestionably, but also politically).

[25] Porcelly claims that he meant these lyrics to be deliberately provocative rather than an endorsement of militancy and mentions that "more than once, [he has] regretted [putting out the Project X record] because of all the violence and intolerance caused by that one record" (qtd. in Lahickey 132–133).

[26] Reno's 7 Seconds founded a subgenre of positive straight edge that became known as posi-core.

[27] In *Dance of Days*, Ian MacKaye candidly discusses his own history of violence (although he seems to draw an imaginary distinction between his actions and those of later straight edge scenes): "I was in a lot of fights. . . . I'd just try to teach the guy a lesson, no permanent damage, just a bruise or two. . . . I'm fascinated by gangs. . . . I don't like going out and beating people's asses but I like the idea that if I have trouble, I have a lot of friends that are going to help me out" (81–82). Although, as he notes in a separate interview, "We [DC punks] didn't go out looking to kick someone's ass all the time. Even though there was all this talk about gangs

of its primary cultural markers. Significantly, "Straight Edge Revenge" turns MacKaye's personal ethos against three things that seemed so important to everyone else into a list that pits individual control in violent opposition to (generally) culturally accepted recreational pleasure-seeking strategies—directed towards a single "you": "*I'm* as straight as the line that *you* sniff up your nose"—endorsing violence against those who refuse to adhere to straight edge.[28] While the youth crew stance may simply reflect what Frith describes as a subculture "creat[ing] its community by keeping other people out" (262), within the context of a hardcore show, where the audience often screams along, the individual voice of Project X's "Straight Edge Revenge" is enveloped by the collective of the crew (also frequently called the wolfpack in youth crew songs) that is both an expression of the positive potential of community and a threat to those that oppose it—a move repeated in many songs of the youth crew era.[29] The song became "an instant straight edge classic" ("Project X").

Straight Edge Revenge

"Straight Edge Revenge" marks a key narrative moment in Eleanor Henderson's novel *Ten Thousand Saints*, a coming-of-age tale set within the youth crew scene (although it never explicitly uses the term and plays a little fast and loose with historical context).[30] Early in the novel, Vermont high-schoolers Teddy and Jude spend their time listening to the Misfits and getting high. Jude's parents are divorced, and his father, Les, lives in New York

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and straight edge kids in Washington D.C. knocking beers out of people's hands it was all bullshit" (qtd. in Lahickey 101).

[28] Although as Robert Wood points out, "On the basis of lyrical evidence alone, . . . it is naïve to assume that straightedge individuals actually engage in the drug-war violence described in their subculture's songs" (37).

[29] See Judge's lyrics to "New York Crew" ("See my brother, he's in a fight. / They got him down, it's 3 on 1. / 10 of us show, GUESS WHO WON?"); Youth of Today's "Youth Crew" ("Walk with me and my crew. / There is so much shit we can do. / And we won't stop until we're through"); DYS's "Wolfpack" ("A mini-army / Of angry youth / Wolfpack! Don't give us any shit / Wolfpack! Or you're gonna get hit."); and Warzone's "We're the Crew" ("You've turned your back on the crew / Someone's going down / It ain't me—it's you.") for relevant examples of this theme.

[30] Henderson's book was adapted into a film that further simplifies the music into generic "punk."

City. Although they don't talk much, Les has convinced his girlfriend's daughter, Eliza, to stop by Jude and Teddy's hometown of Lintonburg (a stand-in for Burlington) after a ski trip to meet Jude. The three end up going to a house party, where Jude is beaten up by a local jock and Teddy and Eliza have sex in a bathroom. Following the party, Eliza heads back to New York, while Teddy and Jude huff Freon and pass out. Teddy never wakes up, and his death sets the narrative in motion. A despondent Jude steals a large quantity of marijuana from his dealer and is forced to flee to New York, where he falls in with Teddy's brother, Johnny, who is the singer in a popular straight edge band. Meanwhile, Eliza realizes she is pregnant. Driven by grief over Teddy's death, the three decide to keep Teddy and Eliza's baby and raise it together. At the same time, Jude becomes increasingly involved in the straight edge scene, eventually fronting a popular new band.

If this premise sounds a little like an afterschool special, that's because it turns on many of the same melodramatic beats.[31] Drugs, ever-present in the novel, represent the destruction of the nuclear family and often lead to disability or death. Henderson offers an array of stereotypical drug users that include, besides Jude and Teddy, Teddy's mom, Queen Bea, an alcoholic with a "stash of booze," who early on disappears, leaving Teddy to fend for himself (5); Jude's adoptive parents, Harriet, a "reformed" hippie who still smokes pot and "condone[s] Jude's experimentation" (6), and Les, a drug dealer; and Eliza, who has "been kicked out of two boarding schools in a year and a half—both times for drugs" (28). Henderson builds a case against conformity for the sake of conformity, even as she continually emphasizes straight edge as a reactionary movement: Johnny explains to Jude that "Ian MacKaye had written ["Straight Edge"] for a friend who died of an overdose"

[31] In *Chronic Youth: Disability, Sexuality, and U.S. Media Cultures of Rehabilitation*, Julie Passanante Elman argues that afterschool specials function as "a form of rehabilitative citizenship training" that "culturally transmitted medical knowledge and narratives of disability for public consumption, entertainment, and education" (64). Henderson's novel similarly deploys disability as a means to engage normative modes of life.

(130). Johnny has a similarly trajectory. He "ended up at a straight edge show at CBGB, alone and falling-down drunk, and met a hardcore drummer named Rooster DeLuca. . . . In no time . . . Rooster had him hooked on the drug that was no drugs" (110).

For Henderson at least—and this is also reflected in the sociological studies of straight edge—straight edge as a way of life becomes a strategy of recuperation and recovery of the strong, able body that seeks to regain or maintain control over bodies (and family structures).[32] Over the course of Henderson's novel, Jude transforms from drug user to a leader in the straight edge scene. Henderson makes clear that this transformation is the result of Jude's strict self-disciplining and mastery of his body:

> [Jude] enjoyed the challenge of self-restraint. He enjoyed the exercise of it. . . . He would count the number of days he could go without jerking off, and each time he broke down . . . his consolation would be a new personal record to break (253) . . . . He gave up honey. He gave up Coke. Mouthwash. Processed sugar. His multivitamin, encased in gelatin. He went so many days without jerking off that he lost count. . . .He [felt] immortal, he felt fabulous, indestructible, he was a straight edge god. . . . So maybe he was addicted to the game itself. What was wrong with that? It was like being addicted to wheatgrass, or jogging. (256)

Jude soon turns his desire for control outward, chastising family and friends for breaches of his newfound identity. When he scolds his sister for smoking, she responds, "Because you're straight edge now, you get to harass me?" Jude replies, "That's what straight edge is all about" (198).

Jude's reply underscores the ways that a personal ethos of self-restraint is marshaled against those who refuse to follow the same rules—a posture that is reinforced through

[32] Jude explains to his father, "Some of [the straight edge kids] are recovering addicts. . . . Some just have parents who are addicts" (133).

straight edge cultural products like the song "Straight Edge Revenge." As Henderson herself notes, "Straight Edge Revenge" is the only real-life straight edge song quoted in her book, "so quintessentially righteous is this song's attitude" ("Interview with Largehearted Boy"). In the novel, the song "Straight Edge Revenge" speaks quite literally to Jude's desire for revenge against his high-school bullies. Jude "listen[s] to Project X's "Straight Edge Revenge" again and again," noting that it gives him "all the authorization he needed [to fight them]. They were asking for it" (221).[33] The lyrics of "Straight Edge Revenge" give Jude license to attack these bullies (while also abnegating him of any responsibility in the matter), but more importantly, they also provide him a reason to involve his friends in the fight, evening the odds: "Jude had learned in New York that bands weren't just bands. They were troops. They were tribes. And now he was no longer an army of one" (221). This strand of the novel is resolved in a massive brawl between the hardcore kids and the jocks (and a few errant fans of Phrog—the novel's stand-in for Phish) in a scene straight out of *The Outsiders*. (As the novel describes it, "*Rumble* was the word that came to mind" (232)). Through violence, straight edge crews demonstrate a physically dominant masculinity that, according to youth crew cultural texts, proves the ideology's triumph. Emboldened by their success in

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[33] And as the song makes clear, violence and cultural production exist in a loop, with songs about violence leading to actual violence, which in turn, inspires new songs. In a zine interview, Jude explains,

> Let's face it the scene will never be without violence. If some guy isn't respectful of us and he's blowing smoke in our faces and that's only happened two or three times, yeah, there will be some shit going down. Look at our song "Blowing Smoke." I mean frankly you should know better than to start shit with us. (264)

Aside from an allusion to the SSD anti-smoking song "Get It Away" (Think I'm joking about your smoking / Think it's fair to steal my air / You you you you you take my breath away), Jude's comments also point to a common trope of discussions about violence within the straight edge scene, where participants will explain that while violence was rare, when it did occur, the victims had it coming. An interview with hardline band Earth Crisis offers an anecdote very similar to Jude's. Drummer Dennis Merrick notes,

> There was a show in New Jersey and some kids were throwing yogurt at us while we were playing. At one point a kid with a fur coat ran across the stage to make fun of us for being into animal rights. We didn't do anything but our fans beat the kid down. He was being disrespectful and he probably deserved it. [laughs] There were a lot of misconceptions about us being a violent band, but the only time we ever had any physical altercations is when people were being outright disrespectful. (qtd. in Peterson 247)

the fight, Jude's crew begins patrolling Lintonburg, "seeking out the small-town drunks and the stoners and doling out a temperate pounding, not threatening their lives but giving them something to remember in the morning" (248), completing the move from cultural narratives and ideology celebrating violence to putting this ideology into practice.

Physically strong, morally straight?

Jude's recuperation of masculinity is also a rehabilitative intervention. In perhaps the novel's most melodramatic twist, besides being a self-described "burnout," Jude is implicitly (although never officially) diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).[34] The novel articulates the connection between masculinity and the able body—itself affirmed by Youth of Today's motto "physically strong, morally straight" ("Youth of Today")—through Jude's negotiation of an identification with fetal alcohol syndrome, which, in the text, becomes representative of the failures of the previous generation (in the sixties and seventies) against which straight edge rallies. Jude's adoptive mother Harriet notes how Jude's diagnosis colors and stigmatizes her image of Jude's birth mother:

> Now she was a drunk. A sixteen-year-old drunk, a ghetto dweller, a street urchin, with questionable hygiene and poorly fitting clothes and the same alcohol-melted facial features, as though they were a family trait. Or she was a prostitute. Or she was a junkie. It pained Harriet, the distaste she now felt for the mother of her own child. (215)

For his part, Jude's father is a bit more laissez-faire: "Look, who cares? It's just a fancy name for your birth mom indulged a little too much. So did half my generation, okay? We didn't

[34] While the effects of FAS are largely neurological and behavioral, Henderson emphasizes that FAS also manifests itself physically on the body in "telling facial features"—"Short, upturned nose; flat space between nose and mouth; thin upper lip; small chin; short eye openings"—which she ascribes to Jude (77).

know any better. Your mom smoked like a chimney when she was knocked up with your sister. Not to mention a little wacky tobacky now and then" (166–167).

While disability in this context shores up the very impulses that drive straight edge subcultures (particularly through the image of the "alcohol-melted facial features" of the "damaged" child), the novel seems to offer disability as a potentially productive means of identification. When he first reads a pamphlet on FAS, Jude immediately identifies with the pictures he sees, "fe[eling] as though he were looking at a family photo album, brothers and sisters he didn't know he had" (98). However, he quickly refuses a disability identity, later calling FAS a "retard disease" (175) and blaming it for his dyslexia. Once Jude begins his practice of self-control, he begins to think, "Maybe he didn't have dyslexia; maybe he didn't even have FAS. Maybe he'd just been a burnout, and now his synapses were awakening after a long hibernation" (256). While Henderson likely doesn't mean to suggest that through straight edge Jude was able to "overcome" the embodied experience of FAS, it falls out of the narrative as Jude recuperates his masculinity through a sex act, enacting the "interwoven" forces of compulsory heterosexuality and able bodiedness that Robert McRuer traces in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2).

As Jude's foreclosure of a potential disability identity suggests, straight edge's dependence on an idealized masculinity frustrates bodies that, for whatever reason, don't or can't fit within the narrow strictures of straight edge ideology. While this is true of embodied difference like Jude's, it is also true of queer identities.[35] From the moment Ian MacKaye screamed "Don't fuck!" in "Out of Step," straight edge has had a complicated relationship with sexuality. As was the case with abstaining from drugs and alcohol, celibacy became

[35] Not to mention issues of race: See James Spooner's documentary *Afro-Punk* and *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, edited by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay, for a detailed discussion of race within the predominantly white subculture of punk.

associated with straight edge—further established as a religious mandate in the turn to Krishnacore.[36] Others outside the scene took straight edge's perceived ban on sex—along with its emphasis on homosocial bonding and the physicality of violence—as evidence that straight edge was a cover for homosexual desire.[37] In their seminal article "Don't Be Gay, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk up the Ass," first published in *Maximum Rocknroll*, G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce, polemically argue,

> Going to most punk shows today is a lot like going to the average fag bar. . . . All you see is big macho 'dudes' in leather jackets and jeans parading around the dance floor/pit, manhandling each other's sweaty bodies in proud display. . . . In this highly masculinized world, the focus is doubly male, the boys on stage controlling the 'meaning' of the event (the style of music, political message, etc), and the boys in the pit determining the extent of the exchange between audience and performer."

Lynn Breedlove describes such masculine hardcore posturing in *Godspeed* as "homoerotic hockey bonding, boys in love who can't kiss" (233). A number of characters in Henderson's novel voice this opinion, including a character named Hippie, who's "heard things about . . . straight edge guys" (230). These comments poke fun at the intense homosocial (and homoerotic) practices at the heart of the youth crew scene and call attention to the scene's deep-seated homophobia. As Nick Riotfag notes in his article on queer identity and the straight edge subculture, "It's not that . . . the two identities are necessarily incompatible,

[36] A number of key players in the youth crew scene, including Youth of Today's Cappo and Porcelly, drew inspiration from Hare Krishna to situate the conservative values of straight edge within a religious-historical narrative, creating in the process a more melodic subset of straight edge hardcore known as Krishnacore. Although New York hardcore had long had a Hare Krishna element—Cro-Mags singer John Joseph was the earliest convert and proselytizer—the further diffusion of the straight edge subculture was also indicative of nineties hardcore's further fragmentation into a number of subgenres and concerns. (The nineties would also see straight edge take a more militant political turn as Hardline.) See *NYHC* (213–216) and Colin Helb's "'The Time Is Right to Set Our Sight on Salvation': The Strange Tale of How the Hare Krishnas Came to Play Punk."

[37] The straight edge queercore band Limp Wrist's song "Cruisin' at the Show" explicitly makes this point: "You look good in your youth crew wear / Shaved head tough face and your Revelation gear / I saw you from across the pit / your eyes looked into mine and we nodded / cuz we both wanted it.

but they seem to have an uncomfortable relationship. On the one hand, I haven't felt much space to be my queer self in most punk/hardcore scenes, and the hyper-masculine reputation of sXe definitely turns me off. On the other hand, I've faced a lot of exclusion within queer scenes for my sobriety" (342).

Henderson's novel probes straight edge's complicated relationship with queerness. The novel largely situates the youth crew scene as a closet, in which homoerotic moments are possible but sexual acts, particularly queer but also heterosexual, are not. In Henderson's depiction, straight edge is, as Rooster, the guitarist in Johnny's band and Johnny's secret lover, points out to Jude, "a fuckin' front," because straight edge kids are "all fags anyways" (366). While Rooster's comments are in part, a reaction to Jude's discovery of Rooster and Johnny's relationship, they appear to be prophetic, when one night after a show, Jude wanders into a circle jerk:

> When Jude found his way to the bathroom, the door was unlocked and the light was off, and when he turned it on, four guys were crammed elbow to elbow in a ring-around-the-rosy with their pants around their knees, jerking one another off. Their eyes had been closed, and what haunted Jude later was the dreamy look on their faces, just before he blinded them with the light. They scrambled to get their pants up—"What the fuck, man?"—except one of them, who put his hands on his hips and narrowed his eyes at Jude. "You in or out, Green?" He was out. (296–297)

This moment turns out to be decisive for Jude. Jude is "haunted" by the unapologetic queerness on display. (He is also haunted by visions of Johnny and Rooster having sex on "every surface" of Rooster's apartment (365).) The novel problematically uses this moment of queer intimacy to both implicitly critique the youth crew scene for its hypocrisy and homophobia and shore up heteronormativity by marking this act as deviant. (Importantly,

this is the only moment of queer sex in the novel besides Rooster and Johnny's monogamous homonormative relationship.) Immediately following the encounter, Jude has a romantic, slightly sexual encounter with Eliza, whom he has been pining over throughout the novel. When they kiss, Jude becomes erect, his embodied arousal proof of the idealized masculinity that he has been struggling to attain: "The hard-on in his lap seemed appropriate. He was unembarrassed of it, grateful for it. His friend was gay, and Jude—here was the evidence—was not. Of this he was ecstatically sure" (333). While Jude's thoughts are couched in acceptance of Johnny, they also frame queerness as outside the recuperated masculinity he has just achieved. This moment marks the end of the explicitly straight edge narrative of the novel. Jude's "ecstatic" reaction to proving his heterosexuality notwithstanding, by breaking his edge in this way (according to the most rigorous straight edge standards Jude himself has been shown to follow), Jude, Henderson implies, moves away from hardline straight edge.

Likewise, Johnny's queer identity makes visible the cracks in the unified body celebrated by straight edge. Like Jude, Johnny uses control as a means to deal with his failure to fully actualize the ideals of the "physically strong, morally straight" straight edge body. In Johnny's case, this means refusing his sexual desires and marrying Eliza as a means of recovering the domestic family that he believes he is denied by a society that refuses the possibility of a life with Rooster. The AIDS crisis further emphasizes the distance between the straight whole body and its other, while also historicizing the disconnect between straight edge and queer identity. Disability haunts the queer bodies to which straight edge sets itself in opposition and emphasizes the incompatibility of queer disabled identities and straight edge. It also creates a commonality among a number of marginal subjectivities "who [are all] wasting away" from the disease, including "bums and junkies and squatters" as well as gay

men like Johnny and Rooster (198). Johnny imagines "the possibility that one day it might catch him, too" (198). However, it's Rooster who is eventually diagnosed with AIDS, which he suggests he contracted while cruising in lower Manhattan before he went straight edge. AIDS, like FAS, reflects the dangers of practices tied to bodily desire and pleasure-seeking experiences in the early eighties. Thus, even though neither disability nor queerness are strictly pathologized in the text, and even as Henderson attempts to highlight the flaws in straight edge as an ideology, the novel's conservative focus on normativity (including an insistence on the family) reproduces the very beliefs that undergird straight edge as a movement.

The failure of straight edge (at least in the youth crew/Krishnacore version) is a failure of control to account for bodies that are unable to fit into the boundaries of its regulations. The straight edge scene Henderson describes can only ever be a youth movement that can be folded back into mainstream society (if imperfectly for queer characters like Johnny and Rooster). Johnny's and Jude's differences do not fit within the straight edge scene, but both are ultimately recuperated through the reproduction of the domestic family. Johnny's narrative arc ultimately comes down to his acceptance of a queer identity, but he still cannot do so within the confines of the straight edge scene. Johnny and Rooster leave for San Francisco—a space that, like New York's Chelsea neighborhood, represents what Rooster crassly calls "Candy Land for fags" (326)—but significantly, the novel frames this space as one where they might embody the norms of marriage and simply be "one husband taking care of the other" (281). Likewise, by the end of the novel, Jude reunites with his mother and sister, with Eliza, now his girlfriend, in tow, and the novel's epilogue offers a glimpse of Jude's future family.

(Queer) sex, drugs, and rock and roll

Queer people have always been part of punk. In *Visual Vitriol: The Street Art and Subcultures of the Punk and Hardcore Generation*, David A. Ensminger traces the various queer actors and acts, from punk's origins to contemporary [acts] that "'queer' hardcore music by poaching the style and content of the genre" (147). But although a number of early punk performers were queer, as Ensminger points out, the scene itself was rife with homophobia, whether through "jokes" and banter about queer sex acts or outright condemnation, such as the infamous incident in which the Bad Brains sent a note reading "Burn in hell bloodclot faggot" to the Big Boys, whose singer, Randy "Biscuit" Turner was openly gay (170). In the late eighties, the queercore movement, established by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce's zine *J.D.s* and continuing with Tom Jennings and Deke Motif Nihilson's *Homocore* and Matt Wobensmith's *Outpunk*, took on homophobia, criticizing mainstream punk while also creating a space for a queer punk community (Ensminger, *Visual Vitriol* 164–165, Wiedlack 34–36). Jones and LaBruce define it as "a movement that refuses to conform to the standards of sexual decency and moral conduct expected of even the most rebellious of youths" and "a spontaneous insurrection provoked by specific incidents of discrimination and, yes, even violence, directed against . . . queers" that in its cultural production is "critical of both the apathy of the gay community and the limitations of punk." While the purpose of the queercore movement was quite serious, many of the strategies participants employed what an early article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* calls "a defiant mixture of humor and anger" (Arnold). Robert DeChaine argues that this sense of "play endows queercore participants with a space in which to resist and subvert the materials of dominant culture. It is a way of appropriating and turning against—of working within the system in order to sabotage and undermine the cultural values which it holds up as normative and "correct" (8).

Jose Muñoz calls this disidentification. And as Curran Nault observes, "Queercore has functioned as a brilliant prism through which queer theories have circulated and refracted" (30). (Tribe 8's "Neanderthal Dyke" wryly exposes both the theoretical underpinnings of queercore and its humor, with its titular Neanderthal dyke, who's "never read" Dworkin or McKinnon and "ride[s] a big bike.")

Unlike many other subgenres of punk that can be identified by a particular look or sound, queercore is defined by its opposition to what participants see as homophobia within the punk scene at large, and thus incorporates and refigures all types of punk music—even straight edge. In "Redefining the Body Electric: Queering Punk and Hardcore," David Ensminger investigates queer edge hardcore bands like Limp Wrist, a punk supergroup of sorts fronted by Los Crudos's Martin Sorrondeguy, and Youth of Togay, a band that crudely and humorously parodies youth crew songs, including "Straight Edge Revenge." (Their version, "Gay Edge Revenge," includes the lyrics "I'm as gay as a dude on a three dollar bill / I'm as yummy as the jizz that you swill down my throat / I'm as hard as a cock that you put in my ass / And I'll fuck your ass as fast….well, fast.") Ensminger argues that these bands "recodify a music scene often derided as a hotbed of macho, lean, spurious music shaped by a self-righteous, plebian, clean-cut, neo-religious philosophy" (62). However, while these bands certainly interrogate hardcore and create a space for queer participation at punk shows, they also risk recreating the masculine violence that undergirds hardcore (although as Sorrondeguy points out in an interview, women and queers have always been part of Limp Wrist's audience and that they've never had issues with violence (Brontez)).

As J. Jack Halberstam has noted, queer punk serves "as a potent critique of hetero- and homonormativity, and dyke punk in particular, by bands like Tribe 8 and the Haggard, inspires a reconsideration of the topic of subcultures in relation to queer cultural production

and in opposition to notions of gay community" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 153). In their recorded music and live performances, Tribe 8 makes this explicitly clear. As Maria Katharina Wiedlack argues, "Tribe 8 offers a perspective on whiteness, sexuality, gender, and class that depicts the norms and hierarchies [including those of the feminist movement] as contrived and far from natural" (237). Tribe 8's cover of Black Flag's song "Rise Above" (also the title of a Tribe 8 documentary) is enlightening. Tribe 8's straightforward cover of one the foundational songs of hardcore places them within the same lineage—that is, their music fits within the limited palette of acceptable form and structure—while the specific performance also critiques and rephrases Black Flag's masculine hardcore (*Rise Above*).[38] The members of Tribe 8 often played shirtless, mirroring male performers (see any picture of Henry Rollins singing for Black Flag) while calling attention to the gendered sexist responses to such a move by many in the punk scene, and Breedlove was known for wearing a strap-on dildo, which he would invite members of the audience to fellate.[39] The image of Breedlove and his dick is both a humorous dig at the very serious performance of masculinity that the increasingly muscular Henry Rollins put on in Black Flag (and continues to put on today) and a commentary on the masculinity of the punk scene in general.

In his novel, *Godspeed*, the story of Jim, a speed-obsessed and -addicted masculine-

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[38] In the early days of hardcore, Black Flag's bassist Kira Roessler was one of the few women playing in a widely known band. As she notes in Stevie Chick's *Spray Paint the Walls: The Story of Black Flag*, at times she was even at odds with the make members of the band, especially with regard to Black Flag's controversial song "Slip It In," which Chick describes as "a dark and somewhat troubling song [that is] an only-slightly-ambiguous bolt of misogyny" (316). As Roessler notes, she wasn't offended by the song so much as confused: "If this is how you [the male members of Black Flag] feel about women, then why would you want a girl in the group?" (317).

[39] In *Godspeed*, Hostile Mucous, the band Jim roadies for, does the same thing:

> The pit starts swarming, and me and Johnnie Mae, we go to it right away, slamdancing and butting heads, shaking up beers and shooting them into the crowd. . . . Dev whips out a ten-inch [dildo] from under her skirt and starts yelling, "Which one of you motherfuckers is gonna suck my dick? . . . [The crowd] start[s] pointing at this cowboy who's been throwing his weight around and grabbing ass. Motherfucker must be drunk, because he gets onstage. . . . He chokes out, "I don't suck dick," the final act of defiance. And she yells, "When you're on THIS stage, you DO, and that's ALL you do, motherfucker." . . . "Next contestant," yells Loosh, and a willing victim jumps on state, assumes the position. Deep throat. We have a WINNER. (152–153)

identified dyke bike messenger trying to win back his love, Lynn Breedlove offers a wildly different view of the limitations and possibilities of the punk scene. Breedlove, who is also the singer for Tribe 8, illustrates the productive potential of queercore as a cultural practice, while, at the same time, outlines a personal ethos of pleasure seeking (particularly through drug use but also cycling, sex, and participating in the punk scene) that stands in direct opposition to straight edge's demand for self-control. So while the queercore scene Jim participates in as fan (and, later in the novel, roadie) is subversive on a subcultural level, as an embodied practice of pleasure seeking, Jim's drug use is a refraction and refiguration of the bodily control of the youth crew scene. It is neither exclusively positive or negative. (Although Jim has a number of negative experiences related to his drug use and eventually kicks his habit by the novel's conclusion, these actions do not demonize drugs or drug users in general.) Instead, Breedlove situates drug use as one (perhaps flawed or incomplete) means of pleasure seeking that, as Kane Race explains about drug use more generally in *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, "can be approached as an attempt, on the part of users, to construct new materialities in the context of specific embodied circumstances and normative regimes. . . . The transformations, pleasures, and forms of enablement, disablement, and escape found in drugs should be approached more simply as experimental and material engagements with the circumstances of life" ("Pleasure Consuming Medicine"). Or, as Jim notes, "The rush is the fucking meaning of life" (18). Jim's drug use is also bound to his identity as a queer punk, which marks him outside both the masculine-oriented hardcore scene and traditional queer culture. As a queer, genderfucking punk, Jim generally refuses any easy gender identity—he explains that he feels like a fourteen-year-old boy inside (36)—choosing only his punk crew Hags SF: "crazy, rocker-pervert hellions outside even dyke society, banished by lesbians to the pit, where

[they] mosh after ingesting copious amounts of stimulants on the bathroom counter in front of regular dykes applying lipstick and otherwise grooming themselves" (58).

And although it may seem that the pleasures of drug use are about losing control, Jim explains that drug use is a form of control:

> That's the way it is with mainlining. It's the best of both worlds, control and being carried away. Yeah, you hold the spike, you put the power in your arm, and then the power seizes you by force, like a headless horseman grabbing you up. It's its own life force in your head, your blood, it's reflex killing thought and not needing thought to live. It's already alive. (20)

The controlled loss of control Breedlove locates within drug use offers one entry for thinking about a critical practice of what I will call decontrol, a term that ironically evokes the aggressive Boston straight edge band Society System Decontrol (SSD). For SSD, "society system" referred to the knot of intersecting forces within US society, which included social pressures to participate in drinking, smoking, and drug use, but also, in "The Kids Will Have Their Say," nodded to colonialism, militarism, and institutionalization. For SSD, decontrol seems to mean a kind of deprogramming—that is, adhering to the tenets of straight edge is an oppositional political practice that in some sense wakes you up to society's evils. Decontrol then refers to a productive engagement with and resistance to dominant structures, however they may be defined. I mean decontrol to contain this kernel of resistance, but in my understanding, decontrol occurs through an affective process of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as deterritorialization.

Race points out that while "it is tempting to think of drug use as an escape from an oppressive social order . . . this perspective covers over the multiplicity of drug practices. And it denies the agency of drug users: the capacity of our bodies to be active producers of

pleasure—and incidentally, care" ("Exceptional Sex").[40] This is borne out by Jim's claims for his body's capacity and desire for speed (both the drug and the sensation) rather than simply a response to social pressures of any kind:

> Some people get high to escape, but I got nothing to escape, no torturous childhood. Just my own self. I ain't running from or to, I just like running, like riding, that downhill whoosh, scariness, no rules, the danger that speed itself might take you out. (20)

Jim's description evacuates drug use of any meaning making beyond that found in the affective experience of the intensities that subsume cognitive thought. As this brief quote suggests, drug use gets at the same deterritorializing forces at play in any affectively intense situation (including, for Jim, cycling San Francisco's hills, which is a terrifying proposition), prioritizing affective embodied experience over rational cognition. Deleuze and Guattari point out, "All drugs fundamentally concern speeds, and modifications of speed" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 282). However, while Deleuze and Guattari recognize the deterritorializing possibilities of drug use, they ultimately find it an inadequate means of accessing this affective potentiality, arguing that "drug addicts continually fall back into what they wanted to escape: a segmentarity all the more rigid for being marginal, a territorialization all the more artificial for being based on chemical substances, hallucinatory forms, and phantasy subjectifications" (285). In Breedlove's novel, the decontrol Jim seeks through drug use, while certainly available for brief moments, similarly becomes bound to the monotonous structure of addiction—itself a form of bodily control.

[40] Guy Davidson notes that Breedlove's focus on drug-taking (and the economies of selling, stealing, and using) "crystallizes [the text's] linked concerns with oppositionality and commodity culture . . . bring[ing] into relief the ways in which Jim simultaneously carries out and counters the norms of consumer society" (142).

We called it the wolfpack.

As *Godspeed* progresses, Jim's drug use becomes less of a focus to the narrative. Although he still uses (and his drug use continues to be a supplement to Jim's affective experience of music), the punk scene in clubs across the country and in the squats of the Lower East Side takes precedence. The cost of drug use is also high: in the final chapters of the novel, Jim is raped while high, and his love Ally has become strung out.[41] As Breedlove (like Deleuze and Guattari) implies, speed (the drug) is a shell game, an incomplete means of achieving the decontrol he craves, but finds decontrol within the space of the punk performance itself. In *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary*, Breedlove explains, "The first show we played . . . where we had an audience of 50 people or whatever, I was so high. I was like, "Whoa, dude. This is so much better than shooting drugs. I can't even fucking believe I waited this long. This is so rad." The pleasures of the experience of music (whether performer or audience), as Deleuze suggests, move subjects beyond ordered sense, a shift that allows the potential for affective openness that, through the shared experience of a punk show, can become a site for collective intervention.

Simon Frith argues that "theories of rock meaning can only be developed through rock practice, and rock practice involves a relationship between musicians and audiences in a particular cultural institution" ("Formalism, Realism, and Leisure" 171). The practice Frith imagines is grounded in the historical context of the event itself. Such an investigation of punk must attend to the space of the show itself, which as I have shown, was a violent embodiment of problematic masculinity but also a staging ground for both homosocial and queer community building. The affective valence of musical performances is likely the most positive aspect of hardcore, and this is true of both straight edge and queercore. In "Another

[41] In *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary* Breedlove and the other members of Tribe 8 discuss their drug use and their successful attempts to get clean.

Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life," Lawrence Grossberg explains that rock and roll

> locates, for its fans, the possibilities of intervention and pleasure. It involves the investment of desire in the material world according to vectors which are removed from the hegemonic affective formation. It is not that the desires and pleasures themselves are oppositional but rather that the affective investments of the rock and roll apparatus empowers its audiences with strategies which, taken topographically, define a level of potential opposition and, often, survival. (325)

The collective experience of a live punk show reflects what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming, a phrase that takes on a significant valence when considering the "wolfpack" mentality of a "crew"—straight edge or not.[42] Decontrol refers in this context to the affective resonance of losing yourself in the music of a show, or in the intensity of a pit—an embodied practice that begins in an individual experience and expands to encompass the entirety of the show.

Grossberg shares a framework for addressing the affective dimension of musical subcultures, tracing what he calls the "rock and roll apparatus" over "three intersecting axes—"youth as difference," "pleasure of the body," and "post-modernity" (322–323)—but for the purposes of my argument, I'll focus on the second. Here's Grossberg's description:

> The second affective axis of the rock and roll apparatus involves its celebration of the body as the site of pleasure—in its transformation of identity into style, in the centrality of rhythm and dance, and in its courting of sexuality and sexual practices. The musical practice itself is inserted into the apparatus at the site of the body: it is a

[42] In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari write, "A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity" (239). They continue, "What we are saying is that every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. That it has pack modes, rather than characteristics, even if further distinctions within these modes are called for. It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal" (239).

> music of bodily desire. There is an immediate material relation to the music and its movements. This relation, while true of music in general, is foregrounded in rock and roll. At its simplest level, the body vibrates with the sounds and rhythms, and that vibration can be articulates with other practices and events to produce complex effects. The materiality of music gives it its affective power to translate individuals (an ideological construct) onto bodies. This material relation is there, within the apparatus, available to its fans. (323)

Grossberg's gloss of the affective, embodied experience of music—besides being a more theoretical rephrasing of Janey's earlier accounting of a punk concert—"you is just vibrations so there's no difference between self and music" (122)—reflects Deleuze and Guattari's claim in *A Thousand Plateaus* that "music seems to have a much stronger deterritorializing force, at once more intense and much more collective" (302).[43] This double move takes into account the generic and well-regulated quality of straight edge hardcore music and ideology but also suggests the ways that the collective affective experience of this music works differently. For Grossberg, "it is not that rock and roll does not produce and manipulate meaning but rather that meaning itself functions in rock and roll affectively, that is, to produce and organise desires and pleasures" (319). He argues that

> rock and roll becomes visible only when it is placed within the context of the production of a network of empowerment. Such a network may be described as an "affective alliance": an organisation of concrete material practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world. (313)

[43]At its most limiting, music "draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes"—what they refer to as a refrain or a block of content—(323), but as they also explain, "'The chorus formed by the assembly of the people is a powerful bond. . . . These conditions are explained by the force of deterritorialization of music" (302–303).

In *Ten Thousand Saints*, Jude's first experience of live hardcore music is at a show by Johnny's band, Army of One, loosely modeled on Youth of Today.[44] Henderson's description (which ironically locates the deterritorializing force of the concert not only in the music but also in some magic mushrooms Jude has taken) is very much of a piece with Acker's, as bodies decompose into arms, shoulders, chins, backs, sweat, and spit—all coming together in a mass of intensities.

> Jude fought through the field of bouncing bodies. A dance had started up in front of the stage, a boisterous, good-natured ritual that involved hurling one's body, like a sack of flour, at other bodies. Arms windmilled, shoes flew. . . . Jude was close enough to the band to feel the radiance of their sweat, their spit. He found himself in the middle of things. Or he put himself there. He jumped, and his body remained in the air for several hours before he landed on somebody's shoulder. He was half helped up, half shoved away. He spun sideways into another wall of people, his chin smashing against someone's tattooed head, his sweat-soaked T-shirt sealed to someone else's back. (Henderson 134)

Henderson describes a similar show later in the text, this time with Jude as performer in his and Johnny's band, *The Green Mountain Boys*, which foregrounds the violence and homosociality/sexuality on display.

> Then the blackout hour. It was a sensation Jude could only imagine was like sex. If the hours beforehand were like the anticipation of a date—not Will I get a blow job? but Will there be a fight?—the show was sex itself. It was carnal, it was communal, it was religious. It was Harriet and Les's orgy. Yes, there would be a fight. Yes, someone would misinterpret dancing for fighting, or fighting for dancing. Some jock

[44] Youth of Today guitarist Porcelly advised Henderson on aspects of the straight edge scene.

> would push some skinhead too hard, and someone would get a boot in the face. Yes, someone would grab the microphone, tongue it, and then hand it back. Mucuses would abound. Someone would dive into the crowd, and his balls would accidentally get fondled. In the morning, they would be purified. The shows purified them. Yes, it would be a night to remember.
>
> (305)

In both examples, the collective experience of the show as affective assemblage exceeds the regulatory demands of straight edge, opening the potential for a site of resistance to the limitations of the regulations themselves. Within this affective experience, as Grossberg attests, "The body becomes the site at which pleasure is restructured and desire potentially redirected. . . . It is here that one might try to articulate the possibilities of an oppositional sexual politics within the rock and roll apparatus" (323). This is made apparent in the "carnal" (queer) intimacy Jude describes that would otherwise be challenged within the scene. While in youth crew in particular, this intimacy is immediately recuperated by masculine forms of control, it does suggest the potential that a more critically informed punk practice like queercore might employ decontrol.

David Ensminger argues that "queercore and queer-edge culture is not simply satisfied with recognizing and exploiting the implicit irony of male-thronged all-ages shows, youth crew fashion semiotics, and the 'disruption' of norms within the culture but also the reclaiming of the space they envision as latently queer" ("Redefining the Body Electric" 62). Breedlove's Jim similarly defines the pit as a productive site for affective decontrol.

> We fling each other into boys and fuck up anyone that gives us shit. . . . See, it's not that were looking for a war. We just want to get our yayas out on each other, scream and yell and jump and pound on each other. It's the assholes that fling a fist in your

> eye, throw you down and jump on your kneecaps, but you can't beat the willing. We like it, smashed by sweaty bodies, bodies craving contact and black eyes, to see if any of it can get through to us, make us feel at all. (87–88)

By taking over the pit, Jim and the queer punks revise the stakes of slam dancing (participating in the violence[45] but directing it toward different ends—namely the formation of a queer (feminist) space within the pit itself). In his reminiscence of the punk clubs of his youth, José Muñoz explains that the shows they hosted served as important spaces for feeling together—"the potentiality that those scenes of spectatorship promised even before the performers showed up onstage. The hum of other men's bodies, bodies that for whatever reason, for that moment, rejected a trajectory that was attuned to the normal" (*Cruising Utopia* 109). Muñoz continues:

> I remember the sexually ambiguous punk clubs of my youth where horny drunk punk boys rehearsed their identities, aggressively dancing with one another and later lurching out, intoxicated, to the parking lot together. For many of them, the mosh pit was not simply a closet; it was a utopian subcultural rehearsal space. (111)

As Ensminger notes, in the pit, "the [scene's] aggression and homophobia become temporarily suspended in such a liminal, unbound, and "reclaimed" space" ("Redefining the Body Electric" 63).[46] Although, as the case of youth crew suggests, such possibilities are limited, especially when founded on control, the spaces communal experience of shows move beyond control to a space that, rather than chaos, offers a new topology of

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[45] In a number of instances, Jim takes part in vigilante violence against sexist, misogynist, violent men but argues that the (perverted) pleasure comes, in part, from fucking with the patriarchal system: "I gotta fight back, I gotta feel the power they [white men] were born with so I can give it up, I gotta get high, because you know, . . . it was always what gritty little thrill can I devise from this moment." (219–220).

[46] Later in the novel, Jim roadies for fictional queercore band Hostile Mucous (a band that recalls Breedlove's own Tribe 8) as they tour across the US. Every night, Jim gets to participate in a new pit where "guys [who] try to get in the pit. . .are instantly rejected by swarms of rabid chicks, who notice when there's something in their way that does not belong there" (147).

community.

The reconstituted pit of the queercore show shows how affective intensity might be deployed toward resistant ethical ends. Importantly, punk shows have always brought together, if uneasily, a number of (sub)subcultures joined by the experience of music, even when, at times, the content of such songs (lyrics, the band's wider political views, etc.) is in direct opposition to those of the participants themselves.[47] The actual sonic quality of the music is less important than the noise it makes and the assemblage of bodies and body parts, desires, and affects that noise makes possible. For Deleuze, music "disembodies bodies . . . lodged on lines of flight that pass through bodies, but which find their consistency elsewhere. . . . But in escaping, the body discovers the materiality of which it is composed, the pure presence of which it is made, and which it would not discover otherwise" (*Francis Bacon* 47). Hardcore's noise conveys a break with mainstream culture, but this break comes about, at least in part, through an affective experience of music itself. Queercore inserts such metaphorical noise into traditional punk forms, even as bands like Tribe 8 put forward aural noise in pursuit of a communal understanding. In this way, punk imagines belonging and community, to repurpose Brian Massumi, as "unmediated, and under way, never already-constituted"—"the openness of bodies to each other and to what they are not" (76).

[47] The recent film *Green Room* aptly illustrates this moment, as progressive hardcore band the Ain't Rights win over a crowd of neo-Nazi skinheads after playing the Dead Kennedys song "Nazi Punks Fuck Off."

Counterattacks in a Spatial War: The Potential and the Limits of Squatting as a Communal Practice of Resistance

There are many reasons to squat an empty building. The most straightforward is financial. The less money one spends on rent, the more opportunities remain for other things in life—the things that make life beautiful. Another reason that is equally legitimate but makes the situation incomparably more complex is the desire to "live differently." What does one want to achieve with this "different life"? Is it to escape the existing forms of repressive daily life? Or, even grander still, is it to achieve true autonomy? And what do we mean by this strange and wondrous thing: autonomy? Are we talking of those forms of individual autonomy that are a prerequisite to becoming a "citizen"? Or does the autonomy practiced in bold actions such as squatting demonstrate yet another form of libertarian-anarchist communism?—Geronimo

Over the past four chapters, I have examined various communities on the margins of US society—maquiladora workers, rural drug users and producers, homeless men, and punks—each bounded by specific intersections of race, class, sexuality, and able-bodiedness, and have attempted to trace the many ways cultural representations of these subjects are defined by affective orientations within the regime of neoliberal capital. So far, I have argued the importance of affect to both the formation and representation of specific communities in the contemporary United States, suggesting that an attention to affect uncovers less visible connections and possible associations between these communities in the contemporary history of late capitalism. As a treatise on space, this dissertation has largely concerned itself with the margins, those locations, both material and imaginary, where people can refigure dominant modes of being. These felt spaces provide openings to critique the kinds of limited narratives neoliberal culture allows (which these very same works themselves often unintentionally reproduce) but also facilitate the organization of communities associated by a concern for social justice. However, as I have shown, these moments are often contingent, fleeting, and only glimpsed as refractions of prevailing narratives.

This chapter takes the ephemeral potential I have traced as a starting point to investigate the ways that this communal energy might be deployed toward concrete acts (and

spaces) of resistance. Rather than communal practices of care, maintenance, or pleasure (although these are certainly important aspects of any resistant practice), the subjects I examine in this chapter occupy space, at times by force, demanding an alternative to what housing activist Geronimo calls in the quote that opens this chapter the "forms of repressive daily life," which are themselves tied to the neoliberal project. This is a timely question. From the Arab Spring protests to the Occupy movement to anti-austerity moments in Greece and Spain to the recent Standing Rock protest against the North Dakota Access Pipeline, the occupation of space, both public and private, has once again become a favored mode of political activism. This chapter traces a somewhat smaller territory, but one that is nonetheless driven by the same desire to live differently: the squatting of abandoned buildings. More specifically, I look at two actually existing examples of squatting in the nineties—the gutter punk squatters Penelope Spheeris interviews in *The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III* and the widespread squatter's movement that took place on the Lower East Side of New York City between the seventies and the turn of the century—to explore the ways that the occupation of space can create a lived practice of resistance. I then turn to two fictional representations of squatting—Cari Luna's *The Revolution of Every Day*, set during the waning days of the Lower East Side squats, and Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*, in which a group of twenty-somethings squat a house in Brooklyn's Sunset Park neighborhood at the height of the 2007–2008 financial crisis. While these narratives draw on some of the same critical practices of occupying space, they prove the difficulty of even imagining alternative ways of living when the revolutionary desires motivating actual practices of squatting are contained by normalizing forces of family, government, and neoliberalism itself.

Squat the world!

At its most basic, squatting refers to the act of illegally occupying a space. As Hans Pruijt, one of the most prolific scholars writing about squatting, explains, "Occupancy without legal title has always existed" ("The Logic of Urban Squatting" 1). In *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World,* Robert Neuwirth claims that in sheer numbers, "one out of every six humans on the planet" is a squatter, a ratio that will rise to one in four by 2030 (9). Neuwirth focuses much of his book on large-scale squatted communities in developing nations such as Brazil and Kenya, some of which have taken on the auspices of respectability, but also discusses squatting in the US, glossing the history of this "land of illegal occupiers" (190) shored up by settler colonialism.[1] As Neuwirth makes clear, squatting takes many forms, including so-called "shanty towns" that are home to thousands of people. However, the most common form of squatting from a contemporary US perspective is individual or small community-based occupations of abandoned buildings, residential or otherwise.

While "unmet housing needs [is] an important motive for all squatters," Pruijt notes, "squatting is generically political" ("The Logic of Urban Squatting" 2, 20). As part of his project to create "a typology of urban squatting, specifically designed as an alternative for the often-made distinction between squatting as a way of meeting a housing need and squatting as a way of satisfying a need for counter cultural and/or political expression" ("The Logic of

[1] Neuwirth explains that squatting was part of the colonial project from its inception in Jamestown, the first British settlement in the United States, and notes that squatting, abetted by the Homestead Act, drove the western expansion of the United States. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1885 protest novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, depicts one aspect of this history: the US's cultural and political takeover of California following the Mexican-American war, squatters threaten to preempt the land claims of newly nationalized Mexican-American ranchers, which were guaranteed under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Along the way, Neuwirth also sketches a history of squatting in New York City in the nineteenth century before briefly mentioning one of the more recent and longer-lasting instances of organized urban squatting in the United States: a collection of squats on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a few of which persisted from the late seventies until their legalization in 2002.

Urban Squatting" 2), Pruijt puts forward a framework outlining five types of squatting: deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial squatting, conservational squatting, and political squatting. Ultimately, Pruijt distances the practice of squatting from "subcultural expression" as a founding principle, stressing "the importance of the need for space for all squatters, including those engaged in subcultural expression" ("The Logic of Urban Squatting" 23). Pruijt finds it more useful to think about "'squatting as an alternative housing strategy' where the goal is to house oneself. . . . Once someone is settled in a squat, she or he will find an environment that is, to so some extent, conducive to a countercultural development" ("The Logic of Urban Squatting" 23). In this understanding of squatting, the occupation of space begins with need but encompasses a challenge to prevailing concepts of housing that are couched in the deification and defense of private property, which, as Pruijt points out, opens the possibility for communities of resistance. In this way, squatting is what Henri Lefebvre famously calls "a cry and a demand for the right to the city" or "a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (*Writings on Cities* 158). As David Harvey explains, Lefebvre's "demand [for the right to the city] was really a command . . . to create an alternative urban life that is less alienated, more meaningful and playful but, as always with Lefebvre, conflictual and dialectical, open to becoming, to encounters (both fearful and pleasurable), and to the perpetual pursuit of unknowable novelty" (*Rebel Cities* 9). The right to the city, as Harvey argues, "primarily rises up from the streets, out from the neighborhoods, as a cry for help and sustenance by oppressed peoples in desperate times" (12).

As Edward Soja argues, even more firmly linking the right to the city with the ways that people might occupy and refigure space, "Seeking the right to the city is a continuous and more radical effort at spatial reappropriation, claiming an active presence in all that takes

place in urban life under capitalism" (96). At its most fundamental, squatting is an implicit call for what Soja calls "spatial justice," "the essential starting point" of which "is the vigilant defense of public space against the forces of commodification, privatization, and state interference" (Soja 45). Soja traces a much broader definition of the ways space and (in)justice are intertwined, from the institution of boundaries to the creation of coalitions across them in what he calls "thirdspace":

> an efficient invitation to enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable. It is a space where issues of race, class, and geneder can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other; where one can be Marxist and post-Marxist, materialist and idealist, structuralist and humanist, disciplined and transdisciplinary at the same time. (6)

As Soja's theorization of thirdspace suggests, the revolutionary potential of occupying space is not necessarily in its upending of social mores and laws—although that is always one significant aspect—but through the affective capacity these transformed spaces produce, particularly in the ways that it might assemble what Hardt and Negri call the multitude: the "living alternative that grows within Empire" (the global form of order in our current era)—comprised of subjects with a "multiplicity of . . . singular differences" who must nonetheless "discover the common that allows them to work together" if they are to work against the confines of Empire (*Multitude* xiii–xv).

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre explains that "a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential" (54). Harvey traces the revolutionary possibilities Lefebvre outlines as instances of heteroropia. Lefebvre's concept of heterotopia

is similar to Michel Foucault's in that it offers what Foucault calls "a sort of counter-emplacemen[t], a sort of effectively realized utopi[a] in which . . . all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture . . . are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted; a kind of places [sic] that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable" (17). However, as Harvey argues, Lefebvre's concept of heterotopia differs from Foucault's more neutral theorization of these spaces (which as Foucault notes, can include institutions like the prison) in its analysis of the revolutionary potential of the heterotopic space: "the spontaneous coming together in a moment of 'irruption,' when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different" (*Rebel Cities* 18). In *The Coming Insurrection*, the French collective the Invisible Committee imagine what this resistant practice of "the decomposition of all social forms" might look (and feel) like (42). As they argue, the coming together through difference presents "the ideal condition for a wild, massive experimentation with new arrangements, new fidelities. . . . 'Becoming autonomous' [in this context] could just as easily mean learning to fight in the street, to occupy empty houses, to cease working, to love each other madly, and to shoplift" (42). Although perhaps these theorists' explanations of the productive revolutionary potential of occupying space seem too optimistic and too removed from actual revolutionary practices (a common critique of Hardt and Negri's work especially), the acts the Invisible Committee describes reflect many of the practices I have traced throughout this dissertation, from acts that contest standing laws as a means of survival, such as the drug users in *Winter's Bone*, to the mad love at the heart of *The Mad Man*. Each work I have discussed details a specific encounter with neoliberal capital on the margins of US society and the ways that these subjects attempt to mitigate these circumstances. Squatting movements suggests one way these ordinary

affective moments might be turned toward the revolutionary capacity Lefebvre describes.

The decline of western civilization

While Pruijt suggests that a counterculture movements is not the basis for a squatting movement in the first instance, these communities have played an important role in the way squatting is understood particularly in an urban context in the US and Western Europe. Punks in particular are associated with squatting, largely through the image of the punk house, which in the United States was first represented in Penelope Spheeris's early-eighties films *The Decline of Western Civilization*[2] and *Suburbia*. Early in her 1981 documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization*, Spheeris interviews Black Flag at the Church, a former house of worship in Hermosa Beach that served as the band's practice space—and as singer Ron Reyes and drummer Robo's home, for $16 a month in rent. Spheeris presents Reyes's and Robo's "bedrooms" (a closet and a cabinet) as a whimsical example of punk life, a fact further emphasized in the depiction of the actual practice space (what Reyes jokingly calls the living room), with its graffiti-covered walls and thrift-store furniture. While Reyes and Robo are not technically squatters—they do each pay $8 a month in rent, after all—their living situation is indicative of the new forms of (communal) living that occur when people, for whatever reason, are forced to live outside of the boundaries of proper society.[3]

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[2] Spheeris's documentary series *The Decline of Western Civilization* is one of the best-known documents of the punk subculture. The first installment explores the Los Angeles punk scene's transition to hardcore (discussed in more detail in the previous chapter). Notable for its serious, measured interviews with musicians and fans and live performances by the Alice Bag Band, Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, Catholic Discipline, Fear, the Germs, and X, the film is a classic of the genre. *Slate's* Jack Hamilton calls it "the finest cinematic distillation of punk ever made, not simply as music but as ethos." Crowds of punks at the film's midnight premiere drew 300 LAPD motorcycle cops, leading then-police chief Daryl Gates to demand the film never be shown in LA again ("The Punk Director"). These films were out of print (although widely bootlegged) until 2015, when Spheeris and her daughter, Anna Fox, released them as a box set.

[3] Spheeris returned to this communal punk ethos in her subsequent drama, 1984's *Suburbia*, about a group of punks who run away from home and squat a house in an abandoned subdivision on the outskirts of Los Angeles. *Suburbia* served as an unintentional precursor to the third film in Spheeris's *Decline* series, discussed at length in this chapter. In a discussion of the connections between her work, Spheeris remarked, "What's freaky

As Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore agues in his introduction to *Punk House: Interiors in Anarchy*, the reimagining of domestic space that takes place when punks live together—many times in squatted buildings—provides a powerful, if passive, critique of society. As Moore puts it, "Living together is a punk rock rite of passage into responsibility in complete disregard of social standards" (6), and goes on to suggest that "what differentiates punk in regard to communal living is not a policy of escapism and devotion to nature but a destruction/construction process as a learning period for genuine adult survival" (9)—which seems akin to what Geronimo calls in the quote which opens this chapter "a desire to live differently . . . [and] escape the existing forms of repressive daily life." However, in contrast to Geronimo's call for autonomy, however complicated, Moore makes it clear that he finds the "crusty utopianism" that bolstered the European and New York punk squats of the eighties and nineties outmoded, present only today in the "death rattle of anarchist confusion" (8). Regardless of his feelings on the present state of political squatting, Moore aptly describes a deconstruction and reimagining of contemporary domesticity that can open space from which, to borrow a phrase from Félix Guattari, "unprecedented formations of subjectivity" might emerge (*Chaosmosis* 91).

Although *The Decline of Western Civilization* presents Reyes and Robo's home as little more than an effect of punk's "disregard for social standards," by the time of 1996's *The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III*, Spheeris had turned to the darker side of punk squats. Focused on homeless punks in LA in the mid-nineties and detailing the failures of public policy that necessitate squatting as a political practice and a means of survival,[4] the film is so

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about [*Decline III*] is . . . I did *Suburbia* . . . in '83. *Suburbia* is a written, narrative piece on the same subject as *Decline III*, which was made in '97. And I'm often going back and forth in my head going, Did people watch *Suburbia* and then do that? (in *Decline III*), or was I struck by God and saw it coming and that's why they're so similar" (*Decline III* DVD extras).

[4] As Spheeris notes, the title of her series was "meant to be ironic," but "by the time [she] got to Part III, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy" ("Talking to Penelope Spheeris about time, rock 'n' roll, and The Decline of

grim that it was never distributed. In a discussion of *The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III*, Spheeris explains that while she set out to make a film about the commercialization of the punk scene in the mid-nineties, when she began interviewing the punks she saw around Hollywood, she shifted her focus from the subcultural excavation to "the social environment . . . how these kids got out on the street, because most of them were homeless" ("Penelope Spheeris Talks Her Seminal Punk & Metal Documentaries 'The Decline of Western Civilization'"). The film offers a series of stark interviews with young gutter punks (many of them teenagers and hardly any out of their early twenties); with the exception of one young punk with an apartment,[5] paid for through a mix of family support and disability benefits, all of Spheeris's interviewees live on the streets or in squatted buildings. Spheeris draws out the stories of how the young punks became homeless and how they survive on the street, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of everyday life for these kids as well as the extent to which squatting is depoliticized in this context—all the punks interviewed participate in what Hans Pruijt calls "deprivation-based squatting," by which he means squatting in its most basic sense: to fill an unmet need for housing ("The Logic of Urban Squatting" 4). However, as Pruijt points out that although deprivation-based squatting can be used as an activist tool under the right circumstances, "It has little to offer people whom

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Western Civilization"). An outlier in the series, 1988's *The Decline of Western Civilization: Part II—The Metal Years*, follows a similar format of intimate interviews and live performances but is viewed largely as an unintentional comedy, with scenes of almost unbelievable rock star excess and blatant misogyny—most infamously, an interview with W.A.S.P.'s Chris Holmes, who talks with Spheeris in a pool while getting increasingly drunk as his mother looks on disapprovingly—that make taking the film's subjects seriously all but impossible. This is especially true of the film's most widely known segment, an interview with Ozzy Osbourne that predicts his later success in reality TV. In it, Osbourne discusses the pros and cons of fame while cooking eggs and bacon. As Osbourne finishes cooking and goes to pour a glass of orange juice, the camera cuts to a close-up presumably showing Osbourne spilling juice all over the table. Spheeris later explained that the scene was faked, but that "it gets a huge laugh. It's foreshadowing [the Spheeris-directed film] *Wayne's World* humor" ("Inside 10 Iconic 'Decline of Western Civilization' Scenes").

[5] This apartment is the location of a wild party in Spheeris's documentary, the room filled with rowdy, drunk kids. In an interview, Spheeris notes, "Besides the night my brother got killed, I will say the night that I shot that scene in Darius' [sic] apartment was the most depressing night of my life" (Interview with Sarah Jacobson and Beth Loudmouth).

authorities or the public do not recognize as having a genuine housing need"—and this is especially true of those "whose lifestyle deviates from the mainstream" (7). Many of the punks draw attention to the abusive situations that led them to abandon what Sage, one of Spheeris's interlocutors, calls "a domesticated house," offering a corrective to the common belief that all gutter punks come from "good" middle-class families and are, as journalist William Booth put it in a 1996 article in the *Washington Post*, "homeless by choice."[6] The punks talk candidly about the physical and emotional abuse they suffered at the hands of their families, many of whom were alcoholics and drug addicts. (One lifts his shirt to literally bare his scars for the camera.) While the deprivation these punks suffer leaves little room for explicitly organized practices of resistance, the spaces of communal care and camaraderie these punks create in their squats provide alternatives to the limitations (and at times, violence) of the domesticated house.

In one long scene in the middle of the film, Spheeris cuts between interviews from seven punks focused specifically on homelessness and squatting—marking what Spheeris calls in an interview the "point . . . where all of a sudden you can feel like the audience got hit in the stomach" (Interview with Sarah Jacobson and Beth Loudmouth). Early interviewees Filth and Sage explain that they "live wherever [they] sleep," in locations including a "field behind Burger King," "alleys," or what Filth calls "a drinking field." Interviewees Troll and Hamburger mention that they have been squatting since they were early teenagers and "have been in thousands of squats all over the country." Then Spheeris gets into the nuts and bolts of squatting with Squid, Spoon, Troll, and Hamburger.

[6] Booth's article, "'Gutter Punks'; Angry, White Rebels Are Homeless by Choice," ostensibly calls readers' attention to "a new kind of homeless: white, middle-class, often bright, politically militant and homeless by choice"—a stereotype perpetuated in the gutter punks of the sketch-comedy TV show *Portlandia*. The sketch that introduces the characters hinges on the fact that the three punks are all from wealthy families and attended tony private schools in the suburbs of Portland.

Squid: How do you find a squat? Ummm.

Spoon: Just walk around. Find a place that looks empty.

Squid: A boarded-up house. An abandoned building.

Spoon: Wait till dark fall and break into it.

Squid: Rip a board off.

Spoon: Crowbar.

Squid: Invite yourself in.

Spheeris: And then you live there?

Spoon: And then you live there.

. . .

Spoon: But [the squat] got busted, or else we would've been able to film there today.

Squid: That was a "down" squat. That was my last squat. The neighbors loved us. We had it set up. It was so clean.

Spheeris: It was nice.

Hamburger: It was the best house I ever lived in.

As this conversation (and Spheeris's film, more generally) make clear, for many of these punks, squatting is a response to a fucked up domesticated house, and their nihilistic politics of no future—rather than simply a punk neutral position—can be read as a critique of the sociopolitical state of the neoliberal United States. At the same time, these punks resituate the terms of the domestic home—the very place most were escaping from—by explicitly engaging them, through talk of good neighbors and a nice, clean home. As Spheeris notes, the punks "formed new families. They were very protective of each other and still, to this day, so many of them are just as close" ("The Punk Director").

Although the punks Spheeris talks to are rarely political, and investigating a more

politicized squatters' movement is beyond the scope of Spheeris's documentary, a few punks comment on the wider implications of their situation, linking the practice of deprivation-based squatting to a larger political stance. One, a member of the band the Resistance, details the failures at the heart of US society (while also referencing the title of Spheeris's series, unintentionally emphasizing the shift Spheeris notes from ironic hyperbole to something grounded closer in reality):

> People . . . decide to live on the streets, just because of the simple fact that they know they can't exist in regular society. . . . And it's not just because of [their specific personal situations]. It's because of what society's become. It's in decline. It's falling apart. And writing of the youth who can't buy houses, who can't get jobs, who aren't getting the education they need, that is, you know, that's basically an inevitable fact of the future—all systems collapse. I'd say that there's an inevitable economically based class war that's gonna happen in the United States. I think the economic system has taken the haves and the have-nots and separated the classes to where the poor and the rich anymore and the middle class is dying away.

In another, an interviewee shows how deprivation and the desire for alternative ways of living connect. In answer to Spheeris's question, "Why do you live in places like this [squat]?," the young woman answers, "I believe in squatter's rights and I don't have anywhere to stay."

If, as Jonathan Flatley argues, "our spatial environments are inevitably imbued with the feelings we have about the places we are going, the things that happen to us along the way, and the people we meet and these emotional valences, of course, affect how we create itineraries" (77–78), squatting quite literally repurposes space, in the process imbuing it with a new affective dimension ties to community and ideas of "home." We can see it in

Spheeris's young punks, one of whom called his last squat "the best house I ever lived in." This communal affective aspect is why, as the Invisible Committee points out, "an old squatted shack still feels more lived in than the so-called luxury apartment blocks" (55). Thus, while not an explicit act of political resistance, squatting for these punks offers a negotiation of what social concepts like domesticity mean within their alternative practice of living, expanding the affective potential of punk discussed in the previous chapter through communal practices that emerge in the face of debilitating circumstances.

Importantly, these practices cannot remedy the violence that these punks have suffered. Spheeris offers a conclusion of sorts as she asks her subjects where they think they'll be in five or ten years. Their answers—variations on drunk or dead—read not as punk posturing but as frank statements of how these young adults see their lives. As Sage, one of the film's most tragic subjects, explains, "I'm not happy here [in the world]. The sooner I go the better as far as I'm concerned. I don't live a happy life." (Sadly, Squid, Hamburger, and Sage have all passed away.) However, through the occupation of empty (and often unwanted) spaces, squatting offers one reformation of space aimed at repurposing space toward useful, communitarian ends. Stavros Stavrides explains that these "everyday forms of encounter and collaboration indeed take shape in and through [common collective practices] without even declaring themselves to be an alternative to the existing social relations" (77). The Invisible Committee offers a way to consider the political utility of the felt spaces created by the punks: "Local self-organization, superimposing its own geography over the State's cartography, jams it and annuls it, and produces its own secession" (108) but importantly one that is created through an affective community that "come[s] into being when people find themselves, understand each other, and decide to go forth together" (101).

Down on the Lower East Side

As the gutter punks' experience suggests, squatting is marked by the tension between squatters' "need" for housing and the political statement they are making by opposing conceptions of private property. These are not mutually exclusive positions, as occupying space in defiance of laws, for whatever reason, is always a political statement. If squatting is revolutionary because of the sorts of resistant affective communities it brings into being, it is also, as Nick Wates writes, "seen as a threat to 'law and order' and the democratic process, and above all to the sacred rights of private property" (3). But the real threat, Wates argues, is "the possibility of the movement escalating, and even extending the principles of direct action into other fields" (3). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest something similar in *Commonwealth*:

> Since the dominant form of the republic is defined by property, the multitude, insofar as it is characterized by poverty, stands opposed to it. . . . The poor, in other words, refers not to those who have nothing but to the wide multiplicity of all those who are inserted in the mechanisms of social production regardless of social order or property. And this conceptual conflict is also a political conflict. Its productivity is what makes the multitude of the poor[7] a real and effective menace for the republic of property. (39–40) [8]

[7] In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri draw on Peter Linebaugh's work to outline the challenge that the multitude posed to the British colonial empire in the eighteenth century,

> The multitude is a many-headed hydra that threatens property and order. Part of the threat of this multitude is its multiplicity, composed at times of combinations of sailors, maroons, servants, soldiers, tradesmen, laborers, renegades, castaways, pirates, and numerous others circulating through the great oceans. The threat is also, though, that this multitude will undermine property and its structures of rule. (*Commonwealth* 44)

[8] Hardt and Negri theorization of the commons is not without its critics. In his analysis of the contradiction in Hardt and Negri's argument that the common has been incorporated and exploited by capital even as the common retains the potential for resistance to this control, Cesare Casarino explains, "The qualitative

For Hardt and Negri, the productivity of the multitude emerges from what they call "the common," a concept that reimagines but is distinct from the historical concept of commons (*Multitude* xv). In their most recent work, *Assembly*, they explain that the common should be understood as "nonproperty," "an equal and open structure for access to wealth together with democratic mechanisms of decision-making" (97). Harvey similarly describes the common(s), as "an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood," what he calls "a social practice of *communing*"—"at the heart of [which] lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and noncommodified" (119). And Stavros Stavrides has expanded these concepts into what he calls "commoning practices," which "do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common" (17). For each of these thinkers, the collective practice founded in these reimaginings of the commons creates the potential to work against capitalism. As Harvey argues, "The political recognition that the commons can be produced, protected, and used for social benefit becomes a framework for resisting capitalist power and rethinking the politics of an anti-capitalist transition" (137–138). Stavrides cautions, however, that these practices should not be understood as "anti-capitalist by essence" but rather as "hybrid collective works-in-progress, in which glimpses of a different future emerge" (77).

Stavrides in particular considers material practices of commoning through the

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difference between the common and capital understood as the regime of surplus value consists of this other surplus, which, for lack of a better term, I would like to call surplus common. Revolutionary becoming is living the common as surplus" ("Surplus Common" 20). See Alex Callinicos's review of *Commonwealth* in the *Socialist Review*, Samir Amin's review of *Commonwealth* in the *Monthly Review*, Bruce Robbins's review of *Commonwealth* in *n+1*, and Joel Wainwright's review of *Commonwealth* in *Human Geography*.

occupation of urban space. "Urban movements," he argues, "actually transform or even produce parts of the city. . . . What is more important in those movements, however, is that they in a way build upon a crucial characteristic of the societies in movement from which they stem: the creation of common spaces" (112). In what follows, I look at perhaps the last widespread squatting movement in the United States, which occurred on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from the early seventies until 2002, when the last remaining squat was legalized. During this time, as many as two dozen abandoned buildings were squatted (Luna "Squatters of the Lower East Side"), and many more were being repaired by legal homesteaders. This movement is then an instructive historical example of both the potential for squatting as an oppositional social movement and the lengths to which governing powers, in tandem with the real estate industry, will go to "protect" private property against those who would see it used productively rather than as a tool of financial speculation.

Over a few disparate waves between the seventies and the nineties, people began occupying neglected apartment buildings across New York City, a number of them in the Lower East Side's Alphabet City. As Alexander Vasudevan notes in *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting*, this was in part a response to a long-term financial crisis that saw a rapid increase in the number of abandoned buildings across the city (from 1,000 in 1961 to 7,000 in 1968 ("Reclaiming New York")), a crisis made worse by a national recession in the early seventies.[9] City services, including fire departments, trash collection, and libraries, were shut down, and the city began its decline into what Sam McPheeters, exploring the era through its representation in film, has labeled a "pee-smelling woe zone." In "Squatters of the Lower East Side," Cari Luna describes the immediate effects of the crisis on the city's

[9]When city officials pleaded with Gerald Ford's White House for assistance, Ford refused (Phillips-Fein), a fact immortalized by the *Daily News's* infamous headline, "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD" (Roberts). However, as the *New York Times* points out, only two months later "Ford signed legislation to provide federal loans to the city, which were repaid with interest" (Roberts).

housing stock:

> On the Lower East Side, bank disinvestment exacerbated the already dire situation. Landlords, unable to refinance their properties due to redlining, abandoned buildings, some starting fires in an attempt to claim insurance money. These buildings became property of the city, entering *in-rem* forfeiture due to unpaid taxes. The city created the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to manage the buildings, which were warehoused empty rather than repaired and returned to the housing market—leaving a tremendous amount of housing stock vacant even as the numbers of the homeless grew.[10]

In response, people soon began occupying the buildings. Some were former tenants who never left when the buildings were abandoned, while others saw an opportunity to remain in New York City when they couldn't otherwise find affordable housing. The takeover of these buildings was legalized by president Jimmy Carter in 1977 through the National Urban Homesteading Demonstration Project, which was particularly successful on Eleventh Street. Although homesteading was slightly different than squatting, the two groups existed in an uneasy alliance. Both groups took over abandoned buildings across New York and worked to make them livable (an investment of time and money), but the quasi-legal homesteaders were bound by government regulation. As Pruijt points out, besides dealing with a "torturous process" of financial and bureaucratic challenges, homesteaders were not allowed to occupy their buildings until "renovation [was] completed up to code" ("Is the Institutionalization of Urban Movements Inevitable?" 141); squatters in

[10] To discourage squatters from taking over abandoned buildings, city workers destroyed the very things that would make them habitable, such as sinks and toilets, gas lines, even staircases, forcing squatters to effectively start from scratch. In *Kill City*, Yaz, a squatter who lived in See Skwat (C-Squat) remembers, "The first few months I was there, there was no roof, no sheetrocked walls, no floors, no toilets, no water, no electric, no heat unless a wood burning stove existed. Over the course of years and years the puzzle pieces are slowly put together. The salvaged golden garbage and recyclables became the literal foundation of our home" (122).

contrast moved in immediately, with little thought to laws or housing codes. NYC homesteading efforts were irreparably damaged when newly elected president Ronald Reagan cancelled Carter's federal homesteading program, which, in tandem with an ineffective city government and the ever-rising value of NYC real estate from the mid-eighties on, made homesteading disagreeable to city officials (Ferguson 147–148), who became increasingly worried that legalizing any occupied buildings would open the door for adverse possession suits from squatters across the city.

The nineties saw the forced eviction of the majority of squatted buildings across New York City, as the Giuliani administration attempted to reclaim the valuable real estate being squatted on the Lower East Side. The most infamous eviction—of 541 and 545 East Thirteenth Street on May 30, 1995—involved what the *New York Times* called at the time "a show of force befitting a small invasion," which included "hundreds of [NYPD] officers . . . carrying riot gear [and] . . . using a tanklike vehicle" (Kennedy).[11] Over the next few years, the city continued its policy of eviction. On February 9, 1997, a fire broke out in Fifth Street Squat, giving city officials cover to evict the building with riot police and demolish it, even though "the Fire Department never even made a thorough investigation of the cause of the fire" ("New Styles of Eviction in the L.E.S./NYC"), and during the 1999 eviction of Dos Blockos, a squat a few blocks from the squats evicted in 1995, New York police were forced to contest with "heavily fortified" defenses and at least one hundred protesters to evict the building (Cooper).

In his introduction to Ash Thayer's *Kill City: Lower East Side Squatters, 1992–2000*, which documents the Lower East Side squatting community through Thayer's intimate

[11] This moment is also (only slightly hyperbolically) memorialized in Lynn Breedlove's *Godspeed*, as protagonist Jim's unnamed LES squat is evicted by riot police, SWAT teams, helicopters, and tanks while the squatters defend themselves with Molotov cocktails, grenade launchers, and guns. In Breedlove's take, Jim selfishly leaves the squatters to their fate, escaping through a tunnel in the basement and locking the door behind him.

photographs and first-person accounts from some of the squatters depicted in the photos, housing activist and longtime squatter Frank Morales relates his personal history of squatting, which took him from the South Bronx to a number of squats spread out across the Lower East Side from the eighties onward. (As he notes, "By 1990 or so [squatters] had collectively occupied and secured some 30 buildings from Fourteenth Street to Houston" (12).) As Morales points out, squatting was a political call to arms. In Sarah Ferguson's "The Struggle for Space: 10 Years of Turf Battling on the Lower East Side," Morales clarifies his position.

> We saw the taking of buildings as part of a counterattack in this spatial war, so to speak. . . . From then on, the notion of space—seizing territory as a defensive strategy against this onslaught to remove and push [poor people] out of the area—became the center of what we were talking about. The idea of building communities of resistance was precisely that. It was hands-on ideology, not abstract but ultimately practical. We were resisting this effort to remove us from these areas. (143)[12]

For Morales, squatters explicitly demonstrate the power of the common to create what he calls "communities of resistance" to the forces of neoliberal capitalism, which seek to demolish the productive and revolutionary alternative housing strategies that would threaten the rentiers seeking to profit from the gentrification of lower Manhattan. This resistance is equally founded on a rearticulation of the domestic—"a means, through use of abandoned spaces, to meet the necessity of a home, and build solidarity and power on the grass roots"

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[12] Morales was one of Cari Luna's sources for both her article in *Jacobin* and her novel *The Revolution of Every Day*, and his arguments get voiced by Steve, the leader of his building's movement:

> "You can call it a theory," Steve said, "but spatial deconcentration sure as hell looks like real government policy to me. I've lived in the neighborhood all my life, and I've watched the city cut our services, making it harder and harder to live here, trying to force us out. I've watched them look the other way while whole blocks burned. If we take those burned-out buildings, it's a counterattack. It's a legitimate assault on their system. We take those buildings and we hold them, and they're out of play in the gentrification game." (59)

(qtd. in Luna, *Jacobin*)[13]—illustrating the ways that communal practice founded in everyday life can be revolutionary.

The revolution of everyday life

In the remainder of this chapter I investigate the ways that squatting is represented in two recent novels—Luna's *The Revolution of Every Day* and Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*. Significantly, these novels were both written in the aftermath of the 2008 mortgage crisis, during what has come to be known as the Great Recession, but before the Occupy Wall Street protests, which refigured public conceptions of the occupation of space. While these novels draw on the desires for alternative practices of everyday life that motivate the LA gutter punks and the Lower East Side squatters, ultimately, both are unable to imagine space outside of the structures of neoliberalism, demonstrating how squatting becomes incorporated into the very fabric of the neoliberal city.

The title of Luna's novel refers to Raoul Vaneigem's 1967 Situationist text *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, an anticapitalist screed that locates a revolutionary praxis in the lived experience of life.[14] Luna's novel is notable for the history it uncovers on this little-known moment, as well as the arguments it presents in favor of the potentially transformative power of affective oppositional community. However, it also (pessimistically—and for good reason, as we will see) traces the limits of squatting as an effective oppositional strategy and, although this is certainly not Luna's goal, espouses a disenchantment that aligns it with (without being apiece of) Thurston Moore's contempt for

[13] Morales explains that he squatted back [in the seventies] "because [he] needed a place to live [and] didn't have sufficient funds to afford to rent an apartment." But he also makes clear the political and ethical component of squatting as "mak[ing] a direct statement about the moral requirement to house homeless people, and to do so by doing it—together with homeless people housing ourselves" (*Kill City* 11).
[14] Vaneigem contents that "people who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have corpses in their mouths."

crusty utopianism.

Luna fictionalizes the history of the mid-nineties LES squats, teasing out the tensions between squatting as a form of political protest, on the one hand, and squatting as a practice of living everyday life differently on the other. The novel's five main characters each represent a different motivation for squatting: Gerrit, a Dutch immigrant, sees squatters as "claim[ing] their right to housing" (72); Lower East Side native Steve views squatting as "mak[ing] a home" (59) and "do[ing] some good . . . in the old hood[,] . . . staking a claim[, and] taking back . . . Loisaida" (61); Anne, a New York transplant from the Midwest, became involved with squatting through her relationship with Steve (and who, unlike the other squatters, has family in New York to fall back on in the event of eviction); Amelia, a formerly homeless teenager and drug user begins squatting when she is taken in by Gerrit and the squatting community at large; and Cat, who, like Steve, grew up in the neighborhood, sees squatting as a replacement for the family- and couple-oriented relationships emphasized by the other characters. While she admittedly "made a lot of shit up" (Interview with the *Austin Review*), Luna's narrative conforms closely enough to actual events to provide a shocking testament to the lengths the government, backed by private developers, will go to protect its ability to extract money from property.[15] The residents of Thirteen House attempt to fight eviction in court, arguing adverse possession. Although they are granted a stay of eviction,[16] they are forcibly evicted nonetheless. Although the residents

[15] In another plotline reflecting actual events, the Giuliani administration's plan for the squatted buildings (once evicted) was to turn the site over to (fictional) real estate developer (and Giuliani contributor) Donald Biano for low-income housing, managed by Biano's company, that would very quickly regain control of the buildings and revert rents to the market rate (236). In practice, this meant evicting low-income residents (the squatters) for slightly lower-income residents, who would then also be displaced.

[16] Again, referencing the actual history of the East Thirteenth Street squats. After city building inspectors city inspectors "testified that conditions posed "imminent danger to the safety and life of the occupants from building collapse, and list troubles such as deteriorated joists, buckling walls, sagging floors, and disintegrating window lintels" (qtd. in Luna *Jacobin*), the squatters hired independent expert Jim Morgan to inspect the building. In an op-ed in the *Times*, Morgan notes, "Records of the New York State Supreme Court trial in

barricade themselves inside, they are quickly removed, save Gerrit, who is hiding in one of the apartments as an ultimately futile technique of resistance. The city then demolishes the building with a wrecking ball, killing Gerrit in the process.

Although she fictionalizes and condenses parts of the history of the Lower East Side squats, Luna illustrates an important and largely unknown moment in New York City history, testifying to the intertwined forces of private property and neoliberal capital that have remapped the city over the last two decades. In keeping with her nod to Vaneigem, who argues for the creation of "small federated microsocieties, true guerrilla cells practicing and fighting for . . . self-management," Luna argues for the importance of a reimagined domestic space that is the site of potential new forms of communal living. However, this eviction narrative is framed by the messy everyday lives of the squatters. The characters living in Thirteen House, the main squat in the novel, exist in a web of overlapping intimate relationships; as Anne remarks, "They're all so mixed up in each other's lives. Some people need that; some people found their first true family in Thirteen House. . . . But . . . [that] degree of intimacy can sometimes be unnerving. Suffocating" (49). Amelia and Gerrit have lived together for years, ever since he took her in when she was a homeless crusty punk "with a bundle of plastic bags for a pillow" in a squat with "no heat, no Con Ed, one wrong step and you're falling straight down to the basement" (178). In fact, it is Thirteen House's comfort that leads Amelia to stop using drugs. As "she leaned into the work of the squat[,]. . . . the people of Thirteen House became her family" (44). Even more explicitly, Steve and Anne met at a "radical meeting . . . for some group organizing around housing rights" (57) but begin squatting to "make a home" (59).

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progress on the matter clearly show that there is absolutely no danger of those buildings collapsing—by the admission of city building department officials, as well as testimony of other licensed professionals (including myself)."

As should be obvious in a narrative about squatting, the concept of home saturates the novel. In some of the earliest descriptions of Thirteen House, Amelia conflates affective experience with the physical space of the squatted building, which is also tied to the wider history of the place, reflecting the squatters' insistence that their buildings, rather than derelicts that should be torn down, were still useful: "Home. She feels it settle down around her, the warmth, the safety. Her palm finds the banister, the good solid oak worn smooth from a century of hands. Her feet find the stairs, the new treads solid and sure beneath her feet" (31). During the eviction, Amelia and her fellow squatters reveal a banner they have made that simply reads "HOME" (367). Like the LA gutter punks, who reimagined domestic space as a form of communal living, Amelia's concept of home in this sense is much more expansive, referring both to the space Amelia occupies in the building and the community of squatters throughout the Lower East Side.[17] Anne ties the concept of home even more firmly to a political practice of opposition—one that also expresses the affective and creative dimensions of everyday life that work against, or at least outside of, capitalist production (and cites Morales's argument discussed in the previous section):

> What they're doing here in the squat [is] they're standing up. They're saying no. No, we will not be drones in the great corporate hive. No, we will not sacrifice our time and happiness to the all-consuming goddamn maw of consumption. No. We're going to take this unused land, and we're going to build a home on it, and we're going to live here, together. A community of resistance. Sharing this land, pooling our resources, helping each other. We will spend our time thinking, making art,

[17] Describing the "Wednesday night dinners when [the squat] opens up the community room and makes food for anyone who's hungry," Amelia explains that she "wants it so crowded people have no choice but to touch each other, even the ones they don't know. . . . Some Wednesdays it seems they're all down there together, everyone from Thirteen House and everyone from Cat House, squatters from Maus Haus and Utopia, kids from [Tompkins Square] park, and a steady stream of the homeless. In summer they all spill out onto the sidewalk like a party" (18–19).

sleeping, making love, raising children. (163)

At the same time, Luna's dependence on the concept of home uncritically reflects the institutionalization of the Lower East Side squats through a regressive insistence on domesticity that reincorporates the squatters into "officially" proscribed forms of life, a storyline that rests uneasily with the more revolutionary tone of the historical narrative. As the novel makes clear, "Not all squats are the same" (177). In trying to rally the local community to the cause of the squatters, Amelia wants to "[push] the homesteader angle more" rather than focus on a call to action to "defend the squats" (176). Her tactical goal is to differentiate the residents of Thirteen House from "a bunch of punks crashed out in crumbling buildings" and "freeloaders out to get something for nothing" in the minds of the squats neighbors and in the wider NYC public following the story (176–177). While Luna is not necessarily interested in drawing a distinction between squatters and homesteaders—in response to Amelia, one of the residents pleads, "Let's not get too caught up in the squatter/homesteader thing" (177)—the affective dimensions of home as an acceptable domestic space contrasts to the more informal living situations embodied by gutter punks. This mindset is exemplified in a *Village Voice* article, "Better Homes and Squatters," which makes the case that "for every radical in the streets, there were always many more [squatters] who shunned the spotlight, quietly working to carve out homes inside their rubble-strewn buildings" (Ferguson). In their appeals to respectability, these arguments demarcate which squatters can be reincorporated into the regime of private property.

Echoing Lefebvre's famous statement that capitalism operates "by occupying space, by producing space" (*The Survival of Capitalism* 21), Pruijt notes that squatting is generally integrated back into the folds of capitalism, either through institutionalization—in which "a movement is channeled into a stable pattern based on formalized rules and laws" ("Is the

Institutionalization of Urban Movements Inevitable?" 134)—or cooptation—in which "the coopting organization embraces certain ideas from the movement, while redefining problems in such a way that solving them does not threaten its own stability" (136). In the case of the occupation of the Lower East Side, Pruijt explains that the rift between squatters and homesteaders opened early and was dependent on conceptions of private property: as homesteaders "began to see themselves as homeowners," they also began seeing themselves in opposition to rather than allies of their neighboring squatters ("Is the Institutionalization of Urban Movements Inevitable?" 141). And as the *Village Voice* notes, the emphasis on private property was appealing to the New York City government as well: New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development "liked the fact that the homesteaders didn't request any city or state money to finance their renovations." Home ownership and the concept of private property was ultimately the means by which the eleven remaining squats on the Lower East Side were legalized in 2002: in what Frank Morales calls the World Bank Model—a common practice of neoliberal intervention—the squatters were forced to take on massive private loans to bring their buildings up code as a requirement of the legalization process ("Squatters of the Lower East Side"). When pushed to explain why the city was legalizing squats in 2002 after ten years of brutal eviction practices, a city official tied the decision to reproductive family: "These 11 buildings have been occupied by families in a much quieter way. They've left us alone and we've left them alone. They're not the buildings where people were throwing things off the roof. This is a different population" ("Better Homes and Squatters").

As if to underscore such a conservative conception of home, the "domestic" subplot of the novel turns on reproductive futurism. Luna admits that she conceived of her novel as "a love letter to the New York City I felt I'd lost," namely New York as "an affordable place

for middle-class families to live," that was motivated by her own pregnancy ("Squatters of the Lower East Side"). In her novel, Carla, the only child living in Thirteenth House, becomes representative of the squatters' project: "Having little Carla, six years old then, running through the halls, leaving hopscotch squares and flowers and hearts chalked onto the sidewalk out front, solidified something, a reminder of what they were doing, the community they had set out to build; here was a child, deserving of a safe place to live and play and be loved" (103). A child is also at the center of the domestic conflict at the heart of Luna's novel. Steve and Amelia have been having an affair, and Amelia is pregnant with Steve's child. While this fact in itself would be enough to sow discord within the community of Thirteen House, the stakes are heightened by the fact that Steve and his wife Anne have been unsuccessfully trying to get pregnant, and their marriage is suffering as a result—that is, the home is not a home until it is inhabited by a child.[18] As Lee Edelman argues in his polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, "However radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (2).

In "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," Tavia Nyong'o interrogates Edelman's claims against

[18] Luna's narrative privileges the able (reproductive) body without ever interrogating why such claims might be problematic. Anne sees their failure to conceive as a failure of her own body, a fact paralleled in Gerrit, who is marked by disability—the result of thalidomide poisoning in the womb—giving him a deformed hand, a lowered sex drive, and the inability to maintain an erection. (Although Gerrit and Amelia live together and the rest of the building thinks they are a couple, they are roommates rather than lovers. However, Gerrit convinces Amelia to let everyone assume he is the father of her child—one means of recuperating his masculinity; in his youth, a doctor who told him he "should not expect to have girlfriends, a wife, children. These things were most likely out of reach" (loc 1630).) Significantly, Gerrit's disability is tied to a failure in his mother's own reproductive cycle, as she was prescribed thalidomide for morning sickness. Anne's and Gerrit's distance from traditional concepts of the able body manifests as an impediment to their desires for life: a baby for Anne, a physical relationship with Amelia for Gerrit. In Gerrit's case, disability is a literal emasculation that, disturbingly, he attempts to overcome through sexual violence. When Gerrit finds out the baby is Steve's, he rapes Amelia in a fit of rage.

reproductive futurity, specifically with regard to punk, suggesting one way to read the child in relation to the revolutionary squatter communities. Nyong'o takes as his starting point an interview with performer Patti Smith in which she imagines the future as "an open space for children" (103), arguing that for a feminist punk like Smith, such a conservative "paean to family values was shocking" (104). However, Nyong'o finds that Smith's comment "produces both punk and queer affect" (105) through what he calls a "radical," "childlike innocence" that refigures the future as, quoting Smith, "an open space rather than the disciplinary, delayed temporality of generational, Oedipal succession" (105). Nyong'o reads this open space as one of encounter that reflects the practices of commoning I have been tracing in this chapter that is "inhospitable to the heteronormativity" of the type Edelman rails against (105). These punk, queer common spaces offer one way to theorize the alternative domestic situations squatters are creating, which comes through in the margins of Luna's novel, if not its driving narrative. However, the spaces Luna describes reconstitute rather than refigure the normative terms of the domestic, casting the child as the emblem of a future that can't be anything other than inscribed in neoliberal capitalism.

Significantly, the novel ends with Amelia imagining bringing her child back to the location of the demolished Thirteen House.

> If she brings her son back here, there won't be anything left of this old life to show him. She'll stand with him in this spot, and point across the street to some slick condo building, and say, "That's where it was." How will he picture Thirteen House? How will she make him understand where he came from? "Used to be, there was room for everyone here," she'll say. "Used to be you could be whoever you were, however you wanted to be. I knew artists and activists. I knew junkies and thieves. We were pioneers," she'll tell him. "We were pirates." But her son won't be of this

> time or place. This is the past now. Her son is of the future, and she needs to carry him toward it even as she carries Marlowe and Ben, Suzie and Denise, Steve and Anne with her. Even as she carries Cat. Even as she carries Gerrit. Amelia will have to love this baby enough for all of them. (388)

While the junkies, thieves, pioneers, and pirates call to mind the "many-headed hydra that threatens property and order" Hardt and Negri describe in *Commonwealth* (44), Amelia casts this threat in the past. The slick condo that has replaced the squat testifies to the failure of this multitude, even as her child demands her membership in this future. Although her comments give no account of Amelia's specific situation, they suggest that Amelia can't imagine squatting or the communal practices that emerged from it a useful strategy in her (and contemporary readers') present. Like Thurston Moore, Amelia sees the "crusty utopianism" of the squatters as something already finished.

Occupy Sunset Park

If Luna's novel delineates the tensions between squatting as an oppositional political practice and the incorporative hegemonic power of neoliberalism, Paul Auster's 2010 novel *Sunset Park* offers a description of squatting that is always already incorporated within this framework and evacuated of any sociopolitical utility. In Auster's formulation, squatting, while theoretically a reaction to the housing crisis and the wider recession, becomes a way for white middle-class young adults to inhabit traditional roles to which they feel they are entitled without ever dealing with the realities of poverty, positioning squatting as a depoliticized act that refuses community making.

Set during the 2007–2008 financial crisis and subsequent Great Recession, Auster's novel attempts to tease out the effects of this economic crisis on a group of urban, well-

educated twenty-somethings. The title of the novel obliquely refers to the ramshackle house in Brooklyn's Sunset Park neighborhood that Auster's protagonists are squatting. While Auster explains that "ironically enough, [he'd] been walking around with this idea in [his] head for a couple of years before [the downturn of 2008]" (Interview with Leonard Pierce), his focus on squatting is timely. The novel was published in November 2010; a little less than a year later, in September 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement began and soon spread across the US, drawing attention to social and economic inequalities through the occupation of public and private spaces. However, the scale of the Occupy movement's concerns also made Auster's novel immediately outdated, focusing as it does on a character study of upper-middle-class white men and women whose illegal occupation exists outside of any specific sociopolitical reckoning with or criticism of the financial crisis—which doesn't seem to have directly affected any of the members of the squat.[19] Auster makes it clear that his focus is the failure of a very specific form of the American dream. In an interview, he explains that he "wanted to write about young people, but the young people of *today* [in 2010]—what it's like for them, all the problems facing these educated people who come from middle-class backgrounds, but they're all struggling in one way or another. There's no good jobs, not much money, and very little prospects for them. It's tough to be in your 20s today" (Interview with Leonard Pierce; author's italics).[20]

Although the thrust of Auster's narrative may have begun as a more generalized study of a troubled protagonist, from the first sentence, Auster founds *Sunset Park* within the wreckage of the mortgage crisis. When we meet protagonist Miles, he is working as a trash-

[19] Mark Lawson quips, "Indeed, the book's only specific evidence of what the crash means for the US comes from a literary perspective," although Lawson forgets about Auster's description of how the crash has also hurt independent filmmaking (*Sunset Park* 193).

[20] Auster describes the theme of the novel as "dispossession[:]. . . someone being kicked out of the place where they lived, thrown out into the street and having to cope without really any resources" (Interview with Leonard Pierce)

out man, cleaning up foreclosed-on houses so that banks can resell them. Unlike the spaces that the gutter punks and Lower East Side squatters describe as imbued with potential, "each house" Miles cleans out "is a story of failure—of bankruptcy and default, of debt and foreclosure" (3) in the "collapsing world of economic ruin and relentless, ever-expanding hardship" (4). But even as it calls attention to the "absent people [who] have fled in haste, in shame, in confusion" (3) from the effects of the collapse of the subprime mortgage crises, the novel implicitly blames the owners of these houses for their failure, which Auster ties to consumerism, exemplified in Miles's habit of photographing and cataloging "the objects, the forgotten possessions, *the abandoned things*" (5; author's italics), which he imagines as "speaking to him in the voices of the people who are no longer there, asking him to be looked at one last time before they are carted away" (5). While Miles's focus on abandoned things at first seems to poetically elegize the victims of the financial crash, by anthropomorphizing these objects, Miles effectively erases the people themselves, along with any empathetic connection he might have made. When the absent people are mentioned at all, it is only to emphasize that they are certainly living in "new dwellings [that] are smaller than the houses they have lost," assuming they "are not camped out in the streets" (5). And of course, Miles's is working for the very companies that have foreclosed on these people.

Armed with the knowledge that Miles will himself squat a house, readers may imagine a narrative arc in which he comes to reflect on and regret his feelings at the start of the novel. However, Auster offers no such resolution. This callous treatment of people who have recently lost their homes only serves to underscore Miles's grim austerity—he has "pared down his desires to . . . a bare minimum" (6) and lives as cheaply as possible—a sentiment with which the novel is aligned. Like so many proponents of minimalism, Miles disregards the socioeconomic privilege that allows him to confidently and comfortably

embrace the tenets of minimalism as a lifestyle, all forms of which, as Chelsea Fagan writes in the *Guardian*, "imply that they are in some way a moral upgrade from the life of 'mindless consumerism,' and as a bonus, allow you to take on some of the desirable aesthetics and morality of poverty without ever having to *be* poor." Fagan's argument lays bare the early conflict in Auster's novel between Miles and the family of his underage girlfriend, Pilar Sanchez, that propels the narrative.

Miles's moral stance against consumerism at first glance offers a parallel to the anticapitalist punks and squatters, who desire alternatives to the prevailing destructive system. However, as Fagan's insightful comments make clear, Miles's minimalism is rooted not in a critique of neoliberal capitalism but in disdain for the consumers themselves, particularly those of a lower economic class, whom he sees as living beyond their means. It should be noted that Miles comes from a wealthy family. (His father owns a literary publishing house, started with a significant loan from his own father, and his mother is a famous Hollywood actress.) And although Miles himself lives a frugal life on a meager paycheck, he seemingly has no economic worries and has actually managed to save quite a few thousand dollars, putting him in a much better financial position than most in the US, only 41 percent of whom had enough in their savings account to cover a surprise bill of $1,000 in 2017 (Vasel). By locating financial loss as an individual failing, the novel effectively occludes the problematic racial dynamics in the narrative. Miles's trash-out crew—"brain-dead Victor, the crew boss; stuttering, chatterbox Paco; and fat, wheezing Freddy" (5)—are Latino, as are Pilar and her family. Auster associates an objectionable consumerism with these nonwhite, working-class characters (the only people of color given any space in the novel). Miles's crew take what they want from the abandoned houses they are cleaning and call Miles "a fool for turning his back on these spoils—the bottles of whiskey, the radios, the

CD players, the archery equipment, the dirty magazines" (5–6). To win over Pilar, Miles sets himself in opposition to these characters, proving to her "that he was more than just an itinerant trash-out worker, that he was in fact a highly educated person with a nimble mind and a love of literature so vast and so informed that it made her English teachers at John F. Kennedy High look like imposters" (16).

While Miles never takes anything for himself, he makes an exception to placate his girlfriend's family, who are worried that twenty-seven-year-old Miles is dating their sixteen-year-old sister:

> To clinch the bargain, he offered them presents, any number of things they craved but were too strapped to buy for themselves. Much to the shock and jeering amusement of the three clowns at work, he temporarily reversed his stance on the do's [sic] and don'ts of trash-out etiquette, and over the next week he calmly filched an all-but-brand-new flatscreen TV, a top-of-the-line electric coffee maker, a red tricycle, thirty-six films (including a boxed collector's set of the *Godfather* movies), a professional-quality makeup mirror, and a set of crystal wineglasses, which he dutifully presented to Angela and her sisters as an expression of his gratitude. In other words, Pilar now lives with him because he bribed the family. He bought her. (12–13)

The transactional nature of this arrangement is particularly ironic for ardent anticonsumerist Miles, but it also serves to conflate the desire for things with a significantly more shocking moment that vilifies Angela and her sisters, suggesting that they care more for things than their sister (while also uncomfortably hinting at slavery and human trafficking).

As the quote makes clear, Miles sees eldest Sanchez sister Angela as a villain, in large

part because of "her inexhaustible craving for those ugly, stupid things" (41).[21] Auster's omniscient narrator presents these as immutable facts, aligning the reader with Miles against Angela. However, a focus on class inequalities at play complicates these simplistic and moralistic descriptions and enables a reading that goes against the grain of the narrative. The Sanchez family is "too strapped to buy" the items Miles takes from the houses. In fact, as the novel suggests, the family is struggling. Their parents are dead, killed two years prior in a car wreck, and the sisters, sixteen-year-old Pilar, twenty-year-old Maria, twenty-three-year-old Teresa, and twenty-five-year-old Angela, live together in an apartment. Angela is "the major breadwinner of the clan" (12) and has been taking care of the family since she was twenty-three. Since the novel neglects to provide these characters (or Miles's fellow trash-out men) any real agency, we can only imagine the ways their desire for things is motivated by consumerism certainly but is also mediated by race and class.

Miles is forced to flee Miami for New York City, where he was raised, when Angela threatens to turn him in to the police for statutory rape after he refuses to bring her more things. Miles's high school friend Bing offers Miles a spot in a squatted house in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The squat is almost unbelievably appointed. In contrast to the actual experiences of squatting documented throughout this chapter, Miles and company find that "for reasons unknown, the electricity and the heat [and presumably the plumbing] are still functioning" (38). All their freestanding house needs is a little paint to be (almost) as good as new (82). This should be the first sign that Auster is not interested in making any kind of larger statement about squatting. The novel pays lip service to the critiques of capitalism and the

[21] Problematically, Miles also overtly sexualizes Angela, whom he judges for her sexuality, labeling her little more than a prostitute. Although she is "a hostess in a cocktail lounge"—a job that Miles implies is only due to her looks—"according to Pilar, [Angela] sometimes sleeps with the customers for money" (9). Miles later suggests that Angela is jealous of his relationship with Pilar, "as if she can't quite believe her baby sister has snagged him . . . since reason dictates he should be attracted to her, the beautiful woman, whose job in life is to be a beautiful woman and make men fall for her" (40).

failure of neoliberal society made by the other squatters in this chapter, largely though ringleader Bing, who, although "he does not believe in political action[,] belongs to no movement or party, has never once spoken out in public, and has no desire to lead angry hordes into the streets to burn down buildings and topple governments" (71), imagines squatting as "an opportunity to put his [political] ideas to the test, to move beyond his invisible, solitary attacks on the system and participate in a communal action" (76). Bing's justifications for squatting, however, come down to a rehash of the discredited broken windows social theory, rationalizing what is largely an act of self-interest by calling on a community that he and his fellow squatters make no effort to become a part of:

> These are desperate times for everyone, and a crumbling wooden house standing empty in a neighborhood as ragged as this one is is nothing if not an open invitation to vandals and arsonists, an eyesore begging to be broken into and pillaged, a menace to the well-being of the community. By occupying that house, he and his friends are protecting the safety of the street, making life more livable for everyone around them. (76)

While the four squatters form a community among themselves, it is based not on the "decomposition of social forms" but their reproduction—that is, the domestic house as a white, middle-class project reimagined for the millennial generation[22]—an "old squatted shack" that is really just another version of the luxury apartment block.

Auster allegedly based the house on an existing property he chanced upon "on 34th Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues, near Green-Wood Cemetery" (Interview with Leonard Pierce), although if so, it has since been torn down. The spot is located on the northern edges of Sunset Park, a neighborhood Auster describes in an interview as "a sort of

[22] Wiley developers are spinning this as "coliving"—the practice of packing tenants into tiny rooms (for slightly lower rent each) to replicate the dorm experience, and in the process, make the landlord more rent (Semuels).

downtrodden place" and "not a beautiful part of Brooklyn." He continues with a list of the many "things that make [the neighborhood] unattractive," including "a lot of poor, struggling people," ugly architecture, and its "industrial zone near the water," before explaining his feeling that "this was the kind of neighborhood where young people, such as the characters in [*Sunset Park*], would be able to find a spot" (Interview with Leonard Pierce). With that attitude, it's unclear why Auster imagines that the young, white, middle-class characters in his book would be able to find a spot among "the Mexicans, Dominicans, Poles, Chinese, Jordanians, Vietnamese, American whites, American blacks, and a settlement of Christians from Gujurat, India," or the "warehouses, factories, abandoned waterfront facilities, . . . biker bars, check-cashing places, Hispanic restaurants, [and] the third-largest Chinatown in New York" that make up this "hodgepodge" of a neighborhood (80), save for the lower property values that propel all waves of gentrification. (Whatever criticisms you can levy at Auster's novel—and as this chapter shows, there are many—he was on to something. In 2016, the *New York Times* named Sunset Park a new neighborhood "primed to take off" (Higgins), although, to be fair, the *Times* would place the house Auster describes in Greenwood Heights, a newer, real estate broker-imagined neighborhood that emphasizes ties to Auster's own wealthy neighborhood Park Slope while distancing itself from the more ethnic Sunset Park (Williams).)

Auster's characters all connect more deeply with wealthier, more homogenous parts of New York: Bing, Miles, and Ellen all grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and both Bing and Ellen lived and still work in Park Slope; Alice lived in a small apartment on the Upper West Side before she lost her lease. Unlike the LA gutter punks and many of the Lower East Side squatters, the Brooklyn squatters are members of the cultural, if not economic, elite: "a writer, an artist, and a graduate student, all in their late twenties, all poor

and struggling, [but, as Auster is quick to mention,] all with talent and intelligence" (39). While certainly this does not preclude the kinds of affective community making through difference that Hardt and Negri emphasize as the basis for the multitude, Auster's squatters never interact with anyone from the community at all. Indeed, Miles admits he finds the multiethnic makeup of Sunset Park undesirable: "There is something dead about the place, he finds, the mournful emptiness of poverty and immigrant struggle, an area without banks or bookstores, only check cashing operations and a decrepit public library, a small world apart from the world where time moves so slowly that few people bother to wear a watch" (132). As was the case in Miami, rather than unpack any of the social policies that might have brought the specific makeup of the neighborhood into being—to say nothing of Miles's myopic perspective in general—Miles distances himself from the neighborhood and refuses a communal feeling, claiming, "This New York is not his New York" (132).

Bing and Miles embody an entitlement (to a home, to affordable rent) that evades important sociopolitical issues in the neighborhood.[23] Of course, Bing's true motivation, like that of the rest of the squatters, is more direct: he could no longer afford the rent on his apartment in Park Slope, so now he must "risk everything on the chance to live in a rent-free house for as long as it took the city to notice him and give him the boot" (81).[24] It's true that the squatters are dealing with significant financial difficulties themselves. Alice in particular

[23] It is this same point of view that effectively erases the real (or at least more significant) victims of the crash and allows Miles's father to imagine disguising himself as the Can Man, "one of those old, broken-down men who forage among dumpsters and recycling bins for bottles and cans, five cents a bottle, five cents a can, a tough way to make a living, but times are tough and one mustn't complain" (179), in order to see his son, without ever considering the daily life of such an individual. Too, Miles's father's evocation of the clichéd "times are tough" echoes Bing's earlier statement that "these are desperate times for everyone" (76)—moments that deploy a narrative of lack to shore up possibly selfish acts and at the very least flattening any nuanced consideration of the crisis itself.

[24] Ironically, the faltering economy that drives Bing and his friends to squat is the very thing that impedes the legal implications of their actions: "Each morning they wake up to the threat of immediate and forcible eviction, but with the city buckling under the pressure of economic hard times, so many government jobs have been lost that the little band from Sunset Park seems to be flying under the municipal radar, and no marshals or bailiffs have shown up to kick them out" (38).

illustrates the affective experience of poverty: by "not having to pay rent or utility bills for the past four months[, she] has saved . . . close to thirty-five hundred dollars, and for the first time . . . can breathe without feeling her chest tighten up on her, without feeling that her lungs are about to explode" (91). And clearly, everyone deserves access to affordable housing. However, Auster's squatters offer no larger consideration of gentrification, affordable housing, or the reasons why these affluent young people can't afford their rent, a particularly egregious omission since Ellen works for a Park Slope realty company.[25] Instead, for Bing there is no middle ground between living in Park Slope, one of Brooklyn's most expensive neighborhoods, and living rent free. At no point, for instance, does Bing consider moving farther our in Brooklyn—a longer commute to be sure, but the rent is cheaper. In Auster's novel, squatting is contained as another facet of the neoliberal present. It is nothing more than a savings plan for the occupants, who feel they deserve affordable housing but still distinguish themselves from the "mournful emptiness of poverty and immigrant struggle" that Miles suggests defines Sunset Park.

When the squatters are eventually evicted, Miles punches a city marshal before escaping. Miles believes his act has sealed his fate, forcing him to choose between going to prison for assault on an officer (which seems unlikely given both the circumstances of the incident and Miles's social standing) or spend his life on the run. On the final pages of the novel, Miles offers a depressing litany of victimization.

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[25] Auster's squatters (and Auster himself) do not seem concerned with critiquing the system responsible for the empty homes (save Bing's slight justifications), and it is hard to imagine that they will go on to join the Occupy movement. However, they do share with Occupy Wall Street offshoot Occupy Our Homes an investment in the home as a social space: as Occupy Our Homes's mission statement notes, "For all of us, having a decent place to live for ourselves and our families is the most fundamental part of the American dream, a source of security and pride." Occupy Our Homes "is a movement that supports Americans who stand up to their banks and fight for their homes" ("About"). Mirroring Bing's speech, Occupy Our Homes draws attention to the fact that there are "thousands of homes without people," "boarded-up houses. . .sitting empty—increasing crime, lowering the value of other homes in the neighborhood, erasing the wealth that lifts families into the middle class." Of course the difference is that Occupy Our Homes is concerned with keeping homeowners in their homes.

> Homeless, they are all homeless now. . . . Alice and Bing are homeless, he is homeless, the people in Florida who lived in the houses he trashed out are homeless, only Pilar is not homeless, he is her home now, and with one punch he has destroyed everything, they will never have their life together in New York, there is no future for them anymore, and even if he runs away to Florida to be with her now, there will be no hope for them, and even if he stays in New York to fight it out in court, there will be no hope for them, he has let his father down, let Pilar down, let everyone down, and as the car travels across the Brooklyn Bridge and he looks at the immense buildings on the other side of the East River, he thinks about the missing buildings, the collapsed and burning buildings that no longer exist, the missing buildings and the missing hands, and he wonders if it is worth hoping for a future when there is no future, and from now on, he tells himself, he will stop hoping for anything and live only for now, this moment, this passing moment, the now that is here and then not here, the now that is gone forever. (307–308)

Miles's frequent invocation of homelessness in this passage speaks to larger concerns than his eviction from the squatted house. The allusion to the September 11th attacks expands the scope of home to the space of the nation. (It also puts a different spin on "occupation," calling to mind the military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq that followed the terrorist attacks.) Although this doesn't seem at all to be the goal of Auster's project, perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Sunset Park* is that in its elegy for a generic US citizen subject it accidently reveals the cracks neoliberalism has made in white (middle-class) masculinity. Miles can't imagine a future, because the terrorist attacks and the Great Recession have both underscored the vulnerability of the white middle class.

As the novel makes clear with the discussion of the mortgage crisis at start, this

"national" home can only be occupied by proper citizens. The experiences of the squatters in Los Angeles and Manhattan underscore the difficulty of trying to live differently outside of this limited conception of home. However, the existence of these communities of resistance—even for a short time—refigures the felt space of the city and reimagines the way space itself is socially and legally configured. As George Katsiaficas explains in *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, **"**Although . . . 'marginal' groups appear to exist on the edge of society, they are often central to social change" (xi). Responding to the question of whether "squatting was still a viable form of direct action . . . in response to the foreclosure crisis," Frank Morales explains, it's "more viable and necessary now then ever. Through the mass occupation of foreclosed property, the people secure the housing they need—and just as importantly, they launch a counterblow to the banks." (Luna "Squatters of the Lower East Side"). Occupation is a demand for a more just way of life and the creation of a new resistant space that counters the neoliberal regime. As the common squatter's slogan "Squat the world!" implies, another world is possible and can be brought into being through the collectivities created in these new spaces.

In the past five years, the occupation of space has again become a valuable political action. From the Occupy Wall Street movement to the Standing Rock protest of the North Dakota Access Pipeline, people have come together to demand alternatives to the flawed and dangerous dominance of capital over the needs of people. While ultimately unsuccessful at effecting lasting change, these lived alternatives have brought multitudes into being that rather than hoping for nothing and living only for now, invent hope through ephemeral lived practices in the here and now.

Conclusion: Reframing Justice for the Multitude

As there is a neoliberal globalization, so there is a globalization of rebellion. Not just the workers of the countryside and of the city appear in this globalization of rebellion. Others also appear who are much persecuted and despised for the same reason, for not letting themselves be dominated, like women, young people, the indigenous, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexual persons, migrants and many other groups who exist all over the world but who remain unseen until they shout ya basta, enough of being despised. Then they rise up, and we see them, we hear them, and we learn from them. Then we see that all those groups of people who are fighting against neoliberalism, against the capitalist globalization plan, are struggling for humanity.—Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, 2005

This change that's coming will not have leaders. People will wake up and know in their hearts that it's beginning. It's already happening across the United States. The change isn't just limited to Native Americans. It can come to Anglo-Americans, Chicanos, African-Americans as well. Every day people wake up to the inhumanity and violence this government perpetrates on its own citizens, and on citizens all over the world. That's why the change will not be stopped, for it will be a change of consciousness, a change of heart. . . . Think of [this change] as a natural force—human beings massed into a natural force like a hurricane or a tidal wave. It will happen when the people come from the South, and when the people here [in the North and the Midwest] understand. . . . [I see myself contributing to this movement] just by telling people—"Look, this is happening!" As I tried to make clear in Almanac of the Dead, you don't have to do anything, for the great change is already happening.—Leslie Marmon Silko, 1994

Throughout this dissertation, I have traced a potential ethical commonality based on an appeal for justice founded on the interconnected affective and affected nature of global capitalism. In this brief conclusion, I return to the borderlands where the dissertation began and to the ghosts of neoliberal capitalism that have haunted each of the chapters, exploring Leslie Marmon Silko's epic novel *Almanac of the Dead*. Published in 1991 and written in the decade previous, *Almanac of the Dead* is one of the earliest works in the dissertation. As such, it offers a unique perspective on both the revolutionary optimism of alternative ways of being that I have attempted to trace throughout these chapters and the limits of affective community as a revolutionary practice in and of itself. After all, nearly thirty years later, we are still struggling with the injustices of late capitalism.

Silko finds in the borderlands the same destructive systems of global capital Roberto

Bolaño details a decade later.[1] However, while Bolaño is content to reveal (and perhaps force readers to encounter) this violence, Silko imagines how the experience of life under the rule of global capitalism might be mobilized toward revolutionary ends, namely, the end of capitalism as we know it. The vehicle by which Silko imagines this change will come is a revolution based on the anticapitalist commonality. Silko describes the multiplicity of revolutionary groups opposed to the violent capitalism practiced by the United States, including an indigenous uprising in Chiapas, a multiracial army of the homeless led by two disabled veterans of the Vietnam War, an ecoterrorist cell, an indigenous army out of Alaska and Canada, and a prison uprising.[2] As the narrative progresses, these groups build connections with each other in preparation for a global revolution in which the Global South will recolonize the Global North.

Although she published her novel three years before the Zapatistas mobilized against NAFTA in Chiapas, Silko nonetheless predicts what Naomi Klein has called the Zapatista

[1] Silko's apocalyptic novel details many of the same concerns and critiques of late capitalism as the other works investigated in this dissertation, but rather than simply an indictment of contemporary US socioeconomics, it exposes the connections between capitalism and the colonizing forces of imperialism and moves beyond simply depicting the material effects of inhabiting these communal felt spaces and trying to live differently. Instead, Silko's novel offers a revolutionary praxis of the multitude on a global scale that predicts and imagines an end to the "five hundred year war" the indigenous peoples of the Americas have waged against the European "invaders" (178).

[2] The multitude Silko imagines as coming into being is paralleled in one of Subcomandante Marcos's most famous statements:

> Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a gang member in Neza, a rocker in the National University, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Defense Ministry, a communist in the post-Cold War era, an artist without gallery or portfolio. . . . A pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city in Mexico, a striker in the CTM, a reporter writing filler stories for the back pages, a single woman on the subway at 10 pm, a peasant without land, an unemployed worker. .. an unhappy student, a dissident amid free market economics, a writer without books or readers, and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains of southeast Mexico. So Marcos is a human being, any human being, in this world. Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized and oppressed minorities, resisting and saying, 'Enough'! (qtd. in "Zapatismo and Queer Struggles")

movement's "new model of resistance" ("Zapatista Code Red").[3] The potential of the "new model" offered by the Zapatistas lies in the establishment of the multitude, most recently and extensively theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle established what came to be known as the Other Campaign, which "call[s] on those who are like [the Zapatistas]—["women, young people, the indigenous, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexual persons, migrants and many other groups"]—[to] join together with them, everywhere they are living and struggling . . . against neoliberalism, [and] against the capitalist globalization plan" (*The Other Campaign* 61). The Zapatistas hail these disparate groups through an appeal to commonality, focusing on connections, cooperation, and social relations to foster the multitude that the Sixth Declaration calls the "globalization of rebellion" (61). However, the Zapatistas emphasize that these new forms of democracy do not negate or overshadow clearly defined calls for justice against specific instances of abuse.[4] At the same time, they recognize that individual acts of injustice are part and parcel of what Nancy Fraser calls the larger "structure of governance" of neoliberal capitalism (65).

A roadmap to global rebellion

In an interview with Florence Boos, Silko recalls the affective demands of being

[3] In "An Expression of Profound Gratitude to the Maya Zapatistas, January 1, 1994," a piece written immediately after the Zapatista rebellion, Silko discusses the connections between her then recent work and the burgeoning revolution:

> The intrepid Maya people of Chiapas know very well the story, the history that they are living as they rise up against the genocidal policies of the Mexican government, tool of the greedy profiteers who violate Mother Earth and poison her children. This is no new war; this war has a five-hundred-year history; this is the same war of resistance that the indigenous people of the Americas have never ceased to fight. . . . The spirits of the ancestors cry out for justice. Their voices are louder now. . . . There will be no peace in the Americas until there is justice for the earth and her children. (153–154)

[4] Specifically, the Zapatistas fight for indigenous rights of Mexicans, or, as Subcomandante Marcos notes in a scathingly funny 2003 response to the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), "We want to be a part of [Mexico], but without leaving who we are: indigenous. So, figuring in that we struggle for Mexico, for the Indian peoples of Mexico, for all the men and women of Mexico no matter if they are Indian or not, the ending should say: Long live a Mexico with its' Indigenous!" ("I Shit on All the Revolutionary Vanguards of This Planet").

haunted. She explains, "In writing *Almanac of the Dead*, I was forced to listen. . . . I was visited by so many ancestors. . . . It was very hard. It changed me as a human being" (139). Silko's self-proclaimed transformation points to the ways that haunting provides an affective opening. Her text repeatedly argues, through various perspectives, from Native Americans and African Americans to poor whites, that "the Americas were full of furious, bitter spirits; five hundred years of slaughter had left the continents swarming with millions of spirits that never rested and would never stop until justice had been done" (424). In another interview, Silko describes this experience as "a medium, a field, of positive and real communication" (Interview with Arnold 5) and suggests that the openness this field allows can become the basis for a revolutionary politics demanding justice.[5]

This affective experience is tied to the process of storytelling—a central concept in Silko's work.[6] Silko calls storytelling "a way of interacting . . . a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in a bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location but in terms of what has gone on before, what's happened to other people. It's a whole way of being" (qtd. in Jones 214). In *Almanac of the Dead*, storytelling locates ghosts within the logic of capitalism that provides "a bigger context" to the individual revolutionary movements. However, these stories do not simply reiterate a common history. As the quote suggests, Silko sees haunting as a pathway to justice, a productive affective force whose power is situated in a communicative act between the spirit

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[5] Time and again in Silko's text, communicating with ghosts marshals the affective field of positive energy Silko describes. In one instance, a Yupik woman calls on the spirits:

> The old woman had gathered great surges of energy out of the atmosphere, by summoning spirit beings through the recitations of the stories that were also indictments of the greedy destroyers of the land. With the stories the old woman was able to assemble powerful forces flowing from the spirits of ancestors. (156)

The Yupik woman draws on these powerful affective forces—themselves made possible through a memory that is also a critique and "indictment" of the violence inherent in capitalism—to produce material effects. The novel implies that she is able to bring down a Korean Air flight by disrupting its compass (157–158).

[6] See the collection of essays, *Yellow Woman,* edited by Melody Graulich, which covers a range of critical responses to the idea of storytelling in Silko's work.

and the haunted subject in which the "fierce energy" of the spirits manifests itself in the material world.

With her trenchant critique of capitalism, it is perhaps unsurprising that Silko's indigenous rebels turn to Marx, although rebel leader Angelita refuses a prescriptive understanding of Marxism as an ideology: "Do we follow Marx? The answer is no! *No* white man politics! *No* white man Marx! . . . We must protect Mother Earth from destruction. . . . Marxists don't want to give Indian land back (518–519).[7] Instead, Angelita emphasizes the affective ethics of storytelling as both recitation and indictment. Discussing the reception of Marx's work, she argues,

> Word by word, the stories of suffering, injury, and death had transformed the present moment, seizing listeners' or readers' imaginations so that for an instant they were present and felt the suffering of sisters and brothers long past. The words of the stories filled rooms with an immense energy that aroused the living with fierce passion and determination for justice. (520)

Angelita's resituation of Marx as "tribal man and storyteller" enables a reading of Marx's thought outside of the ideological structures that have no relation to indigenous life or to the new world outside of global capitalism Silko's novel imagines while still serving the goal of storytelling as locating yourself within a greater context. Much like Lisa Cartwright's concept of moral spectatorship discussed in chapter 1, Angelita's description explores the affective power of storytelling, making claims for justice through a connection with the suffering of those who came before, made possible through a haunting communication with the present.

[7] In "The Silko Road from Chiapas or Why Native Americans Cannot Be Marxists," Tamara Teale unpacks Angelita's claim. "It is impossible for Marxists to return tribal lands," she argues, "because like capitalism, Marxism needs the earth for industry; it will not protect the earth, only reassign the rights of exploitation" (164).

A failure of storytelling?

Almanac of the Dead does not shy away from its explicitly revolutionary politics, and Silko's early reviews, published at the height of the culture wars of the nineties, were not kind. In *Newsweek*, Malcolm Jones Jr. complained, "Silko isn't keen on fairness. In her cosmology there are good people and there are white people. . . . This vivid, preposterous, splinter-under-the-fingernails book is guaranteed to make you mad and just as sure to make you squirm" (qtd. in Holland 68). It is true that in *Almanac of the Dead*, whiteness is conflated with a violent culture responsible for historical atrocities—including indigenous genocide, the slave trade, and the Holocaust—and white characters in the novel also participate in drug abuse, murder, eugenics, bestiality, and most problematically, gay sex.[8] However, as Sharon Holland notes, the "subjects [of Silko's novel] . . . are very much *like* the people in power in quotidian life*"* (69). (Too, the marginal subjects Silko describes as participants in this revolutionary community—the homeless, the rural poor, migrants—are the very same communities I've been tracing throughout this dissertation.)

Even when reviewers praised Silko's revolutionary spirit, they did so backhandedly. In perhaps the most oft-cited review of *Almanac of the Dead*, Sven Birkerts, writing for the *New Republic,* argues,

> That the oppressed of the world should break their chains and retake what's theirs is not an unappealing idea (for some), but it is so contrary to what we know both of the structures of power and the psychology of the oppressed that the imagination simply balks. Similarly, while Silko's descriptions of the myriad ways that corruption

[8] In her otherwise glowing review of *Almanac of the Dead*, Linda Niemann criticizes the novel's "too-easy identification of moral depravity with homosexuality that attaches itself to Silko's use of evil gay characters," although she notes that Silko slightly redeems this narrative with a self-sacrificing gay eco-warrior (who also has AIDS) (3). Sharon Holland and Michelle Jarman also take issue with Silko's use of what Jarman calls "exaggerated stereotypes" but point out that Silko deploys them to "expose the danger of a masculinist perspective from every angle" (Holland 97) and to emphasize "that the Euro-American drive to domination depends upon an active cannibalization of its own past (Jarman 155).

> chases cash are convincing enough (nothing could strain credulity on this score any longer), her premise of revolutionary insurrection is tethered to airy nothing. It is, frankly, naïve to the point of silliness. (41)

What is most apparent in both Jones's and Birkerts's reviews are the affects experienced by these two (privileged) white men. Neither Jones nor Birkerts can imagine the kind of transnational community that coalesces in response to the violence of capitalism. (Perhaps had Silko published after the Zapatista rebellion, Birkerts would have walked back some of his statements.) In both cases, the affects produced—anger in one, silliness in the other—allow the readers to shirk the implications that Silko's text forces upon them.[9] And as Sara Ahmed explains, although "alternatives to global capitalism come across as silliness[,] the silly or ridiculous nature of alternatives teaches us not about the nature of those alternatives but about just how threatening it can be to imagine alternatives to a system that survives by grounding itself in inevitability" (165).

Ultimately, Jones's and Birkerts's response to Silko's text should be expected. While Silko's novel describes how the affective force of haunting might be put to use, its goal is not to call such a community into being. Although the ghosts of the victims of Western culture are omnipresent—and although in the novel their haunting becomes a productive force through which, as Avery Gordon argues, "abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life" (xvi)—Silko's work represents the pedagogical extension of these feelings, a practice of the all-affected that illustrates the potential effects of the affective work that ghosts do rather than attempt to foster this feeling in readers, which the novel treats as read. In other words, you either get it, or you don't.

[9] Sharon Holland challenges these reviews, arguing, "It is amazing that after centuries of marking black and brown peoples as the antithesis of the word good, we should be so frightened of turning the tables, even when that look at the underside of history provides us with some truth about the way things really are in the eyes of peoples surviving the terror brought on by the practice of genocide" (68).

For her part, Silko imagines her novel a description of things to come. She explains, "[I see myself contributing to this movement] just by telling people—'Look, this is happening!' As I tried to make clear in *Almanac of the Dead*, you don't have to do anything, for the great change is already happening" (Interview with Boos 144–145). In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko's claim is reflected in the Chiapas-based indigenous revolutionary group's statement defining their struggle. In a speech to villagers, spokeswoman Angelita explains,

> We are the army to retake tribal land. Our army is only one of many all over the earth quietly preparing. The ancestors' spirits speak in dreams. We wait. We simply wait for the earth's natural forces already set loose, the exploding, fierce energy of all the dead slaves and dead ancestors haunting the Americas. We prepare, and we wait for the tidal wave of history to sweep us along. (518)

At first glance, waiting seems like a poor strategy for bringing about revolution. After all, what are the revolutionaries doing if not preparing to take action? However, it makes more sense when taken with Silko's claim that revolutionary change comes from the affective experience of ordinary life in which the US "government perpetrates [inhumanity and violence] on its own citizens" (Interview with Boos 144). As Silko herself notes in a 1994 interview:

> This change will not have leaders. People will wake up and know in their hearts that it's beginning. It's happening already across the United States. The change isn't just limited to Native Americans. It can come to Anglo-Americans, Chicanos, African-Americans as well. . . . That's why the change will not be stopped, for it will be a change of consciousness, a change of heart. . . . Think of [this change] as a natural force—human beings massed into a natural force like a hurricane or a tidal wave. It will happen when the people come from the South, and when the people here [in the

North and the Midwest] understand. (Boos 144–145)

Silko slightly revises Angelita's language to bring humans to the fore, emphasizing that the core of the revolutionary promise Silko offers in *Almanac of the Dead* is the creation of a community of those who oppose the violence capitalism (and its attendant, imperialism) inflicts on the lower classes at the margins of society that is based on an already existing shared affect. Although for Silko, as well as for the Zapatistas, the revolutionary community—what the Zapatistas call "the globalization of rebellion" and what Silko imagines as "human beings massed into a natural force like a hurricane or a tidal wave"—is founded on a critique of capitalism that recognizes that "neoliberal globalization destroys what exists in . . . countries, their culture, their language, their economic system, and their political system [as well as] the ways in which the people who live in those countries relate to each other" (*The Other Campaign* 101), for both, these communities come together through a feeling that all are affected by such a system of governance. In other words, as the revolutionary collective the Invisible Committee reminds us, an "insurrectional surge" of the kind that Silko depicts and imagines is "nothing more than a multiplication of communes, their coming into contact and forming of ties" (117).

The promise of the multitude and its limits

The Zapatista's model of resistance has been celebrated by Hardt and Negri as a form of "new social relations that attempt (and sometimes succeed) to configure institutionally the equality and freedom of the multitude in the common"—"even when," as Hardt and Negri point out, "they do not succeed in establishing lasting institutions" (*Assembly* 237). Hardt and Negri place the Zapatista movement within a larger body of oppositional actions—beginning with the protests of 1968 and including the alter-

globalization movement, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Indignados, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the 2016 Standing Rock protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline (also known as NoDAPL)—in which "the subordinated . . . appropriate the spaces in which they live and they . . . produce the wealth they want" while "accumulate[ing] diverse collective desires" (*Assembly* 237). In Hardt and Negri's theorization, these movements depict forms of the multitude that critique capitalism and produce alternatives from within. As was true of Silko's novel, the revolutionary potential lies in the collectivities created when disparate subjects come together through difference. Of the examples Hardt and Negri give, the most recent, 2016's Standing Rock protest, most clearly illustrates the concerns Silko traces in *Almanac of the Dead*, deepening her arguments without fully resolving the tension between the optimism of revolutionary practice with the pessimism as specific instances of opposition fail.

Throughout 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe fought the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Designed to carry crude oil from North Dakota to Illinois, the proposed path of the pipeline would threaten sources of drinking water for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe[10] as well as culturally significant locations to the tribe. In response to the planned pipeline, the Standing Rock Tribe mobilized resistance.[11] The battle played out in the courts, as the Standing Rock Tribe sued the Army Corp of Engineers to withdraw the permit for construction (and were in turn sued by Energy Transfer Partners, the parent company of Dakota Access LLC, for blocking construction), but also at the construction site itself, as thousands of Native Americans, along with many other allies, occupied land in the path of the pipeline for months, preventing construction from moving forward. Although

[10] As Naomi Klein points out, the pipeline "was originally supposed to pass through the majority-white city of Bismarck, [but the plan] was widely rejected over concerns about safety" (*No* 259).
[11] See Alexander Sammon's "A History of Native Americans Protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline" in *Mother Jones* for a timeline of events.

the Standing Rock protest was nonviolent, it faced fierce opposition from "collaboration between federal, local, and state police and private security" forces, which included military contractor TigerSwan, working on behalf of Energy Transfer Partners (Brown, et al.). Protesters, who called themselves "water protectors," were attacked by dogs, mace, tear gas, and water cannons (Klein, *No* 253). While President Obama eventually temporarily blocked further construction of the pipeline at the end of his term, one of President Trump's first acts was to sign an executive order resuming construction (Elizabeth). By February 2017, the camp had been cleared by law enforcement (Cuevas, et al.).

Despite failing to prevent the pipeline, the Standing Rock protest was significant in the ways that it underscored the twinned violence of colonialism and capitalism. Mirroring Silko's argument in *Almanac of the Dead*, Kelly Hayes notes, "It is crucial that people recognize that Standing Rock is part of an ongoing struggle against colonial violence. #NoDAPL is a front of struggle in a long-erased war against Native peoples—a war that has been active since first contact, and waged without interruption." Certainly, the Standing Rock protest belongs alongside the occupations of Alcatraz and Wounded Knee in the history of Native American activism. At the same time, the community of protestors, which numbered as many as ten thousand and counted among them not just Native Americans from tribes across the country but many others, including environmental activists, anticapitalists, Hollywood actors, musicians, and even a contingent of military veterans, reflects the change of consciousness Silko describes as a condition for revolutionary change. As Lakota elder LaDonna Brave Bull Allard—who started the first camp in April 2016—explained to Naomi Klein:

> Although stopping the pipeline was crucial, there was something greater at work in this convergence. . . . The camps were now a place where Indigenous and non-

> Indigenous people alike were learning to live in relationship and community with the land. (254–255)

While this community was shored up by forms of knowledge drawn from Native American experience, it expanded on them, "modeling of a form of resistance that," as Klein notes, "with one hand, said no to an imminent threat and, with the other, worked tirelessly to build the yes that is the world we want and need" (260).

While the potential of this resistant community to imagine and practice alternative ways of living is clear, it is also clear that as a means of revolutionary praxis the multitude is not a guarantee of the kinds of progressive community making I've been tracing throughout this project. As Hardt and Negri point out in *Commonwealth*, "The multitude-form is not a magic key that opens all doors. . ." (111). 2017, or more appropriately, the Age of Trump, has demonstrated that affective communities also consolidate around far-right ideology and even hate. Obviously, this is not a new development. However, the horizontal, multitudinous form of these nebulous right-wing groups, generally grouped under the name "alt-right," demonstrates the extent to which such practices of commoning might be put to use to bring together racist ideologues and other assorted extremists that until now had been considered on the fringes of the right wing. To give just one recent and disturbing example, the alt-right has become the means for white supremacists to come together despite their own differences, creating an inversion of the commonality celebrated by Hardt and Negri. As J.M. Berger writes in the *Atlantic* regarding the alt-right protest in Charlottesville, Virginia, which ended with the murder of Heather Heyer,[12]

[12] The rally also saw support from a number of militia groups, as did the earlier 2016 occupation of the Malheur wildlife refuge in Oregon, in which a number of armed white ranchers, led by Ammon Bundy, took control of the refuge as a protest against federal control over lands—particularly the Bundys' refusal to pay mandated grazing fees on public land. In the 41-day occupation that followed, law enforcement took a hands-off approach, largely allowing the occupation to proceed while monitoring the situation, although one occupier

> White nationalists all generally agree white people should be in charge, but they have many different competing beliefs about why that is the case, and how white rule should be implemented. These differences are not trivial, and for decades they have prevented a broadly concerted campaign of action by white nationalists in America. Charlottesville was an example of how the alt-right umbrella community can muster numbers that Odinists or the KKK alone cannot.

Hardt and Negri explain that these forms of right-wing populism depend on the idea of identity, and that "based on race and ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or any other social factor," they argue, "closes down the plurality of movements, which must be instead internally diverse, multitudinous" (*Assembly* 57). However, this is of little comfort in the face of the popularity of these groups, particularly those whose members might otherwise be thought of as the victims of capitalism. The one bright side is that the alt-right has instantiated an oppositional multitude of its own, bringing together a diverse group of subjects and interest groups to protest.

Waiting for a change of heart

The cooptation of strategies of affective community making by right-wing populists demonstrate the tenuousness of the multitude as a political strategy. It's easy to find failure in the examples of the multitude Hardt and Negri give, from the Occupy Wall Street to Standing Rock. As is true of the examples in this dissertation, in most of these cases, the alternative forms of political and social organization withered in the face of hostility from

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was killed by the FBI during a traffic stop, under unclear circumstances. The Malheur occupation stands in direct opposition to the Standing Rock protests, both in the scope of the protest and the response by law enforcement. See the *Oregonian's* "Oregon standoff timeline" for a narrative of the occupation itself and Catherine Thorbecke's "Oregon Siege and North Dakota Protest: Both Land Battles, But Similarities End There" and Michael McLean's "A Tale of Two Standoffs" for a comparison between the Malheur occupation and the NoDAPL protests.

governmental or extralegal forces. And for many, simply celebrating the multitude as foundational to a rethinking of global democracy—arguing as Hardt and Negri do that "the primary decision made by the multitude is really a decision to create a new race, or rather, a new humanity" (*Multitude* 356)—seems naïve. Indeed, one of the most common critiques of Hardt and Negri's work is that they offer no roadmap for achieving this new humanity, save the assurance that "revolutionary politics must grasp, in the movement of the multitudes and through the accumulation of common and cooperative decisions, the moment of rupture of *clinamen* that can create a new world" (357).[13] As Judith Butler points out in her own rumination on the potential for a politics based on commonality, "It is not easy to understand how a political community is wrought from such [affective] ties" (*Precarious Life* 25).

Rather than focus on the moment of revolutionary rupture when the multitude emerges to propel us all toward a new world, perhaps it's better to think in terms of multitudes plural—the multiplicity of moments in which lived alternatives actually exist and proliferate. As Hardt and Negri's oeuvre implies, these instances represent an accumulating force that exposes even in the face of failure what José Muñoz calls the "concrete possibility for another world" (1). After all, as Hardt and Negri explain, all we really know is that "the extraordinary accumulations of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a radical insurrectionary demand" (*Multitude* 358). Silko calls this moment of rupture a "change of consciousness" and a change of heart," emphasizing the connection between an affective recognition of the all-affected and its revolutionary

[13] In "Multitude, Are You There?" Bruce Robbins acerbically argues,

> When pressured on the multitude by their critics, Hardt and Negri tend to back down, talking about its "making" rather than what it already is, or calling it a "project" that might only be realized at some future date: "not a spontaneous political subject but a project of political organization." I take this as an admission that the multitude exists only on the drawing board, where it shares space with a lot of other unbuilt and perhaps unbuildable structures.

potential. The years since Silko published her novel have proven that the process is not yet complete. In light of this, Silko's call is both a recognition of the challenges in effecting great change and an optimistic attention to the future. As Silko portends, the change is coming, but for now, we must wait and prepare.

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