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Thrillology: Affective Intensities and the Everyday-Spectacular in American Literature and Culture

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THRILLOLOGY:
AFFECTIVE INTENSITIES AND THE EVERYDAY-SPECTACULAR
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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ABSTRACT

“*Thrillology: Affective Intensities and the Everyday-Spectacular in American Literature and Culture*” presents thrill as a powerful thematic component centered on immediate affective gratification informing character development and narrative. This perspective rethinks theme as always having an affective dimension that accompanies its conceptual articulations, with the former, in many cases, being the more important element. Thrilled psycho-emotional states emerge, in their own right, as legitimizations of individuality and cultural autonomy from the perspective of the passional subject. Engaging with a broad spectrum of literary and cultural sources spanning the last hundred years, this project investigates various ways in which the self-fulfilling affective intensity of thrill imparts a compelling spectacularization to everyday experience.

Case studies featuring Naturalist novels by Norris, Sinclair, and Dreiser expose the pursuit of material success as an intoxicating affect that drives central figures, regardless of the attainment, and inevitable loss, of wealth. In contrast, Ishmael Reed’s *MumboJumbo* presents a very different *frisson* of social rebellion that is determined to find fulfillment within its defiance and re-appropriation of cultural identity, no matter the stacked-odds confronting protagonists. And, book-ending nearly a century of fictional engagements with the pervasiveness of fame, fortune, and celebrity in mainstream consciousness, Nathanael West’s *Day of the Locust* and Bret Easton Ellis’ *Glamorama* portray the pursuit of thrill as an end itself, regardless of any realization of stardom. Finally, these thrillological considerations extend into contemporary American *social*

texts, here embodied by the recurring spectacle of the Super Bowl broadcast and the extravaganza of Apple.com's 2010 web-based introduction of the *iPad*.

Through its examination of thrill as a positive affective power and the capacity of such excitation to translate into modes of expression and identification, *Thrillology* adds new perspectives to the body of contemporary affect theoretical literary analysis that has been prominently concerned with the examination of negative affective dimensions. This project brings a variety of theoretical fields into conversation in order to achieve a versatile conception of thrill's affect, combining literary and cultural modes of analysis that co-involve affect theory, performance studies, theorization of spectacle and *The Everyday*, and effects of mass-media and consumerism.

CHAPTER ONE: METHOD AND TELOS

“*Thrillology: Affective Intensities and the Everyday-Spectacular in American Literature and Culture*” presents thrill as a powerful thematic component centered on immediate affective gratification that informs character development and narrative. This perspective rethinks theme as always having an affective dimension that accompanies its conceptual articulations, with the former oftentimes being the more important element. Crucially, thrilled psycho-emotional states emerge, in their own right, as legitimizations of individuality and cultural autonomy from the perspective of the passional subject. Engaging with a broad spectrum of literary and cultural sources, this project’s case studies investigate various ways in which affectively-charged states influence subjects’ sense of aspiration, purpose and destiny. This is to say that, in a wide variety of contexts—including, for example, the American Dream, social rebellion, and the allure of fame, which often appear as conceptual goals invariably deferred—the self-fulfilling (*autotelic*) affective intensity of thrill imparts a compelling spectacularization of everyday experience.

Indeed, American literature and culture are the site of widespread interrelation between tropes of the Everyday and the Spectacular. The Spectacular, born of humanity’s limitless appetite for entertainment and titillation, rises to ever-greater societal prominence, evolving from the earliest games and dramas of antiquity into our (post-post-)modern mega-million dollar, globally-consumed communications, news, and entertainment industries. Framed in contemporary perspectives, this *Thrillology* focuses its consideration on topics spanning the last hundred years. From sport to war, beauty to gore, featuring and fawning upon myriad incarnations of celebrity and royalty, tragedy and victory, the array of *spectacle* engenders countless modes of subjective involvement

and a proliferation seemingly without boundary. Of a piece with the pandemic spectacularism are *intra-appropriations* between spectacle and everyday as instantiated in a wide assortment of cultural texts and contexts, literary and non-fictional. These range across diverse spheres of everyday life, informing its private moments, as well as mass-attended social events, all of which are, more often than not, refracted in the global machinations of consumer-capitalism. Within such intersubjectivities, it is important to note that the spectacular is borrowing from the everyday just as readily as is the inverse of that dynamic.

This study's central concern is investigation into the psycho-behavioral reasons involved in such affinities. While it is only moderately revelatory to 'shine a spotlight on' the increasing presence of everyday-spectacular phenomena, especially as these have become familiar societal elements, it does seem fair to say that inquiry into the forces driving such developments bears further intensification and reveals greater complexity. It would not be the first time, after all, that conspicuous and thoroughgoing aspects of the human condition were accorded insufficient critical attention, if only because they seem so familiar—'reality,' always in our face and informing our experience, can seem beyond question.

The spectacular informs the quotidian, just as the Everyday rises into spectacle, megacultures¹ of humanity's deep and fixating interest in all things sensational and intoxicating. Thence, important questions: *Why?* What catalyzes the recombinations of Everyday-Spectacularism? What are the consequences of such interrelations? The proposition, in this study, regarding such existential and experiential motivations shall be, simply put: *for the thrill of it*. This notion put simply, however, should in no way be

equated with simplicity—for superficial engagement with the phenomenon of thrill succumbs to compromisingly simplistic apprehension, indeed.

Taking analytic steps towards a more developed understanding, this *thrillology* frames the subjective experiences of individuals, as well as those shared *en masse*, by proffering the notion of a *rapture-telos*—a powerful desire-mode that seeks, above all, the thrill of affective intensities and their repeating climax and catharsis. In this case, ‘rapture’ is not to be associated with its theological connotations, rather with affective intensities of excitation, euphoria, passion, and so forth. Moreover, the *rapture-telos* model demonstrates that spectacle—as opposed to being delineated by, and delineating, actors and onlookers, wherein the performance’s goal is to entertain spectators—is, more importantly, a venue for experiential and performative modes that dissolve barriers between stage and audience. Subject-desire becomes realized through active participation, because therein lies the greatest potential for (the fulfillments of) *thrill*. It is never enough to *spectate* the spectacular, its appropriation and consumption manifest an irrepressible affective *telos*.

Of course, it is hardly groundbreaking to claim that thrill-seeking drives and motivates people; much like ‘desire,’ or ‘pleasure,’ such concepts tend towards the nebulous in definition and the general in their explanation of human behavior. Therefore, this study will undertake the exposition of a variety of *modes* of the rapture-telos, or thrill-drive, in the interests of nuancing its ontologies, contexts and effects. To lend further structure to the analysis, whose propositions engage the greater human condition, three initial contrasting categories are established for further development:

1. Making It
2. Breaking It
3. Faking It

Short-form characterizations of the categories are as follow:

Making It is embodied in the rapture of success—both in the material sense, as well as in other forms of personal fulfillment, as, for example, in the more ideological telie of the pursuit of happiness, social status, or prosperity. *Breaking It* is the thrill of rebellion, of transgression, rejection, and negation, or indeed the destruction of existing socio-cultural strictures and structures (oftentimes societally-constructed/sanctioned *types* of ‘rapture’ and of ‘making it’). Lastly, *Faking It* consists in performances of rapture, in thrilling behavior intimately involved with the experience and expression of identity. Particularly in consumer-cultural modes of personalized signification and appropriations of celebrity culture, for example, the acting out of identity manifests behaviors every bit as involved and complex as those in the world of performance arts. Crucially, *faking it* is never ‘fake,’ rather is always already a very real mode that empowers the thrill (and immediate access to the telie) of persona, personhood, and socio-cultural identity.

Fundamentally, exposition of the *rapture-telic* drive is an interdisciplinary and multi-modal cultural studies endeavor dedicated to the assembly of a wide-ranging and versatile perspective that is accompanied by investigative depth. Hence, the diversification of primary source materials for its analyses is as crucial as the disambiguation of *rapture-telos* modes. To these ends, fictive source materials spanning the last century, useful in their reflections of and commentaries on American society and culture (Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, Nathanael West, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis,

and Ishmael Reed) are augmented by non-fiction texts selected for their relevance to the overall theoretical (thrillological) frame. As a consequence, exposition of the *rapture-telos* and attendant everyday-spectacular contexts will extend into source materials embodied in *social texts*—to be understood, here, as events, narratives, and thematics related to American culture, particularly as affected by contemporary consumer culture. *Making It* engages with a spectacle at the center of our 20th/21st-century Circus Americanus, the Super Bowl broadcast (in this study, Super Bowl XLVI (2012) on NBC), and provides a multi-media text for *rapture-telic* considerations. Then, in *Faking It*, Apple.com's web-based introduction of the *iPad* will present a case study involving the contemporary phenomena of cyber-interactivity and digital self-(re)presentation.

A nota bene should be added that, while theoretical considerations of the *rapture-telos* will be broad and applied to American society over a century's span, the specific case studies receiving in-depth attention have been chosen for their wide-ranging relevance and applicability. Of course, there exist countless literary and cultural artifacts that would be worthwhile to examine through the *rapture-telic* lens (in addition to diversification of its *modes*, beyond the trio considered here). *Thrillology*, however, is meant not only as a kick-off into exactly such expansions, but also targets an initial, generalized framing of method, and one applied to mainstream cultural contexts such that its findings remain as widely relevant as possible.

This is not to say, of course, that such topics have not undergone previous analysis; much of late 20th-century cultural theory is indeed devoted to elucidating the psycho-social effects of contemporary cultural environments. Major works by Adorno, Debord, Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Jameson, to name just a few among many others,

expound upon concepts of modern/postmodern alienation, superficiality, hyperrealities of simulation, evolutions of media effects, etc., wherein notions of truth and reality threaten to melt into thin air, confusion reigns, and so-called ‘grand narratives’ mutate incessantly, become untenable. Still, certain *megacultural* trends are worth re-considering, especially with an emphasis on the ways in which people, aka, subjects, *use* (rather than suffer under, or become deluded by) these same conditions.

In the *rapture-telic* examinations of this study, it is the excited *feelings* bound up in each case’s situation and action that are ultimately compelling, if not eclipse the ostensible pursuits of success, rebellion, and the performance of identity. Whether associated with modes of *making it*, *breaking it*, or *faking it*, this project’s analytical approach highlights the psycho-emotional power,² the *frisson* of thrill, not merely as vehicle, venue and catalyst for affective gratification, but also as a vital context for the experience of identity. This is to say that, in every case, *Thrillology*’s over-arching conceptual trifecta—co-involving the everyday-spectacular’s binary and its affective conjurations of *rapture*—will form the analytical basis of investigation. At the outset, however, discussion of its central socio-cultural contexts and theoretical framework, as embodied in the notion of the *everyday-spectacular* and other relevant theorizations, is warranted. These framings will locate the theoretical parameters of thrill and its affective dimensions, both in terms of useful previous theorizations and with respect to the wide varieties of context and case studies that inhere in this research project. Most effective, however, before elaborating their myriad conjunctions is an explanatory review of these two crucial tropes.

Everydayisms

Terminological definitions specific to the *everyday-spectacular* need not be conjured sui generis; rather, its conjunction draws from well-developed fields of inquiry. Formal scholarly consideration of the Everyday reaches back to turn-of-the-20th-century sociological investigations by Georg Simmel centered on metropolitan life, fashion, sociability and public behavior, as well as economic influences on value and exchange systems. Karl Marx's socio-economic analyses also engage with the Everyday and capitalism's effects on workers, workplace, and quality of life. Continuing the critique of capitalized modern society, the 1930s' Britain-based Mass-Observation project, and mid-century/post-war French social theorists including Henri Lefebvre, Georges Perec, and Michel de Certeau, expanded theoretical lenses into anthropological and ethnographic dimensions, incorporated the consideration of media effects, and interrogated the concepts of 'mainstream' and 'mass-'. These evolving approaches within study of the Everyday also began to develop notions of subjective agencies embedded in quotidian experience, and exposed tactics of cultural appropriation and revitalization catalyzed by the sites and contexts of everyday life.

More contemporary scholars such as Ben Highmore, Joe Moran, Michael Sheringham,³ among others, have expanded conceptions of Everyday Studies into cultural studies themes and theoretical approaches, while integrating a great deal of earlier work into their broader analyses. Consequently, the overall scope of the Everyday's discursive field is wide, heterogeneous, and intricate, with each of the many projects making its own valuable contribution. The more detailed theoretical overview

that follows here, however, will primarily serve to generate a working model of the Everyday that is most relevant to its interaction with the Spectacular—always with an anticipatory eye towards immanent conjurings of the *rapture-telos* as an effect of the dynamic.

No matter the wide variety of trajectories that theorize the Everyday, all more or less initiate with the explication of behaviors typically thought of as quotidian. A common ontological characteristic is based in the frequent and repeated occurrence of certain actions and experiences, if not their inescapable omnipresence. Analyses then work towards more general distillation of everyday qualities framed by such repetition. At a fundamental level, the greater inquiry interrogates that which makes the familiar, familiar. Of course, everyday experience is inevitably subjective to the extreme, and any similarities or trends necessarily emerge from great diversity. Therefore, at a very basic level, the concept remains essentially un-fixable and requires exposition that covers a great deal of ground.

Nonetheless, theorists tend to begin with perhaps the habitual associations that would occur to most people when confronted with notions of the Everyday. Routine and regimentation, with boredom and monotony as over-riding affective contexts, are central to and product of the workaday world. Likewise, its highly predictable, repetitive management of time has an effect wherein the temporal itself seems to evaporate into a sort of debilitating non-factor, as countless moments pass without distinction. In this sense, Marx's diagnoses of systemization and alienation, for example, can be seen as foundational. Subsequent theorists, moreover, trace such characteristics into nook-and-cranny detail, and see controlling and rigidifying effects, not only in the organization of

society, but as endemic to a great majority of behaviors, actions, and perceptions that engage subjects in modern civilization. In addition to Weberian rationalization of administrative and legal systems, Highmore's analyses discuss Siegfried Giedion's depictions of a mechanization penetrating to everyday material sites through examples such as eating, washing, resting, and even death, and whose banal codification only reinforces notions of the hyper-ordinary trivialization of the Everyday. (8)

Interdisciplinary analyses of contemporary Everyday Studies, however, move beyond a focus on mundanity and engage with post-World War II theorization based in the reestablishment of the quotidian as a site of great liberative potential. Michael Sheringham, in his 2006 tour de force, *Everyday Life*, reinforces such critical approaches as concatenated with everyday ontology, proper: "If the everyday is the site of a struggle between alienation and appropriation, critical reflection is inevitably involved in a similar dynamic. . . . Ways of rethinking the everyday . . . acknowledge its resistance to thought, [an] indeterminacy that makes for its paradoxical strength." (360) Echoing de Certeau's emphasis on irrepressible subjective agencies crucially locatable within the regimentation of quotidian life, Sheringham's perspective acknowledges a "wider cultural shift from systems and structures to practices and performances." (292) Thus, a preeminent keyword for the Everyday Studies project, in its hundred-year development, is unquestionably *agency*. Consequently, analytical pressure applied to the experiences, contexts, and details of the Everyday yield a flip-side to the quotidian mundane, one that is packed with unpredictable potential.

Another school of thought, Andre Breton and the Surrealist movement, presents further interesting considerations of everyday life, especially as a first gesture towards the

inter-combinations of an *everyday-spectacular* phenomenon, as proposed in this thrillology. Acknowledging Surrealism as a political-revolutionary movement towards societal liberation (as well as an argument about aesthetics), the desire for a re-activation of deeper consciousness (and conscience), must also necessarily accomplish its effect at the level of everyday life. The connection to *rapture-telic* orientations inheres in the mandate for a subjective abandon to feeling in the immediate moment (the everyday), aimed as much at the transcendence of capitalist constraints, as dedicated to a resuscitation of the affective essences of everyday experience. It is an unmediated rawness of feeling, the purest connection to experience, to be pursued at any cost, that Breton champions, in *The Second Manifesto*, with a call to “uproot thought from an increasingly cruel state of thralldom . . . to return to its original purity.” (124) Rapturous states that spectacularize everyday day life share a similar affect-centered impetus, in the case studies to follow.

Nevertheless, it remains useful to not entirely divest the Everyday of its originary qualities of routine, ennui, repetitiveness, etc. These will remain relevant to this study’s literary and cultural interest in subjective experientiality, wherein quotidian entrapment and routinization emerge as catalytic to action seeking newfound agency and identity performance. Moreover, the more monotonous aspects of the Everyday retain their salience if only because, rather inescapably, the greater sense of the *every-day* inevitably contains or at least relates to *every-thing*. Engaging with Claude Riviere’s *La Ritualisation du quotidien* (1996), Sheringham agrees with characterization of the Everyday as a “basic touchstone of reality . . . the core of concrete lived experience.” (300) Its “pre-existing set of situations” (300) may well give rise to unexpected agencies

and dynamics, but the ‘daily grind’ remains a fundament for inquiry into everyday life, a necessary starting-point, regardless of intriguing socio-theoretical reconsiderations, that inevitably maintains its influence and presence within the human condition. Certainly it can be taken as self-evident that boredom’s recrudescence is every bit as omnipresent as humanity’s eternal curiosity and desire for new experience; moreover, it is precisely the systematized organization of everyday routine that often inevitably functions as a context and catalyst for new lines of flight.

Sheringham’s articulations explicitly follow upon Georges Perec’s conception of Everyday study as an ongoing ‘project’—always as focused on its own developing processes of investigation, as upon the continued *émergence* (Perec) of the Everyday from limiting, quotidian categorizations. Sheringham further elucidates that project’s approach as one “‘tuning in’ to a particular level of existence, a new mode of attention... In doing so, it generates attention to the present, to the unresolved matter of what is still in process.” (391) Sheringham further notes that “the project brings us into proximity with something that might have seemed familiar, but which we now acknowledge more fully.” (391) Overlooked and often undervalued affective qualities of Everyday experience are of particular relevance to this study’s proposed interaction between the Everyday and the Spectacular. To wit, the *rapture-telos* is marked by its capacity for perpetual immanence and re-creation; it is always emergent. Furthermore, its spectacularized “level of existence” in contemporary culture is, indeed, omnipresent to the point of quotidian familiarity, a presence which this study’s explorations will seek to ‘acknowledge more fully.’

Of course, the foregoing summary of the Everyday studies project remains necessarily preliminary, prior to its application to any specific literary or social texts. Greater explication will follow within the main case studies, as will in-depth reconnection to a variety of theories on the Everyday. The main purpose of this introductory chapter, however, remains the establishment of a construct for the Everyday, in purely theoretical terms and context, to be specifically counterpoised to notions of the Spectacular. These first articulations target an elucidation of each of the dyad's theoretical underpinnings, in concert with dialectical interactions at the conceptual level, whose most important consequence is the evocation of the central theoretical component of this study, the *rapture-telos*.

In sum, the *what is it?* consideration of the Everyday not only explodes definability, but typological parameters as well. Its multiplicity is underscored by its proliferation, as enumerated here, into a wide range of investigations, including sociological and ethnographic approaches (Simmel, Mass-Observation), humanist Marxism (Lefebvre), anthropology, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, post-structuralism, and literary experimentation (de Certeau and Perec). What is crucial, then, is precisely the versatility, mutability, and potentiality afforded by the Everyday as a context for subjective claim-staking and empowerment that is both pervasive and highly diversified. Thanks to its reconceptualization in the hands of the greater Everyday Studies project as an ideational trope and as a material locus, the concept emerges from quotidian circumscription and into more dynamic interactions for both its analysts and, more importantly, its denizens.

Powers of myth-making, revitalizing rebellion, and the un-determinable appropriation of power towards identity creation and expression, all of these will find their bases and origins within contexts of the Everyday, in the primary texts to be examined in this study. The emphasis will be upon active, empowered subjects whose everyday appropriations and manipulations, to again borrow from Sheringham, "...weave contexts together," and whose "practices make it [everyday existence] visible." (360) In concert with theoretical trajectories of the greater Everyday Studies project, this *thrilllogical* analysis interrogates Everyday contexts of the human condition, and agrees that a capacity for the mining of meaning and significant feeling, embedded in its details, gestures towards conceptions of the quotidian as anything but mundane and limited. It is a potentiality that proposes an appositive dialectic with the momentous, and one whose reclamations are rife with elements of the spectacular.

Spectacularism

The notion of spectation, as embedded in the term *spectacle*, calls for reappraisal within the scope of this study's recombinations of the Spectacular within the Everyday, and vice versa. Initial entries in the Oxford English Dictionary serve to highlight a pair of the phenomenon's most evident and universal qualities. One aspect of definition emphasizes visuality, from the Latin root *spectare*, to look, citing the spectacle as something to be witnessed by some form of audience: "a specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature (I.1.1 a.I.1.a) . . . exhibited to, or set before, the public gaze (2.1.2) . . . A thing seen or capable of being seen... a sight (3.1.3a)." The

second aspect is qualitative and centers upon the extraordinariness particular to such spectacular apparitions meant for visual consumption: "...forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment (I.1.1 a.I.1.a) . . . either (a) of curiosity or contempt, or (b) of marvel or admiration (2.1.2) . . . esp. of a striking or unusual character (3.1.3a)."

These are accurate articulations, certainly, orientations with which to begin, but also already lacking (despite the ensuing bevy of further definitions) with regard to other qualities that might readily be suggested. For one, the OED's descriptions tend towards the passive; the spectacle is to be *spectated*, viewed by an audience at some degree of remove, if not un-involvement. The mere idiom "making a spectacle of oneself" reminds us that the phenomenon always is also performative, has its agents, its actors, and (and this will emerge as a central tenet of this study) often includes and even depends on the audience's participation for its conjurations.

Indeed, the further development of an understanding of spectacle should necessarily include the capacity for subjective involvement, in other words, a criterion that insists upon an always extant dimension of both compelling relevance and accessibility. Spectacles, no matter how lurid or grandiose can never 'fall silently in the forest,' with nobody paying attention—their ontology is eventive, not only in terms of witness and audience, but perhaps more importantly in their necessary quality of some significant level of relatability/relationality, be that connection symbolic, affective, reflective, or identity-formative. This is to say that, as much as we know spectacle when we encounter its presence, that knowledge inheres in content-based association as much as in experiential qualities. The very notion of spectators watching the spectacle, of spectation itself, is contested within the intra-appropriations of the everyday-spectacular,

wherein boundaries between the two are transcended and utilized in pursuit of the *rapture-telos*' thrilling affect.

Moreover, further fleshing out of the concept can proceed (even prior to considering theoretical contributions by scholars that make the spectacular their pointed field of study) under the auspices of common knowledge and experience, if only because, in our globally-mediatised, *info-tained* world centered on entertainment as much as the spread of information, notions of the spectacular are pervasive to the point of inescapability. Globalized communication pours gasoline on and fans the flames of any given instance of spectacle, not only because it culls both from the worldwide panoply of spectacular events and then disseminates inter-continently, but also in its tendency towards ever more extreme instantiations. Since these phenomena are largely presented via commercial media purveyors seeking maximum viewership, the tendency is towards baser forms of graphic sensation, taboo, scandal, conflict, and tragedy. These are unceasingly represented by the rotating menu of death, destruction, war, hedonistic excess, celebrity worship and immolation, and sensationalized internecine competition in all possible contexts, with which contemporary global audiences are so (unavoidably) familiar. Readers are invited to take a moment to contemplate their own witnessed examples from the categories short-listed here, typologies that doubtlessly bear further expansion.

Furthermore, such sensationalized spectacularism needs to target engaging content, thereby gaining additional traction and relevance by virtue of discernible implications for all involved. Then, spectacular significance, or perhaps better said, *signification*—for the significance (say, of exploding skyscrapers and assassinations, or celebrity drug habits

and weight fluctuations, or any of myriad everyday consumer items, from espresso to dish detergent, etc. etc.) may well remain elusive, if not entirely ephemeral—can function in the capacity of socio-cultural *eidolon*, both as a mediatized sort of apparitional instantiation, as well as gain function as a cultural idol capable of carrying indentitarian imagery. No matter that spectacles involving crises of death and destruction, rabidly represented by non-stop media-coverage, may raise questions that remain irresolvable, the mere notion of apocalyptic change, for example, commands invested attention. It is a testament, moreover, to the powers of spectacularization that commercial interludes are apparently able to interject themselves, with their own, equally-engaging imagery and messaging. This is to say that the palpability, the affective power of spectacle, in addition to its capacity as socio-cultural referent, further identifies its instances as momentous *events of scale*, as much in terms of intense accorded attention, audience numbers and proliferating reaction, as in its qualities of extraordinariness and remarkability.

The spectacle's dynamic powers of symbiotic communication and identification may also be thought of as an immanent becoming of significance, an eventive intensity that catalyzes meaning and feeling, as much as it commands witness. These additional conceptions of spectacle not only move beyond the OED's audience-oriented *spectation* into understanding the phenomenon as always interactive, but also explicate its functionality beyond visuality into any/all faculties of perception, feeling, and realms of intellectual, spiritual, psychological intercourse. Indeed, this study's pointed analysis of intra-appropriations between the spectacular and the everyday target an elucidation of Spectacle's greater functionality within modern/contemporary contexts of human experience.

Society IS the Spectacle

Whenever the subject of spectacle is at hand, Guy Debord's 1967 tour de force, *The Society of the Spectacle*, necessarily casts a looming shadow. It is not only the work's pointed examination of spectacle itself, but its relevance to much of later-20th-century socio-cultural analysis, that lend Debord's theorization eminence. Debord's view of the post-WWII world is one that relates myriad forms of spectacular performance to societal conflict arising in the contexts of titanic capitalistic industry and commercialist sensationalism. Meta-analyses of the phenomenon of spectatorial witness and consequent implications thereof are also integral to the project. It is an exegesis very much informed by Marxian perspectives and, while Debord's commentary ranges across a great variety of topics, it is fair to say that his central argument is a comprehensive critique of contemporary society as afflicted by capitalism availing itself of spectacle as another tool for exploitation and oppression. Debord's theoretical analyses are consistently interlaced with a revolutionary and activist agenda in articulations such as "dialectical theory is a scandal and an abomination in terms of the rules . . . their necessary destruction." (Thesis 205) The attitude is perhaps most stridently crystallized in the starkly militant closing statement of Debord's Preface to the Third French edition (1992): "This book should be read bearing in mind that it was written with the deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society."(10)

Nonetheless, and with the ready concession that Debord's observations retain pointed relevance in the decades subsequent to his passing (1994), the 21st-century's hyper-mediatized and increasingly entertainment-obsessed paradigm calls for expansions of the theoretical lenses through which spectacle should be considered. The greater realm

of cultural studies, with its interdisciplinary forays into such specialized fields as media, performance, affect, and celebrity studies, for example, engage spectacular concepts at levels of particular detail that the focused anti-capitalist interrogations of Debord's theoretical mode perhaps only gesture to obliquely.

In general, more recent examinations of spectacle as purveyed by global commercial entertainment, when viewed with an emphasis on cultural environments, train their pervasive influence at the superstructural level of subjective experience. While certainly perpetuating much of the economically totalizing effects of capitalism, particularly with regard to entertainment industries, these new forms can be seen to target a metamorphosed sense of use value that prizes potentialities for affective interaction and performances of identity. This expansion beyond pure Debordian-Marxian analysis of spectacle acknowledges an oftentimes willed symbiosis wherein subjects “buy into” systems of global commercialism and—to borrow Fredric Jameson's spectacularly graphic metaphor, in *Postmodernism*, “like lightning striking from the superstructure back to the base, fuses its unlikely materials into a gleaming lump” (xiii)—demand to partake in society's spectacularism on their own terms.

Crucially, an upshot of the *rapture-telos* project's literary and cultural case studies will propose a tweaking of Debord's thesis-bearing title into “the society *is* the spectacle.” This change of preposition to verb aims at adapting the emphasis of spectacular society-forming industries (Marxian ground-up base-informing-superstructure) to a more cybernetic/symbiotic model wherein society is in effect indistinguishable from its spectacles—its spectacle *is* the everyday, as much as the everyday is spectacular.

In addition to the preceding complication of Debord's model, further qualitative description of the phenomenon of spectacle helps to frame this study's understanding of its experiential essences. 'Spectacle' is always a very personal, that is to say, subjective experience that remains particular to its site of occurrence within the perception of any given subject; thereby, and perhaps most importantly, it is an experience that is *felt*. It is this penetrating and explosive dimension of feeling that is missing in Debord's wide-ranging sociological/historical engagement. Subjective reactions to spectacle (even in collective experiences) are invariably related as personal anecdote—a sort of “where were you when...” contextual framing accompanied, perhaps even more importantly, by a “how you felt” correlative to the event. Such reception-side emphasis should be acknowledged as a mode of active participation always intrinsic to 'reception,' witness, or spectation, wherein perception is an act in its own right. Moreover, subjective acts of 'spectation,' inherent in performances of spectacle, invariably include much more interactivity than mere perception. At a basic level, for instance, 'making a spectacle of *one-self*,' the active engagement and social ubiquity thereof, must incontestably occupy as much phenomenological salience within the greater exegesis of the spectacular as do more standardized audience-show/witness-media binaries.

It should suffice to say the purpose here is to both acknowledge Debord's framework and analysis, while simultaneously beginning to exert liberating pressure upon the understanding of the concept, sociologically, theoretically, and culturally. Such engagement at the purely theoretical level, as previously indicated, should serve the purpose of highlighting key concepts that undergird and integrate this study's primary goal: exposition of the *rapture-telos*.

Spectacles of the Hyperreal

Given that in *Simulacra and Simulation* Jean Baudrillard announces the end of Debordian spectacle as a functional socio-cultural mode of analysis, “We are witnessing the end of perspectival and panoptic space..., and thus the very abolition of the spectacular,” (30) it would seem unlikely that his own theorization retain relevance to that very subject. Yet Baudrillard’s concept of the *hyperreal* does exhibit usefulness both in the explication of contemporary spectacularism and with regard to the *rapture-telos*. Baudrillard contends that the *hyperreal*, arises as a consequence of the erosion of identifiable “reality” under the widespread effects of simulation and an attendant precession of simulacra as their formative precondition. Hyperreality, then, exists as a mere template of authenticity, of the real, with no referent original—a void of actual reality. Baudrillard repeatedly characterizes the effect as one of *vertigo*, of *aleatory* determination, and invokes the Mobius strip’s reversible twirl to elucidate the confusion of an escaping apprehension of reality, and of dialectical analyses.

A briefly summarized example illustrates the simulation/simulacra dynamic at work. In this case, the rule and overall concept of *law* sees its alleged reality, as a social standard, cast as an ephemeral simulacrum. Baudrillard proposes the idea of “a fake holdup” wherein harmless weapons are used and victims are accomplices (20). The no doubt uncontested result of summoned law enforcement and inevitable legal consequences, Baudrillard contends, shows that distinction between actual crime and its faked replication can be muddled. To follow Baudrillard’s further conclusion that the rule of law is hereby de-legitimized⁴ is a stretch, but the example does illustrate the notion of “reality” slipping into abstraction and questionable verifiability, wherein the presence of

simulacra must be acknowledged. Particularly in realms such as consumer-advertising's representations of everyday life, or in celebrity-culture influenced performances of public persona, such destabilization (if not evaporation) of an identifiably real existential templates is a genuine factor. Indeed, Baudrillard's subsequent repetition of such theoretical treatments—in cases involving Disney Land, the Watergate Scandal, religious iconography, installations at the Centre Pompidou, and others—is operative in exposing further effects of simulation and the influence of intangible simulacra.

The notion of *hyperreality*, however, finds new application within *rapture-telic* contexts. As much as Baudrillard's pervasive simulacrizization eliminates any site for, or possible authenticity of, an authoritative 'real,' a simultaneous flip-side of the theoretical model clears space for new incarnations, which are authentic in their own rights, moments, and performances. Moreover, it should be noted that, Baudrillard's selection of high-profile examples notwithstanding, a theory centered on the evaporation of the Real and its replacement by a ghostlike *hyperreality* giving rise to entirely new conceptions of culture and society is a spectacular proposition in and of itself. This sort of proliferating divestment of authenticity empowers new appropriations at the level of the Everyday. Subjects may borrow consciously from the templates, statures, and symbolizations of preceding simulacra, in a willed subversion of authority. Hyperreal conditions of simulation open up everyday-spectacular dynamics to new contexts for subjective performativity and invention that, in their own right, must be considered authentic, or "real."

Such symbioses, exhibiting agencies of identity performance and affective fulfillment as opposed to the aleatory confusions of Baudrillard's hyperreal diagnoses,

will emerge in the subsequent analysis of fictional reflections of society and close readings in the rhetorical environments of consumer culture. Examples involving subjective expression through clothing, art, culinary preferences, brand signification, consumer choice, and other manipulable contexts, will illustrate appropriations of socio-cultural *eidola* such as wealth, power, and/or fulfillment, wherein reference to the ideals being represented is incarnate in the performance of such ideals by subjects, in their own particular moments and cultural contexts.

Spectacularizing Media

In more recent critical engagements with the spectacular, emphases are decidedly centered on the relevance of multi-media, especially in its filmic, televisual, and now internet-based forms—in other words, the great techno-communicative vehicles of global entertainment industry. Correspondingly, in this thrillology, aspects of mediatized spectacle will come to bear upon primary texts set in the later twentieth-century's rise of digital information and entertainment technologies. Geoff King's 2005 media and cultural studies anthology *The Spectacle of the Real* centers on such topics, and its overarching concern with the interrelationships of 'reality' and spectacle somewhat mirrors the everyday-spectacular correlation of this project. For King, as articulated in his introduction, contemporary mediatized spectacularism interfaces with reality in two particularly significant dynamics: first, in the spectacular (re)presentation of reality in various media forms, most particularly via the enchantments of ever-evolving special-effects magic and sensationalism; and, second, in self-referential claims to the

spectacular, per se, as augmented by the hype of big-budget marketing campaigns and an attendant public relations industry devoted to celebrity culture.

In addition to its filmic investigations, King's anthology moves through a diverse array of media genres, including reality television in its myriad forms (from gameshow-competitions and Real World/Big Brother-style social experiments to professional wrestling, medical procedure documentary), news reportage (mostly of disaster and trauma), sports culture, pornography/'real' sex, candid camera/close-circuit surveillance footage, etc.—formats that, in addition to King's own introduction, are surveyed in Douglas Kellner's opening essay "Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle." Sharing crucial methodological and culture-analytical goals with this study, King closes his opening remarks with an explication of the anthology's wide lens and critical ethos: "The value of a thematically oriented collection such as this is its ability to trace such phenomenon across media, rather than being limited to a focus on one particular terrain." (21) This is to say that these examinations prioritize real-spectacular thematics in their analysis of cultural symbioses, over various mediating forms.

For Kellner, the interpenetration of spectacle and everyday reality is an explicit thesis, and a phenomenon that he sees more generally as a pandemic pervasion of 'technospectacle' into seemingly every aspect of public life: "During the past decades, the culture industries have multiplied media spectacles in novel spaces and sites, and spectacle itself is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life. ...with the development of new multimedia and information technologies, technospectacles have been decisively shaping the contours and trajectories of present-day societies and cultures." (23-4) Kellner engages Debord, mostly to agree

with the latter's diagnosis of spectacularized society as being further organized by, and for, capitalist exploitation (a systematization that he refers to elsewhere as *technocapitalism* (Kellner 1989)), but adds that his own study aims at tracing the hegemonic take-over in more specific detail within diverse categories of film, television, consumerism, internet, etc., than does the macro-social lens of Debord's analysis. Moreover, Kellner's detailed cataloging of spectacle's widespread incursion into most aspects of social life also elicits a dialectical everyday-ification of spectacle. These sorts of behavioral-cultural intra-appropriations map quite well onto the dynamics at work between the Everyday and Spectacle, as they give rise to the affective environments of the *rapture-telos*.

Celebrity Cult(ure)

Another active and burgeoning field relevant to all things spectacular is the study of celebrity culture. It is a saliency evident in Routledge's 2006 *Celebrity Culture Reader*, edited by P. David Marshall, whose wide spectrum of analyses encompasses historical and contemporary perspectives through a diversity of text genres and critical approaches. The volume features a substantial assembly of scholars from various disciplines, many of whom are established experts in their respective fields, such as Leo Braudy, Leo Lowenthal, Lawrence Grossberg, Richard Dyer, Joe Moran, among others, in addition to collaborating Celebrity Culture authorities, Graeme Turner and Frances Bonner.

The anthology readily acknowledges the spectacular as the domain and central characteristic of celebrity culture, with these closely entwined aspects occupying an ever

more prominent presence in contemporary society and culture. Initial historicization by Sennet and Braudy, in particular, traces elements of celebrity culture back into the Renaissance and antiquity, respectively. Their perspectives serve Marshall's thematically-unifying editorial goal in that the emphasis remains focused on "the meaning of the celebrity in a grand narrative on the dimensions of individuality and identity in contemporary culture where comparisons between the self and the celebrity are continuously made and cultural norms are supported, altered, or dismantled." (4) Alternately, Marshall characterizes the dynamic as being based on "ingredients for the particular relationship between the individual and the hyper-individual." (8) And Sennet, in his article "Man as Actor," quotes Erik Erikson's definition of identity as "the meeting point between who a person wants to be and what the world allows him to be." (21)

Theorists such as Ernest Sternberg and Alison Hearn subsequently inject consideration of political economic aspects involved in celebrity culture. Both invoke Daniel Boorstin's concept of the image (from his seminal 1961 monograph of the same name, excerpted in the anthology in "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event") as a dominant force in 20th-century cultural and societal interactions. Sternberg, whose article is entitled "Phantasmagoric Labor: The new economics of self-presentation," claims that the preeminent force driving our current economy has gone beyond material products, and even information, to image. (418) Erving Goffman's notion of the dramaturgical performance of self(-presentation) as "how human beings accomplish meaning in their lives" is incorporated in Sternberg's phantasmagoric labor, from whence it is a not illogical step to identify celebrity culture as both a performance of such by stars, as well as a subjectively appropriable model. Such modeling, it should be

noted, in both the work of Sternberg and Goffman, is not at all confined to dreams of stardom, rather extends into almost all aspects of life, family, personal, career, wherein Sternbergian phantasmagoric labors of performance, of acting, of “composing the persona,” are as central to everyday life as they are to celebrity culture.

Alison Hearn’s related examination of “the incorporation of identity in the age of reality television” revolves around the notion of a “spectacularization of the self.” (618) For Hearn, influences of the greater culture/entertainment industry are informing a spectacularized market of persona: “The culture industry, then, is the exemplary mode of production, as it provides templates for effective performance, communicative and image skills, all requisite for the production of the entrepreneurial self.” (622) The opportunity should be taken here—in the interest of staying in touch with this project’s focus on intersections of spectacle and everyday—to point out that Hearn’s “incorporation of identity” represents a spectacularization of the self that exists at the level of audience involvement/consumer investment—a context *par excellence* informing dialectical symbioses of cultural production.

This, of course, is not to claim that all of celebrity culture studies, or even the *Celebrity Culture Reader*, can be boiled down in cursory summary of these few points. Indeed, what is to be taken away from this engagement with celebrity culture is that its relationships with spectacle are every bit as relevant as the preceding perspectives examined. As much as Debord’s visions of spectacular capitalism’s totalizing social and societal effects, Baudrillard’s perceived spectacular erosion and subsumption of authenticity, and Geoff King’s anthology centered on symbiotic intensifications arising between spectacle and the growing powers and proliferation of media(-technologies)—

celebrity culture also contributes significantly to spectacle's prominence in modern and postmodern culture. And, to retain this projects' critical cross-hairs trained on the everyday-spectacular nexus, it should be reiterated that each of these instantiations of the spectacular exhibits dialectical tropism towards the everyday (via the pervasion of hype(rbolic)-essences into the social sphere), as much as the preceding incarnations of the everyday gesture toward spectacular potentialities.

Nonetheless, analyses in the *Celebrity Culture Reader* remain mostly concerned with celebrity's influence upon everyday culture. Therefore the aim of this study will be an expanded investigation of audience-side appropriations of celebrity. A preeminent task, therefore, will be to ask the question, seemingly left unposed by much of celebrity culture studies: *why*—why have the tropes of celebrity gained such investment in contemporary culture? After all, one could argue that ample evidence exists to suggest that models of celebrity life would hardly be advisable/desirable, given the vulturistic media attention and dissections that take an obvious toll on the mere mortals trapped in stardom's and notoriety's scalding spotlights. Might not, in fact, a flight from, and abhorrence of, celebrity status be every bit as likely, as its dogged and adulating pursuit? Much of the existing analysis seems to focus on *how* celebrity affects culture and is used as a vehicle of subjective explorations and expression of identity, and, very frequently, is ascribed to a universal desire for attention (i.e. fame). These are completely worthwhile tacks of investigations, of course, but ones that do not necessarily undertake comprehensive inquiry into *the reasons for* celebrity culture's appropriation: a lacuna of sorts may well be exploited regarding the appeal, promise and potentiality of celebrity.

Rapture-Telos

Affect-Zones

Affect theory is useful in thinking about states and dynamics involving the *rapture-telos* and lends itself, as well, to further explication of the everyday and the spectacular as they are recruited into conjunction by the rapture-telic effect, ...or is it that their mutual affinities give rise to rapturous telie, ...or both? Embracing Deleuzian multi-dimensional models of (human and non-human) experience that intertwine and cross-pollinate the subjective and the objective into non-deterministic, evolving assemblages, a framing concept to be termed the *affect-zone* will be employed in the investigation of multiplex relations within *rapture-telic* contexts. While the integration of affect-related dynamics pertaining to everyday-spectacular thrill will proceed in the primary text case-studies that follow, this methodological introduction targets further explication at the purely theoretical level of affect-analysis.

Patricia Clough introduces her edited anthology, *The Affective Turn* (Duke 2007), by identifying “the realm of causality” involved with affects, suggesting, “They illuminate . . . both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers.” (ix) Clough further orients affective study around Deleuzian notions of “machinic assemblages.” These are particularly well-suited for the interactive dynamics that both foster and incarnate a “biophilosophy” of affect-systems wherein “the organism must be rethought as open to information . . . the event or chance occurrence arising out of the complexity of open

systems,” one whose approach to a “techno-ontological threshold” implicates it in a “postbiological evolution as part of its very definition.” (12)

While Deleuzian ‘biophilosophical’ conceptualizations require careful integration into the cultural and literary aspects of affect theory’s work, so-called postbiological/machinic dynamics of affective exchange and production ring as both prescient and relevant to the proliferation of (personalized) information-technology into innumerable facets of contemporary socio-cultural experience. Indeed, inquiry into such organic/inorganic co-evolutions not only figures prominently in Clough’s anthology, but accompanies affect theory’s extension into a variety of other fields.

Affect theory’s adaptability and widespread relevance is similarly evident in *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Siegworth (Duke 2010). Essays involving cultural studies’ investigations into cuisine, shame, glamour, and office culture, for example, are interestingly arranged in larger sections that include pieces centered on politics and economy (including a reprise by Clough of her ongoing research), war and terror, and purely philosophical-theoretical exegeses. Especially helpful is Gregg and Siegworth’s conscious editorial effort to portray the wide range of affect theory scholarship, by virtue of the diversity of the collection, as well as in their introductory chapter. The provocative statement “There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be,” (3) underscores their pointed valuation of the ongoing development and fertility of the approach, and sets the stage for their anthology to perform its own version of the field’s complex inter-connections and juxtapositions.

Nonetheless, in readily admitted dialectical tension with affect theory's replicant expansion and resistance to uniformity, Gregg and Siegworth proffer eight groupings, along thematic and primary source material lines, of research "concerns." Two of these conjoin to loosely arrange the purview of this thrillological study's affective frame, placing emphases on "lines of psychological and psychoanalytical inquiry... open to ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring... to a categorical naming of affects... with ultimate aims that are often more human-centered"; and, secondly, an interest (quoting Isabelle Stenger) in making "present, vivid and mattering, the imbroglio, perplexity and messiness of a worldly world, a world where we, our ideas and power relations, are never alone." (8) As stated, this introductory section on affect represents generalized gestures, at the macro-theoretical level of affective concepts, which will figure in more a detailed manner in the primary source material examinations to follow. The first point to be taken, however, concerns the mutuality of influence in affect-oriented systems, as well as the interdisciplinary, multi-modal/multi-textual, and topically diverse potential of the approach.

Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's co-written piece, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" (1995) is widely considered (perhaps along with Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect," published the same year) an inceptive moment in the affective turn of contemporary literary and cultural theory, particularly as relates to its incarnation as a new field. (5) Affect had previously been the subject of other, disparate thinkers and disciplines, including Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, and Silvan Tomkins, amongst many others. At any rate, it is specifically conceptualizations of the cybernetic, borrowed

and adapted from Tomkins (and central to Sedgwick's book-length work on affect, *Touching Feeling*), that are relevant to inter-dynamic states involving the *rapture-telos* and the everyday-spectacular.

Tomkins' psychologically-based work with affective states, which he delineates into nine distinct yet interrelating categories, represents an appropriation of cybernetic concepts from mid-century systems theory combined with social psychology, as published in his multi-volume work *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. In "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," Sedgwick subsequently engaged with mid-century cybernetic system's theory that conceived of the prospect of "virtually unlimited computational power" and "a new appeal to concepts such as feedback," which, in turn, embodied a "rich intellectual ecology, a Gestalt" that held implications for understanding the brain "as a continuing feature of many systems, including the biological." (105) Such cybernetics-based approaches were equally intriguing for Sedgwick in that "precisely through its tropism toward the image of an undifferentiated but differentiable ecology, (the approach) had as one of its great representational strengths an ability to discuss *how things differentiate*: how quantitative differences turn into qualitative ones, how digital and analog representations leapfrog or interleave with one another," allowing as well for interrogation of "what makes the unexpected fault lines between regions of the calculable and the incalculable..." (106) Analysis and application of such liminal "interleaving(s)" will be left to specifically-suited primary text cases; however, the relevance of complex and multi-faceted relations of Sedgwick's/Tomkins' cybernetic theory of affect should already be evident, with regard to this project's own intra-active model involving elements of everyday, spectacle, and the *rapture-telos*.

The symbiotic mutuality of *cybernetic* systems may be understood, basically, as an interactive process in which the systemic action of an environment affects actants/subjects within that environment, while their own actions, in turn, affect further action/change within the greater system (i.e. *feedback*). This is to say that the affective system pursues multiplex relations that allow for greater degrees of unpredictability, chance, and the ludic, for example; and calls, within the contexts of contemporary affect theory, for careful analysis of subjects, objects, and contexts, in “coassembly with affect systems.” (Sedgwick 101)

It is somewhat curious that Sedgwick’s emphasis on cybernetics makes no mention of the work of Gregory Bateson. Perhaps it is Tomkins’ development of affective typologies that serves Sedgwick’s work to a greater degree. Nonetheless, Bateson must be considered a significant figure in the mid-20th-century rise of humanist applications of cybernetics and systems theory. His extensive collection of writings relevant to the field in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, spanning four decades of work (1930-70), offers further insight into the interactive systems of cybernetics, whose models, as stated, are also reflective of *rapture-telos* dynamism.

In the essay “Conscious Purpose Versus Nature,” Bateson includes “the systemic nature of the culture in which he lives, and the systemic nature of the biological, ecological system around him” (434) as integral to “knowledge of the total systemic creature” and for understanding subjective experience. With an inclination towards the multiplex symbioses of affect theoretical perspectives, Bateson’s expansion of the “systemic creature” applies equally to the *rapture-telos*’ move to interrelate the subject and psycho-emotional (affective) states/responses with cultural contexts as inextricable in

the composition of *affect zones*. Individuals' responses to culture and society, in other words, are both reactionary to (whether in affinity or negation) and formative of that culture: as per Bateson, biology (the subjective body and its behavior) is always in interaction with culture's social contexts (historical, political, economic, etc.) in the manifestation of conscious experience (intellectual and psycho-emotional).

Further illustration of Batesonian cyberneticism comes via his analysis of cognition, as applied to computing systems. Bateson contends that it is "the man *plus* the computer *plus* the environment," that engages in the deductive processes of trial and error, which comprise "thinking." (438) Further, these components are not to be seen as "boundaries," as much as constitutive of the "thinking system." (483) In the *rapture-telos* model, then, similar systemic interactivity obtains, with, however, an essential emphasis on feeling and affective states, as opposed to logical-analytic cognition, as in Bateson's computationally-derived model. Bateson's articulation of a cognitive ecology finds its thrillological analog through modification of the concept into *psych-ecology*, which proposes an exposition of the psyche (from the Greek 'breath' of life), as always in relation its 'house' (Gr. *oikos*, eco-), be that a body, environment, or context. It is a conceptualization that also underscores the consideration that life occurs both *in* the greater environment of the world, as well, always, as in the contextual 'house' of human consciousness. In other words, the *psych-ecological* approach of this project will investigate the symbiotic relationship between the ways in which people seek thrill and pursue the *rapture-telos*, as well as the ways in which socio-cultural surroundings *inform* conceptions of such *rapture-telie*.

The notion of *affect-zone*, already deployed in the title of this section bears further development and connection to spatial aspects of Sedgwick's affective dynamics. As opposed to neatly allignable, dyadic relationships, *affect-zones* are instead comprised by *multi-lectic*, constellating interaction, perhaps helpfully thought of, as well, as webs of interrelating tensions and influence. In handling the primary texts to come, intra-appropriations of everyday and spectacle—and their conjuration of/conscription by the *rapture-telos*—arise in cybernetic affiliation, always feeding-back, always mutually formative, always inseparable: *affect-zones* where rapture is simultaneously elicited and informs.

It is also important, at this early juncture of theoretical exposition, to specify the function of *telos* in this study's central concept. Here, again, affinity with Sedgwick's work on affect is useful. The notion of the *autotelic* carries explanatory power that Sedgwick, in her introductory chapter to *Touching Feeling*, finds apropos to elucidating the versatility of affect dynamics (particularly positive ones, like the *rapture-telos*), quoting Tomkins' contention that "affect arousal and reward are identical in the case of positive affects; what activates positive affects 'satisfies.'" (19) Such is also the function of rapture's *telos* in this thrillological project: it is an orientation that instantaneously, upon adoption (conscious, or not) places subjects in affective zones of rapture; it is an orientation towards the self-fulfilling *telos* of excitement and stimulation, which achieves its 'goal' as soon as it is conceived. Of course, rapturous states can be intensified, their processes of acquisition refined and perfected, but, in this study's model of the *rapture-telos*, purpose and valuation are preeminently about process—the journey, the means transcends (even as it is organized by) the ends—it is *autotelic*.

In addition to Sedgwick's (and Adam Frank's) close engagement with Tomkins, work by other affect theorists is also helpful in framing the *rapture-telos* and its associated affect-zones. Sianne Ngai's 2007 *Ugly Feelings*, while taking as its main subject matter negative affects (ranging across anxiety, paranoia, irritation) that are the obverse of the *rapture-telos*' largely positive characteristics, nonetheless shares important similarities with regard to theoretical approach. Ngai's emphasis on "ugly feelings" targets analyses of affective states relevant to modern/postmodern socio-political and economic shifts. On Ngai's view, affects are distinct in their more ambient presence and influence (vide, affect-zone), from intensely eventive emotions like rage, terror, or euphoria. While the *rapture-telos* does engender episodes of catharsis, its affect-zone's primary purpose is catalysis of perpetuated repetition of such exhilarations, such that a base-line state, or tension, of excitement is achieved. Moreover, while Ngai seeks to deploy her "aesthetic" of ugly feelings as an irony-based rhetorical attitude (largely for socio-cultural/political commentary), the *rapture-telos* will substitute the *performative* for the rhetorical with an attendant subject-based focus having more to do with personal expression and the attainment of psycho-emotional states. Still, these overall approaches are not dissimilar in that affective contexts inform the theoretical lens through which behavior and psychology are viewed.

Finally, Ngai also proposes a multiplicity of sites for affective dynamics, along the lines of Sedgwick/Tomkins, that "destabilize our sense of boundary between the psyche and the world, or subjective and objective reality... (and) enunciation." (20) The concept of "tone" is central, and while the *rapture-telos*' affect-zone elicits and produces differing kinds of affect (and effect), Ngai's theoretical ontology and incorporation of

diverse primary source texts is a useful elaboration for both: “I mean a literary or cultural artifact’s feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation towards its audience and the world.” (28)

For Lawrence Grossberg, whose cultural studies scholarship is also widely-considered to have contributed to affect theory’s gestation as a bona fide critical field, “sensibility” is the term of choice, involving “a particular form of engagement or mode of operation. It identifies the specific sorts of effects that elements within a context can produce, ...defines how specific texts and practices can be taken up and experienced.” (584) The *rapture-telos* is a similar sort of “sensibility” that organizes (everyday-spectacular) experiential and cultural dynamics via a self-reflexive productivity that works towards its own ends, by its own means—in other words, agency exists within the productive action, as much as it does as a result of that productive action. A Grossbergian example of people’s interaction with cultural environments provides a useful, generic corollary: “People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires.” (582-3) Grossberg also adds the concept of mattering maps, within “socially constructed domain of effects” (and affects) that orient and embody loci where things ‘matter’ to subjects, qualitatively, wherein their “‘absorption’ or investment constructs the place and events which are, or can become, significant to us.” (585) This sort of appropriation of spectacular aspects from the greater cultural environs’ everyday contexts will be a crucial cybernetic mode in the *rapture-telic*/thrillological analyses of primary texts to come. A closing, eloquent and compelling articulation by Kathleen Stewart, whose essay “Worlding Refrains” also closes the *Affect Theory Reader*, resonates with

many of the notions introduced here and succeeds in performing affectivity's open invitation to engagement in its realms of possibility: "...it is also a worlding, an attunement to a singular world's texture and shine. The body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world's composition." (341)

Play

The concept of *play*, a career-spanning topic of investigation for Johan Huizinga, rendered more or less comprehensively in his 1938 work, *Homo Ludens*, circumscribes human behavioral contexts, motivations, and conduct intimately related to those associated with the *rapture-telos*. If this affect-zone's dominant tone is one of interactive raptures of excitation, of thrill, of *frisson*, then playful activity must certainly be considered as a central catalyst and motivator. For Huizinga play is a "significant function" that goes beyond "a mere physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex," (1) and represents a "totality in the modern sense"(3), a "play-factor... extremely active all through the cultural process and that produces many of the fundamental forms of social life... older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment." (173) Indeed, this study's contentions hold very much the same socio-behavioral centrality for the *rapture-telos*. Moreover, Huizinga's further portrayal of the play-factor dovetails with the cybernetic intra-appropriations of *rapture-telos* dynamism (its affective term exchangeable with 'play,' in the following) when he adds, "...it arises *in* and *as* play [or *rapture*], and never leaves it." (173)

Careful and repeated distinction is made to establish play as an incarnative, as opposed to representative, aspect of human behavior—its performances are actions that

emphasize powers of manifestation over portrayal and underpin the immanent becomings of such diverse social fundamentals as language, myth, and ritual. For Huizinga, “all play means something.” (1) Even in its *dromenon* (“something acted”) rites, where dramatic representations rely heavily on visual communication, Huizinga strongly preferences play’s “realization in appearance” over any “sham-reality.” (14) Play elicits “*imagination*” (the conception/creation of image) in the original sense of the word.” (14) Huizinga emphasizes the “element” of *fun*⁵ as “an absolutely primary category of life.” (3) The admixture of fun and play (as per Huizinga’s opening illustration of the the “romping of young dogs,” wherein “all the essentials of human play are present in their merry gambols.” (1)) implicates both cathartic intensities (rapture), as well boundary-testing in, such ardent interaction. There is an agonistic dimension of challenge in Huizinga’s exposition of play, one that connects to the *rapture-telos*’ identification of thrill’s capacity for affective intensifications that mutate into passionate desires and burning pursuit.

In contrast to Rome’s *panem e circenses*, Huizinga cites an everyday-ification of such spectacular ‘play’/games, in the modern era, in the proliferation of sport throughout contemporary culture, at professional and amateur levels (though with a pessimistic caveat that “commercial competition” is serving to erode the pure nature of ‘play,’ in such contexts (and this in the 1930s, ...if poor Johan only knew what was to come!)). Continuing along cultural lines, Huizinga also notes the populist spreading of art into the larger society, off of its High-Art elitist and patronized pedestal, becoming “an affair of the individual and his taste . . . public property, love of art *bon ton*.” (202) Further apprehension for Huizinga, within the realm of play, regarded art’s slide “down the steep

slope of Impressionism and into the turgidities and excrescences of the 20th-century,” and its susceptibility “to the deleterious influences of modern techniques of production . . . advertising, sensation-mongering . . . directly for a market.”(202) While such developments, again, would only intensify and proliferate towards the new millennium, media-empowerment and art-production capabilities that pervade contemporary everyday culture at the subjective level remain central to *rapture-telos* perspectives as agencies of personal expression (often in intimate connection with celebrity culture’s own performative capacities).

Despite the pessimistic bent of his modernist social critique Huizinga closes with an encomium of the immortal power of play based in the conviction that “logical thinking does not go far enough. Surveying all the treasures of the mind and all the splendors of its achievements we shall find, at the bottom of every serious judgment, something problematical left. . . . Instead of the old saw: “All is vanity,” the more positive conclusion forces itself upon us that “all is play”.” (212) Huizinga’s ultimate identification of a ludic propensity, born of indefinable human potential, gestures towards the *rapture-telos*’ recuperative theorization of a self-fulfilling, thrill-based play, incarnate in the affect-zones of the everyday-spectacular.

Interestingly, Bateson’s cybernetic systems of cognitive-ecological behavior are also centrally concerned with concepts of play. In particular, psycho-therapy represents a cybernetic context or setting that engenders an *affect zone* whose potentialities “delimit a psychological frame, a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages. In both play and therapy, the messages have a special and peculiar relationship to a more concrete or basic reality.” (191) Bateson further characterizes these assemblages and their

effects as metacommunicative, or metalinguistic, defining “either explicitly or implicitly, the set of messages about which it communicates,” giving the receiver, “*ipso facto*...instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included in the frame.” (188) The *rapture-telos*, then, organizes its own circumstances towards the generation of intense affective response, i.e. *thrill*, “...and indeed, it is this frame which permits the transfer to reach its full intensity.” (191) For Bateson, such frames work to enable patient and therapist to more pointedly access problematic states or symptoms. Within the context of the *rapture-telos* participants are not determined by patient-expert relations; however, both the idea of play as engendering and empowering affective states, as well as the express pursuit of thrill as a parallel to the goal-based processes of therapeutic interaction, bear similarities to the cybernetic dynamics discussed thus far in relation to the *rapture-telos*.

Play offers complexities of behavior, intention, and communication that are particularly fertile to the cultivation of thrill in its many manifestations. For Bateson, play’s inherent tendency towards paradox, which destabilizes conceptions of ‘reality,’ is well-suited for multiplicities of intention and interpretation. Bateson’s prime example (which is not credited to Huizinga, but represents a striking reoccurrence, in terms of example) is dogs’ nipping as absolutely differentiable from actual biting, which nonetheless remains bound up with the signification and action of the latter. (141) The metacommunicative messaging of certain actions (the nip) allow for performance of, reference to, and comment upon other closely related, but distinct, action (the bite).

Such meta-relationality between action, intention, and signification allow, within *rapture-telic* pursuits, for mimesis as an original action carrying its own affective

intensities and meaning—as, for example, in the thrill of celebrity-styled performances within the context of everyday life. Bateson elaborates, in his own research, on such multi-layered relationships via the example of gambling wherein “histrionic threat,” as a function of gaming and its ludic intensifications (including bluffing, raising, calling, going all-in, etc.) “have their roots in the combination of threat and play,” (181) but also, of course, may often represent very real, significant financial rewards and losses. This *thrillology* will expand upon the investigation of such multi-(or meta-)dimensional aspects of interaction, including celebrity and the performance and appropriation thereof, as well as the active and identitarian engagements of spectatorship and consumerism.

Epi-Formance

Clearly, Huizinga’s analysis of play extends into the realm of performance, a natural and logical progression, and one that suits the further elaboration of the *rapture-telos*. The study of performance is another wide-spectrum (and often exploding) field; that is to say, conceptual parameters of ‘performance’ strain at boundaries and easily morph into new iteration (as is the case with theorization of the everyday, the spectacular, and play). Such anti-deterministic and perpetually inventive characteristics are amply evident in two performance-related texts central to this thrillology: Erving Goffman’s work, seminal to the field, *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and the more contemporary *Perform Or Else* by Jon McKenzie (2001).

In general, Goffman’s perspective sees the pervasion of dramaturgical elements and theatrical metaphor throughout everyday life (closely related to, if not following on, Kenneth Burke’s dramaturgical approaches), including concepts of the mask, the role, front

and back stage locations and behaviors, (mis-)communication of character, and impression management. Essentially, notions of performance as related to the *rapture-telos* are crucial in that performance is not to be seen as, simply, a mode of interpretative or imitative representation, fleeting or inauthentic, rather as the incarnating instantiation of experience and identity (both of which are, of course, never fixable, but may well be recursive and repetitive). Goffman's handling of the notion of mask, for example (as consciously and etymologically attached to the Greek 'person/persona'), carries a reification of 'role' in that "everyone is always, consciously or not, playing a role . . . becomes second nature, an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons." (20) Stress is placed upon the fluidity and dynamism of social performance, mixing conscious intention with the unintended, as well as an emphasis upon the uncontrollability of reception/reaction. Contexts extend into profession, nationality/race, socio-economic status, sex, appearance, etc., and are simultaneously seen as social-behavioral clues and orientation-points employed in what Goffman terms the "arts of impression management." (208)

Integration of these dynamics into the *rapture-telos* is pertinent at the level of subjective interaction with social systems and environment, as well as within affect-driven intra-appropriations between the everyday and spectacle. Performance is the vehicle that enables movement between and recombination of these realms. As a further elaboration: if play is the suitable behavioral, active mode whose flexible, interpretative, and improvisational capacities allow for enhanced subjective engagement within social dynamics, then performance is a more focused and organizing intentionality of the ludic potential.

A reconceptualization of ‘performance,’ in the interest of further development of the *rapture-telos* model, posits the concept of *epi-formance*. Connection, once more, to Sedgwick’s affect theory is useful via its own notion of *periperformance*—a related but nonetheless autonomous event, to be thought of as *beside*/“peri-” (rather than *per-* (‘through’) formative) and produced of its own impetus. *Epi-formance*, then, is a similar notion: its formativity, or incarnation, gestated by the affect-zone context, goes ‘beyond’/epi- (or, alternately, ‘over,’ ‘after,’ ‘outside’), thereby participating (cybernetically) in the embodiment of a new overall situation—*epiformance* is an immanent becoming, a total performance that manifests anew. While Goffman’s exegesis of performance cites its ubiquity and pervasive social-influence, the *rapture-telos* model is one that seeks to integrate such performative/dramaturgical activity within creative, affect-driven expressions of subjects, communities, and cultural contexts. It is an addition of *what is happening*, and *why*, to the Goffmanian elaboration of *how* performance is incorporated into everyday life. The *rapture-telos*’ everyday-spectacular capacity for *epi-formance* ties its agency-nurturing flexibilities, principally, to the quest for *thrilling* experience.

In other words, not only is the *rapture-telic* mode one that engenders subjective agency within contexts of identity and cultural environment, its agency is rooted in and ratified by psycho-emotional intensity, by rapturous states. It is the palpability of thrill that empowers the location of self, through intense feeling, as an identifiable entity. A further illustration of this interrelation of affective state and experiential context, and a dynamic which shall be proposed as an oft-occurring component in human experience, can be expressed via the inversion of Freud’s concept of the oceanic.⁶ As opposed to

Freud's description of a desire to merge with an "oceanic," or universal feeling of existence (also associated with the prenatal state), human experience in *rapture-telic* contexts is one that seeks to escape such non-individuated conceptions. Instead, it is through affective intensity, like the acute palpability of thrill, which engenders the capacity for a location of self and tangible identity. The Cartesian existential ontology, *cogito ergo sum*, becomes a new mandate centered on feeling, *sentio ergo sum*.

Interminglings of the everyday with the spectacular elicit affective contexts that enable such identification, and combine with ludic strategies of behavior/performance to enable *rapture-telic* states of excitation.

Jon McKenzie's *Perform Or Else* engages performance with a decidedly more postmodern, affect-centered bent than does Goffman's sociological approach. Whereas several of the theoretical conceptualizations previously explored in this introduction were described as prone to 'explosion' beyond definability, McKenzie's presentation is a literal performance of eruption. Not only is his primary metaphorical vehicle the *Challenger* space shuttle's final journey, McKenzie's prose itself embraces increasing abstraction and mutation to the point that its conclusion features white calligraphic type disappearing into black background. Nonetheless, the first half of *Perform Or Else* successfully recapitulates the wide range of interpretations that Performance Studies has elicited, over the last half-century: from dramaturgical explications, à la Goffman and others, of the "efficacies of cultural performance"; to sociological/society-organizing "efficiencies of organizational performance" following on Frederick Winslow Taylor and Fordist models; to inquiry into the "effectiveness of technological performance" that consider the contemporary era's interactivity (subjective and societal) with the digital, the

virtual, and information technology, writ large—(phrases above in quotes are the titles of McKenzie’s first three chapters).

At the level of thesis and fundament, performance is inseparable from challenge for McKenzie; and two challenges central to his study are the effort to understand performance’s global relevance, while simultaneously investigating its myriad manifestations within a conscious effort to partake in those performance modes. The shuttle example stands “somewhere between theater and ritual,” as does McKenzie’s conception of performance’s value and meaning, generally. Actions within the *rapture-telos* affect-zone take on such characteristics, as well, with a special emphasis on ritual as carrying agency and potential for expressions of identity. McKenzie’s own engagement with the inherent power of Austinian *speech-acts*, as well as his explorations and enactments of catachresis locate empowerment in all sorts of performance.

As his exegesis unfolds into its final, culminating acts McKenzie introduces his flagship trope, *perfumance*, “a funky milieu, a radically heterogeneous atmosphere, . . . a becoming mutational of normative forces, perfume of discourse, odor of entity, sweat concepts . . . the ruse of a general theory.” (203) The immanent becoming that McKenzie pointedly heralds as constitutive of performance imbues his own engagement with performance in unfettered and creative ways that jibe with the potentialities of affective cyberneticism, its feed-back exchanges, as well as the potencies of psycho-emotional investment.

In further articulation of *perfumance*’s interactive mode that fits well into Batesonian systems/metacommunication theory, McKenzie claims: “A *perfumance* . . . breaks with the sociotechnical system producing it and enters into recursive

communication from other systems, thereby displacing their discourses and practices as well as their systemic limits.” (228) This preference of “annunciation over enunciation” resonates as well with Deleuzian concepts of immanence central in the introductory remarks of Gregg and Siegworth’s affect theory collection that elaborate its contexts and dynamics as always exploratory and creative. Moreover, McKenzie identifies performance as a zone of play (with an affinity for *calumnia*/trickery), whose affective dynamism that maps well onto the ‘worldings’ and intra-appropriations of the *rapture-telos*. Finally, the exuberant performance of McKenzie’s analysis (of all things performative) is additionally compelling in that it offers a thrill-filled, spectacularized engagement with his own everyday, professional capacity as scholar.

Rapture

Having assembled the forces and contexts influencing the greater cybernetic system of the *rapture-telos* affect-zone, more specific ontological (or perhaps better said, anatomical—for it very much behaves and evolves as a living system) elaborations can follow. What exactly, then, is the rapture at the core of the *rapture-telos*?

Georges Bataille’s expanded conceptualization of *erotics*, in his second volume of *The Accursed Share—The History of Eroticism*, is very helpful in elucidating the wide-spectrum affective dimension of rapture within *rapture-telic* contexts. Chiefly, Bataille insists on an addition of “violent contrasts” (18)—darker emotional modes that include, for example, anguish, pain, and fear—within the greater affective composition of the erotic, a domain typically associated with positive ecstatic emotional states and responses. It is a circumscription of thrill’s *affect-zone*, which, in Bataille’s articulation,

limns the affective dimensions of subjectivity “as if being itself were this exploration of all possibility, always going to the extreme and always hazardous.” (101) Additionally, there is the central idea of pushing the limits and boundaries of experience, of insubordination and revolt as crucial to “the *total* image of the erotic disturbance.” (78) Indeed, the idea of erotic experience as disturbance presents a new affective texture, one similar in its possessive turmoil to rapture’s connotations of seizure, and being carried away. The erotic, for Bataille, is only potent when its engagement is not only penetrant, but a total experience that beckons the subject to be “consumed and to lose oneself without reservation.” (113) It is also important to note that Bataille’s expansion certainly allows for an increased potential for subjective appropriations of such spectacularized erotics: not only is erotic experience accessible to any person, its wider definition necessarily will incorporate a greater variety of circumstances and interactions from everyday life.

In the context of the *Breaking It* mode, for example, it is the admixture of danger, intentionally pursued, that fulfills Bataille’s erotic mandate for intense psycho-emotional experience, its power inherent in the capacity to take subjects into new affective realms. A vital texture to Bataille’s expansion of erotic experience is, precisely, that it must always be accompanied by a startling and new *frisson*—it must be thrilling, at any cost. Anything less smacks of impotence, chief nemesis of the erotic. No matter how bewildering, or even threatening, only a “fever of sexual passion,” (177) one that suffuses body, spirit, and circumstance will qualify; The Bataille’s eroticized state represents a global inclusivity of rapturous feeling that well qualifies as an instantiation of *affect-zone*. Indeed, Bataille underscores the intense appeal of thrill—one that inhabits the realm of

affective response, always interior to subjective experience and always therefore palpably real.

Norman O. Brown's 1959 reconsideration and critique of psychoanalysis, *Love Against Death*, also takes on an analysis of affectively charged states, and centers on sublimation as the central concept of the Freudian system, whose function is associated with the processing of excess cathectic, sexual energy generated by the prime Freudian force, the libido. For Brown, however, what is lacking in psychoanalytic approaches (especially those which Brown identifies as "orthodox psychoanalysis" (152)) is a more effective engagement with these volatile psycho-emotional excesses, one offering alternatives to neurosis, negation, violence, and frustration, i.e. the prevailing effects as identified by psychoanalysis and other social-theoretical perspectives. The reconfiguration of excess sexual cathexis, according to Brown, amounts to a dangerous *desexualization*. On his way to proposing his own theoretical and therapeutic intervention Brown nonetheless agrees with (and cites) Freud's analysis, in *The Ego and the Id*, describing "inclinations to aggression and destruction," (174) elaborated, by Brown, as "a path of cumulative aggression and guilt, aggression being the revolt of the baffled instincts against the desexualized and inadequate world, and guilt being the revolt against the desexualized and inadequate self." (174)

In addition to the struggle to deal with sexual cathexis, Brown also emphasizes Freud's concern for the psyche's interaction with the powerful presence of death's inevitability. The instinct to sublimate, in this case, confronts another dead-end. Brown accedes to Freud's understanding of the impasse (*The Ego and the Id*): "If the mechanism of sublimation is the dream, the instinctual economy which it sustains is the primacy of

death over life in the ego. The path which leads from infantile dreaming to sublimation originates in the ego's incapacity to accept the death of separation, and its inauguration of those morbid forms of dying—negation, repression, and narcissistic involution.” (173) Brown's work is dedicated to the pursuit of a “way out” of this painful conundrum and insists on an alternative to sublimation, a tack that neither contemporary psychoanalysis, nor society, is as yet able to conceive. To illustrate such possibilities, Brown draws the distinction, hearkening to Nietzschean philosophical perspectives, between a world overly determined by Apollonian predisposition—emphasizing restraint, moderation, and, in its “flight from death,” become a “deathly form”(174)—desperately in need of a more eroticized condition, that of the Dionysian.

In Brown's closing section, “The Resurrection of the Body,” connection to previously elucidated *rapture-telic* elements of play/performance and affective intensity becomes explicit: “The life instinct, or sexual instinct, demands activity of a kind that, in contrast to our current mode of activity, can only be called *play*. (italics added) The life instinct also demands a union with others and with the world around us based not on anxiety and aggression but on narcissism and erotic exuberance.” (307) Moreover, the new resurrection transcends both the drive for negating reaction, and “because the body is satisfied, the death instinct no longer drives it to change itself . . . its activity is in eternity.” (308) It is an omni-directional, omnipresent rapture of eroticized affect, which Brown also refers to as the “polymorphously perverse” in which “the abolition of repression would abolish the unnatural concentrations of libido in certain particular bodily organs—concentrations engineered by the negativity of the morbid death instinct.”

The alternative is a Thoreauvian human condition (following Brown's citation) of "a purely sensuous life." (308)

The *rapture-telos* project, then, is one which seeks a more specific anatomization of such alternative, sensuous/(affective) modes, and their instantiation within subjective and socio-cultural contexts. Where Brown leaves off saying that the world needs a massive dosage of eros, this study picks up with an inquiry into how such developments might be occurring. Complicating these *rapture-telic* updates, however, will be the simultaneous recasting of ecstatic Dionysian states that expand Brownian estimations for potential affective fulfillment into, for example, the thrill of rage and other so-called negative emotions, or the *frisson* of material conquest, and the ecstasies of consumerist fantasia.

Another late 20th-century psychoanalytical approach, that of Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, also hones in on the individual human condition, giving pointed consideration to affective states. As the subtitle of Marcuse's work, *A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, indicates, his main purpose is the proposition of alternative models to Freudian constructs. Marcuse begins with nuanced reconsideration of Freudian drive-concepts, especially that of the pleasure principle and its influence on the individual within the context of society. Marcuse employs the terms *performance* and, alternately, *reality principle* to connote an integration of the pleasure principle into 'civilized' contexts that mitigate and control the turbulent, driving forces of desire by delaying satisfaction, restraining pleasure, and the prioritizing work, productivity, and security over playful, explorative, or risk-filled tendencies. (12)

To elucidate that his alternative proposals have long existed in human experience, Marcuse first reaches back into classical mythology. The figures of Orpheus and Narcissus initiate his reformulating exegesis on pleasure, under the preferred moniker of *eros*, and its re-nomination as a preeminent drive for both the individual and society:

The Orphic-Narcissistic images are those of the great refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject). The refusal aims at liberation . . . Orpheus is the archetype of the poet as *liberator* and *creator*—an order without repression . . . the poet of redemption, the god who brings peace and salvation not through force but through song. (170)

The Orphic-Narcissistic model's imaginative, ludic, and sensual emphasis is contrasted to that of Prometheus, "the culture-hero of toil, productivity, and progress through repression." (161) Marcuse's proposed preeminence of *eros*, through libidinal cathexis of the ego and body, represents a potential for the conversion from Reality Principle repression to a new, liberated mode of being.

Crucial is the distinction between sexuality (which he associates with Freud's *lust prinzip*) and *eros*, the discussion of which comprises the central thesis of Part II of *Eros and Civilization*, entitled "Beyond the Reality Principle." Largely aligned with the power dynamics of the performance principle, Marcuse reiterates that the prevailing Freudian model governing the reality of the human condition pits society and the individual in an "antagonist system," as much as the ego is in perpetual conflict with both id and superego. (197) Marcuse then goes on to suggest that this repression-based dynamic and the "guilt accumulated in the civilized dominion of man" (198) might only be transcended by a re-commission of original sin, quoting Kleist's injunction: "We must again eat from the tree of knowledge in order to fall back into the state of innocence." (198)

The crux, for Marcuse, is to elaborate on how this return to innocence might be achieved, what it would mean for society and for the individual. Within these contexts, however, what is most interesting, in relation to the *rapture-telos*, is Marcuse's valuation of heightened affective gratification at the site of the individual subject. To be sure, society must be radically reconstructed, but what seems at least equally important, for Marcuse (particularly in the second half of *Eros and Civilization*), is to explicate the ways in which his proposed transformation of human experience also arises at the level of the individual, manifest in a psycho-emotional *rapture* that suffuses everyday life. So while the socio-political, revolutionary contexts of Marcuse's vision rests on material change, links to this thrillology are most profound at the level of affect—what the new experiential state *feels* like.

This re-invention of the human condition, then, per Marcuse's own neologism, is the *erotization* of humanity via a "transformation of the libido: from sexuality constrained under genital supremacy to erotization of the entire personality. It is a spread, rather than an explosion, of libido..." (201) It is an expansion, a *liberation* of libidinal cathexis, however, that also goes beyond the individual psycho-emotional state to the orientation of social identity. The drive for pleasure, the libido, no longer needs to be suppressed, its dangerous powers no longer constrained in the interest of civilization and the control of society. There is a strong association with the ludic dimension in this reign of pleasure, as "play is entirely subject to the pleasure principle ... expresses objectless autoeroticism." (214)

It is important to note that this *rapture-telic* emphasis on Marcuse's erotized human condition is not a blind oversight of Marxian revolutionary preconditions. Indeed,

its leapfrogging thereof intimates the proposition that significant numbers of people may well have lost patience with waiting for societal transformation. Instead, taking the capitalist system as a given, subjects are pursuing new avenues for affective gratification (which additionally implies a re-conceptualization, along such lines, of the concept of freedom). And, indeed, a good deal of Marcuse's explication of *erotization* begins to sound more like a transformation to be achieved on a personal level. Any agenda for societal reconstruction seems largely implied, in "Beyond the Reality Principle," if not predicated on the seizure (echoing *rapture*'s Latin etymology) of a new *omni-erotized, thrill-based* attitude, first and foremost, at the individual level.

The ensuing theorization of the *rapture-telos* and its application in this project's variety of case studies will assemble an array of evidence for a concluding discussion of the issue, one offering both a well-developed frame of the argument, as well as a solidification of its thrillological viewpoint.

Ergo

Inquiry into the immemorial intercourse between spectacle and the everyday inevitably lends itself to a diverse range of lenses and analytic approaches. Genres of the spectacular and the everyday figure prominently in tracing its socio-cultural effects and permutations, as much as historical and medium-specific contexts are relevant to phenomenological investigation of the everyday-spectacular. Likewise, examination of the evolutions of (mass-)media offer perspectives particular to late-twentieth and early twentieth-first century socio-cultural dynamics; that is to say, the historical ascendancy of mass-information technologies, in particular, such as radio, television, the internet, and

personal(ized) mobile communications especially encourage interpenetration of spectacle and everyday. The focus of this *thrillology* inheres in its terminology: inquiry into the diverse contexts and interactions of that ineluctably human endeavor, the pursuit of affectively-fulfilling experience.

However, as opposed to a focus upon literary genre, author, or period-specific texts, the *deep* reading of this project concerns phenomena of the *rapture-telos* and the establishment of a theoretically-centered expertise in *thrillology* that engages with its many manifestations, its modes and social types. While this project draws heavily upon literary source materials, and a thoroughgoing literary analytical approach, it nonetheless locates itself within, and arises from, a larger theoretical field. Augmenting the literary, its milieu includes cultural theory and media studies lenses—and, especially important, the *rapture-telos* theoretical frame is interested in bringing a wide variety of perspectives into new conversations with one another. Equally, while involving diverse 20th-century cultural theorizations, this project targets an ongoing, adaptive engagement with contemporary analytical developments. Perhaps Deleuze's (and Nietzsche's) identification of philosophy as the ever-new *creation of concepts*—in addition to the notion that “Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained”⁷—can serve as both an elucidation of this project's approach, and source of its inspiration. Neither the theoretical, nor the literary, has preordained or prefigured this method. Rather, the *rapture-telos* interpretative mode arises from a symbiosis involving the experiences of reading a great variety of literary and social texts, and the socio-cultural observations/commentaries embedded in those texts, in *interaction* with existing

theoretical perspectives, whose recombinations and reconsiderations seem worthwhile and necessary.

This study's hermeneutic core, the *rapture-telos* analytical lens, travels over territories of American Dream-styled notions of success, thence into vibrant critique of such visions, and subsequently takes up examination of thrilled appropriations of personal agency within the greater socio-cultural and media-consumerist environment. To underscore, the *rapture-telos* lens should not be seen as reductive of either American, or subjective, experience—the thrill-drive is, obviously, *not* the only force contending for influence upon the human condition—nor does it preclude myriad other factors, such as libido, nationalism, identity politics, which, of course, have their own components of *frisson* and involve other types of drive. Still, this project is meant to expose the *rapture-telos* as a prominent impetus in human behavior and the conceptualization of value and meaning systems. The intention, of course, is that future research will continue to interrogate the complexities of thrill, in its myriad instantiations, while developing frames of inquiry beyond this project's scope. Just as this study seeks to bring a variety of different theoretical perspectives into conversation under its thrillological aegis (and inter-relations of the spectacular with the everyday), surely the topic offers relevance to fields untouched here.

CHAPTER TWO: MAKING IT

The thrill of *making it is* perhaps most notoriously bound to material success and associated in American contexts with the tantalizing, paradisaical promises of its “dream.”⁸ Of course, after centuries of social-economic experimentation and experience, the American Dream has taken on a much greater aspect than simply that of wealth attainment and has risen to the level of diverse cultural trope, meaning many things to many different people, even to the point of generating contention.

In resonance with such complexity, it should be underscored that this thrillology’s *making it* mode and anatomy is decidedly not an historiographically-based or purely literary engagement. Rather, this project represents an inquiry into diverse notions of success, ranging from the ever-present, ever-prominent drive for prosperity, to auras of success that may or may not necessarily be accompanied by fortune. Moreover, desires for affective fulfillment of all types, not just “happiness,” but security, redemption, or dominance are also exemplary. Of course, merely tracing the wide variety of such tropes would occupy many lifetimes; therefore, the *rapture-telos* analysis will operate within a specific framework dedicated to contexts of the everyday-spectacular. The primary goal will be the consideration of *how* subjects conceive of, approach, and experience diverse success-modes that span the preceding century. From early 20th-century literary reflections on the pursuit of wealth and power to more contemporary reflections of success as portrayed, and marketed, in contemporary mainstream commercial media—the thoroughgoing aim will be to locate *rapture-telic* affect-zones within intra-appropriative everyday-spectacular contexts.

Success Stories: *The Pit*, *The Financier*, *Oil!*

Thrillology of the *Making It* mode begins with turn-of-the-20th-century tales of the pursuit of wealth and power as its primary case studies. Frank Norris' *The Pit* (1903), Theodor Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912), and Upton Sinclair's *Oil* (1927) represent literary reflections explicitly concerned with archetypal notions of American Dream-style success. Developments of plot and protagonist in each of these invariably involve a spectacularization of everyday experience, and track rather typical citizens as they rise from business world anonymity to exceptional heights and then, more importantly, undertake examinations of their ongoing relationships to their achieved success. The study's central interest, then, will be the analysis of conceptions of desire and its fulfillment at work in the novels, especially given the fact that, once these iconic character-symbolizations of power and lucre reach said heights, their stories become increasingly unpredictable and complex, in terms of both the influence of thrill's affective power and *rapture-telic* orientations of desire.

Addicted to the Game

Curtis Jadwin, the central protagonist of Frank Norris' *The Pit*, is a grain-speculator on the Chicago Exchange, who for a time successfully corners the wheat market and stands as financially omnipotent (long after he has become independently wealthy beyond any possible need), and is exemplary of a deeper behavior- and identity-ruling drive than that of pure material and monetary success. Jadwin's motivation is more

akin to an obsessive, biochemical addiction based on intense and inspiring excitement. He confesses to his wife: “Oh, it’s not the money, . . . It’s fun of the thing; the excitement.”

(231) With financial stability long since accomplished, Jadwin’s return to speculation, after promising his neglected wife (whose beauty and affection Jadwin had originally sought as the only possible equal to the fulfillments of his business career) that he would retire, is one of a power-hungry, and equally bored, man whose taste for competition and domination is unrequitable. He explains to his wife, who pleads for restraint on behalf of his precarious health, and for the sake of their marriage:

I’ve got to taper off. You’re right, Laura. But you don’t know, you haven’t a guess how the trading in wheat gets a hold of you. . . . I’ve got to be busy. . . . When you know how to swing a deal, and look ahead a little further than the other fellows, and can take chances they daren’t. . . . I tell you it’s absorbing. (232)

For Jadwin, the onerous everyday routine of his retirement demands a reengagement with the spectacular world of finance. At face value, his occupation as trader is not exceptional to the legion of other businessmen engaging in the tumultuous machinations of the wheat market. For many, indeed, it is merely a career that fulfills the requirements of subsistence and requires daily effort. But even Norris’ description of the Chicago Board of Trade Building harbors a greater experiential and alluring potential. Indeed the connection is made to no less than divine forces at work, ones that, for Jadwin, represent a monstrous power transferrable, as well, to those who reach for mastery:

(Jadwin) had long since conceived the notion of some great resistless force within the Board of Trade Building. . . . All through the Northwest, all through the central world of the Wheat the set and whirl of that innermost Pit (trading floor) made itself felt . . . majestic in a vast flood from West to East . . . a primeval energy. (79) Jadwin was completely master of the market. Everything stopped when he raised a finger; everything leaped to life with the fury of obsession when he nodded his head. (345) The time was come, he felt, for the grand *coup* . . . (371) the final consummate assault, and the thrill of a victory more brilliant, more

conclusive, more decisive than any he had ever known, vibrated in Jadwin's breast. (373)

The telos of Jadwin's rapture is a self-fulfilling one along the lines of Sedgwick's notion of a drive or desire that can be understood as *autotelic*(19)—he needs to be 'in the game,' thrives on its thrills, its exhilaration. Had financial success, or even dominance, to say nothing of the usual American Dream aspects of security, status, etc., been the goal, then there would never have been a return to the markets for Jadwin, and certainly not any exceedingly hazardous, Don Quixote-styled hubris of cornering the wheat market, which despite his initial triumph Jadwin undoubtedly was aware could also be (and was) his undoing.

Furthermore, Jadwin's premature, in his view, retirement at the behest of his lonely wife seems to cast his self-regard, indeed his identity, into an unbearable anonymity and obsolescence. The inescapable awareness that the Exchange's powerfully-pumping pulse of trade and speculation continues apace, with Jadwin painfully exiled to the sidelines, eats at the speculator, both in terms of the business opportunities that he is missing, as well as in a disturbing absence from that crucible of competition by which he has always measured himself and his mettle. An instantiation of the previously introduced concept of the *reverse oceanic* is at work in Jadwin's case, as well. He is a man lost in the great and anonymous void of life outside of his self-defining and fulfilling context (*affect-zone*) of the Board of Trade and the intense experience of speculation. Whereas Freudian desire for merging with oceanic *feeling* seeks transcendence of individuality and a merger with a greater, humanity-eclipsing state, Jadwin is desperate, precisely, for a reclamation of self as identifiable through very human, specifically-cherished psycho-emotional indicators attached to the everyday experience of his

profession. Yet, at the same time, in an interesting exemplification of paradoxical interrelations and tensions in Batesonian cybernetics—and of rapture-telic *intra-appropriation* between subject and environment—Jadwin does, in another sense, lose himself in the game of speculative trade, such that he becomes *one* with the greater world of business, albeit a world that offers him a compelling context for self-identification.

Additionally, this dual (reverse-oceanic/oceanic) conception of identity and belonging, as applies to Jadwin, exhibits the multi-plex re-combinations of psycho-emotional, career-oriented, identity-performing impulses that Sedgwick's affect theorization seeks to expose within the complexity of human experience, as opposed to its rationalization. With a similar affinity for honoring the intricacies and paradoxes of human desire, self-conception, and behavior, the *rapture-telos* method focuses on the exposition of such complex interrelations, and the assemblage and consideration of the various forces at work.

Not only does absence from the trade market's exhilarating arena wash Jadwin in disappointing anonymity and impotence, it smacks of a sort of untimely death in the sense of Norman O. Brown's diagnosis of an Apollonian conundrum whose call for self-disciplined moderation becomes a "deathly form" (174), in the face of Dionysian temptations of thrill and indulgence. The primacy of affective states, such as the *rapture-telos'* valuation of thrill, are underscored by an agency ascribed to the domain of the Freudian Id as "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement," (175) as well as the conviction, in Freud's own *Delusion and Dream*, that "all psychic forces are significant only through their aptitude to arouse emotions." (70) In Jadwin's case, it is precisely the

arousal of feeling that has gone missing, rising the pall and threat of death's finality, of an *ending*.

As much as there is no longer anything for Jadwin to do, his life is equally bereft of the intense stimulation he so loves in the world of business. Brown's diagnosis aligns itself with what he identifies as later tendencies in Freud's thinking toward a strong allegiance to the pleasure-principle: "rejection of mind-body dualism . . . the narcissistic, self-enjoying character of human desire," and the recognition "that human perfection consists in an expansion of the self until it enjoys the world as it enjoys itself." (47) In this sense, the *affect zone* is embodied by the spectacularization of Jadwin's everyday as afforded by the adventures of high-powered trading and speculation—the speculator can, indeed, only enjoy himself and feel alive, if he is in midst the feverish animation of the Exchange. Jadwin's wife feels that allure in direct competition with her attempts to connect with him, and sees his obsession as casting an irresistible spell that makes him "all different; such a look came into your face, so cruelly eager, and triumphant and keen." (235) To be sure, it is an intoxicating rush that Jadwin is unable to turn away from.

The *rapture-telos* affect-zone, then, becomes part of an overall performative context, one that, to use Goffman's terminology, is intimately related to the "staging of the self," whereby "this self does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action." (252) This is another case of cybernetic feed-back environment, never a simple one-to-one interaction, rather a performance involving, and involved in, indeed *creating*, the "scene" in its entirety. And, indubitably, Curtis Jadwin is as much a man of his trade as he is an intense, if not formative (given his domination of the wheat market), force in the general arena of that trade. Context and setting (as both purposefully chosen

and/or unwittingly salient), which comprise “the front,” or “stage,” for Goffman’s concept of *dramatic realization*, represent equally crucial elements to the establishment of Jadwin’s compelling *affect-zone* of business competition. This type of performative interaction with one’s environment finds resonance, as well, with Santayana’s notion of life as perpetual role-playing: “we do not merely live but act, we compose and play our chosen characters . . . we wrap ourselves gracefully in the mantle of our inalienable part.” (56) Perhaps complicating Santayana’s estimation of “gracefully,” these inalienable parts, in Jadwin’s case and others to follow, certainly can be seen to dip into less than graced states—not only of greedy and hubristic undoing, but also with respect to desperate, addictive, even ravenous, longings for rapturous experiential states. This is, of course, not a compromising or qualifying matter where the *rapture-telos* is concerned. Thrilologically-speaking, intensity of affective experience is the standard of measure, quite apart from any moral/ethical considerations.

Power, self-ordained

Upton Sinclair’s 1927 novel, *Oil!*, introduces into the *Making It mode* another tale of spectacular material success, set in the early 20th-century Californian *black gold rush* scramble to exploit petrochemical resources, which have fueled human civilization ever since. As it mustered all the cutting-edge technological know-how and industrial machinery available to its pioneering *wildcatters*, the rush imposed itself as much upon the California landscape, with its towering drills, wells, derricks, pipelines and, eventually, sprawling refineries, as it did upon the state’s residents. Many were eking out subsistence, sharecropper-style livelihoods in a hostile wilderness when cash-heavy

speculators arrived, prompting the precipitous rise of land-values and an attendant fever of internecine claim-staking and bartering.

Sinclair's exposition of the era unfolds via the story of "oil man" juggernaut, J. Arnold Ross and his son and prodigy, Bunny. While the scope of the tale sprawls over three decades—and delves, at great length, into the details of early petrochemical industries, the corruption of politics and big business, and a mounting exegesis of labor organization and communism—*Oil!*'s diverse plot-lines always remain framed by the spectacular rise of the oil business and its super-powerful, ultra-wealthy barons. Here is a spectacle of success driven by realizable opportunity, where the prosperity of men armed with knowledge and venture capital seems bounded only by their own imaginations and energy. It is a potential that translates, equally, into their capacity to develop California into its modern economic and culture stature, while, perhaps even more impressively, remaking the ways in which the world does business. Dad and Bunny ride the wave of countless millions of dollars in profits, capitalizing on early extensive land-grabs, America's growing automobile industry and appetite for fuel, as well as ramping-up First World War military production.

This *making it* mode carries the thrill of power. These burgeoning powers of industry and finance, despite their intrinsic belonging to everyday human affairs of commerce, are imbued with an aura of spectacular wonder, an embodiment of the human tool maker's ability to assert power over natural resources and chain its force, like a beast of burden, to the further development of 'civilization.' This sort of miraculous dimension of human success, courtesy of science, technology, and industry, carries an awe that, only a few years earlier at the 1900 Paris World Exposition, made a deep impression on Henry

Adams, as reflected in his essay, “The Virgin and the Dynamo.” In the Hall of Dynamos, Adams is confronted by gargantuan mechanisms of the latest energy-generating technologies, silently spinning their massive force into electricity. By virtue of his notion of an “irruption of forces totally new, ...man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement.” (381-2) Overwhelmed by the spectacle, only the powers of religion, long dominant in human culture, seem to afford Adams a conceptual referent for understanding these newest incarnations of industrial might:

the dynamo became a symbol of infinity... he began to feel the forty-foot dynamo as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive... than this huge wheel, ...humming an audible warning to stand a hair’s-breadth further for respect of power. (380)

The spectacle of the California oil boom, with its mindbending generation of new power and wealth, pervades Sinclair’s novel with a similar sense of awe, whether it be on the part of the oil industrialist’s constant, miraculous discoveries of further resources to be exploited, the sci-fi-esque appearance of newfangled, industrial-size machinery, or the general public’s stunned witness of sudden, inexorable technological development.

Certainly the machinations of the petrochemical industry, the drilling, the refining, the black geysers “blowing gold all over the place” (to borrow the *Oil-man*’s line in Anderson’s film adaptation, *There Will Be Blood*), provide vivid imagery to the spectacle of the boom. Moreover, as is the case with Jadwin, Ross remains rooted in and defined by the everyday performances of his profession, a destiny increasingly spectacularized by the greater circumstances of the industry’s historical unfolding. Interestingly, Sinclair chooses Bunny’s innocent view of things to lay bare the affective intensity that arises from the charged interaction between the daily routine of wild-cattin oil and his Dad’s stranglehold on the pulse thereof. The novel’s opening scene, an

automobile trip by Bunny and Dad in their new vehicle, is emblematic and demonstrates the penetration of material success into every aspect of their lives and times.⁹ The power of the car and Dad's fast, authoritative driving set a tone for the quest for wealth and power that drives action and theme throughout the novel:

It was a big, commanding horn, hidden away under the capacious hood of the car; a horn for a man whose business took him on flying trips big enough for an ancient empire; who had important engagements waiting ... with an engine full of power, magically harnessed... Dad had explained it—money had done it. Never since the world began had there been men of power equal to this (4-6)

It is a young scion's first grasp of the ever-mounting spectacle of power and achievement that lies ahead and that will occupy his own everyday life with the raptures of an all-consuming experience of victory, born of technological and financial expertise finding its bulls-eye mark in the opportunities of the oil boom years.

At work, here, is what Bateson identifies as a dynamic of mutually defining *metacommunication* between subjects and their cultural and material environment. As Ross brings technologies and resource- and asset-realigning influence to bear upon the California landscape and society, those actions, in turn, serve to define and incarnate not only Ross' social identity, but, perhaps more importantly, his own identification with a certain psycho-emotional state of being. Ross' everyday existence as oil-man, much as Jadwin's own forays into the speculative grandeur of his wheat-corner campaign, is blown up into spectacular proportions by the runaway success of his endeavors in the booming petrochemical industry. Also like Jadwin, well beyond any first blush of success, Ross' rise continues towards near indomitability, not only in oil business, but as an increasingly powerful magnate on the greater regional and national political scenes and, by tale's end, into the realms of international business and trade. One of Ross'

cronies, Vernon Roscoe, who is perhaps a slight notch, even, above Ross' stature, but who nonetheless exemplifies the heady thrills of power as relentlessly pursued by these barons of industry, explains such self-empowering mandates to Ross' subsequently socialistically-wayward son, that same Bunny initially awestruck by the thrill of his father's burgeoning power:

Get this straight: I can buy any officials, just the same as I can buy any politicians . . . because I had the brains to make the money, and I got the brains to use it. . . . The rest have to work . . . but when some feller comes along with the gift of the gab, and sticks himself in between me and my men . . . why then I say, "The jute-mill for him!" (385)

These barons' seizure of financial power represents as much a heady reification of their success, as it does a template for their self-identification as the holders of legitimate and indomitable authority. Ross's own mantra *vae victis* ("woe unto the conquered ones") further embodies not only the never-look-back/no-regrets attitude of these self-ordained captains of industry, but, perhaps more importantly, their hypertrophic conception of success along the lines of an affectively-charged trope of conquest. Their notions of grandeur reach far beyond mere opulence into the heady realm of omnipotence, and it is clear that their interactions with society become cast into near-megalomaniacal, that is to say psycho-emotional, terms as opposed to simple business roles.

Looking forwards, briefly, to Guy Debord's ominous anti-capitalist diagnosis and excoriation, these avatars of *making it* in the grandest of fashions illustrate, perhaps garishly, the magnitude of force that confronts the type of social critique proffered by *The Society of the Spectacle*. Indeed, Jadwin and Ross, by virtue of their considerable successes—and, perhaps more piercingly, by their unremitting devotion at the deepest psycho-emotional and identity-performing levels—not only acknowledge, but seem to

insist, that society *is* a spectacle, and should be. It is their express purpose and desire to wrangle the spectacular from the everyday, form it in that image, in a thrilling endeavor that should know no insurmountable bounds, lauding if not glorifying the totalization that Debord and other Marxian critics so fear and condemn.

As a consequence, the Ross family success in production manifests itself in limitless consumption. Outside of their business endeavors, Bunny and his family run with the *nouveau riche* Californian elite, bask in the opulence of palatial mansions, travel the world in high-style, socialize with Hollywood stars, attend only the most prestigious clubs and schools, and found new ones... a heady rush of power and means. While such prosperity will lie beyond the reach of most Americans, in the ensuing Great Depression years, its dreamlike reality moves into mainstream American culture with the rise of the middle-class, after the national triumph of WWII. In this sense, J. Arnold Ross represents a pioneer in more ways than simply becoming a successful west coast industrialist and member of the newly-minted elite. His life performs and prophesies the United States' rise to material grandeur in the latter-half of the 20th-century—a phenomenon whose contemporary mainstream-media representations this thrillology will investigate in *Making It's* second major case study, involving NBC's 2012 Super Bowl broadcast.

“His own aggrandizement”

Theodor Dreiser's *The Financier* provides a third example of the *making it* themes in exposition, here. This tale of another voracious market speculator, Frank Cowperwood, is, like *The Pit*, centered around the protagonist's immitigable pursuit of power and riches, well beyond their considerable attainment. Useful, here, in

augmentation of the *rapture-telic* impetus of success, is Cowperwood's explicit articulation of his persona-defining ethos, "his claim to intellectual and social nobility" as driven by the mandate to "satisfy myself." (135) It is a satisfaction, as is born out by Cowperwood's seemingly unrequitable appetite for financial conquest and expansion, which has much more to do with its thrilling raptures of competition and victory than with any necessary, or even satisfying (since the pursuit never ends), further asset accumulation. Indeed, the *frisson* of boundless, preferably absolute power figures centrally in Cowperwood's vision of career success: "Then he could talk as a capitalist. He began to dream of city-wide street-railway system controlled by a few men, or preferably himself. (114) This intoxicated him, for immediately he saw the opportunity of fulfilling his long-contemplated dream . . . Indeed, he was one of those early, daring manipulators . . . of American development for his own aggrandizement." (158)

Cowperwood's satisfaction, mirroring the affluent ostentation of the Ross clan, is manifest in the assembly of ever more pompous luxury to adorn his private life and lavish upon his family, and secret love interest, Aileen Butler, who embodies, trophy-like, his performance of success. Beauty, thrill and passion become bound up together in his extramarital love affair as a reifying crystallization of his comprehensive triumph. Cowperwood's response to the flush of Aileen's youthful vibrancy and beauty upon him engenders an impetus to confirm and express those feelings in material form; a gateway to luxury and elite aesthetic pleasures is manifest:

Wealth in the beginning, had seemed the only goal, to which had been added the beauty of woman . . . to the beauty of womanhood he was beginning to see how necessary it was to add the beauty of life—the beauty of material background. . . . this Aileen Butler, her raw youth and radiance, was creating in him a sense of the distinguished. (162) This place where they were secretly meeting must be beautiful. So it became a veritable treasure trove . . . some rare examples of altar

cloths, rugs, and tapestries of the Middle Ages . . . Chippendale, Sheraton, and Heppelwhite modified by the Italian Renaissance, . . . Greek vase forms, lovely collections of Japanese ivories and netsukes. (161)

As a matter of course, such signifying adornment and flamboyance extend into Cowperwood's domestic and business environs. His personal architect and various art dealers become central figures attendant to the speculator's unrelenting drive to express his attainment of self-"satisfaction." Consequently, Cowperwood orients himself in a second rapturous affect-zone, augmenting, but also derivative of the everyday-spectacularization afforded by his success in finance, one that derives its *rapture-telos* from the affective pleasures of elite societal and cultural status, and epicurean indulgence.

To go with the preceding analyses, Thorstein Veblen's investigation of leisure, wealth, and the conspicuous consumption thereof, offers interesting perspectives. Veblen characterizes elite, monied behavior as consuming "the staff of life beyond the minimum required for subsistence and physical efficiency, but his consumption undergoes a specialization as regards the quality of the goods consumed." (73) Certainly the description pertains to Cowperwood and the Ross family as they refine their material acquisitions, well beyond practical needs. Jadwin, in *The Pit*, it should also be mentioned, is no exception to such opulent gestures, lavishing his wife with endless luxurious clothes and furnishings, a new mansion, carriage, and ornate recital hall with priceless antique organ; for himself, Jadwin crowns their lakeside getaway with the purchase of an impressive steam-yacht (hardly ever used), christened the *Thetis*, which nonetheless signifies a source of great pride and joy for trade tycoon.

Further thematic consistency among these fictive case studies of conspicuous consumption inheres in the motivation behind the characters' behaviors. A product of the

cybernetic interaction of these materially successful subjects with their societal and professional milieus is their desire for attainment of an “honorific” aura, as Veblen terms it, “of punctilious discrimination as to qualitative excellence . . . a connoisseur in creditable viands, ...in seemly apparel and architecture.” (74) Cowperwood, in particular, repeatedly articulates his drive to become “a man of dignity,” one who commands respect (108, 392, 478, 487). Notwithstanding these orientations towards the extravagant public performance of wealth and power, and an acute concern with reputation, the *rapture-telic* lens nonetheless trains its focus, equally, on the site of the individual subject, where, attendant to these social significations, must surely also reside a strong personal taste for the affective *frisson* of elite accomplishment. Indeed, the “high-bred manners and ways of living” that conform to “the norm,” as per Veblen, of conspicuous consumption, catalyze, in conjunction with their respective social contexts, the greater *affect-zone* in which these subjects pointedly locate their identities as delimited by certain psycho-emotional conditions. Their personae exist as sites of sensate fulfillment; successfully self-engineered spectacularization make their everyday existences tangible, locatable, within potent affectivity.

In accordance with his material performances of pleasure and wealth, the pure thrill of Cowperwood’s heated passion for Aileen—which, no matter the social strictures of his being a family man, he will not be denied—embodies his ethos of self-satisfaction, one whose affective core is mirrored in all of his endeavors, in business and leisure. And Cowperwood is militant regarding these self-entitlements. His flouting of strident anti-divorce prescriptions of his day is exemplary, as is his refusal to accept any true legitimacy with respect to his eventual indictment (and conviction) for financial

corruption and embezzlement. Cowperwood essentially sees his philosophical deviation from the norm as born of innate personal power and independent thinking in a world dominated by weakness and hypocrisy. Dreiser describes him as “innately and primarily an egoist,” whose self-interested perspective, considering love, suspected “that apart from maintaining organized society in its present form there was no basis for this one-life, one-love idea.” (134) Thus, regardless of social and political consequences (Aileen’s father is a powerful figure in Philadelphia, who prosecutes a bitter vengeance when he discovers his daughter’s illicit tryst), Cowperwood remains undeterred in his pursuit of her.

Cowperwood is headstrong in all matters and retains an unshakeable confidence based in powers inherent to his person: “It was very evident, in so many ways, that force was the answer—great mental and physical force. Why, these giants of commerce and money could do as they pleased in life, and did.”(135) Doing as they *pleased*, it should be underscored—not, perhaps, doing, even, whatever guaranteed their unassailable commercial preeminence and security—reinforces an approach to life based in a heady rapture of power, an affective, *autotelic* state of being for its own sake. Even when his unconscionable financial machinations land him a four-year prison bid, Cowperwood’s self-conviction remains steadfast:

That thing *conscience*, which obsesses and rides some people to destruction, did not trouble him at all . . . There were just two faces to the shield of life from the point of view of his peculiar mind—strength and weakness. Right and wrong? . . . They were bound up in metaphysical abstrusities about which he did not care to bother. . . . He was strong, and he knew it, and somehow he had always believed in his star.” (271)

In this sort of attitude, based in *belief*, there already resides an interiority from which it would follow that fulfillment would have to proceed not merely from material and public success, but that would, crucially, require an affective, psycho-emotional dimension, a

corroboration of the predominate self. The *rapture-telos* should be understood as a self-fulfilling orientation (autotelic), rather than an end-game, goal, or destination; its mode, instead, centers on affective zones wherein the hallowed success-concept of *making it* is a condition of being composed equally of feeling and action, subject and environment.

Thrill to Power

In each of these literary case studies, the *rapture-telos* exerts its influence as a self-fulfilling orientation (autotelic), rather than an end-game, goal, or destination. Instead, the focus is on the dynamics of affective zones wherein the hallowed success-concept of *making it* is a condition of being that arises from interrelationships between feeling and action, subject and environment. Consequently, the *rapture-telos* lens interrogates subjective motivations beyond material accumulation and the pursuit of social status. In these considerations of empowerment, the experientiality of palpable feeling and intensely stimulating affective states are preeminent. Relatedly, the glorification of material extravagance, leisure and effortless luxury, when knit into the equation via conspicuous consumption, becomes another agency of affective consummation, of spectacularized feeling, integral to the everyday circumstances that empower the intoxicating *affect-zones* of power and success so compelling to the characters here examined. While these instances of *making it* occur within contexts of elite material success, the point here is that success itself equally inheres in simultaneous affective gratification along with (not delayed by) the intensity of its working efforts. The non-linear framing of the *rapture-telos*, its autotelism pointedly devoted to affective stimulation, adds that any such lofty ambitions always already hold the thrill, the affective palpability of *making it*. The measuring criteria are affectively-based, exert

themselves at psycho-emotional levels—gratification is only ever as thrilling as the process and effort, in these cases, of material attainment.

In such considerations of thrilling affective intensity, it is interesting to consider Norman O. Brown's call for an wide-reaching and liberating *erotization* of life. In *Life Against Death*, Brown identifies “filthy lucre,” (239) in other words materialistic obsession, as a fundamental hazard to the achievement of such transcendence. Brown centers his theoretical elaborations of this redemptive Eros on the call “for a science based on an erotic sense of reality, rather than an aggressive, dominating attitude toward reality.”(316) This study's literary-thrillological reconsiderations, on the other hand, while also pointing towards a high valuation of passionate affective states, see the material/financial world as an intense *affect-zone* that can empower a rapturous experientiality not necessarily predicated on Brown's “erotized” conceptions that claim an emancipation from “the sense of possession,” so that “the human enjoyment of the senses will be achieved for the first time.” (318) Whereas Brownian *erotization* calls for a “resurrection” (317) of the body and prescribes the world “more Eros and less strife,” an “end of negation,” (322) this *rapture-telos* perspective refashions and expands such inclination (which Brown sees as a rule of Dionysian sensibility) into affective/sensuous modes that include entrepreneurial/financial involvement and the thrill of aggressive dominance. Material conquest and the ecstasies of consumption are equally liberating and compelling contexts, particularly as applies to meaningful and fulfilling subjective experience.

In the context of this thrillological emphasis on everyday-spectacular inter-relations, it is important to underscore that the rarified worlds of big-time industrial

development and speculation are, for these figures, truly integrated within their everyday lives. Moreover, with respect to intra-appropriative aspects of the *rapture-telos*, an important dynamic at work in these case studies involves the spectacular potential that these worlds offer whose experiences are triggered, synergistically, by the actions and psycho-emotional desires of the central protagonists—these men *make* the world they desire, both exteriorly and interiorly. Returning once more to Bateson’s conceptualization of cybernetic systems—wherein cognition, for example, is anatomized as the assemblage and interactions of brain+computer+environment—dynamics in the *making it* recipe it simultaneously affective and material *rapture-telic* drive for success manifests a manipulable assemblage of subject+industry/markets+environment (the last parameter, again, offering both interior and exterior dimension).

It is the everyday-spectacular, volatile dynamism of this *thrill to power* mode of making it that conjures, immanently and irresistibly, a *rapture-telos* for its subjects that represents not necessarily a destination or goal, as much as an affect-dominated state that they come to identify as most meaningful and self-defining, and one outside of which they cannot abide. For these business moguls featured in these case studies, their business *is* their life, and it is all the more important that it is a “life” whose vibrancy and penetrating *alive-ness* is at all time as compelling and, in fact, as tangible as their material accomplishments. Given this sort of existential and psycho-emotional investment it is perhaps less mindbending to comprehend how exceedingly-powerful and wealthy figures, both in these fictive worlds and within actual history, continue to bring (often criminal) tragedy upon themselves and society. When life is a game of chance, its wild and

delectable *frisson* has a way of habituating the human condition to thrill—and once the hooks are in, an addict is an addict is an addict...

Of course, there are many other ways of *making it* besides the material success-driven model here examined. For example, in other cases a secure and stable quality of life may well be an important quality to “having it made” (as well as being eminently locatable within the everyday, though perhaps not spectacular). Love, contentment, as sense of community, and other emotionally-based states that may arise independent of material attainment, also represent very real cases for subjective success and fulfillment. Indeed, the protagonists featured in these case studies value such aspects as well, but nothing can compete with their drive for a thrilling *battle royal* of material success, in conjunction with its affective reification within their personal experiences. Rapture, in the sense of spirit-, body- and circumstance-inhabiting affective condition, intense in its palpability, is an ephemeral *telos* for such sensibilities, but one that is nonetheless profound.

Success on Parade: NBC’s 2012 Broadcast of the Super Bowl

A crucial dialectical dimension of the *rapture-telos* is manifest in intra-appropriations occurring between elements of the everyday and the spectacular. The case studies of the preceding chapter, “Success Stories,” saw the everyday lives of its various protagonists spectacularized by extreme material success and psycho-emotional reactions to that success. This second case study of the *Making It* mode, “Success on Parade,”

moves from literary to cultural/eventive source material and centers upon NBC's broadcast of the 2012 NFL Super Bowl (XLVI).

In this case-study the *rapture-telic* dynamic is reversed in that the Super Bowl broadcast, including, critically, its commercial advertising interludes, represents spectacle's incorporation of everyday life. This topical turn and further development of the *making it* mode, stresses that different forms and types of dialectical interactions are possible within the category. Such shifts underscore that the *rapture-telos* theoretical lens proffers flexible, cybernetic-affective frameworks for the examination of human experience. Due to its mass-cultural scale, the Super Bowl is ideally suited to perform aspects of the *rapture-telos* that transcend the individual subject-based model and manifest an *affect-zone* involving a larger community. The structure of the event-broadcast and its associated experiences are fertile ground for inclusive, as well as diverse, interactions between cultural, consumerist, and sports-affiliated orientations.

The recurrent gaps in football broadcasts produce a micro-episodic form and function that offers consistent opportunities for the interlacing of other information streams and narratives. In the natural flow of action, plays never last more than a few seconds, while continuous game coverage rarely exceeds fifteen minutes, and is most often interrupted in less than ten. To more precisely apprehend the ratio of gridiron action to broadcast space, it is instructive to note that a typical game, consisting of four 15-minute quarters and 3 time-outs per team, per half (officially, 30 seconds each, but stretching to three minutes, due to commercial 'bumpers,' in broadcast games) elapses over a period of roughly four hours (Super Bowls tend to run longer). Thus, a typical ratio amounts to about three parts commercial programming for every one part football

action. Consequently, when pre-game build-ups and analyses, and other Super Bowl-oriented special programming, are included (all consistently generating their own commercial breaks), the overall experience offers an essentially day-long cornucopia of interaction between audience/consumers and broadcast/commercial advertisement. It is often difficult to distinguish the NFL's prime feature from the myriad alter-narratives, within the greater assembly, and the game itself may well be considered "the commercial for the commercial," as much as the featured advertisers can claim sponsorship of the event.

As these investigations of *Making It* move into the realm of contemporary popular culture the central purpose nonetheless remains an interrogation of idealized visions of American culture, as framed and pervaded by the thrilling experientiality of spectacle. Despite the fact that the Super Bowl is a one-time annual championship clash between football's pair of last-standing elite teams, its broadcast event is one thoroughly imbued by everyday American culture tropes. The event's global audience, assembled, by and large, in everyday social settings far removed from the game itself (homes, bars, etc.), lends the occasion a decidedly mainstream cultural context. While the intense rush of armored gladiatorial clash for championship conjures momentous excitement, its high-tension affect resonates in attendant consumerist narratives thematically-based in the quotidian. Analog to the game's aura of championship, an equally spectacular *frisson* of sensation and appeal imbues the relentless exhibitions of commercial-break hard-sells, intimating rapturous consummations of all kinds. Moreover, such messaging moves inexorably towards further daily integration, in that most of these high-profile Super

Bowl advertisements are being premiered for their subsequent tenures in routine broadcast rotations.

In the process, tantalizing propositions for mimesis arise via a crucible-effect presenting contexts for *spectacularized* modes of self-realization and the performance of identity. Dorothy Hale's explication of modes of literary social discourse is demonstrative of implications involved in interactions between the everyday-ness of character-traits and surrounding environment, in this case, that of media-spectacle: "perception is constitutive of individuality, ...new value accorded to the quotidian details of everyday life is . . . devoted to mimetic representation." (438) From a cybernetic¹⁰ perspective, such interest in imitation arises, equally, on the production-side. A prime motivation of commercial television advertising, after all, is to capture, in dramatization, the "ever-changing . . . representations" of everyday life's consumer-side. (438)

The Everyday Show

Georges Perec's theorization of the Everyday is helpful in interrogating such presences within Super Bowl contexts. The detail-oriented analytical approach of Perec's *Life, a User's Manual* lends itself to close reading of the Super Bowl as a cultural phenomenon. *Life* captures the quotidian goings-on of an apartment building and features a comprehensive recitation of boarders' daily conversations and activity, as well as detailed reportage of their immediate surroundings. At first blush, these meticulous reflections appear perhaps obsessive, but initial framing of the Everyday concept as based in monotonous repetition and uniformity is always only a point of departure. Perec's work is on its way to an engagement with one of his most-employed conceptual

perspectives, the *infra-ordinary*, in a move beyond (or “beneath/ below”) the superficiality of daily humdrum that seeks to “found our own anthropology... Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic. To question what seems so much a matter of course...” (*Species* 210) The endlessly enumerative descriptions and cataloguing, therefore, are intimately bound to investigation of personal identity and experience at the level of material reality and in the particulars of what is happening.

The commercial advertising themes and subject matters that are both frame and vehicle for the Super Bowl broadcast manifest a similar, comprehensive and detailed presentation of *endotic* everyday life. In this case, the endo- prefix of Perec’s neologism, focuses upon the details that make up the “inner”/“containing” experience of real-life American society and culture. Moreover, having committed the extreme advertising budgets necessary to appear in the Super Bowl broadcast (at an average cost of \$3.5 million per thirty-second slot¹¹), commercial sponsors would do well to carefully consider notions of the American Everyday. Such statistics are especially relevant, given that market research indicates an inevitably mainstream socio-economic audience composition (according to Nielsen Ratings, 166.8 million viewers worldwide, 111.3 million in the U.S., meaning that roughly half the population watched at least some of the initial broadcast¹²).

Take as a sample, the final three commercial breaks leading up to the opening kick-off, considered (in addition to the last half-time slot) to be the most attended-to, and therefore most expensive, slots. Connectedness to the *infra-ordinary* is an invariable lynch-pin of the various sales pitches by these select corporations. The products featured are unified by their everyday utility, and include: automobiles, instant- and fast-food,

soft-drinks, beer, candy, medical services, television-oriented and travel-booking websites, auto and home insurance, shaving products, mobile phones, and casual-wear clothes. Two film trailers and teasers for other NBC programming represent, in their own way, mainstream/everyday entertainment commodities. Luxury and select-branding are entirely absent: no jewelry or high-priced watches, couture, resort getaways, etc., as appear in more high-brow/elite television programming. Presenting-corporations (apart from Lexus, who nonetheless pointedly market themselves with “luxury and efficiency”) are equally from the ranks of everyday familiarity, such as McDonald’s and Pizza Hut, Nike, Hershey’s, Hyundai and Chevrolet, Priceline.com, Kraft foods, Gillette, Pepsi, Budweiser, Verizon.

It is striking, however, that, in favor of repetition, the line-up excludes countless (only slightly) lesser-known competitor-analogs. Myriad fast-food and restaurant chains, other successful and well-known automobile manufacturers, to say nothing of the vast galaxy of retail services and products that might have squeezed (budgeted) their way in, between M’n’Ms and Old Navy, somehow fail to make the cut. This suggests that some sort of mainstream-popularity filter may be at work in NBC’s final selection process, in addition to pure financial power in the bidding process. While these behind-the-scenes vicissitudes are perhaps unknowable, such dynamics would further reify the corporate network as an arbiter of American cultural representation. In this sense, the ultimate selection of featured products and companies, embodies their crowning not only as commercial champions, but also as cultural hallmarks, in their own right.

Staying, for another moment, within the context of inclusive societal-cultural dynamics, it is worthwhile to consider visual culture theorist WJT Mitchell’s exposition

of totems, whose primary role he sees as providing companionship and eliciting identification. In this sense, the diversity of the Super Bowl's spectacular commoditizations and its event, per se, represent an array of "found objects that come to the beholder by chance,"(194) but are nonetheless a "self-consciously articulated, collectively produced . . . representation that unites the social species with a sense of its natural identity (tribe), its exchanges and 'intercourse.'"(190)

Leveling the Playing Field

The Everyday-appeal and mainstream commercialism of the Super Bowl broadcast seek both to level the consumerist playing-field and cast the widest-possible net of cultural inclusion. Previously popular, class-based strategies that held out luxury as a desirable epitome (recall Grey Poupon's successful 1980-90s ads featuring British aristocrats asking folks-on-the-street for mustard replenishment) are largely dispensed with, and replaced by affect-centered common denominators, such as thrill and sensation. Also, this sort of pure-entertainment hegemony has a way of subsuming class struggle by virtue of a homogenizing effect at the thematic level that seeks to maximize socio-cultural identification. In combination, auras and themes that propose a unity of fulfillment performed at the level of consumption are all the more accessible, disseminated amongst the joyous hoopla of the Super Bowl event. It should be added that the near holiday-scale recognition and widespread celebration of the Super Bowl broadcast's everyday-spectacular recipe is potent enough to engage non-sportsfans. It is not uncommon for viewers to claim the commercials as their only reason for watching—a mode of interest further substantiated by the extensive criticism, media coverage, and on-

line re-broadcasts (e.g. often including official, annual reviews by major news outlets, and certain archiving on YouTube) that follow every year's event.

Prominent sociological analyses of the late 20th-century saw class relations, and indeed their continued stratification, as reinforced by cultural power dynamics (many centered upon the interpretation and appropriation of pleasure and taste) and calcified by distinctions of class. (e.g. Bourdieu's *Distinction*, 1984) Now, however, pervasive commercial entertainment emphasizes on pleasure target widespread provision to diverse social groups; the industry has proliferated its points of purchase and identification so as to deprive almost no citizens of access.¹³ Moreover, when entertainment performances are rendered in increasingly compelling high-definition and interactive potentiality, and at low-cost via internet and television, the exclusivity of VIP-treatment and prohibitive entrance fees (examples of symbolic elitist power, as identified by Veblen (1912) and Baudrillard (1970)) are stripped of some of their classist significance.

As a side, but corroborative, note reaching forward to the 2013 Super Bowl, audience participation in the event (in other words, elements of the Everyday informing the spectacle) becomes increasingly direct and unexpurgated. Bruce Horowitz's USA Today article, for example, dubs this year's happening the "Crowdsourcing Bowl," due to the involvement of consumer-based social-media networks voting on which commercials will make it into the broadcast, as well as the submission of originally-produced ads for consideration by corporations' marketing strategists. Additionally, according to Angelique Krembs, vice president of marketing for Pepsi, 50 'winners' (whose photos of themselves will be the basis of choice—800,000 submitted thus far) will join Beyonce on-stage for her half-time show, because Pepsi knows "that Pepsi fans prefer to live their

lives as participants, not just observers.”¹⁴ An instance of last year’s public(ity) interactivity will be repeated by Pizza Hut, featuring a single winning-applicant’s home-produced commercial spot (though winner, David Johnson’s 2012 rap video appeared to be rather professionally touched-up). And finally, Lincoln auto-manufacturers will be incorporating tweets from younger-demographic viewers, based on the theme of ‘wackiest-ever road-trips,’ into their commercials, in a pointed effort to “embrace social media,” says Matt VanDyke, global marketing chief. (in Horovitz)

Of course, these sorts of ‘audience’ engagement are contextual to the Super Bowl broadcast itself, but Horovitz is nonetheless right in pointing out that such initiatives also serve as more widely-relevant public relations campaigns, signaling to consumers that corporations are interested in their direct involvement beyond mere purchasing, and that consumer identities are an increasingly valued part of product development and marketing. While acknowledging that consumerist rapture “is dreary and depressing to some,” consumer culture scholar James B. Twitchell emphasizes a perspective focused on the mainstream and insists “one should not forget that the often vulgar, sensational, immediate, trashy, tribalizing, . . .unifying force of consuming is liberating and democratic to many more.” (288) Likewise, these sorts of impetuses represent an agency of purchasing-power that operates at a level that transcends need, and moves into performances of status and identity.

Glorious Collage

Henri Lefebvre’s call for a “life as art” represents an insurrectionist approach to the Everyday, focused on its re-appropriation from capitalistic co-optation. (Lefebvre

1947) It is an attitude shared by another earlier, crucial engagement with conceptions of the Everyday: the surrealist project. Part of Andre Breton and the surrealists' mission was bent on undermining what they saw as an industrialized, commercialized culture; and it was at the level of the everyday, where such totalization had penetrated, that the surrealists focused their creative revolutionary efforts. Relatedly, Ben Highmore underscores that the surrealists' diagnosis of a systematized Everyday under threat of succumbing entirely to an ennui of humdrum predictability, had the effect of a concentrated effort to resurrect aesthetic mystery—a chief strategy was collage. (46-50) The technique of collage was especially suited to such endeavors as it both mimicked and foregrounded juxtapositions inherent in the heterogeneous imagery and sensations of everyday life. Surrealist collage embraced the cacophonies of advertising cycles, clashing urban architectures, and endlessly mutating fashion and design styles, among many other instantiations of diverse societal experience. It was a gasoline-on-the-fire approach whose flames burnt away the numbness of quotidian routine and illuminated its intrinsic strangeness in what Highmore also terms a “systematic attack on mental bureaucracy” (49).

Attendant to these radical shifts in perspective is a thematic re-approachment with spiritual dimensions of myth and the sacred. More than a simple reshuffling of perspective, a wiping clean of perception's windows, the surrealist strategy seeks to discover deeper meaning at the core of inescapable everyday experience. Highmore reports on contemporaneous research at the College de Sociologie that proposed an interlacing of Durkheimian concepts of the sacred and the profane. These, brought forward into modern societal contexts, were to become locatable in an Everyday whose

predictability was matched by a perpetual capacity for surprise. (57) That is to say, its commonplace routines would nonetheless produce sites for repeated spiritual and psychological liberation. However, such *modi operandi* remained largely conceptual in the work of the College and confined to the artistic avant-garde with the surrealists—in other words, remained as commentaries upon everyday life as opposed to achieving any widespread, readily identifiable societal change.

The perhaps ironic proposition embodied in NBC's broadcast of the 2012 Super Bowl is that the aesthetic of its polymorphous (one could add chaotic) assemblage very much fits the genre of collage, while remaining thematically rooted in tropes of American everyday experience. Of course, from the surrealist perspective, which Highmore also characterizes as one that seeks "the marvelous in the everyday," such adaptation represents an additionally discouraging testament to capitalism's apparently irrepressible morphability. It would seem that commercial advertising and entertainment/sports industries' aesthetic strategies of juxtaposing imagery from the socio-cultural landscape and experience have availed themselves of exactly the traction-points and quotidian relevance that the socially-revolutionary stances, such as Lefebvre's and Breton's, had been suggesting.

Take as an example the procession of imagery and messaging directly preceding the Super Bowl coin-toss. Leukemia treatment for children at the Ronald McDonald House is enjambed with suggestively-dancing animated M'n'M candies, whose dialog mixes sexual innuendo with racial profiling (the brown M'n'M takes offense, insists that she is not naked). This jarring thematic contrast segues into Droid Razr's futurist laboratories, where techno-miraculous innovations in mobile communications are

underway, their promise echoed by Hester Prynne's hit-single "Turn it gold." Thence, out of commercialism and headlong into flourishes of a Super Bowl stadium MC announcement (as cameras pan across star and bars, and faces uplifted): "In celebration of our beautiful country, please welcome from NBC's *The Voice* (a new musical-competition show premiering post-game), Blake Shelton and Grammy-winning Miranda Lambert." Their twanging country-music rendition of "America the Beautiful" proceeds through roaring cheers in response to live-footage of soldiers stationed at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. American heartstrings plucked, the meandering narrative tumbles into a trailer for Sacha Baron Cohen's politically-parodic new release, "The Dictator." No matter the directly-preceding patriotic sentiments, Cohen's caricature of a last standing terrorist thorn in the world's side gleefully proclaims in a comedic, non-distinct Arab accent, "I know who will win...I just bought NBC! Enjoy the game!" Via such starkly diverging cultural relevance and messaging, certainly, the shock-value of surrealistic contrapuntal theme and image deployment is being achieved. Most importantly, the overall effect lays vividly bare the bizarre and unpredictable diversity of the American Everyday.

While the Super Bowl event, itself, is cast as a singular sports/cultural moment, its intertwining alter-narratives, themed in consumerist and national identities, are presented as timeless (i.e. everyday). The surrealists worried that mainstream society was becoming numb to everyday commercialization, lulled and de-sensitized to its cacophonies and contradictions. Their new artistic reflections would rattle societal consciousness back into some modicum of reality, albeit a painful and even capitalistically-manufactured version thereof. It appears, however, that the commercial entertainment wing of corporate-

capitalist industry is pre-emptively succeeding with a strategy of outright celebration and spectacular enhancement of just such chaotic consumerism; and, moreover, that its packaging and presentation (a consumable commodity, in its own right) is being validated by large sectors of the populace. That is to say, a broadcast event like the Super Bowl performs the American Everyday exactly as a crazy collage, and is all the more successful for it.

Similarly, Guy Debord's trenchant criticism, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, is very much concerned with the deleterious effects of Super-Bowl-styled, that is to say, *spectacularized*, commercialism. Nonetheless, his analysis also poignantly articulates the power of openly-embraced, celebrated consumerism, when he states: "This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by 'intangible as well as tangible things,' which reaches its absolute fulfillment in spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible *par excellence*." (26) Indeed, it is the power of image, as equally available for consumption as that which it represents (vide the commodities, sports entertainment, patriotism, etc. as offered by the Super Bowl experience), that so potently affords the "fulfillment," which Debord seeks to castigate.

The Power of Purchase

As entertaining as its spectacle may be, the cultural phenomenon of the Super Bowl offers more than mere diversion—it is venue and vehicle for subjective identifications and the performance thereof. Recent scholarship by consumerism expert Grant McCracken takes part in contemporary cultural studies arguments opposing lines

of analysis that see consumers as manipulated and exploited by pressures of modern commercial materialism¹⁵. Analysts in McCracken's camp, instead, underscore an empowering agency inherent in material acquisition and the success it implies. The inclusivity of *rapture-telic* affect-zones consequently proposes that the exposure to such potentiality, via advertisement, is of a piece with such empowering conceptions.

Certainly, advertising's exhortation of consumers to take the ultimate action of purchase is a telos-driven process. On the other hand, the same process, examined through a lens more focused on affective dynamics, that is to say, with an emphasis on psycho-emotional engagement, suggests more than a mere cause(desire)-and-effect(purchase) experience. Consider the thrill of consumerism as celebrated by television advertising. Excepting, perhaps, examples such as food and drink consumed in public establishments during sports-viewing events, its site and experience are most often far removed from actual purchase points. Under such circumstances, the viewing and contemplation of purchases is *autotelic* to the acquisitive/consumptive mode—in terms of anticipatory desire, the event is already underway. Sedgwick, in her own understanding of autotelism, explains that “affect arousal and reward are identical in the case of positive affect; what activates positive affects ‘satisfies’.”(19) This is also to say that cerebral and emotional reactions to unattainable products—whether it be, for example, the unaffordable new automobile, or the ill-advised steaming pile of buffalo wings—are accessible in the rapturous suggestions of advertising's spectacle.

This *affect-zone*, assembled via the Super Bowl event, with its myriad themes offering their direct consumption via entertainment and/or socio-cultural identification, is all the more potent for its immediate affective stimulation, no matter that the messaging

is presented virtually (as a broadcast). Indeed, its mode is perhaps additionally effective (and affective) for its virtuality and modes of transmission that depend on engaging the imagination. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Ranciere similarly conjoins viewer and viewed, and focuses on their interrelation: “the capacity of anonymous people . . . is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations . . . Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator in the same story.”(17) In other words, within the greater context of the Super Bowl event there exists a thoroughgoing symbiotic potentiality involving the so-called ‘audience’ (a term inevitably carrying connotations of passivity, here refuted) and the broadcast spectacle. Spectation, within the *rapture-telos*, is active participation in the cultural tropes, themes, and performances that constitute the event and its *affect-zone*. Here, the idea and terminology of an *affect-zone* serves to emphasize its cybernetic, that is to say, multiply-interactive, *inclusivity*, where subjectivities are not necessarily limited to people, specific location, or delineating event—any thing, presence, consciousness, or cultural influence within (and contributing to the composition of) the zone becomes involved, can engage.

So what exactly entails the Super Bowl broadcast-event’s *affect-zone*, its potency that thrills millions? Beyond pure entertainment and the hocking of hot new commodities, how is the greater *epi-formance* fertile to cultural identification? For one, NBC’s commercial broadcast of the Super Bowl represents a performance of mainstream prosperity, of the ‘good life,’ and the rousing proposition that it is not only attainable, but, in effect, *happening* in American society. Furthermore, that this sort of success is “for sale,” as well as sponsoring this major cultural event, posits a kind of proof of its

veracity and the fulfillment of its visions. It is an iteration of materialistic success and its corollary attendant affective satisfactions that exists on an ideological plane (repeatable, incidentally, across the vast realm of commercialized entertainment).

The power of consumption inheres in the potential for actualizations of identity defined by prosperity, and casts consumerism, to again follow Grant McCracken, as “an important medium of our culture ... a place we keep our public and private meanings, meanings we use to define ourselves.”(4) In establishing such associations, the rhetoric of (Super Bowl) commercialism directly addresses its audience through consistent usage of the second-person singular, “you.” A sampling from the first few commercial-breaks bears out this dominant communicative mode/hailing-tactic. Regardless of product, a somewhat paradoxical tone of mandate and quasi-empathy informs the pitches. Kraft’s Mac ‘n’ Cheese, which “You know you love...,” offers perhaps the purest form of the approach. Similarly, Gillette urges men to “Join the masters of style...” (embodied by dashing film and music celebrities Adrian Brody and Andre 3000) with the insistence that folks out in the consumer-sphere “...gotta lift yourself up,” and can do so by using the *Fusion* male-grooming electric razor. The latter example’s exhortative spiel also directly addresses the audience “out there,” in TV-Land, and, perhaps more importantly, makes explicit the affective mode that its communication relies upon: “Can you *feel* it out there?” (italics added) Even the NFL’s own promotional tag-line claims that “we play for *you*,” while its uniformed players sing broken-voiced, (supposedly) candid-camera-captured versions of the pop-hit “You Are My Hero,” on surprised fans’ doorsteps.

Fulfilling the role of generally-representative (advertisement-) mantra is the McDonald’s fast-food chain’s ubiquitous slogan, “I’m loving it.” While 2nd-person

imperative is eschewed in favor of the (spoken-performed) 1st-person testament, the messaging nonetheless adheres to the hyperbolic, if not utopian, sentiments of love, salvation, victory, excellence, etc. inherent to the overall consumerist rhetoric. The direct-address is, of course, one of advertising's standard operating procedures, along with professionally-dramatized testimonies by proxy consumers. But what is especially salient, here, is that the Super Bowl's spectacular commercialism almost exclusively presents its familiarized/quasi-chummy message in themes that perform an idealized everyday American life; as opposed to, for example, tropes associated with luxury, or mid-century-styled "keeping up with the Joneses" status-competition. It is important to underscore that the effort to cultivate an intimate everyday identification is consistent in both the advertising rhetoric, as well as in the National Football League's own packaging. Not only do these two components of the Super Bowl broadcast become associated in everyday-ness, their conjunction lends itself to a mutual amplification of the event's spectacularized affective power.

Twitchell's further research emphasizes interpellating advertising strategies, which do not necessarily strive to "*force* consumers to accept material," rather, center on "determining what indeed we do want as tracked by what, and how, we purchase . . . advertising does not invent desire, . . . it expresses desire with the hope of exploiting it." (157) Furthermore, in terms of the construction and expression of identity, Twitchell proposes that production and consumption, in consumerist contexts, can become one and the same. This profile of everyday people as consumers all, links human tool-usage with the equally human cherishing of material items; and maintains that consumers are rational and quite aware of their pursuit of satisfaction and delight in the act of consumption. (38-

9) In his proposition of consumerist agency, Twitchell again connects the autonomy of such acts to populist and democratic principles: “We have not been lead into this world of material closeness and shared desires against our better judgment... We have not just asked to go this way, we have demanded. ...Getting and *spending* have been the most passionate, and often the most imaginative, endeavors of modern life.” (38)

Appraisals of consumption as carrying the capacity for embedded meaning-bearing and affectively-fulfilling communications—as in the auras of empowerment and thrill that inform the Super Bowl broadcast’s commercialism—evoke Jean Baudrillard’s notion, in *The Consumer Society*, that material accumulation can attain a mystical dimension. Under the influence of this sort of aspect, “Consumption is governed by a form of *magical thinking*... based on a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts (...of signs). ‘Affluence’ is, in effect, merely the accumulation of the *signs* of happiness. The satisfactions which the objects themselves confer... the anticipated reflection of the potential Great Satisfaction... summoning up total Well-being, of Bliss.” (31) “Signs of happiness,” after all, need not await their consummation in order that they produce their magical rapture. It is a thrill familiar to American mentality from as early as the childhood anticipation (far in advance of Santa’s overnight visit) of gifts promised to materialize beneath the Christmas tree. Furthermore, it is an intensely palpable psycho-emotional state that holds sway, whether the dreamed-for items actually appear, or not (...there’s always next year, after all). The glee-filled, titillating representations of Super Bowl advertising portray, and promise, another kind of *perpetual* gift-getting, and stand as an epitomic tribute to the utopian tales of consumption that pervade Everyday commercialism.

As variegated as the tapestry of commercially-sponsored messages interlacing the event may be, its composition unmistakably adheres to a common choice in thematic textile: the narratives all portray the American Everyday in thrilling, idealized hues. “Take a victory lap in your new Hyundai!” promises a delectable affect of triumph, born of the preeminent act, simply, of having purchased a new Hyundai. It is an *affect-zone* whose rapturous theme and tone resonates throughout NBC’s broadcast of the 2012 Super Bowl. The quality of tone, in particular, distinguishes itself from connotations of pure emotion, as per analysis by affect theorist Sianne Ngai, in that the former manifests a more imbuing, ambient effect than the latter’s eventive, episodic character. Ngai’s emphasizes on a “global or organizing effect, [a] general disposition or orientation towards its audience and the world.” (28) Along such lines, it is an overall hyperbolic tone of excitation, a thoroughgoing *frisson*, that informs the immediately self-fulfilling, psycho-emotional/socio-cultural *vibe* (the pop-cultural term seems particularly suitable, here) of the Super Bowl.

In his essay “Advertising: The Magic System,” Raymond Williams makes a related point of stressing the intensified, personal appeal of commercial dynamics when he recasts such interactions as “public relations,” wherein the simple selling of goods develops “to sell personas, in a particular kind of culture.” (183) Moreover, commercially-framed, everyday-spectacular happenings, such as embodied in Super Bowl advertisement, are representative of a greater “organized and extending system, at the centre of our national life,” (184) which may be thought of (echoing the foregoing surrealist gloss) as an “official art of modern capitalist society.” (184) While Williams’ description of advertising as ‘magic’ is mostly hermeneutically suspicious of capitalistic

exploitation (along the lines of Debordian and Frankfurt School critiques), the socially-interactive model that he lays bare can also serve to demystify, and be perhaps alternately described as *conversant with*, consumerist processes of desire and identification. In other words, while Williams' rather withering Marxian critique informs his central thesis, the essay's reconsideration, here, under the auspices of a view of commercial consumerism that is trained on subjective agency, allows that "consumption is within its limits a satisfying activity . . . a commanding social purpose." (188) When Williams adds that "we may then also find, taking advertising as a major form of modern social communication, that we can understand our society in new ways," (185) the "we," of course, mostly connotes the critical-analytical perspective. However, it is the contention here that that "we" also, if not more importantly, applies to society, in general, and most pertinently so at the level of socio-cultural conceptions and performances of identity.

The Affect of Championship

Of course, The Game, itself, is equally crucial to the experiential raptures and socio-cultural themes pervading its greater everyday-spectacular event. Foremost, the drama of competition for ultimate championship engenders heartfelt involvement. The clash of brightly-colored, blood-thirsty gladiators invariably elicits hysterical joy and agonized dejection, as larger-than-life heroes perform miraculous deeds, while zebra-striped arbiters dole out contestable rulings in the face of megatron-displayed, super slow-motion replay-evidence.

Nor should the magnified psycho-emotional commitment associated with high-stakes gambling that surrounds the Super Bowl be underestimated. In this case,

participants' own dreams of success are intrinsically tied to the game's outcome, as well as various statistical categories, if not particular moments. In addition to the greater universe of private betting, Las Vegas officially creates myriad sub-categories upon which bets can be laid, such as which team will score first, will it be a touchdown, or field-goal; or, which team will first complete a pass over thirty yards in the second half. Odds on over-under margins are also set on results such as combined points scored, as well as an individual player's statistics. In short, amongst the Super Bowl's entertainment and commercialism, there is actual money to be made, money to be lost.

However, the event's most extreme affective rapture inheres in the roller-coaster ride of Super Bowl victory expectation that engages ardently team-affiliated fans and brings entire cities to a standstill, emptying streets and punctuating breath-held silences with euphoria and/or sadness. People reduced to tears; rage, elation, victories and losses remembered for generations; validations and dissolutions of fan-allegiance. It is near impossible to watch and not end up rooting for one of the sides, to say nothing of the vehement dedication of those fans whose team or favorite players (or even preferred conference, or cultural region) have made it to the decisive showdown. And, not the least vehicle for engrossment is the very real belief in the 12th-man effect: that of fan-power's ability to spur teams to unthought-of heights. Moreover, the contest's subjective activations are always in direct competition with opposing legions, and not just in the Super Bowl-ordained stadium—among those lucky (and wealthy) enough to be in attendance—but in the deeply-entrenched hearts and minds of countless club-affiliated fans gathered in hometown bars and living-rooms, and invariably scattered worldwide.

These passion-engaging aspects of the Super Bowl event's *affect-zone* are inseparable from its commercial broadcast and the cornucopia of events, transactions, ephemera, related broadcasts (news/sports-news programming), and other sports-journalism, on-line, and in print. Resonance, however, is by no means confined to ancillary business and media-dissemination. At the core, professional sports and its athlete-heroes offer compelling, megacultural opportunities for participation. Two prominent examples, one material, the other intangible, are those of merchandise and memory.

Despite the fact that only the scantest minority of humans can entertain any hope of raising a professional trophy on high, spectacularized exposure to such unreachable dreams, in conjunction with all manner of paraphernalia sales, presents an appealing opportunity for impassioned engagement and identity performances. Sports memorabilia are a multi-million dollar industry; and globally, millions of people, of all ages, races, etc. don "official" (high-priced) jerseys and other team-affiliated merchandise. Many make the hundreds of dollars investment in video gaming systems, in which one can "be" the player, or "coach/manage" the team. Fan identification with sports-idols can be as basic and low-cost as consuming an athlete-endorsed sports drink; or, alternately, as financially and physically committed as getting high-priced, elaborate tattoos, currently all the rage among hallowed sports-warriors. And, finally, at the most essential level, widespread engagement in sport, with its inevitable investment in equipment, facilities, league fees, travel, attendance at amateur events, etc. feeds into, as well as off of, the spectacle of professional sports. The spin-offs, and this the entertainment-consumerism and sports industries well understand, are virtually unlimited.

These modes of interactivity also carry the capacity for enthusiastic engagement to rise to levels of subjective identification that extend beyond the event's moment or related consumerism. Memory, in particular, is often intrinsic to the cumulative experience, and is drawn-on in the form of perpetuated affective resonance. Games are remembered for decades; paraphernalia are framed and on display in homes and public spaces; jerseys and other affiliation-signifying gear are worn year-round, and often verge on formal-wear, in their social function. It is a symbiosis catalyzed by the megacultural appeal of sport's spectacle, one that drives supply-side affect-oriented production, in response to demand-side valuation of intensive psycho-emotional experience, of rapturous states.

Rapture, in this context, represents a refinement of the more general affect of thrill, by virtue of its connotations closer to pleasure. At the extreme, for example, dangerous or near-death experiences may (if only in retrospect) be thrilling, but hardly carry rapture's sense of fulfillment. At the same time, however, this case study's conception of rapture does not therefore take its level of excitation down any notches from thrill—this is simply to clarify that intoxications of Super Bowl-purveyed competition, laced with its nationalistic pomp and idealized visions of American life, buzz their spectacular intensities with unmistakable overtones of joy.

Along such lines, conceptualizations of Dionysian tendencies as forms of liberating behavior are certainly at rapturous work in the Super Bowl's grandiose celebration. For instance, in the Super Bowl's general bacchanalian ambience feasting and, perhaps more intensely *de rigueur*, libation are as intrinsic as in any other major holiday festivity. These are graphically substantiated by the perennial, majordomo

presence of beer commercials and quasi-pornographic close-ups of juicy, steaming snacks and entrees (whose gustatory satisfactions had better be, in some incarnation, close at hand at any Super Bowl Sunday site, on pain of cultural faux pas). Such gustatory pleasures and epitomizations, of course, only represent one mode of the overall festivity, but nonetheless exemplify the carnevalesque pageantry that spreads throughout the Super Bowl experience.

The overall effect/affect amounts to a re-presentation of American society and culture that smacks of fulfilling the Marcusean call (in *Eros and Civilization*), for an omni- and auto-erotization of the human condition—*everything* is a thrilling pleasure, “...culture appears as the builder of Eros—that is to say the natural fulfillment of the innermost trend of Eros.” (203) The Game, in its details and in its larger contexts, is the celebration of an enchanting, near-utopian perspective on contemporary America, reified by the raptures of its immediately-accessible (autotelic) and ever-accommodating *affect-zone*. Its alleged incarnation, however, skips over the comprehensive societal reformation that presupposes Marcuse’s post capitalist vision, portraying such raptures, instead, as *fait accompli*, thanks to an all-inclusive capitalist largesse reflected in the performances of Super Bowl broadcast commercialism.

Of course, the Marcusean view should also qualify all this celebratory and intoxicating affect as having a repressive effect of de-sublimation—and, at the societal level, it would be difficult to argue against such critique. People are not becoming more materially free from the requirements of the workaday grind, not somehow getting a larger slice of the capitalist pie, and (r)evolution of the prevailing societal structure is hardly a suitable topic for the overall American encomium that is manifest in the Super

Bowl phenomenon. But the *rapture-telos* lens pointedly trains its analysis at the level of psycho-emotional states, posits another understanding of liberation that is very much immanent to the experiential *moment* and contexts of intensely palpable affective response—*thrill*, in all its guises. The Super Bowl catharsis (of course, only for those who *buy* into it—which is, after all, a huge population) is an annual event whose unbridled enthusiasms, both on the sides of consumption and production, reveal mainstream American conceptions of liberation along *pro*-capitalist lines. Moreover, from this perspective the wait for fulfillment, predicated on total societal reconstruction, is over. Instead, the (quasi-)utopian, omni-eroticized reality has arrived, and most penetratingly so, in the form of immediate affective stimulation. Ritual stands in for revolution, an *autotelic* rapture accessible to the imaginary that is not dependent on material liberation; the mere celebration of the ideal satisfies, indeed thrills.

In the further instantiations of the *rapture-telos* thrill that follow (even in the *Breaking It* mode that features socially-insurrectionist behaviors) the question of the actual *power* of its thrilling affective intensities, particularly within political and socio-economic contexts, represents a theoretical aspect that continues to haunt the specter of *thrill*. While the matter will be further developed in ensuing case studies, it seems most appropriate to finally handle the question in the concluding chapter, once all the case studies have been presented, in order to address the issue in the most macroscopic and thorough sense. ...For the time being, the show goes on, and what is indisputable is that many millions of people are having a very serious, ideologically-penetrating good time.

From Faith Hill's broadcast-opening theme song "Waiting All Day" (which pointedly ends with a drawn-out triumphant skirl of "...on NBCeeeeeeee!!), to legendary

color-man Al Michaels' zero-hour pronouncement that "the greatest spectacle in American sports . . . is just moments away," the hype and near-hysterical excitement of the Super Bowl event glorifies itself archetypal.¹⁶ Not only is the event presented as a momentous occasion that global audiences can ill-afford to miss, on penalty of also suffering a major cultural lacuna, its affective eminence equally imbues the commercial narratives, sales-pitches and frame of its commercial-sponsorship. Again, the contest, itself, functions as a commercial for the commercials.

Any and all narrative themes with the capacity for lending spectacular aura are availed. In addition to dramatically patriotic performances of "America the Beautiful" and the National Anthem—accompanied by visual montages of overseas soldiers; a red-white-and-blue bespangled, adorably innocent children's choir; and portraits of sincerity amongst the stadium audience and clash-ready players—this particular Super Bowl allies itself, along resonating thematic lines and through repeated commercials for NBC's incipient coverage, with the upcoming Summer Olympic Games, in Great Britain. The connection between sport and national identity is vividly proclaimed by U.S. Olympic athlete testimonials: "There's so much emotion surrounding the Olympic Games . . . Our nation's best athletes . . . putting aside our differences . . . USA across your chest."

In sum, this is to say that the Super Bowl's thrilling and engaging assembly of cultural tropes and occasions for subjective identification generates a cybernetic system of intercommunication between everyone, and *everything*, involved. In such instances, cybernetic assemblages generate what Gregory Bateson identifies as a system of *metacommunication*, wherein "interactive messages . . . have a special and peculiar relationship to a more concrete or basic reality," giving participants "*ipso*

facto...instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included in the frame . . . which permits the transfer to reach its full intensity.” (191) The sporting event, its viewing audiences, and its commercial presentations involve interactions between athletic competition, consumerism, and performances of American cultural and social identities, interlaced with sub-themes concerning success, joy, power, patriotism, championship, etc. These seemingly disparate voices and themes, then, are unified by the tone and mood of their greater *affect-zone*, one permeated with the thrill of the Super Bowl’s spectacle and the rapturous performances and promises of its commercial messaging.

The entire affair enhances to the level of Douglas Kellner’s *technospectacle*¹⁷, as articulated in “Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle,”(24) with its media proliferation through all manner of international airwaves (the 2012 Super Bowl was broadcast in over 50 countries), including the augmentation of radio and television coverage with an NBC.com simulcast. At work, as well, is Geoff King’s notion of media-spectacle self-referentiality that draws attention, not only to its content, but also pointedly to itself as the ultimate purveyor of experience. (19) Its preeminent capacities for ubiquitous distribution, in addition to its powers to conjure spectacle and sensation, represent another layer of advertisement, for itself. Such media-driven hypertrophy and multiplication of *frisson*, in turn, lends itself even greater auras of grandiose experientiality and cultural relevance.

Baudrillard’s explication of *hyperreal* phenomena, in *Simulacra and Simulacra*, via another American cultural icon, Disneyland, is additionally useful and largely substitutable for the Super Bowl, in terms of its relation to everyday American life (at

least within the Baudrillardian theoretical framework). The Super Bowl broadcast's performance of a utopian American experience, via its commercialized representations and overall affective hype(bole), smacks of "a play of illusions and phantasms," and an "objective profile of America, down to the morphology of individuals and the crowd," (12) which Baudrillard sees in Disneyland. The operant trope of the Disneyland analysis involves "childishness" and its impacted relation to adulthood, confused by hyperreal representations (does the childish experience reify adult reality outside Disneyland, or is it an indicator of the infantilization of American consciousness?). Regardless of how one might interpret Baudrillard's handling of Disneyland and "childishness," a useful similar consideration of the simulacra-effect, in Super Bowl contexts, is available when "real American life" is substituted for considerations of "child-/adulthood."

Crucial, here, is the fact that there is no verifiable relation (indeed, the comparison is impossible) between the commercialized dramatizations of American culture and society, and actual American life. "Real" America is far too culturally and socio-economically diverse and experientially complex to be reduced to the twenty-second performances, sound-bites, and allegedly iconic imageries of the commercial advertising template. Instead, these representations achieve the Baudrillardian effect of concealing a "real that is no longer real," (13) which is to say that actual America is in effect non-representable within the broadcast framework. The "concealed real" is the dramatized "real" of the commercials, whose inauthenticity is unacknowledged. The "life-like" re-enactments, culling from very real *topics and themes* of the American everyday (family, daily consumerism, food, travel, financial management), inevitably remain as simulacra lacking any legitimate referent—that is, they even fail as simulations, due to the

limitations of their packaged and simplified re-presentational mode and format. It really is just part of the show, the *spectacle*. Baudrillard calls this effect *deterrence*, “neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up to rejuvenate the fiction of the real . . . in order to foster illusions.” (13)

Ultimately, the crucial aspect here is that of removed spectation, or commercial consumption (to include the watching of advertisements). This is not, however, to say that the *affective* response to the everyday-spectacular performance of the Super Bowl broadcast is inauthentic—the *feelings* generated amongst the global audience, even those of cultural identification, are inescapably real. What is interesting to note is that such compelling experiences of cultural identity, hope and happiness, and tropes of success and fulfillment are achieved by very unreal representations. The play of light and shadow, as in Plato’s cave, inevitably remains a genuine experience, regardless of its illusion.

Conclusion: The Place to Be

Thrilling affective intensities saturate NBC’s 2012 Super Bowl broadcast. Its engaging psycho-emotional aura, fueled and framed by the passionate contest of football’s ultimate championship, attracts global attention in the millions. The Game, however, is only half the story; a lesser portion, in fact, in terms of air-time. It is important, as well, to think the Super Bowl beyond its physical and temporal occasion, beyond its sports-historical contexts and into its cultural involvement, beyond pure sports fandom and into societal interactions. Dialectics between tangible and intangible elements comprising the Super Bowl’s overall amalgamation (viewing-experience and

event), whose action simultaneously advances in conceptual/experiential dimensions, inform a dynamic *affect-zone* within which subjects find myriad sites of connection.

The Super Bowl broadcast's instantiation of the everyday-spectacular can be usefully described as socio-cultural *eidolon*, drawing on the term's connotations of both an ideal image, and one that carries the potential for individual and societal identification. Regardless of the myriad ways in which audience-participants may interpret and/or engage with the narratives, symbolisms, and messaging that comprise the Super Bowl event, at work in the greater performance are *significations* meant not only to sustain attention, but also to base the experience in meaningful metacommunication for all concerned.

Such multifarious, cybernetic communications are further reified by the diverse affective intensities that they evoke. Kathleen Stewart's concept of "worlding" illustrates the permeating capability of *affect-zone* excitation, wherein "events, relations, and impacts accumulate as the capacities to affect and be affected. Public feelings world up as lived circuits of action and reaction." (339) For Stewart such assemblages become "bloom spaces . . . weighted with the buzz of atmospheric fill." (340) This study's exposition of the greater Super Bowl event contends that nothing less than such compelling inclusivity and dynamism, on psychological, intellectual, and experiential fronts, could possibly captivate global attention, especially in a world infinitely proliferated by media-entertainment options.

With its stadium-epicenter energy emanating into countless televisual refractions, the Super Bowl event intrigues millions, whether rooting (possibly with money down) for the home-team, or simply taking the opportunity to carouse and be entertained (if only by

the theatricality and cleverness of newly-minted, big-name commercials). Its presentation is effectively and, more importantly, affectively *autotelic* to engaging subjective experience. Whether it be affect-driven synergies that co-involve fumble-causing/bone-rattling hits with hand-held technological super-powers; or the miracle of a 50-yard touchdown-*bomb* with the idealized power of the newest heavy-duty truck; or supermodel beauty with its accessorized emulation; or the delectably simple harmony of nachos and beer, on the table, as on the screen ...NBC's presentation of the Super Bowl satisfies in a spectacular manner.

CHAPTER THREE: BREAKING IT

The *Breaking It* chapter presents an examination of texts that consciously turn away from traditional notions of success. The dreams of expansionist wealth and visions of collective utopian prosperity featured in the preceding case studies emerge as largely confined to materialistic contexts. That only very few can *make it*, like the protagonists of the “success-story” American novels previously examined, is a statement of the obvious. Moreover, the spectacular pomp and promise of the Super Bowl’s hyperbolic celebrations most assuredly must fall flat, if not appear impotent, both for those who see in contemporary consumerism a fantasia whose sound and fury amounts to nothing but tantalization, and, even more trenchantly, for those whose limited financial means immitigably bar entry to America’s prosperity. These limitations engender a different kind of quest for affective fulfillment whose catalysts will have to come from other experiential sources. Consequently, *Breaking It*’s literary representations exhibit their own *thrill*, as it were, in anti-materialistic articulations, thrill-modes and *affect-zones* that operate, purely, at the level of experience. Not only do these alternative conceptions of fulfillment critique the *Making It* mode’s impossible extension of opportunity (say nothing of meaningful gratification) to all subject-dreamers, its very core is revealed as inadequate in terms of affective stimulation—the pipe-dream of success is debunked as unsmokable, precisely because its effects are insufficiently palpable for those who lack the trappings of opulence and/or remain unmoved by the glories of American consumerism. How, if “making it” simply is not an option, does everyday life still harbor the potential for spectacular thrill?

Revolting Subjects: Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*

Breaking It's first *rapture-telic* case study carries the thrill of rebellion, of transgression, and, indeed, the destruction of existing predominant strictures and structures of societally-sanctioned types of success, and oppressive norms impacting race, class, and gender. *MumboJumbo* (1972) is particularly interesting in its relationship to affective autotelism in that its central act of revolt is nothing less than spontaneous riotous behavior, rapturous expression of joy through song, dance, and amorous abandon—an impulse dubbed the “Jes Grew.”¹⁸ In its glorious chaos, *Mumbo Jumbo* successfully renders an entirely new mode of affectively fulfilling *thrill*, one very capable of a spectacularization of everyday experience.

Dance Fever

The Jes Grew phenomenon is first introduced via “reports . . . that people were doing stupid sensual things,” were in a state of “uncontrollable frenzy,” were wriggling like fish, doing something called the “Eagle Rock” and the “sassy Bump,” were cutting a mean “Mooche,” and “lusting after relevance.” (4) Uninhibited expression, in the form of dance, with decidedly erotic overtones, characterizes the newly emerging fervor, bringing, as well, a cryptic new language, slangy monikers. While the Jes Grew condition is spreading rapidly, the paths of its transmission remain mysterious: “play(ing) hide and seek with us . . . it's not 1 of those germs that break bleed suck gnaw or devour . . . This is a *psychic epidemic*. It knows no class no race.” (5) Two important points emerge from the preceding: first, the notion of a “psychic epidemic,” one spreading uncontrollably through psycho-emotional dimensions, carrying an intense affective charge, *rapturous*

qualities; and, second, that the condition's susceptibility is omni-inclusive, non-discriminatory.

While Reed's initial depictions borrow from tropes of epidemic and infection, it soon emerges that these are descriptions from a stance in combative opposition to Jes Grew, dedicated, in fact, to the quickest possible eradication of its "plague." But, in truth, its "victims" are devoted proponents, not only willing carriers of its celebratory syndrome, but thrilled and active performers of its so-called symptoms of dance, music, sex, romance, and unrestrained, spontaneous expressions of liberated personality. The Jes Grew catalyzes an agency born of thrilling affect, one that permeates the everyday with its spectacle.

Set, as it is, in 1920s North America, Reed borrows amply from the socio-cultural contexts of the era in order to create the world of *Mumbo Jumbo*, citing, for example, historically accurate details relating to jazz and fashion, politics and world affairs, urban life in New York City, etc. In one instance, a quotation from Langston Hughes serves to explicitly knit the experiences of the Roaring Twenties to those of the Jes Grew, with a special emphasis on its consciously-willful behavior and expression: "We liked people of any race who smoked incessantly, drank liberally, wore complexion and morality with loosed garments, and made fun of those who didn't do likewise." (101) Moreover, the Jes Grew's socially anarchic spirit finds contemporaneous adoption across the Atlantic, and connects the European Surrealist movement, once again, to this project's thrillological expositions. The pronouncements of Andre Breton's surrealist manifestoes, beginning in the early 1920s, similarly championed unimpinged expression, especially through artistic

means, with a decidedly intoxicating bent that attacked mores of acceptability and, especially, social control:

the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant are all devices which we can always call upon (16) ...in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (26) ...able, by its own means, to uproot thought from an increasingly cruel state of thralldom . . . to return to its original purity.” (124)

It is an attitude whose literary and artistic expressions of rebellion are meant, equally, as performances of insurrection, of destruction of the social status quo, thrilled by the prospect of “breaking through the drumhead of reason and looking at the hole.” (Breton 300) Only through such transgressive thought and action can subjective experience throw off its everyday societal limitations and attain “the region where desire arises unconstrained, a region... where myths take wing.”(299) This is to say that, with such transcendence comes, as well, new vision, new interaction with mythic experience, another aspect of the everyday’s spectacularization, besides the seizure of subjective freedom through the disruption of social order. It is important, as well, in the *rapture telic* contexts of this analysis, to note that such liberated states of subjective experience are immanent to the re-orientation of mindset and behavior— that is, the fulfillment of its alternate reality is *autotelic* to the conception thereof. It is a change of *weltanschauung*, a change in attitude towards life, in a general sense.

As stated, the reorientations of the Jes Grew condition “give free rein to fantasy” in action, language, and myriad forms of personal expression. Importantly, emphasis is placed upon the fact that, despite the Jes Grew being a communally- spreading experience of liberation, diversity in the form of individual agencies of expression remains intrinsic to its newfound states of exuberance:

Jes Grew was on the rise . . . wiggling wobbling rambling and shambling ringing and chaining. Up. Down. Any which-a-way. Couples were dancing until they fainted in 1 another's arms. . . Individuality. It couldn't be herded, rounded-up; it was like crystals of winter each different from one another but in a storm going down together. . . The men dressed in white linen suits; the women wearing the most outlandish geegaws and long colorful skirts. (140)

Clearly, emancipatory powers of the *carnevalesque* are at work in the Jes Grew impulse and connect, in this instance, to Bakhtin, wherein the “laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended.” (122) Moreover, the Jes Grew phenomenon proposes that suspension as a permanent change, a thrilling reorganization of life, in the greatest sense—“all-annihilating and all-renewing,” on the Bakhtinian view. (124)

Within these *rapture-telic* contexts, perhaps the most profound connections relate to Bakhtin's notion of “carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of free and familiar contact” that “permits in concretely sensuous form—the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves.”(123) Also germane, the *carnevalesque* incorporates an everyday-ification of spectacle, “a pageant . . . without a division into performers and spectators . . . everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act.” (122) Beyond such inclusivity, carnival's spectacularization of the everyday is underscored by Bakhtin's conception that “its participants *live* in it, . . . a *carnevalistic life*, . . . life drawn out of its usual rut.” (122) Crucial to the Jes Grew, as well, is the fact that its festivity is not event-based, rather, is represents a transfiguration of the everyday human condition.

Concepts of *ludic* behavior and the phenomenon of play are also relevant to the rise of Jes Grew's, as it interacts with American society and culture in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Connection to Huizinga's theorization of play shares an emphasis on the element of *fun*,

which Huizinga designates as “the very essence, the primordial quality of life . . . with its tension, its mirth.” (3) Particularly its intensity, “this absorption, this power of maddening,” (2) characterizes the Jes Grew rapture (thrillologically affinitive, as well, with the surrealists’ impetus for an engrossment in the charged affective states of experiential abandon). For Huizinga, the “maddening” quality of fun, its *thrill*, is also explicitly aligned with subversions of normalized behavior, claiming resistance to “all analysis, all logical interpretation, . . .it cannot have its foundations in any rational nexus.” (3) The manifestation of Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo*, in turn, exhibits close relation to themes of the occult, mysticism, and dialectical re-appropriations of ancient myth—always accompanied by its intoxicated flights of imagination and creative expression, via dance, language, and romance.

Unmistakable powers capable of reorganizing social life itself, as much as subjective experience, corroborate Huizinga’s contention that “play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos . . . confirms the supra-logical nature of the human situation.” (3) Gregory Bateson’s own theorization of play offers useful contextualization of the Jes Grew-styled rapture as arising within “the dim region where art, magic, and religion meet and overlap,” and “human beings have evolved the metaphor . . . the sacrament that is felt to be more than “an outward and visible sign, given unto us.”” (185) The *frisson*, moreover, of its alter-consciousness presents itself as a viable reality, and, much in that way that “the dreamer is usually unaware that he is dreaming,” (185) people at play are frequently completely given over to its context.

Dance, in particular, figures centrally in the Jes Grew *rapture-telos*. Reed again includes historically-accurate evidence from the times to bring his fictional exegesis into realistic contexts, by quoting famous choreographer of the day, Irene Castle: “Nowadays we dance morning, noon, and night. What is more we are consciously warring not only against unnatural lines of figures and gowns, but we are warring against fat, against sickness, and against nervous troubles . . . these are the things that all the reformers in the world could not do for us.” (46) Here again is the revolutionary impulse of unfettered creative expression, combined, crucially, with healing and salutary qualities born directly of its animated behavior.

Jon McKenzie’s inclusion of challenge as always a part of, if not an eliciting condition for, performance applies here, as well. The dance and revelry of Jes Grew may be a vital healing, liberating force, however, throughout *Mumbo Jumbo* it is met with committed opposition and attitudes antithetical to its ethos. It is specifically the erotic overtones of the Jes Grew-engendered style that are seen as threatening: “The kids want to dance belly to belly and cheek to cheek . . . want to Funky Butt and Clack Bottom while their elders prefer the Waltz as a suitable vaccine . . . Limbering is the way the youngsters recreate themselves while their elders declaim they cease and desist from this lascivious “sinful” Bunny-Hugging, . . .this wild abandoned spooning.” (22) It is a theme of conflict that Reed builds to a crescendo over the course of the novel within race, class, and historical contexts, exhibiting the versatility of Jes Grew’s appeal.

Throughout the Jes Grew rapture’s encounters with rabid opposition, *Mumbo Jumbo* remains committed to explicating its attendant power always as both liberating and salutary. Importantly, such benevolence is a function of every aspect of Jes Grew’s

thrilling articulations, whether sexual, romantic, linguistic, or expressed creatively, fashion included. Dance, however, retains its central position, reaching as far back as the phenomenon's pre-biblical origins, where dance is medicine, both for the soul and for the greater social body. The fact that dance, when compared to painting, literature, or music, for example, is perhaps the most widely practiced, most *everyday*, form of expression reinforces the importance that Reed attributes to the universal power of bodily expression.

A revolutionary *erotization* of everyday life, particularly as associated with imagination and creative expression, is the basis for Herbert Marcuse's utopian vision of a post-capitalist, reinvented human condition, in *Eros and Civilization*. Leaving aside, for the moment (as Marcuse does in the culminating section of his treatise, entitled "Beyond the Reality Principle"), the social and economic conflicts whose resolution would enable such an alternate society, Marcuse's vision is useful for articulating the socially-regenerative, revolutionary impetus of Jes Grew, at the level of affect. That such expanded *eros* seeks to compensate for aspects of fulfillment lacking in society and subjective experience, as it stands, is a stance established early in Marcuse's exegesis when he speaks of a "gratification that culture [based upon the Freudian model of society organized through sublimated erotic cathexis] cannot grant . . . as such and as an end in itself, at any moment." (11) The antidote and an alternative approach to life, then, arises in the imaginative power of "phantasy" (140), closely allied to artistic expression of all types, which represents "a most decisive function in the total structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest product of consciousness (art), the

dream with the reality . . . the tabooed images of freedom. . . phantasy has a truth value of its own. . . This occasion is art.” (140-4)

Crucial in these links is the proposition that “phantasy” is a fundamental force carrying imagination’s potentiality, that gives rise to very *real* instantiations, performances, and experiences of artistic expression—what is born of the immaterial (imagination) gains form in the physical (body, expression). For Breton and the surrealists, the impetus is foundational: “Imagination alone tells me what *can be*.” (4) Elucidating such *rapture-telic* dimensions of (re)organization that arise, as well, in the imaginative expressions of Jes Grew dance, Marcuse adds, in his own exegesis of similar literary powers: “Style, rhythm, meter introduce an aesthetic order which is itself pleasurable.” (145) It is an ethos, moreover, resonant with Jes Grew’s insurrectionist tendencies, one that champions A. N. Whitehead’s claim (quoted by Marcuse) that aesthetic achievement is invariably marked by a “great refusal,” which, for Marcuse, inheres in the uncompromising pronouncement that “Art allied itself with revolution.” (149)

VooDoo Arts at Work

In further explication of the central theme and title of *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed offers, simply, the American Heritage Dictionary’s definition: “fr. Mandingo *ma-ma-gyo-mbo*, “magician who makes the troubled spirits of the ancestors go away.” (7) One of the main figures who incorporates this role, an expert practitioner and long-standing vessel for Jes Grew-type powers (as opposed to the increasing numbers of initiates whom Reed largely renders anonymously, *en masse*), is Papa LaBas, a VooDoo priest, originally from New

Orleans, now operating his Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral in Harlem. Papa LaBas' mystical healing powers are manifold, largely benevolent, and derive from ancient teachings that reach back to pre-biblical Africa: "PaPa LaBas, noonday HooDoo, fugitive-hermit, obeah-man, botanist, animal impersonator, 2-headed man, You-Name-It is 50 yrs old and lithe (although he eats heartily and doesn't believe in the emaciated famished Christ-like exhibit of self-denial and flagellation). (45) Papa LaBas carries Jes Grew in him like most other folk carry genes." (24)

Combining Caribbean VooDoo arts (most often associated with Haitian origins, but frequently intermingled with Jamaican Obeah, and Hispanic Santeria) with the African spiritual tradition of the *loas*, and no small degree of original tricksterism, LaBas most often simply refers to his practice and belief system as "The Work." A sign on his Cathedral door reads: "PAPA LABAS/MUMBO JUMBO KATHEDRAL/FITS FOR YOUR HEAD." (24) Reed additionally describes LaBas' work as "mind haberdashery where he sized up his clients to fit their souls. Many are healed and helped... People trust his powers." (24) The double-meaning embedded in "FITS FOR YOUR HEAD," in conjunction with fitting his clients' souls, reflects his adeptness at personalized healing, as well as The Work's extreme psychic manipulation aimed at conjuring cathartic trance states (fits), whose intensity represents the full force and manifestation of Jes Grew capacities.

The *loas*, deities from the African (mostly Yoruban) pantheon of ancient myth and spirituality, exhibit (as does Papa Labas' Work) humanized, individuated aspects that correlate to specific elements of human nature and behavior. *Erzulie* is the loa of, among other things, love, lust, and desire; *Esu-Elegbara* (or Legba, in Haitian Voodoo) is an

interpreter, boundary-crosser and guardian of the cross-roads, (Gates 704) closely associated, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, with Papa LaBas. Additionally, the Jes Grew impetus towards the satisfaction of universal appetites for play, stimulation, and eros, exhibits another crucial aspect of the West African tradition in the ritual practice of feeding the *loas*. At Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, Papa LaBas is consistently concerned with making sure that the various *loas*, whose manifestation seems to carry both animal and plant characteristics, are properly nourished and kept in a nurturing environment (candles, incense, flowers, and music are used). Neglect or failure in this careful art of tending the *loas*' spiritual powers brings about adverse effects in the human world, such as sickness, confusion, misbehavior. Every bit as unpredictable as the human spirit, the *loas*' possession of the soul occurs both in benevolent and malevolent contexts—at the Cathedral, and in The Work of LaBas and his fellow specialists, both exorcism and invocation are practiced. Jes Grew, in turn, represents a prime mode of invocation, of willful desire to be possessed, fed, by the ancient mysteries of the *loa*, adapted into the VooDoo arts:

Potential victims gather about the already infected rejoicing chanting GIVE ME FEVER GIVE ME FEVER.(32) Upon hearing Ethel Waters sing “THAT DA-DA-STRAIN” and a jazz band play “PAPA DE-DA-DA” European painters take Jes Grew abroad . . . on Wall Street saxophones make a strong rally while violins are down . . . cases reported including cows, chickens, sheep and horses, disproving that its effects are confined to the human species. Even the sap in the maple trees moves nasty. (105-6)

Additionally explicit here is The Work's connection of the human experience and condition to the natural world (as well as its universal, cross-cultural susceptibility, as it travels abroad). The spectacle of Jes Grew mysticism and the spiritual powers of The Work offer not only rapturous upliftment and healing, but carry a unifying and

harmonizing social effect. In contrasting the socio-spiritual approach of Papa LaBas' ancient lineage to (more incursive) monotheistic Western belief systems (referred to as the Atonist tradition), Reed describes LaBas' benign harmony with the world as "contemplative and relaxed, which Atonists confuse with laziness because he is not hard at work drilling, blocking the view of the ocean, destroying the oyster beds or releasing radioactive particles... LaBas is a descendant from a long line of people who made their pact with nature a long time ago." (45)

Henry Louis Gates also characterizes the *Esu-Elegbara* divine spirit, "master of the mystical barrier," as "the phallic god of generation and fecundity." (687) Erotic, romantic, desirous proclivities of human experience are equally within the realm of The Work, and unmistakably central to Jes Grew's greater expressiveness and excitement. One particular case in *Mumbo Jumbo* is illustrative of The Work's *savoir-faire* in the sexual realm, in which an associate of LaBas, Black Herman, is called upon to practice the sexual-healing aspect of The Work. A compatriot of the Cathedral collective, Earline, finds herself under the malevolent influence of the *Erzulie* loa,¹⁹ after her lover, Berbelang, with whom she argues bitterly about infidelity in their final meeting, is killed. She plunges into a dangerous depressed state of unchecked intoxication and lasciviousness, aspects of the *Erzulie loa* when unrequited and at ill-ease. Black Herman, known as "an international heartbreaker, who while on a trip to Africa hypnotized a lion," is called upon to "give a Crisis de loa to a loa," (128) or perform an exorcism. His job is to satisfy the agitated *loa*, so that it will leave its host in peace, and let Earline heal from the trauma that has engulfed her life. Just as with the in-house *loas* at LaBas' Cathedral, it is The Work practitioner's job to feed the divine spirits:

Herman reaches over to where she is suspended and puts his arm about her waist, gently bringing her body towards him like an intelligent fisherman reeling in, ...enchanted the fish . . .
He bends over, holding her there and kissing her...
Softly, a husky whisper. Now you know you want to leave this girl now, don't you?
She cries passionately almost inaudibly Yes! Yes! ...but first . . . please . . . please feed me!" (129)

In this instance, *The Work* manifests an erotic art of healing, consistent with the Jes Grew's affective and sexually-charged powers, wherein bodily communications of rapturous sexual intimacy are every bit as potent as dance and music.

It should be noted, at this juncture, that Reed's connection between Earline and the *Erzulie loa*, especially in this scene's characterization of the *loa*, may well be seen as incomplete, if not biased towards a feminine dependency on masculine healing. Indeed, various critical perspectives have taken issue with such apparently gender-biased rendering that leans toward a Jezebel-type profile of the black female, wherein "women's falls from purity represent grave female failures to contain not only their own sexual passions, but those of their male partners as well."²⁰ (Andersen 209) A reinforcement of such representation, for example, may also be found in the fact that, in the escalation of her seizure *cum* possession, Earline seduces a random bus-driver. For some critics, such representation "owes most its inspiration to patriarchy" (Wallace 187) and is "so bent on reestablishing black manhood that he [Reed] can picture it only in conjunction with a differentiated and (many would say) subordinated black womanhood." (Hume 511)

Not unrelated to such contentions, it is additionally useful to reinforce that a wider-scoped portrayal of the *Erzulie loa* manifests divine powers that are anything but helpless, or in need of Black Herman styled sexual healing, powers that inherently obtain the capacity for such healing and, indeed, are seen to routinely exert their sway over the

male sex. In her authoritative and comprehensive cultural-anthropological study of Haitian Voudoun and the *loas*, for example Maya Deren's *Divine Horseman* emphasizes the *Erzulie loa*'s dominance in the sphere of love and sexuality, where the feminine is associated with a "divinity of the dream, as the Goddess of Love, ...as mother of man's myth of life—its meaning... sublime luxury is *Erzulie* ... the excessive pitch with which the dreams of men soar." (138) Similarly, literary analyses also serve to paint a broader, all-powerful picture of the *Erzulie loa*, one capable, indeed, of encompassing both sexes in its power: "*Erzulie* goes beyond false dichotomizing," an indeterminate goddess "whose libido wanders between women and men," even when her powers "concentrate on men and how they must serve her." (Dayan 7) In sum, these qualifications are not meant to undermine Reed's novelistic right to build characters and unfold action as he sees fit, rather, simply to make the point (which the novel as a whole successfully accomplishes) that the *loas*' realm of divine power extends in multi-fold, unpredictable directions, scarcely confined to gender-determined roles in its capabilities. Whatever the dynamics, sexual interaction fits into the sensuality of *Jes Grew* powers of healing and rapturous affective experience.

Surrealism's proclamation of its own "Living Works" centers on a similar erotized spiritual dimension, in which "it is absolutely true that carnal love is at one with spiritual love. Their reciprocal attraction must be strong enough to bring about perfect unity, at once organic and psychic." (Breton 301) Throughout the *Mumbo Jumbo* experience, and pervading *Jes Grew*'s conjuring, is this intoxicating intra-communication between spirit and body, between expression and satisfaction, between the divine and the worldly—the everyday made into spectacular rapture. For Gates, the *loas*' power, The

Work of an *Esu-Legbara* figure (LaBas), inheres in a mediating capacity, a liminal hermeneuticism between various dyadic contexts that interprets “the will of gods to man” and carries “the desires of man to the gods.” (687)

Mumbo Jumbo’s original re-presentation of the rapturous powers of ancient mystical traditions is based on the power of thrilling, *rapture-telic* affective intensities transposed north to New York from the Deep South, by way of the Caribbean and Africa. Crucial in its syncretic figures of vitalism is the implication that such powers can migrate, reincarnate, and become re-appropriated into new socio-cultural contexts, often carrying a revolutionary impetus. The story of its evolution parallels thematic unfolding within the novel’s narrative action, while establishing a new cultural context for its mystical presence and metamorphic pervasion: “In Haiti it was Papa Loa, in New Orleans it was Papa LaBas. In Chicago it was Papa Joe. The Location may shift but the function remains the same. . . .Erzulie with her fast self is sheltered in a ‘vocalizing’ trumpet . . . Legba takes requests from behind the derby-covered bell of a ‘talking’ slide-trombone.” (77)

Black Herman, specifically, represents an updating of even Papa LaBas’ deep southern, Caribbean-derived tradition, transmigrated to New York (the greater U.S., and Europe), and manifest within 1920s North American culture. Black Herman’s own innovated method is—in resonance with Gates’ explication of the interpretative, mediating, and sign-reading powers of *Esu-Legbara*—based in creative re-appropriations that allow *The Work* to do its *thang* within new contexts: “It’s a loa that Jes Grew here in America among our people. We call it Blues. . . .We were dumped here on our own without the Book to tell us who the loas are, what we call spirits were. We made up our own. . . .I think we’ve done all right. The Blues, Ragtime, *The Work* that we do is just as

good. . . . If you heart's there, man, that's ½ the thing The Work is not like taking inventory. Improvise some." (130)

Clashing Styles

The Jes Grew's mortal nemesis is the Atonist Path. Born of a tradition reaching back into history, as well—from ancient Egypt through Moses, into Christianity's beginnings, involving the Teutonic Knights, the Templar—in *Mumbo Jumbo*, its lineage takes the form of a modern North American militant wing, the Wallflower Order. Aligned with dominant economic and political power structures and fiercely committed to the *status quo*, the Wallflower Order's overarching mandate is to “defend the cherished traditions of the West . . . eating at the fabric of our forms and technique, our aesthetic integrity,” (15) according to a Southern Congressman. First exposure of the Atonist stance is simultaneous with the Jew Grew's debut, and in the same place, New Orleans. The mayor—himself in delectable *flagrante* with a flapper-styled, “doo-wack-a-doo fizgig floozy” named Zuzu, “flask stuck in her garter healthily endowed gams,” (3)—is called to St. Louis Cathedral to attend to an emerging crisis situation involving a “Creeping Thing,” the Jes Grew epidemic. At the hastily-assembled triage area are anaesthetized victims (including the priest, who had “been shouting and carrying on like any old coon wench with a bass drum.”(5)) The increasingly hysterical doctor implores the Mayor, “Don't you understand, if the Jes Grew becomes pandemic it will mean the end of Civilization.” (4) Calvinist editorial writers agree, “wondering aloud [about] the effect of Jes Grew upon 2000 years of civilization.” (15)

Everything that the Atonist path believes in, mostly in terms of social order, is apparently threatened by the wanton abandon of Jes Gres raptures, its unrestrained hedonistic spectacle. People are literally dancing in the streets, evidently flouting their day-to-day responsibilities; and, from the vantage point of the Wallflower Order's New York City center of power—where the madness still seems mostly confined to Harlem speakeasies, jazz joints, and house parties (and the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, of course)—full encroachment is beginning to feel imminent. Desperate measures, as heroic as those called upon to defend the Holy Land in the time of the Crusades, are called for. The madness, the storm of unbridled sexuality and decidedly untraditional forms of expression, must be stopped, immediately and at any cost. Walter Mellon, aka “The Sphinx, a cool tycoon who knows the score,” conductor of the Wallflower Order of America, has a plan: “Suppose we put a tax on the dance floors and get out of circulation J.G.C.s [Jest Grew Carriers] like musicians, dancers, its doers, its irrepressible fancy . . . arrest them on trumped-up drug charges and give them unusually long and severe prison sentences . . . put an end to Jest Grew's resiliency.” When a lackey timidly opines that such steps might “result in depression,” Mellon's stance, preferring his own, controlling mayhem, is clear: “if a panic occurs . . . It will be our Panic.” (154-5) The Atonists' oppositional tactics make additionally clear the anti-oppression, and anti-depressive, qualities inherent in the Jes Grew phenomenon—its *breaking it* mode has as its *rapture-telos* an exuberant uprising against domineering cultural paradigms and hierarchical societal rule.

Restriction and control are the power fetishes of Atonism, whipped into zealous flame, as much by the Jes Grew's hedonistic anarchy and The Work's counter-cultural

practices, as by their rampant appeal and spreading presence. Monotheistic belief systems, in particular, appear excessively restrictive in contrast to the more permissive, widely-inclusive, and multi-faceted experiential power of Jes Grew. Two articulations culled from Reed's narration demonstrate the diametrical opposition: "To some if you owned your own mind you were indeed sick but when you possessed an Atonist mind you were healthy. A mind which sought to interpret the world by using a single loa. Somewhat like filling a milk bottle with an ocean," (24) as opposed to the "ancient Vodun aesthetic: pantheistic, becoming, which bountifully permits 1000s of spirits, as many as the imagination can hold. ...larger than the Koran and the Bible, the Tibetan Book of the Dead." (35)

The stark contrast is by no means confined to human expression and behavior; the distinction is also incorporated in the material details of the novel's settings. In stark contrast to the organic fecundity, riotous color and sound, and metamorphic intricacies of the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, the Wallflower headquarters "have nothing real up here. Everything is polyurethane, Polystyrene, Lucite, Plexiglas, acrylate, Mylar, Teflon, polycarbonate. A gallimaufry of synthetic materials. ...Nothing to remind you of the Human Seed. The aesthetic is thin flat turgid dull grey bland like a yawn. ...The Atonists got rid of their spirit 1000s of years ago with Him. The flesh is next. Plastic will soon prevail over flesh and bones. Death will have taken over." (63) Conversely, the Jes Grew's creative, organic cultural fecundity is evident when a covert naval operation, on a mission to apprehend a leading member of the Wallflower order, arrives from Haiti. The interior of the ship reflects Haitian Voodoo's own colorful and animated aesthetic, clearly a forbearer of *The Work's* style and culture: "Outside the ship may be tugboat-

shabby but the interior is beautiful. On the floor are loa signatures drawn with cornmeal and water. Rada Drums hang from the ceiling . . . the walls are red, the floor is black. A flag hangs from the ceiling upon which has been sewn the words *Vin' Bain Ding*, "Blood, Pain, Excrement." On the table are handbells . . . On the walls are portraits of Toussaint L'Ouverture, . . .and Boukman, the Papa Loi, who rallied the Haitian countryside to the banner of VooDoo," (131-2)

Tricks of the Trade

LaBas, his Work, and the Jes Grew all carry the capacity of *tricksterism*, a characteristic associated with African and Caribbean spiritual powers. In *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde emphasizes the point that the sometimes incomprehensible, if not apparently devious, machinations of trickster figures serve a purpose most often involved with empowering the powerless, or undermining tyranny. The potential to impact human lives make tricksters "creators of culture," according to Hyde, and their "seemingly asocial actions continue to keep our world lively and give it the flexibility to endure . . . require that there be space . . . to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on." (9) Within the context of Jes Grew's rise in 1920s North American culture dominated by materialism and empirical scientific authority, on the one hand, and mostly monotheistic religious perspectives (including Islam), on the other, The Work's socially anarchic and paradigm-shifting implications rise into stark contrast. Such destabilization of power structures and transgressions of mores, not the least of which accompany Jes Grew's hyper-sexualized hedonism (and erotic approaches to healing, as per Black Herman's practice), serve to further illustrate tricksterism's tendency for

boundary-crossing that not only infringes upon contested lines, but thereby confuses the distinctions they attempt to uphold.

If boundary-crossing and the disruption of established socio-cultural norms are the trickster strategy, then humorous irreverence, satire, and parody are crucial tactics. Gates refers to these qualities in his own analysis of *Mumbo Jumbo*, while offering pointed connection to Bakhtin's explication of *carnival*, already established as central to this thrillological examination of the Jes Grew rapture. Bakhtin identifies the ritualistic mode of laughter and humor as often targeting "something higher, . . . gods, the highest early authority were put to shame and ridiculed to force them to *renew themselves*." (127) The Wallflower Order's panicked and brutal response to Jes Grew hilarity and its humor-based critique of the status quo indicate a desperate attempt to resist any "shift of authorities and truths, . . . of world orders." (127)

Meanwhile, it is equally true that the traditions encapsulated in Papa LaBas' Work, born of a history of oppressed, non-Western cultural orientation (*à la* the Jes Grew's), "...deals with the very process of change, with crisis itself . . . a profoundly universal laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world." (Bakhtin 127) It is a thrilling, rejuvenating proposition at that. The Jes Grew's wide-scoped view of the world and the greater human condition, with all its sufferings and contests for power, are made explicit in Papa LaBas' musings, as he contemplates African statuary: "...amusing lampoons carved in wood . . . depict Whites who went into Africa . . . represented giving bribes, drinking gin, leading manacled slaves... Their chalk-faces appear silly, ridiculous. ...LaBas could understand the certain North American Indian tribe reputed to have punished a man for lacking a sense of humor. ...Nowhere is there an account or portrait

of Christ laughing . . . until tears appear in his eyes like the roly-poly squint-eyed Buddha guffawing with arms upraised, or certain African loas, Orishas.” (97) Not only is an eminent valuation of humor and laughter evident, the carvings’ depictions tap into the carnivalistic concept of the *decrowning double*. Bakhtinian images of the oppressor recast in parody “turn the world inside out . . . diminishing, distorting,” (127) and enact a “joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position.” (124) The worldviews and re-interpretative powers presented in *MumboJumbo*—including those of Caribbean VooDoo and the African *loas* that reach back into history and beyond American borders, as well as Jes Grew’s home-turf upheaval and proposition of revived socio-cultural norms—all base their liberated re-organizing strategies on exuberant forms of expression (including, in Jes Grew, dance and reinventions of language) that conceive human experience in new ways that invariably critique prevailing norms. Gates’ explication of such dynamics at work in *Mumbo Jumbo* posit that The Work is “the very work (and play) of art itself.” (705)

Another historically-relevant quote included by Reed, from A. Joost and M. Merloo’s *The Dance: from Ritual to Rock and Roll, Ballet to Ballroom*, reinforces *Mumbo Jumbo*’s exaltation of artistic expression (and dance, in particular) as a liberating social force, as well as one that engenders socially beneficial communication, if not harmony: “Dance is the universal art, the common joy of expression. Those who cannot dance are imprisoned in their own ego and cannot live well with other people and the world. They have lost the tune of life.” (60) Many aspects discussed thus far contribute to the Jes Grew’s *affect zone*, however, the non-linguistic interactions of dance are interesting for their connection of affective and bodily expressions. Gregory Bateson’s

discussion of *metacommunicative* modes within the organizing principles of psychological frames, in his essay “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” is helpful both in elucidating the greater context of the Jes Grew experience, as well as the way in which dance, in particular, functions within the system. A specific version of psychological frame, the *play-frame* (other examples given by Bateson include “language,” “movie,” “job,” “interview,” etc.), is illustrative of the “logic of classification” that “delimits a class or set of messages (or meaningful actions)... consciously recognized.” (186) Similarly, “The Mooche,” “Funky Butt,” “Bunny-Hugging,” etc. represent conscious new articulations of the movement’s joyful liberation, cultivated and expressed in exuberant 1920s dance-styles.

The Jes Grew’s *affect-zone* is an amalgamation that includes additional socio-cultural frames embodied by The Work, its extra-traditional spiritual orientations (i.e. those infiltrating North American mainstream culture), as well as the frame of societal upheaval in open conflict with the dominant paradigm. All in all, these ingredients feed off of, and into, one another, as does a palpable and over-arching frame of *thrill*, one that garners increasing affective potency as the movement gains momentum. Within the overall system, then, Bateson’s notion of cybernetic feed-back is also at work as force of unification, wherein “the frame becomes a part of the premise of the system . . . which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, [and] *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included in the frame. The converse is also true.” (188) Dance carries the behavioral taxonomies of play, but, just as importantly, instantiates potent *metacommunication* between and amongst the Jes Grew phenomenon and its practitioners. With additional spiritual dimensions augmenting its

affective, performative and expressive potentiality, the Jes Grew *affect-zone* rises to the level of a revolutionary force, a *rapture-telic* mode of *breaking it* that exerts itself upon 1920s American society and culture; and, understandably, has the Atonist power structure quaking in its jack-boots. More than just a cultural movement, the Jes Grew phenomenon represents a shift in American value and belief systems.

These compelling aspects of play are central in Huizinga's chapter, "The Elements of Mythopoesis," wherein the *rapture-telos*' own potentiality for imaginative auto-invention/self-actualization is echoed in notions that interleave the divine with the everyday: "Holiness and play always tend to overlap. So do poetic imagination and faith." (140) These are capacities seen not simply as an "innate habit(s) of mind, ...a playing of the mind," but also as a "tendency to create an imaginary world of living being (...a world of animate ideas)." (136) Underscoring Batesonian *metacommunicative* dynamism, as well as play's capacity for spectacularizing the everyday, Huizinga reminds us that, however prevalent to human activity "typical play-function" may be, it's imaginative genesis can carry the "desire to make an idea as enormous and stupefying as possible." (143)

Battle Royale

It should be pointed out, in further explication of the Jes Grew phenomenon that, in resonance with the realities of historical conflict, Reed pits its movement against formidable opposition from various quarters. While the Atonists, with their grip upon the edifices of North American political and economic power, represent the perhaps most obvious and racially/historically-aligned nemeses for the Jes Grew, there are threats that

arise from within its own ranks, given that Reed largely circumscribes the movement within African-American cultural contexts. This is to say that, as much as Jes Grew sees no color or class within its liberating inclusion, the conflicts associated with its greater implications also know no such bounds.

The most prominent example is embodied by Abdul Sufi Hamid, magazine editor, and notable Muslim fundamentalist. Abdul's intolerance for the hedonistic raptures of Jes Grew matches that of the Atonists, his chief objection being that the black race needs, instead, to replicate the cut-throat industriousness of the dominant class, in the interest of their own advancement:

Cut out this dancing and carrying on, fulfilling base carnal appetites. We need factories, schools, guns. We need dollars. ...He that worships other gods besides Allah shall be forbidden to Paradise and shall be cast into the fires of Hell. ...It's the 1920s, not 8000BC. ...This is a country where something is successful in direct proportion to how it's put over; how it's gamed. ...The Mormons got Utah. ...The authorities are already talking about outlawing VooDoo in Harlem. These are your last great days... (34, 38)

For Abdul, the affective, creative dimensions of the Jes Grew are mere distractions, disempowering even, bound to keep his race oppressed. Moreover, his hardline Islamic discipline is willing to take militant action against even "his own people," as in the case when he publicly cane-whips young female J.G.C.s, guilty of dressing in revealing flapper-wear and "swinging their asses nasty." (36) A thoroughgoing point of contention associated with comprehensive control under authoritarian leadership (versus the Jes Grew's individualistic ethos), a conflict that thoroughly imbues *Mumbo Jumbo*, is encapsulated in this singular instance, when Papa LaBas counters with: "Maybe they felt that they should decide themselves what was best for them to wear, Abdul," (36) and Black Herman adds, "That [Abdul's] bigoted edge resembles fascism." (40)

But opposition is also not restricted to opposing forces trying to determine socio-cultural norms—questions of The Work’s feasibility, and modern applicability, rise amongst some of the younger members of the Cathedral’s own ranks. During a crisis of conviction, exacerbated by Wallflower threats and agitation and viewpoints such as Abdul’s circulating through the Harlem community, Papa LaBas’ assistant, Earline, suggests that The Work’s methodology is “ridiculous. . . . We need scientists and engineers, we need lawyers,” (25) and lacks practicality in the face of modern technology and science. Still, Papa LaBas stands strong, emphasizing invaluable spiritual counter-balances to the physical world’s laws and demands. That modern society has drifted too far into the exclusively materialistic realm, and has lost track of the spectacular capacity that a free-spiritual consciousness can offer everyday life, is, after all, what is driving Jes Grew’s mystical, affect-based resurgence. It is a question of the proper metaphysical “haberdashery,” “fits for your head,” that is appealing and liberating to so many and is fueling the Jes Grew movement. Papa LaBas also refers to its oneiric arts as “Knockings”: I dream about it, I feel it, I use my 2 heads. My Knockings. Don’t you children have your Knockings, or have you New Negroes lost your *other* senses, the senses we came over here with? . . . I’ll bet before the century is out men will turn once more to mystery, to wonderment. (25-6)

Norman O. Brown’s psycho-social analysis in *Life Against Death* similarly weighs material conceptions of upliftment (*making it*) against the failure thereof to account for the need to feed (a la the *loas*) the inner spirit. Brown’s analysis intertwines the need to sublimate with that of economic accomplishment (259), cites such impulse as one that inclines towards the neglect of the “science of enjoyment” (260), and whose

dedication is prone to morph into a “commitment to the sacred-superfluous,” (261) a false-consciousness described, alternately, as “the folly of alchemy’s pseudosecular heir, modern capitalism.” (258) While Earline’s and Abdul’s calls for materialist, scientific empowerment claim to speak from a position of disenfranchisement, it is Papa LaBas’ unyielding rebuttal that such advancements can only fulfill their role in human experience when they do not become the (false) end all, be all. Brown seeks to further expose such imbalance by echoing Freudian theory’s “sublimation (as) the desexualization of sexual energy by its direction toward new objects . . . an alienation of [his] own body.” (281) Central to the Jes Grew impulse, then, is precisely the opposite desire: one that pursues a re-sexualization of everyday human experience (or, at least, not a repression or redirection of sexual energy) manifest in its hedonistic behaviors and the liberating erotic intimations of its dance and *The Work*. Absent the attainment of thrilling affective states associated with of sexual power and joy, the psycho-spiritual void becomes filled by the material masquerading as a mystical, if not divine dimension, or, in Brown’s Marxian-Freudian terminology, leads to “the reification of the superfluous-sacred in monumental enduring form.” (282-3)

Given that the Jes Grew phenomenon imparts its spectacle at the level of the everyday and proposes a change of the human condition, writ large, it is worthwhile to consider Henry Lefebvre’s famed *Critique of Everyday Life*, particularly given his early associations with the surrealist movement and exaltation of the power of festival. These associations would seem to indicate Lefebvre’s seamless integration into *rapture-telic* theorizations of *Mumbo Jumbo*’s worldview, based, for instance, upon Lefebvre’s pronunciamento, “Let everyday life become a work of art.” (*Everyday Life in the Modern*

World 204) Of course, such sentiments are expected, given Lefebvre's contemporaneity and documented contact with the nascent Surrealist movement, whose manifestoes set out to re-claim art as a pervading the everyday realm. Yet Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* essentially opens with a scathing criticism of the Surrealist approach as "mental confusion . . . deliberate semi-neurosis, . . . often little more than ambivalent infantilism (120) . . . they hold forth on the subject of anguish to fashionable audiences in lecture halls . . . shrewdly, cleverly . . . and with verbal elegance." (126) Why the extreme acerbity towards his former comrades? In essence, Lefebvre condemns what he considers to be Surrealist escapism ("the 'modern' intellectual [pushes] far from his lips the bitter chalice of an everyday life which *really* is unbearable," (120)) whose reactive effort to cultivate "the marvelous" actually ends up robbing everyday experience of its experiential power: "...*the very thing which denies life*: it is the *nothingness* of anguish, of vertigo, of fascination." (125) These crippling effects, no matter their fascinations, only serve to weaken the already exploited everyday man, preventing him from living, loving . . . participating in all man's possibilities . . . action, work, love, thought." (126) While the Surrealist perspective would claim that its approach is also dedicated to exactly such ideals, through rejection/re-definition of their standard connotations, Lefebvre unswervingly diagnoses such matters from a Marxist perspective (separating his view from more affect-centered mystical aestheticism aspects, included by the Surrealists), insisting that only "the separation between the human (real and possible) and bourgeois decadence, . . . will imply a *rehabilitation of everyday life*." (127)

The critique does have its logic, yet, at the same time, begs the question as to where Lefebvre would fit into the confrontational dualism of Reed's novel—should

Lefebvre be considered an Atonist? Such considerations appear particularly (and somewhat ironically, given the primary material for this *Breaking It* case study) germane when Jean Cassou's novel *Le Centre du monde* is quoted in further substantiation of the anti-mystical position: "For that's what's important, don't you see, giving up believing in magic . . . throw(ing) away all the tricks and *mumbo-jumbo* for ever." (127) Like Abdul Sufi Hamid, there is no room in the everyday struggle for empowerment for lingering in the marvelous; invoking ethics of work and societal improvement (as opposed, for example, to valuations of play or imagination), Lefebvre calls for everyday life to be "transformed by knowledge." (123) His emphasis is meant to signal "the end of one era and the beginning of a new one . . . when the new man has finally killed off magic and buried the rotting corpses of the old 'myths' . . . a coherent unity of consciousness." (129) It is a vision delivered with stout conviction, one that champions a sober, realistic everyday as the unifying standard. However, Lefebvre's attempts to fully articulate this alternative occupied the full span of Lefebvre's seven decade career, and never truly achieved separation from the non-empirical allure of affective, playful elements. *Critique of Everyday Life* itself closes with an encomium to the psycho-social benefits and ludic mode of *festival*, in particular.

However, if the Surrealists are trapped in artistic contexts, Lefebvre's valuation of festival is also constrained in that his vision is bound to eventive, infrequent occurrence. Conversely, the spectacularization of everyday life, in *rapture-telic* contexts, and within the pervasive social reorientations of the Jes Grew, proposes an unending celebratory mode, integrated into the human condition, generally. Lefebvre's praise of the qualities of *la fete* proceeds along lines very similar to Bakhtinian analyses of carnival, citing "much

merry-making: dancing, masquerades... beauty contests . . . comical taunts and insults, . . . This exuberance, this enormous orgy—with no limits, no rules,” (202) all of which is equally applicable to the Jes Grew phenomenon. What is somewhat counterintuitive, if not contradictory, in Lefebvre’s advocacy of festival is that, without its greater integration into everyday life, beyond infrequent, seasonal events, the argument can be made that such “holidays” may serve, simply, to further solidify the workaday constrictions of the proletarian mainstream that Lefebvre so vehemently insists requires liberation. In other words, institutionalizing the periodic alleviation of everyday oppression through eventive performances of societal disruption only serves to further reify the overall capitalist system. Indeed, acknowledging such limitations, towards the end of *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre pronounces that the “truly human man will not be a man of a few dazzling moments, a drunken man,” (251) perhaps echoing back, as well, to his condemnation of the Surrealist movement as excessively bourgeois.

In that moment of critique Lefebvre also claims that any “theory of superhuman moments is inhuman.” (127) The Surrealists’ artistic antics and philosophizing centered on literary and painterly traditions are seen as inapplicable to everyday life, requiring prohibitive contextual and learned preconditions that limit the revolutionary efficacy of their strategy. However, the point needs to be made (and is made poignantly by the Jes Grew’s widespread appeal) that only certain presuppositions about everyday receptivity to such creative re-orientations, affective catharses, and liberating performances allow for their mode to appear restrictively “superhuman.” Indeed, Lefebvre’s own claim upon an authentic perspective of true, proletarian and agriculturalist everyday life would also indicate a constricted reading thereof, when he describes that part of human experience as

“the harshness of peasant life and the squalor of the farmyard, or the sadness of life in a proletarian neighborhood.” (134) It seems that the only redeeming aspects of such a human condition lie in the “grandiose character of the works that they have produced by their labor,” (134) causing Lefebvre to redouble his insistence on “the practical, effective transformation of things as they are.” (134)

In other words, “things as they are” manifest an entirely unacceptable condition. No doubt, working class/everyday lives of labor are tough, and call for anti-capitalist re-organization, but intermittent festivals seem unlikely to change such situations. The reduction of everyday life, simply, to toil and oppression seems to fall prey (and appear as an equally bourgeois perspective) to Lefebvre’s own previous criticism of the Surrealist impulse as depriving the quotidian of its potential agency. Further consideration, however, of the opportunities that workers and farmers might have for meaningful festive experience on a more daily basis (or, at least, *pour le weekend*) may well yield sides of mainstream and lower-class working life that Lefebvre underestimates. Dance, for example, hardly requires a festival, can happen at any moment, as is equally true of song, linguistic improvisation, and myriad other fulfilling modes of creative expression—a ubiquity and potential, moreover, exemplified by Jes Grew. While the Surrealists and Lefebvre gesture obliquely to the potential for a liberating spectacularization of the everyday, Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* offers a performance thereof, one importantly inclusive of both working class and bourgeois, as is evident in a climactic moment of the novel (handled in greater detail below) where both Papa Labas and his contingent, and Atonists, mingle with high-society New York glitterati at an exclusive party. Moreover, the Jes Grew potentiality for affective, spiritual agency does

not wait, or depend, on the resolution of a re-organization of monolithic society, but ignites itself at the sites of everyday experience.

Mumbo Jumbo performs the *Breaking It* mode of rebellion against dominant paradigms at the level of formal structure, as much as in its narrative themes. Foremost evidence perhaps resides in Reed's eschewing of standard grammatical convention: commas are often omitted, particularly in enumerative sequences; quotation marks are dispensed with altogether; numbers are left in numerical form, never spelled out; sentences need not be completed; and intentional misspellings, not just slang, embody alternative appropriations of English utilized both in dialog, as well as in the novel's omniscient narration. It is a carnevalesque diversity of language, drawing on sub-cultural influences from a variety of sources: African-American, 1920s Jes Grew hipster-jargon, terminologies inherited from the spiritual realms of Voodoo and the Work, news bulletin headlines, and more. In its own way, the tradition-laced cant of the Wallflower Order also contributes to *MumboJumbo*'s unique reflections of American culture and expression, always seeking to pay homage to its Templar roots and, more importantly, reflect its commitment to order, even in its language.

In an added dimension of analysis that echoes the novel's own location of conflict within the African-American community, Gates points out that Reed's literary innovations and thematic exegesis represent a subversive voice and structure. It is a fierce independence, taking its stance within the African-American literary canon, as much as one that confronts Western literary traditions, both of which are "rife with hardened convention and presupposition." (703) In this sense, Reed embodies a trickster figure operating at "the divine crossroads" of multi-culturally-informed storytelling; and,

according to Gates: “From its title on, the novel serves as a critique of black and Western literary forms and conventions, and complex relationships between the two.” (704) True to the sentiments of the Jes Grew’s own rebellion against restrictive social norms, Reed’s text performs a rapturous insurrection against traditional/realistic literary form, underscoring, and vividly embodying, the value of original expression and cultural conceptualization. *Mumbo Jumbo*’s parodic power, then—as per Gates’ praise of Reed’s literary achievement—exposes cultural constructs as “only tropes, figures of speech, rhetorical constructs like ‘double-consciousness,’ and not some preordained reality or thing.” (723) When Gates concludes his seminal essay on Reed, “Blackness of Blackness,” with “His works are the grand works of critical signification,” (723) the repetition of “works” serves as an additional reminder of *Mumbo Jumbo*’s harmonious interconnection of form and content, presenting Papa LaBas (and others), as much as Ishmael Reed, as always original (in both senses of the word) masters of rejuvenatory performance that combines the spiritual and the creative.

Osirian Roots

The climax of *Mumbo Jumbo* is delayed for an historical digression, just as the Wallflower Order and Papa LaBas and crew meet—at a party for New York art-world luminaries, academic intelligentsia, and political heavies, at the sumptuous Irvington-on-Hudson Villa Lewaro—for a decisive showdown. The Wallflower Order has been on a rampage and has murdered members of the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral organization. When Black Herman announces his intention to arrest the Wallflower leader, the legitimacy of their intention is contested as a “kangaroo courtroom” act. By way of explanation, Papa

LaBas launches into a lengthy historical diegesis on the origins of the conflict (devoting twenty-six pages to the tale, Reed essentially includes a second story within *Mumbo Jumbo*'s twentieth-century setting). Rather than going into details of the recent internecine engagement, Papa LaBas reaches back into ancient Egyptian history in order to elucidate the greater philosophical and cultural matters at the core of the conflict.

Osiris, ancient ruler of Egypt, emerges as the central originary figure associated with The Work and its affiliated spiritual traditions. All the vital elements of Jes Grew are present in the inceptive Osirian spirituality: creative expression, cultivation of the forces of fertility and growth, while close association to the earth and the cycles of nature, agriculture and husbandry elevates him to a status of patron-deity of (re)productivity. Moreover, no distinction is made between the impulse for ever-renewing forms of expression and divine communication, and the creation of new life, both in contexts of sustenance and procreation—all aspects conjoin under the God-King's auspices. Relatedly, music and dance represent the affective wellspring and vehicle of Osirian benediction:

... in Egypt this was known as the Black Mud Sound. At this time in history those who influenced the growth of crops and coaxed the cocks into procreation were seen as sorcerers . . . a theater of fecundation generation and proliferation . . . the processes of blooming were acted out by men and women *dancers* who imitated the process of fertilization. They would play upon instruments . . . open their valves and allow nature to pour through its libation. (161-2)

The improvisational approach, pure freedom of expression, the *play-factor*—"As Osiris danced he would experiment..." (162)—are all hallmarks, in *MumboJumbo*, of the Osirian tradition that transfer through the greater African diaspora and manifest within the Jes Grew and The Work. Papa LaBas, in discussion with Abdul, traces this very point in counter-argument to Abdul's fundamentalist Muslim condemnation of the dancing

foolery of the J.G.C.'s, the flappers, and speakeasy bacchanalia: "We've been dancing for 1000s of years, Abdul, ...It's part of our heritage." (34)

So, as much as the Jes Grew movement is a revolutionary force in modern North America, for Papa LaBas and company its societal impact and proposed shift represents a return to cultural roots, a return to spiritual balance within the everyday goings-on of the material world. Its immemorial healing renewal is seen as absolutely crucial for the troubled times in which *Mumbo Jumbo* is set, with its corrupt politics, ongoing capitalist exploitation and class-structure, and global war. The latter factor is exemplified by the invasion and occupation of Haiti by the U.S. (1914-34), which Reed includes as a background story, one which brings Voodoo practitioners to American shores, and to the aid of Papa LaBas' organization. Consequently, spiritual and affective emancipation, in the form of a force coming down through the eons of history to effect its salutary reign in the modern present, is what Papa LaBas champions before his Villa Lewaro audience—a life-saving alternative to the oppressive status quo: "Egypt was prospering under Osiris and there was peace... every man was an artist and every artist a priest. ...Osiris the Bull, the Seedman . . . taught people to permit nature to speak and dance through them." (163-5)

The Wallflower agents present do not take the opportunity to invoke their own cultural heritage, but Papa LaBas' historical recounting nonetheless includes its, equally ancient, antagonism—their standard-bearer being Osiris' hostile and jealous brother, Set. Set, "a crook and flail man." (162) In his own era, Set embodies the Wallflower agenda that opposes The Work and Jes Grew, in *Mumbo Jumbo*'s twentieth-century setting: lust for power and control, an unwavering sobriety of mind and spirit, and intolerance of

spiritual and expressive abandon. In the ancient Egyptian brothers' contest for titular rule, Set consistently makes the argument that Osiris is unfit for leadership, precisely because his spirit is so dynamic, so free: "Osiris was regarded by his brother Set as a dilettante . . . who would not know how to deal firmly with the enemies of the Egyptian people. . . . Set hated agriculture and nature which he saw as soiled dirty grimy etc. (162) Set was going about Egypt telling everybody that Osiris was a fraud and that he was traveling the world "drunk" and "fornicating." (165) These are familiar castigations, of course, of the same ilk as those launched against the Jes Grew and equally concerned with the hold on power.

Papa LaBas begins his recounting of Osirian legend with the young royal's attendance at "a university in Nysa, a town in Arabia Felix (now Yemen)," where, in the course of his studies "he became known as 'the man who did dances that caught-on,' infected people." (162) Later, Dionysus (whose name, Reed points out, can be read as "God from Nysa"), a "school chum and home boy," and prodigy, of Osiris, spreads his rapturous traditions to Greece, where the "Osirian Art's" ensuing "choreomania . . . spread like wild fire . . . unable to stop dancing . . . out of their heads so that the gods could take them over." (168-9)

Brown and Marcuse's interpretations of erotized, liberating life also draw heavily on Dionysian influence; in Marcuse's case, by way of Orphic expressive delight and devotion. Brown, for his part, describes "Dionysian consciousness" as "...embracing and affirming instinctual reality," (176) "not life kept at a distance . . . but complete and immediate." (175) It is the only "way out" of the oppressive and desexualizing effects of sublimation, an orientation equally locatable, by Brown, in the Freudian *id*, where "there is no negation, only affirmation and eternity, . . . call it a chaos, a cauldron of seething

excitement.” (175) Such are the intoxications of Jes Grew that unify body and spirit, that welcome an eroticism that expands beyond sexuality and into creative expression. For Brown, as well, dance’s exuberance for life is exemplary and elucidated by Rilke’s own characterization thereof as “natural speech by means of the body.” (175) Nietzsche’s Dionysian proclivity is also recruited to illuminate an ardent enthusiasm for life that “does not observe the limit, but overflows; . . .the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.” (175) In *The Work*, in Jes Grew, body and mind are unified, rather than requiring that intellect rule over the unruly passions, in the name of order.

On Marcuse’s view, the ludic, erotic, and creative dimensions of figures like Orpheus, Narcissus, Dionysus (to which may be added *Mumbo Jumbo*’s protagonists, from Osiris to Papa LaBas), stand in opposition to Apollonian forces dedicated to order through control of power and productivity. The former cadre is antagonistic to “the god who sanctions the logic of domination, the realm of reason,” and, instead, embodies “the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings.” (162)

Whereas Orpheus, like Osiris, represents an “experience of the world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated . . . in its own fullness—a productivity that is sensuousness, play, and song,” (164) *Mumbo Jumbo* casts Set as “arrogant jealous egotistical . . . the 1st man to shut nature out of himself. He called it discipline.” (162)

Moreover, Marcuse’s erotized Orphic relationship to the world shares in *The Work*’s, and the African *loas*’ communications with all incarnations of life, plant, animal, earth:

“Trees and animals respond to Orpheus’ language; the spring and the forest respond to Narcissus’ desire. . . Eros awakens and liberates potentialities that are real in things animate and inanimate.” (165)

Papa LaBas' historical exegesis of *MumboJumbo*'s seething conflict that reaches back to the mortal sibling rivalry between Set and Osiris also shows its transference through the age of Christianity, into modernity. Throughout, the Atonist drive to stamp out Jes Grew-like phenomena is unrelenting, but perennially unsuccessful: "The Greeks established temples to these Egyptian-derived mysteries . . . Atonist priests will call this diabolical possession, or corrupt the Greek word *daimon* so as to have evil connotations . . . Freud, the later Atonist . . . is to term this "hysteria." (169) . . . The only remedies the Church knew was [sic] to 'beat the *living* shit out of them.' . . . They killed millions of people this way but it didn't put an end to the dance epidemics. . . ." (172) Reed's inclusion of in-quotation italics doubtlessly aims at underscoring the organic life-power of the Osirian/Jes Grew impulse, in contrast to the death-like control fetish of the Atonism.

And the winner is . . .

Papa LaBas concludes his historico-mystical compendium with the inclusion of an unconventional, decidedly un-biblical retelling of the Mosaic legend. Through the eyes of the Osirian tradition, Moses emerges as the inheritor of Set's oppressive inclination, equally lustful of world rule. His machinations corrupt the musical teachings of Jethro, as well as other Jes Grew-type powers to be attained at the Temple of Isis (Osiris' former wife), as he ignores Jethro's warning that the inspirational, benevolent *Rada* aspect (positive *loa* power) of Isis' spirit is available only at the proper moon-phase, as opposed to the *Petro* aspect's deception, otherwise, which proves to curse Moses' quest for absolute power.

A similar desperation, driven by hubris and jealousy in equal parts, has its grip on Wallflower Order ringleader, Hierophant #1, and manifests a bitter justification of his baneful agenda against the Jes Grew: “Look at them! Throwing their hips this way, that way, while I, my muscles, stone, the marrow of my bones, plaster . . . Lord, if I can’t dance, No one shall.” (65) Like Set, known as “the one who can’t shake it ‘til he breaks it,” (165) Moses is too concerned with power to activate his own inspiration and becomes known—instead of as an Osirian inspirer, a true *houngan* (VooDoo priest) enabler of liberation and expression—as a power-hungry, self-centered *bokor* impostor, whom the people mistrust and defame. Berbelang, leader of The Work’s own militant wing, the *Mutafikah*, explains the “charlatan panaceas” of *bokorism*, using “Faust the Quack” as an example of Atonist spiritual corruption: “a humbug who doesn’t know when to stop, . . . that will soon be able to annihilate 1000000s by pushing a button”—it is an irrepressible malevolence, diametrically opposed to the *houngan* “healer, a holy man . . . infuse(d) with the mysteries that Jes Grew implies.” (91)

Ishmael Reed weaves a multi-themed tapestry in *Mumbo Jumbo*. Religion, history, turn-of-the-century African-American culture and the Harlem Renaissance, Christian/Atonist history are handled more deeply than in this thrillological analysis, focused on Jes Grew and its rapturous implications for everyday life. A unifying thematic link, however, that integrates the novel in its entirety, one worth final consideration, is the Jes Grew’s *search for its own text* (a quest that continues, in its own right, in the writing of *MumboJumbo*). Included in Papa LaBas’ ancient Osirian history is the account of the formalization of that age’s Work, wherein the song, dance, and incantations of its agriculture and fertility ceremonies are codified by “the first choreographer,” Osiris’

scribe, Thoth. In the intervening millennia the texts are hidden, lost, or co-opted by Moses and subsequent *bokorist* manipulators of its power, and finally scattered by modern-era Atonists, precisely in order to keep them from uniting with their spiritual complement, the Jes Grew. This sub-strain of Reed's wide-ranging tale is relevant because, in the final developments of *Mumbo Jumbo*, the Jes Grew does not, in fact, succeed in taking universal hold and changing American society and culture in its image... and fails to do so, because, it does not "find its Text." (211)

This end-game is important when considering the ultimate fate of the Jes Grew phenomenon: ostensibly, it fails. Reed's chosen resolution, however, also serves to further expose the exact nature of its historical presence as a continuous force. To wit, Papa LaBas explains to his acolytes, dismayed that their quest is seemingly thwarted: "Jes Grew has no end and no beginning... when it returns we will see that it never left. You see, life will never end. ...Jes Grew is life. ...A future generation of young artists will accomplish this." (204) And this seems an intentional point on the author's part, another level of harmony between form and content. Gates points out a literary-historical parallel wherein Reed's exposition of Jes Grew, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, emerges as a valid commentary on the Harlem Renaissance, which likewise succeeded in "the creation of numerous texts of art and criticism," but that also failed, ultimately, to "find its voice." (707) This quasi-failure, however, in further synergy with Reed's fictional presentation of contemporaneous culture, has its own purpose and value, especially, in Gates' view, as a "critique of traditional notions of closure in interpretation . . . a novel that figures and glorifies *indeterminacy*. ...Reed posits the notion of aesthetic *play*: the play of the tradition, the play on the tradition." (709) Herein, Gates sees a great literary-

critical contribution by Reed, one that recasts both over-determined historical interpretation, as well as its literary reflections, into new, still open-ended, articulation... much like the Jes Grew's own immemorial fate. As previously discussed with regard to Reed's commitment to the debunking of dualities of false cultural consciousness within African-American fiction (as explicated by Gates), the stalemate between the opposing sides—for the Atonists also fail in their quest to stamp out The Work: the Jes Grew is still present, however stalled in its bid to manifest a greater paradigm shift—underscores *Mumbo Jumbo's* elucidation of the human condition as always in flux, always in contention, always complex, and therein fully *alive*.

This seeming draw, however, in the ancient battle between oppositional philosophies does not diminish *Mumbo Jumbo's* clear championing of the the Osirian legacy, come down through the ages into the form of Jes Grew. For Papa LaBas, it really is a contest between good and evil, in which good not only represents the salvation of humanity, but, as per his perennial optimism, is bound to triumph. Perhaps the most vital attribute of the Jes Grew tradition is its empowering inclusivity, applicable to every person, carrying the proposition of an everyday experience suffused in its rapturous joys and spontaneous rituals. It is a liberating and benevolent de-hierarchization of the rigid systems of control that so often dominate society. In a critique of Abdul's domineering approach, one that is equally applicable all the way back to Set and Atonist origins, and, crucially, one that again emphasizes a forward-looking inevitability of Jes Grew's perseverance, Black Herman explains:

We work for principles and not for self. We serve the loas. ... Charismatic leaders will become as outdated as the solo because people will realize that when the Headman dies the movement dies instead of becoming a permanent entity. ... Yes, Abdul will be surrounded by people . . . satellites rotating about the body that

gives them light, but that's ephemeral, faded clippings from the newspaper in comparison to a JuJu Mask a 100 years old. [VooDoo] will find a home in a band on the Apollo stage, ...and there will always be those who will risk the uninformed amusement of their contemporaries by resurrecting what we stood for. (40)

The continual valorization of subjective agency, afforded universally, rejects a spirituality and relationship with identity and expression that would have to take its lead from a highest authority. The Jes Grew impulse to dance to the beat of a jazz band, or faithfully nurture the *loas*' necessities, may appear ephemeral at times, but its fiercely independent ethos (appealing, and thrilling, in its own right) precludes the possibility that any godlike leader could ever be followed into its true raptures. Not only is the thrilling affective intensity of Jes Grew one universally accessible at the level of individual subject, its *autotelism*, its immanent experientiality, testifies to its immortal power, whether its force reverberates as a social high-tide, cresting into mainstream contexts, or ebbs into a sub-cultural holding pattern, its Work only sanctifying the everyday consciousness of mystics like Papa La Bas and his comrades.

Mumbo Jumbo's close appends an epilogue, set forward into the 1970s—evidently, Papa LaBas' meticulous cultivation of his *Ka loa* has afforded a near ageless resistance to senescence. A prime aspect of his practice, in the post-war era, includes giving guest-lectures at universities, to keep the legacy of Jes Grew circulating as an oral tradition, waiting for it to catch on again. While Papa LaBas must wistfully acknowledge that the intervening years have not nearly matched the flare-up of the 1920s, something seems to be stirring, in 1971 (not coincidentally also the time of *MumboJumbo*'s writing): "...the 20s were back again. Better. ...Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around." (218) As per his, and his associates,' repeated

articulations, it is the power of reinvention shared between the Jes Grew and its hosts that makes for its timeless presence. The leader of the covert mission from Haiti, Benoit Battraville, who materializes in Harlem to join forces with Papa LaBas against the Wallflower Order, lauds 1920s American reinvention of The Work as its newest iteration: "...they have synthesized the HooDoo of VooDoo. Its blee-bop essence; they've isolated the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise... The new thang. That talk you drum from your lips. Your style. ...ask those people who be shaking their tambourines impervious of the ridicule. Open-Up-To-Right-Here. ...You are walking fetishes. You are indeed beautiful." (152-3) And so, Papa LaBas is confident, it shall arise again and again, a resurgent spirituality that instinctively knows how to *break* the oppressive strictures of its era, regaining beleaguered creative and autonomous expression, and doing so in its own immediate, thrilling moment.

"(Little) Richard, Chuck (Berry), and Johnny (Cash) wish to remind California's rock fans that the stage is virtually indestructible . . . should he or she feel the call to come forth and declare his or her soul to the glory of Rock 'n' Roll." (168)

Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed

Appetite for Destruction: Affect Beyond Success
in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

The *Breaking It* thrill-mode offered by Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2001) embodies another instance of rapture rooted in rebellion, featuring a bizarre twist to the notion of a spectacularized everyday. The tale's protagonist, Eric Packer, a hyper-successful asset manager and billionaire at the age of twenty-eight, is the embodiment of

his own success-spectacle, a *master of the universe*.²¹ However, while Packer's achievements in the preeminent echelons of 21st-century finance make him a near-reincarnation of the powerful businessmen that the *Making It* mode features, DeLillo's lead character—while also concerned with the inner, affective dimension of success—has quite a different relationship with the drive for personal fulfillment. Packer's bizarre impetus belongs more to the riotous chaos of *Breaking It*. Whereas the business tycoons featured in the literary case studies of *Making It* are similar in that their inner contentment becomes fatefully intertwined with continued material success, the conundrum in DeLillo's novel is that Packer's titanic accomplishments completely fail to generate any inner corollary of satisfaction or purpose. Packer is stymied in his search inward for personal fulfillment. Moreover, Packer is unable to find fulfillment in *Jes Grew*-esque socially-rebellious thrills—for a privileged winner of the game of life, there is no oppressive power to confront. Only transcendence of the materialistic impulse or, perhaps more accurately, a *negation* thereof offers a new potential for thrilling affective intensity and the transformation of an everyday existence become cripplingly mundane into a spectacular life worth living.

Power-Ennui

As Eric Packer's near-absolute material empowerment has long since afforded him every imaginable luxury, DeLillo's hero finds himself casting about for *anything* at all that might offer stimulation, and is therein confronted by the limitations of his otherwise comprehensive achievement. Worldly success has lost its potency; Packer has seen, felt, and owned it all, to the point of a crippling ennui. Dreams of opulence and

grandeur—he is *done* with them, beyond their allure. So exceptional and wide-ranging has been his run on goal-realization, power, and self-indulgence, that all attendant experiential stimulation seems exhausted, as well. DeLillo sums-up Packer’s frustration, simply: “He didn’t know what he wanted.” (6) It is an impasse that paralyzes his everyday experience, a boredom and detachment from feeling similarly diagnosed by the urgent disquiet of Breton’s Surrealist perspective, when it profiles modern subjective estrangement within an endless and predictable capitalist rut, declaiming: “None of his gestures will be expansive, none of his ideas generous or far-reaching. ...Events real or imagined will be seen only as they relate to a welter of similar events, events in which he has participated, *abortive* events ...On no account will he view them as salvation.” (4) It is a stasis bereft of soteriological potential, indeed, but also of affective stimulation and therefore all the more crippling in its pervasion of everyday existence. Unrelenting dominion of the quotidian mundane, particularly in professional contexts, is identified by the surrealist lament, as well: the “submission of oneself to a very few simple instincts ... that fall victim to routine, that society is careful to channel in predefined directions.” (Breton 283) In using these quotes, it should be acknowledged that Eric Packer and the Surrealists, whose experiences are separated by nearly a century, obviously come from dissimilar social circumstances, as well as a different phase of capitalism—to say nothing of the Surrealist political impulse, which is completely absent from Packer’s self-involved quest. However, as initially contextualized in the *Method & Telos* introductory chapter, at the level of affect, and an attitude devoted to changing subjective experience into a more fulfilling mode, the ennui and trapped-feeling that provides impetus for such change is very similar. Neither Packer, nor the Surrealists, are able to find any inspiration, or even

meaningful stimulation, within the tedium of an everyday life suffocated by an overbearing capitalist system.

Formerly both his field of conquest and unrestricted play-ground, the cosmopolis surrounding Eric Packer appears as effete and uninspiring as his inner world. A fourteen-line sentence laboriously catalogues the day-to-day worldliness outside his custom-made limousine window, each successive image reinforcing an affect of tedium: “Buses rolled up the avenue in pairs, hacking and panting . . . sending people to the sidewalk in sprints, live prey, nothing new, and that’s where construction workers were eating lunch . . . the streaming people, the march-past . . . women in brisk skirts, tourists, . . . schmucks with cell phones.” (41) His relationship to the limousine, itself, reflects his disassociation from the world surrounding him; he had “wanted the car because it was not only oversized but aggressively and contemptuously so, metastasizingly so, a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it.” (10) The growing effect, and affect, of his success in completely customizing his immediate surroundings (his elitism manifest in material and social form) has consequently deadened him to any communal identity he might share with the people outside his carapace of luxury: “People hurried past, the others of the street, endless anonymous, twenty-one lives per second, . . . sprays of fleetest being. They were here to make the point that you did not have to look at them.” (21)

His success, also reflected in the giant building that houses his forty-eight-room apartment, is equally disassociating in its grandiose admixture of the material and the man, and, indeed, a compound identity that pushes into the realm of the inhumane: “They shared an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man. It was nine hundred feet high, the

tallest residential tower in the world, a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size. It had the kind of banality that reveals itself over time as being truly brutal.” (8) It all adds up to Eric’s complete alienation from the world in which he lives, and, numbly aware that his life dedicated to financial dominance has left him stranded, his default reaction is a rather desperate dismissal of the conundrum: “He smoked and watched, feeling strong, proud, stupid and superior. He was also bored and little dismissive.” (116) It is, nonetheless, a callousness that is coming increasingly into question, not simply because of an alienation effect, but, perhaps more urgently, as a symptom of Eric’s restive inability to locate anything that might inspire him to feel anything at all. Besides the reigning dull consummation of his seeming every material and professional goal or desire—the *thrill* is gone.

Eric Packer’s desire to transcend his isolated societal role of business mogul, and reconnect to his individual identity and, more importantly, to *feelings* that he can identify as truly his own, represents an interesting inversion of dynamics associated with Freudian notions of the *oceanic*. (*Civilization* 11) Whereas these are typically manifest in individual efforts to reconnect with, if not return to, a transcendent, pre-individuated state— also associated with self-contained and world-oblivious pre-natality—Packer’s impetus is one that seeks to escape such hermetic, non-individuated security. Instead, Packer wants to feel raw, unpredictable emotion and intense bodily sensations, including pain and a close connection with mortality that he believes will allow him to locate and feel himself as an individuated entity, distinguishable from the morass of existence.

For Georges Bataille, in *The History of Eroticism* (Volume II of *The Accursed Share*), the need for such stark affective relativity is similarly crucial in that “*humanity*

would cease to exist the day it became something other than what it is, entirely made up of violent contrasts.” (18) In the societal dynamics that subsume Packer’s persona, a different type of oceanic obscurity alienates individuality from its own, personal experiences—he has become faceless in the faceless mob. Human experience identifiable only within the context of a larger societal throng, parsed only by mechanical, momentary roles, emerges as devoid of meaningful shared communication whose reflections catalyze self- and interpersonal identification. After all, affective experience is born of contrast—we only know pain in relation to pleasure, love against hate, solitude as interrupted by interaction. An early, subtle sign, at the outset of the novel, that Eric is desperate to re-initiate such social stimulation is his desire to get a haircut from a certain friend-of-the-family barber, located across town from his offices. He suddenly decides to put off his daily work routine, even though assistants remind him that volatilities in the international markets demand his close attention: “We don’t care. We need a haircut. We need to go crosstown.” (11) The royal-“We,” of course, serves not only to reinforce his notion of ultimate superiority, but perhaps also the degree to which Eric has disconnected himself from any true “we.”

Glimpses

As Packer’s hi-tech limo attempts to make its way across the city, he finds himself surrounded by apocalyptic events. The international markets are crashing, a global anti-corporate activist organization has chosen the day to launch terroristic actions against the power-structure, and the streets are additionally congested with the riotous funeral procession of a famous rapper. Nonetheless, the hermetically-sealed safety of

Packer's limo—capable of fully monitoring global financial developments via computer link-up, as well as hosting meetings in its lounge-like interior—correlates to his untouchability as an ultra-elite. Far from threatening him in any way, the escalation of events outside his mobile command center merely generates attendant economic fluctuations that he can play to his further advantage.

Indeed, upon joining him in the limo for a consultation-session, Packer's personal theorist, Vija Kinski, calmly knits the protesters' violence into a worldview that underscores Packer's omnipotence: "They are working with you, these people. . . . And if they kill you, it's only because you permit it, in your sweet sufferance, as a way to re-emphasize the idea we all live under." (92) Packer can't divine what that idea is, and Kinski clarifies his awesome power with the single, exhilarating term, *destruction*; referring, as well, to the anarchist ethos that, "The urge to destroy is a creative urge." (92) Kinski is portraying violence as a societally-encompassing ethos—one that legitimates Packer's indomitable capitalist power, as much as the social blow-back against it, uniting their antagonism as a symptom of business, writ large. But her thesis resonates in an unintended way with Packer. As the upheaval in the street envelops his vehicle and hurled objects produce hairline fractures in the bullet-proof glass of his limo, the novelty inherent in the chaotic events surrounding him, the *frisson* of danger, is exceedingly attractive. It is a first glimpse, for Eric, of a dangerous mode of thrilling affective response that throws caution to the wind, an urge akin to Bataille's expansive notions of the erotic, wherein "every horror conceals a possibility of enticement," (96) "a new moment of refusal, of insubordination, of revolt . . . the *total* image of the erotic disturbance." (78)

The anonymous tumult of humanity that surrounds his unassailable preeminence, as portrayed by Kinski, and metonymic in his armored limo, has Packer locked into a dehumanized identity. Kinski sees the demonstrators—so close by that he can see their seething faces, feel them smashing against his techno-automotive fortress—as mere pawns in a greater game dominated by the likes of Packer. But this master of the universe, with all his kingly powers, feels ultimately reduced to his own purely functional role, as well. What Kinski fails to realize is that her cold appraisals of his untouchability are not serving to help Packer further understand, to reify, his power position, rather, that her themes of destruction, echoed by the riot's violence, combine to suggest an intriguing *alternative* to a life that has lost its fascination, its spectacle. Instead, the stark contrast of imminent mortal danger hearkens back to earlier theorization, by Kinski, that had only served to confirm his miserable state of suspended-animation, when she opined, “We create our own frenzy, our own mass convulsions, driven by thinking machines that we have no authority over. The frenzy is barely noticeable most of the time. It's simply how we live” (85).

The notion sums up, more brutally than Kinski could know, Packer's perception of his own captivity in maddening, nihilistic conditions. Now, however, a possible negation of the dim prognosis of ongoing entrapment, within an everyday dominated by business-as-usual, appears to hold the potential for a break-away from its clutches. Consequently, a strategy of willed dispensation of his accumulated power is beginning to dawn in Eric's mind and psychic longing. For Bataille, the intrigue of such self-destructive liberation makes sense within the context of humanity's propensity for flights of fancy, often in the face of prevailing conservative instincts for survival: “The truth is

that we have no real happiness except by spending to no purpose, ...to feel as far away as possible from a serious world, where the increase of resources is the rule. But it is not enough to say far away, we want to be opposed to that world: in eroticism there is ordinarily an impulse of aggressive hatred, an urge to betray.” (178) Eric’s earliest impetus is one that merely begins to question the humdrum *status quo* of his everyday; however, the notion of neglecting the heretofore absolute rule of professional responsibilities (regardless of their expansive remunerations, become effete of palpable gratification) is metastasizing quickly into a willful dissipation of his personal power. The bizarre erotic appeal of all-out “aggressive” war against his previous reality, a delectable betrayal of all that was supposedly precious and sacred, looms on his horizon.

In midst their conversation, Packer’s satellite link-up broadcasts breaking news that a highest-echelon international financial player, Arthur Rapp, managing director of the IMF, has been “killed live on the Money Channel.” (33) Eric’s incipient fascination with annihilation, one that hits close to home in Rapp’s tragic demise, is apparent: “He wanted them to show it again. *Show it again*. They did this of course, and he knew they would do it repeatedly into the night, until the sensation had drained out of it.” (34) Ultimately, the violent death of a peer becomes mundane in its mediatized repetition, a mere echo of mortality’s presence—but Packer’s psychological antennae are unmistakably tuned to the theme. This is clear in his reaction to his own consequently elevated security status, and the continued unstable aberrations of global market indicators: “How did he feel about additional security? He felt refreshed. The death of Arthur Rapp was refreshing. The prospective dip in the yen was invigorating.” (35)

Within Bataille's amplified parameters of erotic stimulation, a similar overthrow of status-quo authority—relevant to ritualized de-crowning, as well as conceptions of power dynamics within the psyche—affords liberating potential that can serve to embolden the subject to pursuit of new, transcendent experience: “The enormous loss [or implication thereof] that the death of the sovereign constitutes does not necessarily give the idea of counterbalancing its effect: better, since the mischief is done [or glimpsed, tasted], to plunge furiously into mischief.” (107) Eric is on his way to a reformulation of his approach to life, determined to wring from his erstwhile lackluster existence a spectacular edge, no matter if it draws him into unprecedented states that call his previous identity, and indeed notion of stability, mental and otherwise, into question.

Again, such impulse is not unlike the conscious metaphysical rebellion of the surrealist mantra: “Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality.” (Breton 4) It is an insurrectionist commitment to a creatively-reconsidered worldview that resonates with Eric's own desperate mandate for some sort of newfound liberation, beyond the prevailing reality of an everyday become debilitating in its tedium. Likewise, Breton's impetus to infuse reality with dream, regardless of idealistic telos, leads to the an uncompromising gestation of the *surreal*: “It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.” (14) Here, too, is the nearness to chaos, if not mortality, the embrace of its dissolutive risk that serves to further heighten the appeal of new, penetrating experience: “the fact that there is no great expedition in art [or any realm of intense affective experience, of everyday-spectacularization] which is not undertaken *at the risk of one's life*.” (289) Indeed, at root it is the *frisson* of the unknown

that entices, and the potential for unpredictable surprise that it harbors—a visceral, as well as psycho-emotional, impulse that acts at the level of intense affective stimulation. Eric might also subscribe to the surrealist ethos, and definition of freedom, that proclaims: “The mere word *freedom*: is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism.” (4)

Next, as the riot abates and he can get underway, Packer’s personal physician joins him, en route, for his bi-weekly medical examination. Everything checks out, apart from two slight abnormalities—a tumor-ish collection of cell debris in his abdomen, and a slight asymmetry of his prostate. As opposed to being alarmed, however, Eric is further intrigued by these new details that hint at change, no matter how threatening; he is titillated at the prospect of new experience of any kind, especially as specific and palpable as one concerning the fate of his body. The physician’s dismissal of further immediate action serves to reify the tension, prolonging the new wrinkle in Eric’s affective state, when he recommends: “‘Let it express itself.’ ...Eric liked the sound of that.” (45) Here, too—as much as in Eric’s willful neglect of his market investments, which appear increasingly jeopardized by market fluctuations, as the days goes on—is a conscious step into insecurity, unpredictability whose affect is evidently a delectable tantalization. Such purposeful psycho-emotional gambling is, again, inherent in the anarchic impulse of Breton and the surrealists, wherein, “for the mind, is the possibility of erring not rather the contingency of good,” (283) and, certainly, conducive to thrill. It is an attitude that embraces conflict, while taking into “account the ephemeral and the eternal, the unreasonable and the reasonable that possess them.” (283) For a high-stakes financier, such as Eric, whose meticulous management of assets lies at the heart of his

craft, such reckless abandon is indeed a sea-change of attitude, but one nonetheless welcomed for its promises of equally unfamiliar experience.

Soon thereafter, Eric comes upon an even more graphic illustration of mortality's intriguing presence, not just in terms of a readjusted *weltanschauung*, but one that holds the spectacular proposition for intense feeling that accompanies uncompromising action. Amidst the scattered riots—in protest, or for some other inexplicable, but none the less compelling, reason—a monk sitting on the sidewalk has doused himself in gasoline and set himself aflame, unmoving as his body immolates. Eric is stunned by the implications and attendant experientiality of the act; its drastic extreme calls to him at a much deeper level than Rapp's assassination, or the potential of creeping, lethal disease: "Eric wanted to imagine the man's pain, his choice, the abysmal will he'd had to summon. ... What did this change? (98) Everything, he thought. Kinski was wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act." (100) Bataille's expression of the enticement of casting aside habitual experience for the the embrace of danger, if not willed annihilation, carries a similar appeal: "We are constantly tempted to abandon work, patience and the slow accumulation of resources for a contrary movement, where suddenly we squander the accumulated riches, where we waste and lose as much as we can." (107) Similarly, Thorstien Veblen's theorization includes an emphasis on affective dimensions of materialistic consummation change "in some measure the energy which formerly found a vent in predatory activity," (59) a shift that, in this case, promises more than, or at least something radically different from, Eric's *master of the universe* business-as-usual. And, to further follow Veblen's articulation of *a turn* in the quest for success and fulfillment, especially as regards its affective capacity, Eric's initial curiosity for new

experience is a ludic interest, one that quickly grows into a quasi-hallucinatory speculative game with larger-than-life stakes, whose “conflicting requirements are effected by a resort to make-believe.” (Veblen 59) This would apply, especially and literally, it seems, to Eric’s largely imagination-born impulse that he can find something new to “believe” in; his principal desire is to *make* a new conscious, and affective, reality.

And so, in the course of his distracted detour to get a haircut and avoid work, Eric has come across a collection of signs that have sparked a radically new perspective, no matter how threatening or macabre; these new notions that touch him deeply, engage his psyche and his emotions, and are connected to physical feeling as much as affective response. Although not yet manifesting concrete change in his life, Eric’s fascination with death and destruction is a seed planted that will soon enough germinate into thrilling action, specific to his own desperate desire for renewed feeling. Somewhat giddy with reckless impetus, at lunch he laughingly proclaims: “Give me the raw fish with mercury poisoning.” (118) The ever-deepening relationship of power and consumption corresponds, for Veblen as well, to a ravenous and reckless expansion of affective appetite: “The quasi-peaceable gentleman of leisure, then, not only consumes of the staff of life beyond the minimum . . . but his consumption also undergoes a specialization. He consumes freely and of the best, food, drink, narcotics, shelter, services, ornaments, apparel, weapons and accoutrements, amusements.” (46) Moreover, as renewable sources for such excess dwindle, and Eric has long since passed any appeal of material luxury and connoisseurship, . . . he is more than willing to taste the darker potions, and poisons, of life.

A Credible Threat

Packer's security detail (personal body guards and limo-driver) soon inform him of a "credible threat" to his safety, not unrelated, perhaps, to Rapp's recent murder—information regarding a potential assassin in the immediate vicinity. Much like his reaction to Kinsky's philosophico-economic theorizing about his indomitability, the security-update, meant to overlay caution upon Kinky's reminder of his considerable personal power and resources, has a quite opposite effect—it is a trigger for his full realization of his path out of isolated, unstimulating ennui: "Assessment, credible red. Highest order of urgency. ...He wasn't sure what was funny about this but found himself laughing as well. He felt defined, etched sharply. He felt a burst of self-realization that heightened and clarified." (101-2) His immediate reaction is to go against security recommendations and step outside of the limo and into the still chaotic street:

He didn't know how long it was since he felt so good ...the effect on him was sexual, cunnilingual in particular, and he let his head fall back and opened his mouth to the sky and rain. The rain was dramatically right. ...and there was a trembling pleasure to be found, and joy at all misfortune, in the swift pitch of the markets down. But it was the threat of death at the brink of night that spoke to him most surely about some principle of fate he'd always known would come clear in time. Now he could begin the business of living. (106-7)

In addition to an unmistakable Bataillean admixture of danger and the erotic, here, again, the uncompromising Surrealist disposition towards intense experience, no matter the cost, is illustrative. For Eric Packer, only pure feeling harbors the affective potential for suffusing thrill, an expanded mode of extravagance, different from his unbounded material success: "Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant are all devices which we can always call upon without fear or deception." (Breton 18)

Suddenly renewed, his mostly disaffected libido is also recharged, and the haircut is delayed for the purpose of adding a carnal analog to his newfound psychic titillation—a hotel room-tryst with his time-and-again sexual partner *cum* female body guard, Kendra. Within his newfound affective predisposition, lascivious prurience regains its thrilling capacity. It is a rebirth of desire that embodies a response similarly required by Bataille’s identification of mundane sexual relations become too tame, evacuated of the power to stimulate: “Analogous to the rest of life in this respect, sexual union is at bottom a compromise, it is a half-measure, and the only measure to take between the chard of life and the extreme rigor of life.” (175) Bataille’s greater meaning of *erotics*, however, one that emphasizes sensuality writ large (and indeed incorporates “sexual union”) applies, likewise, to the *rapture-telic* lens trained here on Eric Packer’s transfiguration, one catalyzed by thrilling elements of wanton abandon and risk. Like the willed dispensation of personal wealth and safety, it is a redefinition of “the fever of sexual passion” that demands “we expend our forces without counting: we expend our forces without restraint. . . . Sensual pleasure is so closely connected with ruination that we have named the moment of paroxysm “*la petit mort*.” (177) Eric’s interlude with his body guard, its surreptitious transgression of propriety (he is engaged to be married), is of a piece with the curiosity driving his appetite to taste whatever is different from the usual, preferably tinged with danger and personal dissipation.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse also acknowledges an inherent need for escalating intensity within contexts of the erotic, in order that its affective mode remain stimulant. The erotic must always push boundaries, must always carry an element of intrepid, if not unsettling, exploration: “It is easy to show that the value the mind sets on

erotic need instantly sinks as soon as satisfaction becomes readily obtainable. Some obstacle is necessary to swell the tide of the libido to its height. . . . This *sensuous* rationality contains its own moral laws.” (226-8)

Such irrepressible escalation of erotic desire becomes vividly incarnate in the aftermath of coitus, as Eric’s newly ravenous affective state leaves him hungry for paroxysm beyond that of sexual climax. As his body guard straps back into her armored gear and weaponry, Eric seizes upon an opportunity for even more penetrant sensation. He instructs his body guard to shoot him with her high-voltage Taser: “Stun me. I mean it. Draw the gun and shoot. I want you to do it, Kendra. Show me what it feels like. I’m looking for more. Show me something I don’t know. Stun me to my DNA.” (115)

Writhing on the floor, in a somehow delectable and totally-encompassing pain, Eric’s lust for a spectacular omni-eroticization of his formerly insipid life demonstrates Bataille’s own knitting of the appeal of darker affective tones into a more capacious notion of the erotic. There is a crucial inclusion of “anguish, without which sexuality would not be *erotic*,” (100) which manifests an appetite for the *frisson* of fear, especially intense when it holds the capacity for visceral feeling, as well, in this case a paroxysm of pain. Equally important, this impetus may be extrapolated as a vehicle for meaningful experience, as is the case with Eric, for whom such adventure represents a new lease on living. And, indeed, such extrapolation moves into all manner of activities that promise extreme new experience and feeling. *Any* placement of the body and psyche in intensely stimulating contexts—not just sexual, but violent, life-threatening, and the starkly unfamiliar—holds potential. This greater understanding of *erotics* (Bataille) maps neatly onto the rapture-

telos perspective in terms of the compelling affective aspects here identified as *thrill*, in its myriad guises.

These glimpses signal the beginning of a rebirth of consciousness and feeling for Eric Packer. And, while a sense of mortality and danger, a certain pall of death, is a strong theme in his awakening, it is very different from the affectless living-death that had come to inform his life of isolated privilege and power. It is an attitude that smacks of the headlong, uncompromising ethos articulated in the Surrealists' *Second Manifesto* centered on the challenge "to escape to some meaningful degree from the universal fetters," in order to discover "a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined . . . cease to be perceived as contradictions." (123) It is a willed departure from everyday experiential norms, precisely those which no longer offer Eric any gratification or palpable, self-locating affect. From the surrealist perspective, the acknowledgement of such stasis represents, despite its crippling disorientation, a fertile "mental site, from which one can no longer set forth except . . . on a dangerous but, we think, supreme feat of reconnaissance..." (123) No matter the indeterminacy of such inevitably destructive and inescapably abstract propositions, they nonetheless promise, as applied to Eric's case, a departure from an everyday existence become numb and impotent, into unfamiliar contexts that promise new, affectively-fulfilling experience.

Escalating-Thrill

The riots, questions regarding his health, the burning man, and, finally, the death-threat against him present themselves to Packer as opportunities to rediscover the thrill of

living. From that point on, he throws caution to the wind, actively seeking out danger, heedless of (if not willing) a collision-course with his potential murder. Packer now seizes any reason to be outside of his limo, and the pressing matters of financial management (his major investments are plummeting in value) are entirely cast aside. Without warning, his security detail scrambling to follow, he plunges into an underground dance-rave, entranced by an event that would have previously never appeared on his radar (and most likely even been thought of as too plebian, frankly, for his elitist social stature). The bodies writhing to the tribal electronic rhythm, intertwined in the flashing dimness of the light-show in throes of either drugged- or sexual rapture, reflect the reckless and chaotic abandon that is resonating in his own soul: “He began to feel an otherworldliness, a strange arrhythmia in the scene. ... There was a remote track under the music that resembled a female voice but wasn’t. ... He listened to it speak outside the range of any language ever humanly employed... There was something infectious in the air.” (126)

He loses another of his body guards to the bacchanal (Kendra has disappeared, as well), and next finds himself wandering towards an inner-city housing project’s basketball court, vaguely interested in some kids playing late night hoops. On high alert, understandably, Eric’s remaining protector, Torval, has his weapon drawn—its lethal implications catch Eric’s attention and he asks to see the weapon, inquires about its ballistics and the personalized secret voice-activation code that allows Torval exclusive control over its firing power. Somewhat confused, but also bemused by his employer’s interest, Torval tells Eric the password. The implication seems to be that Eric’s newly unhinged desire includes shooting a gun, which he does—and seemingly for no reason

other than a further unquenchable taste for the aura of sudden implacable violence, of deadliness—turning the weapon on its owner and shooting him dead: “A small white terror flickered Torval’s eye. . . .He looked foolish and confused.” (146)

No matter the random mayhem and psychopathology of the incident itself, Eric’s actions are consistent with the overall scheme of his pursuit of an unprecedented and spectacular destiny, one fixated on highest life-and-death stakes. The mere fact that he is heeding his every uninhibited instinct is only part of the new *modus operandi*, there is also a definite strategy of extricating himself from every vestige of his former empowered, impregnable, and cripplingly predictable everyday state. He is out of the limo and heading out of the constructs of his life, altogether—but there is method to the madness: “He’d tossed the weapon rashly but how fantastic it had felt. Lose the man, shed the gun. Too late now to reconsider. . . .Torval was his enemy, a threat to his self-regard. . . . [to] pay a man to keep you alive. It was a function of the *credible threat* and the loss of his company and personal fortune that Eric could express himself this way . . . that cleared the night for deeper confrontation.” (148)

Eric Packer is in the throes of an omni-erotized thrill-seeking momentum that smacks of Bataille’s own encompassing conception of desire, whose “individual fever” (106) pointedly seeks darker, violent experience, wherein the capacity to “horrify us” offers an “erotic activity [that] can be disgusting; it can also be noble, ethereal . . . illustrates a principle of human behavior in the clearest way: what we want is what uses up our strength and our resources and, if necessary, places our life in danger.” (104) In jumping out of his limo into the mayhem of the world, Eric Packer rushes towards intensely personal experience. The thrilling concept of danger, of pain, even the strong

possibility of annihilation, promise liberation from the oceanic anonymity in which he has felt himself utterly lost. And, indeed, in short order, wandering unprotected in an area of the city already identified as high-risk, Eric manages to stalk down his would-be assassin in his own hideout.

As stated, no matter how hell-bent and calamitous Eric's escalating spree of danger and violence may appear, there is a method to his mania. As this reading of Eric Packer's destiny in *Cosmopolis* seeks to expose, it is an impulse that can even subordinate human survival to its drive towards affective self-determination. While Eric very nearly reaches such a transcendent state through his extreme financial success, he nonetheless senses a more complete liberation is within his grasp if he rejects even the last vestiges of professional and, indeed, social responsibility. The *rapture-telic* context reframes such impetus into purely affective dimensions, regardless dangerous or harmful consequences. These, as represented by Eric's experiential craving, are ultimately the most penetrant and requiting modes of personal fulfillment, a new realm of necessity. Elusive notions of happiness and fulfillment become the hallmarks of such questing, and, as with Bataille and indeed Eric, the connection again is to an expanded definition of the sensual, erotically thrilling state. In *Cosmopolis*, thrill extends into the dangerous, into the unpredictable rapture of flirting with (and indeed accomplishing) self-destruction as a *telos* paradoxically intertwined with desire.

Spectacular Closure

Benno Levin, the man determined to end Eric Packer's life, turns out to be a former low-level currencies-analyst for his finance management firm, relieved of his

position for underperformance. Levin is obviously shocked at his quarry's appearance in his ramshackle hideout in an abandoned building; but, though both men are armed, no showdown takes place. Without lethal threat, Levin orders Eric to sit down, which, entranced by the actual discovery of his would-be killer, he accepts more as an offer of hospitality: "Yes, I'd like that. Sit and talk... Time for a philosophical pause. Some reflection, yes." (187) Levin begins to explain his essentially anti-capitalist motivations for killing Packer, whom he considers to be the pure embodiment of elitist exploitation and unchecked power. However, Levin is first taken aback, then completely stunned, by Eric's reaction to his indicting diatribe. Clearly understanding Levin's complaint (its representation of the have-not working classes are not unfamiliar to Eric, from his theoretical discussions with Kinski), Eric nonetheless dismisses Levin's argument as self-centered, and in fact blind to its own motivation, or chance for any meaningful efficacy: "No. Your crime has no conscience. You haven't been driven to it by some oppressive force. ... Your crime is in your head. Another fool shooting up a diner because because [*not sic*]. ... Even your weapon is a fantasy. What is it called?" (196) Levin, embroiled in the discussion, ruminating on his erstwhile manifesto, has placed his gun on the table, and—surpassing his consternation at Eric's walking into his lair and rather disinterestedly dismissing Levin's entire perspective—when Eric picks up the gun and fires a shot through the palm of his own hand, the greater narrative of the scene (and certainly Levin's murder-mission) is entirely transcended, at least for the moment.

Clearly, their disjointed socio-political discussion ultimately bares little relation to Eric and his quest, which has intentionally brought him face to face with his assassin. The shot he fires into his own hand proves this—it is consistent with all the other curiosity-

driven, thrill-seeking mayhem that has preceded. Their very meeting is born entirely of Eric's headlong pursuit of an affective re-stimulation of his deadened existence. On another level, his impetus and quasi-spiritual motivation echoes Bataille's notion of "sacrifice as a legacy: . . .this longing to lose, to lose ourselves and to look death in the face, found in the ritual of sacrifice," whose "enactment" may even include immoral themes, all the more engaging because "it is a game." (106) Indeed, even (self-)destruction and violence may carry the attractive potentiality of the ludic.

Bataille goes on to parse the compelling elements of such impulses become ritual-like, wherein "the victim is the unnamed animal—or man—that *plays* the role of the god—in other cases, of the king—whom the priest is meant to kill . . . to account for the excesses that confound the imagination . . . anguish tied to a feeling of vertiginous, contagious destruction, which fascinated while it appalled." (106) In Eric's case, and in his entirely self-enveloping experiential perspective, he internalizes all such roles of ritual, presiding over the sacrifice, the putting to death of himself in order to propitiate his own longings for a more palpable existence (however short-lived), a "fascination" all the more compelling because of its "appalling" implications. Or, as Bataille further elaborates: "the object that fascinates in sacrifice is not only horrible, it is *divine*, it is the god *who agrees* to the sacrifice—who exerts an attraction and yet has only one meaning: losing oneself in death. The horror is there only to accentuate an attraction that would seem less great if he did not offer himself up to painful agony." (107)

Contemplating the bloody, scorched hole he has blasted through his hand, the pain and twisted destruction of his body seems "pervertedly alive in its own little subplot" (197)—alive in its pain-pulsing corporeality (he can *feel* himself, acutely). Bataille, in

turn, frames the allure of mortality and its acute sensibility, “as if being itself were this exploration of all possibility, always going to the extreme and always hazardous,” (101) and goes on to make an explicit connection with death. But, for Eric, while death is a conscious telos, *the process* of its experiential journey is indistinguishable from the end-game and -goal; he has already attained an entirely new *affect-zone*. It is a thrill-context born of a valuation of mortality, one that, for Bataille, as for Eric Packer, carries reward intrinsic to its experience, no matter the ultimate price that it demands: “What is certain is that the lure of the void and of ruination does not in any way correspond to a diminished vitality, and that this vertigo, instead of [or, in Eric’s case, despite] bringing about our destruction, is a prelude to the *happy explosion*...” (108)

Relatedly, the idea of “waste” in Veblen’s theorization of conspicuous consumption deserves further inspection, not merely as associated with the elitist “ostentation” (60) of Packer’s financial and material success/excess, but also as applies to his continued existence. It is a wastefulness that includes his physical body, and indeed the value attached to his life, but a *wasting* that serves a crucial, highly personal purpose. Veblen criticized the term “waste . . . in one respect an unfortunate one,” because “in everyday life the word carries an undertone of deprecation . . . because this expenditure does not serve human life or human well-being on the whole.” (60) However, Veblen recontextualizes: “whatever form of expenditure the consumer chooses, or whatever end he seeks in making his choice, has utility to him by virtue of his preference,” and “implies not deprecation of the motive or of the ends sought by the consumer under this canon of conspicuous waste.” (61) Rather, Eric similarly becomes driven by the “utility” that is the affective thrill of his wasteful destruction. This is also reflective of Veblen’s

own reconfiguration and manifests “the standard of living which set out with being primarily wasteful, [and] ends with becoming, in the apprehension of the consumer, a necessary of life; and it may in this way become as indispensable as any other item of the consumer’s habitual [or newfound!] expenditure.” (61)

These are strange evolutions of omni-erotized desire, indeed, as is Eric’s identification of the wound as a simultaneously representative “subplot” (197) that rushes in with the pain and shrinks his own ego within the greater narrative of his life. Eric’s ego-based relation to the world emerges as that which had helped to strand him in numb anonymity, as much as in his mechanicalized function within global financial systems. In the showdown with Levin, and the throes of his self-inflicted injury, everything is becoming washed with new perspective, the radiating pain of his obliterated hand is relocating his consciousness, re-framing his identity: “The pain was crushing him, making him smaller, he thought, reducing him in size, person and value. It wasn’t the hand, it was the brain...” (198) Milliseconds before pulling the trigger of self-mutilation, he had already glimpsed the nature of this new consciousness, at one with the world, as opposed to being obsessed with wrangling meaning and feeling out of it. Instead, he now identifies uncharacteristic empathic feeling: “an enormous remorseful awareness ... moved through him called guilt.” (196) It is a reorientation of his attention to the experiences of “others down through the years, hazy and nameless,” (196) like Levin, whom his rise to power may well have directly, if not brutally, affected.

Even the experientiality of his former everyday now glows with new value. His arrival at the decisive moment of mortal threat, made palpably acute by his self-inflicted pain, has, in effect, popped him out of his self-centered perspective—the pain enveloping

his body is cutting his mind free to contemplate more than the simple pursuit of intense feeling. He thinks of “middling matrimony” with his wife, misses her; recalls the assurance of his mother’s breast; how “the smell and feel of the soap he uses makes him who he is, ...his strangely achy knee, ...and so much else that’s not convertible to some high sublime.” (206-8) It is a new, transcendent perspective, antithetical to his *master of the universe* identity, so based on victorious competition over any and all comers and challenges. Now, as he feels “his pressure drop to shock level,” (197) even the wind rustling through the abandoned building is of a piece with his newfound awareness. No longer enveloped in an inexorable drive toward thrilling experience and the spectacular taste of mortality’s threatening implications, he is on the other side, in a newfound, vulnerable human condition infinitely more accessible to his affective sensibilities: “There was something intriguing in the sound, wind indoors, the edge of something, the feel of something unprotected, an inside-outness . . . he felt a peace, a sweetness settle over him.” (199)

Fittingly, DeLillo shrouds the actual experience of Eric Packer’s death in ambiguity—it is unclear when, or even if, Levin kills him. With Levin standing behind him, gun to Packer’s head, assuring his victim that their discussion—and, indeed, no possible extenuating circumstance whatsoever (Eric has made an obscure reference to “change” that has occurred within him)—cannot change the fact that he must terminate Packer, DeLillo nonetheless never narrates a fatal pull of the trigger. Instead, Packer visualizes his own death, even into the dark finality of the morgue, and ruminates on the aftermath in the news, and its effect on his wife and colleagues. Still, none of this is definite, and DeLillo closes with: “This is not the end. ...still alive in original space,

waiting for the shot to sound.” (209) As stated, it is a an indeterminate limbo quite apt for thrillological considerations, one which retains an emphasis on the affectively-charged, nerve-jangling dimensions of direct confrontation with mortality, in the moment—Eric Packer has found a new existential reality (however, perhaps, short-lived), has transcended his numb and formerly trapped everyday, and laid bare its prematurely buried capacity for spectacular life experience. It has taken his going to the ultimate extreme, but that was the explicitly acknowledged revelation of his quest, at its inception.

In the case of *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo frames the diabolical appeal of spectacle within the willful pursuit of last remaining, lust-fulfilling options. The limitation of gratification through material success is reinforced. However, the same mitigations hold for the pursuit of inner, experiential satisfaction, which Packer’s character suggests plateaus into humdrum, when ultimately realized—only the *final spectacle*, one which transcends the questing, yearning subject, in willful self-annihilation, will consummate. It is a *rapture-telic* permutation that gestures towards another vision, a new ideological trope to take the place of expansionist and upwardly-mobile visions. This *Breaking It* mode suggests a trajectory that calls for the definitive, spectacular conquest of desire that strives to *make it*, replaced, instead, by the thrill of a consummating, all-consuming desire. And if death is to become the guiding telos, surely its spectacular and thrilling rapture is thoroughly rooted in affective and experiential *process*, since its climax is the ultimate cessation of experience. But until that final closure, Bataille’s understanding of a supreme and consuming erotics, informed by an uncompromising autotelic focus, is demonstrative: “The object of sensual desire is by nature another desire. The desire of the

senses is the desire, if not to destroy oneself, at least to be consumed and to lose oneself without reservation.” (113)

CHAPTER FOUR: FAKING IT

Faking It presents a third mode of the *rapture-telos*, one that hybridizes American success-pursuits and mutations thereof, as examined in *Making It* and *Breaking It*. *Faking It*'s case studies propose alternative options for the attainment of thrill that base their affective power in performance. This is to say that psycho-emotional fulfillment need not be tied to career-oriented efforts, participation in mass-cultural spectacles, or rebellious engagement with dominant socio-cultural paradigms, as in the previously handled examples. At root, "faking it" is never *fake*: the successful performance of rapture, itself, as well as performances that engender such affective intensity, *sui generis*, are equally effective. Furthermore, in the examples next explored, subjects gain crucial agency via the assembly of *affect-zones* that catalyze rapturous experience and, equally importantly, performances of identity. As a consequence, the examination of actor-side potentials for the generation of meaning is also central to the performance-centered literary representations of this chapter. As a theoretical approach, Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, for example, is illustrative of the *faking it* mode: "...the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality." (17)

Just for the Thrill of It: Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*

The lead characters of *Faking It*'s first case study, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, live in an environment pervaded by hyper-mediatized Hollywood culture.

However, rather than West's characters being subsumed into its thrall, an interpretation central to many analyses of the novel, the case can equally be made that a crucial thematic move sees the appropriation of such spectacular constructs *into* protagonist's everyday lives. The lurid sensationalism of their surroundings becomes integrated into, if not subordinate to, their own performances set within the confines of their private lives, directed by and starring themselves. It is a strategy of affective creativity, wherein self-dramatizing appropriations from larger societal templates of grandiose presentation/production serve the purpose of enabling West's characters to seek (and find) intoxicating experiential thrill. A cybernetic interaction, à la Sedgwick and Bateson, involving individual, societal, and cultural, entities, is at work in *The Day of the Locust*. Relatedly, performance scholar Jon McKenzie emphasizes potentials for re-invention ("autoproduction") that arise as an effect of "intercitationality" across diverse affective systems. (200) These aspects find their function, especially, within performative contexts and conceptions of identity; Nietzschean principles, as quoted by McKenzie, further illustrate the notion of subjective multiplicity and its interrelatedness to circumstance: "Every living thing needs to be surrounded by an atmosphere, a mysterious circle of mist, ...instincts and powerful illusion." (201) Via West's characters, these dynamics ultimately amount, in concert, to a strategy that targets rapturous titillation, as well as an impetus to construct an eroticized everyday.

When in Hollywood...

The back cover of Nathanael West's 1962 New Directions Paperbook edition of *Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust* (originally published in 1935) previews the

second novella's apocalyptic take on Hollywood-influenced Los Angeles culture: "...the great mass of inland Americans who have retired to California . . . boredom consumes them, their own emptiness maddens them... In the end only blood will serve; unreasoned, undirected violence. The day of the locust is at hand." Additionally, the front cover's black and white image of a mostly-smiling crowd in 1930s-era urban attire, from a hovering perspective, evidently presents the wanton masses, infuriated by Hollywood tantalization, who will explode into brutality. This interpretative approach is one which dominates much of the critical work on *The Day of the Locust*²². The novel's climactic scene, featuring a riot that breaks out at a movie premiere, generally sets the tone for such thematic analyses of West's novel. While it is certainly accurate that chaotic feelings and a general anomie are evident in much of the novel's portrayal of life in Los Angeles, it is this thrillology's contention that such affective auras serve a greater, differentiated purpose, than the mere precondition for disaffected frustration—Vietch describes the throng as "victims of a cheat" (124)—and its culminating riot. These reconsiderations target closer analysis of the lives and motivations of West's central figures, and, especially, the affective tones involved.

In its interest in autonomous pursuits of self-expression and –actualization, *rapture-telic* examination of *The Day of the Locust* deviates from wider-scoped societal interpretations. Instead of an emphasis upon insidious and torturous Hollywood influences, the contention here is that the everyday lives of West's characters exist in cybernetic metacommunication with their entertainment industry-dominated environment, and appropriate its theatrical conjuring and illusionary grandeur for their own purposes. Hence, the primary interests of this investigation are based in dynamics of

desire as experienced and manipulated by individuals focused on the spectacularization of their own lives. The idea of self-dramatization, as embodied in West's central characters, implies a pair of behavioral strategies: first, a concerted effort to both conduct, and star in, one's own life as an orchestrated production; and, second, to undertake this living theatre with a high valuation appointed to dramatic tensions that precipitate affective intensity.

The prime motivation, or want, that grips West's figures is the perpetuation of impassioned states of desire. In the case of *The Day of the Locust*, the notion of a spectacularized Everyday arises as an immanent state elicited by the novel's protagonists, particularly in romantic and exhibitionist contexts. The varieties of thrill that characters pursue, however, are by no means confined to pure pleasure seeking, rather delve into darker sides of human behavior that flirt with sadism, masochism, if not self-destruction. The *Faking It* case, as well, adheres to autotelic modes of affective intensity; deferred pleasure, and/or pain, will not mollify these temperaments and they orient their actions accordingly, in the immediate moment.

As mentioned, symbolic evidence for *The Day of the Locust* as an indicting revelation of Hollywood's ill effects, is often ascribed to the novel's final, cataclysmic scene. In the moment, West's leading male, Tod Hackett, describes the people surrounding him as, "...tricked and burn(ing) with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. ...Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed."(178) Correspondingly, a painting that Tod is working on, entitled "The Burning of Los Angeles," is seen to confirm West's central characters as being overtaken by a desperate,

Hollywood-generated frustration, grown into violence. In the wanton chaos of street upheaval, Tod's mind inexorably returns to the implications of his composition:

All those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence. ...were marching behind his banner in the great unified front of screwballs and screwboxes to purify the land. No longer bored, they sang and danced joyously in the red light of the flames.

In the lower foreground, men and women fled wildly before the vanguard of the crusading mob. Among them were Faye, Harry, Homer, and himself. Faye ran proudly, throwing her knees high. (184)

Curious, and worth further contemplation, is the exuberance in Faye's depiction. Faye Greener, the object of Tod's tortured love obsession, features similarly in another of Tod's painterly meditations, smiling while pursued by a rock-hurling mob: "She is running with her eyes closed and a strange half-smile on her lips. ...The only explanation for this contrast is that she is enjoying the release that wild flight gives..."(108) It appears that, for Faye, her front-and-center role in both versions of Tod's artistic representation elicits some sort of joyful emotional state, at least confused with abject fear.

Not atypically, the terror and anguish associated with this particular *The Day of the Locusts* scenario comes intermingled with a certain pleasure in the experience of pain. Through the *rapture-telos* lens, such riotous behavior betrays an anarchic *frisson* derived from the Los Angelean turmoil that imparts as much thrill as it does frustration. The *affect-zone*, in which West's characters find themselves, imbues their everyday with a street-level spectacularism that exists in and among the Hollywood entertainment complex, but that is generating autonomous subjective experiences and performances.

Performance thoroughly pervades West's Hollywood-Los Angeles culture and society. Even its fashion and architecture exhibit cybernetic feed-back with the

entertainment industry's auras of cinema-dream imagination and celebrity. The attire of the people surrounding Tod on the streets, as he commutes to work, are chosen for exhibitionist effect and have nothing to do with profession: "...people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes. ...The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping, not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat was returning, not from the mountain, but an insurance office; and the girl in... sneaks with a bandanna had just left a switchboard, not a tennis court." (60) Likewise, the Los Angelean architecture performs an incongruous eclecticism, almost Disney-like and echoing the jumbled scenarios of film studio back-lots, its sundry replications derivative of foreign cultures: "Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, . . . and every combination of these styles . . . he noticed that they were all plaster, lath and paper . . . a miniature Rhine castle with tarpaper turrets pierced for archers . . . a highly colored shack with domes and minarets out of the *Arabian Nights*." (61) These spectacularized elements of garb and dwelling both reflect the *dream-machine*'s effect, as well as testify to the everyday public's interest in myriad modes of titillation, a proclivity, in turn, that invariably influences the entertainment industry's production palette—*metacommunication*, as Bateson would term it, between production and consumption forces, between everyday subjects and ambient culture.

This case study's thrillological reconsideration of *The Day of the Locust* focuses on the reception side of the Hollywood/Los Angeles spectacle, and its attendant experiences at the level of everyday subjectivity, with a crucial emphasis on creative/expressive agencies that are born of performance. McKenzie's theorization is again useful, as he finds Deleuze and Guattari's *territorialization* akin to his own

explication of performative modes, in which “behavior changes function . . . new things are manifest (216) . . . *performatives* are the simultaneous encoding of these bodies into articulable subjects and objects.” (218) Whether it be ostentatious clothing or exotic home design choices, purposeful orchestration of dramatic personal lives, or the *frisson* of street violence, West’s novel exhibits unpredictable behaviors bent to new motivations, *autoproductive* performances that redefine subjective identities. In the character analyses that follow, behavioral strategies will resonate with Santayana’s fitting claim that such performative transfigurations “...continue under the spell of this self-knowledge, we do not merely live, but act; we compose and play our chosen character . . . this style is native to us and our art is vital, the more it transmutes its model the truer art it will be . . . crystallized . . . into an idea.” (56-7)

Faye’s Painful Pleasure

In her role as *The Day of the Locust*’s leading lady, Faye Greener’s behavior is dominated by an apparently consuming interest in intimate relationships. However, any focused development of genuine interpersonal connection is consistently superseded by more immediate and intense modes of desire. Faye’s appetite for passion tends to undermine, in short order, any potential fruition of relationship among the men with whom she is involved. Foremost, is the case of Tod, wherein Faye appears to always preserve the possibility, through dates laced with flirtation, including the intimacies of kissing, dancing, and closeness, that her rejection might eventually give way to romantic consummation. Though she kisses him “willingly enough,” any further escalation of intimacy on Tod’s part is halted, with remonstrance: “Whoa there, palsy-walsy,” she

laughed. “Mama spank.”(107) Similar brinks(wo)manship holds in Faye’s interactions with Earl and Miguel, other men with whom she also has romantic, and sexual, liaisons. While jealousy and repeated violent altercation result among her consorts, such conflict hardly seems to be Faye’s aim, nor is there any indication that she wishes to hurt them. Rather, she is drawn, in the instant, to the greatest potential for intense feeling—it is the immediate allure of the dramatic, which has the end result of undermining any deeper, enduring connection. Still, it is a trade-off she will accept.

The *affect-zone* that Faye arranges for herself is dedicated to the spectacularization of her everyday life and oriented around Dionysian proclivities as valued by Marcuse and Brown. From Brown’s perspective, Faye represents an enactment of “narcissism and erotic exuberance” (308) that centers on “the relation of the ego to its sources of pleasure.” (45) Such affect-centered, individualistic mandates are reinforced, on Brown’s view, by Spinozan conceptions of self-enjoyment (*laetitia*) wherein “the energy of the individual is essentially directed at self-maintenance, self-activity, self-perfection.” (47) Given, as well, that, in all her liaisons and flirtations, there seems to be only a single occasion of actual sexual intercourse, Marcuse’s valuation of *erotized*, sexually polymorphous life, decoupled from “genital supremacy,” (201) is also relevant. As previously acknowledged, Marcuse’s theory of *erotization* is a utopian agenda for human society, writ large—one predicated on the abolition of prevailing capitalist societal organization as a condition of its sensual liberation. Nonetheless, its consequence of a “reactivation of all erotogenic zones” is again useful for the description of reorientations that can occur at the level of individual, especially in the transcendence of social systems such as monogamy. In this sense, Faye’s refusal of stable romance, in

favor of a sensuous experientiality centered purely on her own gratification transcends, at the level of subject, “the institutions in which private interpersonal relations have been organized,” (Marcuse 201). Faye’s is a modus operandi of autotelic fulfillment; she is not maneuvering to attain any ultimate consummation of love with another, rather, her self-centered rapture is ongoing, is always seeking its most immediate, intense stimulation. Moreover, she is willing to take any risk, even the dissolution of known pleasure sources, in order to maintain the most intense affected state.

This sort of replacement of goal-oriented pursuits by desire-based mandates that focus on immediate experience is echoed in Jacques Lacan’s *Ethics of Psychoanalysis Seminar, Book VII*, in the disassociation of Triebe (drives) from Ziel (goal/target): “A symptom is the return by means of a signifying substitution of that which is at the end of the drive in the form of an aim. . . . It is a paradoxical fact that the drive is able to find its aim elsewhere than in that which is its aim—” (110) In this sense, the drive itself becomes the aim, the purpose. In the development of his characters’ preoccupation with their immediate emotional states, West is emphasizing a valuation of desire that is its own means and end. The ostensible goals of, say, devoted love, career advancement, stardom, etc. are subordinated to more immediate emotional experiences, including enticement, anger, obsession, which populate the process of pursuit and evince dramatic tension in the moment.

Similar decoupling of process from end-results is also implicit in Sedgwick’s distinction between affects and drives, carrying the conviction that “affects have far greater freedom than do drives” (19) to attach themselves to and associate with a diversity of objects. In order to gain attention from the diverse objects of desire that

populate her *affect-zone*, Faye must deploy strategic performances of coquettish *femme fatale*, mixed and matched, as she moves from one paramour to the next, with the diabolical frustration of the *belle dame sans merci*. Goffman's concepts of the presentation of self are salient here, as well, in the proposition that people are always playing a role that "represents the conception we have formed of ourselves . . . this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be." (19)

In reality, Faye's acting career is non-existent, and she is a powerless young-adult waif. Despite such disempowerment, however, she is able to manifest as spectacular and desirous heart-throb, a star, in the everyday show that she produces amongst the men in her life. It is a mode of production that resonates with Sternberg's (celebrity culture) notion of *phantasmagoric* labor ("the personal work of self-making" (427)), as associated with the marketing of image, of persona, and the loading of objects, to include persons, with meaning. (418) It should be underscored, however, that Faye's self-serving dramaturgy produces meaning for her audience, as much as it produces affective intensity for herself. In this sense, the notion of value also includes, for Faye, the *frisson* of exhibitionism and attention, and is interchangeable in Sternberg's further elucidation: "Performers gain market value [*frisson*] by mobilizing demeanor and conduct so they reference a realm of meaning that consumers find evocative." (426)

Despite the quotidian, if not domestically contained, setting of Faye's *femme fatale* performances, elements thereof indicate behavioral appropriation from Hollywood's heart-throb mythos. Fittingly, the introduction of Faye's starlet-styled presence into Tod's life comes courtesy of a photo, "autographed in a large, wild hand, 'Affectionately yours, Faye Greener,'" from her only role in cinema, as an extra in a

“two-reel farce.” She plays a courtesan, “stretched out on the divan with her arms and legs spread, as though she was welcoming a lover,” and has only one line, “Oh, Mr. Smith!” (67) Nevertheless, Faye’s bit performance is of a piece with her off-screen persona. At a chaotic party, setting for another of the novel’s explosive scenes, Faye stars as the sole female attraction amongst a group of men, “wearing a pair of green silk lounging pajamas . . . very high heels. The top three buttons of her jacket were open and a good deal of her chest was exposed. . . She stood with one hip thrown out and her hand on it. . . smiling in a peculiar secret way and running her tongue over her lips . . . seem(ing) to promise all sorts of undefined intimacies. . . Faye peacocked for them all.” (156-7) A variety of other instances, throughout the novel, wherein Faye similarly seizes the occasion to act the role of garish temptress, demonstrate that her chosen character need not wait for formal fulfillment in entertainment industry performance.

Further character-style consistency, metacommunication with, but occurring outside of, the world of Hollywood is demonstrated in a conversation with Tod about “some swell ideas for pictures.” On this occasion, as well, her narrative conceptions are imbued with a Hollywood-esque spectacularization of romantic sentimentality. Love triangles, damsels in distress needing gallants to come to the rescue, falling helplessly in love, etc. are thematic hues that dominate her imagination, as much as they inform her real life performances. Faye’s claim that her “stories” often derive from her dreams, reveals a provenance based in further appropriation of Hollywood *dream machine*-styled creativity, put into the service of everyday self-dramatization.

The oneiric impetus figures prominently in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, generating agency at the level of everyday subjectivity, as well as offering

contexts for performances of identity. An example manifests in his concept of *poaching*. No matter the commercial and systemic structuralizations of everyday life, subjective imaginative powers, especially, inspire possibilities for a “living and mythical practice of the city” and allow for its experiences to “accede to another dimension.” (202-3) Faye may well be living in a dream-world of her own creation, but her appropriated persona of Hollywood-styled leading-lady and heart throb exemplifies a de Certeauian potential for transformation and “fabricating realities out of appearances.” (186) Myriad cases of spectacularized performances of everyday lives and identities are found throughout *The Day of the Locust* (operating both within characterization, as well as in setting), and serve to resonate with the thrill of appropriating, and partaking of, Hollywood’s dreamy auras.²³

Curiously, while such dynamics dominate the Los Angelean world rendered in West’s novel, concrete examples of Hollywood product, either films proper or movie-star appearances, are virtually nonexistent. Even the closing scene’s film premiere is dominated by street-level action that barely references the event, and the vehicle’s name is never given. The lone film appearing in the novel, however, does offer further connection to the everyday plot development involving Faye’s melodramatic menagerie of male temptation. *Le Predicament du Marie*—a short, silent-flick shown privately during an after-hours party, at a Sunset Boulevard brothel—its précis need only be brief, is soft-core pornography, featuring a central character, Marie, whose sexual liaisons with multiple partners make for the “predicament.” Interesting, as well, is that the projector malfunctions and burns the film to a crisp, before any resolution of the plot—another

parallel to the in-the-moment autotelism, devoid of sustainable romantic connection, that marks Faye's own philandering.

No matter its performativity, such viscerally-generated behavior hardly serves Faye's professional acting pursuits, any more than it generates sustained human connection or romance. After her father's death, she is essentially left without means and subsequently exploits one of her suitor's (Homer Simpson) equal measures of generosity, obliviousness and romantic hopefulness, by moving in with him. Given her tenuous situation, it would behoove her to keep up the ruse, rather than risk offending her painfully subservient host. But she cannot, and Homer's living room becomes the main site of her seductions. One such occasion is attended by Claude Estee, an invitee of Tod, and a successful Hollywood producer. Faye takes the chance to share her show business dreams with Estee, "Acting is in my blood. We Greeners, you know, were all theatre people from way back," (158) and even seems to have captured his attention. But Faye is so caught up in the melodrama that she is orchestrating, so intent on "creating a scene," that the inevitable end result is the eruption of a ferocious brawl amongst her romantic hopefuls. Serious injuries and vengeance-swearing departures insure the party's end. Having indulged her flirtatious whim with nearly all the men, in order to "earn the celebrity status that both verifies and reinforces (her) status," (Sternberg 426) proves explosive and, as a consequence, Faye squanders any professional opportunity, as Estee also flees the bedlam. Likewise, Faye soon succeeds in incurring Homer's ire, if not directly initiating his subsequent psychotic break.

In all of this, Faye is guided by a desire for emotional reactivity, drawn, willingly, like a moth to flame. It seems not to matter that she poisons the very relationships that are

the source of her own affective fulfillment; they are exploited to their maximum, then discarded, as Faye moves on to her next “scene.” Indeed, after the climactic blow-up, Faye disappears from West’s novel altogether, and, given her earlier disappearance from the narrative into a stint of prostitution, it would seem that the circuits she is willing to “work” are myriad. Goffman’s notion of performance as an everyday phenomenon, in general, is pertinent: “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify.” (72) Faye’s *rapture-telic* orientations take advantage of dual, mutually-enhancing aspects of performance. First, it is thrilling to appropriate Hollywood-styled stardom, the model affords a tangible, spectacular template vetted by socio-cultural popularity; and, second, affective intensity is guaranteed via the immediacy of such presentation, both in terms of Faye’s self-ordained role as leading lady, as well as in the reaction of the already-engaged audience of her everyday life.

Tod’s Pleasing Pain

In another instance of complicated desire, Tod Hackett, West’s male protagonist, both endures, and pursues, imperfection in his love life. Whereas as it might be expected that Tod should avoid his torturous obsession with his *Day of the Locust* co-star, Faye Greener, he nonetheless revels in the intensity of his own agony:

Her invitation wasn’t to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do it with a scream. You wouldn’t expect to rise again. ...If she would only let him, he would be glad to throw himself, no matter what the cost. (68)

Tod’s paradoxical attitude is additionally emblematic of West’s treatment of torturous romantic passion. Importantly, however, in these instantiations of desire’s affect, figures

like Tod and Faye are not *victims*; rather, they are willing participants in the game, and drama, of unrequited desire, to especially include its darker emotions of pain, suffering, frustration, etc. In this sense, while the characters take actions that ostensibly sabotage their own best interests, their behavioral patterns also succeed in the perpetuation of stimulating affective states.

These complex modes of desire are similarly reflected in Freud's explication of competing, and often contradictory, motivations, that involve "...ego instincts, which we equated with death instincts, and sexual instincts, which we equated with life instincts" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 72). The drive for pleasure, however, does not so much contend with the death drive, in West's characters, as become virtually inextricable. Faye's lust for control, for instance, which corresponds to the death drive, is nonetheless a control that seeks to perpetuate pleasure, in most cases within sexualized contexts. In his own discussion of comparable dynamics at work in *The Day of the Locust*, Chip Rhodes also articulates a manipulative interaction with desire, when he states, "Desire is based on lack, triangulation, and the ego demand for self-confirmation." (43) Rhodes elucidates such notions in reference to Slavoj Žižek's discussion, in *Looking Awry*, of stratagems of behavior that pursue unending affective intensity: "The realization of desire does not consist in its being fulfilled, fully satisfied, it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular movement." (43) Here, then, again, is the *autotelism* of thrill, one that eschews consummation for a perpetuated state of arousal. Such behavioral tactics exemplify the ways in which West's characters spectacularize their everyday lives through manipulation of their surroundings, most specifically as

comprised by the people therein, to promote intensified affective states all the more compelling in their admixtures of pain and pleasure.

A preamble to the novel's climax of intertwined brutality and lust is the graphic episode of a cock fight that the men arrange in Homer's yard. Suitors all, a titillation of jocular machismo and enthusiasm for violence grips the men. Although Faye avoids the scene, the ensuing sexualized altercation for her attention is presaged by the men's competitive animosity, and the mortal combat of the fighting-cocks. What follows is another instance of *The Day of the Locust's* consistent intermingling of violence and desire: the dance-party-turned-battle-royale amongst Faye's suitors/temptees. Its intensity and explosion is best reflected in West's original prose:

When Tod went back into the house, he found Earle, Abe Kusich and Claude standing together in a tight group, watching Faye dance with Miguel. ...He held her very tight, ...all the buttons on her lounging pajamas were open and the arm he had around her waist was inside her clothes. ...The phonograph record had been changed to a fox-trot and Earle was dancing with Faye. ...Faye, her head thrown back, was laughing wildly. Earle had both eyes shut tight.

Miguel and Claude were also laughing, but not the dwarf. He stood with his fists clenched and his chin stuck out. ...

"Le'me dance," he bellowed.

...he charged between Earle's legs and dug upward with both hands. Earle screamed with pain, ...then groaned and started to sink to the floor, tearing Faye's silk pajamas on his way down. ...Lifting the little man free, Miguel shifted his grip to his ankles and dashed him against the wall, like a man killing a rabbit against a tree. (163-4)

It is a knife's edge of conflicting affective charges that West cultivates in the scene, cutting with equal intensity towards the lustful heat fanned by Faye's libertine insinuations, and that of impending internecine male competition to win its prize. While Tod may be delectably aware of his own conflicting urges and desires, and their off-set emotional and psychic qualities, the dance-party scene represents a raw performance of

such affective convolutions that inhabit the novel's romantic contexts, in general. It is, of course, simultaneously, a perfect reflection of the paradoxical *affect-zone* that Faye has set up, for her own enjoyment, via her appropriation of the contradictory roles of elusive temptress and romantic partner.

Courtesy of the violence, it becomes all the more evident that Tod's twisted attraction to the pain of enduring Faye's cycle of temptation and rejection carries emotional valuation that goes beyond simple amorous longing and metamorphoses to include a lustful (lust for) hatred. The amalgamation of positive and negative affective response is evident in Faye's violent victimization, both in Tod's painting, as well as in his repeated brutal ruminations:

She put one hand on each of her buttocks and began to dance... She flashed by Tod. He reached for her ankle to pull her down, but missed. ...Already he could feel how it would be when he pulled her to the ground. (117) ...Sitting next to her in the dark proved the ordeal he expected it to be. Her self-sufficiency made him squirm and the desire to break its smooth surface with a blow, or at least sudden gesture, became irresistible. (141) ...but the driving itch refused to go. If only he had the courage to wait for her some night and hit her with a bottle and rape her. (174)

Nevertheless, Tod's violent inclinations remain indefinitely buried, never even receiving verbal articulation; and his interactions with Faye remain exclusively affectionate, if not fawning. Aside from a brief hiatus, he is unable, indeed unwilling, to extricate himself from relations with his temptress. Instead, the mixture of torment and longing apparently heightens Tod's overall psycho-emotional excitation.

This sort of affective intricacy, one that knits together suffering with desire deserves further examination. Otto Kernberg's article "Hatred as Pleasure," from the psychoanalytical anthology *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, discusses psychological states that evince a conscious desire for, and enjoyment of, loathing: "This

identification condenses tolerance of hatred and the wish to destroy the object . . . with the underlying experience of masochistic pleasure . . . aggression is absorbed by libido, hatred by love, and the pleasure with hatred becomes the ordinary pleasure in aggressive self-affirmation . . . in surrendering emotionally to the loved object.” (186) In this sense, Tod’s attraction, however unrequited, nonetheless gives him purchase to explore passionate feelings, and hatred becomes his own actualization within the dynamic—it is as if the antipathy allows his lust to continue by simultaneously giving him release, absent his feelings being requited in any way. Given his excruciating exposure to Faye’s coquetry with other men, it would appear that Tod is consciously sabotaging his own possibilities for requited romance, in the interest of a more complicated emotional thrill drawing on starkly contrasting feelings.

Tod’s case demonstrates how affective states can involve both psychic and emotional dimensions (psycho-emotional). Specifically, on the psychic side, there is a deployment of intellectualization that functions both as a defense mechanism against conflicting emotions, those of love and hate, and allows for their diametrically-opposed coexistence. (Parker 106) Tod, himself, seems aware of the mental machinations involving his feelings for Faye, when he wonders: “. . .if he himself didn’t suffer from the ingrained, morbid apathy he liked to draw in others. Maybe he could only be galvanized into sensibility and that was why he was chasing Faye.” (140) Here, again, the case can be made for a willful spectacularization, no matter the psychic toll, of the character’s everyday. While perhaps more conscious of its paradoxicality, Tod’s behavior is nonetheless also akin to Faye’s, in that the concealment of its darker side depends on a consistently performed front of affection.

In their respective quasi-romantic contexts, Tod and Faye both manipulate, and attempt to perpetuate, complex affective states. More often than not, their myopic and self-indulgent behaviors engender chaos, however, by focusing on the immediacy of their emotional states, West's leading figures effectively compose and (en)act the *rapture-telos* of their desires.

What a riot!

While this thrillological treatment of *The Day of the Locust* emphasizes spectacularized everyday lives that refashion surrounding Hollywood influences, and are more obsessed with their own narratives and plot development, the film industry nonetheless contributes significantly to West's thematic exegesis. One scene, in particular, is illustrative, in which Tod goes looking (without success) for Faye among the back-lot production sets of the studio at which he works. Having caught a glimpse of Faye for the first time in weeks, clad in period costume, Tod surmises that she is working as an extra on the studio's big-budget historical film, "Waterloo." Notably, it is once again a character's personal life, driven by desire, that orients Tod's interaction with Hollywood, as opposed to any career-oriented impetus, or work assignment. On his quest, the eclectic visual details of the various sets resonate with the spectacular strangeness that has made its impression on Tod, in his greater Los Angeles experience.

Moreover, his encounters along the way evoke intertwining maudlin tones of longing and alienation that echo his own psycho-emotional state. The people that Tod approaches for directions, a group of picnicking men and women, an Arab on a stallion, are all busy acting and become annoyed by his presence ("A man who scowled and held

up a sign—"Quiet, Please, We're Shooting"). Tod's frustration becomes its own pseudo-public performance, a role nonetheless deriving from his real life. Midway through his odyssey, he comes across "a Greek temple dedicated to Eros. The god himself lay face downward in a pile of old newspapers and bottles." (131) The experience turns his mind—always inevitably associated with his tribulations involving Faye—to his painting, by association, to past masters of "Decay and Mystery," including Salvator Rosa and Francesco Guardi. (132) The half-dismantled and under-construction sets, strike him as "a final dumping ground . . . a dream dump. A Sargasso of the imagination!" (132), and remind him of the disarray and apparent deterioration of his own life. Indeed, that his quest is to find the set of a reenacted Waterloo, suggests to Tod his own day of reckoning, perhaps already underway.

Simultaneously, and in resonance with the contextualizations of this study, the scene serves to further demystify, if not undermine, Hollywood's power and influence. Tod finally arrives at the Waterloo set, just in time to see the reconstructed hill meant to be the site of the final military showdown between Napoleon and his nemeses collapse under its own weight, injuring actors and bringing the entire production to a standstill. No sign of Faye, of course. Tod's own commentary on the pathetic implosion both heightens the moment's irony and emphasizes an everyday-perspective on the impotence and thoroughgoing inauthenticity of Hollywood's machinations:

...a fatal error. Mont St. Jean was unfinished. The paint was not yet dry and all the struts were not in place. ... Waterloo resulted in a draw. ... Big losses were sustained by the insurance company in workmen's compensation. ... The noise was terrific. Nails screamed with agony as they pulled out of joists. ... Lath and scantling snapped as though they were brittle bones. . . . It turned into a rout. The victors of Bersina , Leipsic, Austerlitz, fled like schoolboys who had broken a pane of glass. "Sauve qui peut!" they cried, or rather, "Scram!" (134-5)

More destruction and violence lacing *The Day of the Locust*, but, again, intertwining a certain everydayness within its spectacle; in this case, real carnage courtesy of an acted-out conflict. It is another meditation, much like those dominating Tod's paintings, that deconstructs spectacular violence into performed scenes. In doing so, new meanings and implications arise in relationship to West's protagonists. McKenzie describes such reiterations as "disjointed performance . . . that breaks with the sociotechnical system producing it and enters into recursive communication from other systems." (228) In this particular instance, the "other system" involved is the real world and Tod's personal life and frustrated romantic affect, one that illustrates, particularly well, McKenzie's further elaboration of such mutating dynamics of the "*bathos*-absurd . . . accidental parody, . . . ludic juxtaposition." (229)

There are further instances in which Hollywood remains an important referent to West's exposition of interpersonal dynamics, in *The Day of the Locust*. It is true that ambivalence towards Hollywood culture, in both its filmic iterations and attendant dramas of celebrity elitism, imbues West's Los Angeles with an angst-filled aura. A film premiere riot at Kahn's Pleasure Dome remains the stark closing note of the tale.

American Superrealism (1997), a comprehensive treatment of West's fiction by Jonathan Vietch, emphasizes such elements in his closing chapter on *The Day of the Locust*. Vietch provides his own gloss²⁴ on prevailing readings of the novel, as addressed in this section's introduction, that see West's Los Angeleans as incensed "victims of cheat" at the hands of Hollywood's illusion's. However, *Superrealism* is also consistent in its dismissal of any notions of agency, even those of immediate affective gratification (e.g. the thrill of riot, and/or meaningful expressions of frustration, rebellion, etc.): "Its most

salient feature is an utter lack of gaiety . . . the sullen fury of the petit bourgeois.” (129-30)

While such diagnoses of anomie and hopelessness certainly apply, the contention here is that they fail to tell *The Day of the Locust*'s whole story, particularly as regards complexities of affect that mix negative and positive elements. This is not to say, in agreement with another of Vietch's qualifications, that the climactic upheaval at the film premiere amounts to any concerted social rebellion, nor has that been the contention at any juncture of this analysis. Rather, the point is to insist that, within the dark and depressive states of West's characters—including, crucially, the climax's anonymous throng of stock characters— affective tones of hysterical glee do inhere, no matter how violently twisted. Vietch's own quotes (most of which are repeated here) from the midst of the riot's conversation are demonstrative:

“...Somebody hollered, ‘Here comes Gary Cooper,’ and then wham!”

“That ain't it... This is a riot you're in.”

“Yeah,” said a third woman, “...A pervert attacked a child.”

“He ought to be lynched.”

“... He must have been crazy,” said the man in the cap. “What kind of fun is that?”

Everybody laughed. The stout woman spoke to the man who was hugging her.

“Hey, you,” she said. “I ain't no pillow.”

The man smiled beatifically but didn't move. She laughed, making no effort to get out of his embrace.

“A fresh guy,” she said.

The other woman laughed.

“Yeah,” she said, “this is a regular free-for-all.” (183)

Affective responses within the crowd are hardly consistent; some are incensed, others joke about the goings-on. Despite the claim of a Gary Cooper sighting, the overall scene is equally detached from frustrated Hollywood expectations in that its mayhem may also have also been triggered by an incendiary rumor of child abuse occurring within the

throng. It seems that any trigger, at all, will suffice to set into motion the release of the mob's undefinable energies into their subsequent tumultuous performance of violence and sexual innuendo. It should be added that, from this perspective, Tod's artistic reflections of his Los Angelean experience become reintegrated into the protagonist's worldviews and behavior, whereas Vietch stresses a disconnect between Tod's painting and his reality.

West's closing treatment of the *The Day of the Locust's* greater *affect-zone* is afforded by the societal, and anonymously public, context of the film premiere mayhem. Amidst the contradictory affective tendencies at work in West's novel (as exemplified, at the level of individual, by Tod's own heterogeneous psycho-emotional responses to the riot's unfolding events), boredom emerges as the sole candidate for a thoroughgoing affective touchstone of the novel's experientiality. Its condition, confirming to affect's general auratic quality, can lead to a variety of other affective states, such as disappointment, bitterness, savagery, and even reactionary abandon in the pursuit of thrill (parallel in the riot and Faye's and Tod's romantic lives). Tod includes all these hues in his descriptions of Los Angeleans, whether narrative or within his painting. That human experience, in *metacommunication* with its 1930s Los Angeles/Hollywood socio-cultural environment, is so unpredictable, and practically beyond comprehension, serves to make it an all the more thrilling and spectacular proposition for West and his characters in *The Day of the Locust*.

West places great emphasis on showing that entertainment industry-/dramaturgically-informed ideals tend to be played-out in personal lives and in riotous societal behavior, much more than in actual pursuit of film/celebrity careers, or activated

social protest. Autotelic valuation of thrill, of an everyday-spectacularizing *frisson*, is empowered, to reconnect to aspects of Goffmanian performance, by a notion of self that is a “performed character.” West’s characters exist in cybernetic resonance with their surroundings and situation, and their “dramatic effect . . . arise(s) diffusely from a scene that is presented . . . out of intimate interaction with the contingencies of staging performances.” (253-4)

Crucially, thrilling affect is the aim of such performances, and is catalyzed by its metamorphosing and unpredictable recombinations. For McKenzie, *calumnia* (trickery) and nonsensicality are central to the inventive potential arising from such everyday-spectacular intra-appropriations. Indeed, the seemingly self-inflicted confusion of West’s characters, as much as the chaotic surrealism of their surroundings, are the very factors that enable *The Day of the Locust*’s alarming intensities: “If there’s no nonsense in one’s work, then one has not gone far enough in engaging the logic and common sense—the formal presuppositions and informal prejudices.” (230) Bateson’s concept of *metacommunication* functions as a unifying rubric for the dynamics at play in *The Day of the Locust*, particularly in connection with metamorphic capacities inherent in performativity, where the communication process “sets the stage for a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery.” (Goffman 8) All the world is indeed a stage; it is also a film set, studio, and theatre; and, as much as all people are players, West proposes that subjects develop and realize their respective self-dramatizations by incarnating every role, from highest-ranking producer to frustrated bit-player—even as they take their front-row seats in the audience.

Thrill-or-Bust: Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama*

The Allure of Allure

Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama* ends with a flashback to an episode predating the action of the rest of the novel. A Hollywood pool-party, the scene features protagonist Victor Ward getting his first taste of the "model-slash-actor" highlife, the buzz of celebrity. (111) It is a formative moment, one that anneals heady lust into conviction. Surrounded by "beautiful people," all riding the entertainment industry's wave of fame and fortune, sex and drugs, lust and loathing, Victor is gripped with a rapturous thrill that, no matter its obvious dangers and ephemerality, he claims unequivocally as his own: "...decisions had to be made, the priority being: I would never dream of leaving any of this." (545)

Simultaneously, Victor is conscious that his appropriation of the lifestyle, and the persona he must manifest to achieve it, will require force of will, as well as require the uneasy acceptance of certain problematic ground-rules, a sort of diabolical deal with his inner malevolence: "On the verge of tears—because I was dealing with the fact that we lived in a world where beauty was considered an accomplishment ... I made a promise to myself: to be harder, to not care, to be cool." (545) Victor knows he has the elitist ticket of good looks and that he must capitalize on it, if he wants to remain a VIP at the global celebrity party, basking in its mediatized glow, rolling in its cash, debauchery with its gorgeous guys and dolls. It is a will to thrill, one that promises both affective consummation, as well as a solution to questions of identity: "The future started mapping itself out and I focused on it. In that moment I felt as if I was ... floating above the palm

trees . . . and relief swept over me with such force I sighed.” (545) Victor has had an entrancing taste of pure leisure, where an otherworldly existence is within reach. If he can learn the role, it will be a pleasure to lose himself in it. It is the nascent moment of Victor’s destiny, one that unfolds, as much as it unravels, over the course of Easton Ellis’ bizarre hallucinations of a postmodern world spiraling through supermodel terror.

The novel begins an indeterminate, but clearly not too distant, time later with Victor thoroughly engaged in a semi-successful “model-slash-actor” (111) career in New York City. His bank-card password is “COOLGUY,” a self-identification echoed by typical, flattering off-hand salutations (*not* conversation) such as, “you have a . . . kind of . . . non-specific . . . fabulosity—oh my god,” (221) which may be returned, in passing, with a compliment that someone is achieving an “Uma-ish” (20) aura (as in Uma Thurman, supermodel). His life is spent Vespa-ing from posh restaurant and coffee rendezvouses to modelling photo-shoots to late-night drug-addled clubbing, and covert sexcapades, both with his top-flite supermodel girl-friend, as well as with various other paramours, some dangerously closely affiliated to his closest friends—infidelity is rampant. Victor and his glitterati peers are obsessed with (but also take entirely for granted) strictly *haute couture* clothing, luxuriously-appointed posh apartments, and micro-manage their (perpetually intoxicated) states of mind and body, as much through hard-core drug use and perpetual caffeination, as via therapist prescribed mood-management pharmaceuticals and quasi-psychoanalytical self-support techniques. In the New York City model-slash-actor scene, Victor attains the wonderland existence that he glimpsed in his pool-side Los Angeles revelation; he is on top of the/his world, and flush with its headlong hedonism. The overall scene is one whose affect is permeated by a

Bataille's notion of the erotic, wherein the object of sensual desire is inevitably eclipsed by a more expansive nature of desire, as previously mentioned in relations to Eric Packer's passion: "The desire of the senses is the desire . . . to be consumed and lose oneself without reservation." (113)

Professionally, and privately, for that matter, Victor's *modus operandi* also qualifies as what celebrity culture scholar Ernest Sternberg terms *phantasmagoric labor*, a contemporary mode of productive behavior whose "driving force is image . . . [and] the capacity to load products, including both object and persons with meaning," (418) wherein, moreover, "the ability to present oneself has become a critical economic asset." (420) Modeling would seem an incarnation, *par excellence*, of such labor strategies, where Victor's success is contingent both on his body image's alignment with industry standards for beauty and sensuality, as well as upon his ability to present those aspects suitably ("however you want us") in photo shoots. These standards dominate the greater social scene, as well. In the latter setting, the proper stylish image requires augmentation with the equally scene-sensitive "cultivation of flair and charisma." (Sternberg 425) In this sense, the "fashion world" paradigm prevails as much within the spectacle of its runway-shows and photo-shoots, as it does in the everyday after-hours scenarios of its corollary social-life. Another model-slash-actor crony of Victor's corroborates Sternberg's notion that the "capacity for calculated posing is now a routine . . . that both verifies and reinforces glittering status." (425) when he explains: "I'll go to the Versace luncheon. I'll have a club sandwich. I'll nod when appropriate. . . I'll stick to the script," (334)

Barry King's discussion of stardom takes up a related theme involving the competition between star persona and acted role: "The actor confronts problems in characterization that relate to his or her being as a general cultural object" (238) This is exactly what Victor cannot distinguish; for Victor, *being* is acting the role of model, which has permeated his everyday and completely informs his sense of identity. Moreover, in Victor's case, it is an irrevocable conundrum that echoes King's notion of a "selection process of type-casting, which has a persistent tendency towards self-fulfillment..." (238)—at least Victor hopes so. Richard Sennett's own connection of life devoted to pleasure and its inevitable availing of performative modes comes up in his discussion of Rousseau's dissection of 18th-century emerging cosmopolitan social mores: "For in a state of leisure, people interact more and more for sheer pleasure of contact; the more they interact outside of necessity, the more they become actors." (30) And, indeed, as *Glamorama* unfolds, necessity, security, and even the ephemeral notion of the *work* of stardom are intimately conjoined within the novel's characters, as they seek to bleed their glitterati existence, and each other, of every possible drop of their affect-centered lifeblood—thrilling intoxications of any and every kind.

However "superficial" such pursuits may appear, materialist desire's power to objectify, to make people into *things* becomes an orientating perspective, a titillating excess that enables Victor's intoxicating high and the conviction that he is still riding the wave of success and stardom. Bataille explicates such appeal by connecting the transgression of material profligacy with a conscious reveling in excess: "That sparkling finery, those jewels and those perfumes ... those bodies dripping with wealth, becoming the *objects*, the focal points of luxury and lust ... dissipate a part of human labor in a

useless splendor.”(142) Grossberg’s elucidation of a “hyperconsumerist sensibility” combines such intensities of materialistic desire with the gratifying experience of consumption (aspects which both apply directly to the world of fashion) as centered on the “production of pleasure,” (585) in other words, principally within the affective dimension. For Victor and his gliterrati compatriots, the consumerist sensibility extends beyond their own pleasures derived from the unremitting luxury consumption (the clothes, the parties, globe-trotting), into redoubled thrills associated with performing those delights, publicly. Such synergies connecting production and presentation offer an augmented *frisson* of consumption for subjects who embody both product and person. In this sense, Victor’s model-slash-actor existence, its sub-culture, and that subculture’s position within the greater societal context becomes, to borrow again from Grossberg’s explication, “a socially constructed domain of cultural effect,” (585) or, in terminology specific to a *rapture-telic* exposition of *Glamorama*, an *affect-zone* centered on the rapture of consumption (and self-consumption).

It is crucial, not only to exemplify Victor as an incarnation of everyday-ified spectacle, but also to underscore his simultaneous location both on the audience-, as well as performer-side of the celebritized show that is the fashion world. This is to say that he both idealizes the supermodel identity, with fan-like adulation, as well as directly conceives of his own persona within such contexts. Grossberg further limns the “affective sensibility” of such fan-celebrity dynamics as offering culturally-relevant and psycho-emotionally compelling reference points for conceiving “identity as something to be invested in, as something that matters.” (585) It is a dynamic that holds for nearly all the characters in *Glamorama* who, as mere bit-players in the glamor-game of celebrity, are

equally star-struck by the esoteric *mise-en-scene* they have forced their way into. Here is another affect-driven instantiation of cybernetic feedback, “a kind of contemporary mirror-effect where the culture reflects back the value of the celebrity’s image,” (Marshall 13) all the more poignant and humanized by *Glamorama*’s everyday-spectacular, first-person perspective of Victor Ward, as he desperately attempts to appropriate the mantle of supermodel/actor *star*.

The High Life

In toto, *Glamorama* is an incarnation of Montesquieu’s notion of a *theatrum mundi*, “where it is unclear who’s on stage and who’s supposed to be watching; everyone is parading, posing, having a good time.” (Marshall 23) There is also a unique notion of *personification* (perhaps more readily understood as *person-ification*—the making of a person) at work, wherein the calculated composition of image and meaning comprises “a human figure whose gesture, body position, costume and surrounding refer to a concept” (Marshall 420)—in the case of the model, that of idealized beauty and no modicum of affective allure. In affect scholar Nigel Thrift’s discussion of glamor, it is the crucial aspect of the aesthetic that comes into play in these sorts of modeling performances: “It is the art of creating reactions without words, through the look and feel of people Aesthetic shows rather than tells, delights rather than instructs (291) . . . producing a more magical world that is also, at the same time, more calculated.” (290) Victor is both producer and product of such phantasmagoric industry. Moreover, as model-slash-actors, *Glamorama*’s characters are in a significant sense simply responding to fame’s installation as a mainstream desire, or as David Giles points out in “Quest for Fame,”

their behavior is influenced “through the promotion of a value system constructed in numerous magazine and television features”—certainly this counts for the fashion and entertainment industries, in general—“whereby recognition, financial success and achievement [and, most assuredly, at the level of socially-normalized standards of beauty] are represented as the positive goals.” (479)

Celebrity permeates the everyday world of *Glamorama*, where industry-standard charm and attractiveness make bell-hops indistinguishable from stars in short-lived elevator cameos, and Entertainment Tonight is on the scene in trendy gyms to interview “celebrity trainers more famous than the celebrities they train.”(61) The novel’s scene devoted to celebrity gym culture—so hip, in fact, that the gym has no name—is in its own way emblematic of rarified entertainment-industry culture. Victor is there, working out with his private trainer, before a photo-shoot, while being simultaneously interviewed by an intern from *Details* magazine. Fielding social and job related phone calls while toning his abdominals, in a statement metaphorically illustrative of his devotion to the allure of stardom, he proclaims, “I’m suddenly seized by the need to climb.” (65) He is referring, literally, to the Treadwall, the indoor rock-climbing simulator, but his overall ardor prompts a follow-up comment by the interviewer, “You’re really into this.” (65) It is an indeterminate remark, but one that elicits further reactionary personal disclosure regarding Victor’s sense of self, “What’s wrong with looking good?” (65)

Indeed, in *Glamorama*’s glamorous, super-model appealing, success, and notions of fulfillment are all wrapped into one impetus, dismissive of any other criteria, as perhaps suggested by the intern’s muttering commentary, “Well, if its at the expense of something else...” (65) Victor hears her, and, indignantly, proclaims his style of self-

centered existence as the only one worthwhile, the only controllable human condition, in an apparently otherwise horrifying and dysfunctional world: “Yeah, I wanna give this all up and feed the homeless... I’m gonna—what? Help improve race relations in this country. Run for fucking President? Read my lips: Spare me.”(65) Nothing but the thrill of further development of his own spectacular, narcissistic persona (indistinguishable from his career), both as a telos and as immediately gratifying, will requite Victor’s desirous appetite. And the stakes are indeed high—in addition to his addiction to the high life, his personal identity hangs in the balance. In Grossberg’s sense of the concept, these things *matter* greatly to Victor; his success, good looks, and perpetuated “good time” are cues that amount to an “image of mattering maps [that] point to the constant attempt ... to organize moments of stable identity, sites at which we can, at least temporarily, find ourselves.” (587)

Spectacular, Everyday

As Victor plies his phantasmagoric trade, jet-setting through New York City’s world of haute-couture, its rarified runways and guest-listed soirees may well seem the epitome of pure spectacle, untouchable by the everyday masses. However, Easton Ellis not only portrays, through Victor Ward, the spectacularization of his protagonist’s own everyday, but, using Victor as a narrative tour-guide, illuminates the unavoidable *everydayness* of life amongst the glitterati, no matter its spectacularized aura. A chief leveling-effect at work in this instance of the everyday-spectacular is the homogenization of supermodel standards of appearance; people become *genrefied*, interchangeable in their beauty, indistinguishable stars in the firmament of NYC nightlife and day-time

interviews and photo-shoots. Even the fact that Victor is making significant money (not a living, since profligacy is *de rigueur*) as a male model, a career thought of as select succumbs to a similar anonymizing effect—all the models clambering for success are beautiful in very similar ways, unavoidably indiffereniable among their peers: “All the guys basically look the same: cute head, great body, high hair, chiseled lips, cutting edge, naughty or however you want us.”(66)

As Victor prepares to partner in the grand-opening of yet another exclusive club (readily acknowledging the venue’s limited half-life, inevitably replaced by next month’s new hot-spot), the main concern is the guest-list to the opening’s catered dinner and after-party. Endless review and emendation of the list is the central subject of conversation with his business partners and assistants. A list of names hundreds long, which, worked through in arduous alphabetical sequence, in harried meetings and phone calls, on the run, is seemingly never finalized by the time the first champagne is popped. Perhaps, in the first few readings of these endless lists of (actual) movie and rock stars, supermodels and fashionistas, athletes, the ultra-rich, news-cycle celebrities, and endless notorious significant others, certain names may jump out (at readers), bringing to mind famous faces, heart-throbbing good looks, or dastardly deeds, but the effect, as the recitations of star-studded listings mount, is not only numbing, but becomes inconsequential, indistinguishable, mundane. It is a first introduction to a pervasive affect of bored malaise that dominates Victor and the day-to-day world he so desperately clings to.

Victor orients his life around a quotidian practice of celebrity that manifests a personal performance in communication with, if not informed by, a greater cultural paradigm (of celebrity industry) that is “governed by specific sub-codes of representation

that allow the production of signs which are understood to bear a conventional relationship to everyday life.” (Marshall 237) One of his prized irons in the fire of his career hopes is “to host this MTV show—about me. My life, y’know, what I do during an average day.” (226) In this sense, no matter the rarified airs of model-slash-actor celebrity life, an identity that Richard Dyer would identify as a “social type,” Victor’s desire to publicly perform his glitterati everyday lifestyle as a television show emerges as a “general image of stardom [that] can be seen as a version of the American Dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness.” (154) A moment of solitary reflection in his apartment demonstrates the complete penetration of celebrity culture into Victor’s identity when his fantasy enacts a “camera [that] slowly pans around my apartment,” (212) enumerating the typical materiality of his everyday life in the form of clothes, accessories, music, food, media, all comprehensively categorized by brands whose luxury connotations further perform the details of the model-slash-actor identity that he has appropriated. Social-cultural context, and validation of his inclusion, is represented by “a slip of fax paper” draped about his room that, like his guest-list (although this seems to be some random catalog of pop-culture references, including brands, famous criminals, pop-music references), assembles cultural orientation points for his life and identity, and whose elite-status connotations become everyday-ordinary within the reality of Victor’s world. Perhaps Victor’s assistant, J.D., best articulates the dynamic when he comments, “Reality is an allusion, baby.” (10) Whether it is a function of the deep attachment he feels to his life and celebrity identity, or perhaps welling fears regarding its sustainability, is unclear as Victor breaks into tears to close the scene—but his intense involvement in its rapturous existence is evident.

It is a strange combination of trapped-ness and reassurance that keeps Victor going; he is well-aware of the mass-effect that rules his spectacular milieu, but fulfilling its standardized proto-type of beauty is not only highest priority, its image is clearly wrapped up in Victor's personal identity, as well: "I catch my reflection superimposed in the glass covering of an Armani Exchange ad and it's merging with the sepia-toned photo of a male model until both of us are melded together." (107) As a model, and given that image's strict codification, it appears that Erik Erikson's conception of identity as "the meeting point between who a person wants to be and what the world allows him to be," (Marshall 21) is particularly and non-negotiably true in Victor's case. Thrift's circumscription of the allure of glamour/style applies, as well, when he states that "style is a modification of being that produces captivation . . . and we want to be charmed by it; we want to emulate it." (297) And, what is additionally crucial is that the relationship to the everyday-spectacularizing potential of "style" is a performance whose thrill simultaneously drives an outward projection of persona, as well as an inwardly reifying construction of identity. As Giles also points out, "the audience is the self." (298)

Indeed, it seems that remaining a contestant in the race eclipses becoming its front-runner; falling out of the celebrity game, its high-living fast-lane, is the biggest threat. As casually as Victor concedes "that he is just 'quasi-famous,' when someone assumes that he is a "bold-faced name," (221) clearly, his also-ran status is disconcerting—beyond his obvious addiction to the overall scene's wanton sexual liaisons and non-stop intoxication—precisely when he searches for any notion of an autonomous identity. In an insisted-upon lunch meeting with his high-profile D.C.-politician father, who is concerned about his son's future (and, even more so, the possible

media effects of his sexualized public persona and after-hours gallivanting), Victor proffers a rare articulation of personal purpose (however confused it may remain): “I just want to do something where it’s all mine,” I stress. “Where I’m not . . . replaceable.”(90) His dream-plan, which never materializes and is hardly original, is to open yet another nightclub. He seems to be laboring under the notion that, if his fame ascends to a certain elevation, he might transcend his vaguely anonymous celebrity status. It is a hope, however, that confirms his general disconnection from the reality of NYC high-life.

After all, the elite world of the modeling jet-set is cut-throat, has its palpable dog-eat-dog social Darwinism. Didier, a premier fashion photographer, revels in abusing the models, whom he clearly sees as pathetic mannequin-idiots assembled for his Calvin Klein photo-shoot, Victor included. Clearly disgruntled with another photographic assignment no more artistic than serving up fresh, sexualized meat, he sums up his subjects, ranged in bikini briefs and smoking cigars in front of a blue screen, as “sad.” When Victor asks him, “. . .sad *because* we are smoking cigars? . . . Or sad because this is just too ‘Baywatch?’” Didier doesn’t pull his derogatory punches: “Sad because you are all idiots and just now on this [blue drape which will be a] beach you have realized it.” (67) Alternately, an MTV video-jockey fills someone in on who Victor is: “The same old story,” Mutt sighs. “Nobody, up-and-comer, star, has-been. Not necessarily in that order.”(158) Still, none of this will dislodge Victor from his place in the NYC fashion/celebrity “scene,” he will take any amount of abuse, deflect all criticism, in order to hold on to his identity of choice. He may only be playing a role, indeed posing, much like a mannequin, for the sake of beauty and allure, but it has become his reality.

Thrilled to the Bone

While allusive relations to the world of celebrity figure centrally in Victor's life and persona, *illusion* also becomes a salient factor in the unfolding plot (and attendant social commentary) of *Glamorama*. Confetti, carrying symbolic associations with spectacle and hedonism, begins to appear with increasing frequency in illogical places and mostly in stress-filled situations. Importantly, Easton Ellis is careful to portray the confetti's presence as vivid for Victor, but not necessarily even extant for other characters. It is a strange play upon illusion, not unlike Conrad Aiken's depiction of schizophrenia's onset in the short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow,"²⁵ which uses the metaphor of hallucinated snowfall, out of season, to perform the protagonist's unreal world increasingly closing in around him. Cold, as well, in *Glamorama*, carries an unmistakable affect of unease, if not threat. Victor is seemingly always chilled, and especially so in emotionally intensified situations, and begins to envision sheets of ice covering windows and floors (200), people are slipping around precariously, their breath billowing even as they parade about in skanty, revealing party-outfits. (364)

Correspondingly, amidst the sybaritic rush of New York City's celeb-world there exists a palpable affective overtone tone of ominous fear and foreboding. It is born of the undeniable impermanence of glitterati privilege, of being "hot," both in terms of personal allure and public/entertainment-industry appeal. A haunting sense hangs in the air that, at any moment, anyone's good fortune, their spectacularly wonderful dream, could come to a crashing close. It is a knife-edge existence, fraught with ambiguity; characters like Victor are dedicated to its momentary affective fulfillment, addicted even, but not at all sure how to sustain the heady buzz. Embracing the confusion at the aesthetic level, one

that permeates their existence entirely, a designer flippantly proclaims: "...in is out. Out is in. Simple, non?" (17)

The confetti's increasing appearance and the inescapable chill foreshadow a greater coming-into-question of Victor's world and his place in it. Victor's *e unibus pluram* fade into the ranks of NYC model-slash-actor ranks becomes more pronounced than mere interchangeability with the other hunks around—his actual existence comes into question. People repeatedly remark on having seen him at a Miami Calvin Klein show that he never attended, as well as other parties, and even one-on-one meetings. The notion that he has some sort of doppelganger is mixed up with his generic fashion-model good looks and the assumption that he is always present at high-profile celeb gatherings and night-life hotspots. Upon denying he was at another fashion show, his tenuous social persona becomes acutely evident when someone easily supplants him with another, comparable pseudo-star: "Let me guess—that was Jason Gedrick." (69) Another rival bitinglly proclaims, "You *act* very cool, Victor, but really you're very normal." (195)

Eventually, Victor is confronted with apparently photo-shopped pictures involving him in public acts of infidelity. That he can no longer be sure of his own presence, through the prism of media representation and increasing cases of mistaken identity, is made amply clear by his blackmailers, who sum the situation up with: "Were you there or were you not? ...It all depends on who you ask, and even that really doesn't matter anymore." (408) Despite the fact that Victor is aware that the inconsistencies and insecurities that govern his glitterati life ("I'm thinking, Jesus, the zeitgeist's in limbo.") (194), the understanding that such contingencies come with the territory is ultimately meager consolation, and his nerves and his notion of personal identity begin to fray: "For

courage I just kept telling myself that I was a model, that CAA represented me, that I'm really good in bed, that I had good genes, that Victor *ruled*..." (265) His dogged recitations seek to substantiate the quasi-delusion that Victor is living in; however, their evaporating grasp on reality hardly push him towards any pursuit of clarity. Instead, he simply becomes more convinced that his *surreal* existence is unavoidable. The topic of "reality" comes up in a conversation with a shadowy figure (who Victor believes is an emissary from his politician father), who seems to know everything about Victor, as well as other important, impending details that he is willing to share only under certain conditions. Victor's apprehension gives rise to a moment of incredulous near-clarity: "So you're telling me that we can't believe anything we're shown anymore... That *everything* is altered . . . a lie?" The agent corroborates, "That's a fact. . . . We change. . . . We adapt," reaffirming the unknowability of things, capitalizing on Victor's confusion. Victor can't conceive of such adaptation, again feeling any sort of orienting conviction slip away, "To what? Better? Worse?" The agent's response is further reification of a reality inevitably cloaked in illusion, and always in question: "I'm not sure those terms are applicable anymore."(463)

Not only does Victor's celebrity/super-model status threaten to dissolve into anonymity, but what is actually happening in his everyday experience becomes fraught with the unreal. *Acting*, appropriately enough, becomes the determinant trope, as Victor and others increasingly wonder if their lives are simply parts in an inconsistently acknowledged, around-the-clock movie production. Everyday life misperceived as a filmic spectacle becomes an affective barometer of the tale's growing auras of anxiety and disorientation. Felix, one of the nebulous film's directors, whose actual existence is

equally questionable, exhorts Victor, but also only adds to his confusion: “You *need* to pay attention. Things get mildly... er, hazardous. ...I’m worried that the project is ... ill-conceived. ...The writers seem to be making it up as it goes along.” (221-2)

Consideration of reality television, which was beginning its rise to socio-cultural prominence at the time of *Glamorama*’s writing and setting, offers interesting perspectives on many of the performative tropes at work in the novel, where on-stage/on-camera is indistinguishable from everyday life, roles are confused with identity, and the overall narrative is supposedly undetermined. Reality-TV scholar Alison Hearn’s exposition of performance-informed iterations of “reality” is relevant when she opines that such dramatizations “embody the collapse of any meaningful distinction between notion of the self and capitalist processes of production.” (619) Certainly, the complete encapsulation of Victor’s life within the contexts of his modelling career presents a “character type ... which takes place inside a tightly controlled corporate context,” (624), i.e. the greater entertainment industry. Characters’ involvement with what Hearn calls “self-spectacularization,” or “image-entrepreneurship,” (619) plays upon the blending public and private aspects under the auspices of “self-conscious development and management of a public persona based on templates of the “self” supplied by corporate media culture.” (619)

Within contemporary societal contexts of social media (Facebook and online dating, in particular), it is apparent that such trends of performativity and blending of the private and public persona have not only continued, but are becoming pervasive social phenomena. Had the novel been written a mere five years later, social media’s everyday-spectacularizing presentations and manipulations of self would doubtlessly have been an

an easy fit, given Victor and his peers' intense consciousness of composing their personas chiefly as a public presentation (and, as celebrities/models, for consumption).

Victor's notion that he is playing his life out in a non-stop movie—like reality television—is reinforced by ubiquitous movie cameras and film crews. His frequent worry about his own role and the film itself “going off script” is assuaged by penumbral directorial guidance that assures him that they are relying on top-notch editors to put the final footage together—itself a mainstay of reality television production's techniques involving the re-presentation of “real life.” In addition to ever-present fashion industry cameras and paparazzi—and the glitterati demimonde's own shutter-bugging self documentation, which lend further tantalizing credence to Victor's notion of his life as an ongoing movie production—instances of filmic panopticism are found within his supposed private environs, as well: “A complicated video-monitoring system runs throughout the apartment (and the outside cameras are equipped with built-in illuminators) ...all the phones are tapped.” (339)

It is a sort of Janus-faced existence, wherein, according to Katharine Lumby's investigations of social impacts of celebrity culture, the quasi-mythical dimension of notoriety and stardom exert equally confusing influence on the public audience as on its lime-lit subjects. As both a wanna-be star and a semi-successful public-performer, Victor partakes in both sides' illusionary tendencies. Lumby opines that “getting to the truth behind the media images—is a Sisyphean task,” (545) and, more directly revealing of Victor's own unshakeable perplexity, adds that actors in the *circus maximus* of the celebrity world “arguably function as a kind of screen for the anxiety generated by this scenario. At once real people and media-generated images, celebrities embody this

paradox.” (545) Victor acknowledges such indeterminacy when, searching for a telos to his everyday, he chooses the mantra: “I was told by the director that what I didn’t know mattered most.” (265) It is a strange self-fulfilling attitude, not one that begs to be resolved, rather, one that accepts its confusion and attempts to become comfortable with not-understanding.

“An implosion of meaning. *That’s where simulation begins,*” Baudrillard announces in his further explication of the effects of simulacration, wherein “nothing separates one pole from another . . . a contraction of one over the other.” (31) Victor’s apprehension, and indeed the ontology of his everyday experientiality, has similarly “imploded.” Is he still a supermodel-slash-actor, or just a poseur going through the motions? And, isn’t going through the motions, acting and posing, essentially his job and the way in which he performs his identity, anyway? Identifiable reality seems oddly beside the point. Baudrillard diagnoses a disappearance of any “differential mode of determination,” (31) which, interestingly, in Victor’s case (really, his life) not only submerges him into confusion, but has the simultaneous side-effect of allowing him to keep believing in a “reality” of his choosing, regardless of its hallucinatory essence.

But, even in the narcotized narcissism of Victor’s “model-slash-actor” world such vagueness is hardly sustainable, and insecurity, if not the panic of sanity slipping away, exerts its debilitating influence. *Anxiety* is the preeminent affective flip-side to the high-life thrill of Victor’s existence: “In the hazy distance, . . . the PA who looks like Heather Graham is already talking with the director and Felix, and both of them keep glancing over at me—suspicious, whispers, a general aura of cold worry—and confetti is scattered all around, some of it simply falling from somewhere above us...” (375) Even Victor’s

closest relationship with his supermodel girlfriend Chloe Byrnes is falling prey to the growing uncertainty, simultaneously embedding a sense of endemic superficiality to Victor's quasi-celebrity demimonde. When Victor desperately proclaims to Chloe that "you have something to do with me," he is not simply trying to reaffirm their supposed personal connection, one that hopefully transcends the industry's chaos and aberration, his plea is also one that seeks re-confirmation at the level of identity, one that is desperate to know that their superstar-celebrity world is still intact. Chloe's response is not only disheartening, it shockingly reinforces both their reality's dissolution and the very metaphorical vehicle that is bringing everything into question: "Only in an increasingly superficial way," she says. "Only because we're in this movie together."(181)

Chloe is Victor's last tether not only to a reality that he can identify, but one that he is thoroughly and frantically dependent on. What is initially a sort of playful interaction with the illusion of being on-set—comfortable enough for Victor, since his life essentially does consist of moving from fashion-shoots to high-profile social scenes to acting the part of hunk-lover in his various liaisons—becomes increasingly untenable, appears to be spiraling out of control. When the concrete details of his spectacular day-to-day existence begin to come into question (why are people seeing him in Miami, and at events he has not attended?) and his interchangeability within the entertainment industry's needs becomes patently evident, the "movie" is less and less enjoyable, its insecurities unbearable. Victor senses that he is nearing a break-down unless he can somehow slow down the deterioration of his reality, if not get back to its previous oblivious, intoxicating routine: "'I'm just like... trying to catch my breath, trying to fit this into perspective,' I choke, slipping helplessly into tears. 'I'm waiting for the director

to shout ‘Cut.’” (195-6) But no matter the desperation that Easton Ellis sets up for his model-slash-actor characters, the exposure of their self-involved ephemeral dance with stardom and celebrity lifestyle is hardly *Glamorama*’s ultimate point. The quivering indeterminacy of “reality,” accompanied by knife-edge experiential condition suspended between terror and euphoria, is merely an initial set-up for further investigation into thrill’s capacity for affective permutations that can always find their way towards psycho-emotional gratification for those dedicated, perhaps *addicted* is a better description, to its heady buzz.

Whatever: The Thrill of Oblivion

In the face of such unraveling, Victor flees on a luxury cruise-liner to Europe. The impetus for that action is every bit as phantasmal as the surreality gripping his NYC life: he is approached by a mysterious character who seems to know everything about him (Victor suspects his father is covertly involved), and who enlists Victor’s help in finding a former friend of his, Jamie Fields, gone missing in England. It is a desperate sort of exit strategy *cum* headlong pursuit of his former glitterati existence that starts out by languishing in the tedium of the Atlantic passage, a metaphorical rendering of the affective textures which will dominate the final acts of *Glamorama*: “...the air seems vaguely transparent and disposable . . . yet it’s always bright in a dull way, ...the trail the ship leaves behind is a Jacuzzi blue that fades within minutes . . . It’s easy to feel safe, for people to look at you and think someone’s going somewhere . . . five days is a long time to stay unimpressed.” (217) It is an affect-laced metaphorical representation that fits in well with George Bataille’s own examination, in *The History of Eroticism*, of the often

paradoxical affective dimensions of the erotic, which he also finds evocative in association with natural elements: “The tepidness of rain, the dull fulguration of the storm, evoke both the figure and the inner sensation of eroticism.” (152) Perhaps thinking of erotic desire’s irresistible impetus as akin to the uncontrollable rhythms of weather is an effective way to distill feeling into its purest form—a phenomenon all its own, yet situated within and of utmost relevance for subjective psycho-emotional contexts. Indeed, the most spectacular trope at work in *Glamorama*’s climaxing second half is the bizarre eroticization of glitterati desire, both in its performances and experience.

It is interesting that Victor’s European quest is intimately related to Jamie Fields, for it is she, as well, who first, and perhaps most poignantly, typifies the new relationship with desire’s strange thrill and delectable tortures that Victor descends into in the wake of his dissolving NYC life and identity. They first met in the haze of their elite private college years, when Victor was struck by Jamie’s unprecedented demeanor: “At first she was so inexpressive and indifferent that I wanted to know more about her. I envied that blankness—it was the opposite of helplessness or damage or craving or suffering or shame.” (208) Initially, even though they become sexually involved, her aloofness perplexing, if not frustrating. But, instead of forcing the issue, Victor follows suit, finding a confidence of his own in a seemingly callous, disaffected persona. When he finally tracks her down in London, their bizarre emotional *détente* is still in place. Reminiscing about their early years as they plunge back into wanton sex, Victor proclaims: “It’s not like you broke my heart.” Jamie’s reciprocation is not only physical, but corroborates the detached attitude that still dominates their relationship: “That’s because you didn’t have one. ...But hey, I don’t necessarily find that ... unsexy.” (290)

So, in reaction to the ominous and confusing deterioration of the high-profile, quasi-celebrity life that he had sworn dedication to at his first star-studded pool-party in L.A., and subsequently fallen hopelessly in love with in the form of his spectacular modeling/partying career in New York City, Victor's new relation to thrill gains even deeper hold in the simple adoption of an attitude comprised of equal parts denial and oblivion (the latter of which becomes increasingly explicit as Victor, Jamie, and their social milieu essentially never emerge from the haze of alcohol, narcotics, and pharmaceutical self-medication). What could be more thrilling, in the face of ultimate dissolution, than to ignore its threat? Jamie's demeanor is a proto-type performance of the titillating, erotic desire of a *dis-affected* emotional state—a rapture born of pure visceral thrill, where even the dark emotions of fear and insecurity are imbibed for their intoxicating affect. Such uneasy bed-fellows—in the form of darker, fearful moods intertwined with more obviously desirable emotions (of fame and self-esteem, for example)—are also relevant in Bataille's rumination on the subject: "...anguish, without which sexuality would not be *erotic*... To clearly represent this extraordinary effect, we have to compare it to vertigo, where fear does not paralyze but increases an involuntary desire to fall; and to uncontrollable laughter." (109)

Victor's crowd learns to delight in their fantastical, ephemeral everyday—not just heedless of consequence, but savoring its edgy indeterminacy. The attitude also becomes a sort of self-protecting reflex. "*We'll slide down the surface of things...*" is a phrase that crops up repeatedly in the novel, always unclear as to who might have said it, whether it is echoing in Victor's mind, or simply a motto for the story, interjected by the author. Staying on the surface of things, dis-affected, is not only a survival strategy; it makes for

an even more thrilling affective state, a spectacular and willfully oblivious raising of the stakes. Again Bataille's interrogations of desire are resonant, echoing the affective intensification afforded by danger, by the threat of loss, of living on the edge, wherein thrill is derived when its intoxication remains "threatened with losing its plenitude, both desiring and fearing to lose it. As if the consciousness of plenitude demanded a state of uncertainty, of suspension ...always going to the extreme and always hazardous." (101)

Typifying the paradox of Victor's *kamikaze* affective rapture and the disaffected attitude required to tumble into its throes, an anonymous party-goer in London remarks: "You're looking tired, Victor. Gorgeous and tired." (344) In a very salient sense, Easton Ellis's play upon such contrasts in the fashion scene is loyal to his setting and the Heroin-Chic trend of the 1990s. In that period models were photographed in uncharacteristic, less-than-flattering modes, often appearing sickly, unhappy, strung-out, yet strangely still reveling in the supermodel aura and all its luxurious trappings. At the same party, Victor seems aware of such contrasts, and equally willing to partake: "...I'm looking for a leather sofa to fall into because I can't tell if people are really as disinterested as they appear or just extremely bored. Whatever—it's infectious. ...It's really an alarming party and everyone is a monster. It's also a mirror."(439) Delightful monsters nonetheless, and all the more thrilling because of their paradoxical manner. The game has perhaps changed from what Victor knew in New York, become less straightforward than its prior model-slash-actor routine, but adjusting to the new vertigo of erotic intoxication is a *modus operandi* that holds perhaps even greater potential for thrill and self-spectacularization—the affective telic that most penetratingly hold Victor and his crowd under sway.

No matter how intense and personally fraught things may get, Victor and his cronies always have the disaffected gear to switch into, both in order to muddle through whatever predicament and to sustain their never satiated lust for thrilled affect. Moreover, Victor acknowledges, explicitly, the underlying element of surrender that dominates his everyday approach to life, sees it, in fact, as the only suitable conclusion: “We’ll slide down the surface of things... You try to care. ...Even if you wanted to, you can’t. ...*Confusion and hopelessness don’t necessarily cause a person to act.* ...Someone from my first publicist’s office told me this a long time ago. ...Only now does it mean anything to me.”(459) It is a capitulation, however, that retains its specific aim, a mandate for the perpetuation of the high-life thrill, and the uninterrupted intoxications of (pseudo-)fame, sex, drugs, and glamour. Victor and the glitterati jet-set’s resigned enchantment to such affective throes makes sense in the expanded sense of Bataille erotic contexts, as well: “This is an essential element of eroticism ... passivity is in itself a response to desire’s insistence.” (143)

In an instance that epitomizes their willfully heedless coping strategy—when Victor walks in on his business-partner and close friend, Damien, *in flagrante delicto* with a woman that Victor is also cheating on Chloe with—all three of them act as if nothing is happening. Instead, they plow through the situation’s awkwardness with conversation about the outfits they are wearing, until, nothing left to say, the thrill-catalytic affect of disaffectedness permeates the scene as “a long chilly silence none of us are able to fill floats around, acts cool, *lives.*”(122) It is a “chilly...cool” that is born of *Glamorama*’s characters’ bizarre survival-instinct attitudes of carefully constructed flippancy, rendered and echoed by the ambience that Easton Ellis constructs via morbid

ocean scenes, iced-over party windows, and, in this last case, a *cool* mood invisibly hanging in the air.

A Knife-edge of Thrill

It must be stressed, however, that this coping strategy serves a greater purpose than mere survival. Its detached attitude translates directly into a capacity for the pursuit of more intense thrill; its recklessness is fuel to the hedonistic passions and inebriations that are the *rapture-telos* of Victor's world. This is to say that, despite their disaffected coping mechanism, *Glamorama*'s characters become even more obsessed with the comprehensive and spectacular erotics of sex, fame, fortune, and intoxication that informed their glitz-and-glamor everyday, in NYC. It is precisely the thrill of going past their fears, past any reasonable limitations of their pursuit of rapturous intoxication that holds prime allure for Victor and his peers.

Similarly, for Bataille, an erotic desire that transcends the purely sexual and instead becomes an all-subsuming *weltanschauung*, a conception of the human condition itself, is illustrated in his exposition of the Phaedra complex's attraction to prohibited desire. Within the paradox of temptation for that which is forbidden, "it often seems that, by overcoming resistance, desire becomes more meaningful . . . the test that assures us of desire's authenticity. . . . The moment of transgression (or of unbridled eroticism)." (57) *Glamorama*'s promiscuous decadence, its orgy of sex and intoxication typifies an eroticism that, in the Bataillean sense, is born of a similar impulse to push the boundaries of thrilling affect. As per Bataille's conception of "Festival" based in "the transgression of prohibitions," (89) an "explosive liberation interrupts the course of an existence

subordinated to ordinary ends . . . shattering limits.” (93) The bacchanal in New York City merely sets a template whose twisted sybaritism is palpably amplified, in London and Paris, and whose mayhem represents the lust to “quench” an intense affective “thirst with this horror. . . that has become delight.” (Bataille 118) Furthermore, like *Mumbo Jumbo*’s Jes Grew, Victor’s demimonde has become unending carnival indistinguishable from everyday experience, a refusal to come down off the high; appropriation of its revelry and spectacle is standard operating procedure.

Certainly, the high-lifestyle is problematic, torturous even, in its tenuous insecurities. However, such critique, as for example articulated by Giles—“Fame has evolved into a superficial cultural pursuit that is of little benefit to most of the people who attain it” (480)—emphasizes vexations most notably associated with the unrelenting pressure to perform and fulfill erratic (contract-based) financial demands. And, of course, this is true for Victor, unendingly stressed by his next source of income, his next photo-shoot or movie role. Moreover, even beyond the perpetuation of his “career,” his desperate need to sustain at least the appearance of such success is equally precarious. Through the *rapture-telos* lens, on the other hand, and this is patently evident in what drives Victor, as well, the immediate affective state of, even, pseudo-celebrity, of a name on a VIP guest-list, of even the rumor of another modeling gig or film role, provides a thrill that not only justifies all the anguish, but takes an addictive hold in terms of the pursuit of everyday satisfaction.

But letting the confusion of thrill and danger awash in (and in the name of) erotic, intoxicating rapture is, of course, and as per Victor’s early trepidation, not sustainable. Consequently, Easton Ellis moves Victor into ever darker realms of twisted hedonism

and increasing violence. Following the spell of Jamie Fields' aloof and tantalizing sensuality brings Victor into contact with another super model, Bobby Hughes, whose supermodel lifestyle in Paris is cover for terrorist activities, such as public bombings, poisonings, and abductions. Of course, through the drug and alcohol haze that has become central to the perpetuation Victor's everyday spectacle, even Bobby's deadly covert operations are confused with "the movie" that is being shot, non-stop. As a product *par excellence* of the model-slash-actor world, Bobby understands the twilight reality of quasi-stardom and its inevitable attendant desires for celebrity and thrilling excess; and he uses these factors, both at the psychological and biochemical level, to manipulate his minions. He bullies Victor, capitalizes on his latent fears and feeds him anti-anxiety pharmaceuticals like candy, tranquilizing Victor into further acceptance of a powerless, but somehow still desirable status quo.

Bobby also plays upon the psychological paradox that he knows inhabits the conception of identity in the glitterati world. He tantalizingly asks Victor, "What if one day, Victor . . . you became whatever you're not?" (327), knowing full well that such indeterminateness will not necessarily be dominated by fear, but also, for the likes of Victor, smack of delectable potentials for model/actor performances, and the ego-gratification and emotional charge thereof. In turn, Victor, having long since adopted his own delusional and inebriated coping strategy (even as he is conscripted into collaboration in terror-acts), continues to muddle his way onward, squeezing whatever thrill and jollies he can get out of his evermore fantastical day-to-day: "since so many scenes are being shot without me I just frantically memorize my lines and show up according to the production schedule... (342) On so much Xanax it's remarkably easy to

concentrate solely on the making of a Cosmopolitan.” (356) When, in a rare moment of clarity, Jamie attempts to unveil the illusionary world they are living in and claims that “No one’s being themselves, everyone’s so phony,” Bobby’s ready response is to shush her, and then whisper in her ear, “That *is* them being themselves.” (353)

In *Simulation and Simulacra*, Baudrillard parses dissimulation from simulation, distinguishing the former from the latter as presence versus absence, while complicating simulation by insisting that it is different from “pretending.” (3). The notion is elaborated via the example of a person feigning illness, wherein it is important to Baudrillard that such simulation “threatens” distinctions between true and false, real and imaginary. In this sense, the simulative act is creative, and *produces* symptoms, regardless of their diagnosable relation to illness. In the case of Victor’s increasingly ephemeral supermodel-slash-actor world, the attendant affective thrill of his (and his peers’) notions of stardom and ongoing professional success may be substituted for the symptoms of illness in Baudrillard’s example. Whether or not they are still riding the high-life, all that apparently matters to them is that they continue to act out its intoxicating (and intoxicated) implications. What is crucial here, and brings into play the related concept of the *simulacra*, is that the foundational assumptions (of illness, or success) become obscured, their *reality* is thrown into question, and the standards of such lose any concrete referentiality. Only a simulacrum of the so-called “real” phenomenon remains.

To keep the allure, the heady intoxication of superstar lifestyle going, Bobby also encourages and orchestrates wanton sex-acts among his terrorist-supermodel cadre, especially effective in Victor’s case, since he remains obsessed with Jamie, whom Bobby has wrapped around his finger and subsumed into his intrigue. Jamie’s explanation of her

original attraction also exemplifies Victor's and so many of his peers' driving identitarian and experiential mandate, including the allure of stardom and the thrill of desire: "I can't tell you exactly ... what I was motivated by ... had a brief affair with a boy from an Aerosmith video ... There were things I wanted ... I wanted to be beautiful ... rich, I wanted to be famous. ... Bobby ... made me feel attractive." (351-2) Bobby capitalizes on such psycho-sexual vulnerability by indulging in a *ménage a trois* with Jamie and Victor where, for a moment, they consummate the fantasy of their erotized existence and transcend, via its intoxication, the fear and insecurity that accompanies their quest for the high. The cycle of pressure that builds up in their psyches, that willful self-daring to move ever closer to the edge of sanity and any identifiable conception of self, is momentarily mollified, consummated in orgies of obliterating sexual and narcotic climax.

The thrill is so viscerally intense, such a perfect performance of the all-encompassing desirous affect of their *rapture-telos*, that it succeeds as a release, a sort of re-set that allows them to ignore the inevitable return to another anxious, drug-laced wait for the next sybaritic blow-out. Easton Ellis successfully renders both the intensity of such catharses, as well as its futility, through seven uninterrupted pages of graphic, violent sexual description, in which every conceivable debauched sex-act is performed amongst the threesome. The effect, while initially playing upon an edge of thrill and alarm, soon renders in its endless protraction the numb desperation that grips *Glamorama's* characters, even in the throes of spectacular debauchery.

When Bataille announces that "Erotic activity can be disgusting; it can also be noble, ethereal ... [it] is what uses up our strength and our resources, and if necessary places our life in danger," (104) he is effectively illuminating both Bobby's manipulative

strategies, as well as Victor's proclivity (if not drive) to indulge in such headlong pursuit of erotic rapture. The unbridled debauchery of the *ménage a trois* and countless previous sexual interludes, all rendered in graphic detail, always bordering on violence and sado-masochism in their pursuit of thrill represent Bataille's understanding of the erotic as a "pinnacle of transgression... [an] unreserved removal of limits." (130) Bataille's own preeminent exemplification comes from Saturnalian rites: "Monstrous couplings ... reveled in a fear whose object was their dreadful license, a license that fear made exhilarating." (130) Nevertheless, the desperate emotional carapace that ultimately allows for such abandon remains always intact, and based in sexual activity disaffected from true emotion. Even in the aftermath of their sexual battle royal, the orgiastic thrill-enabling disengagement from reality and real emotion is evident: "Hey Jamie—" I reach out and touch her shoulder. "What's the story? ... You don't love Bobby. It's a job, right? You're just acting, right?" ... I deliver the line in such a way that it's impossible to tell whether I'm feigning innocence or acting hard . . . Bobby's distracted by something across the room and in a suave way doesn't seem to care." (343)

Though it is perhaps lost on Jamie and Victor's muddled senses and confused identities, there is a calculated intention to Bobby's action, a method to his madness centered upon the delivery of a message to and about the world. His connection between the carnal and carnage is explicit, as is *Glamorama's*, in that both are rendered in graphic detail that confuse pain with pleasure, bodies displayed pornographically, both dead and alive, invariably framed by the cosmopolitan tropes of *haute couture* and spectacular lifestyles of the rich and famous. Before the bombs go off, the scene is always a version of Victor's imagined paradise of luxurious, quasi-celebritized life. Vespa motor-scooters

piloted down the Champs-Elysees by Ray-banned multi-national beautiful people draped in Versace and Luis Vuitton, etc. are then suddenly re-displayed in dramatically-violent “fashion” by spectacular eruption: “mangled guitars and hundreds of CDS and fashion magazines . . . Calvin Klein and Armani and Ralph Lauren hang from burning trees . . . belts whipped off waists and Prada purses still clasped . . . clothes from the Gap contaminated with blood.” (503) Bobby explains that any result of the destruction and the killing is not the point. These are side effects of a performance that seeks to illuminate, while providing the uncompromising drive of contemporary society’s desire for thrill, spectacle, consumption, not matter the costs: “You show the world things and in showing the world you teach it what you want . . . We are just reflections of our time.” (353) A confusion of “you” and “the world” is inherent in the idea of reflection; Bobby and his model-slash-actor peers may be the producers and representations of the spectacle of human desire, but their own wanton appetites are no different from those that imbue everyday craving for thrill, an insatiable hunger for consummation/consumption.

Embedded in the ethos of Bobby’s harrowing social commentary is a sentiment articulated in Richard Sennett’s critique of celebrity, when he paraphrases Rousseau’s suspicion of human profligacy within hedonistic cosmopolitan contexts: “frivolous pleasure, foreign amusement, idle gossip in cafes is everywhere . . . when men have no necessary duties pressing on them they give way to their natural passions, which are evil.” (28-9)²⁶ Indeed, the case may be made that Victor’s elite sect are unable to handle the heady privilege and profligacy of their perpetual bacchanal, and, blinded by narcissistic intoxication, are inevitably descending into destruction of themselves and the world around them. . . idle hands.

Here again is Bataille's notion of excess, the total expenditure of erotic stimulation: "the effect of maintaining the fervor, the delirium . . . It can be maintained only on the condition that one discover what was alluring in the fact that an object is horrible . . . and desire a single, violent convulsion." (78) This is the ethos Bobby's agenda performs, one that simultaneously points to the dark and tortured side of Victor's hedonist excess as a mode of affective gratification—and, by implication, includes contemporary society's adulatory link of obsession with stardom and celebrity. And, as things spiral increasingly out of control, the disaffected coping strategy, the "whatever"-attitude, emerges as ever more crucial. Bataille's own exposition that includes even horror (present in a pure form in Bobby's terrorist bombing plots) distills a particular kind of thrill based in a challenge of psycho-emotional extremes: "The more difficult the horror is to bear, the more desirable it is—but one must be able to bear it!" (97)

Given the intensity of the overall scenario, however, nerves do begin to fray; non-stop debauchery, drug and alcohol abuse, and the ever present worry that their glamor-laced careers may be slipping away are perhaps manageable via their calculated obliviousness, but complicity in death and destruction increasingly penetrates the haze, threatening to replace a thrilling fear with abject panic. When Jamie finally breaks down and demands answers, a reality-check, even flirts with remorse and guilt for the violence that they are perpetrating, Bobby's pronouncement of the requisite attitude rings as a manifesto brought starkly to light in that moment of crisis, but also one that has held sway almost from *Glamorama's* outset: "This reaction of yours is useless. It carries no meaning with anyone here and it's useless. We agreed that no one would care." (438)

Real is as Real does

Glamorama demonstrates that “faking” something is always experientially authentic, regardless of any delusionary apprehension of reality or instability of identity; and, perhaps more importantly, that the affective component of such activity has the capacity for intense affective experience. Moreover, such thrilling performance carries an inherent psycho-emotional charge on two levels. The first is its *sui generis* conjuration of that charge; the second is the proposition that the power to conjure is a reality for anybody. It is an intensity and affective gratification discovered in childhood play that is readily transferred to adult experience. Victor and his gliterrati compatriots—no matter the insanity of their desperate clinging to notions of a utopian high-life, and headlong, schizoid methods of pursuing it—have attained a cutting-edge of intense affective stimulation (erotically consummating, in the Bataillean sense) that manifests a life-performance whose *telos* of affective rapture, as intensely painful as pleasurable, one that demonstrates not only reality as always an imaginative construction, but the realities of its psycho-emotional content as determinant. At its core, Victor and his pseudo-celeb compatriots quite intentionally choose to locate their everyday experientiality in an indeterminate zone between the real and the imagined—it is a thrilling choice, both for its edginess and the spectacular volatility that implies *anything* is possible. Baudrillard refers to such experiential ambiguity as an “anticipation, this precession, this short circuit, this confusion of the fact with its model,” that allows “for all possible interpretations, even the most contradictory—all true.” (17) It doesn’t matter that Victor’s career and identity are ostensibly collapsing, that the people surrounding him are equally inchoate; not only might it all just be a mirage (their ephemeral relationship with stardom has conditioned

them to such indeterminacy), living in a world dominated by illusion has, indeed, become their preferred reality.

As a consequence, it is entirely consistent that Easton Ellis makes not attempt to resolve the dualities and paradoxes that *Glamorama* has developed. Even at the novel's conclusion, when it appears that Victor has returned to New York City, has gotten his life back together (modelling, a film role, and evidently even enrolled in law school!), Easton Ellis reinvigorates the story's inescapable *doppelgänger* aspect by schizophrenically inserting passages that portray another, simultaneous iteration of Victor, living in Milan, still trapped in and operating with Bobby's terrorist outfit, still strung-out. Moreover, for the NYC-Victor, supposedly doing much better, it is only a matter of time before the confetti, the paranoia, and the violence returns, as he is accosted by shadowy figures from the fashion industry in his freezing apartment, and either hallucinates or actually eviscerates them...

Indeed, emphasizing *Glamorama*'s central theme of spectacular illusion tied in with desperate longing for thrill, Easton Ellis closes the novel with a completely abstract dream sequence *cum* reflection by Victor:

“...a bridge strung across a pass through the mountain will take you to any point beyond that you need to arrive at, because behind that mountain is a highway . . . billboards with answers on them... I'm falling forward but also moving up toward the mountain, ...rising up, a fiery wind propelling me ...and stars hang in the sky... The stars are real. The future is that mountain.”
(546)

While the passage might appear cryptic, if not drug-induced, in its melodramatic symbolism, most of its elements can be parsed as representative of Victor's life, without excessive creative inference. Mountains, of course, are rather standard symbols of challenge and quest—Victor's being that of glitterati fame and fortune. “Billboards with

answers on them,” in turn, lends specific focus to Victor’s understanding of success as one bound up with consumerism, both inherent in his profession of model-slash-actor, as well as in the way that his own consumption of *haute couture* fashion and life-style informs his sense of identity. The dichotomy of “falling . . . rising up, a fiery wind propelling me” performs the mind-bending admixture of his passivity in the face of a confused reality, where painful contradictions involving depression and violence, euphoria and fear, desire and disaffectedness are endured in a numb and desperate hope for the perpetuated affect of intoxicating thrill. The burning upward rise also reflects the affective aura of Victor’s desperate social climbing, and star-struck conception of upward-mobility: “the stars are real.” His hallucinatory conviction that “the future is that mountain” echoes the same revelation that set him on his path of destiny, in that nascent moment, pool-side in L.A., when he first glimpsed “the high life.” This final symbolic dream-sequence is a distillation—detached from the chaotic details and action of the rest of *Glamorama*’s tale, much of which is devoted to creating the confused, breathless, and surreal textures that imbue its demimonde—that illuminates, through a more lyrical treatment of the novel’s thoroughgoing affect of desperately-sought thrill, a *rapture-telos* that is all the more penetratingly authentic for its pure imaginative essence and committed passion, even in a life as postured and materialistically superficial as Victor Ward’s. In the end, Ellis’ final dream sequence serves to shine a reflection back on the entirety of *Glamorama*’s tale and the reality that Victor has hallucinated for himself. Dreams are real, and reality is but a dream.

Carpe Gaudium: Apple.com and the *iPad* Roll-out

In contemporary American (and increasingly global) cultural contexts, thrilling affective intensities arise out of spectacularizations of the Everyday, especially as empowered by the excitative capacities of new media. Close readings of recent Apple.com advertising campaigns expose a rhetoric and tone devoted as much to marketing the affective thrills of new technology, as to its dynamic functionalities. The Apple corporation's twin-ideology of joy and personal empowerment successfully catalyzes, and capitalizes on, desires for identity performance in the liminal regions of overlapping on-line presence/profiles and technologically-enhanced subject bodies, recalling Marshall McLuhan's ontology of media as "extensions of the self." These new digital-organic combines are no longer left to stand on the sidelines of the hyper-mediated spectacle that is contemporary society. Instead, via a thoroughly *mediatized* everyday, in synergy with ubiquitous information and communication technologies, these new forms arise, not in hyperreality, but as intrinsic to earthly existence. Contemporary media and cultural studies inevitably confront performativity in these contexts, as the thrill of enhanced identity exploration and presentation pervade mainstream cultural consciousness. This case study of *Faking It* brings the initial *rapture-telos* of material success into new Digital Age modes, where frontiers of thrill expand outward through technological connectivity and information manipulation, while spectacles from the outside world are simultaneously projected inward for subjective appropriation.

What's in *an apple*? Golden Delicious, Pink Lady, Granny Smith, Fuji, ...MacIntosh. Apples: known to keep the doctor away, Forbidden Fruit, The Apple of Knowledge, American as Apple Pie (not cherry, not peach), "a bad apple," "...of my eye," ..."*apple*-ication." Not until Google's twentieth listing, however, second page of search results, does one encounter "...the pomaceous fruit of the *apple* tree, species *Malus domestica* in the family Rosaceae..." (courtesy of Wikipedia, of course). Instead, a more prominent apple of our times dominates. The first search result (indeed, the first nineteen) yields: Apple.com. Much of the time, the Apple we pick, we pick with a click. "Going to," "clicking on," purchasing from, loving, *being* an "Apple/Mac person"—apple-esque conceptions of the information technology epoch.

For decades now, Apple has cast itself, and been oft-acknowledged, as the vanguard innovator of all things info-tech, poster-child of the Computer Age. The 2010 roll-out of its transcendent, next-level-computing gizmo, the *iPad*, saw the proclamation of its technological genius and unprecedented media empowerment easily matched by its spectacular, preemptive ad-campaign hype. This dialectic was by no means pioneered with the *iPad* release, rather reaches back into Apple's history, to its initial big-bang, in 1984, with the introduction of the first personal computer, the Macintosh. Analysis of the rhetoric and imagery attached to the *iPad*'s debut reflects ideologies that have become synonymous with Apple products and their marketing strategies, both of which are thoroughly imbued with rapturous excitement and promises of an everyday spectacularized by technology. Given such intimations of a techno-enhanced human condition, surely the challenge stands for denizens of this cyber age to always remain as critically as experientially engaged within its vaunted *interactivity*: to bite the apple of

knowledge is to *know*, after all, not just to bite (vide the Apple logo), but to taste, chew, and swallow. This inquiry investigates the fruit, shakes the tree to see what else it may harbor, exerts critical-analytic pressure on an archetypal, predominant source and manifestation of the Information Technology Age: already an ur-artifact, where better to begin, than Apple.com?

The Rise to Phylogenetic Supremacy

It is crucial to emphasize that this study represents a close reading of Apple's marketing strategies, *not* a deterministic diagnosis of user habits and motivations. At the same time, however, the widespread popularity of the Apple experience, inextricable from ever-increasing product sales, underscores the relevance of such deeper inquiry with regard to socio-cultural effects. Crucially, the affective contexts of its experientiality should not be dismissed, merely, as marketing rhetoric; rather, its effectiveness indicates Apple's power to meld its product with a unique experience (equally reflected in its marketing strategies). The combination of work with play is particularly potent, as are synergies between empowerment and entertainment, and the dialectical relationships between such tropes deserve careful consideration. Furthermore, while the analytical perspectives of this examination maintain a critical edge and seek rigorous interrogation of human-technological interfaces, it should be underscored that the aim is not a critique of Apple's success, rather, an interest in the affective ontologies of that success

First, some historico-critical and epistemological contextualization. In his treatise on media and culture, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Neil Postman could only speculate, looking forward from the early 1980s-dawn

of the global computer age with a nonetheless perspicacious, and provocative, musing: “To ask is to break the spell. To which I might add that questions about the psychic, political, and social effects of information are applicable to the computer... Thus, a central thesis of computer technology—that the principal difficulty we have in solving problems stems from insufficient data—will go unexamined.” (161) One might adapt this quote to include (with the notion of “insufficient data”) insufficient processing power, or the wrong (out-dated) machine. Postman was able to go into greater analytical depth, specific to the rise of computerization, eleven years later, with *Technopoly*, but reaffirmed the injunction to think critically about ever-evolving modes of information transfer—not nearly alone, of course, in such sentiments, going back as far, at least, as the *Phaedrus*’ concern regarding the dominance of written language. Certainly, it is difficult to argue that such considerations are any less crucial living in a world increasingly mediated, organized, and indeed dominated by information technologies. In addition to technology’s rapid global evolutions (and obsolescences) that exert infrastructural and market-determining (and, inescapably, socio-cultural) influence, such systemic effects surely validate other Postmanian concerns, including: “What is information... its various forms? What conceptions of intelligence, wisdom and learning does each form insist upon, ...neglect or mock? What are the psychic effects of each form... moral biases? [and this critic’s favorite:] What does it mean to say there is too much information?” (160) Essentially, such critical engagement insists that society maintain an awareness not just of *what* we are doing, what technologies we are using, but also *how* we are acting with, and using, technologies—indeed, how these may be using us.

The ascendance of information-technological media as a globally dominant paradigm becomes logically apparent when examined under epistemological lenses. No other communications medium of the modern era is able to claim as comprehensive a recapitulation of preceding communication modes, as can the innovation of the information technology age, particularly as embodied by the Internet. . Take, for example, the transition from the 18th and 19th century dominance of typography (when North American literacy rates rose to an historical high-point) (31) to the age of commercial television's contemporary global regime, in the latter 20th-century. The metamorphosis was largely an antagonistic one, wherein the media characteristics and social effects of commercial television marked a radical departure from the typographic paradigm. Typography's reading and writing skills, which privilege linear, concept-decoding, expository modes of critical thinking and of expression, were supplemented and challenged by television's emphasis on sensory (audio-visual) and emotional interpretation/reaction, and increasingly influenced by commercial sponsorship.

These distinctions intensified with television's rapid propagation of content and choice in the cable-package era, and were accompanied by a competitive upping of the entertainment-value ante. Moreover, provocative, quick-cutting and increasingly decontextualized, sensationalistic, affect-driven aesthetics moved ever-further away from the more syntactic-analytic engagement-demands of typography. A final consideration of television's epistemological roots also foregrounds its selective incorporation of preceding media evolutions, namely telegraphy and photography, that emphasize instant information transfer and image-based content. Indeed, much of 20th-century media

studies remained focused on commercial television's apparently imperialistic socio-cultural effects and agenda.

Similar concerns regarding antagonistic effects of contemporary media-paradigm shifts are especially associated with the threat against print culture by emerging digital media formats. Nonetheless, epistemological appraisal of information technology evidences a widespread incorporation of most preceding media formats, including typography, all forms of image (moving and static), and unlimited audio capabilities. Add to such comprehensivity the digital augmentations of infinite archival capacity; instant access, portability, convenience, and personalization; and orders-of-magnitude larger information dissemination/correspondence capabilities, at near-instantaneous speed, and the hegemony of info-tech innovations seems inexorable. All of this, perhaps most popularly, gains even greater momentum, via exponential expansions of user-choice in commerce and entertainment.

It should be additionally noted that the nanotechnology of micro-chip information processing, the seminal inventive component of the digital era, has become increasingly central to virtually myriad forms of technology via its applicability: telephony, television, photography, audio-processing, transportation, and the vast array of digital-electronic components used to control everything from automobiles, to household appliances, to personal effects, to mass transit. There can be no exaggeration of its omnipresence, an aspect crucial to its greater societal and socio-economic impact. Overall, these innovations and proliferations may be seen as an expanding capacity for what Gregory Bateson would term *metacommunication*, wherein cybernetic interconnectivities link people and information, as well as diverse media and communication systems. Bateson's

theoretical work with cybernetics and systems theory, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, identifies “knowledge of the total systemic creature,” (1972, p. 440) as central to understanding cybernetic experience. Sharing an inclination towards the multiplex symbioses of affect theoretical perspectives, Bateson’s exposition of the “systemic creature” interrelates affective states with technological and cultural contexts, i.e. a multiplex ecology of subjective consciousness and experience. Additionally descriptive of such dynamics is Jon McKenzie’s conceptualization involving “immanent annunciations” of subjective states of being as a function of “recursive communication” within human-computational systems. (228) Consequently, the holistic qualities of such assemblages manifest expanded modes of performance and attendant affective intensities, greater than the sum of the parts involved

Given such interconnection/interaction, the question remains: to what ends and purposes, such human-technical evolution; and, perhaps most importantly, to what effects and, specific to the *rapture-telic* lens, ...to what affects? The introduction (and promotional representation) of the *iPad* at Apple.com is fertile to such contemplations.

Ontogenetic Rapture

Georges Perec’s emphasis on the value inherent in the seemingly meaningless details of everyday life is reflected in Apple computation’s engagement with quotidian activities of all types. Citing Perec’s inclusive lens, Michael Sheringham articulates an ongoing dedication of Everyday Studies to the preservation of a “priceless sense of connection, which binds persons, acts, histories, and communities to each other, not in any fixed or predetermined pattern, but in that constantly fluid becoming that Perec called

‘emergence’.” (290) Pointed attention to the often-unnoticed *remarkableness* of the Everyday is an opening gambit that both underscores the field’s theoretical priorities, and also gestures beyond its mandated reclamation of the quotidian, towards discoveries of agency. The same can be said, not only of the telos of Apple’s technological innovation—that of computational augmentation, the creation of a community unified by operating system (and brand), and the transmogrification of the details of everyday life by pleasure and efficiency—but also with regard to the affective aura of its greater marketing strategy. In the case of the *iPad*, Apple’s prime techno-functional vehicle for such Perequian penetration into everyday life is the *app*, or application, whose performances, detail by detail, task by task, are integrated across Apple’s range of products.

The wide-ranging potentiality of *app*-empowerment is exuberantly performed (spectacularized) by the Apple website. A few examples: a neon-green footprint (“rubiTrack”) is “an activity tracker and exercise journal (that) displays, analyzes, and organizes your workout information for sports such as running, biking, and walking. It reads tracks from many GPS-enabled devices, displays them on a map, and analyzes workout details”; a neon-lightblue bowl, containing white liquid and non-descript bits, is the “YummySoup!” recipe organizer; a check-mark, on white background, with a blue frame (which, with closer inspections and context, reveals itself as an in/out box) invites you to “meet *Things*: where you go from ‘to-do’ to ‘done,’ a task manager that strikes a perfect balance between simplicity and power. ... *Things* allows you to get the most out of your day—every day”; a sunflower is your photos; and a blue circle, in which the not-

immediately recognizable shapes of pencil, ruler, and paint-brush form the shape of a capital letter “A”, is the “*apps*” app.

The primary and initiatory allure of all such functions is *interactivity*, made fun and allegedly easy by Apple (for those who have the proclivity for digital-interfacing). Fulfilling Bateson’s concept of a computational cybernetic system-assembly (subject + technology + environment), Apple’s corollary tripartite amalgamation constructs a zone of affectively-satisfying, as much as technologically-efficient, activity. Crucially, these specialized aspects of Apple’s techno-universe inform modes of communication, interpretation, and behavior, as much as they establish the same for attendant consumer commerce. Moreover, the processing capabilities and market-presentation on display are emblematic of contemporary information-technological contexts, writ large.²⁷

The *iPad* and its web-presence at Apple.com reprise the macro-identity and functionalities of all things Apple. The *iPad* page is largely comprised of exuberant video tutorials (read: testimonies) and spectacularized images of the product. Most immediately evident, in the language associated with the *iPad* roll-out, is the thrilled, verging on euphoric, usage of hyperbole—both in the four elaborative linked articles (promotions), as well as in the crafted-for-naturalness scripts of its video-tutorials. This analyst soon realized that tallying the use-counts of laudatory terminology, such as “incredible,” “really,” “amazing,” “love,” “exciting,” “great,” “the most...,” “the first...,” etc. was unnecessary—suffice to say that every successive sentence, with very few exceptions, employed superlative verbiage. The language reflects an autotelic *frisson* of techno-instantiated rapture (pending, of course, the *telic* event of acquiring the necessary machinery), while the auto-encomium of its marketing tactics enthusiastically

presages/performs a guarantee of the same for its consumers. It is interesting to note the continued preference, at the core of the *iPad* 's greater sales-pitch, for affective textures related to joy and jubilation over the more subdued auras of technological expertise and computational efficacy.

The *iPad* web-page's main informative vehicle is its centrally-featured video (essentially reprising the additional clickable options of a sub-categorized list of "guided tour" video-tutorials), which includes a clip of the *iPad* TV commercial, officially dubbed "Meet the *iPad*." A note on the TV commercial, before proceeding, will add salience to the greater analysis. Much shorter (30 seconds), its music-only soundtrack features the raucous hit-single, "There goes my love," by the Danish pop-band, *The Blue Van*. This choice of music contrasts sharply with the instrumental, elevator/shopping-mall/motivational sort of triumphant sound-backgrounds to the other videos. Moreover, Apple could hardly have been limited (certainly not in terms of funds) in its choice of music, and therefore the tone/affect with which the *iPad* was introduced to the global television audience represents the height of intention. Consequently, it is also fair to infer that such choice largely reflects Apple's chief target audience (young, hip, apparently casually successful— as are all of the spokesmen appearing in the longer promotional video); and while, equally energetic music could have been used (even an instrumental version of the song), the original lyrics, which follow, were retained as spokes-speech for the spectacle of the *iPad* roll-out:

Be, be the charming type,
Take off your gloves and show what they hide,
Please, please my naked wrists,
With your hands and fingertips
And please, baby get on your knees,
Don't bare bare bare your teeth,

I'll let you try,
If you close your eyes,
I'll have an answer for your ass!
[Chorus:]
There goes my love,
There goes my love,
There goes my love love love love love,

Much of this, of course, appears to verge on the nonsensical, and the obviously orgiastic, but nonetheless yields itself to relevant literary analysis (as must have been most assuredly considered by Apple's highest-ups). First, there is the imperative mode, instructing submission, ...to what? What is it that the song lyrics and, by association, Apple and the *iPad*, exhort, nay, command, that the audience "...get on your knees," in order to be allowed to "try, ...with your hands and fingertips"? What is the "answer for your ass"? Whatever it is, the chorus seems to indicate the opportunity is somehow missed, on this occasion. The piece, its subliminal intimations notwithstanding, is the height of tantalizing intention: You must try/have this, on pain of suffering (neglect and obsolescence are likely candidates), because it manifests "your love." A similar fleeting, tantalizing aesthetic informs the quick-cutting edit of the commercial's images. None longer than a second in duration, the clips feature mid-distance portraits of the *iPad* in action, close enough to see the larger pictures displayed on its screen (while revealing cozy, well-appointed domestic backgrounds, and users in relaxed and smiling, recumbent positions), but too far away (and too quick) to decipher exactly what operations the machine is performing. Interestingly, images of people hard at work, or any professional settings, are completely absent.

The hip, catchy "Meet the *iPad*" TV-commercial is a sneak-preview and its cryptic, affect-driven insinuations are amplified in the website's main video (8 minutes long), to be considered next. Most notable, initially, are the visages of the spokesmen (all

men) making the *iPad*-related video presentations. Their eyes are wide open and glistening in the stars-in-your-eyes effect of direct-spotlight positioning, usually reserved for Hollywood love-scenes; and their demeanors verge on euphoria—they are modeling for us the company’s promise of technological rapture. Moreover, these performances remind us of the *fait accompli* autotelism of the Apple-styled techno-satisfaction, assured once subjects enter the empowering, and equally (if not more) *fun*, realm of Apple-sponsored computation.

The first speaker, Jony Ive (Senior Vice President of Design), spares us having to read too much into the greater message, explaining, in a dreamy British accent, “You know, it’s true, when something exceeds your ability to understand how its works, ...it sort of becomes magical.” And we’re off on an intoxicating litany, and testimony, about the “unbelievable device,” “the most advanced piece of technology,” “like nothing you’ve ever seen,” “...a whole new gold rush,” and so on. Ive finishes his opening bit with, “I don’t have to change myself to fit the product—it fits me!” This final note is, of course, mercurial in its applicability. Despite that “what’s really exciting is that it starts at \$499,” the notion of changing oneself is unavoidably subject to who one is, to begin with. *If* one has five hundred dollars (starting) to spend on the latest gadgetry from Apple; if one is a techie, either with need, or just the desire, to have the latest technologies at one’s fingertips at all times; if one loves to read on the web, download and organize one’s infinitude of digital pictures (to wit, if one has a digital camera, transferable memory card, Macintosh computer, various interfaces)—another spokesman informs us that, “Apple is the one place that you can really do this”— ...*then*, such is the assurance, it can all be “...incredibly fun, and productive!”

At any rate, access to such person-enhancing technology seems to be advancing, globally, at an exponential pace that supports the assumption that its presence could be nearly universal in the not too distant future. Alison Hearn's work on reality television and her development of concepts involving the "spectacularization of the self" (620) offers interesting socio-behavioral parallels to much of the techno-fulfillment heralded by Apple. Hearn identifies a mad rush of subjects towards the possibility of instant television/web-viral fame as an impetus involving contemporary performances of personal identity.²⁸ Apple's own media-interactive, socio-behavioral template is not dissimilar, albeit with a telos that replaces fame with the (autotelic) goal of technologically-enhanced subjecthood and the affective (and self-expressive) satisfactions to be thereby attained. Hearn christens the culture industry as "the exemplary mode of production," (622) whose processes and standards inform performances and productions of the ("entrepreneurial") self. Surely, such modes include productions of the self within the context of a spectacularized everyday culture, as facilitated by Apple-styled, personalized information-technologies. .

Kitzmann and Marshall's idea of *prosumerism* (production + consumerism) (Marshall 638) extends the notion of an *iPad*-catalyzed experience as one that offer more complex interactions attending its functionality than mere affective excitation. Promsumerist interactive behavioral modes, while thoroughly embedded in consumption (of technological equipment, processes, and networks), incorporate additional potential for subjective creativity and expression. In a word, gadgetry and experience are *personalizable*. From data-organizing systems oriented around "favorite" and "popular" criteria, to color-coordinated and customized accessories, 'looks,' and carrying-cases, the

iPad (and the proliferated Apple product-line) offers an interactive experience that is personal. In cybernetic terms, this mechanico-human interface represents much more than the mere execution of programs and functionality, it begins to carry characteristics akin to a *relationship*, thereby deriving even greater capacity for affectively-reified performances of individuality. The performativity of self, of identity, within the quotidian, is lent an aura of the spectacular through Apple's enchanting lens on the world. As performance theory would have it, subjective agency is availed through dramaturgical "accomplishment of meaning" (Goffman 418), and Sternbergian notions of *phantasmagoric* labor dedicated to "composing the persona." (423)

While such essences of Apple-dom surely hold a spirit of being "really exciting," it should again be emphasized that its marketing campaign presents a joy exclusive to the empowerment of Apple's proprietary technological platforms and equipment-arrays. It is a market-cornering exclusivity whose accelerating innovation (and built-in obsolescences) carries certain pressures of recruitment. Moreover, the rapturous techno-power/entertainment that Apple markets as intrinsic to its products is accompanied by an implicit message suggesting that we cannot do *without* such joy. Slavoj Zizek distills a similar urgency in his article, "Will You Laugh for Me, Please," when he explains:

...in contrast to the notion that the new media turn us into passive consumers who just stare blindly at the screen, one should claim that the so-called threat of the new media resides in the fact that they deprive us of our passivity, of our authentic passive experience, and thus prepare us for the mindless frenetic activity. (lacan.com)

Crucially, Zizek points out that such messaging (as in the impelling exuberance of Apple's techno-joy) takes on the character of a mandate. Such positively imperative modes, of course, echo the tone of the *iPad* theme-song ("There Goes My Love")—an

über-persuasive call to action. These conceptions also follow Žižek's oft-invoked Lacanian *injunction to enjoy*; and, as that injunction is one directed from super-ego upon ego, Apple's intense marketing of technological fulfillment, framed in socio-cultural contexts, manifests a similar insistent barrage targeting potential subjects/customers. From a *rapture-telic* standpoint, the thrill-eliciting capacity of Apple's mechanico-human affect-zones oftentimes preempts such hard-sell tactics by becoming a readily accepted invitation, greeted with enthusiasm and expanding popularity.

Cautionary caveats regarding consumer manipulation through marketing, and the creation of perhaps inflated demand (when utility is weighed against cost), appear consistently subordinated to the satisfaction of "users," hyper-friendly with Apple's personalized-technology and its pleasing affective auras. Additionally descriptive of such dynamics is Jon McKenzie's concept of subjects' "immanent annunciation" of their states of being as a function of "recursive communication" (228) within human-computational systems. The specifically thrillological concept of *epi-formance* applies as well, in that these recombinations of subjecthood and technology manifest an expanded mode of performance (and consequent affectivity) that is greater than, and "beyond," (*epi-*) the sum of its parts.

In the Zone

The charged, affect-driven sales-pitch embedded in the website's central and more elaborate 8-minute video-tutorial cum advertisement ascends upon near-ecstatic tones. Scott Forstall (Senior Vice President of *iPhone* software) takes over, even more wide-eyed than Ive, a veritable giggling Cheshire about the subject at hand, explaining

that technology, like the *iPad*, involves “...how we do everything—how we interact with the world.” It is an omnipresence well-suited to the importance with which Georges Perec invests the details of everyday life. Indeed, Apple’s valuation of the quotidian as the site of subjective interaction “with the world” validates its technology’s thoroughgoing incorporation (in both senses of the word) into the everyday, and, perhaps more importantly (in terms of marketing power), enhances its promises of the *spectacularization* thereof.

Of course, there is a significant spin to Apple’s claim upon “how we do everything,” one which, beneath the exuberance, cannot evade implications of a dependency upon technology. As much as the *iPad* promotional content is laced with satisfaction and fun, its attendant joyous affect rests on the threat that such contentment is essentially unattainable without the proper technology. The suggestion is implicit that our psycho-emotional satisfaction is every bit as at stake, as is our successful operation and inclusion in the constantly evolving technological world. Kitzmann and Marshall’s *prosumerism* is again illustrative: Apple’s technological empowerment, which aids in productions of subjecthood (both in the performance of everyday tasks, and of identity), is concomitant to the consumption of Apple’s machinery and operating platforms. It should be noted, as well, that these productions of identity, affective states, and functional capacities are cybernetically intertwined, not only in the *prosumerism* of Apple clientele, but are equally symbiotic in the relationship between users’ multi-faceted employ of Apple apparati and the company’s ongoing research and development efforts. This is to say that the creation of exciting, interactive affect-zones relies on consumer profiling and feed-back, both in terms of computational needs and the execution thereof,

as well as in the perpetuation of compelling affective experiences to be associated with the Apple experience.

Forstall's *iPad* presentation underscores the ostensible benevolence of such techno-empowerment, suggesting that, best of all: "You don't even think about it—you just do!" Voila, another satisfying theme of Apple-hood—no need to cogitate excessively, (teetering on a Nike creative property lawsuit) one *just does it*. To such ends, what exactly does Forstall mean by "doing"? How to define the action, aside from the experiential, affective delight that is obviously inherent? Most of the rest of the web-presentation is devoted to the explanation of such capabilities that lie just the other side of the preeminent act of purchase. These are the primary examples performed by the video tutorial: pics, digitally copyable and pastable hither and yon'; inspiring restaurant locators; sharing suggestions for the Japan vacation; buying books on line (the two examples are the novel, *Safe Harbor* (!), and Ted Kennedy's posthumous memoir); "Plus! ...all the games you love to play" (echoing the impassioned tone of the *Blue Van* lyrics)—examples display monster-killing in *World of Warcraft*, and high-speed urban driving—"where its Game on! And on. And on..."; and, finally, Apple's *iPad*-compatible "three phenomenal on-line stores": *iTunes*, *iBooks*, and *The App-Store* (over 140,000 apps, a "whole new gold rush"). What do these *actions* add up to—do they offer any type of inclusive behavioral categorization? Two thoroughgoing aspects seem to dominate: the archiving of personal multi-media data, as well as its sharing with, and it seems rather specific here, those folks closest to one (as opposed to work-related, and perhaps more official, entities), ...and endless entertainment.

But there is more at stake here, and at “play,” particularly in the context of Johan Huizinga’s encompassing depiction of the concept, in *Homo Ludens*, as a “significant function, ... extremely active all through the cultural process.”(173) The cybernetic intra-appropriation at work between the *iPad*’s technological functions and users’ everyday behaviors and experiences become all the more compelling (as they assemble an affect-zone catalytic to the *rapture-telos*) in that the experience “... arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.” (173) However, these (inter)activities are not mere games; rather, they increasingly involve important activities. The ludic capacity for entertainment remains central, but also becomes context and aura for the functions and tasks of everyday life as enabled by the *iPad*’s flotilla of supportive apps, including such vital parameters as the management of time, finance, and health. Apple’s commitment to interactive, playful functionality (in packaging/marketing, as well) enables further expression of subjective identity; the processes are linked, in positive emotion/affect, to the performances of everyday selfhood. Similarly, Huizinga’s notion of an immemorial “enraptured” human experience of the ludic, which “leads him to represent his emotion in an act,” (16) reinforces the potent combination of action and emotion, as catalyzed by play.

While borrowing from Huizinga’s theory of the ludic, it should be underscored that the *rapture-telos* lens nonetheless departs from another (rather paradoxical, considering the pervasiveness he ascribes to the ludic) contention that “play is the direct opposite of seriousness.” (5) Instead, the *rapture-telic* approach also sees play as the height of serious intention, both in its drive for affective fulfillment and commitment to the expression of identity, as much as in its incorporation into the undertakings of everyday life. Again, from a Perequian standpoint, such playful attention to detail and

conscious inclusion of the quotidian (as per *iPad*'s functionality) amounts to a spectacularization of everyday life that is significant and productive. Moreover, Huizinga's own theorization departs from the innocent and ineffably instinctual play of his opening illustration, as exemplified by "canine gambols." Retaining the emphasis that "play always *means* something," Huizinga's elaborations encompass a comprehensive integration of the ludic into human experience—ranging over language, law, war, feasting, knowledge, art, philosophy—one that moves into an over-arching *weltanschauung* that underscores "another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, it *is* order." (10) Engaging at the level of the everyday, similar powers of organization figure precisely in the data, and quotidian-task management capacities of the *iPad*. To then have those *to-dos* realigned within behavioral contexts of play (and fun) lends tangible credibility to Apple's auto-enthusiasm, while strengthening their overall sales-pitch.

Within the context of this thrillological examination of Apple's inventiveness and appeal, it is worthwhile to rewind to where it all began—the big bang of the world-pervading computer age—with the introduction of the first Macintosh personal computer. Apple hired Ridley Scott, fresh off the blockbuster cinematic successes of *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, to direct a film-style commercial, slated to premier at the 1984 Super Bowl. Given the overall price tag, including the hyper-expensive half-time slot, and Scott's lucrative contract and production budget, the event itself was as awe-inspiring as the product being introduced. Geoff King's analysis of contemporary blockbuster film production likewise intertwines media packaging and promotional strategies, and cites inter-referentiality between content and presentation as comprising the greater product,

per se. Similarly, for Kellner, such instantiations of technospectacle (23) are marked by the hype lent to their socio-cultural presence, contexts oftentimes equal in significance to attendant commodification and marketing.

The minute-long Macintosh piece, an eternity in terms of Super Bowl commercial broadcast space, features the inscrutable mass-population of an Orwellian worker-world, shabby in grey-tones, maudlin in its apparent mechanization of humanity; a Big Brother-type speaker's oration echoes propaganda from a giant screen. But the shadowy industrial scene is shocked by the arrival of a starkly-contrasting, colorful figure. In her tight orange jogging shorts and white tank-top, curly blond locks bouncing, she comes running, wielding a sledgehammer, pursued by riot police, who cannot prevent her from hurling the hammer, with a scream, into the speaker's visage, and detonating the commercial into its smoky-voiced, triumphant closing-pitch: "On January 24, Apple computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984*." The tag-line is delivered over a lingering image of the awe-struck, erstwhile oppressed masses, bathed in brightness, that then fades into a black background featuring the rainbow-colored Mac icon.

Indeed, 1984 was not like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but that unfulfilled prediction hardly precludes the rise of another totalizing technological regime, concomitant to the achievements of the computer age's ascendancy. Rather, the Macintosh roll-out spectacle, via its filmic Super Bowl ad, fulfills its own prophecy in many aspects, including the Orwellian nightmare it seeks to criticize and assure emancipation from. When the talking head proclaims, from its gigantic, glimmering monitor, the celebration of "information purification collectives," which have created a "garden of pure ideology,

where each worker may bloom secure from the pests of purveying contradictory thoughts...,” it is a litany that rings as ironically having come to pass—in the form of Apple’s idealized innovations and promises of technological empowerment (if not salvation)—despite the terroristic heroics of our 80s-styled, buxom heroine whose hurled hammer destroyed the demagogue’s image in a flash of blinding light. Indeed, the gape-faced minions seem perhaps more in awe of the spectacular blast of brightness, pure visual delight, than of the implications of their sudden liberation.

The subsequent mass-production/mass-sale of information technology in the intervening years, its endemic incorporation into society, in many ways replicates, rather than transcends, the techno-industrial paradigm of the original Macintosh commercial’s world. What is startling is that the ideologies espoused by the despotic speaker map, rather effectively, onto the panegyric of Apple marketing. The proclamation, “Our communication is enormous,” in particular, seems to sum up Apple’s contemporary claims to technological power. Moreover, a sort of inexorable techno-unification, despite the speaker’s obvious villainy, echoes prophetically in his final words, before the solo-revolutionary’s annihilating assault. He proclaims a one-ness, of will, resolve, and cause, leaving “our enemies to talk themselves to death, and we will bury them in their own confusion. We shall prevail!” (*Boom!*) Of course, both the idea of evading the dangers of confusion, and the unity of interconnectivity, endure as mainstays of Apple computational prowess, hearkening to Kellner’s notion of a *technocapitalism* that increasingly carries “organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life.” (23)

So: *How* has the computer saved us “from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,” since 1984? What has it done, ...what is it doing now? At that zero-hour of the Macintosh Super Bowl commercial, the initial promise is one of personal liberation, symbolized by the lone, beautiful, revolutionary; her colorful image, sex-appeal, youthful vibrancy, and whirling dance are of a piece with the sensuous, affect-driven ingredients of contemporary digital empowerment/experience. She is a metaphorical harbinger of incipient techno-liberation and the raptures of its to-come cybernetic affect-zones. Her stark contrast to the gray-scaled monotony suggests a falseness of the pre-Macintosh world. Its oppressive promises are empty lies, a void to be spectacularly filled by the mass-enfranchisement of personal/everyday computational autonomy, carrying a *frisson* as vivid and world-shattering as her thrilling explosion of the commercial’s Orwellian tyranny.

Here is the *rapture-telos* rendered explicitly as an affective vehicle. It is an aesthetic of feeling, or tone, such as Sianne Ngai explicates in *Ugly Feelings* (28), that informs subjective behavior and experience in a mood-creating interaction with socio-cultural (and technological) environments. In resonance with Ngai, as well, is the affect-zone’s pervasive existential *mode*, as distinct from event-based climaxes of emotion. Of course, the rousing Mac-revolutionary’s anarchistic act is a one-off event within the context of Ridley Scott’s filmic-advert, but its simultaneous kick-off personal computing power is an autotelic performance of the greater societal *upgrade* and new-age pleasures to come.

On the other hand, as promises of enhanced individualism proliferate via innovations in computation and its marketing, user experience begins to court a degree of

systematized thrall.²⁹ When everybody has all media, all the time... how then to revolt, how to transcend the dominant paradigm? Whence, now, the revolutionary figure? Of course, global disparities in socio-economic well-being have thus far precluded *everyone* from having the necessary media, access, or resources to partake in the raptures of techno-empowerment. Nonetheless, Apple's *über*-persuasive marketing recitations, and equally compelling gizmos, stridently point in the direction of desires that no person should deny themselves. Moreover, as an alternative to seeing the phenomenon as pure technocapitalist manipulation and exploitation (which, given the intentional non-compatibility and planned-obsolescence of many product lines, and still relatively high entry-costs, is certainly a valid criticism), the enthusiasm with which information-technology's exponential growth is embraced indicates an inherent consumer-side desire ascribable to more than just savvy marketing and innovation.

The *rapture-telic* lens, then, taking consumer-side motivations under consideration, seeks to expose compelling sources of desire beyond technological enhancement. These deeper associations combine affective satisfaction with a liberation from mundane subjective experience (even in the execution of basic, everyday tasks and needs) along the lines of Brown and Marcuse's appeal for an *erotized* human condition. Recall Marcuse's Orphic-Narcissistic model—equal parts imaginative, creative, and ludic in its propensities, and one in search of an alternative to “separation from the libidinous object.” (170) Cathectic energy is to be derived from (and enjoyed in) all facets of life, de-centering the human libido as its sole source of pleasure and adding potentialities of “objectless autoeroticism.” (217) Apple.com contends (as does this thrillology) that such raptures may well be located in the affective gratifications of technological (inter)activity

that enable new performances of self, in concert with new and liberating enhancements of daily existence. The joys of technological empowerment and increased efficiency are every bit as rewarding as the improvements offered.

Apple Cores

In *Global Culture Industry* (2008), Scott Lash and Celia Lury take stock of global cultural logics indicative of a shift in the ways the world does business, as well as the effects of such dynamics on culture and society. Apple.com's marketing and design strategies dovetail nicely with Lash and Lury's analysis of global branding and their notion of a *mediation of things*:

What was incipient with the emergence of mass media has become the axial principle of global culture industry. (8) ...material environment has become mediatized. And mediums have descended into the environment, as merchandise, as installations . . . design-intensivity and ubiquitous research is the culturification of industry: the mediation of things. (9)

Yet these *things*, which Lash and Lury highlight, take on a new aspect as commodities in that their chief purpose is not merely driven by acquisition, and then utilization; rather, in the Info-Tech Era, "mediatized" commodities are also vehicles for the performance of identity, machines used for affective production. Kellner's *technospectacular* organization of "the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events" (24) seems applicable, as well, wherein mediating technology (as embodied in the *iPad*) organizes the overall interactivity, and simultaneously enables, via its *prosumptive* dynamism, for the staging, imaging, and performance of user personas, i.e. cultural creativity. Following Lash and Lury's exposition of branding as an additional locus for identification, Apple marketing's emphasis on such cybernetic arrangements

(including the buying experience) draws attention to itself as beneficial, if not vital, and certainly exciting.

These processes and functions, characteristic of Apple's computational experience, re-connect to the *system* that is commercial brand-logic. Brand-logical commerce has as its central ethos an appeal to the consumer's experiential appetites, as well as a promise to empower the expression thereof: "Your relations with the brand are part of its value . . . qualities of *experience*. This experience is situated at the interface—or surface—of communication between the consumer and the brand." (7) Brands offer a *relationship* between person and product(s), or, more precisely, between subjects and the cultural constructions of a given company—Lash and Lury's *branded things* are effective symbolic orientations and attachment points for consumer experiences with identity construction/performance.

Likewise, *iPad* functionality that extends subjective experience, framed by Apple brand-identification, dovetails with Alison Hearn's proposition of "the self-conscious development and management of a [public] persona based on templates of the 'self' supplied by corporate media culture." (619) Hearn also emphasizes that the mediating and identity-catalyzing capacities offered by such technologies deserve acknowledgment as effective (and obviously popular) vehicles for the generation of thrilling affective states. Reconnecting with affect theory's valuation of interactivity, Grossberg's understanding of "sensibility" helps to describe the *affect-zone* created by users, technology, brand-identification, and the symbiotic performances within such assemblages. Sensibility, much like tone's "global or organizing affect" (Ngai 28), inheres in "the particular relationship that holds any context together, that binds cultural

forms and audiences.” (Grossberg 584) The thrillological lens, in turn, extends the delineation of “audience” to include *users*, involved in psycho-emotionally reified performances of subjecthood, is an emendation that fits easily into Grossberg’s own elaboration of affective sensibility, which claims “our most common relationship to popular culture is determined by the cultural production of desires.” (584) In this context, it is reasonable to denote Apple’s greater socio-cultural relevance and presence as one occupying a popular cultural position.

In King’s wider-scoped media analysis, *Spectacles of the Real*, the capacity of such reflexive mediation to serve multiple purposes is central. It spectacularizes the user-experience, lending affective intensity through multi-sensory/multi-media stimulation, while simultaneously imparting a brand-particular functionality and aesthetico-cultural gloss to its modes of interactivity. In his own case studies, this translates into King’s estimation of special-effected Hollywood blockbuster production (standing in as a brand unto itself) as self-consciously touting its powers of spectacularization—both in the rendering of cinematized (hyper-)“reality,” as well as in its specific filmic/story-telling creations. (19) The Hollywood cinematic performance, this is to say, encompasses an assemblage of film production, its marketing and transmission, and public consumption, all feeding, cybernetically, off of, and into, the greater experience, or *epi-formance*.

Similarly, Apple’s marketing strategies and equipment functionality assemble an experiential affect-zone that combines user-experience, product-design, and consumerist transaction united under the auspices of its brand identity. Apple’s *iPad* experience is not just about *what* we do, but is also deeply interested *how* we do what we do, incorporating its influence through an affectively-thrilling framework at the level of personal

preference and expression. It is an association alluded to, decades earlier (referring to innovations in mid-20th-century telecommunications, and television's rise as a forum of cultural conversation), in Marshall McLuhan's diagnosis that the "medium is the message." (23)

The World is My Apple

Kathleen Stewart's affect-theoretical notion of immanently arising "worlds" resonates with the concept of the *affect-zone*, in *rapture-telic* contexts. Both represent cybernetic constructs that co-involve subjective, objective, contextual/circumstantial, and psycho-emotional/sensual elements, wherein "everything depends on the dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses and matter." (340) Stewart's conception emphasizes, as well, "a new regime of sensation, become a threshold to the real," incarnate in "events, relations, and impacts [that] accumulate as the capacities to affect and to be affected." (339) *Worlding* describes an emergent "reality" whose immanence "carries off, ravishes, possesses" (as from *rapture*'s Latin etymology) subjective sensibility, but is additionally compelling in that the triggering contexts remain relevant, if not formative. Accordingly, consumer-subjects involved in *iPad* interactivity are afforded absorbing modes of engagement, by virtue of their direct participation in manifesting the experientiality of the *world* of Apple experience. Such agency, technological prestidigitation notwithstanding, is a thrill in and of itself.

These symbioses involving machine and human, producer and consumer, product and identity, as well as potentialities for collective experience, connect to another concept of technological empowerment, that of *convergence culture*. Henry Jenkins' 2006 work of the same name explains, "Convergence... is both a top-down corporate-driven process

and a bottom-up consumer-driven process.”(18) Its interaction gestures towards plurality, an all-inclusion courtesy of benevolent technology, where, through “work and play—spectators perform in the new media system... participatory culture.”(3) But not just “spectators”—it is an ideal that the pointedly *un*-corporate demeanors and appearances (sweaters, t-shirts, stubble) of the (multi-millionaire) Apple.com spokesmen/executives, who star in the *iPad* promotional bits, clearly seek to broadcast. They model for us their *user*-ness, as much as their producer-personas.

Personal computing and entertainment industries respond to consumer/audience tastes, and attendant commercial advertising mandates, by preferencing sensory and affective stimulation, modes of interaction that allow for enhanced performances of subjecthood, and overall entertainment-value. It is a symbiotic relationship not dissimilar to mainstream media’s prioritization (to ensure ratings and commercial sponsorship) of sensationalism, conflict and tragedy, graphic imagery, etc. In other words, ‘give the people what they want,’ and what they frequently want are the heightened sensations of the spectacular in its myriad forms, not the least of which is a media(ted) empowerment that technology purveyors do well to both hardwire and foreground in their products and the marketing thereof.

Moreover, when media’s perhaps most ascendant, if not dominant, form, the internet, is taken into consideration, the spectacular proliferates into virtually limitless variety, through increasingly widespread networks of online connectivity. In other words, the spectacular can become pandemic within everyday experience. Global connectivity enables a proliferation of the spectacular on orders of magnitude, when compared to previously existing modes of (commercial entertainment) purveyance, via ubiquitous

television viewing and expanding cable packages, for example. Digital media innovation penetrates all salient categories: variety, viewer-/user-ship, enhanced multi-media capacities of computer graphics, and ever-expanding capabilities for editing and archiving. That these spectacularizations of form and function pervade “users” everyday lives (thoroughly mediatized, Kellner, Lash and Lury would insist on reminding) lends additional allure to such interactive dynamics, in both computational and consumerist contexts.

At the experiential level lies a powerful affinity for affective fulfillment driven by the raptures, the “magic” (to use Ive’s own descriptor), of new media technology. People want it, Apple provides; and that which Apple provides, in addition to its machines, is an exuberant articulation, and compelling justification, of wanting, of desire *par excellence*. Granted, at this juncture, these analytical sentiments lend a somewhat seamy underside to the celebrated fun of techno-empowerment/-entertainment—a sort of mutual-addiction dynamic. It is an estimation, however, which may be tempered by the notion that this sort of addiction is acceptable (even healthy?). Critical analysis along such lines warrants serious consideration, since its essence drives at the age-old question, exemplified in Faustian myth: Do we use technology, or does it use us? Of course, from the *rapture-telic* standpoint, delighted *prosumers*, corporate and everyday alike, may well answer... *both!!*

Apple.com’s website assemblage of *iPad*-specific textual evidence offers an elemental assay—in tone, vocabulary, imagery, rhetorical technique (exhortation/encomium), and persuasive thematics—of the greater significance being attached to this cutting-edge implement. At work is the compelling, if not time-honored, marketing strategy of casting products as much more than objects. Coextensive with the

language and imagery of technological-empowerment that packages and imbues the *iPad* is the presentation of an Apple's ideology that penetrates everyday human-mechanic experience, behaviorally, psychologically, commercially.

Of course, none of this is news to the corporate strategists at Apple. All of it is "natural," and the video-promotion ends where it began, with oracular Jony Ive: "In many ways this defines our vision, our sense, ...of what's next." In character with Apple's successful (public relations) cultivation of an affect of excitement, this "next" will remain a delectable mystery until the unveiling of Apple's succeeding miracle-ware. Doubtlessly, however, affective intensities, such as those associated with the *iPad*'s web roll-out, will perpetuate, carrying the message that technology is as much (and often apparently *more*) about entertainment and the joys of consumption as it is about the utility and liberating qualities of said technologies. Marshall McLuhan's persistent 1964 study, *Understanding Media*, acknowledges the pervading influence of such fascination, at work not only within dynamics involving humanity and technology, but also informing interactions between the consuming public and digital technology's cutting-edge innovators: "The machine world reciprocates man's love by expediting his wishes and desires..."(56) The folks at Apple make this notion a mantra, basing their company's ethos and marketing strategies equally upon notions of technological empowerment and pleasure.

CONCLUSION

Thrill to Power?—Freedom and Socio-Political Agency Reconsidered

The Effect of Affect

As stated at the outset, the goal of this thrillological project is to establish an analytic-theoretical frame within which the variety of *rapture-telic* modalities and cybernetic interactions can be examined, with particular emphasis on compelling affective dynamics that arise in the context of spectacularized everyday experience. Unquestionably, the phenomenon of thrill represents much more than mere titillation. Its complex zones of affective intensity offer absorbing psycho-emotional contexts that authenticate subjective experience—*sentio ergo sum*—and meaning-filled performances that catalyze subjective identity in action and expression.

Thrilling affect's power and centrality is nicely encapsulated by Lawrence Grossberg when he says: "This 'absorption' or investment constructs the places and events which are, or can become, significant to us... It defines the strength of our investment in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings, and pleasure." (585) The cybernetic interactivity of such affective systems and their organization of *rapture-telic* contexts are helpfully illustrated, as well as framed as an immemorial presence, by the Goethean concept of the *Ur-phänomen*. Hannah Arendt identifies the notion as an "archetypal phenomenon, a concrete thing to be discovered in the world of appearances in which 'significance' (*Bedeutung*, the most Goethean of words...) and appearance, word and thing, idea and experience would coincide." (12) While further research into

Goethe's usage of the concept shows a more scientific/biological approach, correspondence with G.W.F. Hegel on the subject reveals the latter's expansion of the idea's applicability into philosophical and theoretic frameworks. On 24 February 1821, Hegel writes:

This spiritual breath . . . what you strikingly call the *Urphänomen* . . . show[s] how intervention of further spheres of influence and circumstances generates the concrete phenomena, and you regulate the whole progression so that the succession proceeds from simple conditions to the more composite, and so that the complex now appears in full clarity through this decomposition. . . . But may I now still speak to you of the special interest that an *Urphänomen*, thus cast in relief, has for us philosophers. (2)

Hegel's proposed interpretation of *Ur-phänomen* as a philosophical concept is useful in the conceptualization of the *rapture*-telos, as well, in the assignation of its essential characteristics to epiphenomena that it generates, an interactivity based in affectivity that organizes human and societal behavior around its principles. The inter-relatedness of *Ur-phänomen*-al dynamics is decidedly cybernetic, in its own right, and serves to describe both thrill's capacity for spectacularization, as well as its location in everyday experience: "such phenomena . . . make it possible for us to descend, just as we ascended, by going step by step from the *Ur-phänomen* to the most mundane occurrence in our daily experience." When the rapture of *thrill* is thought of in these sorts of ways, as an archetypal, recurring value, formative of human experience and behavior, it warrants further consideration as a macro-organizing influence around which major socio-cultural actants, like media and communication systems, commerce and consumerism, and, indeed, the greater societal structure and value systems arrange themselves.

Moreover, it is important to stress, as per the repeated identification of *autotelism* as an important characteristic present in the various case study analyses, that the intense

affective states of the *rapture-telos* inhere in an in-process experientiality, a conjuring of psycho-emotional response that imbues events and subjects, that is immanent.

Grossberg's explication of the "activity" of affective power is similar in that "the very activity of consuming becomes more important, more pleasurable, more active as the site of the cultural relationship, than the object of consumption itself." (585) That the inexhaustible appetites of many of the thrill-seeking, if not addicted, characters analyzed are more deeply driven by intense *feelings* than anything else, demonstrates just such affective immediacy.

Georges Bataille's expansion of *erotic* experience is also illustrative of the *rapture-telos*' emphasis on the affective potential of thrill. Especially crucial in achieving such intensity is the total involvement of a subjective desire that seeks "to be consumed and lose oneself without reservation." (113) It is a limits-transcending, no-holds-barred impetus whose implications of new experience are based in exploration, "where transgression is the rule of unbridled eroticism . . . the extremes that are the most meaningful." (57) In all of *Thrillology*'s case studies this sort of extremism is extant: the risking of life and limb, incarceration, and destruction; the questioning of social mores and boundaries; the enthusiasm of utopian vision—always concatenated with a recurring conviction that the most penetrant fulfillment lies in the affective dimensions of new experience. Bataille's attitude resonates with the swashbuckling Surrealist impulse, equally laced with the *rapture-telic* valuation of thrill, in the conviction that only such dangerously pure feeling harbors the affective potential for "extravagant" psycho-emotional experience: "Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things

extravagant are all devices which we can always call upon without fear or deception.”

(Breton 16)

And there is more at stake than affectively-penetrating experience. There is an impulse for the reification of the human condition itself, of humanity as palpably alive and without limit for new discovery, both experientially and in terms of the conceptualization of what is *real*. For Bataille, an affectively heightened, *omni-erotized* approach to life is vehicle to such developments, which “respond to the deepest feeling: the need to *create* authentic humanity . . . continual re-creation.” (74) It is an attitude, indeed a *weltanschauung*, that, in its undaunted self-determination of experience (in conjunction with its affinity for transgressive, boundary-crossing exploration), should be characterized as a revolutionary impetus, certainly as concerns the individual subject.

Relatedly, Herbert Marcuse’s own exposition of an *erotized* human condition is also useful in *rapture-telic* contexts. Like Bataille, Marcuse’s theorization values uninhibited action as an important vehicle of transcendent affective rapture and new experience. The reckless insanities of many of the central literary figures in this study—whether it be Packer’s self-destruction, Victor Ward’s hallucinated celebrity-career, or the business tycoons’ unappeasable appetite for the rush of power—embody “life instincts which seek pleasure, not security.” (124) It is an impetus that contradicts “the conception of being in terms of Logos” and, instead, conceives of “being in a-logical terms . . . strives to formulate its own Logos: the logic of gratification.” (124) These risk-filled re-conceptualizations of desire are seen as creative and embrace the imagination as a vital reagent for the re-fashioning of identity.

For Marcuse, the impulse is rooted in fantasy, an empowering “critical function,” as he explains in “Phantasy and Utopia,” based on a “refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle.” (149) Marcuse also makes an explicit connection to the Surrealist approach, enlisting their notion that imagination can be “applied to the fundamental problems of life . . . demanding that the dream be made into reality.” (149) Moreover, such connotations of “phantasy” and imagination are intrinsic to the *rapture-telos* emphasis on thrilling expression—that which thrills, liberates along psychic and creative lines. Creative action in myriad forms—whether it be the rapturous gyrations of the Jes Grew, Eric Packer’s headlong lust to transcend his tedious reality, or *The Day of the Locust*’s leading characters’ delusionary appropriations of star-appeal—refigures subjective reality and experience by drawing power from unfettered imagination. That such transformations are principally subject-based (an emphasis shared by the *rapture-telos*) is evident in Marcuse’s utilization of the mythos of Narcissus as illustrative, wherein:

Narcissism may contain the germ of a different reality principle: the libidinal cathexis of the ego (one’s own body) may become the source and reservoir for a new libidinal cathexis of the objective world—transforming this world into a new mode of being. (169)

Horse v. Cart: The “Power” Struggle

But, of course, such sentiment—certainly as presented in this study’s thrillological context—harbors a rather delicate question, and proposition: From his Marxist position—that sets as a non-negotiable precondition the abolition of the global capitalist system—a “libidinal cathexis of the ego . . . transforming this world into a new mode of being” would seem to telescope individual revolution as integral to that of

society. But, there seems to be a horse v. cart etiological paradox at hand here. An interdependent simultaneity involving both sites might well be the implication, and, indeed, *Eros and Civilization* seems to frequently occupy this liminal zone, despite the reasonable assumption that Marcuse's historico-political standpoint adheres to social-revolutionary template. Moreover, Marcuse's exegesis focuses, increasingly as it progresses, on the nuanced explication of an *erotization* that often smacks of a *sui generis*, immanent transfiguration originating at the site of the individual subject. And this proposition, of course, lies very close to the core of the *rapture-telos* perspective. Nonetheless, whether explicit in *Thrillology* and/or implied in *Eros and Civilization*, the question stands: do the emancipations of intense affective experientiality and its attendant liberated actions and expression, at the level of individual subject, translate into a greater social empowerment (or even, first, into a genuine empowerment of individuals)—or are their raptures just further distractive sublimations that reify longstanding capitalist repression?

As evidenced in *Thrillology's* spectrum of case studies, the conception of “power,” in *rapture-telic* contexts, switches from a societally-scaled revolutionary transcendence of the prevailing global capitalist system, to a focus on understanding potentials for the fulfillment of human desire, an empowerment at the level of subject—and identifies thrilling affect as an oftentimes reliable marker for such gratifications. Thrilling affect's relationship to “power” elicits, foremost, a reconsideration of the very notion of power. The consequence is to contemplate whether “empowerment” should still be mainly conceived as an impetus towards a radical change of prevailing social conditions, against the notion of a more interior, affect-centered subjective impulse

towards feeling something meaningful, or at least acutely palpable, in the *now*... larger-scope political concerns be damned. And might that re-orientation, itself, be empowering, liberating in its own way?

There certainly exist connections between the subjective experiences of thrill, as reflected in this project's case studies, and the society in which they are located, as is inevitable in any cybernetic *affect-zone* model. For example, the thrill-drives of the industrialists in *Making It* have a social effect, though in no ameliorative or beneficial sense. These figures—as is also the case for DeLillo's self-destroying *master of the universe*, Eric Packer, and Easton-Ellis' high-living, bewildered pretty-boy, Victor Ward—are ultimately too caught up in the all-consuming maelstrom of their everyday-spectacles to bring much more than chaos to society and those around them. Similarly, West's characters in *The Day of the Locust* are going about the business of starring in their own personal dramas, without any identifiable social concern.

Yet, in their own ways, these characters, who are so committed to the promised fulfillments, and thrill, of fame and fortune, do exert political and social-economic influence by virtue of their actions and cultural representations, in that such orientations inevitably impact modes of production, marketing and social experience. And this is certainly even more salient, in the actual world, when intense subjective attitudes are multiplied into millions of similar sensibilities that are *buying into* similar value systems and performances of identity in a wide variety of ways, and quite consciously so. Surely, *rapture-telic* proclivities and attendant social effects are evident in the megacultural thrill-seeking behaviors and conceptions of desire within the Super Bowl and Apple *iPad* subject-populations examined in *Thrillology*'s wider-scope socio-cultural case studies.

Of course, the identification of connections between society and subjects does not yet address the question of whether thrill's *empowerment* is transferable to the greater social body, but the establishment of avenues of interactivity is a necessary precondition for such considerations.

By Marxian-Marcusian standards, without question, *repressive desublimation* is rampant; the reigning capitalist system incorporates (in both senses of the word) and exploits a great deal of the activity and consumption of thrilled subjects, certainly within entertainment and consumerist contexts. Fredric Jameson, in *Marxism and Form*, characterizes such gratifications at the subjective level, as relates to society's betterment, as "a matter of individual narcosis, of individual salvation only in the middle of the collective shipwreck." (112) And indeed, it is not difficult to dismiss suggestions of thrill-based agency as "blind" to capitalist repressions, its affectivity as mere distracting sublimation, ...but this study seeks a deeper understanding of why so many millions seem content with the scenario, even celebratory thereof (as, for example, in the oft-heard catch phrases of "USA #1," or "the greatest nation *ever*."). It is certainly analytically worthwhile to suspend, in the interest of a diversification of critical perspective, the notion that people are categorically unaware of their oppression and the attendant implication that they are incapable of conceiving of what their personal freedom would, and should, feel like. Moreover, it is not accurate to write off near-laudatory contentment with the existing state of affairs as only belonging to the well-heeled elite; plenty of middle and working class enthusiasm for the status quo is to be found, as well, both on the everyday streets and reflected in mainstream media.

Thrillology seeks to interrogate, more deeply, how this is possible—is not satisfied by the diagnosis that so many have simply been bamboozled into an anaesthetized sense of fulfillment. While Jameson’s position on the issue seems abundantly clear, it is nonetheless noteworthy that his analysis includes, and thereby acknowledges, the complexity and indeterminacy of the question, by stating: “the problem of happiness forces us to ask whether people can know what is good for them, whether the social good can be judged in terms of a subjective feeling of contentment in a world of brainwashing and manipulation.” (108) Perhaps, as a function of the intervening decades, and an impetus, such as embodied in this thrillology, to continue to interrogate the topic, the elemental question imbuing this query regarding the “problem of happiness,” can again be foregrounded, and, indeed, still stand as worthy of further contemplation.

Admittedly, the mass-distraction of self- and affect-centered orientations can carry a crucial loss of perspective, particularly as regards any hope of a more equitable distribution of resources, and a less brutal human civilization—but... if that hope is perhaps already quashed, in countless hearts and minds, then the *power* to feel intensely, to be thrilled, may well represent a mode of desire that still carries the potential for meaningful, and therefore liberating, human experience. Socio-politically speaking, the focus on thrilling affective fulfillment as a preeminent value may appear as a false consciousness—but, given the greater *rapture-telic* contexts of such drive, its “falseness” becomes delimited in that the affective dimension of such consciousness is, by its own standards, inescapably *real*.

Thrilled is as Thrilled Does

There is a curious statement towards the end of *Eros and Civilization*—very near Marcuse’s posing of the seemingly insoluble question: how can civilization generate true freedom—that contends: “The need to relax in the entertainments furnished by the culture industry is itself repressive, and its repression is a step towards freedom.” (224) Here is the double-edge of repressive desublimation, the notion that subjects (to borrow Burger King’s mantra) should “have it their way,” at least in terms of affective enjoyment. Indeed, an expansion of the notion of “relaxing,” per Marcuse’s quote, into being entertained, and hopefully thrillingly so, is also reasonable, given the wanton and ravenous appetites as reflected in mainstream culture. “Are you not entertained?!” is the benchmark; relaxation is only achievable after climax—the autotelic thrill-cycle to be repeated indefinitely. A human hamster-wheel? Perhaps. But much of humanity seems entirely cognizant of the choice—indeed, it is a preference. And, when compared to utopian and revolutionary visions of a post-capitalist society, requiring enormous upheaval and risk—for a global population that, instead of blundering along in ignorance, may well be very much aware of the staggering scale of power that currently rules over the world—the proposition that the immediacy of affective experience may represent, not merely *a way out*, but a site of personal agency, a foundation of self-determination, should not be cast aside as pure folly. Jameson’s own alignment with Marcuse’s emphasis on “phantasy” seems to admit room for the greater relevance and significant power of the subjective, affect-centered impulse when he says: “The impulse of fantasy, in which alone the pleasure principle remains pure and unrepressed . . . prepares for the world a future . . . a concrete acting out of the Utopian impulse.” (111)

The documentary film *Europe after the Rain: Dada and Surrealism* (1978), directed by Mick Gold and produced by the Arts Council of Great Britain, provides an interesting dramatization of conflicting attitudes regarding emancipation of the human spirit, one that echoes the contentious deliberations informing this discussion. The occasion, based on passages from Breton's *Second Manifesto* (154-5), is the interrogation by a Communist Party functionary of Breton, who has recently submitted his application for membership to the Party. The Communists, however, remain skeptical and are not prepared to have the Surrealists join their ranks, finding their "artistic escapades" to be largely bourgeois entertainments, not genuine proletarian culture/art. The fundamental objection is that if the Surrealists wish to contribute, it should be with direct revolutionary efforts and that, after the successful overthrow of capitalist power, attention can be turned to artistic matters. Here again, is the horse v. cart conundrum that haunts notions of subjective liberation. In resonance with the *rapture-telic* impulse, Breton's response reflects the prime valuation of an empowerment attached to expression and absorbing affective experience at the level of the subject: "You will only transform man's condition if you take into account his subjective needs in addition to his material ones."

Moreover, Breton's principle rebuttal to the Communist Party's critique of Surrealist activities as un-revolutionary serves to further insist upon the imagination as a crucial element in the transformation of the human condition and society: "You demand that the mind and the imagination must abdicate until the revolution has been accomplished. And against this we would say that, even if our work does not immediately help to precipitate the revolution, the job of interpreting man's condition is indispensable to building the post-revolutionary world." (*Europe*) This is to say that the plotting of a

course towards transcendent human liberation must include, as centrally as considerations of socio-political reconstruction, the simultaneous unfolding of newly emancipated subjective feeling and expression—such evolutions cannot wait, but are intrinsic to driving an effective (and affective), renewed human condition. Here the *Faking It* mode is particularly salient in its experimental performativity—which, in *rapture-telic* contexts can be usefully substituted for “the job of interpreting man’s condition,” in Breton’s quote above—meaning that experimenting with socio-cultural performances of subjectivity necessarily implies its own interpretative dimension, propositions for new modes of being.

What does it mean, for example, to present oneself, one’s beliefs, one’s products, in the limitless cyber-universe of the internet, *how* might that carry revolutionary capacities for social transformation? Certainly, the so recently monopolistic reign of corporate music production, which faces its extinction in the face of exponentially expanded consumer choice and independent production, via digital technologies, must see the newly emerged relationship between people and music as a game-changing force, driven by affective autonomy at the level of the subject. Or, what might be the social effects of the spectacularized everyday performances of West’s and Ellis’ characters, which focus on immediate affective/experiential gratifications, independent of product consumption and in a negative response to societal norms? Theirs is a micro-culture not dissimilar to those of counter-cultural communes, or underground movements (like punk rock, hip-hop, drug-culture, to name just a few examples), whose cultural independence is often driven by subjective/affective desire for fulfillment, and in non-trivial ways can turn into powers of change, on the market and at the ballot box. Indeed, with regard to the

recent, significant socio-political victories of marriage rights, “drug” de-criminalization, and the election of an African-American President, certainly a substantial amount of credit belongs to, and derives from, agencies mobilized at the level of everyday subjectivity and driven by undaunted, autonomous desire.

Indeed, when the concept of superstructural influence upon the the capitalist base is added to the dynamic—and, in industries like personalized communications, entertainment, and brand-loyal consumerist performances that enjoy increasing market share, the effect is indeed non-trivial—“giving the people what they want” becomes a productive mandate that may well harbor uncontrollable tides, ones that, even now, are exerting considerable influence on the development of global society. It is further arguable that such effects become exponentially amplified in a global *mediasphere* of ever-increasing interconnectivity and information-sharing and commerce, in addition to the empowerment of such communications and multi-media production at sites of non-corporate, everyday subjectivity. Capitalist hegemony is still profiting, exploiting, no doubt—but social demands for (thrilling) gratification are also moving vast sums of capital and power, and cultural influence, into decidedly subject-centered, affective (i.e. *rapture-telic*) industries. Jameson’s later quote, from *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, meant to limn the newness of this age and its strange reformulations, bears repeating for its dramatic representation of such superstructural seismicity rocking the productive base: “like lightning striking from the superstructure back to the base, fuses its unlikely materials into a gleaming lump.” (xiii) The “gleaming” aspect is particularly apt for its affective charge, and the “unlikely materials” may be

taken as reflective of new subject-based empowerment, not just of fulfilling affective experience, but of the autonomous creations thereof.

Of course, more generally, Jameson concurs with the overall deleterious effects of an inevitably repressive sublimation through the proliferation of subjective satisfactions, seeing them, again in *Marxism and Form*, as the worst and most pervading form of “thought control . . . degradation and dehumanization.”(107) But the case study examples of *Thrillology* exert pressure against such broad-based diagnosis. For example, the insurrectionist thrill-mode of the Jes Grew movement, and its underlying existential and behavioral philosophy as articulated by Papa Labas, ain’t hardly no mind control (to partake here, as does Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo*, in the attendant liberation from linguistic stricture); indeed, its spirit redefines the true, pure human condition as one *uncontrollable*, even within capitalized society. Moreover, the *Breaking It* mode of Eric Packer’s nihilism, in addition to Jes Grew’s anarchic rebellion against the status quo power structure, embody, at both individual and societal levels, respectively, a form of Adornian *negation*, championed by Jameson as the only legitimate reaction in the face of the “universal subservience” agenda pursued by capitalism’s “manipulation and brainwashing.”(108) The *Faking It* mode (which, as stated, is never ‘fake’), as well, carries its own negative activations, wherein *The Day of the Locust*’s characters have removed themselves from the entertainment industry by prioritizing their own personal, everyday dramas; while Victor Ward’s headlong, hallucinatory quest, albeit perhaps obviously, is every bit a negation of the standard requirements of his career, and social behavior norms. And, as intimated earlier, in the final *Faking It* case study, the worshipful addictions to technological enhancements of personal experience and

expression—as exhibited by *iPad* functionalities, and the freedom of access to information and global communication manifest within internet connectivity, writ large—appears, at this juncture in its development and proliferation, to be carrying, at least, equal parts empowerment alongside its techno-dependencies, affective titillations, and consumerist mandates.

Prophecy as Proposition

How dubious and dismayed, of course, Marxian warriors like Marcuse and Breton, and countless others, should be at the suggestion that human society might *play and party* its way into liberation, into a better world. And, of course, such developments are by no means *fait accompli*. Like the vision of global social revolution, when it comes to prognosticating the future of the human condition, of course, theory remains restricted to the theoretical—*only time will tell*—but the unfolding shall doubtlessly carry its own kind of thrill, for better or worse. Indeed, for all Marcuse's stature as an undaunted champion of the Marxian vision, the courageous open-endedness of *Eros and Civilization's* theoretical trajectories, like these *rapture-telic* propositions, should signal new modes of thinking and feeling bound to immediately accessible action. In its own way, this thrillological analysis finds a hope-filled potential, as opposed to a depressing fatal flaw, in the immemorial human appetite for affective thrill and rapture. Marcuse himself seems, refreshingly, to admit to the lingering mystery of capitalist domination's end-game, ever-difficult to prophesy:

The insights contained in the metaphysical notion of Eros were driven underground. They survived, in eschatological distortion, in many heretic moments, in the hedonistic philosophy. Their history has still to be written...
(126)

Sharing an appraisal of such indeterminate destiny, the *rapture-telos* entertains the notion that it may not be, exclusively, a mobilized overthrow of the capitalist system that brings about radical change, but that perhaps the seeds of its implosion may well have been sowed, especially, by its dependence on the inexhaustible exploitation, in our contemporary era, of human desire. As a result, the capitalist production structure and megacultural humanity stand bound-together by a taste for rapture that has grown to ravenous addiction, one from which there is no weaning; an interdependency, in which, for Jameson, “the power elite often seems . . . as much a pawn as a master of the enormous forces at its disposition.” (*Marxism* 107) We either arrange our society around its further, mutually-beneficial consummations, or tear down and set ablaze civilization as we know it in a mass-frustration of withdrawal. Not revolution, but apocalypse (another thrilling performance, indeed). Against a comprehensive, dismissive diagnosis of repressive desublimation, as far as the meditations of this Conclusion are concerned, *Thrillology* works to create some *wiggle-room*, some breathing-space, for the argument that affective fulfillment *can* contribute to a true liberation at the level of the subject, which also has a potential to transfer its energy to similar empowerment at the level of society.

Of course, the main object of *Thrillology* is decidedly *not* to determine whether the *rapture-telos* is the savior or grave-digger of liberated human civilization. While the dread-inspiring implications of that Janus-faced conundrum have dominated these concluding pages—and certainly warrant consideration in future works—the central purpose of this project remains the exposition of the *rapture-telos* phenomenon, in its myriad forms, effects, and affective intensities, whose widespread influence deserves

rigorous critical attention. As previously stated, these case studies and theoretical elaborations represent a beginning, an initial frame of analysis, for the further interrogation of *thrilling* elements of human experience.

NOTES

¹ *Megacultural*—indicating a phenomenon culturally relevant to and involving very large sectors (across nationality, class, generation) of global society, that suffuses through myriad channels, including cultural inheritance, ritual, word of mouth, shared identity performances, etc. *Megacultural* seeks distinction from *mass-cultural* connotations, usually associated with specifically large-scale, media-disseminated connectivities; or, alternately, is associated with “the masses,” or mainstream (sensibilities), whereas *megacultural* inclusivity transcends class-distinction (see Chapter Two, “Leveling the Playing Field, p.102).

² *Thrillology* will employ the the term psycho-emotional in the interest of connecting, while disambiguating, aspects of the psyche based more in intellectual/conceptual dimensions of response, in contrast to emotional aspects centered on feelings and affective states.

³ Ben Highmore *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, Joe Moran *Reading the Everyday*, Michael Sheringham *Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life*

⁴ Baudrillard concludes that legal authority is undermined in that its inefficacy is exposed: if it cannot identify true crime—how can the law be adequately enforced, how can its power be legitimate?

⁵ Huizinga sees *fun* as a basic concept not further reducible, if even definable beyond the English term. Huizinga proposes *aardigheid*, from Dutch and German linguistic stems (‘aard’) associated with ‘art’ (and ‘wesen’), which indicate ‘ways of being’ that, in turn, evoke notions of the Latin *ardere*, “to burn,” as in ardor and ardent. In any case, theorization of the *rapture-telos* pushes beyond the irreducibility of fun to add the dimension of thrill, or *frisson*.

⁶ *Civilization and its Discontents* 11.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze *What is Philosophy?* (pg. 7)

⁸ *Making It* distinguishes its focus on an expanded conception of success from tropes associated more specifically with notions of the American Dream. Even so, a brief excursion into that conceptual terrain proves worthwhile. Lawrence Chenoweth, for example, in *The American Dream of Success* (1974) identifies a paradox at the core of American cultural conceptions of success, where “individual competition in which a man should work for his self interest and defer present gratification in the hope of attaining future wealth, fame and power” is at odds with socio-cultural mandates that encourage “citizen to be happy in the present . . . concentrating on leisure, entertainment and the purchase of material products.” (3) Not only, however, does another increasingly pervasive notion of American dreaming gesture towards “having it all,” the success

raptures of the protagonists examined here seem to insist upon such inclusivity. Instead, the desires that Chenoweth sees at cross purpose feed into one another, and manifest a ‘happiness’ (or, through this study’s lens, an intense affect of thrill), whose bounties of leisure and consumption both reify and perform through their “gratification,” to use Chenoweth’s term, the very success that the bifurcation of his analysis seems to preclude.⁹ In *Culture and Consumption II*, McCracken traces the history American cultural relationships with the automobile, including the central cultural function that the purchase of (ever more spectacular) automobiles exemplified, as connecting cars to “a larger ideological enterprise: notions of mobility in social and international space... the automobile was a consumer good that didn’t merely claim, or show, or seek to prove mobility: it *was* mobility. Moreover, it had all the things that clothing and houses did—currency, style, visible expense... status.”(76-77)

¹⁰ Cybernetic systems are characterized by interactive symbioses involving subjects/actants and their environments (including cultural contexts) in which all the elements assembled have the capacity for *feed-back* interactivity, in other words, for affecting, and being affected by, one another.

¹¹ Sherman, Alex (January 3, 2012). [NBC Gets \\$4 Million for Super Bowl Ads, Sells Out Inventory](#). *Bloomberg LP*. Retrieved January 3, 2012.

¹² Bauder, David (February 6, 2012). ["Super Bowl Ratings Record: Giants-Patriots Game Is Highest-Rated TV Show In US History"](#). Huffington Post. Retrieved February 7, 2012.

¹³ James B. Twitchell elaborates on this phenomenon in *Living It Up: America’s Love Affair with Luxury*, which examines the “downstreaming” of brands formerly identified as *luxé* (Gucci, Calvin Klein, Fendi, Armani, etc.), in the late-1908s, via such companies’ expansion of product lines into lower-priced analogs made more widely available in mass-retail outlets. (44)

¹⁴ Horovitz, Bruce, “Crowdsourcing rules for Super Bowl ads” *USA Today*, Jan 21, 2013.

¹⁵ See McCracken *Culture and Consumption I* (1988), *Culture and Consumption II* (2005); *Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury* (2002); Lash and Lury *Global Culture Industry* (2007); Ritzer *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (1999); Mitchell *Me++* (2003); Himpe *Advertising is Dead, Long Live Advertising* (2006).

¹⁶ Note that American professional sports teams are always crowned “World Champions,” not just victors of their respective leagues.

¹⁷ For Kellner, the interpenetration of spectacle and everyday reality is an even more explicit thesis, and a phenomenon that he sees more generally as an effect of the pandemic pervasion of ‘technospectacle’ into seemingly every aspect of public life: “During the past decades, the culture industries have multiplied media spectacles in novel spaces and sites, and spectacle itself is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life. ...with the development of new multimedia

and information technologies, technospectacles have been decisively shaping the contours and trajectories of present-day societies and cultures.” (23-4)

¹⁸ Reed’s novel quotes James Wheldon Johnson’s usage of the term in discussing African-American poetry (in addition to an uncredited reference to its ragtime associations), but its original appearance, it should be appended, comes courtesy of Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

¹⁹ Maya Deren’s in-depth study of Haitian Voodoo, in *The Divine Horsemen*, points out that the manifestation of the *Erzulie loa* “gone wrong...combined with rage and despair” represents a pointedly differentiated version of the goddess *Erzulie Ge-Rouge*, a distinction that casts her powers and spiritual influence into its own particular contexts. (143)

²⁰ See also: Andolsen, Jeffrey E. *Conjure in African American Society*; Maurice Hamington *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood*; D. Roberts “The Paradox of Silence and Display: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Women and Contemporary Contradictions in Black Female Sexuality.” in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. Ed. Bernadette J. Brooten; Martin, Kameelah L. *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature*

²¹ A superlative moniker used in the business world to denote exceptional power and financial accomplishment, but perhaps first popularized by Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

²² See Vietch, *American Superrealism* (1997); Bloom, *Nathanael West* (1986); Madden/Apple, *The Cheaters and the Cheated* (1973); Lewis, “Days of Wrath and Laughter: West” (1965); Kernan, “The Mob Tendency” (1965).

²³ West’s awareness of such performative intra-appropriations should also be acknowledged as prescient to later 20th-century cultural evolutions. Self-representation in social media, in conjunction with the pervasion of entertainment industry influence across countless media platforms and into seemingly every aspect of everyday life, has reinforced the valuation of thrilling self-dramatization.

²⁴ Namely, that of an historicist interpretation that sees West’s fiction as a prophetic warning of incipient American fascism, latent in the boredom and frustrated alienation of a bankrupt society: “. . .this nihilism is a prerequisite for fascism . . . West convincingly articulates a scenario under which that “exotic” ideology might well emerge *within* the American grain.” (131)

²⁵ From Aiken’s *The Collected Stories*, published 1934.

²⁶ Sennett’s direct quotations of Rousseau, in his essay “Man as Actor” from P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity Culture Reader*, indicate the original source as *Letter to M. D’Alembert* (see Works Cited: *Politics and the Arts: The Letter M. d’Alembert*, for English translation citation).

²⁷ Within Apple's computational universe, proper, the successful sale of any given Apple device often multiplies into an extensive compatible-product line as users *buy in* to the brand experience. Similar arrays of devices, and corollary operating systems, increasingly populate the market and enjoy widespread popularity, including: Google Play/Apps, Nexus/Android Apps, Microsoft/WindowsPhone/Tablet, Samsung Galaxy, Blackberry Phone/Apps.

²⁸ Social network systems, such as Facebook, and its precursor, MySpace, are perhaps the most evident examples. But other personalized on-line venues, such as those increasingly constructed by celebrities and professional athletes, serve similar functions. Hearn's own work on Reality TV, examines related tropes involving spectacularization of subjective identities originating in the the everyday public sphere.

²⁹ Potentially problematic complicity emerges between consumers and producers in the validation of value-systems centered as much on driving (if not prioritizing) sales, as on introducing beneficial technologies, wherein the *frisson* of techno-entertainment may well eclipse techno-utility, as a prime selling point. Pricing being driven by factors unrelated to computational efficiency can also have the effect of swaying significant trends of technological research, development, and, consequently, availability. Such factors exemplify Postman's conception of a "supra-ideology," (1986, p. 87) linking consumerism and tech-industry, that affects the entire system.

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