The Ethos of Dissent: Epideictic Rhetoric and the Democratic Function of American Protest and Countercultural Literature

Jeffrey Lorino Jr
Marquette University

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FUNCTION OF AMERICAN PROTEST AND
COUNTERCULTURAL LITERATURE

by

Jeffrey Thomas Lorino, Jr., B.A., M.A.

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ABSTRACT
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My dissertation establishes a theoretical framework, the *literary epideictic*, for reading the African American social protest literature of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, and the American countercultural literature of Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey. I argue that epideictic rhetoric affords insight into *how* these authors' narratives embody a post-WWII "ethos of dissent," a counterdiscourse that emerges out of a climate of dynamism deadlocked with controlling ideologies. Epideictic rhetoric commends or censures a particular individual, institution, or social practice, preserves or revises value systems, and builds social cohesion. Postwar American society provides "epideictic exigencies" for these authors, i.e., historical events that inform each novel's counter-narrative – the script and myth of the black male rapist in *Native Son*, the nonrecognition of African Americans in the social and political sphere in *Invisible Man*, the Cold War's ideology of domestic containment and desire in *On the Road*, and emerging measures of social control in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. These narratives reveal how their respective social environments impede the realization of democratic freedoms for individuals who refuse to adhere to cultural codes of acquiescence, and they feature alternative values that clash with the dominant social forces attempting to control individual activity.

Chapter one applies Sarah Ahmed's "affective economy of fear" to Wright's *Native Son* and helps elucidate Bigger Thomas's traumatic fear as the impetus for his actions, an intense fear embedded in violent histories of contact between black and white bodies. Chapter two attends to Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the theme of invisibility, which calls for the social and political recognition of African Americans. In chapter three, I argue that Kerouac recodes postwar desire in *On the Road*, and his novel offers a vision of mobility and authenticity that is akin to a Deleuzian becoming, producing a shift in American values within a culture of containment. Finally, chapter four examines Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* and how the narrative captures an emerging culture of surveillance and *parens patriae*, and counters with the notion, "play as power."

 "The Ethos of Dissent" offers two new insights: 1) my dissertation contributes to literary scholarship by providing a new framework for reading authors who are not ordinarily compared, but who, as Ellison proposes, "report what is going on in their particular area of the American experience" during the postwar period; and 2) it adds to rhetorical criticism by extending epideictic rhetoric from the public civic arena (oratory) to the private literary realm, as well as contributes to a previously unexplored relationship between *affect* theory (in a broad sense) and epideictic rhetoric. While scholars have attended to the function of communal values uniting an audience, there is no work delving into the affective components of the epideictic process. These social protest and counter-cultural novels strive to affect readers emotionally by incorporating *emotive discourse* that relates to their targeted issues, and the novels instigate a moral examination of the narratively depicted realities against the democratic ideals by critiquing the broad values of racism, conformism, and authoritarianism. Ultimately, the authors and their texts expose failing value systems, promote positive values alluding to a democratic interdependence, and imagine alternative possibilities to the current state of social and political affairs.

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Jeffrey T. Lorino, Jr., B.A., M.A.

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I also want to thank Dr. Kris Ratcliffe and Dr. Cedric Burrows. Dr. Ratcliffe helped me in the early stages of developing my dissertation topic, and she paraphrased my argument during the DQE at a moment when I was at a loss for words. After Dr. Ratcliffe pursued an opportunity elsewhere, I needed to replace a committee member. Dr. Burrows graciously accepted. I am grateful for all the talks we had in his office (which is exquisitely decorated with vinyl album covers), and for the times Dr. Burrows would drive to my side of town to meet and to talk not only about the dissertation, but also about movies, music, and everything else.

Dr. Sorby has been the wise sage. During the DQE, Dr. Sorby helped me realize that the theoretical focus of the dissertation should be on epideictic rhetoric. More importantly, due to the seemingly inherent fact that a dissertator can undergo feelings of inadequacy, I remember one time I was in such a state, and during a meeting, Dr. Sorby said, "to write a dissertation is an exercise in learning *how* to write a dissertation." Those words picked me up and got me back to the keyboard that day.

I also want to thank Dr. Curran for all of his support. Coming into Marquette University, I had planned on focusing on Early Modern literature and John Milton. However, things change, and I ended up switching my field to American Literature and Rhetoric. I would be lying if I said that I didn't question that decision, for various reasons, but one of them being losing out on the opportunity to work with Dr. Curran. However, Dr. Curran continued to support and help me along, beginning all the way back to when I was as an undergrad, and all the way through my graduate career.

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these days, and this includes their familiarity with electronic devices over what may be deemed more conventional ways of writing and revising. This helped me immensely in how I structure my classrooms and I am grateful for that lesson.

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Being in grad school and having a child with a wife who worked third shift as a nurse was challenging, to say the least. My hardworking wife, Nikki, would leave for work at night and have to sleep the next day. If I did not have classes to teach or to attend, I was lucky to be able to spend one-on-one time with Lukin. However, I did not have a lot of extra time for research. Jeanne Kuske took Lukin every Friday since he was born, and more! The times she pitched in to help my family in various ways was astronomical. I could not have gotten this done without all of her steady help over the years. It has meant so much to me. Dave Kuske has always provided wisdom, support, and a helping hand when things went wrong or got tough. Thank you both for helping me along.

In December 2013, Nikki and I found out we were expecting again. On 2-7-14 we found out we were having twins (I appreciate the mathematical irony there). I have to thank my dad for helping me through a very tough time as I contemplated quitting grad school to work full-time because of our growing family. He helped me stay the course and has supported our family from the very start, most notably through his positive attitude and his "never say never" mentality. Thank you to my Mom, and Ken, and my sister HollyAnn for their love and support. And to our good friends, Amber and Carl Carstens, Jodi and Nathan Tonarelli – thank you for being there and helping us make it through. I have to thank Scott Britten and MATC for providing me part-time employment at MATC just a couple of months after Cogan and Dean were born. In the end, we all found a way to make this PhD work. It required 2-3 part-time jobs, but I chipped away at it, and I am proud of what I was able to accomplish with the help of all of these individuals.

I've talked about the boys, but now I have to officially "shout out" to them. Lukin, you were the first to change my life. In the early days, it was just you and me a lot of the time. Oh, how I cherish those memories! All the times we would go out on adventures to Batteries Plus, or to the park to walk our beloved Charlie "Geeters," or to the MU library to return and pick up books, and much, much more. Or the nights when Mom was working, and I would chase you around the house and we would exhaust ourselves laughing; and then I would read *Paradise Lost*

to you at bedtime. We have had so much fun together and I am so happy that I chose you more than the work. I had to work a lot of late nights, and this project probably took more time because of our family, but it was most definitely worth it. You taught me how to love.

Cogan and Dean: you two have also changed my life immensely. The two of you had some challenges right in the very beginning, namely, 46 days in the NICU, but we all got through it. I have to thank the wonderful NICU staff at St. Joseph's hospital for excellent care. I do, however, cherish all of the hours I spent with both of you in the NICU. As soon as I turned in the Ellison chapter, I hightailed it to St. Joe's and I was there practically everyday until you two came home. Some of my favorite memories will always be the times I got to give you two "kangaroo-care," where I would snuggle each of you, and talk to you both about how much fun the five of us were going to have for a lifetime once we broke out of that joint. And when we finally did get to come home, it was surreal to finally have our family together in one place – our "home." Since then, I have enjoyed watching the two of you develop your personalities; Cogan, you are so contemplative, and yet extremely goofy, and you give the best "Bear" hugs! And Dean, you are a character, always on the move, talkin' a mile a minute, truly reminiscent of Neal Cassady, aka, Speed Limit. The beginning indeed was tough, but I am grateful for the strength our family has developed. At one point, I really wanted to quit. *At one point* is a vast understatement. But I do not want you, Lukin, Cogan, and Dean to ever quit on something you love, or something that you have worked so hard on. So thank you for helping me push through.

And lastly, my wife, my partner, my friend, Nikki. The world can never know how much you have sacrificed in the last eight years. You are truly a selfless person, and you have done everything you could do to make sure I had time to research and write. I definitely could not have done this without your love and support. That is a given. I feel like you should have an honorary part of this degree, so I dedicate this dissertation to you. At one point, during the dissertation defense, I saw you sitting there so intently, practically mouthing the words to the questions because you were such an integral part of the project. You were my personal committee, and you would listen, and ask questions, and engage me in late-night discussions on the authors, texts, and theories. It was so cool to see you there and to see you so engaged, adorning the sacred *On the Road* dress. That moment will stay with me forever.

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"What I am trying to do is grasp the implicit systems which determine our most familiar behavior without our knowing it. I am trying to find their origin, to show their formation, the constraint they impose upon us; I am therefore trying to place myself at a distance from them and to show how one could escape."
(Michel Foucault, interview with John K. Simon, *Partisan Review*, 1971)

"As I see it, the novel has always been bound up with the idea of nationhood. What are we? Who are we? What has the experience of the particular group been? How did it become this way? What is it that stopped us from attaining the ideal?"
(Ralph Ellison, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy," 1967)

"I've also written a 550 page novel called ON THE ROAD which is a vision of America that is so wild none of the publishers understand it – but it will be discovered later."
(Jack Kerouac, Letter "To Stella Sampas," 1952)

"What Americans want to learn from their writers is how to live."
(Saul Bellow, interview with Jason Epstein, *New York Times Book Review*, 1971)

Chapter I: Introduction
The American Protest and Countercultural Novel:
A *Literary Epideictic* Function of Democracy

The social advancements following World War II engendered new forms of prosperity in

a myriad of capacities (wealth, property, education, mobility, etc.), which resulted in a new wave

of individual freedoms. This progress ultimately led to a new set of values that affected

individuals across race, gender, and class, for example, and at the same time, delineated the larger

cultural climate of the postwar period.[1] As a result, postwar American society appeared to

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[1] See Richard Abrams, *America Transformed: Sixty Years of Revolutionary Change, 1941-2001*.
Cambridge University Press, 2006; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; and Peter Kuznik and James Gilbert, eds. *Rethinking Cold War Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001. Abrams ambitiously interprets a vast history of the United States from the Second World War onward. He argues that this time period was "revolutionary," transforming American way of life socially, politically, and economically, creating progressive change over the latter half of the century. He writes, "the change that had the most profound and widespread effect was the unprecedentedly swift rise of Americans to affluence," which "would contribute significantly to at least three other developments of profound social significance: the transformations of racial relations, the breaching of historic boundaries between male and female roles, and the breaking of virtually all traditional limits on sexual behavior" (x).

promise an expanded reach of individual agency, packaged in what Ralph Ellison calls the "ideal

of an *open* society, … in which a great landmass allowed peoples to move about, to change their

identities if they would, to advance themselves, to achieve results based on their own talents and

techniques."[2] However, the tension mounts when social forces attempt to control these newly

found potentialities, as a postwar society that promises democratic ideals for all individuals

necessitates ideological submissiveness in order to gain entrance into the "open society." For

instance, the "American Dream" serves as such a controlling ideology and represents a core,

postwar cultural narrative, for Lee Artz explains how the American Dream is a "dream of

consumption" that is "defended by an ideology of individual merit that gently obscures collective

subordinate conditions and experiences." The American Dream codes objects and behaviors as

living out the "good life," which include the home and the pursuit of wealth, and it possesses

political implications in terms of how institutions package what types of behavior and beliefs lead

to the attainment of the American Dream.[3] Adherence to normative social conditions, the

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Roszak is the leading theorist who coined the term "counter culture" and he investigates the social and cultural developments occurring during the years 1942-1972 or the "Age of Affluence" as he calls it (xi). He writes, "What I have called 'the counter culture' took shape between these two points in time as a protest that was grounded paradoxically not in the failure, but in the success of a high industrial economy. It arose not out of misery but out of plenty" (xii). This rise in economic growth increased opportunities and middle class wealth following WWII, which led to the belief – mostly among a white middle class – that the universal abundance decreased poverty and conflict. However, a discord emerges as opportunities are prevalent, but not equally accessible for all peoples. On the other hand, in *Rethinking Cold War Culture,* Peter Kuznik and James Gilbert assert that Americans experienced the changing culture after WWII in various ways that "reflected profound differences between generations, genders, race, classes, regions, and religious groups" (11). For a more racialized historical perspective, see David Pilgrim, *Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia: Using Objects of Intolerance to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice*. Ferris State University. Web. 23 Oct. 2013; Randall Woods, *The Quest for Identity: America Since 1945*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Essentially, the coming of World War II initiated another wave of black migration from the South to the North and to the West, the induction of African Americans into the military, and Executive Orders calling for equal treatment for all persons in the armed forces without regard to race (Pilgrim). From the work of groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (founded in 1942) and leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights Acts were legislated in 1957,1960, 1964, and 1968, although largely ineffective (Pilgrim).

[2] Ralph Ellison, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Modern Library, 1995, p. 761.

[3] Lee Artz and Dr. B. A. O. Murphy, *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000, p. 275. Also, Lawrence R. Samuel provides a cultural history of the American Dream, stating that in the postwar years, the American Dream "turned into a ticky-tacky house filled with the latest appliances. Everybody seemed to want to own the same things … this common desire for the 'good life' creating a more homogenous, less individualistic society." See Samuel, *The American Dream: A Cultural*

"implicit systems" influencing individual behavior, demarcates those who conform to the status quo from those who are resistant – individuals who reject the sociocultural scripts are categorized as "other," or as "outsiders," and postwar American society fails to reify democratic principles for individuals that do not accept the structures in place.

Although the postwar period is viewed as a time of cultural conformity, it also witnesses the rise of a counterdiscourse of *nonconformity* – captured literarily – that challenges the accessibility of the nation's "open society." During the postwar period, which I define as the years of World War II as well as the Cold War period that follows, the American novelists Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Jack Kerouac, and Ken Kesey begin protesting societal ills, or countering dominant cultural narratives, both of which expose the limiting consequences of centralized systems of thought and behavior. Scholars do not typically discuss African American protest authors and white countercultural writers in the same critical context; Wright's and Ellison's novels belong to the protest tradition and have maintained a political bent, whereas Kerouac's and Kesey's literature is lumped into the broader "countercultural movement" that emerges in the 1950s, while their work is predominantly viewed as aesthetic and apolitical.[4] But,

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History. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012, p. 57. More alarming, and more demonstrative of the American Dream as a controlling ideology in the postwar period, is the historical "American Dream" travelling pageant in which thousands of "national treasures" "were taken by four trucks on a fifty-city tour in 1956," and included objects like Teddy Roosevelt's "pocket watch," a replica of "the first lightbulb," and "war trophies" like paintings belonging to Adolf Hitler (53). Such an event like this only serves to control the way people think of attaining individual successes evidenced by material "things" couched in a political context, one which filters down into everyday, individual life.

[4] Within the literary history of the American protest novel, scholarship recognizes texts that address deplorable social conditions and grants them a fundamental politicization that is closely affiliated with subject and theme – a politicization of which the countercultural texts of Kerouac, and to a lesser extent, Kesey, seemingly lack. In her article, "Novels of Civic Protest," Cecelia Tichi defines the social protest novel as one that "expose[s] moral and social injustice in a bid to reshape public opinion and thus to hasten positive social change in the United States of America and beyond." See Cecelia Tichi, "Novels of Civic Protest," in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. Eds. Leonard Cassuto, et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 393. Tichi designates Upton Sinclair as a monumental figure of literature for social reform due to the conjunction of Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) and the social action that followed – namely, the Federal Meat Inspection Act that regulated industrial meat contamination and the Food and Drug Act of 1906. Tichi credits Sinclair for giving voice to the American literary tradition of protest writing that includes Harriet Beecher Stowe's premier protest novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), and establishes the literary foundation for John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) that will follow. The protest tradition incorporates many novels targeting various social issues: class privilege in Stephen Crane's

these four authors and their novels, *Native Son, Invisible Man, On the Road,* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, grapple with social forces, even if only narratively and from "a distance" to lived reality; they attempt to suss out the implicit systems and values that order individuals about, and they display new ways of thinking about postwar existence that resist the power-constraints imposed upon the individual. The narratives explore the abstract power relations that Foucault is touching upon in the epigraph, and they offer a form of escape, or line of flight, from a society of normalization and control by proposing new values that challenge the societal bankruptcy of democratic liberty.[5]

In grouping these authors together, I do not intend to dismiss the category of race, or deny the reality of Wright's or Ellison's black experience, and while these four authors occupy

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Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893); women's rights and suffragism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915); gendered roles in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963); and environmental issues in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) just to name a few.

Scholars view these novels and the way they interrogate, explicitly or implicitly, the society that produces these injustices as politicized. The divide between social protest and countercultural literature, I argue, stems from the public and popular (mis)reception of the political efficacy of Kerouac's and Kesey's work that is the result of their inclusion within the countercultural movement as a whole, which ultimately leads literary critics to focus more on the image of these countercultural writers as *iconoclasts* rather than attend to their sociopolitical literary significance. Take, for example, the explicitly stated objective proposed by Timothy Leary, arguably the most famous countercultural icon, in the foreword to *Counterculture Through the Ages*: "the focus of counterculture is the power of ideas, images, and artistic expression, not the acquisition of personal and political power." See Christopher Gair. *The American Counterculture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. x. It is baffling how someone as deeply dedicated and intellectually involved with the movement as Leary could possibly disassociate the social power of language from the rhetorical effect of artistic expression. It is time to reevaluate the relationship between the countercultural and the political and it appears that Leary makes a fundamental mistake in thinking the two are mutually exclusive. Postwar increases in affluence led to the development of an unprecedented mass society and the permeation of an emerging "popular" culture, and rather than creating a rift in society between the cultural and political, these advancements ushered in new beliefs, values, and norms that shaped the way citizens related to the government, and the way citizens related to each other. Indeed, the authors and the texts address social problems that are related to public life and appeal to readers who are concerned with questions of authority.

[5] On escape, Foucault writes, "For if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight." See Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), p. 794. "Lines of flight" comes from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. They write that lines of flight are "marked by quanta and defined by decoding and deterritorialization," which is a "coming undone," or "decoding" process (222). Tamsin Lorraine says of "lines of flight," "Deleuze and Guattari deliberately designed *A Thousand Plateaus* to foster lines of flight in thinking – thought-movements that would creatively evolve the connection with the lines of thought of other thought-movements, producing new ways of thinking." See the entry for "Lines of

two separate literary classifications with arguably different agendas, rather than approach race as an identifier of the author or of the novel's subject, I look at Wright's and Ellison's focus on race as it extends to a historical "situatedness" in a post-WWII social context.[6] This situatedness pertains to the "social environment," which is a term I use to represent the postwar zeitgeist of potentiality deadlocked with control. In discussing Bigger Thomas's situation, Wright offers up the term "social environment" as that which "supplies the instrumentalities through which the organism expresses itself," and he points out the social environment's role in determining individual behavior; and Max Scheler illustrates how the social environment can operate as a stable entity for individuals within a given time period due to the presence of communal values. Scheler defines the "milieu" apart from the physical world-setting, referring to it as "the value-world experienced in practice," and the milieu remains constant in its "structure" regardless of whether or not objects or bodies undergo changes.[7]

Flight" in Adrian Parr, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p. 148.

[6] I use the term "situatedness" (and the terms "historicity" and "throwness" somewhat interchangeably), to refer to an individual and historical facticity that includes properties of race, class and nationality, for example, as well as the historical, cultural, political moments that comprise individual existence. I use the term historicity because of the term's application to an individual's situatedness in history, in time and space. For instance, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* defines "historicity" as denoting the nature of human existence that is located in specific "concrete and historical circumstances." See "historicity." *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Bunnin, Nicholas and Jiyuan Yu (eds). Blackwell Publishing, 2004. Blackwell Reference Online. 21 December 2014. Wilhelm Dilthey views historicity as defining the temporal structure of individual existence in relation to the expanse of history that roots the individual's existence in time. See Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1995, p. 166. And Heidegger's conception of historicity viewed individuality as "a life history, a happening, an unfolding between birth and death and a flowing outward into the future and backward into the past." See Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Heidegger's notion of "becoming," or an unfolding existence includes two temporal structures: "throwness" and "futurity." "Throwness" insists that Dasein always finds itself "thrown" into a particular cultural setting, with certain parameters revolving around choices and expectations already set. "Futurity" pertains to the future directedness of Dasein's being-in-the-world and includes a striving to accomplish something. Furthermore, Heidegger claims that human existence is embedded within a larger communal context as part of the "throwness." The authors, the characters, and the activities all occur in a postwar American "throwness" that the authors challenge and grapple with. All of the texts I am dealing with confront their "throwness," whether that "throwness" has to do with race, economic status, or institutional power struggles.

[7] The "social environment" is a prominent concept in Wright's work, and he invests the term with a racial context in order to indict the space in which black and white bodies navigate. In his essay, "How Bigger was Born," Wright professes, "I don't mean to say that I think that environment *makes* consciousness, but I do say that I felt and still feel that the environment supplies the instrumentalities through which the

Correspondingly, each author constructs a narrative within a social environment that pertains to the postwar situatedness of increased individuality and opportunity, even if to varying degrees for various people. Therefore, I do not equate the impact of a white supremacist society that oppresses and calls for the conformity of African Americans to the impact of an overabundant society that shapes and establishes middle class values maintaining an insensitivity to the underclassed. Yet, historically, the development of a movement that struggled against unjust treatment of African Americans and the development of a generation of white countercultural men and women that rejected the homogeneity of a bourgeois society occurred alongside each other, and both literary movements take up the issue of national identity, or as Ellison puts it, both represent how different groups contribute to this defining era in terms of *who* and *what* America is in the present moment.[8] Take, for example, Ellison's mission statement in the essay, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy," where he claims that citizens in postwar American society are in most need of the "novel" because "race is by no means the only thing which divides" the country, and he concludes that America is "at once very unified, and at the same time diversified." This predicament, he states, "gives the writer of novels a role beyond

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organism expresses itself, and if that environment is warped or tranquil, the mode and manner of behavior will be affected toward deadlocking tensions or orderly fulfillment and satisfaction." See Richard Wright, "How Bigger was Born," in *Native Son*. Introduction by Arnold Rampersad. New York: HarperPerennial, 2005, p. 442. Max Scheler writes, "that which we call 'milieu,' or the value-world as effectively experienced in practice, does not undergo alterations in content simply because we travel or change our residence, etc. Although the objects that we meet during such changes do undergo alterations, the milieu *itself*, with its *structure*, through which any thing is a milieu-thing (not only a 'value-thing' but also a 'thing of the environment'), remains completely constant throughout such bodily changes of place." See Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 142-143. Jörg Dürrschmidt discusses Scheler's theory and refers to it as an " 'alphabet' through which the individual reads the environment as a meaningful and practically structured configuration…. [which] serves as a relatively stable filter through which the individual experiences different environments." See Dürrschmidt, *Everyday Lives in the Global City: The Delinking of Locale and Milieu*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 47.

[8] Foucault too discusses collective identity in terms of power relations, stating that power struggles often surround questions of "Who are we?" and the struggles are a "refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which *ignore who we are individually*," stating that a potential target in the modern time is "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are." See Foucault, "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), p. 781; 785.

that of entertainer" by incurring the "responsibility of reporting what is going on in his particular area of the American experience."[9]

If one reads these major postwar novelists as writing during a time when new opportunities were becoming available for individuals of different racial, sexual, and economic status, and reads their novels as exposing how their respective social environments fail to embody these democratic principles, the four writers occupy a literary spectrum of a post-WWII ethos of dissent. By "ethos of dissent," I mean the counterdiscourse that emerges out of the post-WWII climate of dynamism met with powerlessness, a counterdiscourse revealing the lack of harmony when certain individual realities are measured against ideals. Rather than portray characters reaping the individual progresses promised by an "open society," I maintain that the four authors I have chosen, writing during this tumultuous time in American history, expose a regime promoting a specious autonomy. Postwar dissent festers when social constraints are imposed upon democratic ideals, and individuals begin to reject the social strata that fail to reify the promulgated rights of freedom and liberty, and what emerges is a dual moral dilemma regarding, among many things, the reality of equal rights for African Americans, and the promotion of a questionably "shared" middle-class value system.

I argue that epideictic rhetoric affords insight into *how* the social protest and countercultural narratives unveil a disingenuous social order. Epideictic is the branch of rhetoric concerned with "praise and blame," acknowledging or disparaging the merit of a particular social practice, preserving or recreating values, and building social cohesion (among the many conventions to be discussed shortly in more detail).[10] Furthermore, epideictic addresses issues of

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[9] Ellison, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy." In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, p. 763.

[10] Aristotle defined epideictic rhetoric as "ceremonial oratory of display [that] either praises or censures" some thing, which is also concerned with the "present." For an Aristotelian overview of Epideictic, see Book I, Chapter 3 in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004, 1358b, p. 12-14. Lawrence Rosenfield refers to epideictic as a rhetoric of "acknowledgement and disparagement in "The Practical Celebration of Epideictic," in *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*. Ed. Eugene E. White. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press,

the present, and relies on *amplification* in order to operate as "an instrument for addressing

private and public 'dis-ease,' a discomfort with the status quo."[11] The novels, therefore, critique

and celebrate certain values related to the emerging postwar, democratic society, and the

epideictic rhetorical project is *affective*. By affective, I mean that the social protest and

countercultural novels in my dissertation strive to affect readers emotionally and instigate a moral

examination of the narratively depicted realities against the democratic ideals. Furthermore, the

novels incorporate *emotive discourse* that relates to their targeted social issues, and this affective

component reveals the oppressive social and cultural conditions that operate under the guise of a

purported democracy, critiques the broad values of racism, conformism, and authoritarianism (in

a sense), and calls forth positive values that promote a democratic *interdependence*.

Each of the novels approaches different themes and social implications, and each novel

engages in its own affective process; yet, the novels all carry out an epideictic process because

postwar American society witnesses power relations that impede the realization of democratic

ideals, or worse, they threaten the safety and personal freedoms of certain individuals. The events

that lead to this democratic defect make up what I refer to as the *epideictic exigency* – each author

takes up particular social and cultural conditions that provide an urgent need for change in the

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1980, pp. 131-155. For more on the importance of values and establishing social cohesion, see Chaïm
Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1969.

[11] The term, "public 'dis-ease'" comes from Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard's article, "The Public Value of
Epideictic Rhetoric." *College English*. Nov. 1996 (58:7), p. 766. Sheard believes that epideictic can "be an
instrument for addressing private and public 'dis-ease,' discomfort with the status quo." She continues,
"Our students at all levels of literacy development need to be taught to appreciate epideictic rhetoric, to
understand the ways in which it invokes shared values as a basis for promoting a vision of what could be"
(766).

For more on the rhetorical technique of "amplification," see Richard A Lanham, *A Handlist of
Rhetorical Terms*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Amplification refers to enhancing,
embellishing, emotionalizing, and arranging in strategic manner to illuminate "attendant circumstances."
For amplification in epideictic, see Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A
Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969, p. 51. They write,
"The speaker tries to establish a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the
audience, and to this end he uses the whole range of means available to the rhetorician for purposes of
amplification and enhancement" (51). Also, see Dale Sullivan, "A Closer Look at Education as Epideictic
Rhetoric." *Rhetoric and Society Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. ¾ (Summer – Autumn, 1994), p. 72. Sullivan sums

postwar period, and each author uncovers diverse ways in which social forces attempt to control individuals in different social contexts. I am not saying that the authors were necessarily aware of epideictic rhetoric at the time they were writing their novels, or that they would have agreed to being considered epideictic. However, there are strong affinities between the novels and epideictic rhetoric that cannot be neglected, for these correlations provide valuable insight when interpreting the texts within the influential postwar period, as well as within the social protest and countercultural literary traditions.

In order to establish an epideictic framework for reading the novels aforementioned, I rely on the social environment of the postwar period in order to contextualize the democratic function of the authors' texts, one which witnesses an increase in individuality, while at the same time experiences new forms of power and control. The social and cultural upheaval stemming from this social environment unites the authors and their texts. Therefore, I call upon Foucauldian notions of power, or as Foucault puts it in the epigraph, "systems that determine" individual behavior without awareness. Considering how the novels relate to their respective themes of power and control will demonstrate how the authors uncover the various constraints that disallow for "attaining the ideal," and this literary approach calls upon the tradition of protest writing, which also serves as a connecting foundation for the authors selected. I will build upon that claim by discussing the conventions of epideictic rhetoric, and how a framework that I refer to as the *literary epideictic* also places these authors and texts in conversation with one another in an American literary and democratic context. Thus, the *literary epideictic* unlocks the novels' "function of American Democracy."

1) Postwar Power and Protest:
Attacking "Anonymous Authority" in Literary Form

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up, "Epideictic praises or blames someone, is concerned with the present, and depends on heightening, or amplification, leading to idealization" (72).

As the postwar period takes shape, new classes emerge, new values take precedence, and a moral confusion surges regarding the nature of the individual and society, specifically in terms of power and control. Mark Carnes points out the rise of large institutions in the postwar period and how this development affects individuals' everyday decisions, what he refers to as the simultaneous promotion of "institutional bigness" with "individual choice and freedoms."[12] Legal and medical institutions, for example, assign particular behaviors with possible outcomes, and as a result, they possess the ability and the power to guide individual behavior within given contexts. Therefore, while individuality appears as a newly developing value, institutional power attempts to regulate individual expression (essentially). I rely on a Foucauldian notion of power as omnipresent, anonymous, and productive in order to connect these authors to the historicity of an expanding "open society" accompanied by constraints.[13] Freedom, individuality, and subjugation are intertwined in the operation of power, for Foucault points out that in order for power to enforce its effects, individuals must possess freedom: "By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of *possibilities* in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized."[14] This ties in with Ellison's, and postwar

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[12] Mark C. Carnes, *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America*. Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 7. Carnes writes, "The persistence of individual subjectivity and expressiveness is itself significant and perhaps surprising. The post-World War II period, after all, has witnessed the tremendous expansion and significance of large institutions. Government plays an increasingly prominent role in nearly everyone's life, … mak[ing] fundamental decisions about our lives, taking more of our income and determining how we spend it" (6-7). However, he notes that the rise of large institutions and their impact on life in the postwar period is met with the "rise [of] a countervailing pattern of individualized expression and consumption."

[13] See Michel Foucault and Donald F. Bouchard, ed., "Intellectuals and Power," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Translated by Donald F. Bouchard, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1977. Foucault states, "It may be that Marx and Freud cannot satisfy our desire for understanding this enigmatic thing which we call power, which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous" (213). This is the main way I am using the Foucauldian theory of power. I believe that David Garland succinctly sums up the complicated task of analyzing Foucault's thoughts of power thusly: "Instead of a single Foucauldian theory there are multiple Foucauldian theorizations, each one designed to address a definite phenomenon in the course of a specific inquiry." See David Garland, "What is a 'history of the present'? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions." *Punishment & Society*, Vol. 16 (4), 2014, p. 366.

[14] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), p. 790. Foucault also touches upon the "ethos of dissent" that I am trying to establish: "At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are *the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom*" (790, italics added).

America's, conception of an "open society." However, because power relations influence the ways individuals live, it resonates in everyday life, and therefore, power operates as a "government of individualization," or, as Foucault expounds, power "makes individuals subjects" by systematizing individual or group conduct.[15]

In this context, struggles with power tend to focus more on a technique rather than on an institution of power, what Erich Fromm refers to as "Anonymous Authority." Fromm situates this notion of power within the sociohistorical context of the postwar era, and this informs the background or subtext of the narratives of Wright, Ellison, Kerouac, and Kesey. In a 1955 essay, Fromm discusses the shift in authority taking place in the middle of the twentieth century, one from "overt authority" to an "*anonymous, invisible, alienated authority.*" He explains that "nobody is an authority except '*It.*' What is *It*? Profit, economic necessities, the market, common sense, public opinion, what '*one*' does, thinks, feels." And he questions, "Who can attack the invisible? Who can rebel against Nobody?"[16] The "Anonymous Authority" operating in the middle of the century contributes to a climate of anxiety and despair in postwar American society, one which expands its reach across races, decades, and literary movements, albeit, in different contextual severity. In effect, the social forces that these authors target are more explicit at times – the racial oppression and violence in the fiction of Wright and Ellison, for example – and more insidious at others – consider Kesey's critique of *invisible* power networks, or more to the point, Kerouac's rejection of the consumerist society that produces inauthenticity. Yet, Wright, Ellison, Kerouac, and Kesey confront Anonymous Authority couched in the social values and beliefs governing individuality, and in doing so, their narratives reveal the *lack* of possibility for

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[15] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," p. 781; 790. Foucault further contextualizes this point: "'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick" (790). Foucault states there are three types of struggles: "forms of domination"; "forms of exploitation"; and "struggles against subjection" (781).

[16] Erich Fromm, "Anonymous Authority – Conformity." In *The 1950's: America's "Placid" Decade*. Ed. Joseph Satin. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960: p. 28. Also, in "The Subject and Power," Foucault touches upon this notion of *anonymous authority* as a technique rather than an

individuals who refuse to adhere to cultural codes of acquiescence. Moreover, recognizing that

racism is one of many forces that limits access to an open society, I propose a re-reading of

Kerouac and Kesey that focuses on how each author ultimately rejects the acceptance,

participation, and the cultivation of a white middle-class value system that has been established as

a prerequisite to move about in an "open society," and that this, therefore, allies them with a

protest tradition.

   A look at the definition of protest literature reveals that the classification of writing

within the protest tradition pertains more to a rhetorical effect – which I will argue is better suited

as epideictic – as opposed to the subject's political value, which is often contrasted with an

aesthetic value. John Stauffer defines protest writing as the use of "language to transform the self

and change society," and as literature that "functions as a catalyst, guide, or mirror of social

change." Stauffer also discusses what he believes to be the difference between general literature

and protest literature, stating that "while the former empowers and transforms individuals, the

latter strives to give voice to a *collective consciousness*, uniting isolated or inchoate discontent,"

creating a specific literary tradition "*inextricably linked to its time and place*."[17] In her essay,

"On the Literature of Protest: Words as Weapons," Kimberly Drake emphasizes that "readers'

emotions are more frequently the targets of protest writers than readers' conventional

understandings of social relations."[18] Both Stauffer and Drake articulate the rhetorical objective

of striking a common antipathy in readers who share a communal value system, an activity that

registers with the epideictic. This value-laden rhetorical effect indicates that a subject and a

distinct, authorial intention of politicization are *not* solely responsible for classification as protest

writing. In other words, literature that does not appear overtly political – but aesthetically

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institutional power: "To sum up, the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much 'such and such' an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power" (781).

[17] Zoe Trodd. *American Protest Literature.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006, p. xii, italics added.

[18] Kimberly Drake, "On the Literature of Protest: Words as Weapons," in *Literature of Protest.* Ed. Kimberly Drake. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013, p. 16.

oriented, for example – can equally "function as a catalyst for social change" on a collective

level.[19]

I view Stauffer's definition of protest literature as the use of language to give voice to a

"collective consciousness" of discontent, and as writing linked to a historical facticity, as very

adequately defining countercultural literature as well. The countercultural antiestablishment rings

of the evasion of official control, which, as Trodd and Ellison document, is part of an American

tradition of Revolution.[20] In this way, these countercultural writers are not *only* aesthetically

oriented, or precursors to the hippie movement – which is the common, myopic view that

Kerouac rejects nonetheless[21] – but they are better read as descendants of a literary protest

tradition that infuses narratives with what I view as a fomenting epideictic discourse to critique

the newly emerging social scene. The conception of power as anonymous, nonconcrete, and as

governing individualization is captured in the novels, for the activity depicted falls within the

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[19] For example, see "What Happened to Kerouac?" Directed by Richard Lerner and Lewis MacAdams, appearances by Steve Allen, William F. Buckley, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, Gregory Corso. *Shout Factory*, 2012. William S. Burroughs acknowledges the cultural, rhetorical, and political power of art to shape a population's attitudes and actions, and this is an important distinction of protest writing. In the film, "What Happened to Kerouac?", Burroughs responds to the charge that Kerouac "lacked direct involvement in political activism" by speaking to the "worldwide, cultural revolution" that Kerouac ignited. Burroughs concludes, "By their fruits ye shall know them. Not by their disclaimers." Borrowing from Burroughs's sentiment, I acknowledge the view that the countercultural movement, and more specifically, the countercultural literature of Kerouac and Kesey, was a cultural revolution as opposed to a political one (arguably), but this does not invalidate the social import of the counterculture, for the cultural and the political are not independent of one another.

[20] Trodd, *American Protest Literature,* xxvi. Ellison writes, "in turning now to the American novel, I wish to emphasize that the American nation is based upon revolution" ("The Novel as a Function of American Democracy," p. 761).

[21] In two separate interviews Kerouac alludes to his displeasure with both hippie behavior and communist behavior and as well. He states, "America was an idea that was proposed and began to deteriorate at the turn of the century when people came in waving flags. And now their grandchildren dance on the flag. Damn them." See Gregory McDonald, "Off the Road: The Celtic Twilight of Jack Kerouac." *Boston Sunday Globe,* August 11, 1968, *Globe Sec.*, pp. 8, 11-12, 14, 16, 18. Reprinted in Kevin Hayes, Ed., *Conversations with Jack Kerouac*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005, p. 84. Also, see Jack McClintock, "Jack Kerouac is On the Road No More." *St. Petersburg Times*, October 12, 1969, *Floridian* sec., pp. 4, 6-10. Reprinted in *Conversations with Jack Kerouac*. Ed. Kevin Hayes. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005, p. 91-95. McClintock's article begins, "What happens to a Beatnik in the age of Aquarius?", and then he summarizes Kerouac's appearance on "the Buckley show" with two guests, who Kerouac refers to as "communists." McClintock notes how the discussion turned to "hippies and political activists," and Kerouac voices his disproval: "Ginsberg … at a party with Kesey's Merry Pranksters Ginsberg came up and wrapped an American flag around me. So I took it and I folded it up the

realm of sociality and speaks to the way people live their lives within postwar power networks. The novels, the characters, and the narrative activity all address main social issues unraveling in the postwar period, embedding the texts within the time and place they reflect.

As a result, the narratives demonstrate anonymous authority and the effect power relations have on individual behavior. Foucault defines the effect of power as "a mode of action which does *not* act directly and immediately on [individuals]. Instead, it *acts upon their actions*: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future."[22] *Native Son* focuses on the fear that Bigger feels in his daily existence when his body comes into contact with white bodies, and Wright comments on how an individual lives a life drenched in fear, and he imagines the social consequences a community suffers when it instills a racialized fear in the lives of black individuals. In terms of power's effect in *Native Son*, Wright attempts to challenge the fear invoked by the social scripts influencing Bigger Thomas's actions in the presence of white people, and how Bigger's action incurs further suspicious and consequential *counteraction*. Ellison demonstrates the power individuals wield when they refuse to recognize the democratic worth of an-other individual, specifically black individuals, and he writes a novel that comments on the social death caused by misrecognition, and he also narrates the struggle involved in *demanding* recognition. The invisible man's activity in the community has consequential action as well, in terms of gaining approval, or procuring and keeping a job, issues revolving around the decisions of others to grant or deny him access to the "open society."

Kerouac focuses on the powerful effects the cultural narratives of domesticity and consumerism have on individuals, as both of these social prescriptions regulate and anchor individuals to the postwar conception of the home, and *On the Road* is a commentary on how to live and desire authentically. Sal and Dean's actions are met with delinquency as they reject the

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way you're supposed to, and put it on the back of the sofa. The flag is not a rag" (94). He also stated that Kesey had "ruined Cassady" (93).

[22] Foucault points out that "'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts" (789).

narrative of domestic containment in a capitalist society and *move* about in a country and an era that codes stability in the home. And Kesey focuses on how the strategy of disciplinary power can order the activity of those who are "mad" and subject to social control – individuals labeled as a danger to society must submit to the psychiatric community before they can be released back into the world. McMurphy and the mental patients' noncompliant actions are therefore met with disciplinary threats of future punitive action; however, they counter the Big Nurse's disciplinary power with play and laughter.

Applying an epideictic framework, I argue that these four authors represent a specific brand of an American postwar protest literature, the *literary epideictic*. My main purpose is to show first, how the voices of a post-WWII American nonconformity, captured in these novels, is shaped and articulated; and second, how both the social protest and countercultural novel in the postwar period function as rhetorical devices for social change. Both classifications of writers, in rejecting power structures (racist, economic, psychiatric, etc.) hinder the further institution-alization of the dominating social and cultural norms and are accordingly labeled "outsiders." Thus, Kerouac and Kesey are not merely products of a culture of overprivileged discontents, as some are led to believe, but rather these authors, along with Wright and Ellison, can be better understood as progressing out of a historical and thematic break in the literary protest tradition that begins in 1940 and encompasses a collective, post-WWII American ethos of dissent.[23] These authors' novels are epideictic because they narratively depict activity that is embedded in value systems unique to the postwar social environment, and ultimately, the authors reject the prevailing values that they believe interfere with opportunities to live freely or authentically.

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[23] Indeed, Kerouac and Kesey faced a difficult challenge to locate an appropriate discourse to protest the ills of a (predominantly) favorably viewed, prosperous, American society. In other words, the general response to increasing economic prosperity was positive among middle-class officials and citizens, and writers like Kerouac and Kesey, who would critique the newly developing social values, clashed with the mainstream assumptions of the time. Essentially, Kerouac and Kesey contribute literary styles that build on the literary protest tradition that came before them. Therefore, lumping the writers Kerouac and Kesey into a Beat or countercultural movement immersed solely in an aesthetic, drug-infused, and/or spiritual context perpetuates their literature's detachment from sociopolitical concerns and depicts Kerouac and Kesey as

2) Epideictic Rhetoric and Conventions in the *Literary Epideictic*

The *literary epideictic,* broadly speaking at this point, is a mode of literature, social

literature, that functions much like epideictic oratory in rhetorical theory. The social protest and

countercultural novels function as *literary epideictic* texts that reveal, critique, celebrate, and

reinvent value systems that provide guidelines for how individuals expresses themselves in

postwar society, and the social context of the postwar period in which the novels exist prompt the

authors to create texts that reflect the times. The narratives unveil textual space for readers to

contemplate values, individual and communal action, and they imagine actual and possible

worlds. However, the *literary epideictic* carries out its task narratively as opposed to oratorically,

and as a result, it adapts some of epideictic's conventions and even invents some of them anew.

Epideictic rhetoric incorporates the following conventions:

1) A *revelatory* function ("to show forth")
2) *Praises* or *censures* a person, place, or thing
3) A *value-laden process* (adhere to, or challenge value systems)
4) A goal of *community cohesion*
5) A display of *ornateness* (strategic language use)
6) An *educative* function
7) A concern with the *present* (addresses matters of the present moment)
8) *Occasion*-based (present events call forth epideictic rhetors)

These are the main conventions of epideictic rhetoric.[24] While all these conventions work in

epideictic rhetoric and the *literary epideictic*, I will categorize them under three main operations –

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cultural icons rather than literary authors who take their work seriously as it connects to a history of
literature as protest writing.

[24] In an early and often cited scholarly review of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, E.M. Cope touches upon what would
be a dominant view of the third branch of rhetoric, the epideictic, stating,

> The third branch is inferior to the two preceding in extent, importance, and interest. It is the …
> demonstrative, showy, ostentatious, declamatory kind: so called because speeches of this sort are
> composed for "show" or "exhibition," *epideixis*, and their object is to display the orator's powers,
> and to amuse an audience … what are therefore *theoroi* rather than *kritai*, like spectators at a
> theater, or a contest for a prize … rather than any serious interest or real issue at stake. (121).

See E.M. Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric*. London: Macmillan, 1867. J. Richard Chase calls
epideictic a "wastebasket term that embraces all non-deliberative, non-forensic oratory," and designates
praise and blame as the most prominent defining feature of epideictic. See J. Richard Chase, "The Classical

the revelatory function, the value-laden process, and the presentist notion. These objectives

incorporate all of the epideictic conventions in one way or another within the novels *Native Son,*

Invisible Man, On the Road, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and ultimately, these

characteristics comprise the *literary epideictic*.

Perhaps epideictic's chief operation entails unveiling that which is "hidden," or

illuminating the indiscernible. The word "epideictic" comes from the Greek verb *epideiknumi,*

meaning to "reveal," and to "show-forth" (*epi-deixis*), and originally, epideictic had been

classified as the rhetoric of encomium, the rhetoric of praise and blame.[25] Aristotle first identified

epideictic with public ceremonies that praise or censure a person or thing, often presenting the

Conception of Epideictic." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Vol. 47, Issue 3, 1961, 293-300. Danisch defines epideictic by "1) aesthetic practices of display that uncover what lies hidden, 2) a focus on outlining, on describing, on making present the common values of audiences, and 3) mechanisms for generating cohesion in a community." See Robert Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self: Michel Foucault's Epideictic Rhetoric. *Southern Communication Journal*. Vol. 71, No. 3, September 2006, p. 293. Dale Sullivan articulates that epideictic has a "constellation of purposes: preservation, education, celebration, and aesthetic creation," and Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard observes the educative function of epideictic and claims that epideictic "is in many ways ritualistic, that it elicits judgment, that it can initiate, support, influence, or lend closure to other modes of discourse, and we should add not only that it participates in reality at critical moments in time but that it interprets and represents one reality for the purpose of positing and inspiring a new one." See Dale Sullivan, "The Ethos of Epideictic Encounter." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1993), p. 116, and Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric." *College English*. Nov. 1996 (58:7), p. 765-790.

For a more general discussion of epideictic, see Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*. New York: Garland Pub, 1987; George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. For more on the revelatory function see Lawrence Rosenfield, "The Practical Celebration of Epideictic," in *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*. Ed. Eugene E. White. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980; for more on the nature of praise and blame in epideictic, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, and Chase, "The Classical Conception of Epideictic," p. 293-300; for more on values in epideictic, see Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," p. 765-794, and Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self," p. 291-307; for more on community and communion, see Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969, and Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing 'Communion' in Chaïm Perelman's *New Rhetoric*." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, no. 1, 2006, p. 45-71; for more on display and ornateness, see Rosenfield, "The Practical Celebration of Epideictic," and John Poulakos and Takis Poulakos, *Classical Rhetorical Theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999; for more on the educative function, see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca *The New Rhetoric*, and Dale Sullivan, "A Closer Look at Education as Epideictic Rhetoric." *Rhetoric and Society Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. ¾ (Summer – Autumn, 1994), p. 70-89; for more on the concern with the present in epideictic, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* and Danisch, "Power and Celebration of the Self"; for more on the nature of occasion and epideictic, see Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar." *Communications Quarterly*. Vol. 33, No. 4, Fall 1985, p. 284-299.

[25] Thomas O. Sloane, *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric: Volume 1*. New York: Oxford University Press, Internet Resource; Michael J. Hyde, *The Ethos of Rhetoric*. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004, p. xxi.

opportunity for the speaker to advertise rhetorical skills to what has been deemed a *passive* audience.[26] Most of the traditional subject matter of epideictic revolves around ceremonial events, funeral orations, or sundry objects of praise or blame, and the speaker's abilities seem to consume most of the early critical attention of epideictic discourse, which happens to overlook the social function of epideictic. The audience, in that case, takes less of a role in the epideictic exchange due to the prominence of the speaker's strategic use of language, or rhetorical "skill" and "ability," as the rhetor works towards revealing or unveiling meaning.[27] Thus, epideictic became recognized and prized for its use of ornate and emphatic language designed to reveal or "show forth" that which is hidden. As a result, epideictic has been more concerned with display – what the language reveals about the speaker's abilities – than with a civic function – i.e., *what the audience perceives and understands anew* in regards to a communal identity.

Conventional understandings of epideictic have failed to grasp the fact that epideictic possesses a larger social significance in terms of community and power. Rather than reveal a

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[26] George A. Kennedy explains the passive nature of epideictic as "speeches that do not call for any immediate action by the audience but that characteristically praise or blame some person or thing, often on a ceremonial occasion such as a public funeral or holiday." See George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.7. Christine Oravec also focuses on the audience's role as a group of "observers" who must receive the speaker's decorous language, but then "judge" the speaker's abilities in presenting praiseworthy or blameworthy objects. This aesthetic response, Christine Oravec has observed, functions as an act of "judgment" due to the audience's role as a group of "observers" who receive the speaker's decorous language and other rhetorical devices that represent some thing as praiseworthy or blamable. See Christine Oravec, "'Observation' in Aristotle's Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 9 (1976): p. 171. Also, see Book I, Chapter 9 in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004; J. Richard Chase, "The Classical Conception of Epideictic." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Vol. 47, Issue 3, 1961, p. 293-300; James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction*. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2009, pp. 77-97, specifically pp. 85-86. And for more on the role of the audience, see Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969.

[27] See Scott Consigny, "Gorgias's Use of the Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992), p. 281 and n.4, p. 295. Consigny points out two translations of the Greek word *dunamis* as "ability" (Freese translation), or "skill" (Roberts Translation). Also, see Book I, Chapter 9 in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004; and J. Richard Chase, "The Classical Conception of Epideictic." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Vol. 47, Issue 3, 1961, 296-297; and Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*. New York: Garland Pub, 1987. Burgess discusses the affinities between epideictic literature and poetry (114-115; 245). Aristotle referred to epideictic as "ceremonial," and in Book I, chapter 9, he writes, "Praise is the expression in words of the eminence of a man's good qualities" (35).

"radiance,"[28] or turn discourse into an "art object,"[29] I view epideictic's revelatory function as providing a vision of the social imaginary, or the way in which value systems organize and institute collective, normative practices.[30] Because the social imaginary can shift over time, epideictic can help elucidate the fluid and ever-changing values that inform *how* individuals imagine their social surroundings and interactions with others, as well as distinguish the status quo (how things actually are), from ideal states of how things *ought* to be. For instance, Robert Danisch examines the epideictic nature of Foucault's work on power and the individual, and he claims that "the [epideictic] aim is to make present aspects of the social world that remain hidden," and that epideictic rhetoric "has the potential to reveal how discourse and power organize and order communities."[31] A more fitting view of epideictic, then, entails a revelatory function of discourse that attempts to understand how power can ensconce itself and operate within value systems, and it works to uncover how power relations regulate the way in which an individual navigates the social world as a member who is identified and ordered by communal values. In this way, epideictic can reveal instabilities by illuminating the inconsistency of lived reality against the value systems that are believed to govern sociality, especially in terms of how

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[28] Lawrence Rosenfield, "The Practical Celebration of Epideictic." Rosenfield contends that epideictic functions as a rhetoric of display, claiming that the audience perceives a "radiance" emanating from the speaker that "acts to unshroud men's notable deeds in order to let us gaze at the aura glowing within" (135).

[29] John Poulakos and Takis Poulakos. *Classical Rhetorical Theory*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). John and Takis Poulakos illustrate that epideictic rhetoric implements "elegant phrases that turn a piece of discourse into an art object, thereby inviting audiences to experience language aesthetically" (61).

[30] I borrow Charles Taylor's conception of the "social imaginary," which Taylor defines as "the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations" (171). See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. Taylor insists on the terminology of "imaginary" because ordinary people do not express their understandings in "theoretical terms, [but] it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc." (171-172). The social imaginary is "shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society," and it comprises "common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (172). Taylor admits that at "any given time," the social imaginary is "complex," and that it is important to "recognize ideal cases," and he gives the examples of an election, a polite conversation, and ways to organize a demonstration (172-173).

[31] Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self," p. 298; 294.

values determine expectations and a normative sense of how things should be versus how they actually are.

It is important to remember that epideictic has always preoccupied itself with value systems, and the way in which epideictic's revelatory practice works in conjunction with value systems had begun to shift epideictic discourse from a method of entertaining spectators, to one of educating members of a social public.[32]   In fact, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca refer to the epideictic speaker as an "educator" whose task is to promote values with a mind towards influencing the future *action* of audience members, and they argue that epideictic is less concerned with "promot[ing] the speaker" as it is with creating "a certain disposition in those who hear" the discourse.[33] Much like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Gerard Hauser also touches upon epideictic's correlation of values and behavior, or the "public norms for proper political conduct" within a public sphere. In discussing epideictic's ability to establish public morality, Hauser proposes, "[epideictic] can educate us in the vocabulary of civic virtues that may constitute citizens as an active public, and communicate principles on which responsible

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[32] Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," p. 766. As Sheard diligently puts it, "value rather than reason has long been seen as the special province of epideictic rhetoric." Sheard writes, "From antiquity to the twentieth century, epideictic has been seen as a rhetoric of identification and conformity whose function is to confirm and promote adherence to the commonly held values of a community with the goal of sustaining that community" (766). And she acknowledges that contemporary epideictic rhetoric is "ultimately about conduct and values within communities addressed or invoked" (771).

Also, see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 74. They explain, "one appeals to values in order to induce the hearer to make certain choices rather than others and, most of all, to justify those choices so that they may be accepted and approved by others" (75). They claim that values are inherent in argumentation and they distinguish between "concrete" and "abstract" values, the former values "attaching" to "a living being, a specific group, or particular object, considered as a unique entity," and abstract values, such as justice, truth, and discipline for example, existing "only in relation to concrete values" (77). They reveal that a concern with abstract values is deeply tied with change, indicating that abstract values possess a "revolutionary spirit," and they claim that both concrete and abstract values are "constantly being recast and remodeled" (79).

[33] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 52-54. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out that the epideictic speaker, like an educator, must be qualified and "skillful" in her/hir/his presentation. They claim that the "purpose of epideictic speech is to increase the intensity of values held in common by the audience and the speaker," values that also play a role in deliberative and legal speeches (52-53). They affirm, "educational discourse, like the epideictic one, is not designed to promote the speaker, but for the creation of a certain disposition in those who hear it" (54).

citizenship may be based and a vibrant public sphere can survive."[34] Thus, epideictic not only

reveals values, but also educates individuals on how to conduct themselves in a civic realm.

Furthermore, the "vocabulary of civic virtues" inculcates a more desirable way to act, and the

relationship between education, values, and conduct, leads to communally-conceived desirable

states of existence, or social ideals. Epideictic offers a community the means necessary to

uncover the values operating underneath matters of social importance, and the means necessary to

evaluate, reinforce, or reinvent values that affect individuals and the community at large.

Because epideictic uncovers or promotes values that attempt to govern ways of acting in

the world, epideictic carries the charge of establishing a community, or more to the point, creating

a "communion" amongst individuals. As stated previously, the civic function of value-formation

has historically been assigned to the speaker with little activity on the part of the audience of

"spectators."[35] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca rescue the epideictic audience, and genre, from

passivity by redirecting epideictic from the theatrical, to the argumentative, claiming that in order

for group consensus to come about, there must exist "objects of agreement," and the main tactic

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[34] Gerard Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. 29:1, 1999, p. 17; 20. On the other hand, Dale Sullivan reverses the relationship, arguing that education itself functions as epideictic rhetoric because the "teacher" educates "students" about values and teaches them communal perspectives tied to dominant or particular values, in order to prepare the students for future action within the public sphere. See Dale Sullivan, "A Closer Look at Education as Epideictic Rhetoric." *Rhetoric and Society Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. ¾ (Summer – Autumn, 1994), p. 73-75. Sullivan argues in his thesis, "Education is a form of epideictic rhetoric that relies on the rhetorical acts of praise and blame (1) to teach reasoning appropriate to professional and public practices, and (2) to instill in the student sentiments or emotions considered appropriate within the orthodoxy which the teacher represents" (71). He discusses epideictic's concern with "virtue," and the educational objective to develop virtuous individuals who are defined as such by their ability to manage affairs concordant with society, which entails the use of "practical knowledge and reason" along with "cultural knowledge and emotion" in order to respond appropriately to issues facing the community.

[35] See Book I, Chapter 3 in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1358b, p. 12-13. Also, see Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*. New York: Garland Pub, 1987. In terms of the audience's role in epideictic rhetoric, most of the focus has been on the "hearer," for Burgess points out that Aristotle's division of the branches of rhetoric stem from the activity of the "hearer," as opposed to the "judge" in other branches: the "judge" has "some real interest at stake and is expected to make a decision," and the observer is "so named from the analogy of the theater, where the audience are mere spectators and entertainment is the chief purpose" (92). And yet, Christine Oravec cites Aristotle's emphasis on "observation" and proposes that it contains an "intellective dimension" because the speaker constructs messages from a common body of knowledge shared with the audience, and 'the audience 'learns' or 'understands' the connection between the principle and the manifestation of the principle" (166). See Christine Oravec, "'Observation' in Aristotle's Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 9 (1976): p. 162-163.

in establishing consensus or communion is through the appeal to distinct communal *values*. The

"speaker" attempts to "establish a sense of communion centered around particular values

recognized by the audience"; but, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also point out, the audience

may accept or reject the particular values due to the possibility of the proposed values coming

into conflict with other prevailing values; as a result, it is more appropriate to regard the

epideictic audience with a more active role.[36] In effect, epideictic pertains more to a participatory

process, what amounts to a transactional exchange, more than it does to a ceremonial, and hence,

spectatorial display.

Surprisingly, however, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca fail to recognize the

transformative power of epideictic rhetoric, for they insist that epideictic rhetoric revolves

predominantly around "adherence" to already-accepted views, rather than epideictic's possibility

for inculcating change. And yet, the interrelationship between the epideictic process and its

participants is more complicated than they suggest, for value formation and value sustentation

should be viewed as more fluid. More appropriately, Danisch emphasizes how epideictic

discourse is "constitutive of self, identity, and community," and he recognizes the power of

epideictic to help a community "to come to know itself and to come to know the other

communities living in the same society," which can potentially lead to "assimilation,

transformation, and change."[37] Thus, because epideictic is closely connected with community and

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[36] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 51. In discussing the three branches of rhetoric, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca mention the roles of the audience as "deliberating" (deliberative), "judging" (forensic), and "an audience merely enjoying the unfolding of the orator's argument without having to reach a conclusion on the matter in question." They point out the inadequacy of the audience's role in epideictic, calling it "unsatisfactory" and not suitable for "the study of argumentation" (21). In terms of epideictic, they claim the objective of "strengthening the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to values" plays a significant role in "argumentation" (50), and this suggests a notion of "agreement." Elaborating on agreement, the authors indicate that when a speaker offers "premises" that make up the basis of her argumentation, she "relies on the hearers' adherence to the propositions" put forth. However, they recognize that audience members may "refuse their adherence, either because they do not adhere to what the speaker presents them as being accepted, or they may see that his choice of premises is one-sided, or they may be shocked by the tendentious way in which the premises were advanced" (65).
[37] Robert Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self: Michel Foucault's Epideictic Rhetoric. *Southern Communication Journal*. Vol. 71, No. 3, September 2006, p. 292; Robert Danisch, "Alain Locke on Race and Reciprocity: The Necessity of Epideictic Rhetoric for Cultural Pluralism." *Howard Journal of*

values, it can assist a community in seeking out meaning when that community is faced with

staggering events, or finds itself experiencing new identity exploration; thus, epideictic's value-

laden, educative function then possesses the potential for change. Consequently, as new times

confront a particular community, the value system currently guiding how a community governs

itself might no longer meet the developing circumstances or of the changing needs of the

community. Thus, while epideictic can work to preserve a particular value or value system, one

must not dismiss epideictic's capacity for change, for epideictic can also act as a discursive mode

catalyzing change.

It therefore seems appropriate, then, that one of epideictic's chief concerns regards

matters of the present, which are further invoked by present *occasions* occurring within a society

or community. Aristotle assigns each branch of rhetoric a tense and awards epideictic with the

present, and Jonathan Pratt explains how epideictic "praises or blames its object in *relation* to

present realities."[38] Condit brings together the concept of community and the present moment

when she discusses the purpose of epideictic to work "not only to maintain community values,

but also to accomplish the progressive function of adapting [the] community to new times,

technologies, geographies, and events," touching upon the unprocessed meaning an event can

potentially have for a group of individuals who naturally look for definition, contextualization,

and valuation.[39] Similarly, Danisch calls epideictic "presentist," acknowledging how epideictic

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Communications, 19:4, p. 298. In discussing the epideictic and race, Danisch claims, "Epideictic rhetoric, therefore, is a way for a community to come to know itself and to come to know the other communities living in the same society. In addition, such exchanges lead to inevitable assimilation, transformation, and change, demonstrating the ongoing process of defining race and determining values" (298).

[38] See Book I, Chapter 3 in Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* 1358b, p. 13. He writes, "The ceremonial orator [epideictic rhetor] is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful to recall the past and to make guesses at the future." Jonathan Pratt, "The Epideictic *AGÔN* and Aristotle's Elusive Third Genre." *American Journal of Philology.* 133 (2012) p. 178. Also, see Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 21-23.

[39] Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar." *Communications Quarterly*. Vol. 33, No. 4, Fall 1985, p. 297. Condit's discussion focuses on the 1770 Boston Massacre, but her theory of epideictic extends to any communal event in which a public speech applying epideictic conventions qualifies. She says in order for such communal events to be understood,

involves "telling a history of the present" in order for "the individual to negotiate his or her relationship with the dominant social structures of the present moment." In asking, and then answering, the questions, "*how can I define, describe or explain the present moment*? [and] how will that definition, description, or explanation affect who I am?", Danisch asserts that the epideictic rhetor can "reinvent" the individual *and* the culture in which the individual is situated, producing new understandings and new modes of agency.[40] To this end, epideictic performs a diagnostic function to begin with, uncovering the forces that give birth to whatever present-day-predicament a community finds itself facing. Additionally, epideictic also functions as a means for critical engagement with those forces. That is to say, epideictic first reveals the complexities involved in events that register on a community's identity, and then it affords a discourse that can do the work of definition, contextualization, and judgment. Therefore, epideictic can be viewed as contingent upon "the *critical convergence of time, place, and circumstance*."[41] This convergence of time, place, and circumstance make up what I refer to as the *epideictic exigency*.

3) The *Literary Epideictic*, the Epideictic Exigency, and The American Social Protest and Countercultural Novel in the Postwar Period

To sum up to this point, the *literary epideictic* is a mode of literature that reveals value systems that govern sociality and it is deeply connected to the time and the social environment within which the text is written.[42] The *literary epideictic* social protest and countercultural

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"the event had to be subsumed and articulated within the communal history and the feelings and values of the citizens" (294-295).

[40] Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self," p. 304-305, italics added.

[41] Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," p. 771, italics added. In discussing the communal and civic realms of epideictic, Sheard points out that epideictic existed in "large and small, formal and informal, and public and private" venues, but most importantly, that in antiquity and today, epideictic depends on "*kairos*, or 'exigency' in the broadest sense (not just the 'occasion' of discourse, but what makes the occasion what it is – the *critical convergence of time, place, and circumstance*." Needless to say, epideictic is "informed by the 'present' in very *special* ways" as Walter Beale recognizes, and he concludes that epideictic is a "rhetorical performative," one that "participates in the reality to which it refers." See Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall, 1978), p. 226.

[42] For more on the relationship between the epideictic and literature, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric.* Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004, 1358b, p. 12-14; Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic*

novels focus on the present moment and depict narrative events occurring in a national,

democratic context to create a "communion" amongst readers; these texts ultimately construct a

rhetorical space for readers to interpret narrative events taking place in narrative social

environments that mirror the postwar social climate. Therefore, the values espoused to the notion

of democracy and the newly developing postwar society of social mobility operated as the

transcendental figure uniting the various peoples in the country, those who could potentially be

reading the novels. Hauser illustrates this epideictic process when he recognizes that "political

actors cannot unite out of a common interest without first recognizing shared bonds of

community that transcend individual differences," and Richard Graff and Wendy Winn

emphasize the ability of "words and phrases closely associated with a particular milieu" as

capable of forming a communion amongst individuals. Essentially, the novels begin from the

premise of a shared, "prior existence of community" in terms of a democratic society of readers

who share with one another the principles and values associated with the developing "open

society."[43] Taking this into account, the *literary epideictic* – and especially the social protest and

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Literature. New York: Garland Pub, 1987; Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing 'Communion' in Chaïm Perelman's *New Rhetoric*." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, no. 1, 2006, p. 47-48; Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric." *College English*. Nov. 1996 (58:7), p. 774; Dale Sullivan, "The Ethos of Epideictic Encounter." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1993), p. 116; Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; Sullivan notes, "Just as theater grew out of ancient Greek religious practices, so, too, epideictic came to refer to literary works as well as to ceremonial speeches" (116). Vickers notes that historically, Roman rhetoricians resituated epideictic rhetoric from a public oratory to a private, written form of expression. Classical rhetoricians had lumped epideictic rhetoric with literature because both were categorized as aesthetically oriented and noted for providing "entertainment value" due to the audience's passive, spectatorial role, thereby stripping these expressions of a "political or social function" (57). Epideictic rhetoric had incorporated literature in a broader sense, as Vickers writes, "it is for this reason that, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, *all literature became subsumed under epideictic*, and all writing was perceived as occupying the related spheres of praise and blame" (54, italics added).

[43] Perelman Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969; and Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing 'Communion' in Chaïm Perelman's *New Rhetoric*." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, no. 1, 2006, p. 54. Graff and Winn establish three strategies for achieving "communion" based on their reading of *The New Rhetoric*: the first incorporates the use of "verbal techniques"; the second way is through "references to a common culture, tradition, or past" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca qtd. in Graff and Winn, p. 55; *The New Rhetoric,* 177). This method includes "allusion and quotation as the two devices that function to evoke a shared heritage or bits of cultural knowledge held in common by members of a community" (Graff and Winn, p. 55). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca even acknowledge that "the terms 'right,' 'liberty,' 'democracy' can bring about communion in the same way as the unfurling of a flag" (165). The third technique Graff and Winn

countercultural novel – alludes to a historical milieu through the narrative events, actions,

discourse, and dialogue used by the characters in order to construct a "communion" amongst the

readers, one which shares the social reality of postwar existence.

To establish the social environment, a historical postwar situatedness works in

conjunction with Lloyd Bitzer's original theory of "situation," making up the *epideictic exigency*,

a historic context that gives the novels their distinct character.[44] Bitzer defines "exigence" as an

"imperfection," "defect," or "obstacle" possessing a sense of "urgency." Therefore, due to

exigencies, not all attempts at communion within the *literary epideictic* intend to create a positive

identification with particular values, for epideictic can also expose the failure of certain values to

register within a social environment.[45] For instance, there are times when individual conduct

does not reflect a communally-agreed upon set of values, so the *literary epideictic* writer engages

in a kind of educative capacity, exposing the dissonance between particular activities and beliefs

that clash with the prevailing democratic value system.[46] Exigencies result in a "complex of

persons, objects, events and *relations*" that "invites" the creation of discourse that not only

responds to the situation, but participates with it as well. Additionally, what is important to note,

says Bitzer, is that this "complex" is "located in reality," which links it with "observable historic

facts." But the relationship between the discourse and exigency is not always direct – the

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offer amounts to an invitation for communal engagement or involvement through the "interrogative mood," "figures of address," and the shifting of "grammatical patterns," specifically with pronouns (the use of "I" and "we" for example) (57).

[44] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan., 1968), p. 1-14. Bitzer writes, "Rhetorical acts belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur. … a work is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind" (3). The rhetorical acts, Bitzer continues, are determined to "produce action or change in the world … as a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (4).

[45] Bitzer defines "exigence" as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing with is other than it should be" (6). For epideictic's ability to destabilize, see Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall, 1978), p. 243. Beale writes, "for better or worse, the epideictic or rhetorical performative discourse is as much an instrument of social upheaval as of social concord."

[46] See Dale Sullivan, "The Epideictic Character of Rhetorical Criticism." *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 1993). Sullivan writes, "Unveiling a text can be an uncovering of the value system implicit in the

exigence may be, as Bitzer points out, insignificant, may be unnamed, may only be alluded to, or may even be *re*invented, for instance. Yet, Bitzer maintains that there is likely "one controlling exigence" that serves as an "organizing principle."[47]

One way the *literary epideictic* utilizes the *epideictic exigency* is through the narrative creation of a cultural frame of reference.[48] The *epideictic exigency* refers to specific historic happenings, and each novel comes into existence in response to its *epideictic exigency*. The historic event and context "invite" – perhaps *provoke* is a more accurate word – the authors to create narratives that contain particular discourse (in relation to the *epideictic exigency*) and narratives that allude to postwar, *democratic-value-laden oppositions* through the events, actions, discourse, and thoughts of the characters in order to generate a passional response in the readership. In the *literary epideictic*, the authors and the textual elements work to amplify a particular relation of democratic values with narratively depicted realities that can potentially mirror postwar experiences on an individual and collective level, and help identify the readers with the time period or the cultural milieu. For instance, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca discuss

text," adding that "describing and interpreting, normally considered initial stages in the act of criticism, are epideictic acts of unveiling, exposing the value system of a text or person to the gaze of spectators" (342)

[47] Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," p. 11. In regards to the "controlling exigence as organizing principle," Bitzer provides a fuller explanation,

> In any rhetorical situation there will be *at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle*: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected. The exigence *may or may not be perceived clearly* by the rhetor or other persons in the situation; it may be strong or weak depending on the clarity of their perception and the degree of their interest in it; *it may be real or unreal* depending on the facts of the case; it may be important or trivial; it may be such that discourse can completely remove it, or it may persist in spite of repeated modifications; it may be completely familiar – one of a type of exigences occurring frequently in our experience – or it may be totally new, unique. (7).

Overall, Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation involves the following: 1) it serves as an invitation to discourse; 2) it grants a rhetorical significance to the rhetorical act; 3) it functions as a "necessary condition to rhetorical discourse"; 4) it can be solved or remain unsolved; 5) it allows the discourse to participate with the situation and alters reality; 6) the discourse "fits" with the situation; and 7) "the situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution" (5-6).

[48] Richard Graff and Wendy Winn, "Presencing 'Communion' in Chaïm Perelman's *New Rhetoric*." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, no. 1, 2006, p. 56. Graff and Win discuss allusion and quotation within the example of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and they note that the notion of community is concerned with the "audience members' recognition of a frame of cultural reference they share with one another and with the speaker employing the allusion," and that a "prior existence of a community is

the role of "allusion" in epideictic argumentation and how the power of allusion lies in its ability

to "evoke [meaning] *without* actually naming," and they grant a "special affectivity attached to

these cultural facts," or historical events.[49] The novels evoke "a special affectivity" by alluding to

the social environment that witnesses various "obstacles" or "defects" impeding democratic

freedoms, all of which are locatable in the social reality (or imagination) of the postwar period;

and the narratives do so without specifically referencing the exact occasion prompting the

narratives, or, the actual historical events of Robert Nixon's murder, Isaac Woodard's blinding,

domestic containment and the Cold War, and psychiatric measures of discipline and control. My

theory of the *epideictic exigency* within the *literary epideictic* carries out this rhetorical theory of

a cultural frame of reference – the *epideictic exigency* serves as the narratorial "organizing

principle" that arises from a historic event.

The events that capture the social climate within each novel will be discussed in detail in

the respective chapters. In Wright's *Native Son*, the 1938 case of Robert Nixon, a black male

who robbed a white woman and killed her in the process, accounts for the *epideictic exigency*.

Authorities immediately arrested Nixon, and swiftly accused him of raping the white woman,

even though there was little to no evidence to corroborate that charge.[50] *Native Son* focuses on an

equivalent ordeal, as Bigger Thomas kills Mary Dalton and he too is accused of rape. Both the

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necessary for an allusion" to have force. An allusion to a historical event, they continue, will conjure up values "exemplified" or "rejected" (56).

[49] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, p. 177. They mention "events" and "cultural facts" as allusions that are known and "peculiar to the members of the group with whom the speaker is trying to establish the communion."

[50] See Richard Wright, "How Bigger was Born," in *Native Son*. Introduction by Arnold Rampersad. New York: Harper, 2005, p. 455. In the essay, Wright explicitly links Nixon to the novel, first, by stating, "Any Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and charged with 'rape.' This thing happens so often that to my mind it had become a representative symbol of the Negro's uncertain position in America." He indicates, "So frequently do these acts recur that when I was halfway through the first draft of *Native Son* a case paralleling Bigger's flared forth in the newspapers of Chicago. (Many of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in *Native Son* are but fictionalized versions of the Robert Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the *Chicago Tribune*)" (455). Also, see Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright Daemonic Genius: A Portrait of the Man, A Critical Look at His Work*. New York: Warner Books, 1988, specifically p. 122; Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. New York: Holt, 2001; Jerry W. Ward and Robert Butler. *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008.

Nixon case and the novel illustrate the moral panic that ensues as newspapers report the events

(Chicago newspapers reporting the Nixon murder, and the fictional newspapers reporting the

murder committed by Bigger), but more importantly, the "organizing principle" that both retain is

the racist social script of the black male rapist that a postwar racist society attaches to the black

male body. This event offers Wright the occasion to explore and write about the fear that a black

male consciousness suffers because of the racist scripts, and the tragedy that can occur as a result.

Wright's narrative social environment mirrors the environment of the Nixon case, and he reveals

the fear predicated on the myth of the black male rapist, and the fear that surfaces when black

male and white female bodies encounter one another. In the end, Wright attempts to show that

white and black individuals are implicated in the prolongation of racialized fear because a social

environment that suffocates its members with fear – literally and metaphorically as Nixon's and

Bigger's victims were both strangled or suffocated – can most definitely lead to a tragedy like

Nixon's or Bigger's crimes.[51]

Ralph Ellison's occasion is more abstract and thematic, as his novel *Invisible Man* deals

with the notion of *recognition* in a democratic context as opposed to the physical and

psychological nature of fear in Wright's text. The social climate represented in *Invisible Man*

implicates the matter of visibility – African American abuse was thought to have sprung from the

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[51] Another historical event that weighs on *Native Son* is the Loeb and Leopold case of 1924 in which two teenage Chicago socialites, Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold, murdered fourteen-year-old Bobby Franks to prove themselves Nietzschean supermen. See Hal Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 1999. Higdon states that the Leopold and Loeb case earned the title "crime of the century" because of the frightening nature of the crime – a kidnap, ransom, and murder of a child. Additionally, the two young men had "IQs of 210 and 160," and the case dominated the news in 1924, especially when the lawyer, Clarence Darrow, one of the most famous attorneys of the time, agreed to represent them and changed their plea from "not guilty" to "guilty" in order to prevent the death sentence. Darrow argued that forces beyond the young boys' control influenced their action and that this should be considered when sentencing the boys, who should ultimately be spared the death penalty. For more on the defense, see Simon Baatz, *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Chicago*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 267-289. Max, Bigger's lawyer, uses a similar defense strategy, but to no avail. See Robert Butler, "The Loeb and Leopold Case: A Neglected Source for Richard Wright's *Native Son*. *African American Review*, Volume 39, No. 4. 2005, pp. 555-567; Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. (New York: Holt), 2001; Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius*. (New York: Amistad Press), 1988; Jerry W. Ward and Robert Butler. *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 2008.

high visibility of their black bodies, which a white supremacist society coded as inferior and

subjective.[52] Yet, Ellison composes a novel portraying the narrator's *invisibility* to comment on

the *social* and *political* (non)recognition of black men and women in a racist society, a society

that is supposed to be the semblance of democratic freedom. The historical event that captures

this social climate is the "Blinding of Isaac Woodard," a World War II Army veteran who was

returning home in 1946 just hours after being honorably discharged, and who failed to act in

accordance with the subservient, white expectations of black men in a Jim Crow society.[53] While

still in uniform and on his way home via a Greyhound bus, a heated confrontation between the

white bus driver and Woodard ensued over Woodard's apparently overextended use of the

restroom. At the next stop, the bus driver called the police to report that Woodard was a drunk

and disorderly passenger, and consequently, Woodard was ordered off the bus, beaten, and

ultimately blinded for basically failing to properly address white people.[54] Woodard's case

represents the literal theme of visibility (and in-visibility as a result of his horrific blinding) as it

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[52] Lucas Morel helps put this in perspective: "The tragic irony for black Americans is that they have suffered from both visibility and invisibility. Their 'high visibility' as blacks living in a predominantly white society made them the legal and social target of racism, while their individuality remained in-visible to a white society that judged them only by their color." See Lucas Morel, "Should America Be Blind to Race?" *On Principle*, August, 1998. http://www.ashbrook.org/publicat/onprin/v6n4/morel.html. See also George Yancy, "African-American Philosophy: Through the lens of Socio-existential Struggle." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 37 (5), (2011), pp. 551-574. Yancy illustrates that African-American philosophy develops out of a socio-existential context in which African Americans have lived an experiential reality of the absurd in the form of white racism and racist acts of dehumanization. The socio-existential context presupposes a form of white supremacy, a world that is "anti-Black". Therefore, Yancy writes, "Unlike Descartes, Black self-understanding grows out of a social matrix of pain and suffering; a site where the Black body is a site of marked inferiority, difference and deviance" (554). As a consequence, the African American individual must struggle to understand the self in a world where whiteness functions as a "transcendental norm."
[53] For more on the case of Isaac Woodard, see Carol Anderson, "Clutching at Civil Rights Straws: A Reappraisal of the Truman Years and the Struggle for African American Citizenship," in Raymond H. Geselbracht, ed. *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), p. 31-50; Ken Hechler, "Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, p. 51-66; Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*. (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 204-218; and Andrew Myers, "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, eds. Robert Figueira and Stephen Lowe. (Columbia, SC: The South Carolina Historical Association – South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2004), p. 63-73.
[54] Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 202.

connects to the social issue of political recognition for black men and women in a postwar society – regardless of his service in the fight for democracy at home and abroad, an American racist society reminded Woodard that he is still a black man who must fear and subject himself to whites. The Blinding of Isaac Woodard represents the type of social environment that the invisible man must navigate in search of recognition, and Ellison sets up the visible/invisible contrast in order to appeal to the hearts and minds of readers in hopes of revealing and articulating a morally responsible democratic love.

Perhaps less an isolated historical event, but a more socially pervasive influence, the political doctrine of containment serves as the backdrop *On the Road* stands out against. Containment is the political concept of the post- and cold war era that is designed to stifle communist sentiments not only abroad but domestically as well. The cultural narrative of "domestic containment" codes the home, gender roles, and family stability as the ways of life designated to fight national and global waves of communism, and the formation of this public, middle-class knowledge serves as the *epideictic exigency* in Kerouac's novel.[55] On a more specific note, the famous "Kitchen Debate" of 1959 between then Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev reveals more, perhaps, about the conflict of the postwar period than any international political event, mostly because it provides scripts for family members on how to live the "good life" (despite the fact that it occurred after the publication of *On the Road*. The important point to consider is the developing social and cultural landscape that had been festering and leading up to the era of containment and the Kitchen Debate). During the Cold War, the US relied on an American superiority *connected* to the suburban home, complete with appliances demonstrating technological advancement. Material things, such as a house in the suburbs, a washing machine, a refrigerator, a TV, and many other products, became linked to

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[55] For more on containment, see Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995; for more on domestic containment, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

American values, like domesticity and pragmatism, which staved off the threat and the evils of

communism. Nixon argued that these domestic goods demonstrated the ideality of American life

over that of the Soviet Union.[56] And, as a result, consumerism became entwined with a political

agenda, namely, with the theory of containment. [57] Thus, the "home" becomes the "sphere of

influence" that creates conformist and obedient civilians, and *On the Road* features a narrative

that challenges that social environment through movement and a desire for the authentic, for the

doctrine of domestic containment centers around the inauthentic due to the conformity that results

in homogenization. It is through the context of containment that Kerouac's novel challenges

consumerism, for Kerouac views consumerism as an undesirable way to live life, and he

celebrates movement as an authentic way to resist a culture of containment.

Finally, Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* responds to the *epideictic exigency* of the postwar

development of psychiatric control, which is, in effect, a branch of social control. The psychiatric

implementation of Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT), for example, embodies the social climate

that Kesey's novel pushes back against. This psychiatric development, as evident in the novel

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[56] See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008, p. 21; Richard M. Nixon and Rick Perlstein, Ed. *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, Documents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 88-96. Nixon discusses steel workers and wages, the price of various houses, the quality of the houses, and the benefit of particular products for "housewives." In one discussion, Nixon stops Khrushchev at a "model kitchen in a model house," and he praises the kitchen and calls Khrushchev over to a washing machine. The following occurs:

> Khrushchev: [after Nixon called attention to a built-in panel-controlled washing machine]: We have such things.
> Nixon: This is the newest model. This is the kind which is built in thousands of units for direct installation in the houses. In America, we like to make life easier for women….
> Khrushchev: Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism. (Perlstein, p. 91)

[57] For more on the connection between consumerism and political agendas, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003, p. 124. Cohen defines the "Consumer's Republic" as an institutional strategy for "restructuring the nation's economy and reaffirming its democratic values through promoting the expansion of mass consumption" (11). She writes,

> Mass consumption did not only deliver wonderful things for purchase –the televisions, the air conditioners, and computers that have transformed American life over the last half-century. It also dictated the most central dimensions of postwar society, including the political economy (the way public policy and the mass consumption economy mutually reinforced each other), as well as the political culture (how political practice and American values, attitudes, and behaviors tied to mass consumption became intertwined). (7-8)

also, features the discourse of the "patient's good" (*parens patriae*),[58] and through that discourse,

Kesey connects his novel to the social environment that is implicated by this historical

development. While Kesey was writing the novel, a conformist acquiescence towards

psychiatry's mission statement to work for the "patient's good" manifested.[59] Psychiatry's power

to pluck people out of society and classify them insane, and then to render them powerless in

terms of treatment that is for "their own good," creates an intense desire to conform to whatever it

is that psychiatry deems normal. The way in which judgment, labeling, and power work in the

psychiatric process of ECT makes it a method of control, and as a result, psychiatry begins to

unleash a powerful hold over individuals who are determined "out of place," "other," or

eccentric. This is what *Cuckoo's Nest* ultimately protests – forms of control, for the patients'

only choice is to conform or submit to psychiatric procedures. Kesey embeds this critique in

narrative form as it pertains to psychiatry, but it extends to the broader issue of social control,

akin to the "Anonymous Authority" that Fromm exposes. While ECT functions as a form of

social control, Kesey responds to the *epideictic exigency* in narrative form by displaying a

discourse of *play as power*, which utilizes forms of play and laughter as measures to evade and

challenge power and control.

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[58] See Teresa L. Scheid and Tony N. Brown, eds. *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health*. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. The editors write, "The legal rationale for asserting state control over those with mental illnesses (i.e., the ability to commit an individual involuntarily to the hospital) originates in the state's police power and *parens patriae* functions. Under its police power the state has the obligation to protect the community from potential harm; under *parens patriae* the state has the obligation to serve the best interest of individuals, which means it must protect those with mental illness from potential harm" (410).

[59] David Ingleby, in his article, "Mental Health and Social Order," talks about psychiatry's mission to implement methods "for the patient's good," clarifying, "In these practices, first, authority is exerted not in the name of law or morality, but by virtue of the doctor's right to choose for the sick person what shall be in his own interests." Ingleby goes on to explain that when a medical practitioner's authority is "coupled with *parens patriae* - the right of the state to manage the lives of person deemed lacking in responsibility - the doctor's power is more formidable still; but even the private patient who voluntarily seeks treatments puts himself 'under the doctor,' as the saying goes," submitting to the doctor's appraisal of what treatment is necessary for "[the patient's] own good," leading to an (ir)rational trust on the part of the patient for the doctor to select the methods that will lead to the avoidance of pain and even death. See David Ingleby, "Mental Health and Social Order," in *Social Control and the State*. Ed. Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983, p. 162.

Once again, I am not saying the literary authors allude to the *specific* events, but the events happen to be pivotal in influencing, shaping, and speaking to the social tendencies of the postwar period, and the narratives allude to the *social environments* that create the tensions leading up to the historic events that make up each text's *epideictic exigency*. Each of the four novels contains narratives that expose the lack of democratic values for certain individuals in a certain context, and at other times, the novels contain discourse that works in a more celebratory mode; but in either case, the discourse is influenced by, and participates in, the *epideictic exigency*. An explicit reference to the historic event is *not* a necessary condition for the *literary epideictic*, for Walter Beale points out the "reinforcement of values" – and, I would add, the *challenging* and *re-creating* of value systems – "is seldom an *explicit* function of epideictic"; and Dale Sullivan also notes that epideictic rhetors "are *not* likely to ground their assertions with meticulous detail."[60] Therefore, what is important to take away from the rhetorical theory of exigency for the *literary epideictic* is the way in which historic events influence, speak to, and make up the cultural milieu or social environment that the novels find themselves mirroring. When the narratives amplify themes connected to the *epideictic exigency*, the readers can then judge the thematic allusion as it pertains to actual events that register within a communal history.

4) Conclusion
Constructing an Ethos of Dissent: The *Literary Epideictic* as a
Dwelling Place of Democratic Consubstantiality

In his article, "Power and the Celebration of the Self: Michel Foucault's Epideictic Rhetoric," Robert Danisch poses the question, "Could we invent a kind of resistance that does not ask questions about political effectiveness yet offers an alternative, viable form of agency?"[61] Danisch sets up this question to argue that epideictic provides a form of resistance. However, the

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[60] Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse," p. 223, italics original; Sullivan, "The Ethos of Epideictic Encounter," p. 123.
[61] Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self," p. 300.

literary epideictic is even better suited for this task, especially as the American social protest and

countercultural novels discussed align with the social development of the Anonymous Authority

during the midcentury posed earlier by Fromm. While Fromm cynically asked *who* can attack the

invisible "It," the social protest and countercultural novels provide a form of resistance. In

discussing the nature of power relations, Foucault provides a resistant strategy that reels in the

literary, and one that literary scholars would be wise to note. In "The Subject and the Power,"

Foucault discusses establishing new economies of power relations, and he writes,

> It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting
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> point. To use another metaphor, it consist of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst
>
> so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of
>
> application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of
>
> its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of
>
> strategies.[62]

The *literary epideictic* is indeed more than capable to carry out this task. Literature, especially in

the case of social protest and countercultural literature, acts as a strategy of antagonism – these

authors and their texts are the "chemical catalysts" not only bringing to light power relations, but

also depicting social ills or societal shortcomings in a democratic sense. In Fromm's line of

questioning, he asks about *who* can attack "It," but if one were to ask *how*, the *literary epideictic*

provides a line of exploration to find the point of "It's" application.

As novels within the social protest and countercultural traditions, Wright's, Ellison's,

Kerouac's, and Kesey's novels create, with the application of epideictic, a *literary imaginative*

space for readers to contemplate how the realization of the democratic principles of safety,

recognition, desire, and the "patient's good" are controlled by social scripts. The emergence of

newly found individual freedoms and values are met with power and control, and the authors and

their texts attempt to disrupt the powerful grip particular social scripts have on the governization of individuality. Jeffrey Walker notes how epideictic addresses the "experientially 'permanent' or chronic issues in a society's pattern of existence," and it seeks a "moment or juncture within the pattern" to intervene.[63] In addition, I see social protest and countercultural literature embodying what Michael Hyde refers to as "the ethos of rhetoric," which incorporates this notion of intervention and imagination in what I refer to as the ethos of a postwar, rhetoric of dissent.

The "ethos of rhetoric" comes from Hyde's introduction to the essay collection of the same name, and the anthology considers a specific meaning of "ethos" that predates the more common translation of "moral character" and "ethics." Hyde defines the term as, "the way discourse is used to transform space and time into 'dwelling places' (*ethos*; pl. *ethea*) where people can deliberate about and 'know together' (*con-scientia*) some matter of interest." One way to accomplish this, Hyde points out, is through the appeal to readers' "inventive and symbolic capacity to construct dwelling places that are stimulating and aesthetically, psychologically, socially, and perhaps theologically instructive."[64] I am focusing on how social protest and countercultural literature provide such "dwelling places" for readers to contemplate the sociocultural architecture of behavior, so to speak, that governs human relations – representations of the commonplaces of postwar existence or activity.

In this way, the social protest novels of Wright and Ellison, and the countercultural novels of Kerouac and Kesey, within the framework of the *literary epideictic*, cultivate a democratic consubstantiality among readers.[65] By "democratic consubstantiality" I mean a

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[62] Foucault, p. 780. Foucault gives the example of societal notions of "sanity," stating, "to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of *insanity*" (780, italics added). He also gives legality/illegality, and psychiatry as other examples.

[63] Jeffrey Walker, "Aristotle's Lyric: Re-imagining the Rhetoric of Epideictic Song." *College English,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan. 1989), p. 8.

[64] Michael J. Hyde, ed. *The Ethos of Rhetoric*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004, p. xxiii.

[65] See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Kenneth Burke discusses the concept of consubstantiality, which is a theory of identification based on the acceptance of symbolic structures under a common context. He writes, "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he

rhetorical space for readers to ethically evaluate democratic values within a literarily-depicted

social context. This term coexists with the notion of "community" in epideictic rhetoric, although

I use the terms somewhat interchangeably, mostly because literature does not possess the extant

coordinates of time and space that the physical setting of an oral speech provides for an

audience.[66] Yet, the social climate of a postwar American society can provide the experience, the

democratic values, and the social attitudes that allow individual readers to identify with – and

consequently, to consubstantiate with – others living in postwar society regardless of race,

gender, or class, for all postwar individuals live under the (specious) auspices of democratic

freedoms. Of course, a reader can refuse to participate in the particular contemplation of reality,

but that is why the act is a moral examination – this epideictic framework and the narrative create

a literary "dwelling place" for readers to contemplate the values of freedom, possibility, and

interconnectedness as those values are impacted by a newly emerging, post-WWII American

society. The *epideictic exigency* calls forth the epideictic writer (so to speak), and they feel called

or compelled to report on their experience within the developing American sociocultural

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may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is
persuaded to believe so" (20). There are "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas and attitudes" that
make two or more separate individuals consubstantial. To be consubstantial, Burke writes, is to be "both
joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (21). Thus, "In being
identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he
remains unique, an individual locus of motives" (21).

[66] Sullivan touches upon the role of the epideictic rhetor in establishing a "consubstantial space," noting
how the speaker and the audience "enter timeless, consubstantial space carved out by their mutual
contemplation of reality," and how the onus falls upon the rhetor to initiate this act, but the audience must
choose "to enter that space and participate in the celebration." See Dale Sullivan, "The Ethos of Epideictic
Encounter." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1993), p. 128. Thus, I am arguing that epideictic
rhetoric reveals how social protest and countercultural literature function by confronting the relationship of
different individuals' lived experiences to the professed democratic ideals of postwar society, and the act of
reading serves as an act of participation.

landscape. Wright, Ellison, Kerouac, and Kesey see *junctures* within the social imaginary and situate their narratives as critical commentaries on the social issues unraveling, and they do so by imagining new perspectives and alternative visions, both condemnatory and celebratory. Thus, conjoining epideictic and literature in the *literary epideictic* can perhaps be an effective method in posing important questions, producing new understandings of power relations, opening up new possibilities or alternatives, and ultimately, resisting power.

"One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples. Two hundred and forty-four years of slavery and nearly a century of institutionalized terrorism in the form of segregation, lynchings, and second-class citizenship in America were aimed at precisely this devaluation of black people. This white supremacist venture [….] has left its toll in the psychic scars and personal wounds now inscribed in the souls of black folk."

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1994), p. 85

"I feel that for white America to understand the significance of the problem of the Negro will take a bigger and tougher America than any we have yet known. […] Therefore if, within the confines of its present culture, the nation ever seeks to purge itself of its color hate, it will find itself at war with itself, convulsed by a spasm of emotional and moral confusion."

Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (1945), p. 272

Chapter II: "Bigger Thomas Conditioning" and "The Affective Economy of Fear" in *Native Son*

Introduction

In Book Three of *Native Son*, Max at one point proclaims, "Fear and hate and guilt are the keynotes of this drama!"[67] Within the narrative of *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas's emotions fluctuate and are triggered by exchanges between various individuals as he navigates the social environment. Wright weaves emotional discourse into the novel in order to "blame" systemic oppression for effecting a social death in Bigger Thomas. The social environment creates a distorted worldview for men and women like Bigger in which little opportunity exists for them to move about freely and live a life unimpeded by racialized fear.[68] When the narrative amplifies

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[67] Richard Wright, *Native Son*. Introduction by Arnold Rampersad. New York: HarperPerennial, 2005, p. 386. All future references from *Native Son* will be taken from this edition and page numbers will appear in parentheses.

[68] The "social environment" is a prominent concept in Wright's work, and he invests the term with a racial context in order to indict the space in which black and white bodies navigate. In his essay, "How Bigger was Born," Wright professes, "I don't mean to say that I think that environment *makes* consciousness, but I do say that I felt and still feel that the environment supplies the instrumentalities through which the

the emotions of fear, hate, anger, guilt, and shame, Wright's objective is to magnify the destructive psychological effects produced by racist social practices in 1930s American society, but in doing so, he links emotions and activity within a racial context to call upon a historically situated race problem as it informs the present. Thus, Wright creates an imaginative space for citizen-readers to evaluate the nation's racial history and to conduct a moral examination – readers witness Bigger's psychological state degenerate as Wright exposes the lack of human dignity extended to Bigger.

For Wright, the traumatized character of Bigger Thomas is a portrait of the psychological damage brought on by a racist society, and in depicting the psychological unraveling of Bigger's psyche, Wright engages in *literary epideictic* project of "blaming" racist social conditions by suggesting that they could drive an individual like Bigger Thomas to commit a most heinous act murder out of intense racialized fear. In doing so, Wright reveals the trauma that potentially resides in the depths of the African American consciousness of those who suffer from the ongoing continuation of racist public social scripts, and he exposes the deleterious effects racist social environments can exert on African American individuals.[69] By social script, I mean the

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organism expresses itself, and if that environment is warped or tranquil, the mode and manner of behavior will be affected toward deadlocking tensions or orderly fulfillment and satisfaction." See Richard Wright, "How Bigger was Born," in *Native Son*. Introduction by Arnold Rampersad. New York: HarperPerennial, 2005, p. 442. The social environment provides the means for an individual to express herself, and those means can determine the ultimate ends in which an individual acts towards. Of course, Wright depicts Bigger's environment in *Native Son* as "warped" by racist social scripts and Bigger as "deadlocked" by racial tension.

[69] Social script theory explains how individuals are engaged in various day-to-day activities that maintain typical practices and norms, which are situationally (and culturally) dependent. The standards of behavior pertaining to a particular social situation is established over time and revolves around social interactions of self and others. Thus, the specific externalization of the behavior reinforces the social script based on the context. For more information, see Jack D. Douglas and J John M. Johnson. *Existential Sociology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1977; Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*. (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates), 1977.

A very prominent example of a social script is the paradigm for dining in a restaurant. See Robert N. St. Clair, "Social Scripts and the Three Theoretical Approaches to Culture." *Intercultural Communication Studies*. XVII: 4 (2008), pp. 171-183. St. Clair states, "One does not just enter a restaurant: One must follow a script. That script already exists" (178). He explains how social scripts dictate what one should be doing at a particular time and place if one is to adhere to the social script already established. He gives a detailed dialogic exchange between a restaurant server and a patron to illustrate social script theory in

situational concept of adhering to internalized social norms in particular situations that are grounded in interactions with others, and in the context of *Native Son*, the typical day-to-day activity of a black individual externalized in accordance with the internalized racially motivated expectations – those submissive behavioral conventions expected of black men and women by whites, what Wright refers to as "Bigger Thomas conditioning."[70] Social scripts that established subjugated behavior on the part of black men and women in relation to whites, and then punished any detraction from those scripts with great violence under the guise of "justice," produced a traumatizing effect on African American consciousness. The fear sparked by systemic racial tyranny is experienced and felt in/on the bodies, and as a result of this violent past, the "psychic scars" are represented in forms of intense racialized fear that surface when black bodies encounter white bodies in the social environment.

The important point to consider, however, is that the majority of the text portrays Bigger suffering not from physical harm, but from excessive emotional onslaughts of fear. While Bigger does have visceral responses throughout the text, Bigger's emotional responses to the events of his life – his fear, shock, and excitement, along with his internal struggle to understand his individual plight – are associated with his black body.[71] The narrative shares Bigger's thoughts after he kills Mary and reflects,

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action. This theory very much applies to racist social scripts in American history that dictated particular behavior for black individuals relating to the dominant, white cultural expectations.

[70] See Wright, "How Bigger was Born," pp. 431-462. Wright alludes to the social scripts imposed by the white world in "How Bigger Was Born," defining them as, "a whole panoply of rules, taboos, and penalties not only to insure peace (complete submission), but to guarantee that no real threat would ever arise" (438), and he refers to this practice as "Bigger Thomas conditioning" (439-40). For instance, Wright explains how he modeled Bigger Thomas after five young black youths he had known in his childhood, black adolescents he both admired and feared who rebelled against the Jim Crow establishment. He indicates the violent ends that their insubordinate behavior incurred: they were "shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or their spirits broken" (437). The social environment of white superiority intended "to build up a vast, dense ideology of racial superiority that would justify any act of violence taken against [it] to defend white dominance; and further, to condition him to hope for little and to receive that little without rebelling" (438).

[71] According to *Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, the main characteristic of psychological trauma is the emotion of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and a threat of annihilation." See Benjamin J. Sadock & Virginia Alcott Sadock, *Kaplan & Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2009), p. 134.

> It seemed that [Mary's] actions had evoked fear and shame in him. But when he thought hard about it it seemed impossible that they could have. He really *did not know just where that fear and shame had come from; it had just been there*, that was all. Each time he had *come in contact with her* it had *risen hot and hard. It was not Mary he was reacting to when he felt that fear and shame.* Mary had served to *set off his emotions, emotions conditioned by many Marys*. And now that he had killed Mary he felt a lessening of the tension in his muscles; he had shed an *invisible burden* he had long carried. (114, italics added)

The narrative illustrates how Bigger suffers from an intense racialized fear when he reflects back upon his contact with Mary. Bigger is described as feeling "fear and shame," but these affective values are attributed to social conditioning, and arise when he is in contact with Mary. The narrative at one point articulates, "[Mary] was not real to him, not a human being," but "to Bigger and his kind, white people were not really people; they were sort of a great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overhead." In essence, Mary was an idea or part of a script, one that perpetuated the psychological suffering of Bigger "and his kind" as they tried to navigate the social environment of raced bodies in 1930s America. Most importantly though, Wright connects the treatment of particular African Americans, like Bigger Thomas, to a racialized fear that is based on histories of social contact. The emotion of fear is based upon a past of racial violence, and even more striking is the fact that whether or not Bigger and other African Americans directly suffered such experiences has no bearing on their current psychological state of fear. For Bigger and the other black men and women, they acknowledged the presence of the "invisible white force" and its control over them couched in the social scripts that were prevalent in a white supremacist society. While Mary did not feel "real" to Bigger, the fear and shame that he felt *is* real because it is connected to a history of cultural trauma, for the narrative stresses that "each and every day of their lives they lived with [the white force]; even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality" (114).[72]

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[72] See Richard Wright, *Black Boy*. Introduction by Edward P. Jones. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics), 2005, p. 74. Wright personally reflects upon this instrumental tension in 1945's *Black Boy*. This is not to conflate the two works as autobiographical, but *Black Boy* offers an autobiographical account of this "fundamental problem" from the fictional *Native Son*. Wright recalls specific episodes in his life that opened his eyes to race relations between white and black people that taught him about white "men who

Within the novel, Bigger struggles psychologically to understand his existence in his

daily environment, suffers tremendous fear and dread, and undergoes extreme emotional

pulls/swings, and all of these psychological elements serve as motivating factors for his activity.

Bigger's psychological condition represents an intense anxiety that is historically situated, and

Wright amplifies the traumatic fear Bigger suffers as a result of the myth of the black male rapist

and the violent ramifications attached to that charge for a black man, illustrating the very kind of

psychic toll that results from a history of "institutionalized racism." Racist social scripts devalue

the worth of African American lives, and perhaps, in the context of the 1930s and the narrative of

Native Son, the most disabling of them all is the myth of the black male rapist. The myth of the

black rapist entailed a (fabricated) belief that black men suffer from an intense desire for sexual

relations with white women, a myth invested with political motives to retain white supremacy.[73]

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could violate [his] life at will." Wright offers a haunting theory of "invisible whites" in *Black Boy* that captures the effect racism has on him and other African Americans. He writes, "A dread of white people now came to live permanently in my feelings and imagination," and he mentions how the "hostility of whites" was "implanted in his mind." For Wright, and other African Americans, news about the fate of black men and women at the hands of white people would stir a "vast complex of emotions," and he feared "the threat of some natural force whose hostile behavior could not be predicted. I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings." He later poses the question, "What kind of life was possible under that hate?" (164). The only existence possible within the racially motivated social environment for a black individual is a fearful one, one in which a traumatized fear oppresses individual expression. *Native Son* is the fictional account, with an epideictic objective, to illustrate the *lack* of life that was the reality for Bigger Thomas. Wright uses the character of Bigger to illustrate how a black individual reacts to the "vision of the world" that is predicated upon an intense racialized fear.

[73] See Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South After the Civil War." *Journal of the History Of Sexuality*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Special Issue: African American Culture and Sexuality (Jan. 1993), p. 402-417; Robyn Wiegman, "The Anatomy of Lynching." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Special Issue: African American Culture and Sexuality (Jan. 1993), p. 444-467; and Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*. (New York: Vintage Books), 1983. Hodes places this belief in a historical perspective in her article, acknowledging that sexual relationship between white women and black men threatened the institution of slavery because a child's legal status as a slave or free individual followed the mother; and she observes, "therefore, when white women had children by black men not only were racial categories eroded, but boundaries of slavery and freedom were eroded too" (402). She views the sexual liaison between white women and black men as linked to the possibility of black men's political and economic independence. The demise of racial slavery following the Civil War made the separation of blacks and whites even more crucial to the Southern whites who wished to retain supremacy, and she writes, "because it was the men among the former slave population who gained suffrage rights and a measure of political power – and who therefore had the potential to destroy the racial caste system – whites focused on the taboo of sex between white women and black men with a new urgency" (403). She points out that Klansmen took offense at even the slightest interaction between black men and white women and they believed that rape would be the resulting action if the institution of slavery

In Book Two, Wright touches upon this as the narrative elaborates: "[Bigger] knew that sex relations between blacks and whites were repulsive to most white men. He knew that whites thought that all Negroes yearned for white women, therefore he wanted to show a certain fearful deference even when one's name was mentioned in his presence" (197). Bigger's defense strategy here is warranted by a cultural history for, as Angela Davis contextualizes, a racist American past had called upon this narrative in order to maintain superiority and incite fear: "The myth of the black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications."[74] In other words, rape became the most cited accusation for inciting mob violence against African American males by white males, and even a slight suspicion of rape deemed violent repercussions justified.

Again, Wright references this cultural history in Book Three: Fate during Bigger's conversation with Max:

> Yeah, I reckon it was because I knew I oughtn't've wanted to. I reckon it was because they say we black men do that anyhow. Mr. Max, you know what some white men say we black men do? They say we rape white women when we got the clap and they say we do that because we believe that if we rape white women then we'll get rid of the clap. That's what some white men *say*. They *believe* that. Jesus, Mr. Max, *when folks says*

did not restrain black men, and even the accusation of rape would warrant lynching (409-410). As for the threat posed by black men as perceived by whites, Robyn Wiegman points out the intersection of sex and politics in the time period following the Civil War, where the "social transformation from enslavement to freedom" depended upon the "African American's claim to citizenship in precisely his status as a man," and that castration consign[s] the black male to the fragmented and decidedly feminized realm of the body" (449). Wiegman concludes, "The rise of black lynchings in the late nineteenth century and the attendant articulation of the mythology of the black male rapist demonstrates an increasing reliance on the discourse of sexual difference to negotiate race within the newly emergent economic structures of the twentieth century" (456).

[74] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*. (New York: Vintage Books), 1983, p. 151. Thus, the institution of slavery was replaced by a system of Jim Crow tactics that stigmatized African Americans as socially inferior in order to maintain white privilege. As Davis reports, "In a society where male-supremacy was all-pervasive, men who were motivated by their duty to defend their women could be excused of any excesses that they might commit. That their motive was sublime was ample justification for the resulting barbarities." Physically terrorizing and psychically shaming tactics formed the "institutionalized terror" that Cornel West talks about, culminating in the event of lynchings, which the *Jim Crow Encyclopedia* defines as "extralegal murders carried out by a mob or a group of vigilantes." See Nikki L. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford. *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press), 2008, p. 486. Also, see Jonathan S. Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2013. Amy Wood puts this in perspective in *Lynching and Spectacle*, explaining that between 1880-1940, at least 3,200 black men died in the South alone due to white mob violence. See Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2009, p. 3.

things like that about you, you whipped before you born. What's the use? Yeah; I reckon I was feeling that way when I was in the room with her. They say we do things like that and *they say it to kill us*. (351, italics added)

Bigger touches upon a violent past in which white men fabricated myths regarding black men and white women in order to "kill" black men. An entire history of this narrative of sexual desire, constructed by the white men, precedes this event. As Bigger's reflection suggests, black men have fallen victim to this false belief and have been killed, and this narrative is so prevalent that it has seeped not only into the imagination of white men who actually *believe* it, but also into Bigger's imagination. He is aware of his inability to escape its power over him and even concedes that he "reckons [he] was feeling that way" because white men have transformed that belief from an imaginary tale to a social conviction.

Wright evokes this inexplicit history of the horrors of lynching in the scene when Bigger and Jack are in the movie house and they see a newsreel showing Mary Dalton frolicking on the beach. After Jack expresses his desire to comingle with the white girls, Bigger responds that if he were there, "[he'd] be hanging from a tree like a bunch of bananas" (32). The image that Bigger depicts of Jack's body hanging from a tree references a violent past of lynching performed by whites on black male bodies. However, Bigger makes this comment in jest: Jack and Bigger had just finished masturbating prior to the newsreel of Mary Dalton, which Wright cleverly sequences to hint at the myth of the black male rapist, and after Bigger points out the consequential outcome, they "laughed." Here, Wright conceals the normativity of such measures by conjoining the imagery of black bodies hanging lifeless like bananas from a tree, along with Bigger and Jack's lighthearted response to what has become not a justifiable punishment in their eyes, but an expected ramification for the offense of black men interacting with white women. The fact that Bigger and Jack come to accept that image as an expected consequence, and then (fearfully) laugh about it, indicates its permeation into both the social consciousness and the individual African American consciousness. Socially, the white citizens judged such violent acts as a form of justice, and while Bigger laughs about it here only to illustrate its penetration into the social

imagination, the potential act and violent punishment pose the gravest of threats to an African

American male, and Bigger will come to know this fear much more intimately once he begins

working for the Dalton family. Bigger is excited for the opportunity to work for a rich white

family, but a social environment that can mete out violent consequences that underscore racist

social scripts – as evident in this scene and the hanging bananas – robs Bigger of the opportunity

and will replace it with intense fear.

In order to demonstrate the epideictic function of fear in the novel, I apply what Sarah

Ahmed terms an "affective economy of fear" to Wright's narrative. Ahmed establishes affective

economies to consider how emotions are more than psychological dispositions – they work "to

mediate the relationships between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the

collective," therefore, "aligning individuals with communities."[75] Fear does not reside in the

individual, or the *other*, however. Emotions, as Ahmed explains, do not reside in a subject;

rather, emotions "circulate between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement."

The affective economy of fear is social, material, and psychic – it circulates among subjects,

signifiers, and objects based upon the social relationships. Ahmed points out that fear has been

traditionally attached to objects, and in the case of social relationships, fear is correlated with

bodies that are situated in a social space. Ahmed explains that the affective value of a particular

emotion (fear) accumulates over time, which suggests that contact involves cultural histories that

have come before the present social relation.[76] The affective economy of fear, then, operates

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[75] Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 119.
[76] See the introduction to Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 5-8. Ahmed gives an example of a child encountering a bear, which she points out is a very cited hypothetical case study often used in psychological literature on emotions. The scenario depicts a child seeing a bear and then running away. Ahmed labels the "Dumb View" as that which reads the bear as the cause for the child's fear and automatic bodily symptoms. She also rejects the "functionalist" model that interprets the fear of the child as a survival mechanism. Rather, Ahmed points out that the situation is not so simple: "The child must 'already know' the bear is fearsome" (7). The fact that the subject is a child is important, for Ahmed states that this suggests a possible "first time encounter," or, at the very least, it presents a "not-yet subject." She continues,

> We have an image of the bear as an animal *to be feared,* as an image that is shaped by cultural histories and memories. When we encounter the bear, we already have an impression of the risks of the encounter, as an impression that is felt on the surface of the skin…. It is not that the bear *is*

epideictically by revealing the psychological trauma of Bigger Thomas (and, I will argue as part

of the epideictic discourse, African Americans collectively) generated by the narrative's notion of

the "white force" – the fear-inducing social environment that relies on racist social scripts that

have ignited an intense racialized fear when African Americans come in contact with white

bodies.

In this chapter, I will lay out Wright's epideictic objective that combines psychological

and emotional discourse to craft his epideictic assault on a midcentury, racist American society

that has continued to practice racist social scripts that deprive African American individuals of

human dignities. Wright portrays the intense fear that racist social scripts have impressed upon

Bigger Thomas, taking the reader on an unprecedented tour into Bigger's consciousness, and he

connects the psychological disposition of Bigger Thomas to the collective African American

consciousness because it is conditioned by all-pervasive racist social conditions. Thus, *Native

Son*'s critique attacks American, racist sites of oppression (social environments) that incorporate

other men and women like Bigger Thomas who find themselves suffocated by fear, and the novel

does not just localize the problem to one troubled African American male, but it references an

entire cultural history of racist social practices that have robbed black individuals (in this case,

African American males) of life.

Reading *Native Son* as a literary epideictic project will help the reader understand

Wright's critique of the social and cultural forces that are implicated in the motivation for, and

the murder by, Bigger Thomas. At one point, Max addresses the court regarding Bigger's fate

thusly: "The all-important thing for this Court to remember in deciding this boy's fate is that,

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fearsome, "on its own," as it were. It is fearsome *to* someone or somebody. So fear is not in the child, let alone in the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome. The story does not, despite this, lead to the same ending. Another child, another bear, and we might even have another story. (7)

Ahmed argues that individuals are relational in that they instigate notions of "towardness" or "awayness" in relation to particular objects and this is predicated upon how an individual reads the contact – as beneficial or harmful. Thus, "the 'reading' then identifies the bear as the cause of the feeling. The child becomes

though his crime was accidental, the *emotions* that broke loose were *already* there; […] that the accidental nature of his crime took the guise of a sudden and violent rent in the veil behind which he lived, a rent which allowed his feelings of resentment and estrangement to leap forth and find objective and concrete form" (392, italics added). The social environment must be taken into account, as Max states, "Through the instrument of fear, we determined the mode and the quality of his consciousness" (402).

In order to demonstrate this complex process or affective economy at work in the novel, I will first establish and analyze the prevalence of racist social scripts; the fear that rises through the contact of white and black bodies in the scenes where Bigger interacts with Mr. Dalton, Jan, and Mary, and specifically the murder scene; the racist language of hate and fear, as well as its associations with the myth of the black male rapist existent in the newspaper sections of Book Two: Flight; and then I will conclude with Max's epideictic argument in Book Three that mediates the psychological and the emotional discourse within an epideictic framework.

1) Establishing *Native Son*'s Epideictic Framework: (Re)Situating The Social, Psychological, and Emotional Discourse

When it comes to writing about *Native Son* and Bigger Thomas's predicament, critics have been prone to taking particular psychological approaches to the narrative.[77] Some critics

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fearful, and the bear fearsome: the attribution of feeling to an object is an effect of the encounter, which moves the subject away from the object. Emotions involve such affective forms of reorientation" (8).

[77] Most recently, Jay Garcia's book, *Psychology Comes to Harlem,* discusses Wright's role as a literary artist who concentrated on the issue of race within the psychological discourse of the 1930s. Garcia acknowledges Wright's interest in "psychotherapeutic models as a means of addressing the pressures of racist social environments," and claims that in his work, Wright established a "psychological literacy" that "offered avenues for broadening and deepening the critique of white supremacy and bringing the subject of racism's pervasive harms into public view in dramatic and potentially transformative ways," specifically by focusing on the criminal mind in conjunction with the psychology of the racial minority (15). See Jay Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*: *Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America*. (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012). Garcia summarizes the various theories of psychologists and sociologists that influenced the thinking of such literary figures as Ellison, Baldwin, and Wright and he explains how Wright utilized psychological theories of fear and aggression, psychoanalysis, and social and economic environmental factors to explore racial discrimination and the deleterious effects such forces had on individuals and society. Garcia's study, however, serves more as a biographical look

have alluded to the traumatic register of the social and cultural ramifications of Bigger Thomas's

activity and treatment.[78] W. Lawrence Hogue sees Bigger's traumatic existence as the impetus for

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into the intellectual background and influences of the writers and does not treat *Native Son* in detail, failing to illustrate how the novel "transformed" a reading public.

One main area of interest in the psychological import of *Native Son* lies is the issue of identity. Joseph Skerrett corrals his discussion of the novel into an exploration of how society and the familial unit impacts Bigger, who is left feeling alienated from family and society, which leads Skerrett to claim that Bigger's purpose "is the search for … an identity denied him by both his social milieu and his family situation" (31). See Joseph Skerrett, "Composing Bigger: Wright and the Making of *Native Son*." In *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ed. Arnold Rampersad. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 1995. Matthew Elder pits Bigger's identity issue along with the tension of living in a Jim Crow-era Chicago whereby "enslavement was replaced with economic oppression and geographic racial demarcation." Thus, Elder claims "Wright's central insight in *Native Son*, however, is that the sociological problem and the psychological one take the same form, a dissociation of parts. He sees the individual damage among African-Americans as a psychological fracturing of identity that reflects and necessarily mimics the fractured society that whites work to maintain and blacks are forced to accept" (35). See Matthew Elder, "Social Demarcation and the Forms of Psychological Fracture in Book One of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. (Spring 2010), 52.1, p. 31-47. Masaya Takeuchi calls *Native Son* a "male-centric narrative," and proposes that Wright portrays a character that illustrates Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" – Bigger is "an assertive [self] among blacks, and a submissive one in front of whites." Takeuchi concludes, "Bigger, on the one hand, displays his 'tough' masculine self among his own people; on the other hand, he performs his subservient feminized self in front of white people. Both selves are conditioned by whites" (56). Masaya Takeuchi, "Bigger's Divided Self: Violence and Homosociality in *Native Son*." *Studies in American Naturalism*. (Summer 2009), Vol. 4., No. 1, p. 56-74. Caren Irr steers her discussion towards the emotion of fear and she believes "the major psychological pattern that Wright traces is claustrophobic anxiety." She views the first half of the novel as manifesting "a fear of enclosure," of portraying Bigger's character as confined to Chicago's Black Belt. Once he commits his crime, Irr comments, the novel becomes "agoraphobic" and traces Bigger's fear of exposure. See Caren Irr, "The Politics of Spatial Phobias in *Native Son*." In *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*. Ed. Keneth Kinnamon. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), p. 199.

One of the main problems with these views is that they tend to focus on Bigger as an individual on a quest for identity which is not Wright's ultimate purpose. Wright is not zooming in to illuminate Bigger's internal, existential quest; he is examining Bigger's existence *in relation to* the social forces that assist in his identity formation. Wright emphasizes the way in which the social forces create an intense racialized fear that is embedded in a history of cultural trauma and therefore, *Native Son* is not a novel on identity, but a social critique that extends Bigger's experience to a collective African American body.

[78] See Terry Bozeman, "Mind-Blown: Possibility and Trauma in *Native Son*," in *From the Plantation to the Prison: African-American Confinement Literature*. Ed. Tara T. Green. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008). In his article, Bozeman applies Kierkegaard's philosophy of dread to *Native Son* and claims that this philosophical framework can provide more "clarity on how Bigger's life is guided by his lack of possibility, his comprehension of his infinity, and ultimately his fear of annihilation" (61). Bozeman never fully fleshes out the nature of "trauma" in this book chapter; his emphasis is on the lack of possibility and actualization and he concludes, "[Bigger is] someone trapped in a life without hope, without feelings of joy, and quite simply without possibility of anything other than acute stagnancy" (60). For another discussion on trauma in *Native Son*, see Jonathan Elmer, "Spectacle and Event in *Native Son*." *American Literature,* Volume 70, Number 4, (December 1998), p. 767-798. Elmer sees the murder scene of Mary as representative of a traumatic event that "takes place in a temporal suspension." According to Elmer, in the murder scene, Bigger is symbolic of the traumatized black individual, and Mrs. Dalton represents the white world, but her presence, while it does not witness the event due to her blindness, induces Bigger's fear that manifests the racialized and sexualized fantasy of the black man raping the white woman. Elmer claims that the encounter is missed in "the field of visibility," and the real traumatic event is the "change of state" that occurs in Bigger when he goes from desiring Mary sexually to fearing the "visibility" of the fulfillment

Bigger's murderous act. Hogue applies a postcolonial and existential reading to *Native Son*, and claims that the novel relates a "psychic revolt and transformation" of a subaltern subject in Bigger Thomas. Hogue writes, "Stripped of African culture and simultaneously not allowed to assimilate into mainstream American commercial culture and society, many African Americans became dislocated, trapped and subalternized, particularly in urban centers."[79] However, Hogue views the murder of Mary Dalton as the "catalyst" for revolt that enables Bigger to become an existential being bringing about a psychological freedom whereby Bigger has options and possesses agency. Ira Wells assesses Bigger's murder of Mary as both accidental and political. He notes that Bigger was aware of the racist myth of "black man as rapacious beast," and that stereotype led Bigger to suffer great fear and hysteria, which ultimately led to the murder of Mary. He writes, "Bigger's actions were accidental, but that 'accident' was permitted by the forms of structural violence that had brought Bigger into the Dalton home as a charity case, and then determined by Bigger's awareness of ingrained cultural stereotypes. Indeed, it is in the very 'accidental' nature of Bigger's violence, in its very *unintentionality*, that Wright locates the essence of modern terror."[80] Wells goes on to define "modern terror" as "a profoundly selfless,

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of the fantasy by Mrs. Dalton. He concludes, "Trauma would be the impossible experience of the self-dividing of the event, the change of state. It is not the fantasy of rape that traumatizes; and it is not the accidental murder of Mary that traumatizes. It is in the 'in-between' that the traumatic event resides" (785). The problem with Elmer's reading is that he focuses the traumatic context of the novel to a singular event for the most part. Elmer discusses trauma as "event," and I argue that Wright infuses the narrative with trauma as a rhetorical strategy. I argue that Bigger existed as an already-traumatized individual and the murder scene connects Bigger's fear to a cultural trauma produced by the black male rapist and critiques American society for continuing to invest in this racist script.

[79] W. Lawrence Hogue, "Can the Subaltern Speak? A Postcolonial, Existential Reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Southern Quarterly*. (Winter 2009) 46.2, p. 12. Hogue argues that Bigger is conditioned by social and economic forces that deny him human meaning, and as a result, Bigger suffers an internal colonization in which political, economic, and social forces condition him to act in a particular way – namely, as inferior and full of fear of white people. Hogue suggests that the killing gives Bigger a "self with a free will," and "The existential Bigger recognizes his options, makes choices, and takes control of his psychological destiny, which is something no other black character in the novel does" (24).

[80] Ira Wells, "What I Killed for, I Am": Domestic Terror in Richard Wright's America." *American Quarterly* 62.4 (2010): p. 880-881. Wells begins his essay by drawing the connection between the time Wright began writing *Native Son* (around 1937) and the international political event of the assassination of Yugoslavian king Alexander I and a French foreign minster by Croatian separatists in 1934 in order to illustrate the modern definition of terrorism that was forming via the League of Nations (Wells, 873). Wells claims that the legal institutionalization of "terrorism" coinciding with Wright's creation of Bigger Thomas was no accident. He argues that in the novel, Bigger represents a "single representative among

seemingly automatic form of terror that takes place more because of the existing relations of force than because of the conscious intent of any terrorist."[81]

Despite Hogue's exceptional reading of the novel, I do not view the murder of Mary Dalton as a form of (un)conscious revolt for Bigger, or as the novel celebrating such a distinct form of agency solely on the part of Bigger Thomas. Rather, I will illustrate how the murder scene is connected to a racist script of the black male rapist that Bigger would wish to avoid rather than fulfill or use as an act of revolt. Just as Hogue is right to focus on the traumatic nature of Bigger Thomas, Wells focuses on a key motivating factor for the murder as well: the myth of the black male rapist. However, Wells emphasizes the way in which Wright uses Bigger and his act as a method of terror. I argue that Wright fuses the myth of the black male rapist and trauma in a rhetorical manner, which does not lead to an act of revolt like Hogue argues, or just a way to terrorize white readers like Wells insinuates, for Wells concludes, "In short, while Bigger's strangulation of Mary is politically neutral as far as its perpetrator is consciously aware, Wright's representation of Bigger's violence is overtly political, and intended to create a 'state of terror' in the minds of white readers."[82] What is more important is how the murder is an act of societal and communal complicity – white society's "belief" in the myth of the black male rapist perpetuates and fosters fear in Bigger and *that* is what Wright is trying to illustrate, and any notion of Bigger's excitement or freedom or agency is rhetorically designed to grab a white readership and make them aware of the extreme dangers of such racist scripts. I agree that part of Wright's objective is to invoke terror, but Wells fails to complement Wright's initiative with an

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armies of the disaffected," and that "In Wright's prophesy, however, the towers are not brought down by some outward, external violence, but by a compromised foundation. Wright imagines this terrifying event as a kind of social earthquake in which our celebrated symbols of modernity are flattened by force that is simultaneously beyond our control and somehow self-induced" (874). Key to this analysis is the definition of "terrorism" by the league to include not the external properties of the act itself, but in the "presence of an 'intention' or calculation in the minds of the terrorists, and by a corresponding 'state of terror' in the minds of the 'general public'" (877).

[81] Ibid., p. 893.
[82] Ibid., p. 882.

educational component, and assigning an epideictic purpose underscores how *Native Son* reveals

terror *in order* to create change.

Rhetorically, scholars have explored Bigger's quest for "voice,"[83] the rhetoric of

"blindness,"[84] and the rhetoric of "the death-bound-subject."[85] Mark Bernard White has noticed

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[83] James Miller, "Bigger Thomas's Quest for Voice and Audience in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Callaloo*, No. 28, Richard Wright: A Special Issue (Summer, 1986), p. 501-506. James Miller writes about Bigger's quest for audience and voice, and he challenges the notion that Bigger is inarticulate in the novel. Miller points to the concluding scene of the novel and argues that rhetorically, Max attempts to speak for Bigger, but he fails in the end. He references Bigger's declaration, "What I killed for, I am!" as Bigger finding his voice. Miller states, "And even thought Bigger does not understand Max's language, he nevertheless appropriates it for his own purposes," and the reader is left "with the final image of Bigger Thomas facing his impending death in proud and lonely isolation, a soloist listening to the sound of his own song" (505-506).

[84] Karl Precoda and P. S. Polanah, "In the Vortex of Modernity: Writing Blackness, Blindness and Insight." *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (2011): 31-46. Karl Precoda and P.S. Polanah argue that *Native Son* is about reading/misreading, suggesting that for Bigger, the world-is-text. They refer to Bigger's defining characteristic of "cultural illiteracy" whereby "Bigger is a helpless prisoner of a deterministic fate that is grounded and plotted by his inability to read, to interpret, in the novel's terms, to see. *Native Son*'s rhetoric of blindness thus locates the heart of its, and Bigger's, textual mystery" (31-32). However, the rhetoric of blindness works paradoxically, for the authors point out that Bigger must deliberately misread his "personal text," meaning, his place in history as a black man, in order to survive. But they argue that "Bigger wrestles from latency the will to authorship" by killing Mary and experiencing a rebirth. They conclude, "The impetus to self-authorship ultimately transforms Bigger's blindness, if only momentarily, into genuine insights that manifest a historical or political consciousness illuminating the material ground of his existence," affirming to the readers that Bigger's narrative act is "one of hard-won redemptive insight, a successful inscription of his own subjectivity in the face of obliteration" (32).

[85] Abdul JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). Abdul JanMohamed frames his discussion of *Native Son* around the rhetoric of, what he refers to, as the "death-bound-subject." JanMohamed defines the "death-bound-subject" as, "the subject who is formed, from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death" and he uses Bigger Thomas as an example (2). JanMohamed describes African Americans' subjectification and violent treatment as "instrumental" in this death-bound process because this treatment serves as "the occasion that is designed to produce the terror of death" (6). The conflict that the death-bound-subject undergoes, JanMohamed states, is that "the death-bound-subject's 'life' is thus defined by the need to avoid the possibilities of life as well as the possibility of death," because in living a subjectified life, the constant threat of death awaits, but the subject does not wish to fulfill that threat (19). JanMohamed says that *Native Son* is "structured like a dream and has to be read as such" in order to "unveil the unconscious structures of the dialectics of death by which Bigger is produced, bound, and motivated, structures that have been in place throughout slavery and Jim Crow society" (77). JanMohamed views the temporal and spatial structure of events, intentions, the forms of knowledge and the attitudes of the narrator and characters as part of the unveiling process and concludes, "*Native Son* is not about the development of character, or the tragic fate of its protagonist, or the unmitigating cruelty of an impersonal social system that crushes helpless individuals, and so forth, but about the need for the protagonist and the narrator to come to consciousness regarding the structure and function of the threat of death as a form of coercion" (84-85). Also, see David Guest. *Sentenced to Death: The American Novel and Capital Punishment*. Jackson, MS: (University Press of Mississippi, 1997). David Guest also sees Bigger as a tragic figure fated unto death. He applies a rhetoric of capital punishment to *Native Son* and suggests that Wright charges the criminal justice system with "allow[ing] myths about race to influence the outcome of an individual defendant's trial," and he concludes, "Ultimately, Wright suggests our criminal justice system is an instrument of racial

the epideictic function of what he calls African American Didactic Literature; in particular, White

observes the correlation of the "edifying and shaping" of individual and communal notions of

character in didactic literature, with the ethical, epideictic purpose of shaping individual and

communal values in epideictic rhetoric.[86] He lists *Native Son* as an example of African American

Didactic literature, but does not discuss Wright's novel in detail. Yet, White claims that African

American didactic literature employs the epideictic function of edifying character, or ethos, by

challenging the audience to become more virtuous. However, as Walter Beale has pointed out,

the "reinforcement of values is seldom an *explicit* function of epideictic."[87] I believe this to be

true in regards to *Native Son* and White's recognition of how epideictic "edifies and shapes"

communal values is accurate, but he misses the complexity in Wright's mission to challenge the

audience to become more "virtuous."

One rhetorical impasse in Wright's project was confronting a white readership. For

instance, Michel Fabre notes, "Wright's first ambition was to shock his public, largely the white

liberals, into realizing the truth of the racial situation."[88] In Wright's case, he is not necessarily

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oppression not because it fails to live up to its mandate but because it expresses the [racist] will of the people" (91; 103).

[86] Mark Bernard White, "The Rhetoric of Edification: African American Didactic Literature and the Ethical Function of Epideictic." *The Howard Journal of Communications*. (9): 1998, pp. 125-36. White defines didactic literature, by way of M. H. Abrams's *Glossary of Literary Terms,* as literature with the primary aim "to transform its audience by teaching." He states, "Such literature calls forth an imaginative experience that moves the heart and enlarges the understanding…. of serious issues of the real world," and emphasizes the major role didactic literature has had on African American cultural history (126). White provides a brief overview of some of the functions of African American didactic literature: it includes, "(a) calling for justice, (b) exhorting and encouraging, (c) exposing the evils of racism, (d) verifying African American humanity, (e) exploring issues of identity, (f) celebrating the lives and the value of common folk, and (g) exploring relationships between Black men and Black women" (128).
[87] Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall, 1978), p. 223, italics original.
[88] Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest* of *Richard Wright.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1993, p. 183. See Caleb Corkery, "Richard Wright and His White Audience: How the Author's Persona Gave *Native Son* Historical Significance," in *Richard Wright's Native Son*. Ed. Ana Fraile. (Amsterdam: Rodopi), 2007, pp. 3-20. My analysis takes up the question posed by Corkery: "How could a liberal white audience who generally enjoyed privilege identify with a black man who grew up poor in the South resenting white people?" (9-10). Corkery provides an intellectual and sociological history, whereas I am analyzing the rhetorical strategies that would address such an audience – taking into consideration their awareness and their potential resistance. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, in her introduction to the original 1940 publication of *Native Son*, described the predominant attitude Wright assumed in his audience: "the outlets of native power which would have been open to any white boy were closed to Bigger. [Wright] knows he

addressing a social issue that is confusing or troubling to his audience; the challenge that Wright

found himself facing was how could he reach a readership that included white individuals who

could have been unaware of the problem, contributed to the problem, or individuals who were

sympathetic, but not actively confronting the race problem? For instance, in "How Bigger Was

Born," Wright explains that when reviews of *Uncle Tom's Children* came forth, he felt perturbed:

"I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and

feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it;

that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears"

("How Bigger was Born," 454). Wright felt that with *Uncle Tom's Children*, he had not fully

achieved his goal, and he frames his assessment in terms of the affective value of white readers'

responses.

In order to get the reader to consider the effects of racist practices, Wright creates a

fictional story that revolves around the psychologically damaging effects of a black protagonist,

and the horrifying acts that can result from such social conditioning. He explains how Bigger's

life had to be "couched in imaginative terms acceptable to a common body of readers," and the

moment he began writing, the plot "fell out, so to speak," that "life had made the plot over and

over again, to the extent that I knew it by heart" ("How Bigger was Born," 455). Wright knew

"by heart" the denial of basic needs of life to African Americans by a racist society and the text

works epideictically because it challenges the social forces that create, construct, and affect

communal values, specifically, ones that assume the inhumanity of black life. Therefore,

Wright's psychological excavation (so to speak) serves as epideictic discourse because it allows

him to target misplaced white sympathy by giving readers no consolation, challenging them to

come to terms with Bigger's African American social reality, for he concludes, "so, when the

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does not have to prove this ... every one of his American readers will know all that without being told" (xi). And Robert Felgar touches upon the possible resistance by Wright's audience thusly: "Whites [who rejected Native Son] did not and do not want to acknowledge what their racism has produced" (Felgar, *Richard Wright*. Twayne, 1980, p. 98.

time came for writing, *what had made him and what he meant* constituted [the] plot" ("How Bigger was Born," 454). In essence, Wright's rhetorical strategy amplifies horror. This is not a common way to go about changing communal values with an intent on making a reading audience more virtuous, but it most explicitly exhibits epideictic discourse because it amplifies the psychological horror and terror in order to *educate* the readership on the social realities of African American individuals like Bigger Thomas.

The previous scholars have misinterpreted the significance of the psychological discourse and the establishment of Bigger's traumatized state, and no scholarly work explores the dynamics of the psychological discourse as a rhetorical strategy. I argue that by applying an epideictic framework to *Native Son*, it becomes clear that the novel uses psychology in order to *reveal* the negative effects of racism in order to implicate the public's role in conditioning Bigger Thomas. Rather than give the white readers an account of black life evoking tears of sympathy, Wright amplifies the terror in the mind of Bigger Thomas, and the terror in the minds of the white readers for creating this problem, thus educating them about the aftermath or consequences of "Bigger Thomas conditioning." Wright presents a view inside African American consciousness that is otherwise unavailable to the members of the white community, juxtaposing Bigger's desire for a dignified, meaningful life, with Bigger's fear resulting from the debilitating effects of racism. He provides a shocking potentiality to the white world couched in Bigger's psychological responses of fear and hatred that lead him to murder Mary as, ultimately, the only way Bigger can find meaning in his life, a devastating outcome that both Bigger and the white world suffer. Wright's objective is to critique the current state of race relations in the country, but, because racist social scripts are rooted in the country's history, Wright reveals how a racist past informs the present.

2) The Cultural Imposition of the Black Male Rapist:
***Native Son*'s Epideictic Exigency**

In the essay, "How Bigger Was Born," Wright clarifies his epideictic exigency when he explains that, for his "race," there existed no "fictional works" addressing and critiquing the problems embedded in the "dark roots of life" (443). After Wright talks about his relationships with other white writers and how he would learn their "white reactions" to the "lurid American scene," he reflects, "as they talked, I'd translate what they said in terms of Bigger's life…. I took these techniques, these ways of seeing and feeling, and twisted them, bent them, adapted them, until they became *my* ways of apprehending the locked-in life of the Black Belt areas" (443). He proposes, "In a fundamental sense, an imaginative novel represents the merging of two extremes; it is an intensely intimate expression on the part of a consciousness couched in terms of the most objective and commonly known events" (433). In *Native Son*, Wright depicts the social environment that inflicts fear into the mind of African American individuals and he is filtering the lived realities of black life in 1930s American society through Bigger's consciousness.

The epideictic exigency for *Native Son* revolves around two historic criminal events, namely, the Leopold and Loeb trial of the 1920s and case of Robert Nixon in the late 1930s.[89] In "How Bigger was Born," Wright explicitly links Nixon to the novel, first, by stating, "Any Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and charged with 'rape.' This thing happens so often that to my mind it had become a representative symbol of the Negro's uncertain position in America" (455). He indicates, "So frequently do these acts recur that when I was halfway through the first draft of *Native Son* a case paralleling Bigger's flared forth in the newspapers of Chicago. (Many of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in *Native Son*

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[89] See Robert Butler, "The Loeb and Leopold Case: A Neglected Source for Richard Wright's *Native Son*. *African American Review*, Volume 39, No. 4. 2005, pp. 555-567; Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. (New York: Holt), 2001; Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius*. (New York: Amistad Press), 1988; Jerry W. Ward and Robert Butler. *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 2008.

are but fictionalized versions of the Robert Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the

Chicago Tribune)."[90]

In 1938, an eighteen-year-old black male, Robert Nixon, and his accomplice Earl Hicks,

broke into the apartment of a white woman, Mrs. Florence Johnson, in an attempt to rob her.

Johnson discovered the young men, and Nixon panicked and beat the woman to death with a

brick.[91] In a matter of hours, the police apprehended Nixon with bloody clothes and injured

hands and officials alleged that all the evidence strongly implicated Nixon. Although no

evidence conclusively proved that the woman had been raped, authorities and news outlets

accused Nixon of a rape and murder.[92] Police held Nixon in custody for two days despite

Nixon's pleas of innocence. Finally, on the second night, he confessed to the murder, although

Nixon's lawyers suggested that he had been both "enticed" and "coerced" by pleasurable and

painful means.[93] In the days following Nixon's confession, he confessed to the unsolved murders

of four other white women in the Chicago and Los Angeles areas, mostly due to the correlation of

the murders with a brick as the weapon.[94] The newspapers reported the details of the murder and

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[90] Wright, "How Bigger was Born," p. 455. Also, see Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright Daemonic Genius: A Portrait of the Man, A Critical Look at His Work*. (New York: Warner Books, 1988), p. 122. Walker states that she received requests from Wright to send her all the newspaper clippings on the Robert Nixon case she can find, for "The reason I want all the information I can on that case is that, surprisingly, the novel I'm writing deals with the same stuff" (Wright qtd. in Walker).

[91] See Jerry W. Ward and Robert Butler Eds. *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), pp. 284-285; and Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 172-173.

[92] David Guest, *Sentenced to Death: The American Novel and Capital Punishment*. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1997, p. 90-91.

[93] See Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), p. 544, n. 5. Rowley writes, "Nixon's contradictory confessions, nearly all repudiated later, were almost certainly extracted by means of police brutality. His defense lawyers claimed he had been hung naked, by the ankles, then beaten and kicked until he signed the confession paper."

[94] See Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 41-45. The *Chicago Defender* article, "'Somebody Did It,' So 2 Youths Who 'Might Have Done It' Are Arrested," by David Orro from May 28, 1938 states that police offered him "numerous helpings of [coconut] pie and copious swigs of strawberry pop."

Nixon's confessed crimes put the media, the city, and the white community into a frenzy. Nixon was ultimately executed.[95]

Wright incorporated the "objective and commonly known event" of the Robert Nixon case into his narrative, specifically in regards to the additional allegation of rape along with the murder charge for both Nixon and the fictional Bigger, despite the fact that there was no solid evidence that rape had been committed. Additionally, the police coerced Nixon into confessing to other crimes that he potentially did not commit, and in Book Three of *Native Son*, the district attorney tries to get Bigger to confess to other crimes.[96] Michel Fabre writes, "Wright took an interest in Nixon's case more out of a desire to study the behavior of whites once they turned against a black man than out of curiosity about the psychology and motivation of the murderer himself."[97]

However, Wright's major rhetorical objective in paralleling the Nixon case is his use of the newspaper accounts in *Native Son*. Wright models the news reports about Bigger's crime to that of the Nixon case, and I will show how Wright's purpose is to illustrate how public agencies inscribe the black male body with the myth of the black male rapist. I argue that Wright is amplifying the fear that a black male suffers from the racist social scripts, such as the black male rapist that entrapped Nixon and Bigger. I disagree with Fabre's notion that the behavior of whites and the motivation for Bigger's murder are divorced. In fact, as I will show, the behavior of whites in imposing racist social scripts and upholding them actually contribute to the motivating factors in Bigger's murder case, which ultimately lead to his execution as well.

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[95] Ward and Butler, *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia,* 284. See Pattillo, *Black on the Block*, pp. 42-45 for more information on the news outlets creating a "frenzy."

[96] In Book Three, Buckley says, "'Well, if you won't tell about Bessie, then tell me about that woman you raped and choked to death over on University Avenue last fall.'[....]How about that girl you attacked in Jackson Park last summer?" (304-305).

    The narrative reflects, "Was the man trying to scare him, or did he really think he had done other killings? [....] Bigger wondered, 'Was he lying about the other women in order to get him to tell about Mary and Bessie? Or were they really trying to pin other crimes upon him?'" (305). Buckley finally gives up and responds, "Who'll believe you when you say you didn't do it?" (305).

[97] Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1993, p. 172.

Robert Butler acknowledges the influence of the Robert Nixon case on Wright and the composition of *Native Son*, but he argues, "very little attention has been paid to his use of the Loeb/Leopold murder and trial even though they played a more prominent role in the shaping of Wright's masterpiece."[98] In 1924, two teenagers of wealthy Chicago socialites, Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold, committed the "crime of the century."[99] Both young men were highly intelligent and privileged, and they attempted to prove themselves Nietzschean supermen, based on Leopold's obsession with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the mythical superman "who, because he was a superman, stood outside the law, beyond any moral code that might constrain the actions of ordinary men. Even murder, [Leopold] claimed, was an acceptable act for a superman to commit if the deed gave him pleasure."[100] Loeb and Leopold planned the kidnap, murder, and ransom of a child from a wealthy family in their neighborhood, and they chose Bobby Franks who was a fourteen-year-old distant cousin of Loeb's.

On May 21, 1924, Bobby Franks was walking home from school when Loeb and Leopold pulled up next to him in their car. They lured the boy into the car by asking him about a tennis racquet. Once in the car, Loeb killed the boy by delivering several blows to the head with a chisel and covered his mouth with a rag soaked in chloroform to keep him quiet. Afterwards, they drove to a discreet location and proceeded to pour hydrochloric acid onto Franks's corpse to make the body unrecognizable and dumped Franks's naked body. Then, they composed a ransom note, mailed it, and later called the Franks residence and told the family that the boy had been kidnapped, but was safe, and they demanded $10,000.[101] While this was happening, Franks's

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[98] Robert Butler, "The Loeb and Leopold Case: A Neglected Source for Richard Wright's *Native Son*. *African American Review*, Volume 39, No. 4. 2005, p. 556.

[99] See Hal Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press),1999. Higdon states that the Leopold and Loeb case earned the title "crime of the century" because of the frightening nature of the crime – a kidnap, ransom, and murder of a child. Additionally, the two young men had "IQs of 210 and 160," and there were rumors of a sexualized nature that the boys were perverts. The case dominated the news in 1924, but the ultimate reason Higdon claims is because of the lawyer "Clarence Darrow, the most famous attorney of the age" (8).

[100] Simon Baatz, *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Chicago*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 52.

[101] Baatz, *For the Thrill of It,* pp. 72-90.

body was discovered, along with a pair of horn-rimmed glasses that belonged to Leopold. After

tracing the glasses to an optometrist who prescribed the glasses to Leopold, the interrogation

intensified and eventually Loeb confessed, followed by Leopold, although they both blamed each

other for the murder.[102] The families eventually hired Clarence Darrow for the defense and he

changed the boys' initial please from "not guilty" to "guilty" in an effort to prevent the death

sentence that would most certainly be handed down by an outraged jury. Darrow argued that

forces beyond the young boys' control influenced their action and that this should be considered

when sentencing the boys who should be spared the death penalty.[103]

Robert Butler points out the many similarities between the Loeb and Leopold case and

Native Son. He acknowledges that the victims were chosen by chance, were suffocated to death,

the bodies of both victims were mutilated, both Bigger and Loeb and Leopold wrote similar

ransom letters, and, most importantly, Max's defense is modeled after Darrow's defense of a

guilty plea to "argue that the crimes committed were produce by unhealthy social environments

that emotionally distorted their clients and stunted their human development."[104] He concurs that

both defense attorneys saw the fates of their clients as indicative of "the larger cultural calamities

experienced by modern society," and each lawyer viewed his trial "as a pivot on line in history

dividing barbarism and civilization."[105] As David Guest points out, the Leopold and Loeb case

"may have provided Wright with valuable source material for his novel, but it had little to say

about race."[106] However, Butler does make a minor point that challenges Guest's assessment

when he points out that Loeb's letter reveals his privileged education, whereas Bigger's is "barely

literate" due to a lack of formal schooling.[107] Butler finally concludes that the Loeb and Leopold

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[102] For more information on the confessions, see Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century*, pp. 95-112. For more on Leopold's glasses, see Baatz, pp. 103; 105; 113-115.

[103] Baatz, *For the Trill of It*, p. 283. For more on Darrow's defense strategy see Baatz, pp. 267-289. Baatz explains that due to Illinois state law, an insanity plea would be heard before a jury.

[104] Butler, p. 556-557.

[105] Butler, p. 559.

[106] Guest, *Sentenced to Death*, p. 87.

[107] Butler, p. 557.

case and the Robert Nixon murder were influential in *Native Son* because they "weighted" Wright's novel in "public, historically verifiable events" and "provided an authority and resonance it otherwise would not have possessed," and "transformed" those known events through Wright's consciousness into a "durable work of art."[108]

However, while Butler is more invested in demonstrating the similarities between the Loeb and Leopold case and *Native Son*, I am interested in how Wright amplifies elements from both of these events through an epideictic sensibility in order to blame social forces for contributing to the traumatized psyche of African American individuals. For instance, in Book Three, Max addresses the judge thusly: "But we have had many, many such cases to come before the courts of Illinois, The Loeb and Leopold case, for example, . . . Shall we deny this boy, because he is poor and black, the same protection, the same chance to be heard and understood that we have so readily granted to others?" (376).

What is interesting here, and what Butler misses, is that Wright's purpose in drawing this connection is to adapt the historically verifiable events not to make a "vibrant work of art" as Butler claims, but to construct epideictic discourse. For example, in the Loeb and Leopold case, Clarence Darrow argued that the young men's genetics and privileged upbringing gave them an "excess of intellect and a deficit of emotion, diminishing their moral character.[109] Darrow turned to scientists that would argue that endocrinology, the study of the glands and hormonal secretions, produces a hormonal imbalance that leads to mental illness and explains the motivation for the murder. What is most important for my analysis is Darrow's reliance on a hereditary cause, and his declaration that the young men's crime "was inherent in his organism," and that their mental states came from "some ancestor," and he did not know "how many ancestors" may have "sent down the seed that corrupted" the young men.[110] Wright has Max use a similar defense of social factors, but the overriding element of *Native Son* is fear. The social forces that Max claims

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[108] Butler, p. 563.
[109] Baatz, p. 374-375.

influenced Bigger are forces that instill fear in Bigger's consciousness, but Wright transforms the import of the Loeb and Leopold case through a racially traumatized consciousness that is connected to a violent and oppressive history. Wright parallels the Darrow defense, but he alludes to it only to invert it – Wright amplifies the affective economy of fear that continues the racial social scripts and the ongoing cultural trauma. And while Darrow emphasized the limited moral capacities of the accused, Wright is critiquing the moral code of society for maintaining the racist social scripts that are responsible for the Bigger Thomas's "vision" of the world. In this way, contrary to Darrow's fabricated defense, Wright actually implicates society's role in creating the "moral horror of Negro life in the United States" (461), which could only be registered through Wright's delving into Bigger's consciousness.

3) Fear, Flight, Fate: A *Native Son*'s Affective Economies

In order to explain *Native Son*'s epideictic discourse, I turn to Sara Ahmed's work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Ahmed is interested in formulating a theory of emotion that views emotions as a social and cultural practice, meaning, emotions do not originate in individual subjects, but "produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects."[111] Therefore, she breaks down the barrier that separates the internal subjective states of emotions, and the external cause-and-effect states of objects, in order to demonstrate that emotions shape *how* we respond to objects and others; in other words, emotions help to maintain surfaces and boundaries and are shaped by "contact." Ahmed illustrates how emotions perform on bodies and incorporate bodies within communities, or situate other bodies outside of particular communities, thereby creating a rhetoric of sociality that establishes a self versus an other, and by extension, an "us" versus a "them" (based on likeness and unlikeness).

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[110] Baatz, p. 374. For more information on Darrow's scientific defense, see pages 245-268.
[111] Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 10.

However, while the emotions help to differentiate subjects in social space, Ahmed is interested in how emotions circulate between bodies, and in particular, how they move and "stick." Therefore, she contends, "emotions are shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects."[112] As a result, Ahmed claims that "emotions do not inhabit anybody or anything," but rather, the individual subject exists as "one nodal point in the economy, rather than an origin and destination." [113] Borrowing from psychoanalysis, Ahmed develops a theory of emotion as economy that starts from the premise that unconscious emotions are disconnected from the original event that incited the affect. She writes, emotions "involve a process of movement or association, whereby 'feelings' take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present," and this process creates a "rippling effect" in which emotions "move sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures and objects) as well as forward and backwards (repression always leaves its trace in the present – hence 'what sticks' is bound up with the 'absent presence' of historicity)." Borrowing from a Marxian critique of capital, she continues,

> [E]motions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or the commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation. I am using 'the economic' to suggest that objects of emotion circulate or are distributed across a social as well as psychic field, […] What I am offering is a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become.[114]

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[112] Ahmed, p. 6.
[113] Ahmed, p. 46.
[114] Ahmed, p. 44-45. Discussing *Capital,* she writes, "In *Capital*, Marx discusses how the movement of commodities and money, in the formula (M-C-M: money to commodity to money), creates surplus value.

In this way, Ahmed claims that emotions endow bodies with value, and through repetition and

historical context, the emotional value is generated and accumulates, which *then* ultimately

determines inclusion or exclusion. Ahmed writes, "Emotionality as a claim about a subject or a

collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and

value."[115] Ahmed's theory shifts the focus on emotions from an "inside-out" or an "outside-in"

model to explore how emotions work in social relations of power. The social and cultural force

of emotions is evident in the affective value that particular emotions, like hate and fear for

example, accumulate when individuals associate certain bodies with those affective meanings,

creating a power dynamic that regulates social relationships amongst definitive groups.

Discussing the emotion of hate, for example, Ahmed points out that hate hinges on the

characteristics of "likeness" and "unlikeness," where the hated is paired with "unlikeness."

Characteristics demarcating "unlikeness" inscribe the bodies of individuals, and Ahmed proposes

that "hate works by providing 'evidence' of the very antagonism it affects; we cite the work that

it is doing in producing characteristics of likeness and unlikeness when we show the reasons for

its existence," and she reasons, "the politics of *racial hatred* involve attributing racial others with

meaning, a process we can describe as the 'making of unlikeness.' Hatred is a negative

attachment to an other that one wishes to expel, an attachment that is sustained through the

expulsion of the other from bodily and social proximity."[116] Therefore, the emotion of hate

belongs to a vulnerable, endangered self, distinguishing and loathing an "other" who presents a

threat to the security of those within the community (i.e., those who are "alike").

Most important for my analysis is Ahmed's discussion of fear. She begins by

differentiating between fear and anxiety by emphasizing that "fear *has* an object," but she argues

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That is, through circulation and exchange 'M' acquires more value (Marx 1976: 248). Or, as he puts it: 'The values originally advanced, therefore, not only remains intact while in circulation, but increases its magnitude, adds to itself a surplus-value or is valorized. *And this movement converts it into capital*' (Marx 1976: 252, emphasis [Ahmed]). I am identifying a similar logic: the movement between signs or objects converts into affect" (45).

[115] Ahmed, p. 4.

that "fear is linked to the 'passing by' of the object."[117] "Passing by" has to do with spatial

proximity, temporal proximity, and object displacement. The object of fear can be directly in

front of the individual or not, but the proximity will determine the affective value of fear.

Additionally, Ahmed points out that fear is an intense feeling of unpleasantness towards an object

that is approaching, thus, projecting an individual from the present into a future anticipation. To

put this another way, because emotions can be displaced among objects and signifiers, one could

experience great difficulty in trying to pinpoint an object to contain a particular fear. Ahmed

touches upon this by explaining how fear is related to the future, or, "an anticipation of hurt or

injury." Ahmed cites Heidegger's remark that fear arises due to the "absence of the object" that

incites fear. She claims,

> It is the futurity of fear that makes it possible that the object of fear, rather than arriving,
>
> might pass us by. But the passing by of the object of fear does not mean the overcoming
>
> of fear: rather, the possibility of the loss of the object makes what is fearsome all the
>
> more fearsome. If fear had an object, then fear could be contained by the object. When
>
> the object of fear threatens to pass by, then fear can no longer be contained by an object.
>
> Fear in its very relationship to an object, in the very intensity of its directedness towards
>
> that object, is intensified by the loss of its object.[118]

As Ahmed observes, if fear could be contained by an object, there would be no threat of the

object "passing by" (i.e., the fear stems from an object drawing nearer, or, it is the outcome of an

anticipated fear of future injury intensely registered presently). Thus, the proximity of the object

in terms of space and time is not fixed and an individual may try to flee from the object of fear,

although the fear may be displaced amongst objects.[119] Thus, an object of fear can "pass by" in

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[116] Ahmed, p. 53; 55.
[117] Ahmed, 64-65.
[118] Ahmed, p. 65.
[119] Ahmed gives the example of Freud's case study on Little Hans. Hans had a phobia of horses that Freud argued was a displaced fear of castration as a fear of the father. Hans can avoid horses altogether, but cannot do so with his fear of the father.

terms of physical contact – the object can come into contact with the individual who fears; temporally, the object's production of fear can pass from the future to the present; and/or the fear can be displaced amongst many objects and signifiers.

Ahmed's theory of emotionality figures predominantly in *Native Son*. For instance, in Book Three, while in the cell, Max asks Bigger questions about his life and gives Bigger an opportunity to explain why he murdered Mary Dalton, but the importance of the exchange lies in Bigger's articulation of the affective economies of hate and fear in which Bigger finds himself immersed. The narrative reads, "in Max's asking of those questions [Bigger] had felt a recognition of his life," despite his "acts of fear and hate and murder and flight and despair" (360). This causes Bigger to reflect on his own life, and the narrative relates, "He stood upon the middle of the cell floor and tried to see himself in relation to other men, a thing he had always *feared* to try to do, so deeply stained was his own mind with the hate of *others* for *him*," that this "new sense of the value of himself gained from Max's talk, a sense fleeting and obscure," created a "strong counter-emotion" in him, "urging him, warning him to leave this newly-seen and newly-felt thing alone, that it would lead him to but another blind alley, to deeper hate and shame" (361). In *Native Son*, fear, hate, anger, guilt, and shame are all interrelated, for the white world's hate of Bigger causes him to feel fearful and shameful of his black skin and life, but it also causes him to hate. His hate, therefore, is predicated upon fear, and the white world's hate is also connected to fear – the white world fears that which is not like *it*, and it attempts to expel the differentiated other. In the novel, Wright portrays whites associating a meaning and value with black skin, a value of unlikeness and inferiority, which causes them to mark the body as a separate object, which in turn incites shame for Bigger.

The affective economy of fear plays a prominent role in *Native Son,* causing Bigger to suffer a profoundly fearful existence throughout the novel and illustrating how his fear is often displaced amongst different individuals, different signifiers, and different events on a temporal continuum – meaning, the racialized public script is an already-established social force within the

novel's depiction of 1930s American society, giving it a historical precedence and a current impact on the present of the narrative. For instance, Bigger and Gus engage in a dialogic exchange when they role play in a game they call "playing white," which is "a game of playacting" in which they "imitated" the "manners of white folks." The caricature takes off from a pre-established history of white domination. Bigger acts as a General in the military alluding to the white world's control over military might, and Gus plays J.P. Morgan emphasizing the exorbitant amount of money that he possesses and manages, and lastly, Bigger acts as the President of the U.S. and pretends to call for a very important meeting because "the niggers is[sic] raising sand all over the country, … We've got to do something about those black folks …" (19). At one point, the narrative reads, "Then they guffawed, partly at themselves and partly at the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun before them" (18).

Wright is establishing the "white world" as the social environment that influences Bigger and dictates his very existence – what he can and cannot do, *where* he can and cannot go. Bigger begins to feel fear and hate after Bigger and Gus complete "playing white," and Bigger voices frustration, exclaiming, "[the white folks] don't let us do *nothing*" (19). Gus retorts that this is an old custom, but Bigger states, "I just can't get used to it … We live *here* and they live *there*. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail" (20). The social environment demarcates the space for white and black bodies, and it not only assigns value and meaning to the bodies (i.e. worth), but it also contains the bodies in a certain geographical locale that is connected to future potentiality. White individuals mandated a divide between white and black bodies that was enforced by a racialized terror. Bigger and Gus know that they cannot cross the "line" and they fear to transgress the racial boundaries of "here" and "there." Bigger refers to the living situation as a prison, where bodies are confined and lack freedom, and he forebodes the fear attached to the (non)proximity of white and black bodies: "Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they

being there, I feel like something awful's going to happen to me …" (20). Finally, Bigger asks

Gus,

> "You know where the white folks live?"
> "Yeah," Gus said, pointing eastward. "Over across the 'line'; over there on Cottage
> Grove Ave."
> "Naw; they don't," Bigger said.
> "What do you mean?" Gus asked, puzzled. "Then, where do they live?"
> Bigger doubled his fist and struck his solar plexus. "Right down here in my stomach," he
> said. (21)

Bigger makes his first prophecy regarding his predestined path and he makes it based upon a

racialized traumatic fear. Wright juxtaposes the actual specifics of geographic location with the

figurative locale of the white peoples' residence in order to show Bigger's trauma as rooted in a

violent history of contact between whites and blacks. A social system of fear and control has kept

African Americans from moving about freely in an open society. They are restrained from

"doing things" and "going places." Aimé Ellis references this scene – as well as the subversive

plotting in Doc's poolroom, and the masturbation scene in the movie theater – as incidences of

the black males reinforcing their social deviant practices and challenging white authority due to

the characters "assert[ing] themselves within and against a culture of racial terror" and racial

subjugation.[120] While Ellis is right to point out the resistance in these communal, social-bonding

experiments, she overlooks the fact that Bigger is unfulfilled and still yearns for a realized form

of living with others. Bigger's community of black males cannot achieve Bigger's – and by

extension, the other black men's – desired outcome. What Bigger wants is "to merge himself

with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed

a chance to live like others, even though he was black" (240). However, the African American

male community in the novel and its attempt to indirectly resist racial subjugation fails to offer

this vision in realized form, for Bigger is compounded by a fear-imposing white society that

wants the opposite – to maintain separation as indicated by the geographical allocation of black

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[120] Aimé J. Ellis, "Boys in the Hood: Black Male Community in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Callaloo*
(Winter, 2006) 29.1, p. 196.

housing in the Black Belt and the socioeconomic stagnation of the African American working class within the novel. This notion of playacting is not enough for Bigger anymore. The excitement and joviality witnessed in the beginning of this passage disappear as Bigger ends this scene on a dejected note.

Applying the affective economy of fear to the narrative will elucidate Wright's *literary epideictic* project that reveals Bigger's traumatic fear based on his proximity to white bodies and the traumatic associations that have accumulated through the histories of contact designed to violently maintain the separation of black and white bodies. In the scenes where Bigger interacts with Mr. Dalton in one instance, and Mary and Jan in another, the historically racist scripts call for behavioral expectations that make Bigger aware of his black body as subjugated to white authority. Bigger's fear is further impacted by Mr. Dalton's, Mary's and Jan's different approaches to the previously established social order, reinforcements and/or departures which ultimately confuse Bigger in terms of how he should act in the presence of whites. For instance, when Bigger is on his way to meet Mr. Dalton, he comes to Drexel Boulevard, a representative "white world" described as a "cold and distant world; a world of white secrets carefully guarded," which made Bigger feel "constricted inside," with "only fear and emptiness fill[ing] him now" (44). Bigger has crossed over the line, and his trespass comes with negative associations of black bodies in white spaces. When he arrives at the Dalton residence, Bigger did not know if he should go in the front or the back of the house, and the narrative reflects, "Suppose a police saw him wandering in a white neighborhood like this? It would be thought that he was trying to rob or rape somebody. He grew angry … This was not his world" (44). Bigger is about to enter a world in which whiteness was "carefully guarded" by this distinct social environment that has separated white and black bodies, assigned them meaning and value, and as a result, set up a geographical system to contain the objects of white fear.

As George Yancy shows, historically, a black body has become a value-laden object that functions as "a signifier of negative values grounded within a racist social and historical matrix,"

and the construction of blackness is configured against whiteness as a transcendental norm.[121]

Bigger's very presence in the white neighborhood serves as a trespass, and his presence is a threat to the object of fear passing by the white gaze. Bigger is going to meet Mr. Dalton, who "was somewhere far away, high up, distant, like a god," a man who owned property in the Black Belt and in the white neighborhoods. The narrative reflects, "But Bigger could not live in a building across the 'line.' Even though Mr. Dalton gave millions of dollars for Negro education, he would rent houses to Negroes only in this prescribed area, this corner of the city tumbling down from rot" (174). Mr. Dalton functioned as the transcendental white norm that dictated where Bigger could live and what he could do. He appears to help African Americans through his philanthropy, but he also keeps them confined to a space with unsuitable living conditions. Mr. Dalton is like a god who relegates Bigger to his corner of the city to live apart from the white community. However, Bigger's presence in Mr. Dalton's neighborhood is perceived by whites as a breach. Mr. Dalton's wealth, power, and influence increase the socioeconomic distance between him and Bigger, and they invest the white man's gaze with authority and instill fear in Bigger.

The scene where Bigger flounders as he looks for the employment letter from the relief agency that referred him to drive for Mr. Dalton demonstrates the affective economy of fear at work in the novel. In this scene, Bigger does not fear Mr. Dalton because Mr. Dalton is an object of fear. Rather, Bigger fears Mr. Dalton because of the racial histories of the white gaze that have preceded such encounters of black and white individuals. While Bigger represents an object of fear in the white world because he is not contained by the Black Belt, but is moving and posing a threat of "passing by," Mr. Dalton also serves as an object of fear for Bigger; however, Mr. Dalton equally cannot contain Bigger's fear because of the racial history of terror that his body and gaze represent. For instance, Mr. Dalton greets Bigger with a smile, but the narrative relates how Bigger felt uneasy in the white man's presence: "The man was gazing at him with an amused

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[121] George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2008, p. 3.

smile that made him conscious of every square inch of skin on his black body" (46).   George

Yancy notes that the white gaze is "historically grounded in material relations of white power: it

was deemed disrespectful for a black person to violate the white gaze by looking directly into the

eyes of someone white."[122] When Bigger begins to fumble while looking for the note from the

agency that set up the job interview, the narrative reports,

> He had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton's face once since he had been in the
>
> house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped;
>
> and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. There was an *organic*
>
> *conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be when in their*
>
> *presence; none had ever told him that in so many words, but in their manner had made*
>
> *him feel that they did*. He laid his cap down, noticing that Mr. Dalton was watching him
>
> closely. Maybe he was not acting right? Goddamn! Clumsily he searched for the paper.
>
> (48, italics added)

Bigger is afraid that he is not acting appropriately based on the social scripts that are in place for

social interactions between black and white individuals, but what is most important is the fact that

the narrative underscores the lack of first-hand knowledge of such expectations for Bigger. At

one point, Bigger "suddenly remembered the many times his mother had told him not to look at

the floor when talking with white folks or asking for a job. He lifted his eyes and saw Mr. Dalton

watching him closely. He dropped his eyes again" (49). Bigger's reflection of his mother's

advice taps into a further history that incorporates *her* past experiences, as a member of an older

generation, with white people and illustrates the social customs that are in place – Bigger knows

better than to look the white man in the face, but the case of prospective employment calls for a

shift in decorum, even though the notion of subservience subsists. The behavioral expectations of

black men and women are coded in the bodily behavior of whites, for the narrative mentions the

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[122] George Yancy, "Walking While Black in the 'White Gaze'." *The New York Times*. September 1, 2013.
Web. 02 Aug. 2014.

previous "manners" of white folks as contributing to Bigger's belief. The narrative is suggesting

the customary behavior of white individuals is designed to foster feelings of subjection.

Mr. Dalton's gaze functions as a racist, authoritative gaze, and when the narrative reveals

that Bigger is aware of "every square inch of skin on his black body," Wright is tapping into the

"historicity" of American racism and its effect on Bigger in the present of the narrative, namely,

to be aware of his black body and its inferiority in relation to white bodies. "The history of the

black body in North America," according to Yancy, "is fundamentally linked to the history of

whiteness, primarily as whiteness is expressed in the form of fear, sadism, hatred, brutality, terror,

avoidance, desire, denial, solipsism, madness, policing, politics, and the production and

projection of white fantasies."[123] Yancy further historicizes that the cultural trauma that results for

African Americans includes memories that associate the experience of whiteness with a long

history of white racism that includes lynching, castration, and other violent acts of terror.[124]

Wright conjures up these associations as elicitors in the affective economy of fear, which create a

psychological and moral distancing between white and black bodies. Bigger's fear of being

judged by Mr. Dalton is evident when the narrative reads, "He hated himself at that moment.

Why was he acting and feeling this way? He wanted to wave his hand and blot out the white man

who was making him feel this. If not that, he wanted to blot himself out" (47). As Masaya

Takeuchi points out, Bigger "hates both the compulsory performance and Mr. Dalton, whose

presence forces him to play the stereotypical Jim Crow. In a society in which a black man's

violence against a white man is strictly taboo, Bigger's aggression again turns inward."[125] The

potential loss for Bigger is not only the job; in both of the instances when Bigger expresses a

desire to "blot" out Mr. Dalton or himself, Bigger experiences a threat to his existence. Bigger

fears the object that is judging and threatening his existence and he wants to eliminate it, but more

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[123] Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, p. xvi.
[124] Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, p. 10.
[125] Masaya Takeuchi, "Bigger's Divided Self: Violence and Homosociality in *Native Son*." *Studies in American Naturalism*, Summer 2009, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 61.

importantly, because he has no power to counter Mr. Dalton, and, the possible violence against a white man is unthinkable, Bigger becomes a danger to himself. Additionally, while Mr. Dalton's gaze elicits fear in Bigger in a manner connected to their different placements on the social hierarchy, Mary and Jan provoke fear through their ostensible behavior.

Bigger's interactions with Mary and Jan have an even more profound impact on the affective economy of fear, for Mary and Jan push the boundaries of the racist social scripts in place, an act which causes Bigger to become conscious of his black skin in a way that evokes a history of cultural trauma produced by racial shaming. A racialized history of interactions among black and white people influences how Bigger interprets Mary and Jan's behavior towards him. Mary and Jan attempt to break down the physical and abstract barriers between them and Bigger, but this attempt is corrupted by a history of racism. For instance, when Bigger meets Jan, Jan extends "an open palm" towards Bigger as a gesture of respect, but "Bigger's entire body tightened with suspense and dread" as his "right hand gripped the steering wheel and he wondered if he ought to shake hands with this white man" (66). Furthermore, Jan tells him *not* to "say *sir* to me. I'll call you Bigger and you'll call me Jan. That's the way it'll be between us. How's that?" But Bigger is taken off-guard, for this violates everything Bigger was conditioned to know – it violates and contradicts his lived reality, his *actual* world. He reflects, "How on earth could he learn not to say *yessuh* and *yessum* to white people in one night when he had been saying it all his life?" (73). When Bigger meets Mr. Dalton, for example, he relies on the expected, racially motivated social script in order to show him respect. Jan has withdrawn from a long tradition of historical social scripts that have dictated proper responses for black individuals in social situations involving whites. The only assurance Bigger can muster lies in fulfilling his job responsibility; however, Jan even robs Bigger of the solace from doing one's job when he literally takes over the driving and then, Mary decides to move from the backseat of the car into the front seat, and as she climbs in, she physically touches Bigger's arm. As a result, Bigger begins to feel suffocated by Mary and Jan: "There were white people on either side of him; he

was sitting between two vast white looming walls. Never in his life had he been so close to a white woman" (67-68).

Furthermore, Jan incorporates Bigger into his worldview and vision for the future, using the collective pronouns of "we" and "ours" to speak about a revolution in which "there'll be no white and no black; there'll be no rich and no poor" (68), but a world that belongs to all. And yet, to further confuse matters, Jan and Mary state they want to "see how [his] people live" (69). Mary expresses, "they *must* live like we live. They're *human*" (70). However, at this point, Bigger, and his African American identity, has been transposed back into an objectified state, just after Jan's speech incorporating "we," "us," and "our" and a shared ownership of the world at large. Mary and Jan try to depart from racist forms of social interaction between whites and blacks; however, the past histories are inscribed on their white and black bodies and they cannot undo that turbulent past. The separate worlds that they inhabit do not register the same opportunities to express personal freedoms. For instance, at one point, Bigger reflects, "She responded to him as if he were human, as if he lived in the same world as she. And he had never felt that before in a white person. But why? Was this some kind of game? The guarded feeling of freedom he had while listening to her was tangled with the hard fact that she was white and rich, a part of the world of people who told him what he could and could not do" (65). This connects back to "playing white" with Gus – Mary is part of the "white" world that never allows Bigger do anything because he is black; but, she has discarded an entire historical, class-based, and racialized fixed social order in one brief encounter.

Although Bigger oscillates between the emotions of confusion, anger, hatred, and shame, Bigger ultimately suffers from fear, the overriding emotion of the novel, because he cannot locate a containment for his emotional suffering. In other words, because Mary and Jan are violating the racialized scripts, he cannot anticipate or decode the objects causing his intense fear. Therefore, he is in a constant anticipatory dread because he cannot possibly understand why Mary and Jan are going against the social norms that regulate interactions between black and white individuals

and this causes him great hysteria that begins to register both physically and mentally. The circulating emotions are what separate and mark the surfaces of Bigger's, Mary's, and Jan's bodies, and they are differentiated based on a racial history. Bigger conscientiously observes his black skin and their white bodies and a historical traumatized past is evoked in which the black skin was invested with the affective value of "shame."

In this scene, Wright weaves an ironic twist here because Mary and Jan's behavior towards Bigger incites an intense fear because of their departure from, and violation of, the affective economy of racialized hate (responsible for Bigger's fear) that has been historically situated. At one point, Mary begins to giggle in the backseat of the car in response to Bigger's awkward behavior and response to Jan. The narrative reads:

> He flushed warm with anger. Goddamn her soul to hell! Was she laughing at him? Were they making fun of him? What was it that they wanted? Why didn't they leave him alone? He was not bothering them. Yes, anything could happen with people like these. *His entire mind and body were painfully concentrated into a single point of attention.* He was trying desperately to understand…. *He was very conscious of his black skin and there was in him a prodding conviction that Jan and men like him had made it so that he would be conscious of that black skin. Did not white people despise black skin*? … What could they get out of this? … But they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling. He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; *he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to black skin.* It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jam a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate. (67, italics added)

Bigger cannot understand what is going on – the white people were breaking social customs that he was conditioned to follow and he could not understand their intention. Whatever Jan and Mary's intention, Bigger knows the ramifications of *accepting* their treatment.

At one point later in the novel, the private detective, Britten, alludes to the social system that is set up to keep Bigger and white men and women like Jan and Mary separate. While investigating Bigger, Britten asks Peggy, the house cook, "Has [Bigger] ever sat down in your presence without being asked, like he was used to being around white people?" (192). It is not natural for white people to treat Bigger this way, and he is unable to put his feelings into language for they are "inarticulate," but the problem lies in the fact that Jan and Mary are now distorting a social code that was a) designed to maintain separation of bodies, and b) also served as an abstract containment of Bigger's fear. In other words, while their bodies do not contain his fear because they are treating him civilly, the behavioral deference he was conditioned to show to white people kept him safe; now, Jan and Mary have complicated that and Bigger cannot even imagine the danger of becoming too desensitized to white people. He is paralyzed by confusion and fear. For example, in Book Three, Max sates that "Social custom had shoved [Bigger] so far away from [Mary and Jan] that they were not real to him" (395). More importantly, the narrative indicates, "These people made him feel things he did not want to feel. If he were white, if he were like them, it would have been different. *But he was black*" (69, italics added). Bigger "felt trapped," "distrust[ful]," and "puzzled." He could not understand them or their intentions and he begins to hate them because in addition to causing him confusion, they are making him aware of his "unlikeness" and this interaction begins to foster feelings of shame.

Bigger's emotions register on his black skin in the passage, and the narrative implicates a cultural history of white "men like [Jan]" who have produced the affective economies of hate and fear he is now navigating. What once was a "No Man's Land" for Bigger has been opened up by Jan and Mary, but it is precisely Bigger's former exclusion from the "shadowy region" that invests the scene with the affective value of shame. As an African American, Bigger has been denied an equal playing field with whites, and if he accepts Jan's and Mary's hospitability, he will be in direct violation with the social codes that keep him safe. As Ahmed points out, shame is "the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence," an emotion concerning

how the self feels about itself, often requiring a witness. She writes, "Shame feels like an exposure – another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful – but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other towards itself."[126] For Bigger, he has not done anything disgraceful here, but the shame is "attached to black skin." Jan and Mary have abandoned the social scripts, and if Bigger accepts this behavior and becomes lax in the presence of whites, his reaction could be deemed "bad" and nonnormative. As a result, Bigger must assess the real life consequences of his response to their behavior and he feels "naked" and "transparent." His attempt to hide manifests itself in "cold, inarticulate hate" for himself and the black skin that signifies his "unlikeness."

Furthermore, the scene insinuates that Bigger was already-traumatized prior to his murdering of Mary Dalton, for Bigger already possesses the belief that his black skin represents a "badge of shame" in a white-dominated society. Bigger wishes they would leave him alone, but he cannot turn inward as Ahmed suggests because his racially charged shame has become a badge or marker for black people. The racial hate that has preceded him begins to foster a self-hatred. His anger is tied to the fear, for in Book III, Max attempts to convince Bigger to let him handle his case and the narrative relates that at that moment, Bigger felt "as self-conscious as when Jan had taken his hand and shaken it that night in the car. It made him live again in that hard and sharp consciousness of his color and feel the shame and fear that went with it, and at the same time it made him hate himself for feeling it" (346-347). Bigger's fear turns to hate, but the two emotions are always tied back to the view of black skin as a "badge of shame" that white people conditioned Bigger and other black individuals to accept.

4) The Black Male Rapist and Racially Traumatized Fear in the Murder of Mary Dalton

Wright embeds into the narrative a cultural trauma produced by the myth of the black male rapist, as well as the violent repercussions that follow the accusation of any interracial

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[126] Ahmed, p. 103. For more on shame, see pp. 101-120.

affairs. Bigger eventually finds himself in a precarious and vulnerable situation with Mary

Dalton, predicated upon the affective economy of fear that carries traces of the myth. Hoping to

end his unorthodox night with Mary and Jan, Bigger drops off a very intoxicated Mary at the

Dalton residence. As she is experiencing trouble getting out of the car, and as Bigger is helping

her, he wonders "what a white man would think seeing him here with [a white woman] like this"

(81), referring back to his earlier premonition when he entered the Dalton's neighborhood that the

police would think that he was "trying to rape somebody" (44). Mary's capricious behavior is

expected, and she has little accountability for her actions; but Bigger, as a black male, is left to

deal with the racially infused consequences that pose grave circumstances for him. What unfolds

in this scene is the historical and cultural trauma an African American male is subject to in a

social situation such as this, a traumatic fear that has accumulated over a history of lynching and

brutality for any association, *real or imagined*, between black men and white women, and it is

that history that threatens Bigger's existence in the present of the novel.

When it comes to the murder scene in Mary Dalton's bedroom, critics often discuss the

sexual imagery and language used to describe the events taking place.[127] However, I agree with

Sondra Guttman who reasons that the narrative description, despite Mary's drunkenness, portrays

consensual sexual desire between Mary and Bigger. Guttman argues that Wright is concerned

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[127] The murder scene reads:
> [Bigger] wanted to move from the bed, but was afraid he would stumble over something and Mrs. Dalton would hear him, would know that someone besides Mary was in the room. Frenzy dominated him. He held his hand over her mouth and his head was cocked at an angle that enabled him to see Mary and Mrs. Dalton by merely shifting his eyes. Mary mumbled and tried to rise again. Frantically, he caught a corner of the pillow and brought it to her lips. He had to stop her from mumbling, or he would be caught. Mrs. Dalton was moving slowly toward him and he grew tight and full, as though about to explode. Mary's fingernails tore at his hands and he caught the pillow and covered her entire face with it, firmly. Mary's body surged upward and he pushed downward upon the pillow with all of his weight, determined that she must not move or make any sound that would betray him. His eyes were filled with the white blur moving toward him in the shadows of the room. (85-86)

See Jonathan Elmer, "Spectacle and Event in *Native Son*." *American Literature*, Volume 70, Number 4, December 1998, pp. 767-798; Abdul JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. (Duke: Duke University Press), 2005, pp. 77-137; and Kimberly Drake, *Subjectivity in the American Protest Novel*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 2011, pp. 49-88.

with aligning sexual desire with political desire.[128] Guttman points out the references in the news

reel in the movie house that equate Mary with Mr. Dalton's capitalist wealth, and she asserts,

"Mary continually violates the prescribed distance between white and black, rich and poor

bodies," becoming a "disembodied symbol of white wealth and power."[129] Her sexual desire for

Bigger is a symbolic representation of her and Jan's "revolution" of "no white and no black," "no

rich and no poor" (68). Guttman also declares that Bigger's sexual desire for Mary is a "desire

for black political agency," for "the will to sexually possess the white woman substitutes for the

desire to overthrow white supremacist society."[130]

      While Guttman interprets the scene in line with the cultural stigmas attached to the sexual

liaisons between black men and white women historically, her claim that Bigger desires to

overthrow white supremacist society does not account for the fact that Bigger's actual desire

portrayed in the narrative is to flee the object causing him to fear for his existence. Mary's white

female body and Bigger's black male body are two nodes on the affective economy of fear and

impressed upon them is the racist script of the black male rapist – Mary as an object of sexual

desire for Bigger, and Bigger as a black subject raping Mary. Here, the affective economy of fear

informs the contact between Bigger and Mary's bodies in the bedroom based on past histories of

contact, real or imagined, impressed upon the black male body and the white female body.

Wright reveals the intense racialized fear as a part of the cultural trauma fostered by the

(re)actions inflamed by the myth of the black male rapist.

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[128] Sondra Guttman, "What Bigger Killed For: Re-reading Violence Against Women in *Native Son*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Volume 43, Number 2, Summer 2001, pp. 178. Bigger does manipulate Mary at one point, "leaning" her head back and moving his hands up her back and guiding her head toward him. However, Mary moved her hips in a "hard and veritable grind" and he felt "her move toward him" (84-85). Mary also was incoherent and immobile, but at this point, she begins to move on her own accord.

[129] Guttman, "What Bigger Killed For," pp. 180.

[130] Guttman, p. 172. For instance, the narrative reports that Bigger thinks "[Mary] was beautiful, slender, with an air that made him feel that she did not hate him with the hate of other white people. But, for all of that, she was white and he hated her" (82). Mary violated the status quo regarding how white people treat black people and this subversion of Bigger's social reality confused him and led him to great fear and hatred.

What is important to note in the murder scene are the emotions circulating between Bigger, Mary, and Mrs. Dalton which have accumulated affective value due to the historically situated myth of the black male rapist and have – and are concurrently – registering a traumatic effect on Bigger. For instance, Bigger is first described as "tightened with hate," and then he becomes overtaken with "excitement and fear," only to once again return to hate, his "muscles flexed so taut they ached," and "his teeth clamped, his fists clenched" (83-86). Despite Bigger's oscillating emotions, the scene primarily depicts Bigger suffering from a "blazing terror." Bigger's emotional fear is exacerbated exponentially by the *anticipation* of being caught with Mary, but not an anticipation in an excited fashion as the sexual implications might suggest. Rather, his fear intensifies based on the anticipation of a third-party viewer misapprehending his bodily contact with Mary; thus, his emotion of fear circulates various nodal points on the affective economy. As a case in point, Bigger's fear climaxes when Mrs. Dalton enters the room. The narrative reads, "Then he stiffened. The door behind him creaked. He turned and a hysterical terror seized him, as though he were falling from a great height in a dream. A white blur was standing by the door, silent, ghostlike. It filled his eyes and gripped his body. It was Mrs. Dalton. He wanted to knock her out of his way and bolt from the room" (85). Mrs. Dalton's presence – technically a physical body, but represented narratively as a "ghostly" presence – taps into a history of the social issue revolving around the black male rapist.

Jonathan Elmer points out that Wright constructs the scene as if it were an actual rape and that there results a "missed encounter" for Bigger and Mary in relation to the fantasy because it is disrupted by Mrs. Dalton. Elmer writes, "When this white blur blocks his exit, we have a fictional realization of the phenomenological impasse that lies at the heart of Bigger's deformed experience: we have racial aporia." Elmer argues that the suspension "exacerbates" the drama. He writes, "what Wright ruthlessly delivers here is the image of Bigger becoming the fantasmatic

phallus of the white supremacist fantasy."[131] Mrs. Dalton acts as a type of "witness" to the event

and there is no exit for Bigger. The narrative describes Bigger "hold[ing] his breath, intimidated

to the core by the awesome white blur floating toward him" (86). While Elmer is right to point

out that Mrs. Dalton represents the white world, I argue that she functions more as a phantasmic

image embodying the traumatic history of violence inflicted upon black male bodies accused of

raping white women. For one, Mrs. Dalton is blind, and in order for her to confirm Bigger's

presence in the room, there needs to be an utterance – a vocal expression by Mary which would

then corroborate Bigger's physical situatedness in the room. The narrative reads, "[Bigger] bent

over [Mary] his fists clenched in fear. He knew that Mrs. Dalton could not see him; but he knew

that if Mary spoke she would come to the side of the bed and *discover him, touch him*. He waited

tensely, afraid to move for fear of bumping into something in the dark and betraying his

presence" (85).

Wright knew the power of a white female utterance in the racially charged context

revolving around the social interaction of black males and white females. A perfect example is

the cultural history of rape accusations by white females against black males, evident in the cases

of the Scottsboro Boys and Emmett Till.[132] Such accusations are predicated upon false charges

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[131] Jonathan Elmer, "Spectacle and Event in *Native Son*." *American Literature,* Volume 70, Number 4, (December 1998), p. Elmer, p. 786; 780.

[132] The Scottsboro Boys were nine black youths between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, who were traveling on a train from Tennessee to Alabama and were accused of raping two white women also on the train. On the train, a fight between the black youths and some white youths on the train broke out, and when the train stopped in Scottsboro, Alabama, a rumor regarding rape began to circulate and was automatically accepted. Within a matter of weeks, the youngest boy, thirteen-year-old Roy Wright had been convicted and sentenced to death. The case ended in a mistrial when some of the jurors decided to go against the prosecution's recommendation of the death penalty due to the boy's age. Thereafter, the Supreme Court began to reverse the convictions for the other defendants also based on age, although the state of Alabama attempted to retry the boys. See David Guest, *Sentenced to Death*, pp. 87-92. Also, Amy Carreiro points out in her article, "Ghosts of the Harlem Renaissance: 'Negrotarians' in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Summer, 1999) that "Max's closing argument is a corollary to the CPUSA's defense of the Scottsboro Boys. In that case, nine black male youths were accused of raping a white woman. The International Labor Defense represented the boys, and supported by the CPUSA, supplied attorneys and a defense similar to Max's defense of Bigger" (258, n. 62). Emmett Till was a 14-year old boy from Chicago who went to live with his granduncle in Money, Mississippi in 1955. Money had a reputation for segregation and racial violence. On August 21, Till went to town to the local store and was hanging around outside with some friends. He produced a photograph of some white

that are not witnessed visibly. Wright also connects to the case of Robert Nixon, for in that instance, there existed no evidence that Nixon had raped the white woman. It is irrelevant what Mary *would have said* regarding Bigger in her room – for instance, that she was drunk and Bigger helped her up the stairs. The scene registers fear based on histories of contact between black and white bodies, and in this scene, without visible confirmation that Bigger is in Mary's room, any sound or an utterance could implicate Bigger. Mrs. Dalton would approach the bed and "touch" his body and discover the racial transgression. The narrative reports that Bigger wanted to move away from Mary's bed, but he was afraid that Mrs. Dalton would hear him stumbling through the room. Bigger was caught in a frenzy: "He held his hand over her mouth…. Mary mumbled and tried to rise again. Frantically, he caught a corner of the pillow and brought it to her lips. He had to stop her from mumbling, or he would be caught … she must not move or make any sound that would betray him" (85).[133] Wright alludes to the impact the affective economy of fear has on Bigger, for any sound can "betray" Bigger because his presence in the room is coded with the intention of rape regardless of the real reason he was in the room – to help Mary get to bed safely.

Whether or not words accuse or name the crime, the white bodies are objects of fear and signify threats to Bigger's existence. Mrs. Dalton then is representative of an object for Bigger to

kids he had gone to school with and bragged to the other boys that one of the girls was his girl friend. Upon hearing this, the other boys pointed out a white girl in the store and dared him to enter and talk to the woman. As he was leaving the store, Till allegedly said, "Bye, baby" and in doing so violated the racial codes of Money. His friends warned him that there would be trouble when the woman's husband found out what happened. The following Saturday, two white men – the husband and his half brother – entered Till's house and threatened his uncle not to intervene. They took Till outside of town to a barn and beat him severely and shot him in the head. Days later, Till's body was found in the Tallahatchie River, his face disfigured, eyes gouged out, and a bullet found in his skull. See Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. (New York: Henry Hold, 2001), pp. 470-471; and Davis W. Houck and Matthew A. Grindy, *Emmett Till And The Mississippi Press*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).

[133] Mary, in a way, had already betrayed Bigger earlier. When Bigger meets Mary for the first time, she asks him about unions in front of Mr. Dalton and the narrative reflects, "He knew nothing about unions, except that they were considered bad. And what did she mean by talking to him this way in front of Mr. Dalton, who, surely, didn't like unions?" (52). Bigger worried that he would not be hired after that incident, and after everything turns out in his favor, while driving Mary, she asks whether or not Bigger is a "tattle-tale." When she goes to meet Jan, Bigger felt it was a trap, and that Mr. Dalton had spies watching him and that he would be fired. And when Bigger shows reluctance to go into Ernie's Chicken Shack with them, Mary cries and Bigger perceives her to be "contaminated with an invisible contagion," capable of doing the "unexpected any minute" (72).

contain his fear. Bigger anticipates the future injury throughout the scene, and when Mrs. Dalton

enters the room, his fear intensifies because he cannot avoid or run from the object. He could be

found out and then he will have to suffer the consequences. Mrs. Dalton, representing a "white

blur" – the "invisible whites," the invisible white force – created a fear so great in Bigger that he

ultimately killed Mary trying to keep her quiet so that he would not be discovered by the white

blur. After some time, Mrs. Dalton leaves the room, and the narrative exclaims, "He felt that he

had been in grip of a weird spell and was now free" (87). It is interesting to note that the entire

action of this murder scene is reliant upon the "white blur" that is in the room. Once Mrs. Dalton

leaves, Bigger experiences release from the haunting spell.

Most importantly, Mrs. Dalton is described as "a white blur … silent, ghostlike," who

incites a "dominating frenzy" over Bigger's mind and body. She represents the traumatic history

that follows the violent effects of the myth of the black male rapist. For instance, Anne

Whitehead examines the figure of the ghost, who "represents an appropriate embodiment of the

disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present."[134] In a similar vein, Nicolas

Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, write, "the

concept of the phantom redraws the boundaries of psychopathology and extends the realm of

possibilities for its cure by suggesting the existence within the individual of a collective

psychology comprised of several generations."[135]

While Mrs. Dalton is not a phantom per se, she is described as a "blur" and "ghostlike"

which is a distinct move in order to reveal the cultural trauma caused by the myth. The scene of

Mary's murder is informed by the cultural history that preceded the 1930s context of *Native Son*,

and Bigger's inability to manage his emotions reflects the traumatic effect the myth of the black

male rapist can impose, especially considering the fact that Bigger was not raping Mary.

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[134] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p 6.
[135] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Vol. I.
Trans. Nicolas T. Rand. (Chicago: university of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 166.

Additionally, Bigger is unaware of what is transpiring in Mary's room, and following the event, he is haunted by images and nightmares of Mary's body, resemblant of traumatic experiences.[136] This psychological distress results from what Gabriele Schwab refers to as "transgenerational trauma." In *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma,* Schwab defines transgenerational trauma as a process in which "Traumatic historical legacies may be transmitted individually via unconscious fantasies of parents and grandparents as well as collectively through the cultural unconsciousness. Psychoanalysts have theorized such transmission as a form of psychic haunting, arguing that both children of victims and children of perpetrators unwittingly live the ghostly legacies and secrets of their parents and the parental generation."[137] Schwab concludes, "in violent histories, the personal is inseparable from the collective and the political."[138] This creates a post traumatic stress effect, which Cathy Caruth calls a "haunting power," or the overwhelming response to certain events that take "the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event." She concludes, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event."[139]

In similar fashion, the narrative reports that Bigger felt "strange, possessed, or as if he were acting upon a stage in front of a crowd of people" (84). The narrator relates the haunting power of the event for Bigger: "[Bigger] wanted to laugh. It was unreal. Like a nightmare. He

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[136] I am not, however, interested in discussing the imagery of these scenes, but they do support the claim that Bigger is suffering from trauma, for these images haunt Bigger and remind him of an event that he, at the time, did not really comprehend. Bigger first experiences one of these visions after he checks the furnace for the first time – "his eyes filled with the vision of Mary and her bloody throat…but there was no sign of the body" (118); later on, with Bessie, he asks for a knife and "an image of blood gleaming on the metal blade in the glare of the furnace came before his eyes and fear rose in him hotly" (175); when Britten is investigating the disappearance of Mary, Bigger sees "before his eyes Mary's bloody head with its jet-black curly hair, shining and wet with blood on the crumpled newspapers" (194); and when Bigger reads about the case in the paper and sees Mary's photo, he blinks his eyes, and "he was looking again in sweaty fear at her head lying upon the sticky newspapers with blood oozing outward toward the edges" (207).

[137] Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 77.

[138] Schwab, p. 78.

[139] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

had to lift a dead woman and he was afraid. He felt that he had been dreaming of something like this for a long time, and then, suddenly, it was true" (89). Jonathan Elmer refers to the news reel at the movie theater and says, "If Bigger knows this script, if in all his dealings with the drunken Mary he feels 'strange, possessed, or as if he were acting upon a stage in front of a crowd of people,' it is because this scene has been well-rehearsed."[140] However, the catalyst for Bigger's immense fear is Mrs. Dalton. Throughout the novel, Bigger senses a horrific fate, a feeling that appears to originate in his unconscious. When Mrs. Dalton enters the room and approaches Bigger' space, his unconscious takes on the psychology of a collective suffering from past generations. Up until this point, Bigger has never had intimate contact with a white woman before, but he is all too consciously aware of the potential ramifications of even the nonsexual interactions with a white woman, interactions that could be falsely and racially construed as trespassing into "No Man's Land." Thus, Bigger begins to experience a cultural trauma that leads him to unintentionally fulfill the script that was already-written for him as a black male caught in this situation, and the narrative implicates the script of the black male rapist:

> Though he had killed by accident, not once did he feel the need to tell himself that it had been an accident. He was black and he had been alone in a room where a white girl had been killed; therefore he had killed her. That was what everybody would say anyhow, no matter what he said…. His crime seemed natural; he felt that all of his life had been leading to something like this. It was no longer a matter of dumb wonder as to what would happen to him and his black skin; he knew now. The hidden meaning of his life – a meaning which others did not see and which he always tried to hide – had spilled out. (106)

The passage indicates that the events that took place that night were already written, that the myth of the black male rapist is *so* powerful that it overrides Bigger's understanding of the events that lead up to the accidental murder of Mary. In the context of a white supremacist society, Bigger's

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[140] Elmer, "Spectacle and Event in *Native Son*," p. 778.

murder and rape are "natural" – there is no other plausible explanation for Bigger's intrusion into the space and contact zone of a white female. Wright further underscores the power and the dangerous vulnerability attached to the myth by indicating that Bigger's fate is predestined in a very simplistic style; the narrative informs, "she was dead; she was white; she was a woman; he had killed her; he was black; he might be caught; he did not want to be caught; if he were they would kill him" (89).

Later in the novel, the narrative compares Bigger's killing of Bessie to the murder of Mary, stating, "Mary's death had caused him the most fear; not her death in itself, but what it meant to him as a Negro" (331). What is important to point out is that the meaning of the death of a white woman by the hands of a black man was already-established prior to the murder. The way in which racist social practices have oriented black bodies and white bodies, specifically the black male body and the white female body in the context of the black male rapist, involve power relations that determine the violent punishment handed out for breaking the social custom. The affective economies, in other words, label certain bodies as privileged and other bodies as transgressive. Wright uses the emotion of fear to expose how violent histories inform the present racist social scripts by delving into the individual consciousness of Bigger Thomas as he confronts an "invisible white force." Through the figure of Mrs. Dalton, Wright evokes the unseen, transcendent white normativeness that controls African American lives. As Mrs. Dalton represents a haunting legacy of cultural trauma, Wright is able to extend the implications of Bigger's predicament unto an African American collective psychology. The newspaper sections in Book Two serve as the narrative element that reveals how past histories are embedded in current discourse.

5) The "Stickiness" of the Myth of the Black Male Rapist: The Epideictic Function of the Newspaper Sections of *Native Son*

The newspaper sections in *Native Son* serve to amplify the affective economy of hate, which Wright draws upon to show the deleterious psychological effects and social consequences

of a black male caught in the inescapable thicket of the myth of the black male rapist. Wright

challenges the perpetuation of this myth in the novel – he shows the damaging effects the black

male rapist myth has on black men's individual consciousness and how this racial oppression is

wrapped up in the social practice of reiterating the script to the larger collective consciousness.

Earlier, when Jan goes to visit Bigger in jail, the Reverend tells Jan that they need to focus on

changing people's hearts, and Jan replies, "How on earth are you going to change men's hearts

when the newspapers are fanning hate into them every day?" (289). The problem is that those in

power – for instance, agencies like media companies that influence public perception – "stick"

particular meanings and values onto individuals, and in the context of *Native Son*, the news

articles stick subhuman qualities onto Bigger Thomas, an act which serves to cultivate an

"unlikeness," a move that consequently fosters hate into the minds and hearts of its white, citizen-

readers.

　　One of the ways social scripts become established and accepted is through what Ahmed

refers to as the "stickiness" of objects and signs.[141] Ahmed's theory of "stickiness" results from

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[141] To define her theory of "stickiness," Ahmed begins by referencing William Ian Miller, who, in his book *Anatomy of Disgust*, claims, "horrifying things stick, like glue, like slime" (Miller, quoted in Ahmed, p. 89). Ahmed points out that it is reasonable to assume that slimy things might be associated with "disgust," but the notion that glue is disgusting is questionable. She argues that "stickiness" has to do with objects and bodies and that "perhaps stickiness becomes disgusting only when the skin surface is at stake such that what is sticky threatens to stick to us" (90). Ahmed asserts that stickiness works like glue, and even slime, in that these things are not *inherently* disgusting. She contends, "Rather than using stickiness to describe an object's surface, we can think of stickiness as an *effect* of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs. To relate stickiness with historicity is not to say that some things and objects are not 'sticky' in the present. Rather, it is to say that stickiness is an effect. That is, stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object" (90). The way surfaces become "sticky," Ahmed claims, results from contact with other sticky things – "Stickiness is about what objects do to other objects – it involves a transference of affect," stickiness gets transferred amongst objects (91). In similar fashion, signs become sticky through repetition.

　　To make her point, Ahmed references a passage by Charles Darwin in which he encounters a native of Tierra del Fuego who touches his food, and Darwin writes that the native is disgusted by the softness of the meat, while Darwin is disgusted that a "naked savage, though his hands did not appear dirty," touched his food (82). Darwin defines "disgust" as "something offensive to the taste (bad taste)." In this example, Ahmed points out that the declaration that the native "is not dirty" associates the native body with dirtiness. Ahmed points out that disgust is connected to an object, and that this feeling affects the body physiologically, thus implicating the object, the emotion, and the body. In other words, disgust "is clearly dependent upon contact: it involves a relationship of touch and proximity between the surfaces of bodies and objects" (85). She concludes, "It is not that an object we might encounter is inherently disgusting; rather, an object becomes disgusting through its contact with other objects that have already, as it were,

the "effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs."[142] In other words, the

sticky effect is *that which has been generated* by histories of contact that have "impressed" upon

the object. Ahmed builds upon David Hume's concept of "impressions" in his work on emotions

to define impressions as a potential effect on an individual's feelings – a belief, an imitation or

image, or a mark on a surface. Ahmed wants to emphasize the "press" in an impression to

illustrate the "experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another,

an affect that leaves its mark or trace."[143] Although she clarifies that she does not want to only

associate literal stickiness with physical objects, and metaphorical with language, in order to

demonstrate her theory, she explains how surfaces become sticky by giving the example of an

object that is not inherently sticky imparting some of its stickiness onto another object that it

comes into contact with, so much so that even after the contact, a sticky *surface* can "pick up"

other objects. Stickiness involves "a transference of affect" whereby "what sticks 'shows us'

where the object has travelled through, what it has gathered onto its surface, gatherings that

become a part of the object."[144]

　　　Regarding how signs become sticky, Ahmed argues that through repetition, signs

accumulate affective value. She writes, "if a word is used in a certain way, again and again, then

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been designated as disgusting before the encounter has taken place" (87). Thus, Darwin's association
between "dirt" and the "native's body" represents Ahmed's theory of "stickiness," for she writes, "Through
sticking these two objects together (adherence), disgust allows the subject to recoil, as if from an object,
even given the lack of an inherent quality to the object" (88).

[142] Ahmed, p. 90.

[143] Ahmed, p. 6. Ahmed then claims, "not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me
with an impression" (6).

[144] Ahmed, p. 91. Ahmed states that there is no "distinction between passive and active" objects in terms of
stickiness, despite the fact that one object might be sticky before the other. Stickiness pertains to what
objects do to each other. Ahmed illustrates that objects, signification, and meaning are all implicated and
involve a "form of relationality" that creates a "withness" – she stresses, "elements that are 'with' get
bound together" (91). She distinguishes between "literal stickiness," and "metaphorical stickiness" which
she notes is "a sign that gets repeated and accumulates affective value" (90), but she warns that "stickiness
involves a form of relationality": "One can stick by a friend. One can get stuck in traffic. Some forms of
stickiness are about holding things together. Some are about blockages or stopping things moving. When a
sign or object becomes sticky it can function to 'block' the movement (of other things or signs) and it can
function to bind (other things or signs) together" (91).

that 'use' *becomes* intrinsic."[145] Ahmed gives a very telling example with the word "Paki" and its

association with an ethnic insult. She observes that the word has a "binding effect" in that it

corrals others as "Paki," and the word also functions as a "blockage," meaning, it rejects new

meaning or value based on a historicity of the word's association with other forms of "derision."

Therefore, she argues that a sign is a sticky sign "as an effect of articulation," and this repetitive

process allows the sign to accumulate value, which becomes intrinsic to the sign through past

histories of association. Therefore, because of this process, she claims that words that are not

spoken, like "immigrant, outsider, dirty, and so on," may stick to the term "Paki."[146] Ahmed

explains that when one names something disgusting, for example, she transfers a set of effects

associated with disgusting objects onto the object named. Therefore, the speech act both names

and generates as it transfers the "stickiness" of the word disgust onto the object.[147] However,

Ahmed mentions that a speech act is always spoken to others and it depends on a "shared

witnessing" of the signification in order for "the affect to have an effect."[148] The effect is the

theoretical stickiness, or, the binding of an object and associated signifiers that progress towards a

shared witnessing and normalization. This theory very much illustrates how racist social scripts

are generated and maintained as well, for the myth of the black male rapist carries with it an

effect (i.e. the "stickiness") of signifiers and meanings attached to the black male body.

     Within the narrative, Wright weaves the case of the Robert Nixon and models the

newspaper accounts in *Native Son* after those depicting Nixon's accused crime in order to expose

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[145] Ahmed, p. 91, italics original.
[146] Ahmed, p. 92.
[147] Ahmed explains that objects can become stickier than others due to particular past histories of contact. Ahmed references Judith Butler's notion of "performativity" providing Butler's definition of the performative as "the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (Butler quoted in Ahmed, p. 92). See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 20. Ahmed explains that this construction is "futural" – it generates effects in terms of what is "not yet." She writes, "But on the other hand, performativity depends upon the sedimentation of the past; it reiterates what has already been said, and its power and authority depend upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence" (92-93). What is important to note is the power of the "process of repeating past conventions." Ahmed discusses the naming of something produced in a speech act as performative – "It relies on previous norms and conventions of speech, and it generates the object that it names" (93).

the generative effect and promulgation of the black male rapist through repetition in a 1930s Chicago society. In *Native Son,* the narrative serves as a literary speech act[149] – it depends on community of readers, etc., who will either accept or reject, endorse or condemn, the sentiments issued forth. As mentioned, in "How Bigger Was Born," Wright cites Robert Nixon's case as "paralleling" Bigger's and how he used the newspapers as source-work for his novel. Applying Ahmed's theories of the affective economy of fear and the stickiness of signification to *Native Son* reveals Wright's purpose for incorporating the newspaper accounts into the narrative. Wright displays the transmissive process on the part of a white supremacist society to foster the myth of the black male rapist as evidenced by the reports of the Robert Nixon case. Robert Nixon's accused crime serves as Wright's epideictic exigence and frame of reference. However, by exploring Bigger's predicament in narrative form, Wright is able to delve into Bigger's consciousness as he interprets the hate and the fear that is circulating via the newspapers, and as a result, Wright reveals the sticky process of the word "black" with the racist notion that "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly."[150]

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[148] Ahmed, p. 93-94.

[149] For more on literary speech acts, see J. H. Miller, *Literature As Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Miller captures the definition of a literary speech act very effectively:

> The author's act of writing is a doing that takes the form of putting things in this way or that…. The narrators and characters in a work of fiction may utter speech acts that are a way of doing things with words - promises, declarations, excuses, denials, acts of bearing witness, lies, decisions publicly attested, and the like. Such speech acts make up crucial moments in the narrator's or in the characters' conduct of life . . . . The reader, in his or her turn, in acts of reading, criticism, or informal comment, may do things by putting a reading into words. (2)

Also, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

[150] This passage is taken from Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Introductions by Homi Bhabha and Ziauddin Sardar. (London, Pluto Press: New Edition, 2008), p. 86. In *Native Son*, the narrator reflects, "And regulating his attitude toward death was the fact that he was black, unequal, and despised [….] Maybe they were right when they said that a black skin was bad, the covering of an apelike animal" (275). Wright's demonstration of the stickiness of language/signification here foreshadows Franz Fanon's reflection regarding a white boy's reaction to his black body and further illustrates how "impressions" are left on surfaces, for Fanon's reflection carries traces of Bigger Thomas's predicament as it registers on a cultural identity. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon tells the story of an encounter he had with a white boy. The passage continues,

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.

On a deeper level, the newspapers evince a communal witnessing not only of the horror

of the event, but of the signification of the black male individual as a "fiend" and "rapist." For

instance, the news accounts refer to Bigger as a "Negro sex-slayer," "the black killer," an "ape," a

"black slayer," and a "brutish Negro." News articles focusing on the Robert Nixon case referred

to Nixon as a "Brick slayer," a "sex killer," a "jungle beast," "a sex fiend," and one source

pointed out, "[Nixon] is very black – almost pure Negro."[151] As Mary Pattillo explains, only two

days after the killing of Florence Johnson, Nixon and Hicks were brought back to the crime scene

by the police to reenact the murder, and a crowd of angry residents had congregated to "hurl

racist invective." At one point, "the crowd jeered, 'Why don't they lynch them!'"[152] Similarly,

Bigger is brought back to Mary Dalton's room and told to reenact the murder, and as he is

leaving, he sees a burning cross and a crowd of onlookers who yell, "You black ape!" and "Shoot

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> "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to
> be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.
> I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and
> above all *historicity*,….Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place
> taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my
> body in the third person but in a triple person…. I was responsible at the same time for my body,
> for my race, for my ancestors. (84)

Fanon later reflects,

> My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white
> winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's
> cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because it is cold, the little boy is trembling
> because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through
> your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering
> with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to
> eat me up. (86)

Ahmed reads this passage as illustrating how emotions work to establish the relationship between the
bodies in the encounter. The boy's articulation of "I'm frightened!" declares to Fanon as the other that he
is the cause of the fear. However, Ahmed points out that fear tightens not only Fanon's smile, but his entire
black body becomes overwhelmed with fear not as something that originates from within, but as a result of
this encounter. Furthermore, the boys' reaction is based on "memory traces of the black man" (62).
Ahmed claims that the fear of the black body is felt as a coldness and his body shivers. She states, "While
signs of affect seem to pass between the bodies (the shivering of the Negro becomes the trembling of the
little white boy), what passes is not the same affect, and it depends on a (mis)reading the other's feelings"
(Ahmed, 63).

[151] See Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City.* (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 41-45. Pattillo references the following articles: "Brick Moron Tells of Killing
2 Women," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1938; "Fasten Double Murder in West on Brick Killer,"
Chicago Daily Tribune, May 31, 1938, p. 3; "Brick Slayer Is Likened to Jungle Beast," *Chicago Daily*

the bastard!" (336-337). In both instances, a community of white individuals gather to witness

the black body and proceed to reiterate the racial signifiers that the newspapers helped to

generate. Moreover, "Black" becomes the signifier/signified and will be associated with

blackness, black skin, and the black community at large, for the very first news headline reads

simply, "HUNT BLACK IN GIRL'S DEATH" (241). The headline insists that it is not one

individual that authorities are looking for, but a body, any *body* that identifies with blackness.

The narrative touches upon this by revealing that "police and vigilantes" searched "every Negro

home under a blanket warrant," and that "Negro men were beaten" in several neighborhoods, and

"Several hundred Negroes resembling Bigger Thomas were rounded up from South Side 'hot

spots' [and] are being held for investigation" (244).

  "Black" in the newspaper section of the novel becomes a signifier invested with a racial

history of violent contact between whites and blacks. The news stories include testimonials of

editors and law enforcement personnel that articulate a precedence of violent consequences for

black men who interact with white women. Wright connects the news account to the Nixon case

to put the novel's action in conversation with a recent, racially charged event, but he further

connects it to a racial script rooted in history. As Pattillo notes, while investigating Robert

Nixon, "Chicago police contacted the sheriff in Tallulah, Louisiana, where Nixon was born and

spent his childhood. The sheriff informed them that Nixon had been a pickpocket and thief

throughout his youth and that '*nothing but death will cure him*.'"[153] In *Native Son*, after referring

to Bigger as a "brutish Negro," an Irish police captain "remarked with deep conviction: 'I'm

convinced *that death is the only cure for the likes of him*'" (280, italics added). While Wright also

includes the exact same declaration in the novel, even more revealing of the affective stickiness is

when an editor from Bigger's hometown invokes Southern racial history, stating, "Down here in

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Tribune, June 5, 1938, p. 8; "Sanity Tests Arranged for Nixon, Hicks," *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1938, p. 4.
[152] Pattillo, p. 42-44.
[153] Pattillo, p. 43, italics added.

Dixie we keep Negroes firmly in their places and we make them know that if they so much as

touch a white woman, good or bad, they cannot live" (281). The editor from the *Jackson Daily*

Star refers to the Thomas family as "a poor darky family of shiftless and immoral variety," and he

asserts: "Our experience in Dixie with such depraved types of Negroes has shown that *only the*

death penalty, inflicted in a public and dramatic manner, has any influence upon their peculiar

mentality" (280, italics added).

Crucial to the novel's plot, this passage endorses, and reiterates, the historical executions

done in public and in dramatic fashion, and further underscores the convention of death as a

reasonable and favorable form of punishment involving black crime committed against a white

woman. The newspaper account also contrasts the "Southern Negro" with the "Northern Negro"

by claiming that blacks in the North "get more education than they are organically capable of

absorbing" (281), which was a similar charge made against Nixon.[154] Alarmingly, there is no

room for error for men like Robert Nixon or Bigger Thomas, for "When Negroes become

resentful over *imagined wrongs,* nothing brings them to their senses so quickly as when citizens

take the law into their hands and make an example out of a trouble-making nigger" (281, italics

added). Here, "blackness" is associated with mental depravity, and the news outlets call upon,

and generate, a mental incapacity and an inferiority previously associated with black individuals.

This focus on the black male's lack of mental faculties is an attempt to justify the forbidden

contact between black males and white females, and more importantly, to justify the violent and

deathly punishments used to uphold the separation of black males and white females. Wright,

within the narrative of the novel, references the myth of the black male rapist as it existed in a

violent and racially charged Southern history.

The newspaper accounts refer to historical scripts in terms of a violent history of lynching

and death, and generate anew by creating a moral panic regarding the black male rapist that

evokes enough fear to maintain the social practice of executing black men accused of such

crimes. Wright exposes this racist practice by embedding a fatalistic fate for Bigger determined

by the accusation alone. The narrative illustrates the script in progress when Bigger grabs a

newspaper and reads the headline, "REPORTERS FIND DALTON GIRL'S BONES IN

FURNACE. NEGRO CHAUFFEUR DISAPPEARS. FIVE THOUSAND POLICE

SURROUND BLACK BELT. AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME" (242-243). The beginning

of the article includes language of speculation, like "hint," and "Police expressed belief that Miss

Dalton met her death at the hands of the Negro, *perhaps* in a sex crime" (243, italics added).

However, almost immediately, the news report abandons the speculative possibility that Bigger

solely murdered, and did *not* sexually assault Mary Dalton: "Indignation rose to white heat last

night as *the news of the Negro's rape and murder* of the missing heiress spread throughout the

city" (243, italics added). Wright alludes to historical associations of black men and white

women as the impetus for the illogical induction that could lead to such surety.

Even more telling, the narrative pauses as Bigger rereads the line "AUTHORITIES HINT

SEX CRIME" in order to amplify the racial history associated with the rape of a white woman by

a black man. The narrative reports, "Those words excluded [Bigger] utterly from the world. To

hint that he had committed a sex crime was to pronounce the death sentence; it meant a wiping

out of his life even before he was captured; it meant death before death came, for white men who

read those words would at once kill him in their hearts" (243). Wright is touching upon the

violent history that has been attached to black male bodies and white female bodies by illustrating

the "exclusionary" power generated by the affective economy of hate and fear. The history of the

accusations of black men sexually assaulting white women is invested with hate, for the white

men who read the headline will be overcome with a hate that prompts them to kill Bigger. The

fact that the men kill Bigger in their hearts touches upon the emotionality of the situation, for the

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[154] See Pattillo, p. 43. The newspaper reports "stick" the associations of moral, intellectual, and social
depravity onto the black skin of Robert Nixon, calling Nixon a "slow witted colored youth," and a

men will endow Bigger's life with a meaning and value that only befits the death that comes along with the social transgression. Bigger is both excluded from a fair trial at this point, and even more detrimentally, the fate that those words signal "death before death came" references a history where it is natural for death to follow such an accusation.

Bigger's proleptic fate, his "death before death came," stems from the value of contempt and lifelessness that his black body has become invested with as a result of the history of racist social scripts, and the history of institutionalized terrorism that punished the imagined fulfillment of the myth of the black male rapist; but the newspaper reports not only carry that history in their discourse, but they also continue the affective economies of hate and fear that maintain those racist scripts and the violent outcomes that follow. For instance, an earlier newspaper story in the novel illustrates the power of such outlets for influencing public perception. The account begins by establishing Mr. and Mrs. Dalton's white bodies as "powerful symbol[s] of helpless suffering" in order to contrast the representation of Bigger's black body that will follow. To view the white Mr. and Mrs. Dalton as symbols of suffering creates a psychological distance in the hearts and minds of the white readers who will then view Bigger as the cause of that suffering. The discourse becomes representative of power relations as the newspaper tracks the search for the perpetrator and aligns white individuals with the suffering Daltons, and black individuals with the monstrous Bigger. The article goes into more detail in describing, and inscribing, Bigger's black body: "Though the Negro killer's body does not seem compactly built, he gives the impression of possessing abnormal physical strength. He is about five feet, nine inches tall and his skin is *exceedingly black*. His *lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously*, reminding one of a *jungle beast*" (279, italics added). Bigger's arms are "long, hanging in a dangling fashion to his knees," and his "shoulders are huge, muscular, and he keeps them hunched, *as if about to spring upon you at any moment*" (279-280, italics added). Bigger represents a danger to individuals he may come into contact with, for his strength is not normal, but excessive, and in order to remain safe, he must be

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"moron."

labeled monstrous and then consequently eradicated. The sentiment offered by the news account

provokes both fear and hate, as Bigger's body is described as "obnoxious" and like that of a

"jungle beast," promoting an unlikeness that garners hate. But at the same time, the story creates

fear for suggesting the surreptitious nature of Bigger's movement. The warning elicits fear

because an individual may be unable to identity the threat and the object of fear could pass them

by, a possibility that, as Ahmed has articulated, produces even greater fear.

The former description of Bigger's body in the newspaper inspires fear in the minds of

the reader and further attributes signs of unlikeness to Bigger's black body. The newspaper calls

Bigger a "brutish Negro," that is "out of place in a white man's civilization," and even more

dehumanizing than that, he "seems a *beast* utterly untouched by the softening influences of

modern civilization. In speech and manner he lacks the charm of the average, harmless, genial,

grinning, Southern darky so beloved by the American people" (280). Not only is Bigger expelled

from the white world in which he exists, but the language here also distances him from the black

community – he is distinguished from the socially approved "Southern darky." He is not only

"unlike" the white civilized people – he is also "unlike" the others of his race that fit in with

white society. This even incites more fear, and because Bigger is an object of fear that might

"pass by" the white community, in order for the white community to contain its fear of the black

male rapist, it must identify the object that causes its fear and affix a terminable fate to that

object. This is why Bigger understands, according to historicity and the racial social scripts

called forth in this section of the novel, that the whites "were determined to make his death mean

more than a mere punishment; that they regarded him as a figment of that black world in which

they feared and were anxious to keep under control" and they would use his dead body as "a

bloody symbol of fear to wave before the eyes of the black world" (276).

The article further generates a moral panic by amplifying the belief that Bigger has

tainted blood by mentioning the possibility that Bigger has "a minor portion of white blood in his

veins, a mixture which generally makes for a criminal and intractable nature" (281). Not only is

Bigger ostracized, but also this also further promotes separation of black and whites and inspires fear in white people to avoid comingling with the black race. The newspaper admonishes that "segregating all Negroes in parks, playgrounds, cafes, theatres, and street cars" is "imperative" in order to "lessen their attacks against" white women (281). The language here accumulates values of hate and fear that work to distance bodies and limit contact. The degree of unlikeness that Bigger exhibits results from the affective economy of hate and fear operating amongst black and white citizens, and the newspaper is facilitating a shared witnessing that maintains the myth of the black male rapist.

It is only after the newspaper accounts have impressed upon Bigger's black body associations of "unlikeness" and contempt that Max's epideictic argument can become powerful in the novel. While Wright's epideictic task is implicit at times – the newspaper accounts and the stickiness of signs and objects work pervasively – he uses Max to explicitly blame media outlets controlled by white racist objectives for causing the myth of the black male rapist to "stick." During his defense in the courtroom, Max expresses,

> "How can I, I asked myself, make the picture of what has happened to this boy show
> plain and powerful upon a screen of sober reason, when a thousand newspaper and
> magazine artists have already drawn it in lurid ink upon a million sheets of public print?
> Dare I, deeply mindful of this boy's background and race, put his fate in the hands of a
> jury (not of his peers, but of an alien and hostile race!) whose minds are already
> conditioned by the press of the nation; a press which has already reached a decision as to
> his guilt, and in countless editorials suggested the measure of his punishment?" (384)

Max reels the central issue of the novel into a national moral dilemma. Max indicts the public and national print agencies for circulating the emotions of hate and fear that are associated with the myth of the black male rapist. He wants to demonstrate the reality of Bigger's situation "upon a screen of sober reason" that is untainted by a preceding, national history of racial hatred, as opposed to facing a "conditioned" collective mentality. The newspapers communicated Bigger's

activity in a way that incited shock and disgust over the sexual connotations associated with the myth of the black male rapist, despite the fact that Bigger did not rape Mary. In other words, the sexualized content took precedence in the reporting of the crime. While in the newspaper accounts, Bigger was classified as "other," here Max charges the white jury members as "alien" and other to Bigger. In the same way that Bigger was deemed "hostile" and a threat inflicting fear into the minds of the homogenous white community, Max inverts the affective economy of fear through his epideictic discourse to suggest that the white community is hostile and opposed to Bigger's survival, exerting the same affective response of fear and hate in Bigger. Rather than redirecting the onus, Max redistributes the burden of Bigger Thomas onto the fate of the nation, procured through national and public news agencies, *and* prolonged by citizens who continue to inscribe the black body with negative affective values.

6) Max as the Medium of Epideictic Discourse

Bigger's lawyer eventually delivers a speech that fuses all of the events and actions within the novel, and a speech that functions epideictically by seeking to assign responsibility for the social ills that are unraveling. As a narrative speaker, he serves as the medium to deliver Wright's epideictic argument. Max places his speech in an epideictic context, stating that before he "proceed[s] to cast blame," the court must consider "the raw stuff of life, *emotions* and *impulses* and *attitudes*" (387, italics added). Epideictic seeks to connect individual citizens with communal beliefs and values, and a very effective method of epideictic is the use of emotional discourse. Wright, through Max, creates a national moral dilemma over the debasement of African American citizens. Max begins by historicizing the founding of the country and the pursuit of conquest, and he concludes that in conquering, our nation "*used* others," used lives as "tools and weapons to be wielded against a hostile land and climate" (389), and in building a "nation, mighty and feared," Max charges that those in power have told men like Bigger Thomas, "'This is a white man's country!'" (393). Max has evoked an expansive history of American

progress, yet he does so in order to underscore the chain of effects that have contributed to the current state of affairs regulating the interaction between whites and blacks.

The epideictic discourse in this instance works to challenge the social and psychological separation in order to unite the fates of the black and white communities under one national agenda. Max declares that what is at stake in the case of Bigger Thomas "touches the destiny of an entire nation," and that exploring the causes for Bigger's activity will emphasize "how subtly and yet strongly his life and fate" are "keys" to the nation's future (382). Max asserts, "The complex forces of society have isolated here for us a symbol, a test symbol. The prejudices of men have stained this symbol, … The unremitting hate of men has given us a psychological distance that will enable us to see this tiny social symbol in relation to our whole sick organism" (382-383). Max has symbolized Bigger and the entire black population as test symbols for the nation to evaluate its adherence to democratic principles. He points out that the manner in which society hunted and captured Bigger, the assault, the firings out of fear, the lies, all served as methods to "terrorize the entire Negro population," all of which "was something unheard of in democratic lands" (385). His discourse establishes the nation as a body, a unified body comprised of millions of components, including white and black individuals in this context. He has established Bigger as a case study for moral examination by incorporating Bigger as a part of the national body, and a body that has transformed into a "whole sick organism."

Max begins to construct his rhetoric of blame by calling into question the forces that have created the social climate of hate – and the resulting racialized fear – that informs Bigger Thomas's existence. Furthermore, Max is insisting that members of society look at their own complicity in regards to the events that have taken place by shifting the onus onto their "prejudices." The affective economy of hate has created a divide that infringes upon the democratic health of the nation, for Bigger's body is the object that is lacking health or vibrancy, but, as Max's argument goes, Bigger is part of the larger, national body, which is suffering a self-inflicted wound.

As a result, he has implicated a community of citizens that is united by the nation's

founding principles and values. He is amplifying the history of contact between whites and

blacks, a history in which the black laboring body was appropriated for the advancement of

American civilization, and what is even more damaging is the way in which that history created a

socioeconomic distance. The geographic juxtaposition of the Black Belt and the white

neighborhoods across the "line" in the novel illustrate the effect of this history. The narrative

reports that blacks had to pay twice as much as whites for housing despite the fact that they

cannot receive decent paying jobs, and Bigger reflects, "They keep us bottled up here like wild

animals," forbidden to cross the line. Additionally, the narrative adds, "Almost all the businesses

in the Black Belt were owned by Jews, Italians, and Greeks. Most Negro businesses were funeral

parlors; white undertakers refused to bother with dead black bodies" (249). Mr. Dalton and other

white proprietors profit from this housing arrangement, contributing to the economic growth of

the city, while Bigger and other African Americans are suspended in a geographic and economic

deadlock. African American men and women, like Bigger Thomas, have not experienced

opportunities to participate in the society that they helped create. This of course captures Wright's

sentiment in *Black Boy*, when he sates, "Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black

life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western

civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it."[155]

Essentially, Max is working to amplify the affective economy of hate that has separated

white and black bodies in order to reel the predicament of Bigger Thomas, and the entire African

American community, into a larger national dilemma. *Native Son*'s epideictic discourse captures

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[155] See Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A record of Childhood and Youth*. Foreword by
Edward P. Jones. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), p. 37. The full passage reads,
(Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had
never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it
but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean,
positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with man. I
asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered for,
preserved in ritual from one generation to another). (37)

how the affective economies of hate and the social environment work on individual African Americans, for the separate nation of African Americans is described in terms applicable to the body – it is "held captive," its growth "stunted," and human rights are "stripped." Max accuses the affective economies of hate and fear that are circulating in the social environment, as this connects back to Wright's point about the social environment shaping individual consciousness. Max is beginning to steer the blame onto those who keep the current racist social scripts and he insists that the crime is committed by those that have shaped or influenced Bigger's attitude toward life. Therefore, Max argues that Bigger could only live as society dictated, and he attests, "This Negro boy's entire attitude toward life is a *crime*! The hate and fear which we have inspired in him, woven by our civilization into the very structure of his consciousness, into his blood and bones, into the hourly functioning of his personality, have become the justification of his existence" (400). Yet, according with Wright's claim that the social environment influences consciousness, Max connects Bigger's emotional and psychological distress to the fate of every African American that must struggle to exist in such an oppressive social environment. He propounds, "Multiply Bigger Thomas twelve million times, … and you have the psychology of the Negro people…. Taken collectively, they are not simply twelve million people; in reality they constitute a separate nation, stunted, stripped, and held captive *within* this nation, devoid of political, social, economic, and property rights" (397).

The ultimate atrocity that Max is working towards is the dehumanization that African Americans have been suffering and he accomplishes this epideictic objective by discussing quality of life, or modes of living. The problem of Bigger Thomas is an intricate one, involving a myriad of social abuses that has "last[ed] for three long centuries and which exists among millions of people over thousands of square miles of territory" (391). This is culminating towards Max's major pronouncement:

> I plead with you to see a mode of *life* in our midst, a mode of life stunted and distorted,
>
> but possessing its own laws and claims, an existence of men growing out of the soil

prepared by the collective but blind will of a hundred million people. I beg you to

recognize human life draped in a form and guise alien to ours, but springing from a soil

plowed and sown by all our hands. I ask you to recognize the laws and processes flowing

from such a condition, understand them, seek to change them. If we do none of these

then we should not pretend horror or surprise when thwarted life expresses itself in fear

and hate and crime. (388)

Here Max combines the individual and the collective, the "us" and the "them" into one communal

predicament and he implicates those who continue to "blindly" enforce and follow the racist

social practices. He illustrates how a society operating by laws and customs that benefits white

citizens, but "stunts and distorts" black citizens, directly leads to the life and fate of Bigger

Thomas – that type of social environment hinders any advancement towards quality of life for

those who are excluded from the laws and freedoms. Max attempts to disrupt the continuation of

the affective economies of hate and fear by drawing a correlation to guilt, and therefore, Max

objects to those who refuse to question or challenge a (im)moral obligation to "throttle or stamp

out" the alien form of life that has sprung from a societal irresponsibility and issues a call for

action. Bigger's humanity was constantly denied by others, but rather than establish Bigger as a

form of life cut off from the rest of society, Max refers to Bigger as shaped and marked as "alien"

by the people and the environment that cultivated his existence. The epideictic discourse in this

passage takes away the moral high ground of those that judge Bigger inhuman when Max

suggests that the distorted expression of life stems from the fear, hate, and crime that are natural

conditions of such a social environment. Max charges the societal conditions that "have made it

plain" that society does "not recognize that [Bigger] lives" (404). The problem, Max insists, is

that if the court decides to kill Bigger, then they should have "the courage and honesty to say:

'Let us kill them all,'" and pronounce the entire race as subhuman (405). That is the fundamental

problem that Wright is trying to address in the novel – the fact that African Americans are denied

human dignity. Max stresses, "What does matter is that he was guilty *before* he killed! That was

why his whole life became so quickly and naturally organized, pointed, charged with a new meaning when the thing occurred" (403). The affective economies of hate and fear have obstructed the democratic principles for men like Bigger Thomas, and consequently, have snuffed out the possibility of life.

7) Conclusion

Wright's narrative resembles epideictic discourse because it critically reflects upon the psychological ramifications for African Americans as a result of the day-to-day operations of a racist American society, and *Native Son*'s closing arguments correlate those outcomes with a larger national dilemma of race relations.   In a *literary epideictic* fashion, Wright is able to reveal what white society had previously failed to recognize: the immediate, local consequences that racist social practices produced for Bigger Thomas, as well as the collective complicity of American society in Mary Dalton's murder. Placing the murder of Mary Dalton in the context of the Robert Nixon case in 1930s Chicago, Wright both derides and subverts the moral panic of the black male rapist by centering on the damaging psychological effects of racist myths on the racialized black other. The murder is condemned by the bloodthirsty white members of society, both despaired and celebrated by Bigger, and redirected to social conditioning by Max the Communist lawyer. In the novel's final scene, Bigger, "under the shadow of death," wants Max to "tell him about life," for Bigger felt "that a knowledge of how to live was a knowledge of how to die" (424). When Max struggles to understand and relate to Bigger, Bigger confesses: "They wouldn't let me live and I killed. Maybe it ain't fair to kill, and I reckon I really didn't want to kill. But when I think of why all the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, what I am…" Bigger finally professes, "I didn't want to kill! ... But what I killed for, I *am*!…," while "Max's eyes were full of terror" (428-429).

Critics have debated over the meaning of those words and the significance of Max's inability to understand Bigger. JanMohamed believes that for Bigger, "life and death are sutured

to each other," and he concludes that in the end, "what Bigger implies is that the only way in

which he can 'live' is to take the death that is constantly penetrating him and turn it outward onto

others, or, in short, to commit himself to suicide/murder." [156] Like JanMohamed, W. Lawrence

Hogue also sees the murder of Mary Dalton invested with a personal teleology for Bigger, and he

claims, "The ultimate truth about Bigger, a truth from which Max recoils in horror, is that the

only outlet for his tortured emotions is murderous revolt, and Bigger wants desperately to tell the

world of his actions and his psychological freedom."[157] As I have pointed out, the narrative

reveals that Bigger never "committed" himself to murder; contrastingly, he was committed to

doing everything in his power to evade the objects containing his fear, despite the fact that the

social environment made it nearly impossible to elude systemic racialized fear. The problem with

JanMohamed and Hogue's arguments is the fact that they both rely on an intentionality on the

part of Bigger Thomas, and they assign it retrospectively. For instance, when Bigger meets Mr.

Dalton and he becomes conscious of his black skin as a result of the white gaze, the narrative

expresses Bigger's desire to "blot out the white man who was making him feel this way" (47).

The intentional act of "blotting something out" never occurs in the murder scene even though that

phrase appears multiple times throughout the novel.

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[156] Abdul JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 131. JanMohamed views Max's inability to understand Bigger as Wright's representation of "the difficulty that even a sympathetic person has in facing the devastating effects of social-death on the formation of subjectivity…. Max does not possess an adequate capacity for phenomenologically, psychologically, or existentially entering the subject-position occupied by Bigger. (Thus, Max is not, finally, Wright's mouthpiece)" (133). While I am not arguing that Max speaks for Wright, he is yet another component of the epideictic argument that illuminates the affective economies of hate and fear and implicates a system of racially motivated social conditioning. Epideictic, therefore, challenges, or at least complicates, any notion of intentionality by seeking to establish accomplicity. I chose this word over "complicity" because *Native Son* suggests that the social environment, in creating the psychology of Bigger Thomas, acts as an accomplice to Bigger in murdering Mary Dalton.   For instance, Max confesses, "We planned the murder of Mary Dalton, and today we come to court and say: 'We had nothing to do with it!'" (394). Complicity refers to the association of wrongdoing while accomplice and accomplicity suggest an acting agent. "accomplicity, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 2 November 2014. The definition reads, "The fact or condition of being an accomplice; complicity." The example given itself functions as epideictic discourse: "If the royalists have failed to acquit themselves of accomplicity, who else is to be *blamed*?"
[157] Hogue, p. 34.

However, the affective economy of fear is already in place, and any purpose or agenda attached to the murder of Mary Dalton is predicated upon the affective economy of fear in circulation. Thus, Bigger interprets the disturbance his act has caused in reference to the affective economy of fear, not in and of itself. Ira Wells touches upon this sentiment too and he believes that the "terror" in Max's eyes reveals that Max's "interpretive paradigms have failed" and he has misunderstood Bigger. Wells writes, "If we are duped into thinking that Bigger has killed 'for something,' so have we [misunderstood]. For Bigger Thomas is not a freedom fighter; he's not a revolutionary warrior—and to see him as such is to posit both a political agenda and an autonomous self that were radically absent from the moment of Mary's murder."[158] As Paul Siegel points out, along with a feeling of power, Wright gave Bigger a sense of "guilt" and "emptiness."[159] What this shows is that the murder is, for obvious reasons, very complicated for Bigger. Wells does state that Bigger responded to the "ingrained patterns of structural oppression"; however, he refers to the murder as an "automatic response." As I have argued, the murder, while empowering Bigger perhaps at times, cemented Bigger in a tragic fate that was predicated upon economies of fear and hate. Bigger's reaction was automatic *because* it was conditioned by racist scripts that were situated in a racial history of contact between black male bodies and white female bodies. As a result, Wright utilized the murder scene to expose how the affective economies and the historical traces of racist social scripts can shape, or "warp," African American individual consciousness.

The point in the narrative that really embodies Bigger's proclamation, "What I killed for, I am!", is when the narrative depicts Bigger en route to see Bessie after he has killed Mary and, as he is looking out of the car at "the white faces near him," the narrative reports,

> He wanted suddenly to stand up and shout, telling them that he had killed a rich white
> girl, a girl whose family was known to all of them. *Yes; if he did that a look of startled*

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[158] Wells, p. 893.

horror would come over their faces. But, no. He would not do that, even though the

satisfaction would be keen. He was so greatly outnumbered that he would be arrested,

tried, and executed. He wanted the keen thrill of startling them, but felt that the cost was

too great. *He wished that he had the power to say what he had done without fear of being*

arrested; he wished that he could be *an idea in their minds*; that his black face and the

image of his smothering Mary and cutting off her head and burning her could hover

before their eyes as a terrible picture of *reality* which they *could see and feel and yet not*

destroy. (129-130, italics added)

Later, Bigger wishes he "could cower Jan and Britten into awe, *into fear of him and his black skin*

and humble manners" (172-173, italics added). What Bigger wants, and what happens as a

consequence of his action, is to subvert the affective economy of fear that is unraveling him. As a

black man living in a white supremacist society that inflicts fear upon black men and women,

Bigger knows firsthand the longing to contain his fear in an object in order to manage, and to

avoid, that which terrorizes him. However, the racial social environment that Wright depicts

evokes a violent racial history in which there is no protection for African Americans – fear is

constantly displaced and the anticipation of future injury has no precise containment. Bigger is

cognizant of the fact that he is an instrument of fear in white citizens' minds while he walks

among them.[160]

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[159] See Paul Siegel, "The Conclusion of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *PMLA*, Vol. 89. No. 3 (May, 1974), p. 521.

[160] At one point in the novel, Bigger clutches his gun for protection, and the narrative reads, "he need not be afraid" because the gun offers him a way to eliminate any potential threat to his existence. However, before Bigger is captured, he is on the roof and the citizens and vigilante police force are closing in on him, when the narrative explains, "They wanted the gun. He did not have it. *He was not afraid any more*," when all of a sudden, "Something laughed in him, cold and hard; he was laughing at himself. Why didn't they come for him? They were afraid" (269, italics added). At this point in the novel, it is not the gun that makes Bigger feel safe. The emotional value of fear in the affective economy is moving and shifting signifiers. To the white people in pursuit, the gun signifies an instrument of death, but, the killing of Mary has subverted the affective economy of fear so that Bigger has transgressed into their minds as a horrifying idea – he has become the instrument of fear and has imposed fear on the white community much like the "invisible white" force has done to him. Reading the scene epideictically and applying the affective economy of fear, it becomes clear that the white folks do not merely fear the gun. The gun is an instrument of death, which creates fear, but Bigger has become another signifier of *that which causes death and incites*

While the murder did grant Bigger a sense of agency in the novel, it is solely based on his influence on the affective economy of fear already in place, and critics' attempt to assign autonomy to his act relies on a retrospective *intentionality* that is heretofore embroiled in the affective economies. However, the murder was not premeditated, and Bigger did not feel in control, but felt that his "life had been leading to this," like he was living a "nightmare." Prior to the end of the novel, Bigger would fear Mary and all the racist allegations and violent repercussions historically inscribed on her white, female body. The fear would elicit a normal response in Bigger to flee the object that endangered his very existence, desirably, towards a protective space. However, Bigger had no recourse; the social environment was too big of an adversary for him as the historicity and meaning of his black skin would move, shift, and change signifiers, constantly terrorizing him. He had nowhere to turn, and he ended up carrying out the murder that was ascribed to his black body. Any emotional release for Bigger would come about from the fulfillment of the myth of the black male rapist that had been haunting him throughout his entire life. Thus, in terms of the affective economy of fear surrounding Bigger's existence, the object containing his fear – the white female body of Mary – has been identified and has contained his fear. Now that she is dead and the script has been fulfilled, there is no anticipation of future injury for Bigger. In other words, the injury is *now-in-progress* – Bigger's death has been pronounced and he knows he is about to die. He does not have to feel like his "life will lead to something awful" because a horrific fate is already in motion and the fact of his impending doom has ceased his psychologically tormenting anticipation.

Wright's ultimate epideictic accomplishment in the novel is *his subversion of the affective economy of fear as a call for a conscious effort to face the problem of race in the 1930s American societal context*. Wright indicts a social environment that oppresses individuals like

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fear. Bigger is vastly outnumbered, and yet, the white mob fears coming into contact with his body. But Wright makes it clear that the circulation of hate and fear go round and round, for this scene ends with Bigger's capture, his coming arraignment, trial, and death sentence.

Bigger Thomas by denying them an equal and dignified chance at life, and he does so by amplifying the limited life possibilities that constrain Bigger, and then by invigorating Bigger's act of murder with meaning, threateningly insinuating that countering the systemic oppression may potentially be the only event that registers an African American's existence on the white radar of (non)recognition. The murder of Mary Dalton was the only meaningful thing in Bigger's life because the corollary, before it culminated in death for Bigger, was a rupture in the affective economy of fear – Bigger *affected* white society; he exerted a force back on the very social environment that formerly oppressed and acted upon him. Most importantly, reading *Native Son* epideictically reveals the affective economy of fear at work in a racist society and Wright is supplying the readerly imagination with, on the one hand, a drastic measure that resists racialized terror (the murder and dismemberment of Mary Dalton), along with a call for American society to recognize the race problem as a national moral concern, and, a provocation for individual citizens to confront the racialized terror suffered by black individuals.

Wright's task was to push for equal rights as human beings, and Ralph Ellison will pick up on that mission as he strives to move from human rights to democratic rights – another nudge in the direction of equality. Max presages this next step in the process with his ultimate plea. Max requests, "Your Honor, give this boy life. And in making this concession we uphold these two fundamental concepts of our civilization, those two basic concepts upon which we have built the mightiest nation in history – personality and security – the conviction that the person is inviolate and that which sustains him is equally so" (405). However, the novel depicts the opposite. Bigger Thomas's security is violated by a history of racist scripts that have accumulated great fear over time. Thus, as Arnold Rampersad points out, the novel begins with a "clanging" alarm clock calling America to "awaken from its self-induced slumber about the reality of race relations" (ix), and the social environment that creates Bigger's intense racialized fear beings to unfold. But the novel also ends with the "clanging" of the cell door as Max leaves Bigger, who smiles a "faint, wry, bitter smile" (430). The significance here is that the novel, in

one manner, encapsulates the real racial predicament facing the nation and the readers of *Native Son* – it invites the readers, as the citizens who create and uphold the social environment represented, to draw upon their moral faculties and evaluate the democratic impasse narratively depicted. Wright has captured the extreme on both sides – the extreme lengths that whites will go in creating a moral panic to prolong the racist social scripts, and the extreme violent ends a black man could *potentially* go in the face of an intense racialized fear. Wright strips Bigger of his humanity only to demand human dignity, making way for Ralph Ellison who will issue a call for the recognition of democratic rights for all African American citizens.

"Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed –
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above."

Langston Hughes
"Let America Be America Again" (1935)

"We have learned through the grim realities of life and history that hate and violence solve nothing. They only serve to push us deeper and deeper into mire. Violence begets violence; hate begets hate; and toughness begets a greater toughness. It is all a descending spiral, and the end is destruction – for everybody. Along the way of life, someone must have enough sense and morality to cut off the chain of hate by projecting the ethics of love into the center of our lives."

Martin Luther King, Jr.
"The Current Crisis in Race Relations" (1958)

Chapter III: "We'll Be Dispossessed No More!":
*Invisible Man'*s Epideictic and Emotive Discourse Uniting the "Uncommon People"

Introduction

During a pivotal scene in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator eulogizes a fallen

member of the Brotherhood, Tod Clifton. Speaking to an unsettled crowd following Clifton's

violent murder by a police officer, the Invisible Man declares, "His name was Clifton and he was

young . . . he was black and they shot him." The narrator continues by attributing the fatal

incident to "an old story" recurring time and time again throughout history. He assigns Clifton a

major role in that story, as a character "full of illusions," thinking "he was a man when he was

only Tod Clifton," a man who believed he was "not meant to be pushed around." Yet, the

narrator reveals, Clifton "*forgot his history, he forgot the time and the place*."[161] The time and

the place the narrator refers to is a postwar American society where African American individuals

did not receive equal access to democratic freedoms, which, in this instance, is the right to refuse

to be pushed around, or, to avoid being "crushed" by another as Langston Hughes's poem

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[161] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. (New York: Vintage International, 1995), p. 456-457, italics added. All future references to the novel will be taken from this edition and page numbers will appear in parentheses.

articulates. To put this in a historically democratic perspective, in Franklin Roosevelt's "Four

Freedoms" speech from January 6, 1941, he assigns the world "four essential human freedoms,"

namely, "freedom of speech and expression," "freedom of every person to worship God in his

own way," "freedom from want," and "freedom from fear." This had a profound impact on the

individual within American society, for Roosevelt concludes, "Freedom means the supremacy of

human rights everywhere."[162] The fourth freedom – the freedom from fear – exposes the injustice

suffered by African Americans in the midcentury. Black individuals were subject to immense

fear in regards to their safety in a racist society, and in the essay, "Richard Wright's Blues,"

Ralph Ellison speaks to this historical and social condition, which permeates the Clifton funeral

scene: "For the Negro there is relative safety as long as the impulse toward individuality is

suppressed."[163] Any attempt by a black individual to act in a manner that clashed with the white

normativeness of postwar society could potentially threaten his physical well-being.

In this chapter, I apply an epideictic framework to Ellison's novel, and reading *Invisible

Man* in this way – as exhibiting the rhetoric of praise and blame – will reveal how the novel

constructs an ethical dilemma, as well as how it resolves some of the discrepancy over Ellison's

argument regarding the social role of the novel. Just as the two epigraphs above, which include a

poem and a nonfiction article, implicate a social defect from different mediums, epideictic

discourse allows Ellison to bridge art and protest. Throughout the novel, Ellison invokes the

idealistic vision of America that Hughes laments – a nation that is a "great strong land of love"

would indeed relinquish the power of tyrants, for "diversity is the word," as the Invisible Man

relates in the Epilogue: "Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states" (577). In

centering his novel on the quest for "the condition of man's being at home in the world, which is

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[162] B.D. Zevin, ed. *Nothing to Fear: The Selected Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932 – 1945.*
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), pp. 274-275. For the full speech, see Franklin D. Roosevelt,
"Four Freedoms Speech," Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union: January 6, 1941. The
Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum Website; version date 2013. Retrieved from http://www.
fdrlibrary.marist.edu/pdfs/fftext.pdf.

called love, and which we term democracy,"[164] Ellison answers Dr. King's call for an individual

to come along and "cut off the chain of hate" by projecting an ethics of love into the center of the

protest narrative. Thus, I argue that epideictic provides a most useful approach to reading

Invisible Man because the novel uses the theme of *invisibility* to reveal the social death caused by

"the internal violence of spirit" resulting from the nonrecognition of African American

individuals as a part of a collective, national identity.[165] By delving into the notion of invisibility,

Invisible Man imparts the social and ethical implications related to the *nonrecognition* of African

American individuals in an emerging postwar American society.

In order to develop these claims, I will analyze the scenes that contain speeches following

specific occasions for the narrator, occasions that provide a sociocultural context leading into the

speeches. These narrative speech acts within the novel condemn the social conditions that are

responsible for the nonrecognition of black individuals. I will analyze the Battle Royal scene, the

Eviction speech, the Brotherhood speech, and Tod Clifton's death and eulogy as scenes that

exhibit epideictic discourse that illustrate the narrator's objective to cultivate a democratic

consubstantiality amongst the readers.[166]

1) The Value of Epideictic Discourse for Reading *Invisible Man*

Ellison's acceptance speech for the National Book Award in 1953 had already provided

some insight into what he perceived to be the social function and significance of his epic novel.

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[163] Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 139.

[164] Ralph Ellison, "Brave Words for a Startling Occasion," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 154. In the novel's Epilogue, the narrator states, "And I defend because in spite of all I find that I love … too much of your life will be lost, its meaning lost, unless you approach it as much through love as hate" (580).

[165] I borrow the term "internal violence of spirit" from Martin Luther King Jr. to refer to the internal suffering and despair of the narrator. King, in the same article, "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," stated, "A fourth point that must be brought out concerning the method of nonviolence is that this method not only avoids external physical violence, but also internal violence of spirit." See King Jr., Martin Luther. "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," in Meider, Wolfgang. *"Making a Way Out of No Way": Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 337.

Ellison commented that his task was "to challenge the apparent forms of reality – that is, the fixed manners and values of the few – and to struggle with it until it reveals its mad, vari-implicated chaos, its false faces, and on until it surrenders its insight, its truth."[167] Ellison's language is highly indicative of epideictic discourse ("fixed manners and values," "reveal," "truth," etc.), and epideictic rhetoric helps unveil *Invisible Man*'s narrative and rhetorical strategy to critique existing social orders. As discussed in the introduction, Aristotle defined epideictic rhetoric as the rhetoric of "praise" and "blame" employed in ceremonial situations. Lawrence Rosenfield however, perceived a flawed connotation in the terminology of praise and blame and believed "[w]hat was involved is more accurately rendered as 'acknowledgement' and 'disparagement,' the recognition of what *is* (goodness, grace, intrinsic excellence) or its denial." Ellison crafts a novel that fuses the social context of postwar American society into a narrative that captures the absence of democratic ideals in the lived experiences of African American individuals. In this way, he ventures away from centering his plot on the physical violence suffered by black men and women in a racist American society and educates the readers on the undisclosed internal violence of spirit that leads to a social death for black individuals.

In the article, "The World and the Jug," Ralph Ellison responded to Irving Howe's criticism that *Invisible Man* was "apparently" free from "the ideological and emotional penalties suffered by Negroes" in the U.S. by asserting his authorial intention "to transform these elements into art," and to "transcend the painful conditions with which [racial oppressions] deal." Ellison's attitude was predicated upon his belief that "the work of art" is a "social action in itself."[168] This fundamental view of the novelist's role sparked many debates over the role of literature, most

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[166] See the Introduction to *Ethos of Dissent*, the section titled, "Constructing an Ethos of Dissent: The *Literary Epideictic* as a Dwelling Place of Democratic Consubstantiality," p. 44. And Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. University of California Press, 1969.

[167] Ralph Ellison, "Brave Words for a Startling Occasion," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 154.

[168] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 183. See also, Irving Howe, "Black boys and Native Sons." *Dissent* 10.4 (1963): p. 256 for his critique.

notably between Ellison and Howe here, and Ellison, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin.[169]

The debate as to how *Invisible Man* performs its objective of social criticism is still strong.[170] For

instance, Kenneth Warren challenges Ellison's notion that the novel is a social action in *So Black*

and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion for Criticism, when he asks, "What might it mean to

regard Ellison not as a writer for the ages but rather as simply an extraordinary writer for the

particular era in which he lived a good portion of his life – the roughly six decades of a legally

Jim Crow American society?"[171] Warren concludes, "the degree to which Ellison … remain[s]

capable of speaking for us may point less to [his] universality than to a broader social and

political failure that keeps us mired in the racial commonsense of the twentieth century," because

"unfortunately many issues that should long ago have faded away are very much with us."[172]

Warren's focus tends to fall on how *Invisible Man* loses its impact due to the persistence of social

injustices and his main argument is that *Invisible Man* owes its success more to the fact that

contemporary society has retained the same issues plaguing Ellison in the mid-century. Warren

continues to distinguish Ellison's project between the "political and the cultural,"[173] while Ellison

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[169] For more on this classic debate regarding the function of literature, see Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003); James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *Collected Essays*. (New York: Library of America), 1998; Jerry Ward, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, ed. Maryemma Graham. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2004.
[170] See Timothy Parrish, *Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p. 17; John Callahan, ed. *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Casebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3; Barbara Foley. *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 1.
[171] Kenneth Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion for Criticism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 3.
[172] Warren, *So Black and Blue*, p. 13; 107.
[173] Warren, p. 59. Warren discusses a debate between Ellison and the northern intellectuals, Howard Zinn and George Washington Cable, regarding Ellison's sociopolitical artistic project in which Zinn and Cable viewed Southern "distinctiveness and mystique" as impediments to overcoming the history of the nation's black population as second-class citizens. However, Warren emphasizes that "Ellison argued that the road to an egalitarian future required a confrontation with the past – a past that when looked at properly was an amalgam of southern, Negro, and American identities … Ellison … saw the potential disappearance of [southern] identities as evidence of a national evasion of the truths of the American past and the realities of American culture. Embedded within this disagreement was a larger dispute about whether transforming American society was first and foremost a political or a cultural project" (59).

himself stated that he sees "no dichotomy between art and protest."[174] Warren overlooks the

social import of the theme of invisibility as it connects to a politics of recognition.

　　　　The discourse of epideictic allows for a better reading and understanding of *Invisible*

Man as a text of social action itself. Applying an epideictic framework elucidates why *Invisible*

Man retains a profound impact because of how Ellison fuses the social and cultural influences

along with the medium of literature to *become* a social action itself. Ellison's novel is exemplary

because of the way it correlates the social environment, the readers, and the narrative into a moral

examination, and what I refer to as a *literary epideictic* process. I propose that the narrative – and

hence, the Invisible Man and the reader – enter what can be construed of as an epideictic

relationship. To explain, John Callahan has already noted that Ellison has "transformed the

written word" into a "conversational act" between the narrator and the reader.[175] Michel Fabre too

has acknowledged that the narrative presupposes the existence of a reader who potentially relates

to actual readers, and Fabre explains that the narrator enters a "contract" with the narratee in the

Prologue, one which implies that the narrator and narratee share a certain knowledge together,

mostly, that they "live in the same world to which the novel refers," and the "style of the

narrator" defines both the narrator and narratee culturally. Fabre also comments that the narrator

expects a particular "moral" activity on the part of the narratee and places a "responsibility" upon

him to grapple with the narrator's dilemma, all of which points towards an epideictic process.[176]

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[174] Ellison, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview," in in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 212.

[175] John Callahan, "Democracy and the Pursuit of Narrative." *Carleton Miscellany* (Winter 1980): pp. 64.

[176] Michel Fabre, "The Narrator/Narratee Relationship in *Invisible Man*." *Callaloo*, No. 25, "Recent Essays from Europe: A Special Issue," (Autumn, 1985), p. 538; 539-541. Of the narratee, Fabre says, "he is expected to do two important things: to decipher and interpret correctly a large number of cultural references and also to react to the narrator's call in the frame in the way a participating audience would," in a sense becoming "a character of a sort in the frame." Fabre explains, "Indeed it is through this search for, and possible seduction of, the narratee that the novel can express the idea that finding an audience and forcing it to recognize his visibility is the narrator's only way of existing. This explains in part why the narratee becomes a character of a sort in the frame" (535; 536). *Invisible Man* is a "frame narrative" due to the narrative action that is contained between the opening prologue and the novel's closing epilogue (536). For more on "framed narratives," see David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 186-188. One of the defining characteristics of framed narratives is "when a character tells a tale that, although unrelated to the main

Robert Bataille has recognized the rhetorical nature of the "author-reader relationship," but

concludes that the narrator is engaging in "a notion of rhetoric as a kind of catharsis."[177]

Similarly, John S. Wright claims, "the central drama of his work is the unraveling imaginative

confrontation with the chimeric forms of power and of freedom," which ultimately, Wright

determines, is "a cathartic release of anger and angst."[178]

Callahan and Fabre are right to focus on the notion of a narratological "contract" between

the narrator and the reader, but they overlook the importance of the emotional component of the

narratological exchange, while Bataille and Wright misinterpret the novel's rhetorical aim. What

is missing in these critics' readings of the novel is a focus on the emotive discourse in the

narrative, a focus that an epideictic framework can elucidate. Applying an epideictic framework

to the narrative – and consequently, to the narrator and the narratee's relation – will not reveal a

cathartic release, but a value-laden ethical process that incorporates the components of epideictic

discourse. The narrator, and hence, the *narrative*, seeks to incite an emotional response in the

audiences in order to initiate an ethical process whereby the audience considers value systems

depicted literarily as they relate to lived democratic sensibilities.

A brief example exists in the Epilogue where the narrator charges, "You won't believe in

my invisibility and you'll fail to see how any principle that applies to you could apply to me.

You'll fail to see it even though death waits for both of us if you don't" (580). The "principle"

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story, contains a moral message for the listener in the text" (186). In this capacity, the tale told by the Invisible Man is not detached from the main story, but the prologue and epilogue are more didactic, making them stand apart from the narrative story or action that the narrator tells in between.

[177] Robert Bataille, "Ellison's *Invisible Man*: The Old Rhetoric and the New." *Black American Literature Forum,* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer, 1978), p. 43; 45. Bataille notes that rhetoric is "more important to an understanding of the novel, especially to the author-reader relationship, than has been generally thought." Bataille distinguishes between the old rhetoric as "manipulative and deliberate," and the new as "spontaneous and candid." However, Bataille declares that the narrator is engaging in "a notion of rhetoric as a kind of catharsis." Bataille further explains that the narrator elicits emotions from the audiences in the speech scenes of the novels in a cathartic way.

[178] John S. Wright, *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 26; 25. Wright defines Ellison's written "conscious thought" as "devoted to transforming the themes, the enigmas, the contradictions of character and culture that are native to the African American predicament into literary capital," and Wright concludes, "*Invisible Man* makes artistic transcendence the one

refers to the nation's founding principles of American democracy alluded to in the narrator's

grandfather's riddle.[179] The narrator issues a challenge to the reader to consider the extent to

which democratic principles apply to "invisible" men and women, initiating an ethical reflection

about American society's reification of democratic ideals. The reader is lured in when the

Invisible Man makes the fate of the reader complicit with the fate of his own. Thus, the moral

examination that takes place is not free of emotions, nor are the emotions cleansed or purged.

Rather, the emotive discourse is designed, epideictically, for community building, and

considering the tenets of epideictic discourse, the (reading) audience must make a judgment to

confirm the literary-world-as-status-quo, or to resist the social structures that are responsible for

denying democratic values to certain individuals, and this is how the Invisible Man and the novel

seek to create change.

2) Epideictic Discourse and The Epideictic Exigency: The Blinding of Isaac Woodard

Referring back to the Tod Clifton eulogy, the narrator alludes to a "history" that

determined Clifton's fate – he forgot that he was not a man, but a black man living in a racist,

postwar society. One particular historical incident, the case of Isaac Woodard, makes up the

historical context that applies to *Invisible Man* and its theme of invisibility. A letter from Ellison

to Richard Wright – who was residing in France at the time – dated August 24, 1946, touches

upon the social context of the postwar period that illustrates the correlation of Clifton's death and

the lived experiences of victimized African Americans: "Things here have gone to hell in a zillion

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unsuppressible means through which human freedom is imagined and achieved and human beings are made whole…. *It is a cathartic release of anger and angst*" (p. 128, italics added).

[179] For more on the "principle" in *Invisible Man,* see James Seaton, "Affirming the Principle," in Lucas Morel, ed. *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: a Political Companion to Invisible Man.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp. 22-36. Seaton points out the Epilogue's description of the narrator's grandfather's bedside advice, and the narrator's reflection of the "principle on which the country was built" (*Invisible Man,* p. 574). Seaton discusses the connection between the novel's treatment of the principle and the Declaration of Independence's belief that "all men are created equal." Seaton states, "by characterizing 'the principle' as one 'on which the country was built,' and also the principle 'in whose

directions. The lynchings … have broken out all over the place; about eight in a month's time, with a lot of liberal & C.P. excitement being made over a vet whose eyes were gouged out by police nightsticks in [South] Carolina."[180] The World War II veteran Ellison referred to was Isaac Woodard.

Woodard served in the Army from October 1942 to February 1946, spending time in the Pacific and experiencing combat. He was honorably discharged from Camp Gordon, GA and from there, Woodard took a Greyhound bus from Atlanta, GA to Winnesboro, SC, headed home to see his wife.[181] Along the way, Woodard got off the bus to use the restroom, and he got into an altercation with a white bus driver who cursed Woodard for taking too long to use the "colored" restroom, thereby humiliating the uniformed combat veteran who spent the last four years fighting to ensure freedom and democracy for people around the globe. However, the social reality determined that Woodard was "still a black man in the Jim Crow South."[182] The white bus driver later testified that Woodard requested the bathroom break in a vulgar manner, asking if he could "take a piss."[183] After the driver ordered Woodard to sit down and to not "talk out so loud," Woodard replied, "talk to me like I'm talking to you. I'm a man just like you."[184] When the bus reached Batesburg, SC, the driver notified police of Woodard's alleged obstinate behavior,

name we had been brutalized and sacrificed,' Ellison ties the ideal he invokes to a specifically American context" (26-27).

[180] Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright Papers," (24 August 1946, F. 1314, Box 97), p. 38.

[181] Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 202. For more on the case of Isaac Woodard, see Carol Anderson, "Clutching at Civil Rights Straws: A Reappraisal of the Truman Years and the Struggle for African American Citizenship," in Raymond H. Geselbracht, ed. *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), p. 31-50, and Ken Hechler, "Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, p. 51-66; Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*. (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 204-218; and Andrew Myers, "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, eds. Robert Figueira and Stephen Lowe. (Columbia, SC: The South Carolina Historical Association – South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2004), p. 63-73.

[182] Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, p. 202; and Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, p. 204.

[183] Alton Blackwell testimony, 1947, NAACP Papers (Reel 30, Frame, 125), quoted in Andrew Myers, "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, eds. Robert Figueira and Stephen Lowe. (Columbia, SC: The South Carolina Historical Association – South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2004), p. 65.

accusing the vet of drunkenness and a failure to properly address white folks. Woodard denied

consuming any alcohol, but nevertheless, the police arrested Woodard for disorderly conduct. A

further altercation ensued between Woodard and the police officers, whereby Woodard attempted

to take one of the officer's nightsticks – much like Clifton who refused to be pushed around

senselessly – and the officers "pummeled and beat Woodard until he was unconscious, crunching

out his eyes with the end of a billy."[185] The next morning, Woodard could not see, but the

officers postponed medical treatment for the injured veteran and presented him to the judge who

charged him with drunk and disorderly conduct. After the judge fined Woodard, he was taken

back to the jail where he was improperly treated for his injuries. Eventually, the police took him

to the veterans' hospital in Columbia, SC "where he stayed from February 13 to April 13,

1946."[186]

Thus, while the case of Woodard reflects the "visible" physical violence an African

American man could suffer at the time, Ellison composes a novel revolving around the *invisibility*

of the narrator in relation to democratic rights and freedoms, ones that postwar American society

purported but withheld from individuals like Isaac Woodard, who was a black veteran who fought

for those rights abroad and returned to what was billed as the American fountainhead of

democracy. In this way, *Invisible Man* is experimental because it counterbalances the *visible*

violent racist acts, like in the case of Isaac Woodard, with the theme of *invisibility*. Lucas Morel

helps put this in perspective: "The tragic irony for black Americans is that they have suffered

from both visibility and invisibility. Their 'high visibility' as blacks living in a predominantly

white society made them the legal and social target of racism, while their individuality remained

in-visible to a white society that judged them only by their color."[187] The novel's subject of

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[184] Isaac Woodard Testimony, 1947, NAACP Papers (Reel 30, Frame 125), quoted in Myers, "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard," p. 65.
[185] NAACP, "Southern Schrecklichkeit." *The Crisis*. Vol. 53, No. 9. September 1946, p. 276.
[186] Ibid., p. 276.
[187] Lucas Morel, "Should America Be Blind to Race?" *On Principle*, August, 1998, http://www.ashbrook .org/publicat/onprin/v6n4/morel.html. See also George Yancy, "African-American Philosophy: Through

invisibility is itself a call for recognition, but it is experimental because it is focusing on the

psychological consequences of a racist society on the narrator in the face of a social environment

that that permitted visible violent attacks on African Americans all too regularly.

As Ellison's letter to Wright indicates, he was aware of the brutal and dehumanizing case

of Isaac Woodard, and this incident was symbolic of the degree of depravity that race relations in

the United States at the end of World War II had reached. Ellison began writing *Invisible Man* in

1945, but composed the novel over the following seven years.[188] This is not to say that *Invisible*

Man is a novel responding to the specific attack on Woodard, or that Ellison had Woodard in

mind when crafting his masterpiece. At the same time, I am claiming that Ellison was indeed

influenced literarily by the sociocultural conditions that surrounded the Woodard incident,

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the lens of Socio-existential Struggle." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 37 (5), (2011), pp. 551-574. Yancy illustrates that African-American philosophy develops out of a socio-existential context in which African Americans have lived an experiential reality of the absurd in the form of white racism and racist acts of dehumanization. The socio-existential context presupposes a form of white supremacy, a world that is "anti-Black". Therefore, Yancy writes, "Unlike Descartes, Black self-understanding grows out of a social matrix of pain and suffering; a site where the Black body is a site of marked inferiority, difference and deviance" (554). As a consequence, the African American individual must struggle to understand the self in a world where whiteness functions as a "transcendental norm."

Yancy situates the existential historicity of black individuals: "Bodies that suffer, bodies in pain, lynched bodies, and mutilated bodies constitute the existentially *lived* reality of Black people in America" (552). Take, for example, Frantz Fanon's sentiment in *Black Skin, White Masks*. (London: Pluto, 2008), where he remarks, "I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!" (87). Fanon describes how he yearned for "invisibility" because his blackness "tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, angered me" (88).

[188] For biographical information regarding Ralph Ellison and the composition of *Invisible Man*, see Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), specifically page 153 where Foley indicates, "Ellison stated the words, 'I am an invisible man' came to him as he sat in a barn doorway" in Vermont, emerging "from the conjunction of the New England past with the 'new world a-coming' after the war." While this precedes the 1946 injustice against Isaac Woodard, this historical point only reinforces the connection. Ellison was prognosticating the "internal violence of spirit" that Martin Luther King Jr. alluded to in the epigraph, consummating the physical suffering and death of the African American individual with the more insidious, but nonetheless dehumanizing, social death of the African American individual, who suffers a hidden fate when compared to the more visible and verifiable physical violence. Also, see John F. Callahan, "Ellison's *Invisible Man*," in *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Casebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), where he indicates that *Invisible Man* took Ellison "seven hard years in the making" (p. 292-293). Also, see Michel Fabre, "From *Native Son* to *Invisible Man:* Some Notes on Ralph Ellison's Evolution in the 1950s," in *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. Kimberly Benston. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), pp. 199-216; and Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. (New York: Knopf, 2007), pp. 194-195; 224-226.

conditions that revolve around recognition. Woodard signifies the victimization caused by random acts of violence issued to African Americans to quell any aspirations for change or equality following the war for democracy abroad. Woodard did not have the right to speak out on what was budding into an injustice done to him, nor did he have an opportunity to state his case or receive the right to presume innocence. It is the social climate of postwar American society that Ellison weaves into the narrative of *Invisible Man*, one that initiated the brutal attack on Woodard, and furthermore, permitted racial attacks on a regular basis without civil protection for the safety of African Americans.

This invests Ellison's text with great power as it amplifies that which is *not* visible – the invisibility of African American individuals in terms of democratic potentiality, what amounts to a lack of recognition. Ellison's novel acquires epideictic capital when read against the social backdrop of a society that can blind a black man and then charge that victimized black man with a crime. Pertaining to the existing state of affairs, Isaac Woodard was referenced as an exemplar figure of the brutality against African Americans and his story was used as a prominent example for the cause of civil rights as his incident had a profound impact on the nation and the world. To explain, in an introduction to a special edition of *Survey Graphic* titled, "Color: Unfinished Business of Democracy," Alain Locke talks about the global war and how the objective is revolutionary change in "hearts and minds." He writes, "The crux of this inner conflict is whether our vision of world democracy can clear-sightedly cross the color line, whether we can break through the barriers of cultural racialism to reach the Four Freedoms in their universal goals. Certainly here, both nationally and internationally, *color becomes the acid test of our fundamental honesty in putting into practice the democracy we preach*."[189] Later, Locke writes, "In the neglected and unsolved problem of the Negro in America, the Achilles of the West has a dangerously vulnerable heel. At any time, in any critical position requiring moral authority before

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[189] Alain Locke, Introduction, "Color: Unfinished Business of Democracy," *Survey Graphic*. Vol. XXXI, No. 11, November 1942, p. 456, italics added.

the world, this threatens to impair our influence as an exemplar of democracy."[190] Similarly, in

his acceptance speech for the National Book Award, "Brave Words for a Startling Occasion,"

Ellison talks about how "the Negro was the gauge of the human condition as it waxed and waned

in our democracy," connecting to *Survey Graphic*'s point.[191] Both Ellison and *Survey Graphic*

viewed the black individual as a barometer for democratic success, and with the horrific case of

Woodard, the blind World War II black vet was infused with a rhetorical urgency for social

change.

Woodard's attack proved to be a stopping point for black leaders and others involved in

fighting for the protection of African American individuals, and Woodard even had an impact on

presidential policy. For instance, Lynda Dodd examines the role of presidential leadership in

implementing legislation, and specifically, Harry Truman's efforts to "reform civil rights

enforcement policies."[192] After recounting the turbulent years leading up to 1946 that included

uninterrupted reports of racial lynchings, mob violence, and attacks against African American

veterans, Dodd reports that civil rights groups and the NAACP increased pressure on Truman to

address this "unchecked" social "terror" or "frightfulness." Dodd states that Black leaders "railed

against the hypocrisy of fighting Nazi persecution abroad while ignoring racism and

discrimination at home."[193] What followed was a coalition of civil rights, veterans, religious, and

other organizations that formed the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence

(NECAMV). The NEC met with President Truman, and Dodd mentions that "The President's

face 'distorted in horror' when [the NEC] recounted the story of Isaac Woodard."[194] Shortly after

the incident, Truman mentioned Woodard in a letter he wrote to a man he served with in World

War I, stating that when law enforcers "can take a Negro sergeant off a bus in South Carolina,

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[190] Ibid., p. 458.
[191] Ralph Ellison, "Brave Words for a Startling Occasion," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 153.
[192] Lynda Dodd, "Presidential Leadership and Civil Rights Lawyering in the Era Before *Brown*." *Indiana Law Journal*, 85.4 (2010): p. 1600.
[193] Ibid., p. 1608.

beat him and put out [both] of his eyes, and *nothing* is done about it by State Authorities, then something is radically wrong with the system."[195] As a result, "[o]n December 5 1946, Truman issued Executive Order 9808 to establish the President's Committee on Civil Rights … asserting that such behavior 'is subversive of our democratic system of law enforcement and public criminal justice, and gravely threatens our form of government.'"[196]

The PCCR's primary objective was to investigate law-enforcement protocols to ensure the civil rights of the citizens and to recommend improvements where measures fell short. However, Robert Carr, the head of the committee, was careful to advise the PCCR "not to lose sight of its larger responsibility to *educate* the public about civil rights." Carr alludes to the challenge of inculcating a public morality through legislative means, and I argue that epideictic and literature (*the literary epideictic*) provides the imaginative space for readers to contemplate such a national, moral dilemma: "Law enforcement largely depends on the communities. You can't legislate morals in the people; you have to educate morals into people."[197] Even Carr recognizes that legislative measures can only do so much to *enforce*, but that if there is to be a bigger change, communities must *recognize* moral values. Ellison's perspective of the American novelist seemingly supplies this need for postwar society, and I propose that Ellison's *Invisible Man* works to educate individuals about moral obligation in democratic systems by exposing the personal suffering caused when one refuses to see *an*other.

Literature provides a more conducive space for Carr's primary aim to educate morals into people. Applying an epideictic framework to Ellison's novel reveals narrative scenes in *Invisible Man* that work to critique the social and cultural conditions that create the type of injustice suffered by Isaac Woodard, not only in the physical sense, but in a social context as well, that

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[194] Ibid., p. 1619.
[195] Robert Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 147.
[196] Dodd, "Presidential Leadership and Civil Rights Lawyering in the Era Before *Brown*, p. 1622. The quote regarding the subversive, violent acts of individuals to inflict personal vengeance on others due to race is quoted in Dodd from Executive Order No. 9808, 11 Fed. Reg. 14, 153 (Dec. 5, 1946).

which kills the human spirit. In "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," Ellison points out that the

American novelist is "involved with values which turn in their *own* way, and not in the ways of

politics, upon the central issues affecting his nation and his time," and that there is a

"contradiction between noble ideals and the actualities of our conduct," and this predicament has

"generated a guilt, an unease of spirit … and the American novel at its best has always been

concerned with this basic moral predicament."[198] In other words, Ellison goes after the "hearts

and the minds" of readers by augmenting the visible, violent physical abuse African Americans

suffer with the dehumanizing internal violence of spirit. While readers may certainly *not* have an

immediate experience of violent attacks on black men and women, the social environment that

Isaac Woodard navigated – one in which individuals *and* law enforcement personnel can

violently violate African American individuals without recourse – serves as a frame of reference.

Ellison's novel takes readers into the depths of an African American torn consciousness, which

exposes both the physical and social destructiveness of a postwar racist American society.

The blinding of Isaac Woodard matters to *Invisible Man* because it serves a reference to

the social climate of postwar American society and not only connects to issues of visibility – the

violent attack on Woodard's body and the fact that his eyes were damaged – but it also connects

to Ellison's theme of invisibility and calls for recognition. In essence, Woodard-as-

sociohistorical-context provides a historical event that integrates visibility, invisibility,

recognition, and democratic freedoms, and Ellison's novel does the same – it correlates those

issues throughout the narrative. Because of the cultural and political significance of Woodard's

case, readers may recall the incident due to the similar themes, and even if not, readers would

most likely understand the prevalence of such violent events occurring in postwar society.[199]

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[197] Dodd, "Presidential Leadership and Civil Rights Lawyering in the Era Before *Brown*," p. 1627.

[198] Ralph Ellison, "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 206-207.

[199] In addition to the legal and political dealings with the case of Isaac Woodard, there was also a benefit show for the wounded veteran at Lewisohn Stadium in New York on August 16, 1946. It was orchestrated by boxer Joe Louis and singer Carol Brice, and other big names for the event included the mayor of New

Thus, the emotional discourse and the societal values that the Invisible Man appeals to when discussing Tod Clifton – he was a man who "forgot his history, forgot the time and place" – comprise the contextual capacity for the readers to process the social conditions leading up to violence and nonrecognition. While there exists no direct reference or discussion of the blinding of Isaac Woodard, the novel targets the heart and minds of readers in regards to civic virtue, and perhaps the most correlative historical event that speaks to the novel's themes is Woodard's victimization, which prompts a *literary epideictic* novel that challenges a social environment that witnesses such events.

Invisible Man critiques*,* or indicts, a society that *does not* recognize all African American individuals, and at the same time, seemingly paradoxically, Ellison's novel issues a call for recognition through its plea for love and through the call for the recognition of complicity amongst readers. Axel Honneth mentions Ellison's novel and its Prologue to question how an act of "recognition" is understood epistemologically. Honneth begins by differentiating between the acts of "cognizing" and "recognizing" by assigning cognizance the perception of physical visibility of a situated body "within a spatio-temporal framework," and "recognition" as going beyond the "reinforcement of an individuating identity" through "the expressive (and consequently publicly accessible) demonstration of an assessment of worth that accrues to the [social validity] of persons."[200] Thus, recognition is a "performative act" due to the public reception, or rejection, by way of facial expressions, body gestures, and language use to signal

York at the time, William O'Dwyer, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Langston Hughes. The event had 25,000-30,000 in attendance. See Brian Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

[200] Axel Honneth, "Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition.'" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes,* Vol. 75 (2001), p. 113; 124. Honneth states that the subject who experiences invisibility must assume that he "has been taken cognizance of as an individual" (114). Honneth borrows from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and what he defines as the "'intelligibility' of the person: whether we consider another human being to be loveable, worthy of respect, or worthy of solidarity, what is displayed in each case in the experienced 'worth' is merely a further aspect of what it means for human beings to lead their lives in rational self-determination" (122). Honneth does not spend much time with the novel as he does fleshing out his theory of recognition.

either the acknowledgment of an individual, or the rejection and public "humiliation" that is the

result of its absence.

Furthermore, Honneth situates this act in the realm of ethics, for the addressee possesses

a degree of "motivational readiness" to restrict "her egocentric perspective in order to do justice

to the worth of the other person."[201] Charles Taylor has also speculated on the sociopolitical

ramifications of recognition on identity formation. For Taylor, identity is defined as "a person's

understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being."

Taylor proposes that "identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the

*mis*recognition of others," and that the acts of "nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm,

can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of

being."[202] And Julia Eichelberger examines how Ralph Ellison depicts the relationship of the

individual to society and she refers to Ellison a "prophet of recognition" who "offer[s] readers a

vision of an as-yet-unrealized democracy in which individuals acknowledge or recognize the

innate worth of one another."[203] To put this in the context of a "politics grounded by recognition,"

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[201] Honneth, p. 122-123.

[202] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Eds. Charles Taylor and Amy Gutman. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 25. Taylor begins by discussing Hegel and the master/slave dialectic, but goes further back in history to "the collapse of social hierarchies, which used to be the basis for honor" (26). Taylor replaces honor with the "modern notion of dignity, now used in a universalist and egalitarian sense where we talk about the inherent 'dignity of human beings,' or of citizen dignity." Taylor turns the discussion onto American sociopolitical concerns: "It is obvious that this concept of dignity is the only one compatible with a democratic society" (27). Taylor continues, "…with the move from honor to dignity has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the dignity of all citizens" (37). However, identity has also created a "politics of difference," Taylor points out, in which individuals should be recognized for their unique identity, and a call to recognize everyone's unique identity insinuates that it has, at this point, been "assimilated to a dominant or majority identity" (38).

[203] Julia Eichelberger, *Prophets of Recognition: Ideology and the Individual in Novels by Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Saul Bellow, and Eudora Welty*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 2. *Invisible Man*, according to Eichelberger, portrays a narrator "capable of resisting" ideology – the "domineering mind-sets," or the "ideology of domination": "a historically specific mind-set that is a barrier to democratic and collective life" (5). In analyzing *Invisible Man*, she applies Paul Ricouer's "hermeneutics of suspicion," a method that presupposes the spuriousness of appearances and that the "truth is hidden" underneath such appearances, and Mikhail Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" to illustrate how authority can reside in multiple voices in the plot of Ellison's novel. She claims that *Invisible Man* "encompass[es] a wide variety of voices in dialogue with one another, enacting an ideal democracy that recognizes every citizen." For Eichelberger's discussion of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," see *Prophets of Recognition,* p. 3. For her discussion on Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia," see pages 10-11.

Eichelberger cites John McGowan who "believes recognition takes place already in countless social circumstances," and she concludes, "[*Invisible Man*] portray[s] American society as 'always already' capable of recognizing the intrinsic value of the individual."[204]

However, Eichelberger is missing the point that Ellison is actually depicting the *opposite* – that society is *not* in a state to recognize the intrinsic value of the individual. The narrator reveals the negative impact of society's intentional nonrecognition – it feels like "stand[ing] naked and shivering before the millions of eyes *who look through you unseeingly. That* is the real soul-sickness" (575, italics added). Eichelberger, therefore, performs a misreading of the novel as social action, for *Invisible Man* acknowledges the *depravity* resulting from nonrecognition. Both Eichelberger and McGowan fail to account for the complexities involved in the politics of recognition, especially in regards to when an individual must construct an identity in relation to others. Eichelberger, McGowan, and Honneth require too much of a willingness on the part of the *other* to participate in the act of recognition; the victimizer may not be willing to, or open to, feeling guilt, shame, or fear over his victimization of the victim.[205] My position falls more in line

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[204] Eichelberger, p. 22. For John McGowan's view, see *Postmodernism and Its Critics*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 221.

[205] I am using the terms "victimizer" and "victim" as stand-ins for those who "refuse to see," and the *un-* or *mis*recognized respectively. Jerry Gafio Watts applies similar terms in his sociological study of the ideological concepts that shape the intellectual outlooks of black intellectuals in his book, *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Watts calls the "victim status" a "metaphorical paradigm that describes an ideological discourse that mediates the conflict for mutual recognition that lies at the heart of the oppressed-oppressor relationship…. the victim status establishes moral guidelines for this relationship" (17). The victimized desires recognition from the victimizer. Watts further points out the convoluted tension-filled nature of the relationship between the two subjects, claiming, "The victim status is a metaphor for an ideological discourse that mediates the political, economic, and psychological relationships between oppressed and oppressor" (17-18). The victims experience a pull between the emotions of hate and envy in reference to the values of victimization and victimizing – i.e. of freedom versus the rejection of freedom, and this condition Watts calls the "victim status syndrome" (19). Watts argues that Ellison's strategy to confront "social marginality" and the "victim status" is "a call for heroic individualism" (22). Watts concludes, "Ellison's confrontation with the victim status is subtle and quite unique. He neither attempts to scare whites with images of brute Negroes, like Wright, nor does he champion an image of blacks as morally superior beings, like Baldwin. Ellison claims to be the black writer who is less concerned with appealing to whites than in creating art that affirms black life" (108). Watts deliberately announces that he does "not engage in a literary analysis of *Invisible Man*," and is "less concerned with the substantive meanings of the artistic and intellectual productions of particular black artists than with the ideological contexts that helped to shape their intellectual outlook" (112). I do engage Ellison's novel and its workings with a type of victim status, although not in the way Watts proceeds. However, I will

with Taylor, for instance, who states that identity is dependent on dialogical relations with others, and he acknowledges that, because of this fact, there does not exist an "always already" capability: "Yet inwardly derived, personal, original identity doesn't enjoy this recognition *a priori*. It has to win it through exchange, *and the attempt can fail*. What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition *but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail*."[206]

Invisible Man focuses on the social conditions that lead to the nonrecognition of African American individuals and the narrative casts a blame or a responsibility onto society for the debasement of black men and women. Yet, an epideictic framework elucidates how the novel functions as social action because the narrative employs emotive discourse that attempts community- and morality-building in line with the current social climate – it incorporates the present milieu, focuses on democratic values, and discourses on responsibility, and as a result, *Invisible Man* represents the *literary epideictic*. Ellison's project, then, is almost forcing the victimizer to confront this issue (much like the Invisible Man forces himself upon Mr. Norton in the Epilogue of the novel in the subway station).[207] Ellison's method does not leave itself vulnerable to the compliance of the victimizer but puts more control in the hands of the victimized individual. The individual must acknowledge his own invisibility, but also, as the narrator posits, accept "the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle, because

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ultimately argue that Ellison is not only affirming black life in and of itself, but is comingling black life with a postwar American identity – as one and the same. Perhaps that is where Watts falls short. While he maintains that the black intellectual – here, Ellison *or* the Invisible Man who is an artist who writes the memoir – battles with the social or ethnic marginality, and that heroism lies in "making something out of yourself through enduring," I contend that for Ellison, heroism is of the form *e pluribus unum*. In other words, Ellison corrals all individuals into a national, moral dilemma. Watts's victim status also requires too much of a willingness on the part of the victimizer. The victimizer may not be willing to, or open to, feeling guilt, shame, or fear over his victimization of the victim. If this were to be the case, then the victim status is not achieved and whatever "fruit" that results from Watts's heroism can be potentially negated, and the victim could be left with nothing but more despair.

[206] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," p. 34-35, italics added. Taylor declares that human life is "dialogical," and that we define our identity through "rich human languages of expression" that go beyond spoken words. Furthermore, individuals define and express themselves in tandem with, or against, others (32-33).

we were the heirs who must use the principle because no other fitted our needs? Not for the power

or for vindication, but because we, with the given circumstance of our origin, *could only thus find*

transcendence?" (574). The narrator suggests the power of the individual to accept the

responsibility for all, for the principle, but most importantly, for his historicity, and by doing this,

he can perhaps transcend "the false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" resulting from

society's nonrecognition.

To begin with, there is the curious predicament to make the novel's overarching theme

that of invisibility. Ellison's novel begins with the famous line, "I am an invisible man," and sets

the experimental theme of invisibility throughout the Prologue. John Wright reads the opening

line as a "creative heuristic" spawned from the "rebuttal of the sociological truism that most

African Americans' troubles sprang from their 'high visibility,'" which led Ellison to explore, in

experimental form, the nature of black leadership in American society.[208] However, the theme of

invisibility is not designed to comment as prominently on black leadership in American society as

it is designed to issue a call for recognition by revealing the debilitating effects of *nonrecognition*

on black individuals. The narrator reveals that people see "everything and anything," but they

"refuse" to see him. The ever anonymous "I" retorts that he is "*not* a spook," or one of the

"Hollywood-movie *ectoplasms*," but rather, he declares that he is "a man of *substance*, of *flesh*

and *bone*," who "*might even be said* to possess mind" (3, italics added). Here, Ellison utilizes the

double entendre of the word "spook" to not only allude to the notion that others perceive him to

be a ghost or an embodied "ectoplasm," but also to associate the racial slur ("spook") for African

Americans with the social and historical context.[209] The first sentences imbue the narrative with

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[207] Invisible Man: "Don't you know me?" Mr. Norton: "Should I?" … "You see me?" … "Why, of course …"; Invisible Man: "But you don't really know who I am…. I am your destiny" (578).

[208] John S. Wright, *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 102-103.

[209] This has been pointed out by others. See Timothy Parrish, "Ralph Ellison: The *Invisible Man* in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*. *Contemporary Literature* 45.3 (2004) 433-434, and Kevin J. Hayes, *A Journey Through American Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 11-12. Also, see Anita Henderson, "What's in a Slur?" *American Speech*, Volume 78, Number 1, Spring 2003, pp. 52-74 for a

the Invisible Man's conflict between asserting his physical presence in human terms, right along with the existence of dehumanizing social attitudes that do not grant him the possession of a mind – a distinguishing human quality – based on the fact that he is a physical, human body. In essence, the very beginning of the novel assigns an intentionality to members of society who actively refuse to see the Invisible Man. Furthermore, the narrator pits what he *is* against what he *is not*, associating this conflict with the issue of recognition. Eventually, Ellison corrals all individuals into a national, moral dilemma revolving around recognition, and *Invisible Man* is an example of the *literary epideictic* because the novel accomplishes this task by 1) pinpointing societal flaws that withhold democratic principles, and 2) by fostering communal complicity to achieve a consubstantiality among the readers.

3) Epideictic and Emotive Discourse and the Reading of *Invisible Man*

A major characteristic of epideictic rhetoric, but one that is not thoroughly recognized by scholarship, is the appeal to emotions because the speaker is trying to establish a connection with an audience founded on particular values. Social cohesion is accomplished when an audience feels connected by common values. The process therefore is affective. In order to demonstrate how epideictic discourse applies to *Invisible Man*, I borrow from William Reddy's work in *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. In discussing cultural anthropology, Reddy explains that emotions are representative of collective performances of communal expectations, or, the expression of emotional states as part of learned behavior and social construction, which indicate how *emotional management* and political power are intertwined. Reddy offers the following definition of "emotion": "An emotion is a range of loosely connected thought material, formulated in varying codes, that has goal-relevant valence

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discussion on the social attitudes and current usage of ethnic slurs. The Prologue establishes the racial dynamic of invisibility over the course of the following pages, with remarks implicating a "tall blond man…[with] blue eyes" in an altercation; of how he resided in the "jungle of Harlem … in a building

and intensity, that may constitute a 'schema.'"[210] Emotion can then be broken down into various

components in Reddy's theory.

First, there is "emotional management," which refers to the "instrumental use of the self-altering effects of emotives in the service of a goal," and "emotional navigation," which contains

the "possibility of radically changing course, as well as that of making constant corrections in

order to stay on a chosen course."[211] Lastly, Reddy's concept of "emotional suffering" and

"emotional effort" will come into play within the narrative of *Invisible Man*. Since Reddy defines

emotion as involving goal related intentions, "emotional suffering" is "an acute form of goal

conflict," in which actuality conflicts with the intended emotional goal. "Emotional effort"

involves "maintaining a goal or action plan in spite of rising suffering due to goal conflict."[212]

Thus, emotions are geared toward a type of desired outcome on the part of the individual.

However, as a member of a part of a larger community, an individual's *emotional navigation* is

impacted by the social structures in place as well as by relations with others.

For instance, in postwar American society, some African American individuals are

expected to suppress emotions of displeasure in regards to their social status in a white-privileged

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rented strictly to whites"; and most importantly, with the statement that he has "illuminated the blackness" of his invisibility and will "put invisibility down in black and white" (pp. 4-14).

[210] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.94. Reddy presents a theory of emotion that bridges the fields of cognitive psychology and cultural anthropology in an effort to understand the standards and norms of emotional life in different periods of history. Reddy's concept of emotion in terms of cognitive processes can be broken down into several components. Reddy incorporates what he calls "translation," "activation," and "attention" into his theory of emotion. "Translation" is a "replacement for the poststructuralist concept of 'sign.'" He writes, "the individual [is] a site where messages arrive in many different languages and codes, and where some of the messages are successfully translated into other codes, while others are not" (80). The "stuff translation must work on," Reddy calls "thought material" and includes sensory inputs, cognitive and practical skills, and memory stored as preformulated narrative (87). In other words, whatever enters our perception requires different translations, and in the case of emotional expressions, translating subjectivities into language. Reddy further elaborates that the concept of "activation" "identifies a state or a set of similar states that 'inputs,' 'thoughts,' or 'memories' can occupy and that render them ore or less available to be 'processed,' that is, translated. Equally important is the concept of 'attention' [which] is not the only place where translating occurs, but it is a location of the greatest intensity of translation work and where novel translation efforts (learning) must be carried out" (89).

[211] Ibid., p. 129; 122.

[212] Ibid., p. 123; 124. For a list of concepts and definitions, see page 129.

society.[213] Such a condition exists in what Reddy terms the "emotional regime" located within

"political regimes." Reddy reveals, "Any enduring political regime must establish as an essential

element a normative order for emotions, an 'emotional regime.' Such emotional regimes can be

placed, in a preliminary way, on a spectrum." Reddy explains that at one end of the spectrum are

"strict regimes which require individuals to express normative emotions and avoid deviant

emotions," with the goal of the regime to establish "habituation." Additionally, those who

"refuse" are met with "severe penalties," like "violence, deprivation, confinement, [or] exile."[214]

The opposite end of the spectrum has "loose regimes [which] allow for navigation and allow

diverse sets of management tools to be fashioned locally, individually, or through a robust

subgroup formation."[215] The political regimes in place establish a standard of emotional responses

to incidents occurring in society.

In a postwar context, a "strict regime" punishes African Americans for expressing

deviant emotions, as seen by the excessive cases of lynchings and mob violence, and in the case

of Isaac Woodard. However, individuals in the midcentury began to speak out against such

injustices, and their expressions of nonconformity are expressed in what Reddy refers to as

"emotive discourse." Reddy defines "emotives" as speech acts that pertain to "exterior referents"

that are "not passive in the formation of the emotive…. emotives are influenced directly by, and

alter, what they 'refer' to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from

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[213] A prime example of this is Richard Wright's autobiography, especially the scene in chapter twelve in which Wright and one of his peers, Shorty, discuss proper elevator etiquette for a black elevator operator. See Richard Wright, *Black Boy*. Introduction by Edward P. Jones. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics), 2005.

[214] Reddy, p. 125.

[215] Ibid., p. 126. America, then, must fall somewhere in between according to postwar social conditions. For instance, postwar American society proclaimed open society, but the lived experiences of particular individuals, here African Americans, did not reflect an adherence to such democratic principles. Therefore, there were modes of habituation and a regime, a hidden regime, but an oppressive one nonetheless, that impeded the actualization of democratic freedoms. Reddy explains, "Capitalist democracies, for example, appear to offer great scope for navigation, but, in practice, capacities and options are limited by contractual relationships (that is, by access to money and property). . . . Such societies thus belong more to the middle of the spectrum and produce all sorts of configurations: conforming majorities, marginalized minorities, varying management strategies within the majority, organized cults and mafias" (127-128).

constatives) in that emotives do things to the world."[216] The relationship between "external referents" and emotives that Reddy alludes to will be imperative for my development and analysis of epideictic discourse in *Invisible Man*.

One manner in which I depart from Reddy's scheme is in where I locate the emotive discourse. Reddy turns to speech acts, but since I am dealing with a literary text, I define a literary speech act not only as dialogue within the narrative, but also as constituting interior monological snippets of the narrator's consciousness. Many times, the Invisible Man reflects on events and situations that reveal the emotive discourse he uses to translate the world around him and communicate to the reader. In Ellison's narrative, I define the epideictic discourse as language that serves either as a call for, or a critique of, the social conditions of recognition. In order to accomplish the epideictic objective, Ellison incorporates emotive discourse that 1) illustrates the negative effects of nonrecognition on African Americans, and 2) is designed to create an affective response in the reader to (re)evaluate the individual's role in a democratic society. Therefore, the emotive discourse is epideictic because it reveals the negative effects resulting from the failure of postwar American society to reify the democratic ideals for all individuals and in doing so, the novel catalyzes an ethical process regarding the status of recognition for African American individuals within a larger, national identity. Furthermore, within the narrative, the exterior referents include the action that the narrator encounters – for example, the ritualistic and violent Battle Royal he must participate in before he gives his speech provides an external referent for the narrator to navigate emotionally prior to the speech he gives, which itself contains emotive discourse. Yet, both the Battle Royal and the speech contribute to

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[216] Reddy, p. 105. Reddy, in discussing speech-act theory, states, "statements about the speaker's *emotions* are prominent examples of a type of utterance that is neither constative (descriptive) nor performative, neither 'doing things with words' nor offering an account or representation of something beyond the reach of words" (99). He says that "first-person, present tense emotional claims" contain elements of translation, activation, and attention, and such claims describe personal states and conditions, which are rooted in social life as an individual component of a larger group, and involve activations of cognitions or judgments (100-102). In addition to first-person, present tense emotional claims, there are first-person, past tense emotion claims (I was angry at him), first-person, long-term emotion claims (I will always be proud of you),

the *epideictic exigency* in the novel – the sociocultural context of postwar American society that prompted the text and the theme of invisibility and recognition.

The opening scene of the novel following the Prologue, "The Battle Royal," begins to demonstrate the epideictic discourse, for in this scene, the narrator introduces emotive discourse that a) describes the physical and psychological torment the young black boys suffer, b) establishes a communal bond on the part of the black boys, and a separate community of high profile whites, and c) discloses the tension between the lack of recognition of African American individuals and the call for recognition that rings of the upcoming Civil Rights movement. In terms of the epideictic, the emotive discourse depicting the scene sets up the social regime of a racist postwar American society, a society that has instituted events like the Battle Royal as normative activities for a white audience. Initially, the Invisible Man believes the evening presents an outstanding opportunity to impress very important white men following the success of his high school graduation speech. However, the evening quickly turns to a grotesque masquerade of racially oppressive entertainment for the white men in attendance.

The narrator relates, "We were rushed up to the front of the ballroom . . . Then we were pushed into place. I almost wet my pants. A sea of faces, some hostile, some amused, ringed around us, and in the center, facing us stood a magnificent blonde – stark naked" (18-19). The first, and perhaps most important, point to emphasize in this scene involving the white woman is the emotive discourse that bridges the internal suffering of the narrator and the black boys to a social and historic context. Arnold Rampersad writes that the Battle Royal scene carries "overtones of the classic slave narrative … introducing elements of myth and ritual," such as the "parading of the naked blond woman before young black men" (217); the fighting between black men to amuse whites; and the Speech delivered to an audience of whites for their mockery.[217] Barbara Foley puts the scene in a more specific context, proposing that the threat of violence that

emotionally expressive gestures, facial expressions, word choices, intonations, other claims about emotion states of the speaker, and second- and third-person emotion claims (105-107).

whites make towards blacks regarding sexual repression is a "function of conditioning." She writes, "the battle royal ritually enacts the psychological castration signaling the young men's initiation into manhood according to the ethics of living Jim Crow."[218]

The narrator's goal is to survive the Battle Royal as unscathed as possible in order to give his speech. However, this scene portrays how the narrator must manage and navigate his *emotional suffering* brought on by the racist regime. Emotionally, the narrator reports the fears resulting from the threats that some of the men issue to the boys if they watch the naked woman, while other white men threatened the boys if they do not. One boy "fainted," while another could not hide his erection and "plead[ed] to go home," and others were "crying in hysteria" (19-21). The Invisible Man navigates his internal consciousness, a psychological tour that extends to the collective group of black youths – "Some of the boys stood with lowered heads, trembling. I felt a wave of irrational guilt and fear. My teeth chattered, my skin turned to goose flesh, my knees knocked" (19).

The fear that the Invisible Man and the other boys experience is magnified by the fact that they have no choice but to participate in this horrific event. The protagonist finds himself in a situation he has no control over, for the social norm of the battle royal determines what he must do next – fight Tatlock until one of them is left standing. The narrator continues to describe the scene leading to the finale between the Invisible Man and Tatlock, who presented a look of "hate [for him] aglow with a feverish terror from what had happened to us all" (24). Lucas Morel argues that the novel is about freedom, but that Ellison depicts freedom not as "the untrammeled exercise of human will," but how through the "lack of control, choice, or responsibility," black characters can still exercise freedom. Morel uses the Battle Royal scene as a case in point –

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[217] Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 217.
[218] Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 157.

namely, that Ellison portrays the narrator's mind at work, "free and active" in how he loosens the blindfold placed on him and thinks about his speech during the melee.[219]

Yet, when the narrator tries to negotiate with Tatlock, offering him five, and then seven dollars of prize money if he acts like the Invisible Man knocked him out, his freedom is repressed by the unwillingness of Tatlock. Tatlock is out for himself, and when the Invisible Man hears a voice put money on Tatlock, he is once again confused by the *emotional regime* – "Hearing this, I almost dropped my guard. I was confused: Should I try to win against the voice out there?" (25). Morel's evaluation of freedom in the scene is not strong, especially considering the activity that follows the boxing spectacle where the boys are led to an electrified carpet where they are encouraged to pick up as much money as they can while they are electrocuted, all to the laughter of the white men in the audience. Summing up the entire evening up to that point, the narrator explains, "It seemed a whole century would pass before I would roll free, a century in which I seared through the deepest levels of my body to the fearful breath within me and the breath seared and heated to the point of explosion" (28). The narrative reveals the *emotional suffering* and dehumanization of the black boys that exposes not only the permissiveness of the white men in attendance, but their sadistic enjoyment of such treatment.

What is most important in situating the epideictic discourse within the Battle Royal chapter, but is a rather subtle detail of the scene, is the community that the narrative constructs: the scene involves numerous black youths along with very important men in the community – "bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants" (18). These men play an integral part in establishing social structures and maintaining social order. In essence, before they allow a future leader of the African American community to address them, a boy who will "some day … lead his people in the proper paths" (32), they impose a socially demeaning and undignified event that robs the Invisible Man of the freedom of speech – he must pay a violent

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[219] Lucas Morel, "Ralph Ellison's American Democratic Individualism," in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*. Ed. Lucas Morel. (Lexington: The University Press of

and humiliating price to speak on the behalf of his people, an occasion that is further void of

significance when the men mock the narrator. Ellison is able to expose the dehumanization of the

social, white normativeness of the midcentury, and further reveal the internal *emotional suffering*

of the young black boys due to their mistreatment. Through emotive discourse, the narrative

confronts the reader with an ethical dilemma – she must choose to either remain stolid, or to

abhor the social conditions that permit such activities and inflict such emotional pain on the

sufferers.

Of course, this all leads up to the speech the narrator gives to the men. The narrator's

speech at the smoker is merely an afterthought, for the M.C. declares that they "almost forgot" an

integral part of the evening. The Invisible Man begins by invoking the words of Booker T.

Washington. Here, the narrative calls upon Washingtonian ideals, namely, "social responsibility"

and, as John Wright states, the "cooperation with the ruling whites."[220] Robert O'Meally further

explains that Washington "felt that blacks had to sacrifice social and political advancement – as

well as superfluous academic exercising – and concentrate on the industrial arts."[221] What is

interesting to note about this speech epideictically is the Invisible Man's objective for the speech.

Resembling epideictic's concern with values, the narrator calls attention to the values

established by Washington, but he admits that he "spoke automatically." This brief

acknowledgment amplifies the climactic moment of the speech coming up where the narrator is

asked to repeat "social responsibility" over the laughter and disrespectful hum of the crowd, and

instead, he blurts out "social *equality*" (30, italics added). The fact that the speech begins by

alluding to Washingtonian ideals *automatically* in terms of race relations in American society and

ends on this note invests the speech with epideictic currency. It jars the narration by interrupting

the narrator's speech and presents a conflict between African American subservience to the

Kentucky, 2004), p. 72.
[220] John S. Wright, *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), pp.79-80.
[221] Robert O'Meally, *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 14.

societal standard of "cultivating friendly relations" with white individuals based on a social

responsibility, with that of an idealistic call for society to grant a status of equality for African

Americans.

At this point in the novel, the narrator is still naïve and only beginning to develop and

cultivate his skills, but epideictically, whether or not the narrator classifies this as a "mistake" is

irrelevant – narratively the scene is *amplified* to introduce the ethical dilemma of social

responsibility versus social equality. The ultimate ideal the novel strives for is democratic

equality for all individuals, and the narrator expends an *emotional effort* in the speech when he

points out that his mouth had filled up with blood from the fighting and "almost strangled" him.

However, "wanting to stop" and relieve himself, he notices that the men were listening to him, so

he "gulped" the blood down, and continued on: "What powers of endurance I had during those

days! What enthusiasm! What a belief in the rightness of things!" (30). The protagonist persists

through his emotional and physical suffering to make his first attempt at changing the social

conditions that oppress black individuals.

The Invisible Man's oratory prowess evolves in the eviction scene, which plays another

important role in establishing the appeal to, and further push for, communal values and

contributes to the epideictic framework. John Wright articulates, "The speech marks his

translation from a phase of egocentric leadership 'for' society to a phase of self-effacing

leadership 'against' the social order. And his extemporaneous rhetorical pyrotechnics signal his

regenerated political will to freedom and his new mastery of oratorical 'technique.'"[222] Julia

Eichelberger views the scene as incorporating multiple voices: "the voice of official authority and

the voices of people like the Provos."[223] However, Wright and Eichelberger downplay the role of

community in the scene that overrides the element of leadership and provides a goal for

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[222] Wright, *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*, p. 111.
[223] Eichelberger, *Prophets of Recognition*, p. 48.

incorporating multiple voices. The eviction speech shows the development of the narrator as an orator, but more importantly, it expands the epideictic reach of the narrative.

In the Harlem eviction scene, the Invisible Man condemns the social conditions that lead to eviction, dispossession, and shame on particular African Americans who may have suffered that fate in the midcentury. He constructs and strengthens the sense of community through emotive discourse that conjures thoughts of familial relations and associations with the Provos and the shame that results from being forcefully evicted from their home and having nothing to show for all their "day labor." He concludes, "When you look at all you *haven't* got in eighty-seven years you feel ashamed, . . . these folks had a dream book, but the pages went blank" (279-280, italics added). This is where emotions and values become crucial. To explain, a look at the exchange following the speech on the Harlem curbside between the Invisible Man and Brother Jack alludes to the epideictic discourse found within the speech. Brother Jack calls the oration an "effective piece of eloquence," that, "with a few words…[the protagonist] had [the spectators] involved in action." And while Brother Jack is thankful for the "most instructive experience," he still cannot comprehend how the Invisible Man managed to arouse the citizens so quickly to action (289). However, Brother Jack does acknowledge that the narrator was extremely moved emotionally, but advises the Invisible Man not to "waste your emotions on individuals, they don't count," despite the fact that the narrator feels connected to the people in some manner. Brother Jack rejects individuality, objecting that certain individuals are "incapable of rising to the necessity of the historical situation" (291). This is where Brother Jack errs; he fails to understand the nature of epideictic discourse in conjoining individual action within a larger collective agenda based on values.

In the beginning of the scene, the crowd is not unified. The emotional discourse and the societal values that the Invisible Man appeals to comprise the contextual capacity for readers to connect the scene to historical accounts of dispossession. Gerard Hauser, for instance, discusses epideictic rhetoric in relation to the teaching of public morality. Hauser writes, "Understanding

the implications of actions for oneself and the community is of little value without a

corresponding capacity to make this understanding known through words and deeds sufficiently

powerful to gain assent." Hauser attributes the need for a "communal ethos" in order for

individuals to grasp the nature of ideals or of social ills. He points out, "epideictic offers

instruction on recognizing virtue and thereby on retaining persuasion as an alternative to authority

or force in the public domain."[224] The function of the narrator's speech is the same – i.e. a

teaching function on public morality – although he goes about this process in a slightly different

manner. In other words, Hauser is discussing how the epideictic rhetor utilizes praise and

encomium to instruct civic virtue. The Invisible Man uses reprobation, but still arrives at a

similar end.

The narrator recounts how he encountered a silent and "sullen-faced crowd" observing

white men escorting an old couple and their belongings out of a building and onto the street.

Here is where Ellison incorporates the epideictic exigency of historicity into the narrative, for the

narrator describes, "I realized that what I'd taken for junk was actually worn household

furnishings" (268). This seemingly unimportant observation by the narrator serves as a

commonplace for postwar American readers regarding the Harlem housing situation, especially in

regards to certain African Americans' experience with eviction leading up to the midcentury.

John Callahan has pointed out Ellison's tendency to play on associations and enhance the

significance of particular sociohistorical issues. He mentions the eviction scene and how Ellison

does not mention the Great Depression in the narrative. He writes, "Needless to say, it was for

some purpose Ellison resisted the pull to get some explicit mileage from the thirties. He seems

unwilling to restrict the Provos' dispossessed condition to one point in time, perhaps because of

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[224] Gerard Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* 29:1, p. 12; 16.

the danger that, if he did so, what has been archetypal in black experience might be laid simply at the door of hard times."[225]

Claudia Durst Johnson adds that following the Great Depression, Harlem was witnessing somewhere in the neighborhood of "10 to 20 evictions a day."[226] Additionally, George Brown notes, "It is not a rare sight to see an evicted family's belongings callously dumped on the sidewalks somewhere in Harlem."[227] More importantly, Mark Naison explains the tactic of "eviction resistance" during instances where individuals were forcefully removed from their homes, enacted by Communist-led activist groups in the 1930s, whereby "organizers would move the furniture from the street back into the apartment." He writes, "some of them led to confrontations with police in which hundreds of people participated, but most of them led to some peaceful resolution, and that by World War II, tenant organizations had become a major force combatting the increasing housing crisis in Harlem."[228]

The eviction scene in *Invisible Man* corresponds very closely to this sociocultural history of Harlem, for the narrator can be viewed as an epideictic rhetor who rallies a communal ethos for a peaceful resolution, or "law abiding" approach to the situation as he calls it, by carrying the furniture back into the apartment. When he further approaches the curbside scene, someone in the crowd suggests, "we ought to stop 'em," and questions the will power of the group. Another man disagrees, expressing, "All they need is someone to set it off" (268). At this point, the narrator begins to describe his *emotional navigation*:

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[225] John Callahan, "Chaos, Complexity, and Possibility: The Historical Frequencies of Ralph Waldo Ellison," in *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. Kimberly Benston. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), p. 134.

[226] Claudia Durst Johnson, *Youth Gangs in Literature,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 86.

[227] George F. Brown, "A House is Not Always a Home," in John Henrik Clarke, ed. *Harlem: A Community in Transition*. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), p. 198.

[228] Mark Naison, "From Eviction Resistance to Rent Control – Tenant Activism in the Great Depression," in Ronald Lawson and Mark Naison, eds. *The Tenant Movement in New York City*, 1904-1984. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 101. Naison writes, "The Great Depression, therefore, represented a watershed in the history of tenant activism. Tenant organizations were inactive when the decade began, but by World War II they had become a powerful force in the political life of the city and state" (97).

>Something had been working fiercely inside me, and for a moment I had forgotten the
>
>rest of the crowd. Now I recognized a self-consciousness about them, as though they, we,
>
>were ashamed to witness the eviction, as though we were all unwilling intruders upon
>
>some shameful event; and thus we were careful not to touch or stare too hard at the
>
>effects that lined the curb; for we were witnesses of what we did not wish to see, though
>
>curious, fascinated, despite our shame, and through it all the old female, mind-plunging
>
>crying. (270)

The sense of community is building for the narrator as he incites the crowd to resist the

individuals evicting the Provos, and more importantly, for the readers, the scene attacks the

process of dispossession. Part of that motivation lies in the emotive discourse of "shame" in this

passage that the narrator not only feels individually, but shares with the group gathering on the

street. The Provos's belongings contribute to the sense of community because the objects have an

increasingly greater effect on the Invisible Man and the crowd who are initially "unwilling

intruders" on this event. The portrait of the old couple, the "knocking bones," a straightening

comb, an Ethiopian flag, a rabbit foot, a breast pump, and Primus Provos's free papers, among

other things, had a profound impact on the narrator. These objects illustrate long lives lived, but

the objects are strewn on the street, having the symbolic representation of discarding their history

as well. In an intimate reflection, the narrator expresses,

>And it was as though I myself was being dispossessed of some painful yet precious thing
>
>which I could not bear to lose; something confounding, like a rotted tooth that one would
>
>rather suffer indefinitely than endure the short, violent eruption of pain that would mark
>
>its removal. And with this sense of dispossession came a pang of vague recognition: this
>
>junk . . . all throbbed within me with more meaning than there should have been: *And*
>
>*why did I, standing in the crowd, see like a vision my mother hanging wash on a cold*
>
>*windy day . . . why were they causing me discomfort so far beyond their intrinsic meaning*

as objects? And why did I see them now, as behind a veil that threatened to lift, stirred by

the cold wind in the narrow street? (273, italics original)

The Invisible Man begins to feel like he is being dispossessed too, not of his material belongings, but of his history. He states that he feels like he is "being drawn to the old couple by a warm, dark, rising whirlpool of emotion which [he] feared" (270). The objects are commonplace objects that spark associations within the narrator, and one can assume, in the other spectators as well, because they are artifacts of quotidian life, representative of lives accumulated over the years, and they invoke familial relations. While the narrative only affords insight into the Invisible Man's consciousness, his speech extends the emotive discourse to the collective group and creates a sense of a bonded community and hence, functions epideictically.

To achieve this goal, the Invisible Man infuses the speech with familial associations, which really strengthen a common investment on the part of the gatherers in the Provos's eviction, for the crowd on the street becomes a united group with a common concern and cause. For instance, the narrator engages Primus Provo in a conversation about his age and work, and he reveals the larger social issue lingering within the scene. He exclaims, "Eighty-seven years, and *poof*! like a snort in a wind storm. *Look at them, they look like my mama and my papa and my grandma and grandpa, and I look like you and you look like me.* Look at them but remember that we're a wise, law-abiding group of people…. What's happened to them? *They're our people, your people and mine, your parents and mine*" (278, italics added). He drives his speech and his goal home by trying to convince the men to let them back in the house to pray – a nonviolent solution to the issue that remains within the law, but also challenges the marshals' authority: "They're facing a gun and we're facing it with them. They don't want the world, but only Jesus. They only want Jesus, just fifteen minutes of Jesus on the rug-bare floor . . . How about it, Mr. Law? Do we get our fifteen minutes worth of Jesus? You got the world, can we have our Jesus?" (279). When he asks, "Where do we go from here?," the crowd is roused to action and they storm the marshals and enter the premises. The narrator tells the crowd to take furniture back into the

apartment and relates it back to the law-abiding principle: "It's blocking the street and the

sidewalk, and that's against the law…. Put it out of sight! Hide it, hide their shame! Hide *our*

shame!" (281). The Invisible Man creates a communal ethos by concentrating on the Provos with

familial discourse, which translates to the community of individuals taking up the Provos's

eviction as implicating the entire community of gatherers. By playing on the emotive discourse

and depicting the scene similarly to the historic context of postwar, Harlem evictions, Ellison

constructs a narrative that critiques the historical process of dispossession, and the epideictic

framework illustrates how the text connects to social action.

The larger social issue looming over the eviction scene, that of nonrecognition, is

expounded in the narrator's first Brotherhood speech in the arena. The whole scene reverberates

with issues of recognition. Anticipating the results of this "new phase" that has distinguished him

from his innocent beginnings of the Battle Royal and college, he reflects, "Few people knew me

now, but after tonight . . . How was it? Perhaps simply to be known, to be looked upon by so

many people, to be the focal point of so many concentrating eyes, perhaps this was enough to

make one different; enough to transform one into something else, someone else" (336).

Narratively, the narrator is expressing a rather simplistic desire for recognition – simply the act of

being looked upon by so many people pleases him. However, epideictically, this is another

transition point for the Invisible Man's social project – he will begin to develop a more complex

objective of recognition in this scene.

The Brotherhood speech utilizes the emotive discourse of anger and resentment that

enhances the communal bond amongst the audience. It can be viewed as an epideictic call for the

recognition of what makes the individuals gathered different and unified at the same time – the

fact that they are "*un*common" people. Morris Dickstein views the scene as indicating a self-

transformation: "the narrator is shedding his old skin, exercising his power over language and

people."[229] But that is only half the significance. He is transforming as an individual, but he also

transforms the relation of the individual to the collective in an epideictic manner. The protagonist

uses indignant language to touch upon the injustice being done to African Americans and others

in the community. This contributes to strengthening a communal bond, but does so in an intricate

way. On the one hand, the Invisible Man discloses the lack of recognition black individuals

suffer, but he also plays on a recognition of what makes all of the individuals congregating in the

arena different, or uncommon. His objective is seemingly paradoxical – he is attempting to target

what makes them different, but in doing so, he is gathering a group of uncommon individuals.

I am arguing that the speech reflects epideictic discourse due to its focus on establishing a

communal interest and a stake in the social issue of "dispossession" through emotive discourse.

For instance, the narrator reveals that he was incorporating "The old down-to-earth, I'm-sick-and-

tired-of-the-way-they've-been-treating-us approach" and cries out, "They call us the 'common

people.' But I've been sitting here listening and looking and trying to understand what's so

common about us. I think they're guilty of a gross mis-statement of fact – we are the uncommon

people" (342). He proclaims that the oppressive society, "they," treat and call the uncommon

people "dumb" and never give them a break. He asks, "And what do they do with the dumb

ones? […] It's dispossess him! Evict him! Use his empty head for a spittoon and his back for a

doormat! It's break him! Deprive him of his wages! It's use his protest as a sounding brass to

frighten him into silence, it's beat his ideas and his hopes and homely aspirations into a tinkling

cymbal!" (342). He uses exclamatory language in describing how society has failed to recognize

individuals as worthy of dignity by pointing out how those "above" use the uncommon folk as

"doormats" and how they break them down and take away their ways of life essentially.

Christopher Hanlon interprets the speech as a "spiritual and musical, drawing upon a tradition of

call-and-response oration," and Herbert Rice notices the "emotionalism" of the speech, but

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[229] Morris Dickstein, "Ralph Ellison, Race, and American Culture," in Ed. John Callahan, *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Casebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 141.

ultimately, Rice lumps the Invisible Man and Ras the Exhorter into the same rhetorical category –

"They live by manipulating audiences with the oldest snake oil in the business: rhetoric."[230]

However, the narrator does not "manipulate" the audience in this speech; he intends to plot

common ground. The Invisible Man amplifies an individual reaction to dispossession with

incensed language in order to establish a commonplace for the audience to psychologically latch

onto. It is an epideictic endeavor to not only build a community, but to enhance communal

support to another level that can foster change.

The Invisible Man targets the communal readiness for action by navigating the crowd's

emotions from victimization towards the context of a social responsibility, to use his earlier

phrase in the novel. For example, in discussing the dispossession of uncommon people, he

speculates, "And do you know what makes us so uncommon? … *We let them do it*!" (343). He

continues,

> "Dispossession! *Dis*-possession is the word! …They've tried to dispossess us of our
>
> manhood and womanhood! Of our childhood and adolescence you heard the sister's
>
> statistics on our infant-mortality rate…. Why, they even tried to dispossess us of *our*
>
> *dislike of being dispossessed!* And I'll tell you something else—*if we don't resist, pretty*
>
> *soon they'll succeed*! These are the days of dispossession, the season of homelessness,
>
> the time of evictions. We'll be dispossessed of the very brains in our heads! And we're
>
> so *un*-common that we can't even see it! Perhaps we're too polite. Perhaps we don't care
>
> to look at unpleasantness. They think we're blind—*un*-commonly blind. And I don't
>
> wonder. Think about it, they've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born.
>
> So now we can only see in straight white lines." (343, italics added)

Here the narrator weaves victimization with agency. If, on the one hand, the crowd decides *not* to

resist, they will suffer the dispossession of manhood, womanhood, and childhood, whereby the

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[230] Christopher Hanlon, "Eloquence and "Invisible Man." *College Literature,* Vol. 32, No.4 (Fall, 2005), p. 76; Herbert W. Rice, *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003),

protagonist makes this not only a communal issue, but also a generational one. Furthermore, he amplifies the idea of "dumbness" on the part of the crowd, or at the very least, simplicity. He castigates the group's ignorance towards "unpleasantness," their unrefined manner and politeness, and their lack of awareness as reasons for dispossession.

Yet, perhaps the biggest impact epideictically is the call for recognition that the narrator makes to a group of "uncommon" people. Take for example Charles Taylor's discussion of a politics of difference in his essay, "The Politics of Recognition." He states, "with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity," and that such a politics of difference is "full of denunciations of discrimination and refusals of second-class citizenship."[231] The Invisible Man employs this politics of difference in order to, paradoxically, gather the crowd under a united front that recognizes its "second-class citizenship," and therefore, he aspires to incite the crowd into demanding recognition. He declares, "But I believe one eye is enough to lose without resistance and I think that's your belief. So let's get together. Did you ever notice, my dumb one-eyed brothers, how two totally blind men can get together and help one another along? They stumble, they bump into things, but they avoid dangers too; they get along. Let's get together, uncommon people. With both our eyes we may see what makes us so uncommon, we'll see *who* make us so uncommon!" (343-344).

The narrator begins to employ a discourse of blame by acknowledging the presence of a "who" that makes the people uncommon, in addition to the "what" that makes them uncommon. He calls for a confrontation between the uncommon people, and those who refuse to see them or recognize them. Again, paradoxically, the uncommon people are also blinded, with only one eye as the Invisible Man refers to them as "a nation of one-eyed mice" who "can only see in straight

p. 19; 9.

white lines." Most importantly, though, the unification of uncommon people takes place oratorically. The narrator calls for the individuals to come together and help one another "stumble" around and "get along." He spurs the crowd into believing in a common fate, and he insinuates that if they band together and take action, they can potentially break the cycle of nonrecognition.

The narrator works toward the climactic moment of the speech that brings the epideictic task together. The Invisible Man touches upon community, emotive discourse, and recognition by using what Hanlon has observed is a "call-and-response" technique common in jazz and spirituals;[232] however, the narrator's purpose is tied to social action as he employs this strategy to emphasize the notion of recognition, for the call-and-response style of the speech scene helps the Invisible Man engage in a process of recognition in which the crowd recognizes him. For instance, he responds, "I must confess…. We share a common disinheritance…. *Something strange and miraculous and transforming is taking place in me right now . . . as I stand here before you*!" (345, italics in original). Temporally, the narrator is amplifying the moment to include a very dramatic and significant point for the audience. He calls attention to himself as he builds a notion of suspense and attention. He continues,

> "Let me describe it. It is something odd. It's something that I'm sure I'd never experience anywhere else in the world. I feel your eyes upon me. I hear the pulse of your breathing. And now, at this moment, with your black-and-white eyes upon me, I feel…I feel…. suddenly that I have become *more human*…. I feel able to get things done . . . I feel the urge to affirm my feelings … I feel that there, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I have come home … Home! My true people! My true country! I am a new citizen of the country of your vision…" (345-346)

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[231] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Ed. Amy Gutman, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 38; 39.
[232] Christopher Hanlon, "Eloquence and *Invisible Man*." *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2005, p. 76.

The Invisible Man concludes with a declaration: "SISTERS! BROTHERS! WE ARE THE TRUE PATRIOTS! THE CITIZENS OF TOMORROW'S WORLD! WE'LL BE DISPOSSESSED NO MORE!" (346). The narrator has achieved the goal of establishing a strong sense of community within a discussion of the nonrecognition of uncommon individuals, which includes both white and black men and women, culminating in the call for recognition. The Invisible Man demonstrates this by orchestrating an act of recognition. The crowd witnesses his own process of becoming, vis-à-vis his oration on human dignity. He reflects, "The audience seemed to become one, its breathing and articulation synchronized" (340), and the community has observed the tenets of recognition – agency ("able to get things done"), affirming one's feelings, and feeling at home.

Kerry McSweeney views the arena speech as "inauthentically personal," while Mark Shiffman argues the contrary, stating, "this suggests that overcoming invisibility involves attaining personal and social integrity through honesty with oneself and others about ones' interiority, which requires being given the chance to externalize one's inferiority for a receptive audience."[233] However, McSweeney and Shiffman are mistaken, for the emotive discourse of the speech invests the scene with authenticity, and the Invisible Man navigates the crowd's feelings of inferiority – whether the crowd is cognizant of those feelings or not – only in order to transition from victimization to the call for action. The speech is epideictic in nature because the audience is not only receptive of the incensed language, but it participates in an ethical process by reflecting upon the social conditions that lead to such feelings of inferiority or dispossession – in essence, nonrecognition. Additionally, the audience is faced with the task of considering social responsibility: they are called to either allow things to remain as they are, or to challenge the status quo. In this way, the Invisible Man transmits an *emotional effort* in confronting the social

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[233] See Kerry McSweeney, *Invisible Man: Race and Identity*. (New York: Twayne, 1988), p. 99; Mark Shiffman, "Confessional Ethics in Augustine and Ralph Ellison," in Eds. Robert Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody, *Augustine and Literature*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), p. 352.

issues panging the community, and he puts this *emotional effort* on display for the community of audience members.

Brother Tod Clifton's funeral oration, with which I began the chapter, also incorporates language of recognition on display for a communal gathering. Clifton's funeral scene is an exemplary form of epideictic discourse because it most strongly illustrates the manner in which the narrative denounces the social nonrecognition of an individual who belongs to a collective group. Kenneth Warren compares the scene to "not quite a million men marching," but comments that the narrator "seizes the opportunity to make a collective statement." However, Warren concludes, "but precisely what the crowd means to express and affirm remains largely a matter of interpretation."[234] In a similar vein, Rice claims that the speech employs "understatement and sarcasm," and, "in disavowing a rhetoric that operates through creating a possibility of transcendence, the narrator *has lost his power to politicize the event. But he has also lost the power to move the audience.*"[235] Rice seems to agree with Brother Jack's assessment of the speech, which I will discuss shortly, in which he accuses the narrator of not responding to the incident in Brotherhood-like political fashion. Brother Jack states, "our job is not to *ask* them what they think but to *tell* them!" (473). However, applying an epideictic framework to the speech will reveal how the narrator targets values and emotions in order to create an ethos of rhetoric – or an imaginative space – for the audience to ethically evaluate the scene and its social implications. As an example of *literary epideictic,* the crowd in the scene, in essence, affirms its indignation at nonrecognition and, consequently, its demand for recognition.

To begin with, the narrator casts blame on the societal players who only uphold individual freedoms for particular members of a democratic society. He refers to the ambiguous "they" who are responsible for the social conditions of nonrecognition that lead to such abuse. Ellison assigns the Brotherhood and the cop the condemnatory role of those who refuse to

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[234] Warren, *So Black and Blue*, p. 44.

[235] Rice, *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel,* p. 41, italics added.

recognize African American individuals. The Invisible Man reports seeing Clifton escorted by a cop who "pushed him, jolting him forward . . . in a head-snapping forward stumble until he caught himself, saying something over his shoulder again, the two moving in *a kind of march that I'd seen many times*" (435-436, italics added). The narrator vividly describes the altercation between Clifton and the police officer that ended in "rapid explosions." Describing Clifton's death, he states, "He fell forward on his knees, like a man saying his prayers …The cop was standing now and looking down at Clifton *as though surprised*, the gun in his hand" (436, italics added). The Invisible Man sets up the tension between the "kind of march" he'd seen many times, and the cop's surprised demeanor. The depiction of the cop "as though surprised" suggests the narrative absurdity that the cop would be shocked at the incident, shocked at the unjustified death of a black man within a social regime like a racist, postwar American society. Trying to make sense of it all, the protagonist wonders why Clifton had resisted in the first place when he knew the social customs of being arrested as a black man, reflecting, "And suddenly it occurred to me that he might have been angry *before* he resisted, before he'd even seen the cop" (446-447). At this point in the narrative, the protagonist alludes to a historical and social context that Clifton, the audience, and the readers will find familiar.

Ellison critiques a society that not only fails to treat African American individuals equally, but also chastises individuals – here, the cop and others in authority – within society who abuse their power to inflict violence against African Americans. Narratively, the Invisible Man drives the epideictic discourse by establishing the blame for Clifton's murder on the cop:

> "Let me tell it as it truly was! His name was Tod Clifton and he was full of illusions….
> He lost his hold on reality. There was a cop and a waiting audience but he was Tod
> Clifton and cops are everywhere. The cop? What about him? He was a cop. A good
> citizen. But this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed with
> 'trigger,' and when Clifton fell he found it. The Police Special spoke its lines and the

rhyme was completed. Just look around you. Look at what he made, look inside you and

feel his awful power." (457)

Eventually, the narrator concludes that Clifton "resist[ed] reality in the form of a .38 caliber

revolver in the hands of the arresting officer." The Invisible Man continues, "Now he's in the

box with the bolts tightened down. He's in the box and we're in there with him, and when I've

told you this you can go. It's dark in this box and it's crowded" (458). Epideictically, the speech

is the most complex of the novel, for while the narrator's discourse reflects the components of

epideictic in blaming law enforcement's "awful power" as responsible for the occasion, he also

attempts to navigate the emotions of others – "What we want is not tears but anger. We must

remember now that we are fighters, and in such incidents we must see the meaning of our

struggle" (449). The Invisible Man touches upon the ethical matter by indirectly reporting what

Clifton would say to the crowd: "… get out of the box and go teach the cops to forget that rhyme.

Tell them to teach them that when they call you *nigger* to make a rhyme with *trigger* it makes the

gun backfire" (458). The narrative employs vivid description and emotive language to describe

the action leading up to Clifton's murder, and to rouse the indignation of the audience in

reference to the discrimination of Clifton and others who suffer similar fates. This scene creates a

sense of community among those gathered and utilizes emotive discourse to accomplish the

epideictic task of locating the origin of nonrecognition, and calling for the desire to take the

"awful power" away from those who abuse it within a racist social regime.

Clifton's death and funeral also serve as reference points that further implicate the

Brotherhood as complicit in the nonrecognition or misrecognition of African American

individuals under the false notion of increased freedoms for all individuals in a democratic

society. For example, the Invisible Man compares the Brotherhood's and the community's

reaction to the death and funeral of Clifton. He goes on to say that the Brotherhood misinterprets

the incident by focusing on the dolls, and that Harlem views the death of Clifton in a different

manner. For instance, what was wrong with the speech in Brother Jack's (glass) eyes was that

"under [the Invisible Man's] leadership, a traitorous merchant of vile instruments of anti-Negro, anti-minority racist bigotry has received the funeral of a hero" (466). However, the narrator counters by focusing on the humanity of Clifton asking, "Isn't the shooting of an unarmed man of more importance politically than the fact that he sold obscene dolls?" (467). The narrator argues with Brother Jack and Brother Tobitt because they are both concerned with the strategy of the "response" to Clifton's death, or, the "side show of a funeral" for the "body of a Brutus" as the Brothers put it. But the Invisible Man refutes, "[Clifton] was shot because he was black and because he resisted. Mainly because he was black … and as far as the cops were concerned Clifton could have been selling song sheets, Bibles, matzos. If he'd been white, he'd be alive. *Or if he'd accepted being pushed around*" (469, italics added). Here the narrator touches upon both the nonrecognition and misrecognition of Clifton on the part of the Brotherhood. They fail to recognize Clifton as a (defenseless) man who was shot, as an individual suffering an unjust fate. But, the Invisible Man also rebukes the Brotherhood for *mis*recognizing Clifton. The organization shows an interest in Clifton's death and funeral but only in terms of how the Brotherhood comes off politically to the community. The Brotherhood views Clifton as an ideological instrument for their cause as opposed to a democratically free individual who has the right to *refuse* to be pushed around.

The narrator then asks Brother Jack a pivotal question – what if Brother Jack "misjudged the occasion?" The Invisible Man says the people of Harlem came to the gathering for Clifton because "we gave them the opportunity to express their feelings, to affirm themselves" (469). The Brotherhood not only misjudges the occasion, but it also misjudges the relationship of the individual to the community, a point contended in the eviction scene earlier. At one point during Clifton's funeral, the protagonist says, "The crowd sweated and throbbed, … And as I took one last look I saw not a crowd but the set faces of individual men and women" (459). Here is the factor that Brother Jack cannot grasp in terms of the Brotherhood's objective, a notion that epideictic discourse accomplishes – the agglomeration of the individual and the communal, for

even in the mass of the crowd, the Invisible Man "sees" individual men and women. In

recognizing the humanity, the individuality, and the murder of Tod Clifton, the crowd affirms

themselves in the face of a social order that refuses to recognize them.

Narratively, the *epideictic exigency* is invested when the narrator ponders the concept of

the historian. For instance, he asks, "Where are the historians today? And how would they put it

down?" Yet, he admits, "the cop would be Clifton's historian, his judge, his witness, and his

executioner…. We who write no novels, histories or other books. What about us, I thought"

(439). The issue that the Invisible Man pulls from Clifton's death is the misrecognition of the

African American individual as a member of a larger democratic collective. The Invisible Man's

speech on recognition is roused by his anger and begins with furiosity: "What are you waiting for

me to tell you?. . . Go home, he's dead as he'll ever die. That's the end in the beginning and

there's no encore . . . Go home, forget him" (454-455). But, then he emphasizes the larger

meaning of his death, much like he exposed the significance of the Provos's dispossession – "Can

I say in twenty minutes what was building twenty-one years and ended in twenty seconds? What

are you waiting for, when all I can tell you is his name? And when I tell you, what will you know

that you didn't' know already, except, perhaps, his name?" (455). A name is how someone can

be recognized, and he amplifies the meaning and significance of Clifton's name in the speech in

order to reveal the lack of recognition that society – and here, the police officers specifically –

imposes on an African American individual like Clifton, for the narrator actually educates the

audience, illustrating what more resides in a name – an individual who is a part of a larger social

identity, but one who is *not* protected by the same laws.

His goal – the *emotional goal* – is to make it known that the "meaning of [Clifton's]

death was greater than the incident or the object that caused it…. For they had the power to use a

paper doll, first to destroy his integrity and then as an excuse for killing him" (448). He

reproaches,

"His name was Clifton and they shot him down…. His name was Clifton and his face was black and his hair was thick with tight-rolled curls – or call them naps or kinks. He's dead, uninterested, and, except to a few young girls, it doesn't matter . . . *Have you got it? Can you see him? Think of your brother or your cousin John.* His lips were thick with an upward curve at the corners. He often smiled. He had good eyes and a pair of fast hands, and he had a heart. He thought about things he felt deeply. *I won't call him noble because what's such a word to do with one of us? His name was Clifton, Tod Clifton, and, like any man, he was born of woman to live awhile and fall and die.* So that's his tale to the minute." (455, italics added)

William Nash is spot on when he contends, "What the reader and author know, despite the narrator's convictions to the contrary, is that the great strength of the speech is its transcendence of conventional rhetoric to achieve the remarkably personal insights that come from the recurrent emphasis on the slain individual. By telling the particulars of Clifton's story as he does, Invisible Man finds a way to touch on the universal experiences of injustice and exploitation that the crowd knows." Nash suggests that the narrator evokes the systemic racism that affects the majority of interactions between police and community members, but "he does not let his congregation forget the individual who has been lost."[236]

I agree with Nash that the narrator evokes a postwar racist society, but he appeals to the concept of familial ties much like he did in the eviction speech in order to strengthen the communal bond amongst those gathered to witness Clifton's funeral: "Think of your brother or your cousin." For instance, the Invisible Man wonders why the people had gathered, "Because they knew Clifton? Or for the occasion his death gave them to express their protestations, a time and place to come together, to stand touching and sweating and breathing and looking in a common direction?" (452). The narrator creates a space for the Harlem community to express

sorrow and frustration in a communal way. On the one hand, a man in the procession begins to sing an old spiritual titled, "There's Many a Thousand Gone," and the crowd joins in. By singing together, the members of the gathered community symbolically share in a cultural history as the song represents a generational legacy of suffering injustices. But the narrator also provides a place for the individuals to affirm their exploitation by a white supremacist society. While he suggests that the funeral provided the "occasion" for the crowd to express its protestations, the context of the funeral oration provided the narrator the means to achieve that goal through his emphasis on familial connections. The Invisible Man pitches many physical qualities for the audience to connect with in terms of "knowing" somebody like Clifton in order to work towards his goal of demonstrating the social import of Clifton's death. He points out his hair, lips, and eyes, painting a vivid description of an individual man the crowd can relate to. This familial connection diffuses a wide range of possibilities for the audience to express past grievances that fit Tod Clifton's funeral procession bill.

The communal act of publicly recognizing Clifton as a dignified human being worthy of an honorable funeral occurs because of the collective grievance for the unjustified murder of an African American individual member of society. The Brotherhood and Brother Jack remain uninterested in Clifton's individuality, and what is interesting in this scene is how the Invisible Man acted *individually* to commemorate the fallen individual, in spite of the Brotherhood's command that no member should act alone without the recommendation of the committee. But, when Brother Jack accuses the narrator of "riding 'race' again" and downplaying the "dolls," the Invisible Man replies that he is "riding the race [he's] forced to ride" (469), and that Clifton was "only a salesman, not the inventor" of the dolls (448). Finally, the tension has escalated and the narrator refers to Brother Jack as "Marse Jack," the Harlem community's "great white father" (473). By calling Brother Jack "Marse Jack," the Invisible Man invests the name with tones of

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[236] William Nash, "*Invisible Man* as 'a Form of Social Power': The Evolution of Ralph Ellison's Politics," in Lucas Morel, ed. *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*.

misrecognition. The narrator blasts Brother Jack and those in society who refuse to recognize African Americans as worthy of nobility in the form of a rhetorical question that includes a sense of communal ties – "us": "I won't call him noble because what's such a word to do with one of us?" (455). Epideictically, the Invisible Man amplifies the societal *insignificance* of Clifton's death *in order to* critique the social circumstances and the institutional powers that lead to unjustified acts like the defenseless murder of black individuals.

4) Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the epideictic characteristic of the scenes involving the Battle Royal, the eviction, the first Brotherhood speech, and Tod Clifton's funeral and proposes an epideictic framework for reading *Invisible Man*, which helps elucidate Ellison's statement that the novel is "social action itself." And perhaps, reading the narrative activity in between the Prologue and Epilogue epideictically will complete the *literary epideictic* illustration of nonrecognition along with the novel's plea for love and complicity as the celebratory side of epideictic. The Prologue and Epilogue form a circular structure in the narrative, for in the Prologue, the narrator comments that he is "getting too far ahead of the story, almost to the end, although the end is in the beginning" (6). For instance, the narrator defines his "invisibility as "a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they *look through* their physical eyes upon reality" (3, italics added). The novel's ending line, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" dominates discussion of the Epilogue. However, prior to that, the Invisible Man relates, "Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening *when your eyes were looking through*? (581). As Axel Honneth points out, "the colloquial expression for such active forms of intentional invisibility is 'looking through' someone ... [which] has a performative aspect because it demands gestures or

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(Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), p. 115.

ways of behaving that make clear that the other is not seen not merely accidentally, but rather

intentionally."[237] What my discussion of epideictic discourse reveals is the extent to which the

narrator's Prologue confession amplifies acts of (non)recognition as the novel's ultimate

revelation.

After the unnamed narrator recounts a story of how he almost beat a "tall blond" and

"blue eyed" man who called him an insulting name after bumping into him, The Invisible Man

professes:

> I can hear you say, 'What a horrible, irresponsible bastard!' And you're right. I leap to
>
> agree with you. I am one of the most irresponsible beings that ever lived. *Irresponsibility*
>
> *is part of my invisibility*; any way you face it, it is a *denial*. But to whom can I be
>
> responsible, and *why should I be, when you refuse to see me*? And wait until I reveal how
>
> truly irresponsible I am. *Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form*
>
> *of agreement*. Take the man I almost killed: Who was responsible for that near murder –
>
> I? I don't think so, *and I refuse it*. I won't buy it. You can't give it to me. *He* bumped
>
> *me*, *he* insulted *me*. Shouldn't he, for his own personal safety, have recognized my
>
> hysteria, my '*danger potential*'? He, let us say, was lost in a dream world – which, alas,
>
> is only too real! – and didn't *he* rule me out of it? And if he had yelled for a policeman,
>
> wouldn't *I* have been taken for the offending one? Yes, yes, yes! Let me agree with you, I
>
> was the irresponsible one; for I should have used my knife to protect the higher interests
>
> of society. Some day that kind of foolishness will cause us tragic trouble. All dreamers
>
> and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the
>
> fate of all. (14, italics added)

The Invisible Man introduces the issue of recognition and its relation to social responsibility.

This scene helps establish he rhetorical contract between the narrator and the reader through the

dialogical style, "I can hear you say," etc. This is important because it invests the narrative with a

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[237] Honneth, "Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition,'" p. 112.

theme of interconnectedness – recognition and social responsibility implicate both the invisible

ones and the "sleepwalkers." Therefore, whether the reader is an invisible entity, or a

sleepwalker, she has a vested interest in the novel's depiction of sociality. The narrator satirizes

the notion that an invisible man can be held responsible for his actions by exposing the voluntary

act of "denial" possible in social acts of recognition. Furthermore, the protagonist elaborates on

the social agreement within recognition. In other words, if others deny invisible men and women

social recognition, those men and women, in turn, can (and should?) deny responsibility for any

actions that are deemed questionable by such a social regime.

Epideictically, and for a postwar, American sense of "communal" interests, this amplifies

the notion of "danger potential," the idea that adapts Charles Taylor's insistence that

misrecognition oppresses only the unrecognized. Within the novel, Ellison invests the

unrecognized, or invisible narrator, with a "danger potential" rather than a victimized state. Due

to his invisibility, he postulates what would happen if he "shirks" his responsibility, and in terms

of a society that has habituated compliance on the part of African American individuals within

racist social structures, this challenges the status quo. However, the narrative does not issue a

threat of violence; that is the complex nature of Ellison's literary task. Rather, the novel

illustrates that individuals in American postwar society need to "affirm the principle on which the

country was built," to "take the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle"

(574), to "*affirm all of it*, the whole unhappy territory and all the things loved and unlovable in it"

(579). When the reader considers the epideictic discourse that can be applied to *Invisible Man*,

Ellison's theme of invisibility contributes to his belief that the novel is a social action by

embodying a call for recognition. Ellison's literary task adds to the notion that most African

Americans' troubles sprang from their high visibility through his focus on the inward affliction,

the "internal violence of spirit," suffered by an individual traversing a racist society. Ellison

portrays invisibility in his novel as a social and ethical defect on the part of a self-proclaimed

American democratic society, and thus, he exposes the "danger potential" that can result from a

nation that purports to be the principal source of democratic freedoms and yet denies those rights to the men and women who have helped shaped the "whole unhappy territory."

Addressing a West Point cadet class that was assigned to read *Invisible Man,* Ellison faced a question regarding social taboos surrounding interracial relationships and ties to the Communist party. He mentions the fear over the intermingling of the races, a fear that he referred to as "unpleasant." However, his answer reveals the epideictic function of his literary objective. He concluded, "yet it is in the unpleasant, in that which is charged with emotion, fears, with irrationality, that we find *great potential for transforming attitudes*."[238] The Invisible Man's sentiment that as a nation, we should affirm both the "loved and the unlovable" illustrates the ethos of rhetoric, the imaginative space for readers to consider extending recognition to those who were priorly deemed "unlovable." Ellison reveals the painful consequences of withholding democratic ideals from African American individuals through the depiction of the narrator's consciousness as he suffers mistreatment due to his race. Additionally, Ellison's project consisted of making the problem of one, the problem of many, for the narrator declares in the Epilogue, "Our fate is to become one, and yet many" (577), reinforcing the nation's motto, *e pluribus unum*. In this way, Ellison fashions a narrative that serves an epideictic purpose extremely effectively – as a literary-rhetorical device to call for the recognition of every individual's complicity in the injustices *permitted* by a democratic society, and this culminates in a collective, national moral dilemma.

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[238] Ralph Ellison, "On Initiation Rites and Power: A Lecture at West Point," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 544, italics added.

"If the later nineteenth century can be described as a culture of imitation, and the first part of the twentieth century a culture of authenticity, then our own time might be called the culture of the factitious. We have a hunger for something like authenticity, but are easily satisfied by an ersatz facsimile."
(Miles Orwell, *The Real Thing*, p. xxiii)

"Is it our fault that Lawrence, Miller, Kerouac, Burroughs, Artaud, and Beckett know more about schizophrenia than psychiatrists and psychoanalysts?"
(Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 23)

"The only form of resistance is to move."
(David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, p. 42)

Chapter IV: "Whither goes thou, America?": *On the Road* and the "Purity of Moving and Getting Somewhere" in an Era of Containment

Introduction

This chapter examines desire in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road.* First, I use the rhetoric of desire to reveal how *On the Road* recodes social desire and offers a "new vision" of postwar existence that has sociopolitical import. Lucien Carr proposes what he calls a "New Vision," or "trying to look at the world in a new light . . . in a way that gave it some meaning," by "[t]rying to find values . . . that were valid."[239] Along with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, the core of the Beat generation at its inception, they believed that "literature" would be the venue in which this was accomplished and Kerouac was the forerunner. I argue that desire in *On the Road* is a rhetorical construct operating as a social critique that produces the "new vision," and it is not an abstract, psychological affect detached from sociopolitical influences and implications. In other words, the novel is not only about "kicks for kicks' sakes"; rather, the rhetoric of desire operates

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[239] Lucien Carr quoted in *The Portable Beat Reader*. Ed. Ann Charters. New York: Viking Press, 1992, p. xviii. The "New Vision" began as an artistic movement, where the group at Columbia University was attempting "to follow the example of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud." Charters quotes Carr,

> It was a rebellious group, I suppose, … but it was dedicated to a 'New Vision.' It's practically impossible to define…It was trying to look at the world in a new light, trying to look at the world in a way that gave it some meaning. Trying to find values…that were valid. And it was through literature that this was supposed to be done. And it was through Jack and Allen, principally, that it was going to be done. (xviii)

epideictically in the narrative, exposing inauthentic desire at times, while at others, producing a "new vision" for authenticity in a postwar social context.

As an example of the literary epideictic, *On the Road* features a rhetoric of desire that performs the epideictic function of "praising" or "blaming" the behavior of a developing mass consumer society.[240] In order to demonstrate the rhetoric of desire, I turn to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work on desire in *Anti-Oedipus*. The two aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire that are relevant to *On the Road* include the argument that some "needs" come from social production and are manufactured, and that desire is not about lack, but is a productive construct. Deleuze and Guattari propose, "desire produces [and] its product is real," and they claim,

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[240] My argument is that "desire" is a rhetorical device performing a social critique of postwar existence and relationships among people, bureaucracies, and things. Jeffrey Walker has called epideictic discourse the "rhetoric of belief and desire." See Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Walker emphasizes the nature of "desire" within the epideictic process as it pertains to the audience and to action. He points out that Aristotle assigns a "positive" role for the audience, namely, that of one who makes "observations" about "what is praise-worthy, preferable, desirable or worthy of belief," or, "to form opinions about and in response to the discourse presented" (9). Walker contends that the audience is presented subject matter in order to contemplate "matters of philosophical, social, ethical, or cultural concern" with the aim of forming new – or revising existing – opinions and desires. Therefore, Walker illustrates how epideictic "shapes and cultivates codes of value" for individuals who live in a particular society and who will rely on these presuppositions that will impact decisions made in the more pragmatic forums. Walker concludes, "When conceived in positive terms and not simply in terms of lack, […] the distinction between the *epideiktikon* and the *pragmatikon* comes down to this: the *epideiktikon* is the rhetoric of belief and desire; the *pragmatikon* the rhetoric of practical civic business, a rhetoric that necessarily depends on and appeals to the beliefs/desires that epideictic cultivates" (10).

Authenticity is a component in the rhetoric of desire. It is that which is free from external influence in terms of desire – desiring wealth, things, and ways of living. See Charles Guignon, "Authenticity." *Philosophy Compass* 3/2 (2008): pp. 277-290. Guignon points out that almost all uses of the notion of authenticity rely on the central meaning of the word tied to "authorship," as "original," or "faithful to the original" (277). He writes, "To say that a person is authentic is to say that his or her actions truly express what lies at their origin, that is, the dispositions, feelings, desires, and convictions that motivate them. Built into this conception of authenticity is a distinction between what is really going on within me – the emotions, core beliefs, and bedrock desires that make me the person I am – and the outer avowals and actions that make up my being in the public world" (278). Guignon captures the tension between an internal "core" and a public theory of recognition that both play into notions of authenticity.

Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire:

they are counterproducts within the real that desire produces. Lack is a countereffect of

desire; it is deposited, distributed, vacuolized within a real that is natural and social.[241]

Kerouac's novel relates to Deleuze and Guattari's work because it critiques a postwar desire that

is socially produced under a capitalist regime. It also offers a new form of desire that is in line

with Deleuze and Guattari's process of "schizoanalysis," and as such, it resists the influence of

the capitalist machine. Therefore, desire works in the following two ways: 1) as a rhetorical

maneuver revealing and critiquing containment culture's inauthentic manufactured needs, and 2)

as a discursive thematic displaying the quest for, and celebration of, an authenticity that rejects

postwar containment culture's conformity.[242] And finally, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari's

concepts of "desiring-production," the "plane of immanence," and/or the "Body Without Organs"

connect to authenticity represented in *On the Road*, which I define as a way of living life in

postwar American society that resists the social, external pressure to conform to developing

national political agendas.

In the context of an era referred to as a culture of containment,[243] *On the Road* endorses

mobility, as Sal and Dean are on a quest for authenticity in a deteriorating American sociocultural

landscape. The theory of mobility integrates the social, political, and affective dimensions of

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[241] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 27. All references from this point onward will include parenthetical citations (AO). In other words, needs, defined as a desire based on lack, are socially produced. Also, see Gilles Deleuze and Constantin V. Boundas. *The Deleuze Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. In the essay, "What is Desire?", Deleuze articulates that he does not view desire in terms of "drives." Rather, "Organizations of forms, formations of subjects (the other plane) 'incapacitate' desire: they subjugate it to law and introduce lack into it," thereby concluding that desire itself is "constructed": "every assemblage expresses and creates a desire by constructing the plane which makes it possible, and, by making it possible, brings it about" (137).

[242] With the term, "discursive thematic," I mean to say that desire emerges in the novel not only as a literary theme, but also as an embedded discourse of value that can promote cultural action.

[243] See the section, "Epideictic Exigency: Containment Culture and Conceptions of the Home," p. 170, and Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995. I am interested in cultural meanings of the era of containment and how it factors into *On the Road*, specifically, how the US was a "universal container" of that which is desirable, and everything outside of the national boundaries (real and imaginary) was other-ized and a threat to American ideals.

movement, and as a result, *On the Road* features mobility as movement embedded with authentic meaning. Kerouac's novel critiques what "containment narratives" construct as the objects of desire, and the novel itself presents a theory of desire that Kerouac endorses, one which contributes to the philosophy of an entire Beat movement.

My focus on the novel as a countercultural text in an era of containment is concerned with containment narratives based on domesticity and consumerism, and how the novel celebrates a mobility discourse in the face of such containment narratives. Movement/mobility possesses social significance in relation to the social climate of the postwar period, namely, as a resistance to a culture of containment in a geographic, domestic, and economic context, dimensions I will discuss shortly. To put this as succinctly as possible, the epideictic discourse of the novel unfolds out of the rhetoric of desire in the context of the American postwar period – containment culture produced inauthentic desire, while mobility functioned as a form of resistance to narratives of containment providing the revolutionary impulse for becoming-authentic.

Kerouac's novel critiques a developing postwar inauthentic desire and calls for an authenticity (as the social counter-object-ive of postwar conformity) that only the road, in its "purity," can provide for Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty at this point in American history. As they are about to leave New York in 1949, Sal, the narrator, reflects,

> I said goodbye to my [aunt] and promised to be back in two weeks and took off for
> California again. You always expect some kind of magic at the end of the road.
> Strangely enough, [Dean] and I were going to find it, alone, before we finished with it.
> [...] the purity of moving and getting somewhere, no matter where, and as fast as possible
> and with as much excitement and digging of all things as possible.[244]

Sal and Dean are leaving the "home" and the mother-figure (additionally, the aunt is *actually* Kerouac's mother in the Original Scroll edition) in order to search for the authentic "at the end of

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[244] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. New York: Viking, 2007, p. 234. Future citations from this text will include parenthetical references with the abbreviation (OS).

the road." The passage features movement – "*getting* some*where* . . . as *fast* as possible," and

Kerouac categorizes this movement as "pure," touching upon two definitional components of the

authentic in his novel: movement, and "the digging of all things as possible." Finally, Sal and

Dean desire an authenticity that is connected to American ideals and an American identity and the

novel contains a rhetoric of desire that *operates epideictically by concurrently implicating the*

inauthenticity of a consumerist society, and *performing a "new vision" of authenticity for*

American postwar society.

1) *On the Road*'s Epideictic Discourse and America

Kerouac's main subject in his writing is America.[245] However, Kerouac viewed the

American identity developing in the postwar years as dispiriting, or inauthentic, with its emphasis

on material "goods" and consumption, which contrasted with his "new vision" of desire and the

authentic as the "penetration into the heart of things" – even the language he uses to define the

authentic incorporates "movement."[246] One of the conventions of epideictic rhetoric is the

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[245] See Jack Kerouac and Ann Charters, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*. New York: Viking, 1995, p. 107. In a letter to Hal Chase, Kerouac discusses some of the books he had been reading - Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, a history of the United States, a biography on George Washington and a history of the Revolutionary War, and he concludes,

> . . . and last but not least, I have begun a huge study of the face of America itself, acquiring maps (roadmaps) of every state in the USA, and before long not a river or mountain peak or bay or town or city will escape my attention. Now what does this all mean? I know some people would regard it as a kind of recidivous childishness. And yet I know some people who would regard it as a step ahead. Because, after all, what is the ruling thought in the American temperament if it isn't a purposeful energetic search after useful knowledge. The 'livelihood of man' in America instead of the vague and prosy 'brotherhood of man' of Europe. *My subject as a writer is of course America, and simply, I must know everything about it.*

[246] The Original Scroll version provides a very telling definition of the authentic for Kerouac:

> All I wanted and all Neal wanted and all anybody wanted was some kind of penetration into the heart of things where, like in a womb, we could curl up and sleep the ecstatic sleep that Burroughs was experiencing with a good mainline shot of M. and advertising executives were experiencing with twelve Scotch & Sodas in Stouffers before they made the drunkard's train to Westchester – but without hangovers. And I had many a romantic fancy then, and sighed at my star. The truth of the matter is, you die, all you do is die, and yet you live, yes you live, and that's no Harvard lie. (Original Scroll version, 279)

Of course, on the one hand, "penetration" refers to "passing into or through something" (*OED*), and the on the other hand, Kerouac is discussing an immobile, "ecstatic sleep." This is more explanative of the process of "becoming" authentic in which an individual agent "dies" and "yet lives," suggesting even a movement between different states of consciousness.

inventive and strategic use of language to counsel the audience in matters of human judgment and conduct.[247] Kerouac alludes to this role of the epideictic rhetor in a letter to Allen Ginsberg in which he admonishes society for becoming "evil," declaring, "I believe there will be a judgment day, but not for men . . . for society. Society is a mistake. . . . It is evil. It will fall."[248] Kerouac is more specific in terms of why society is "evil" during an interview with Kenneth Allsop where he charges, "Everyone in America just consumes," stating, "What we Beats are against is technique and efficiency. Everyone in this country is a slave to Deepfreeze and the hi-fi. They're too rich – a kind of sinister luxury."[249] Kerouac sums up the developing postwar American desire for material objects by touching upon the social production of consumerist desire as a process of entrapment – goods that lead to technique and efficiency enslave individuals insidiously. Kerouac's main rejection of the developing postwar society exists in its desire for wealth and a way of life that neglects authenticity for convenience, and thus, Kerouac passes a value judgment on the current state of affairs.

Kerouac embeds the latter critiques on American society within the narrative of *On the Road*. For instance, in a journal entry dated 1948, one year following Kerouac and Neal Cassady's (Dean Moriarty's) first cross-country trip, and a year preceding the above passage in *On the Road* where Sal and Dean leave New York for California, Kerouac provides important contextual implications in terms of what the book challenges in American society:

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[247] See Bernard K. Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1983), p. 90. Duffy explains epideictic's incorporation of stylistic and decorous language, and when discussing epideictic's purpose in educating the audience in matters involving human judgment and conduct, Duffy claims that in comparison to the other two classes of rhetoric, "the language of epideictic is prone to be least referential and most poetic because the facts themselves are not really at issue. Rather, the affirmation of ethical standards of judgment and *behavior* serves as the impetus for the creative use of language." Walter Beale also discusses how epideictic rhetoric serves as a rhetorical speech act in similar fashion to speech act theory's category of "behabitives." See Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall, 1978), p. 221-246.
[248] Jack Kerouac and Ann Charters. *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*. New York: Viking, 1995, p. 193.
[249] Jack Kerouac and Paul Maher. *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005, p. 103-104. Kerouac endorses a more simplified way of life, referring to the Beats as "mystic vagrants."

AUGUST 23, 1948. Told my mother she ought to go live down South with the family

instead of spending all her time slaving in shoe factories. In Russia they slave for the

State, here they slave for Expenses. People rush off to meaningless jobs day after day,

you see them coughing in the subways at dawn. They squander their souls on things like

"rent," "decent clothes," "gas and electricity," "insurance," behaving like peasants who

have just come out of the fields and are so dreadful tickled because they can buy baubles

and doodads in stores. . . . The next thing you know, they'll all be marching off to some

annihilating war which their leaders will start to keep up appearances. Shit on the

Russians, shit on the Americans, shit on them all.

I have another novel in mind—"On the Road"—which I keep thinking about: two

guys hitchhiking to California in search of something they don't really find, and losing

themselves on the road, coming all the way back hopeful of something else.[250]

Here, Kerouac places his "road novel" within the social context of the Cold War and containment

culture. In this journal, he touches upon the socially manufactured needs and desires of the

developing postwar American citizenry, and, he even juxtaposes the fomenting consumerist

behaviors against the Russians, just as politicians did in the political sphere.[251] He sees a decline

in the value of postwar existence, referring to the labor-intensive life as "meaningless," and the

pursuit of "baubles and doodads" as "squander[ing] the souls" of the masses. What is important

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[250] Jack Kerouac and Douglas Brinkley, "On the Road Again." *New Yorker*. 22 June 1998 Issue: n. pag.
NewYorker.com. Accessed 17 Aug. 2015. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/06/22/on-the-road
-again-2.
[251] See the "Introduction" to *Ethos of Dissent*, pp. 38-39 and note 56. Also, see Elaine Tyler May,
Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era. New York: Basic Books, 2008. As May
acknowledges, the "Kitchen Debate" of 1959 between then Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet
Premier Nikita Khrushchev reveals more, perhaps, about the conflict of the postwar period than any
international political event. In this major "skirmish" during the Cold War, the US relied on an American
superiority connected to the suburban home, complete with appliances for technological advancement, and
founded upon gender roles that provided family members scripts for living the "good life." May recalls
how Nixon argued that domestic goods "were the most meaningful measure of American superiority over
the Soviet Union," giving the washing machine as an example of a product "designed to make things easier
for our women" (21).

about this journal entry is the fact that following this observation, he proposes the idea of his new

novel as something that stands out against the social commentary just presented.

The very opening of *On the Road* provides glimpses into the epideictic objective of the

novel, for Robert Danisch points out that the epideictic rhetorician must "define" the present

moment, and "reinvent the culture within which he or she is situated."[252] The narrative reports

that the character of Dean Moriarty begins the narrator's "road life" across America, and reads, "I

first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I

won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with *the miserably wearly split-up*

feeling that everything was dead."[253] The main point of the opening lines, whereby Kerouac

references a feeling that "everything was dead," establishes the epideictic context as he invokes a

peculiar type of sadness in the very beginning of the text. As Ben Giamo notes, the most frequent

word appearing in Kerouac's oeuvre is "sad."[254] The sense of loss and sadness in the novel takes

on the negative characteristic similar to blame, and this sentiment exposes the failings of

America, which is ultimately the entity under scrutiny.

In Sal's perspective, sadness is everywhere in America: in its people, places, and its

relationships, and Kerouac chooses to narratively define the present era as a "sad drama in the

American night" (148). Towards the end of the novel, when Sal is headed home, he has a vision

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[252] Robert Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self: Michel Foucault's Epideictic Rhetoric." *Southern Communication Journal* Vol. 71, Number 3, September 2006, p. 297-314. Danisch discusses how epideictic rhetoric incorporates the present social conditions a community finds itself engaging. He articulates how the epideictic function of "displaying" the dominant values of a culture – and then "praising or blaming" such value systems – can have a significant impact on both the culture and the individual. As Danisch succinctly puts it,

> The epideictic rhetorician must ask two fundamental questions: First, *how can I define, describe or explain the present moment*? Second, how will that definition, description, or explanation affect who I am? In asking and answering these questions, the epideictic rhetorician can reinvent himself or herself *and reinvent the culture within which he or she is situated*. This may even involve reinventing new understandings of subjects and new forms of agency in addition to new kinds of selves. (304-305, italics added)

[253] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 1, italics added. All future references from *On The Road* the published version will be from this text and only include page numbers in parentheses.
[254] Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist As Spiritual Quester*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000, p. 178.

while he is standing on the road and reflects, "when I heard the sound of footsteps from the darkness beyond, and lo, a tall old man with flowing white hair came clomping by with a pack on his back, and when he saw me as he passed, he said, '*Go moan for man*,' and clomped on back to his dark. Did this mean that I should at last go on my pilgrimage on foot on the dark roads around America?" (303). Here is where Kerouac's text takes on an epideictic objective – it adapts the characteristics of "blame" by incorporating language of *loss* and *sadness*, which ultimately reveals the deterioration of an authenticity in an American historical and social context. Sal will "moan" for humankind here, but his lamentation is tied to a specific American historical context, and moaning implies a complaint or grievance for something lost: in this case, the value of authenticity.

However, while Sal will "moan for man's" squandered soul, he also has a vision of authenticity to counter the inauthentic desire he observes. Kerouac's novel presents different values as the objects of desire and transforms what a consumerist society judges as the "good life." For example, authenticity, Somogy Varga points out, is the Western world's "ubiquitous ideal," and he emphasizes that an examination of authenticity cannot proceed without some recourse to what constitutes the "good life." He articulates that authenticity functions as a critical concept, "a measure against which particular self-relations and patterns of societal interactions can be considered distortions."[255] Kerouac touches upon this sentiment in the essay, "The Origins of the Beat Generation." He writes, the America of old was "invested with wild selfbelieving (sic) individuality and this had *begun to disappear around the end of World War II*," as a result of the development of an affluent and consumer based society that stifled authentic individualism. The organization of consumerist-based desire "distorted" authenticity by subsuming individuality

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[255] Somogy Varga, *Authenticity As an Ethical Ideal*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 34. Varga claims, "the question concerning the formal conditions of the 'good life' can be answered in two ways: in the vocabulary of autonomy and in the vocabulary of authenticity" (3). Varga insists that authenticity "involves another ability beyond autonomy or self-determination, namely orientation, in terms of distinguishing between peripheral and core personal commitments, principles, wishes, or feelings that are truly worth following" (2).

under the guise of consumer choice – i.e., with an abundance of products to choose from, individuals can demonstrate their individuality and preferences through which products they choose. However, desire then becomes controllable. Instead, Kerouac calls for a "revolution in manners," in which the Beats oppose "technique and efficiency" in favor of a "new gesture, or attitude, which I can only describe as a new *more*."[256]

The "new vision," the "new more," refers to the potential to become authentic. At one point, Sal refers to himself as the "prophet" passing along a judgment: "I pictured myself in a Denver bar that night, with all the gang, and in their eyes I would be strange and ragged and like the Prophet who has walked across the land to bring the dark Word, and the only Word I had was "Wow!" (35). The novel features "kicks" and the authentic through the celebrated language of "Wow!," "IT," "madness," and "dig," for example. Sal will navigate the country and witness the decrepit state of affairs in postwar society, but his counter-response is embedded in the word, "Wow!". As I will show, "wow" is indicative of the "new more," the "digging of all things," the authentic, for Sal reflects, "But why think about that when all the golden land's ahead of you and all kinds of unforeseen events wait lurking to surprise you and make you glad you're alive to see?" (135). The road serves as the pathway to the "wild selfbelieving individuality," the authentic that overcomes the distortions of socially organized patterns of interactions.

2) Epideictic Exigency: Containment Culture & Conceptions of the Home

Mark Richardson points out that Kerouac's novel indeed represents American fiction in an era of containment, observing how "all the essential Cold War questions trouble" *On the Road*, even despite the fact that its representation of the Cold War context is, as Elizabeth Wheeler puts

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[256] Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," in *Good Blonde and Others*. Ed. Donald Allen. San Francisco, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1993, p. 59, italics added. In "The Origins of the Beat Generation," Kerouac explains, "The word 'beat' originally meant poor, down and out, deadbeat, on the bum, sad, sleeping on subways. Now that the word is belonging officially it is being made to stretch to include people who do not sleep in subways but have a certain new gesture, or attitude, which I can only describe

it, "conspicuous."[257] It is within the sociocultural context of containment that the Beats' "new

vision" is best understood. "Containment" is a political concept coined by Secretary of State

George Kennan in 1947 that captured the American policy toward the Soviet Union during the

Cold War era.[258] As John Lewis Gaddis explains, "the idea was to prevent the Soviet Union from

using the power and position it won as a result of [World War II] to reshape the postwar

international order, a prospect that seemed, in the West, no less dangerous than what Germany

and Japan might have done had they had the chance."[259] Gaddis notes that Kennan essentially

feared a rippling effect, attributing the effects of such a communist expansion in Western Europe

and Japan to influencing the fate of American society. For instance, Kennan's telegram insisted

that Russian leaders were bent on the destruction of rival powers like the US. In Kennan's "Long

Telegram," he writes, "In summary, we have here a political force committed fanatically to the

belief that with the US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary

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as a new *more*. 'Beat Generation' has simply become the slogan or label for a revolution in manners in America" (61-62).

[257] See Mark Richardson, "Peasant Dreams: Reading *On the Road*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. Summer: 43:2, 2001, pp. 218-242. Richardson mentions Kerouac's novel emerged during the time of when a new sense of American identity was forming, in respect to the civil rights of Black men and women, the political conflict with the USSR, The Internal Security Act (1950), the Communist Control Act and *Brown v. Board of Education* (both 1954), the execution of the Rosenbergs, the detonation of the first hydrogen bomb in 1952 among the many historical events (220). Also, see Elizabeth Wheeler, *Uncontained: Urban Fiction in Postwar America*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Wheeler also states, "Kerouac's novel-length hymn to impermanence reflects the postwar era, but it also continues a long tradition in American culture. *On the Road* is a conspicuously American novel" (246).
[258] See George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." *Foreign Affairs* 25 (1947): 575. Kennan wrote, "The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."
[259] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 4. Gaddis points out that one of the main threats that the theory of containment aimed to suppress was "*conquest by psychological means*" – meaning, the danger that people in Western Europe and Japan "might become so demoralized by the combined dislocations of war and reconstruction" so as to become "vulnerable" to communist-based sociopolitical developments/advancements. Therefore, Gaddis reveals the strategy of containment was designed to ward off not a Soviet military attack, "but rather the psychological malaise in countries bordering [the country's] sphere of influence that made them, and hence the overall balance of power, vulnerable to Soviet expansive tendencies" (34). The target of citizens' psychological state in this foreign policy has implications for American citizens as well, for this entire political enterprise influenced the social and cultural front of American society. See pages 24-52 for a complete historical summary of George Kennan's theory of containment. Also, see George Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967, specifically, p. 351.

that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure."[260]

While the aim of the theory of containment was to suppress Soviet power and influence across the Atlantic, that did not free the US from an internal battle. The permeation of the foreign policy of containment into the cultural landscape in postwar American society was a result of the US's attempt to extend its influence and reputation as a world leader of democratic freedoms. David Ryan comments on the US role in the Cold War: "Within this framework, the United States was identified as the guarantor of Western security, the regenerator of its economy, and the instigator of a period of freedom and prosperity."[261] However, in order to accomplish this task, Ryan explains, The Truman administration had to monitor the American public's attitudes to make sure the "disease" of communism was not spreading among the citizens. Therefore, Ryan suggests that the Truman Doctrine employed a "strategy of Otherness," which Michael Hogan elaborates, "[T]he national security ideology framed the Cold War discourse in a system of symbolic representation that defined America's national identity by reference to the un-American 'other,' usually the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, or some other totalitarian power." [262] This pitted desirable American values against "hostile" Soviet values for example. As a result, the Soviet system was associated with "a controlled economy, minority rule, and the oppression of basic liberties, while the American system was associated with free markets, majority rule, and democratic politics."[263] The consequence of this binary opposition was the inopportunity for social and political dissent among citizens.

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[260] George Kennan, telegram to Secretary of State, Washington (The Long Telegram), 22 February 1946, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm.
[261] David Ryan, "Mapping Containment: The Cultural Construction of the Cold War," in *American Cold War Culture*, ed. Douglas Field. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 61.
[262] Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 17.
[263] Ryan, "Mapping Containment," pp. 56-60. For more information on Truman's "Strategy of Otherness," see Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 7-21.

Thus, US foreign policy initiated the theory of containment, but the dubious nature of postwar existence soon began to stretch the parameters of the political concept to incorporate the cultural sphere as well. *On the Road* makes its countercultural intervention by recoding what Alan Nadel refers to as cultural "containment narratives" in his book, *Containment Culture*, and most notably, challenging a specific narrative within what Elaine May refers to as "domestic containment."[264] Nadel puts this into perspective, defining "containment culture" as an "American narrative during the cold war" that not only describes U.S. foreign policy from the 1940s until the 1960s, but "also describes American life in numerous venues and under sundry rubrics during that period."[265] Nadel claims that the American Cold War period enforced particular cultural narratives to "unify, codify, and contain – perhaps *intimidate* is the best word – the personal narratives of its population." He therefore recognizes how a large portion of postwar Americans generally accepted a "small set of narratives," narratives that coded "conformity" as "a positive value in and of itself," and established a pool of public knowledge for individuals to draw from.[266] As a consequence of the Cold War and the political strife between the Soviet Union and the US, a distinct American way of life was pitted against a perilous Soviet *modus operandi* – individuals who bought into what the society deemed the "good" life were patriotic, and those individuals who did not adopt the idealistic behaviors were held in suspicion and labeled outsiders, thus issuing an age of conformity.[267]

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[264] See Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995; and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. May reveals how the home constructed feelings of security in the postwar era. The home, May attests, tamed "liberating but potentially dangerous trends" and created the domestic ideology that provided "private solutions to social problems" (198-199).
[265] Nadel, *Containment Culture*, pp. 2-3.
[266] Nadel, *Containment Culture*, p. 4. Nadel writes, "It was a period as many prominent studies have indicated, when 'conformity' became a positive value in and of itself. The virtue of conformity – to some idea of relation, to 'middle-class' values, to distinct gender roles and rigid courtship rituals – became a form of public knowledge through the pervasive performances of and allusions to containment narratives."
[267] See Ryan, "Mapping Containment," pp. 56-60; and Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*, pp. 7-21.

Containment culture ushered in an era of conformity that relied on the home and consumerism to accomplish its goals of internal security.[268] The concept of the "home" played an extremely prominent role in the development of what constituted the "good life" and the home cultivated "good citizens" in American society following the Second World War. Elaine Tyler May's book, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era,* discusses how the postwar period was one of uncertainty brought about by the advent of an atomic age and how, in an age of anxiety, the home was the place that afforded security. As a result, May declares that American citizens were "homeward bound." She explains that "domestic anticommunism" was another branch of the theory of containment: if "subversive individuals" could be contained, then they would be unable to spread "their poisonous influence through the body politic." She relates how according to a "cold war ethos," conflict within the United States served as a more dangerous threat to leaders, and these included "racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption."[269] She writes,

> In the domestic version of containment, the "sphere of influence" was the home. Within
> its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, so they
> could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men
> aspired. Domestic containment was bolstered by a powerful political culture that
> rewarded its adherents and marginalized its detractors. More than merely a metaphor for

[268] For more information, see May, *Homeward Bound.* May explains how Americans looked to the family as "a bastion of safety in an insecure world," and notes how experts and political leaders "promoted codes of conduct and enacted public policies that would bolster the American home. Like their leaders, most Americans agreed that family stability appeared to be the best bulwark against the dangers of the cold war" (9). She quotes husband Dean Acheson from Daniel Yergin's book, *Shattered Peace*, as summing up the collective "feelings of being a member of a group that in spite of many disagreements internally always will face its external enemies together" (Acheson qtd. in May, 88, see n.71, p. 265). For more information on the role of consumerism in containment culture, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003, p. 7-8. Cohen defines the "Consumer's Republic" as an institutional strategy for "restructuring the nation's economy and reaffirming its democratic values through promoting the expansion of mass consumption" (11).
[269] May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 9.

the cold war on the homefront, containment aptly describes the way in which public

policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.[270]

Thus, the home plays an important role in cultivating proper citizens, and both political and

personal agendas become infused in the home. As May points out, one of the cultural narratives

that exerted a controlling force in domestic containment was that of marriage and the family.[271] In

forming a domestic ideology, American culture advocated the upbringing of "well-adjusted"

children in an uncertain age as a way to prepare for the future. As a result, the home became the

arena in which this objective was carried out. The home becomes a fixed-material *and* an

abstract-presence in postwar society, one that both grounds and is grounded in within a particular

set of values.

Sal and Dean take to the road because their idea of the authentic is disrupted by the

political and cultural impact of containment narratives. And as containment narratives code and

mandate the American way of the good life, this repressive social environment fractures Sal and

Dean's sense of a national "home," a concept that the novel infuses with affect and feeling.[272] The

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[270] May, p. 16.

[271] May illustrates that between the years 1900-2005, the highest marriage rates for the US population occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, and that Americans married at a higher rate than their European counterparts (23; 3). May cites various studies by the *U.S. Bureau of the Census*. The "white middle-class family of the 1950s" represented not a "traditional family" with roots in America's past, but it represented a new political force for combatting foreign threats to the future American prosperity (31-33).

[272] See Alison Blunt and Robyn M. Dowling. *Home*. New York: NY: Routledge, 2006. Blunt and Dowling explore the many complexities that infuse cultural understandings of the "home." Taking into account that "home" is an emotional space shaped by feelings of (non)belonging, Blunt and Dowling reveal how a national identity is implicated and influenced by processes occurring on the level of the home and the household. In their book *Home,* Blunt and Dowling take a "critical geography[ical]" approach, which they define as a mode of understanding "home" as a "relation between material and imaginative realms and processes." Blunt and Dowling elaborate on what they mean by a "critical geography of home": "first we mean a *spatialized* understanding of home, one that appreciates home as a place and also as a spatial imaginary that travels across space and is connected to particular sites. Second we mean a *politicized* understanding of home, one alert to the processes of oppression and resistance embedded in processes of home" (22). They also identify three components of the critical geography of home: 1) home as "simultaneously material and imaginative; 2) the nexus between home, power, and identity; and 3) home as multi-scalar" (22).

In other words, "home" is much more than a physical structure, for it is also, and perhaps more importantly, an "affective space," or a meaningful site embedded with emotional ties. In a key definition, they define "home" as,

. . . a place, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire, and intimacy (as, for

home becomes inscribed as one of the objects of economic desire in an era of containment, and as

a result, the home becomes a political and economic strategy of US foreign and domestic policy;

however, while it unifies American citizens in an abstract ideological sense, the home also

provides the material and spatial means of separation amongst individuals – the home provides a

private space from the public space, a public space where members of the private home work or

conduct affairs. American citizens belong to the same public collective, but the home separates

the members from the public and in essence, contains their private lives. Sal and Dean turn to

movement across the American landscape, leaving the confinements of the postwar home in

search of "The Essence" of all individuals that unites them in a more authentic American identity.

This is how movement in *On the Road* emerges as a form of resistance to containment in postwar

society.

Postwar society began to witness a fragmenting of a national identity across peoples, and

On the Road channels that loss through the theme of "at-homeness," which counter-defines

containment era's concept of the home. I define "at-homeness" in Kerouac's novel as an

experience of authenticity that occurs *outside* of the material home, and a process that views

America as the "home," thus transferring containment's definition of home from the material

spatial home to the idea of a national home; additionally, the quest for at-homeness in the novel

begins with mobility, specifically, the movement on the open road, and as a result, it transposes

an American identity generated from the fixed, stable place of the home, to the mobility afforded

by the open road. Therefore, Sal and Dean's search for at-homeness is infused with national

identity.[273] For Kerouac, and the characters of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the authenticity

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instance, in the phrase 'feeling at home'), but can also be feelings of fear, violence, and alienation. These feelings, ideas, and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial. Home is thus a *spatial imaginary*: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places. (2, italics in original)

[273] "At-homeness" is my term for the intersection of the home as a spatial imaginary, and the nation as an imagined community and relies on Blunt and Dowling's concept of "home" as an imaginative, and affective site of meaning, imbued with feelings and emotions. One other usage of the term comes from Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976. In *A Geography of the Lifeworld:*

they desire is described as "The Essence," or "The One," in which everyone is interconnected.

For instance, in a letter to Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac writes, "the only real is the One, the One

Essence that all's made of . . . ."[274] In the novel, Sal hitches a ride on a truck with two farmers

from Minnesota, along with seven others, including "Mississippi Gene," who was a hobo who

rode freight trains around the country" (23). Sal reminisces about a "tall rawboned fellow from

Louisiana called Big Slim Hazard who was hobo by choice." Sal reflects, "There was something

so indubitably reminiscent of Big Slim Hazard in Mississippi Gene's demeanor that I said, 'Do

you happen to have met a fellow called Big Slim Hazard somewhere?'" (26). After Mississippi

Gene confirms Sal's query and they go back-and-forth regarding Slim, Sal declares, "Well, damn

me, I'm amazed you know him. This is a big country. Yet I knew you must have known him"

(27). Later on in the novel, while Sal is in New Orleans on the Mississippi river, he once again

reminisces, "Old Big Slim Hazard had once worked on the Algiers ferry as a deckhand; this made

me think of Mississippi Gene too; and as the river poured down from mid-America by starlight I

knew, I knew like mad that everything I had ever known and would ever know was One" (147).

Mobility and authenticity overlap here, for it is movement across the country that familiarizes

Mississippi Gene with Big Slim Hazard and acquaints Sal with Mississippi Gene. Furthermore,

mobility is the source of Kerouac's revelation, and referring to the loss of individualism

following WWII, it is mobility that rescues the individual from oblivion here. Kerouac recodes

the nation as the spatial imaginary home, and the road as the pathway to an authentic feeling of

"at-homeness."

Movement, Rest, and Encounter, David Seamon summarizes Relph's concept of "existential insideness" as inaugurating the concept of "at-homeness." Seamon writes, "The person who feels *inside* a place is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed. The more profoundly inside a place the person feels, Relph explains, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place…. Existential insideness, says Relph, is the experience of place 'that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region,'…the person is bodily and emotionally immersed in place; life holds continuity and regularity and its mundane aspects, at least, are taken for granted and rarely reflected upon." See David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.
[274] Kerouac and Charters, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 461.

As mystical as this viewpoint might be, it has political overtones in the postwar era if we take into account Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an "imagined community." Anderson defines a nation as an "imagined political community," one in which the "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[275] As Kerouac has stated, his main subject was America, and within *On the Road*, there exists a rather serious preoccupation with conceptions of "home" and "nation." *I contend that Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty are in search of a feeling of "at-homeness" within a changing American landscape, and that the very shift in a national identity from individuality towards a mass consumer- and conformist-society catalyzes their desire to "move."* For Sal and Dean, their movement is intended to eliminate the notion of "imagined" in community, for they desire to know or "dig" every individual they encounter. In other words, while Anderson is recognizing how citizens of a nation will never know one another on a personal level, Sal and Dean, *even if implausibly*, desire and attempt to acquaint themselves with other Americans on their mobile journey rather than accept the imponderability of the endeavor.

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[275] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006, p.6. Additionally, the nation is "limited" because each nation "has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations," and it is "sovereign" because the concept of nationality developed in an age where "the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" was destroyed (7). Anderson finally declares that a nation is a "community" because of the "deep, horizontal comradeship" that leads people to live and die for their nation (7). Anderson cites the literary novel and the newspaper as examples that represent the imagined community that is the nation. One important feature of each is the concept of "simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time,' or a complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'" (25). He provides a hypothetical novel plot with characters that act in the world, but have no acquaintance with one another, characters "embedded" in societies and who serve as "sociological entities." He writes, "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (26). As an example, Anderson provides an excerpt from José Rizal's novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, which depicts the discussion of a dinner party by "unnamed people, who do not know each other, in quite different parts of Manila, in a particular month of a particular decade" and this conjures up the image of an imagined community (26-27).

Most importantly, Kerouac began to see a disintegration of the American nationalism he had known and dedicated himself to,[276] and he weaves this loss of, and desire for, a return to an authenticity or a feeling of "at-homeness" in American postwar existence into the narrative of *On the Road*. Kerouac, in writing *On the Road*, tries to *re*-imagine the community; containment culture is bent on creating homogenous citizens, but Kerouac creates a "New Vision" of the American-imagined-nation in the postwar period, one that rejects the mass consumer- and conformist-society and celebrates the "mad ones," those who are anything but "commonplace" and are "desirous of everything at the same time" (5).

3) Desire, Mobility, and Authenticity in *On the Road*

In terms of *On the Road*'s rhetorical discourse, desire and authenticity are both part of the epideictic objective. What an individual desires can have an impact on the theme of authenticity, and one can also desire authentically or inauthentically. For instance, in the same letter to Ginsberg where Kerouac insists that society is "evil," he writes,

> History is people doing what their leaders tell them; and not doing what their prophets
>
> tell them. Life is that which gives you desires, but no rights for the fulfillment of desires.
>
> It is all pretty mean – but you can still do what you want, and what you want is right,
>
> when you want honestly. Wanting money is wanting the dishonesty of wanting a servant.
>
> Money hates us, like a servant; because it is false.[277]

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[276] For specific references to this, see Kevin Hayes, Ed., *Conversations with Jack Kerouac*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005, p. 84; 94. In a 1968 interview for the *Boston Sunday Globe,* Kerouac expresses a nostalgia for America, saying, "America was an idea that was proposed and began to deteriorate at the turn of the century when people came in waving flags. And now their grandchildren dance on the flag. Damn them" (84). In an interview for the *St. Petersburg Times* a year later in 1969, he tells a story that includes more details, discussing a party he went to in New York with Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, and the Merry Pranksters. He recalls, "Ginsberg … At a party with Kesey's Merry Pranksters Ginsberg came up and wrapped an American flag around me. So I took it (Kerouac demonstrates how he took it, and the movements are tender) and I folded it up the way you're supposed to, and put it on the back of the sofa. The flag is not a rag. When we went to school together, we were twenty-one and it was books and Shakespeare. But now Ginsberg's anti-American" (94).

[277] Kerouac and Charters. *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 194.

The postwar period was labeled an age of conformity and the development of an affluent and consumer-based society served more as a way of life in which individuals did what their "leaders" promoted, and this crushed individuality in favor of production, as Kerouac implies. As Charles Guignon states, individuals who "absorb the patterns of action" that are promoted as appropriate via a cultural context, and those that internalize social norms and "go with the flow" automatically in the world, are in essence conformists who adopt public norms and standards that are expected, and desire and live "inauthentically."[278]

In Kerouac's *On the Road*, he critiques a developing, conformist postwar desire that is inauthentic and coded by the body of capital. Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Anti-Oedipus* applies to Kerouac's novel because Sal and Dean desire an authenticity that is free from the conditions of capitalism, and rather than "absorb the patters of action" dictated by a capitalist and consumer-based society, they follow "lines of escape" through their mobility, and this rhetoric of desire functions epideictically by protesting the developing consumerist society dictated by a culture of containment.[279] The cultural representation of the "good life" as attainable in the home and in consumer goods subjects desire to a material-based belief system that feeds the capitalist machine and implants a fear or lack into desire – if an individual does not possess a home, or participate in consumerist practices, or behave properly, they are overwhelmed by feelings of lack or need. Society implants these needs or affects into the consciousness of its citizens. Sal and Dean's desire is authentic because it, like the schizophrenic process, is at odds with the social field that they navigate and resists the attempt of the "social machine" to "arrest [their] process

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[278] Charles Guignon, "Authenticity." *Philosophy Compass* 3.2 (2008): 279.

[279] Deleuze and Guattari write, "What complicates everything is that there is indeed a necessity for desiring-production to be induced from representation, to be discovered through its lines of escape" (AO 314-15). Later, they comment on how capitalism is threatened by "an exterior limit," and the lines of escape "constitute an investment of the social field that is no less complete, no less total than the contrary investment. The paranoiac and the schizoid investments are like two opposite poles of unconscious libidinal investment, one of which subordinates desiring-production to the formation of sovereignty and to the gregarious aggregate that results from it, while the other brings about the inverse subordination, overthrows the established power, and subjects the gregarious aggregate to the molecular multiplicities of the productions of desire" (376).

and assign it goals" (AO 382), goals encoded with the lack or the feeling of necessity brought on

by the Cold War era of containment.

To this end, Deleuze and Guattari want to reveal how "social production and relations to

production are an institution of desire, and how affects or drives form part of the infrastructure

itself" (AO 63).[280] Deleuze and Guattari observe how capitalism and psychoanalysis contribute to

the indeterminacy of desire broadly, and challenge the viewpoint of *desire as lack* specifically.[281]

They combine psychoanalytical and capitalistic theory in order to illustrate how desire, and its

"countereffect," lack, is socially manufactured. They see desire as a means of production that

produces what individuals take to be reality, and only under certain social conditions does

desiring-production become fixated on lack. For instance, as a result of Freudian thought, desire

was relegated to a "theater" of fantasy, stripped of all productive power and based on

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[280] Deleuze, more than Guattari, attends to the concept of desire. He bases his conception on other philosophers. For instance, in "Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze: An Other Discourse of Desire," Alan Schrift points out that Baruch Spinoza perceived desire as the essence of what it means to be human and that he connects desire to "the power to act to that is conscious of itself." See Alan Schrift, "Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze: An Other Discourse of Desire," in Ed. Hugh Silverman, *Philosophy and Desire*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 176. Schrift also points out that Spinoza transformed the Platonic view that claimed individuals desire objects that are "good," and he claimed that individuals actually label an object good *only if* it is an object of their desire. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the desiring-machine is a "functionalist translation" of Nietzsche's "will to power." Schrift reveals that by putting desire into functionalist vocabulary, Deleuze and Guattari can "avoid the personification/subjectivation of desire in a substantive will, ego, unconscious, or self" in order to "recognize that desire and the object desired arise together" and consequently, desire is not perceived as a lack (181-182).

[281] One of the contributions of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is the notion of a productive form of desire, or "desiring-production," that produces what an individual takes to be reality through "psychical energy" (libido power), just like social production produces social reality through labor power. Deleuze and Guattari challenge the viewpoint of *desire as lack* and part ways with psychoanalytic theory that uses Oedipal law as a foundation for conceptualizing desire. First, Deleuze and Guattari recount traditional conceptions of desire as a dichotomy of "production" and "acquisition." They claim that the moment desire is viewed from the perspective of acquisition, desire becomes an "idealistic" conception, which causes one to look at desire as "a lack of an object: a lack of the real object." This leads to a "production of fantasies" as demonstrated by psychoanalysis, and Deleuze and Guattari contend, "On the very lowest level of interpretation, this means that the real object that desire lacks is related to an extrinsic natural or social production, whereas desire intrinsically produces an imaginary object that functions as a double of reality, as though there were a 'dreamed-of object behind every real object,' or a mental production behind all real productions" (25-26). The "double reality" that Deleuze and Guattari mention here pertains to the notion that because desire as a lack detaches itself from the object, at the same time it can "intensify" that lack by making the object absolute, as something that is unattainable in this world, and thus suggesting that not every object is contained in social reality so there must be some other place that contains the "key to desire."

representation.[282] In a similar vein, capitalism functions on a system of substitution and representation in which money is substituted for, and represents, the value of objects and behaviors. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari see no difference in a psychic "mental reality" and an objective "social reality": "desire produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production. It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or psychic reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production" (AO 30). Deleuze and Guattari propose, "desire produces [and] its product is real," and ultimately, "*social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions" (*AO 29). What constitutes the "determinate conditions" comes about through a process of coding.

For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism exists as a social machine that codes the "flows" of desire. Coding assigns values to objects and behaviors, qualitative values that amount to what is either desirable or undesirable in order to regulate the thoughts, opinions, and actions of individuals regarding how to live the good life. However, they label capitalism as a system that is "more pitiless than any other" because it introduces an exchange equivalent and substitutes an "axiomatic of abstract quantities" in the form of money for the codes in order to "maintain the energy of the flows in a bound state on the body of capital" (AO 246). Therefore, capitalism possesses the ability to axiomatize, or operate on coded and decoded flows, through the cash nexus in order to replace the old codings and "organize all the decoded flows . . . for the benefit of the capitalist system and in the service of its ends" (AO 233). By replacing the contextual, qualitative codes of certain objects and behaviors with abstract values, capital regulates the flows of desire within a system of substitution and representation that abrogates any code that fails to

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[282] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 24. They write, "The great discovery of psychoanalysis was that of the production of desire, of the productions of the unconscious. But once Oedipus entered the picture, this discovery was soon buried beneath a new brand of idealism: a classical theater was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself – in myth, tragedy, dreams – was substituted for the productive unconscious" (24).

naturally progress capitalism's agenda to create surplus value.[283] The objects and behaviors are

detached from authentic desire and replaced with abstract quantities. This in turn influences the

activity of individuals within society because desire is detached from its object and replaced by

feelings of lack. Because of the capitalist formation of desire, social agencies subject desire to a

formulation of need and introduce the "abject fear of lacking something" into its citizenry (AO

27).

Capitalist society then corrals individuals towards an economic and consumerist belief

system that destroys desire in its free-form. In this way, authentic desire is repressed. Deleuze

and Guattari call desire in its free-form "schizoanalysis," the death of capital from within. They

claim that capitalism creates a "schizophrenic charge" because it decodes the coded flows of

desire in order to axiomatize them under the exchange equivalent of the cash nexus. Capitalism

not only codes desire, but it also decodes and deterritorializes the flows in capitalist production.

They define "decoding" as "understanding and translating a code," and additionally, as the

"destroying" of the code (AO p. 245), whereas "deterritorialization" is the process of "coming

undone" (AO 322).[284] So capitalism only frees up the flows of desire from coding in order to bind

them to the law of cash value (in this way they are decoded, deterritorialized, and recoded or

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[283] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus,* pp. 34-35; 234-235; 248. Capitalism depends on decoding and deterritorializing ("translating" or dismantling) the codes and the socius respectively in order to progress towards it limit (of creating a surplus value), but it simultaneously attempts to avoid reaching its limit through the cash nexus that creates "an axiomatic of abstract quantities that keeps moving further and further in the direction of the deterritorialization" to the point that it could potentially destroy the socius and "unleash the flows of desire" and "dispatch itself straight to the moon!" (AO, p. 33-34).

[284] Deleuze and Guattari clarify further, "For it is certain that the regime of decoding does not signify the absence of organization, but rather the most somber organization, the harshest compatibility, with the axiomatic replacing the codes and incorporating them, always *a contrario*." The term "decoding" can mean either to decipher the secret of the code, or to unravel the code: "It is the thing, the unnamable, the generalized decoding of flows that reveals *a contrario* the secret of all these formations, coding the flows, and even overcoding them, rather than letting anything escape coding…" (153). Deterritorialization liberates the fixed relations that contain a body and introduces it to new machines and organizations (an act that constitutes "reterritorialization"). See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 68. They write, "The merchant buys in a territory, deterritorializes products into commodities, and is reterritorialized on commercial circuits. In capitalism, capital or property is deterritorialized, ceases to be landed, and is reterritorialized on the means of production; whereas labor becomes 'abstract' labor, reterritorialized in wages." Products may have use value, but when they are reterritorialized into commodities, they have an exchange value

reterritorialized).[285] However, at moments within this process, desire is decoded and is

potentially free from any codes, capital or other. Schizoanalysis thus has a revolutionary

potential because it is capitalism's difference, "its death."[286]

I argue that what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "schizoanalysis" or "the plane of

immanence," defined as an unimpeded, unfazed movement of flows through a coded socius that

attempts to regulate the flows, represents the authentic. In discussing the Body Without Organs

(BwO), they write, "The body without organs is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do

with the body itself, or an image of the body," and it belongs to the "realm of antiproduction,"

which means that the BwO serves as the "surface for the recording of the entire process of

production of desire" (AO 11). It exists in tension with the socius by establishing a

"counterflow" that attempts to prevent the productive activity of desiring-production under the

determinate conditions, or, to thwart the organ-ization that imposes a specific, goal-oriented

regime. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write, "The BwO is *the field of immanence* of desire, the

plane of consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without

reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills

it)."[287] The "schizo," then, traverses the BwO, the "plane of immanence," which is the surface of

inscription in the coding process, and schizoanalysis as a process involves mobility – what

Deleuze and Guattari call the schizophrenic escape or "lines of flight." They propose, "The

choice is between one of two poles, the paranoiac counterescape that motivates all the conformist,

reactionary, and fascisizing investments, and the schizophrenic escape convertible into a

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[285] Deleuze and Guattari explain, "By substituting money for the very notion of a code, it has created an axiomatic of abstract quantities that keeps moving further and further in the direction of the of the deterritorialization of the socius" (33). As a result, Deleuze and Guattari observe the dilemma of decoding and deterritorializing flows on the one hand, and the reterritorialization on the other, stating, "The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value" (34-35).

[286] AO, p. 246. Deleuze and Guattari write, "Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death."

[287] *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 154.

revolutionary investment." This process does not lead to an impassionate escape; Deleuze and Guattari place the term in a positive context, stating, "Courage consists, however, in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges" (AO 341).[288] Movement, then, across the social field of inscription is one way to challenge the coding of the socius that leads to "conformist" and "reactionary" behavior.

Deleuze and Guattari even mention Jack Kerouac, as "the artist possessing the soberest of means who took revolutionary 'flight'" (AO 277-278). Kerouac is an example, Deleuze and Guattari point out, of "men who *know how to leave*, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the body without organs. They overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier," and "through the impasses and the triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly" (AO 132-133).[289] The characters, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, exhibit the schizophrenic process laid out by Deleuze and Guattari by fleeing the coded territories in search for an authentic desire that is not encoded by an outside agency – they are desiring-machines exposing the theater of representation, and through their mobility and resistance, they push back on the limits of the capitalist machine that produces inauthenticity. Sal and Dean desire an authentic existence, which Kerouac (inadvertently) describes in Deleuzian fashion as a way of life that resists the postwar "delusionary world-work and fake imagination . . . [which manufactures] imaginary goods for the world's impure attachments," and rejects consumer society's inclination

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[288] Deleuze and Guattari pose the question, "For what is the schizo, if not first of all the one who can no longer bear 'all that': money, the stock market, the death forces, Nijinsky said—values, morals, homelands, religions, and private certitudes?" and they determine, "There is a whole world of difference between the schizo and the revolutionary: the difference between the one who escapes, and the one who knows how to make what he is escaping escape, collapsing a filthy drainage pipe, causing a deluge to break loose, liberating a flow, resecting a schiz" (341).

[289] The full passage reads, "Strange Anglo-American literature: from Thomas Hardy, From D.H. Lawrence to Malcolm Lowry, from Henry Miller to Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, men who *know how to leave*, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the desert of the body without organs. They overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier. And of course they fail to complete the process, they never cease failing to do so. The neurotic impasse again closes – the daddy-mommy of oedipalization, America, the return to the native land – or else the perversion of the exotic territorialities, then drugs, alcohol – or worse still, an old fascist dream. Never has delirium oscillated more between its two poles. But through the impasses and the triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly."

to "multiply imaginary needs and obeisance to the outside Society."[290] In an era of containment

that focused on the home and domesticity, *On the Road* celebrates a mobility discourse, one that

scrambles the politics of containment and the cultural dynamics purveyed by a mass consumerist

society.

The most explicit Cold War passage of the text occurs when Dean and Sal are driving

through Washington in 1949 on the day of Harry Truman's second inauguration, placing the

narrative within the historical context of the postwar period. After commenting on the "great

displays . . . of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass," the narrative reads, "We

suddenly found ourselves trapped in a circular drive from which there was no exit. We had to go

to the end of it. We huzzahed" (135-136). Here, there exists a literal sense of containment – they

find themselves "trapped," or "contained" with no exit in this localized setting, and more

importantly, they are trapped in a precise time and locale – this historical moment documented by

times of war. Countering the feeling of containment in a literal context, but connected to the

political association in this passage, is their movement as a form of resistance. Containment

culture's impact is felt in this scene with the display of military equipment in service of the

Truman Administration's goal to stifle communist expansion, but also, Dean, Sal, and the gang

feel stifled as well. They look for a way out of this communal act of political recognition and

when they find it, they "huzzahed," or shout in celebration for a way out.

The narrative reports the ensuing "huzza: "'Whooee!' yelled Dean. 'Here we go!' And he

hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that.

We were all delighted, *we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and*

performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved!" (134). What Kerouac

accomplishes in the narrative is the infusion of the social and cultural meanings of containment

into the gang's movement, creating an authentic form of mobility that pushes against the forces of

containment culture. The politicized culture that the narrative amplifies only causes the

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[290] Kerouac and Charters, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 447.

characters a state of "confusion" as they witness "nonsense": the "B-29s, PT boats, [and] artillery" overshadowed the "regular small ordinary lifeboat that looked pitiful and foolish" (136). Aside from its literal name, the narrative juxtaposes the war equipment with the lifeboat and Dean "shakes his head in awe" for, they cannot ally their values and way of life with the "great displays of war might" for public viewing in Washington, and this discord serves as an impetus to move. Sal's reflection of movement as a "function of the time" captures the social significance of Kerouac's road novel in the postwar period, and his description of movement as "noble" invests it with meaning and authenticity. More importantly, this scene establishes the cultural (containment) context and the significance of the event that follows, for after they leave the decorous Presidential inauguration, they are stopped by authority figures and treated as criminals on account of their mobility.

Not long after Dean, Sal, Marylou, and Ed Dunkel witness the political symbols of Truman's inauguration and desire to move, they are stopped by the police who could "smell jail" all over Dean. Initially, the officers question Marylou, inquiring as to how old she was – "they were trying to whip up a Mann Act idea. But she had her marriage certificate" (136). The police officers interpret the gang's mobility within a particular context – an unlawful and felonious one, for the Mann Act was designed to "protect women and girls from forced prostitution and sex trafficking" by making it "illegal to transport, or cause the transport of, women over state lines for the purposes of prostitution, debauchery, or 'any other immoral purpose.'"[291] Thus, the novel's mobility in this scene connects to containment culture because Dean is labeled as a detractor who represents a threat to Marylou's well-being and furthermore, the fabric of an American society that values domesticity.

Eventually, Marylou's official marriage certificate exonerates Dean, but not after the officers respond to the legal documentation with more questions as to whom was *really*

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[291] Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act And The Making Of The FBI*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 1.

"sleeping" with her. The officers finally fine Dean "twenty-five dollars," and when Dean objects

to the fine, the cop "threatened to take him back to Pennsylvania and slap a *special* charge on

him." Dean objects, "'What charge?' 'Never mind what charge. Don't worry about *that*, wise

guy'" (136). After settling the dispute, Sal reflects, "The American police are involved in

psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers

and threats. It's a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire

about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don't exist to its satisfaction" (137). Here,

when domestic containment fails to tame the natures of individuals like Sal and Dean because

they take to the road and leave the home, the narrative reports another strategy of containment –

the concerted effort to "sniff" out any illegal activity, even if none exists, among a band of

vagrants in order to contain them.

It is against this backdrop that the novel's mobility functions. After dealing with the

police, the narrative reports that the group drives onward, on the "magical road," exploring the

"golden land," and it is this socially invested mobility that represents authenticity, for they

discuss "the goodness and joy of life," with Dean exclaiming, "Now dammit, look here, all of

you, we all must admit that everything is fine and there's no need in the world to worry, and in

fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we're not REALLY

worried about ANYTHING" (135). This feeling that "everything will be fine" represents the

"pearl" that the narrative mentions in passing, the pearl representing the authenticity the novel

endorses as Sal affirms, "[Dean] and I saw the whole country like an oyster for us to open; and

the pearl was there, the pearl was there" (138).

Dean's insistence that "everything will be fine" also speaks against a popular

containment narrative couched in capitalist and consumerist ideologies, and connects to

Deleuze's argument about desire and lack. Social production, according to Deleuze and Guattari,

manipulates desire with "determinate conditions," meaning, rather than allowing desire to flow in

free-form (i.e. uncoded, undirected), social production substitutes lack for an *attainable* object.

For instance, Deleuze and Guattari write,

> Lack is created, planned, and organized in and through social production. It is
> counterproduced as a result of the pressure of antiproduction; the latter falls back on the
> forces of production and appropriates them. It is never primary; production is never
> organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack. It is lack that infiltrates itself,
> creates empty spaces or vacuoles, and propagates itself in accordance with the
> organization of an already existing organization of production. The deliberate creation of
> lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves
> deliberately organizing wants and needs amid an abundance of production; making all of
> desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and
> making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire
> (the demands of rationality), while at the same time the production of desire is
> categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy. (AO 28)

In other words, "antiproduction" appropriates desire by rerouting desire into the realm of fantasy, making the object appear to be attainable, only to vanish amidst the "fear of not having one's needs met" over and over again in production. The dominant social codes and the dominant systematic flows of desire, along with the ambivalent exchange method of the market economy, creates the "vacuoles" of lack and fear of not having one's desire met. However, antiproduction works to create a reality "exterior to desire" so that individuals become victims to a fantasized pursuit of some object, all the while the capitalist machine reinvests the forces of production back into the system. Antiproduction, then, inhibits individuals from functioning as autonomous beings or desiring freely by manifesting fear and lack amongst the citizenry. An extremely representative passage in *On the Road*, but an often overlooked one, especially in terms of its commentary on desire, fleshes out this point.

After reaching California, Dean and Sal decide to head back east and hitch a ride with a "typical halfway tourist" couple out of San Francisco headed to Denver. Dean and Sal are in the back of the car sharing childhood visions about when they would ride in cars and imagine that they would cut the landscape with "scythes," and it is this schizophrenic energy that accompanies their mobility in the scene. Furthermore, the authenticity of the moment further represents desire in a free-form state, for they have no worries. The narrative reads, "We were telling these things and both sweating. We had completely forgotten the people up front who had begun to wonder what was going on in the back seat. At one point the driver said, 'For God's sakes, you're rocking the boat back there.' Actually we were; the car was swaying as Dean and I both swayed to the rhythm and the IT of our final excited joy in talking and living to the blank tranced end of all innumerable riotous angelic particulars that had been lurking in our souls all our lives" (209). Afterward, Dean "whispered, clutching [Sal's] sleeve, sweating":

> "Now you just dig them in front. They have worries, they're counting the miles, they're thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they'll get there – and all the time they'll get there anyway, you see. But they *need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise*, purely anxious and whiny, *their souls really won't be at peace unless they can latch on to an established and proven worry* and having once found it they assume facial expressions to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them to no end. Listen! Listen! 'Well now,' he mimicked, 'I don't know – maybe we shouldn't get gas in that station. I read recently in *National Petroffious Petroleum News* that this kind of gas has a great deal of O-Octane *gook* in it and someone once told me it even had a semi-official high-frequency *cock* in it, and I don't know, well I just don't feel like it anyway…' Man, you dig all this." He was poking me furiously in the ribs to understand. (209-210)

This scene contrasts the earlier scene in the car when Dean, Sal, Marylou, and Ed Dunkel are leaving the "nonsense and confusion" behind and Dean says that there is nothing to worry about. The tourists desire these things because they lack them, or at the very least, they are led to believe that they lack them and hence, their desire is produced. Dean points out their worry in terms of navigating the way to their destination, but states, "all the time they'll get there anyway," which nulls the lack that is "created, planned, and organized" through social production by institutions such as the "*National Petroffious Petroleum News*." The lack is not a preexisting need, but a result of the "already existing organization of production" in the fuel industry within a capitalist economy (in relation to this narrative scene). Dean possesses the revolutionary power of the schizo because he can see the process at work as he navigates the social field, commenting on the tourists' "need for urgencies false or otherwise."

The important point to note here about this passage is that Kerouac is amplifying narrative action and character reactions *to* Dean that reflect the postwar containment narrative of what a "good citizen" is like. Good citizens are like the tourist couple, concerned with worries and anxieties that are tied to capitalist ideology (i.e. paying for gasoline, procuring a secured place for rest – an abode), and good citizens are able to recognize "delinquency." Dean had become absolutely "mad," or schizophrenic, in his movements; later, when he is driving, Dean "hurled the Plymouth head-on at a truck," "wobbled and hovered in front of it," "swung away at the last moment," "balled right through the desert … demonstrating various ways of how not to drive" (211). The tourists, who are locked in the system of capitalist social production, are in a fit of terror and tell Sal, "We can't let him drive any more, he's absolutely crazy, they must have let him out of an insane asylum or something" (211).

While Dean functions as the schizo in this scene, the tourists are representative of individuals who are ensconced in a capitalist system that manufactures needs. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari charge "The State" for forming a "gigantic enterprise of antiproduction," that creates "an equivalent flow of *stupidity* . . . that ensures the integration of groups and

individuals into the system. Not only lack amid overabundance, but stupidity in the midst of knowledge and science" (AO 236). Here, the tourists' desire is not allowed to realize its capacity because it is redirected towards a fear of procuring gas, lodging, and other sundry needs they feel they have not attained. Antiproduction causes the disconnect between Dean's desire and the tourists' desire because it does not allow for a mutually affective relation between them in terms of desire.

In other words, Kerouac uses the narrative to amplify, not only Sal's inability to recognize this current social strategy, but others who are caught up in a capitalist society as well. At one point in *On the Road,* Sal engages with Old Bull Lee and Lee touches upon this notion of antiproduction. Sal refers to him as a "teacher" who imparts the "facts of life," but clarifies Lee is an individual who learned "not only out of necessity but because he wanted to" (143). This is an important distinction that relies on the concept of "necessity." For instance, Old Bull Lee tells Sal that he is going to produce a shelf that will "last a thousand years!" Following this declaration, Lee places this in a Deleuzian context of desire:

> "Why, Sal, do you realize the shelves they build these days crack under the weight of knickknacks after six months or generally collapse? Same with houses, same with clothes. These bastards have invented plastics by which they could make houses that last *forever*. And tires. Americans are killing themselves by the millions every year with defective rubber tires that get hot on the road and blow up. They could make tires that never blow up. . . . Same with clothes. They can make clothes that last forever. They prefer making cheap goods so's everybody'll have to go on working and punching timeclocks and organizing themselves in sullen unions and floundering around while the big grab goes on in Washington and Moscow." (149-150)

Here Old Bull Lee juxtaposes products of inferior quality against the *unrealized potentiality* of currently nonexistent products in order to focus on *lack*. What the existing products of shelves, clothes, and tires *lack* is the potential to last beyond a timeframe predicated on "general use."

What is interesting to note in this passage is Sal's unawareness of this predicament that is

narratively couched in Old Bull Lee's "wisdom" and educational moment of the passage. The

narrative illustrates both the lack of knowledge of the masses and also the lack of quality of the

products in current circulation. The point of this passage is not a statement solely on the

materiality of goods in American society, but about the fact that there is an intentional social

production that creates a *lack* of knowledge among the individuals in society, and simultaneously

fosters the desire to continually invest labor power ("punch time clocks") in order to purchase

products that keep the capitalist flows of desire circulating. In essence, the capitalist and

consumer-based society lures individuals into its system of "lack amid overabundance" and

entices them into a slavish pursuit of expenses, as Kerouac iterated earlier. And, as Kerouac also

points out, this way of life causes individuals to "want" dishonestly, and to live inauthentically

because "money is false."

4) "Everyone in America Just Consumes": "The Valueless Abyss of Modern Life"[292]

Kerouac's narratives of desire in *On the Road* amplify the increasing moral and spiritual

bankruptcy in American postwar society. Bankruptcy is a fitting word because Kerouac sets up

an exchange discourse of give and take, with space *invested* with authenticity, versus an

American culture that can "rob" the individual of authentic meaning, culminating in a reflection

in which Sal compares the gains and losses that result from authentic vs. inauthentic movement.

Perhaps no other passage better captures the (in)authentic embedded in the interplay of

desire, containment culture, and mobility than Kerouac/Sal's description of an American tourist

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[292] The first line is taken from *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*. Jack Kerouac and Paul Maher. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005, p. 103-104. Kerouac's main rejection of the developing postwar society was its desire for wealth and a way of life that ignored authenticity. In an interview with Kenneth Allsop, he declares, "Everyone in America just consumes." Kerouac endorses a more simplified way of life, referring to the Beats as "mystic vagrants." The second line is from John Holmes's article, "This is the Beat Generation," *The New York Times*. October 4, 1953. Holmes talks about the Beats' propensity to "elude" "square" society, versus the conformists' desire to conform to society, both

family "on the road." In the Original Scroll version, Kerouac reflects upon what he refers to as a "typical" American family, and while he is making a generalization, in a social climate that called for conformity, the typical members of this family are made to represent every-man/woman/ boy /girl in postwar American society. In this scene, the epideictic critique begins by amplifying the family's desires in order for Kerouac to reveal the spiritual bankruptcy of America, made up of families similar to the one under discussion and with similar socially manufactured desires. He reflects,

> Whole families that had driven from the country in old jalopies went put-put-put across
> Sunset and Vine with their eager faces searching everywhere for movie stars. All they
> saw was other families in other jalopies doing the same thing. They came from Okie flats
> outside Bakersfield, San Diego, Fresno, and San Berdoo; they read movie magazines; the
> little boys wanted to see Hopalong Cassidy conducting his great white horse across the
> traffic; the little girls wanted to see Lana Turner in a deep embrace with Robt. Taylor in
> front of Whelan's; the mothers wanted to see Walter Pidgeon in tophat and tails bowing
> at them from the curb; the fathers – gaunt crazy jalopy Americans – scented money in the
> air. They were ready to sell their daughters to the highest bidder. On the sidewalk
> characters swarmed. Everybody was looking at everybody else. It was the end of the
> continent, no more land. Somebody had tipped the American continent like a pinball
> machine and all the goofballs had come rolling to LA in the southwest corner. I cried for
> all of us. There was no end to the American sadness and the American madness.
> Someday we'll all start laughing and roll on the ground when we realize how funny it's
> been. Until then there is a lugubrious seriousness I love in all this. (OS 206)

To begin with, Kerouac was not impressed with the Hollywood machine, and he had commented on Hollywood throughout his career because both films and books capture moments in time, but

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of which "are the result of more or less the same conviction – namely that the valueless abyss of modern life is unbearable."

he felt that writing retained a more authentic vision.[293] For instance, he refuses to talk to a

"Hollywood Starlet" about "love" after a performance on the Steve Allen Show "because in

Hollywood man love is for sale," and Hollywood is full of "fuffoonery and charaderess (sic)."[294]

In this *Road* passage, the members of the typical American family composed of mother, father,

daughter, and son are depicted as desiring inauthentic objects of desire that are socially produced

by Hollywood. Kerouac's passage represents epideictic discourse because it critiques a postwar

desire for "ersatz facsimile." This passage serves as a value judgment as it observes and critiques

the behaviors and actions of others who choose to desire false representations of authentic values.

Furthermore, Kerouac's response to the behavior of the typical American family is critical as

indicated in his negative language.

He begins by depicting the boys as desiring to witness the aura of Hopalong Cassidy,

which is socially manufactured in a realm of theatricality, and with this association, Kerouac

comments on the social production of desires within the cinematic and the capital system at large.

In the book, *He was Some Kind of Man: Masculinity in B Westerns*, Roderick McGillis discusses

William Boyd's (who played Hopalong Cassidy) awareness of his role to young boys and girls

and how he therefore endorsed certain behavioral principles that he solicited as the "Creed for

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[293] See Ann Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973, p. 123. Charters references correspondence between Kerouac and Ginsberg in which Kerouac considers moving permanently to San Francisco, stating he could get a job in Hollywood for $100 "if he wanted it, but he didn't like Hollywood as a town" (118). The reason why was its emphasis on selling authenticity. Also, see Matthew Theado, *Understanding Jack Kerouac*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000. Theado also discusses *Visions of Cody* and the Joan Shawshanks section and mentions Kerouac's fascination with filming and his spontaneous prose method.

[294] For instance, in *Big Sur*, Kerouac reflects on a time when he was asked to rehearse a reading for the *Steve Allen Show*, and afterwards, the studio sends him out with "a Hollywood starlet" who reads her poetry to Kerouac, who refuses to talk to her about love "because in Hollywood man love is for sale." He writes, "the hell with the hot lights of Hollywood" (*Big Sur* 24-25).

Additionally, in *Visions of Cody*, there is a section in which Kerouac recounts a time when he stumbled across the filming of the 1952 Joan Crawford film, *Sudden Fear*. In describing the filming, he observes that the entire crew of technicians, camera operators, and directors work together to produce the film, but all of their effort and contributions are not seen in the finished product, a point demonstrated by the fist line of the section, "Joan Shawshanks stands all alone in the fog" (*Visions of Cody* 275). He concludes that the film crew makes the "backbone of Hollywood for the movies [and they] have nothing now but great technique to show, …[an] imposed but useful and will-get-you-there (ho ho) task huddled in the night

American Boys and Girls." Among these principles included, "Your parents are the best friends

you have. Listen to them and obey their instructions"; "Only through hard work and study can

you succeed. Don't be lazy"; "Our country's laws are made for your protection. Observe them

carefully"; and "Children in many foreign lands are less fortunate than you. Be glad and proud

you are an American."[295] What this list of "commandments" amounts to is a manifesto of what it

means and looks like to behave as a "good citizen." The examples listed speak to American

values of obedience, loyalty, and the American dream, values inculcated in an era of containment.

Here, Cassidy takes on a very important social and political role in educating future adult

citizens on these values, and in that sense, he becomes the epideictic rhetor shaping communal

values. Furthermore, McGillis points out that for boys and girls growing up in the 1950s who

wanted to show their affection for Cassidy, there was no shortage of products that could endorse

this affection and loyalty, such as pistols, board games, and in a chapter fittingly titled,

"Corporate Cowboys and the Shaping of a Nation," he concludes a long list with the sentiment,

"Hoppy's name and face appeared on just about anything you could imagine," illustrating the

connection between containment culture's value-laden project within capitalist regimes.[296]

However, Kerouac's treatment of Hopalong Cassidy and the typical American family in this

passage engages epideictic discourse, for it criticizes the values as inauthentic, for the values are

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doing their work behind the fuffoonery and charaderees of Hollywood so mad." Ultimately, Kerouac
questions the authentic reality of the whole filmmaking industry (*Visions of Cody*, 284).
[295] Roderick McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western*. Waterloo, ON:
Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009, p. 167. The full list is as follows:
1. The highest badge of honor a person can wear is honesty. Be mindful at all times.
2. Your parents are the best friends you have. Listen to them and obey their instructions.
3. If you want to be respected, you must respect others. Show good manners in every way.
4. Only through hard work and study can you succeed. Don't be lazy.
5. Your good deeds always come to light. So don't boast or be a show off.
6. If you waste time or money today, you will regret it tomorrow. Practice thrift in all ways.
7. Many animals are good and loyal companions. Be friendly and kind to them.
8. A strong, healthy body is a precious gift. Be neat and clean.
9. Our country's laws are made for your protection. Observe them carefully.
10. Children in many foreign lands are less fortunate than you. Be glad and proud you are an
    American. (p. 167).
Also, see John C. Super, *The Fifties in America. Volume 3*. Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2005, p. 898.
[296] McGillis, p. 168.

personified in the figure and character of Hopalong Cassidy who is a product of Hollywood, and

the imagery he presents of Hopalong Cassidy "conducting his great white horse across the traffic"

is something the boys expect and wish to see, but would prove to be quite a spectacle if it were to

occur.

Kerouac then challenges the packaged romance of Lana Turner and Robert Taylor by

referencing them together in the film *Johnny Eager*. Writer Margarita Landazuri points out that

Turner and Taylor were "two of the most beautiful faces ever to appear onscreen [and] were

dynamite in their *one and only film together*." Landazuri also mentions how the "steamy onscreen

chemistry carried over to real life, as the married Taylor fell hard for the . . . 21-year old blonde

bombshell."[297] What is interesting to note here is Kerouac's choice of these two Hollywood actors

to represent the desire for romantic love. Kerouac could have chosen from a myriad of actors and

actresses for this passage,[298] but instead he chose two individuals who appeared in only one film

together as representing authentic romantic love, which is further significant due to the fact that

they had a real-life romance; however, Taylor was married, and Landazuri points out that Taylor

"told his wife he was in love with Turner and asked for a divorce." At the time, Taylor was thirty-

six and Turner twenty-one, and, as Elaine May points out, guidebooks suggested twenty-one as a

recommended age for marriage, and popular opinion agreed.[299] What's more, May provides an

exemplary couple, Joseph and Emily Burns, in order to illustrate the marital values of the mid-

century, quoting Joseph as valuing "honesty" and "obedience to the Ten Commandments," which

includes a forbiddance on adultery; and Emily as possessing "the desire to give up all for the love

of one."[300] Additionally, May affirms that postwar Americans "were determined to get married

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[297] Margarita Landazuri, "Johnny Eager." *TCM Film Article*. tcm.com, n.d. Accessed 28 Sept. 2015. http: //www.tcm.com/this-month/article/59892%7C0/Johnny-Eager.html.
[298] Some other popular actresses of the time included Jean Harlow, Claudette Colbert, and Katherine Hepburn. As for the leading actors, Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, and Walter Huston. For more information of Hollywood's leading men and women in the 1940s, see Sean Griffin, *What Dreams Were Made Of: Movie Stars Of The 1940s*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011.
[299] May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 98.
[300] May, 36; 37.

and *stay* married," citing sociologist Andrew Cherlin as indicating that postwar married couples were the only ones to "show a substantial, sustained shortfall in their lifetime levels of divorce."[301] Seeing as Taylor was married, along with his desire to divorce his wife for Turner, this "romance" constituted an immoral one for 1950s American society, another sign of Hollywood's errant influence.

In a similar vein, Kerouac portrays the wife as desiring the courtly behavior of Walter Pidgeon, whose "urbane, unruffled manner" and the "gentle, intelligent charm" of Greer Garson made the "perfect screen pair" and won over film viewers in the eight films they made together.[302] Impressively, Kerouac here juxtaposes the polite and polished character of Walter Pidgeon with the "real" husband, representative of the "gaunt crazy jaloppy" (sic) Americans and their desolate and gloomy behavior of "selling their daughters to the highest bidder," a reprehensible act that readers can assume the noble Walter Pidgeon would never conceive of. The father is also depicted as the head of the family, captaining the American jalopy to Hollywood. Here, the family is a mobile unit, but their desire is based on lack, and as a result, they desire inauthentically. Kerouac had stated that society was "evil," it was a "mistake," that Americans want "falsely" and slave after money and expenses. In this passage, Kerouac mentions the "lugubrious seriousness" of this, connecting earlier to his sentiments of "moaning for man" in the "sad drama of the American night." He appreciates the quest for the authentic, but mourns the current state of inauthentic values circulating in America.

After Sal finally returns to the East after moving around the country with Dean, he reflects upon the different "return of investments" of road life against that of the hustling and bustling New York scene. He ruminates, "I had my HOME to go to, my place to lay my head

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[301] Ibid., p. 176, italics original; Andrew Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 25, quoted in May, *Homeward Bound*, 176.

[302] Joseph Berger, "Walter Pidgeon, Actor, Dies at 87." *New York Times*, September 26, 1984. Accessed 28 Sept. 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/26/obituaries/walter-pidgeon-actor-dies-at-87.html.

down and figure the losses and figure the gain that I knew was in there somewhere too" (107).
Sal notes,

> Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the
> American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush
> hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair
> of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among
> themselves, the mad dream – grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could
> be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. The high towers of the
> land – the other end of the land, the place where Paper America is born. (107)

Here is where Kerouac incorporates an epideictic discourse through his rhetoric of desire. He
amplifies and juxtaposes Sal and Dean's road desire with that of a capitalistic desire in order to
critique the current state of postwar American consumers' socially produced desire. His
"innocent road eyes" provide that epideictic critique as they are unaccustomed to the values
celebrated in Times Square after moving around the country with Dean. The passage pits
containment and movement against each other. While there is movement unfolding in Times
Square, it is taking place *within* that geographical point. Even the literal name of the location as a
"square" speaks to the containment within this narrative activity. Times Square is a very precise
and minuscule plot of land within the nation. Sal and Dean's mobility occurs outside of these
confines, and this display of inauthenticity in Times Square will serve as the catalyst for Sal's
desire for mobility, the road, and the authentic.

Thus, the portrayal of a large aggregate of individuals in Times Square represents the
American desire for wealth, for the narrative describes the actions of the individuals in an
American capitalist context as following the "mad dream," a comment on the erroneous, and
failed, American dream, as well as a rare instance of a negative usage of the word "mad." "Paper
America" too is an allusion to the consumerist society that is emerging in the postwar years and
refers to an industrial-capitalist machine. Sal associates the ultimate end of their mission to being

buried in the "awful cemeteries," suggesting that such a life will incur no value or meaning ironically. As another example, in the Original Scroll, Kerouac reflects similarly on the city of Detroit. He calls Detroit a "sullen town," and he describes it further, "actually one of the worst towns possible in America. It's nothing but miles and miles of factories and the downtown section is no bigger than downtown Troy N.Y. except the population is way up in millions. Everybody thinks about money, money, money" (343 OG).

In both of these passages depicting what Kerouac typifies as the American City and the American Dream, Kerouac is "presaging the ghostly day when industrial America shall be abandoned and left to rust in one long Sunday Afternoon of oblivion."[303] While Sal does not come out and utter it directly, with his connection to the "cemeteries" and ghost-town future or doom of Times Square akin to his description of Detroit, the scene amplified in New York incurs more loss if one keeps track of the gains and the losses. As a case in point, at the end of the Times Square scene, Sal even mentions that he and his aunt "decided to buy a new electric refrigerator with the money [he] had sent her from California; it was to be the first in the family" (107), amplifying a commodity that connects to the domestic ideology of containment culture's household consumerist agenda. However, Sal mentions that he cannot sleep that night and the narrative constructs a very somber feel as the chapter closes, noting that with the departure of Dean from his life, "Now it was too late and I had also missed Dean" (108). After focusing on Times Square and the purchase of an electric refrigerator, the very next section leads into the next journey on the road with his compatriot: "now the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road" (115). Here the narrative pits an economic and status gain against road life. What Sal gains, and what Kerouac ultimately celebrates though, is a "new vision," a "new more," connected to authenticity that stands out against Times Square and the "valueless abyss" of consumer culture.

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[303] Jack Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*. Introduction by Joyce Johnson. New York: Riverhead Books, 1995, p. 34.

5) *On the Road* and the Process of Becoming-Authentic

Containment culture attempted to create a nation of "good citizens" that conformed to narratives that fostered a secure sense of homogeneity. As Deleuze and Guattari show, social conventions and institutions that enforce a framework for social relations engage in antiproduction in order to remain unaffected. Containment culture coded certain ways of life as commendable, and other behaviors as illegitimate, and in this way, the individual had a difficult time in affecting or shaping the fixed relations and fixed values of the postwar period.[304] However Kerouac endorsed an authenticity that "dug" the unrealized potentialities of desire that resulted when Sal and Dean encountered differences – that-which-is-other-than containment culture's ideal.

One scene in which Kerouac pits Sal and Dean's authentic desire against containment culture's conformist desire is when Sal and Dean discuss living as hobos. In part Four, Dean is living in New York with his third wife, Inez, and for the first time, Sal realizes he is leaving Dean behind as he prepares once again to head West. The narrative reports that Dean "was reduced to simple pleasures," as Dean expresses to Sal, "That's Inez . . . Oh, I've talked with her and we've got everything straightened out most beautifully. We're going to go and live on a farm in Pennsylvania this summer . . . and have lots of kids in the next few years" (250). Dean is talking about owning a home, having children, settling down, all the makings of the "good citizen" in the postwar period. However, Sal mentions an important aspect of Dean's character, specifically, how this version of Dean is not authentic. The narrative reads, "It didn't seem to fit Dean. He looked more like himself huddling in the cold, misty spray of the rain on empty Madison Avenue at night" (250).

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[304] See Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*. London: SAGE, 1996, p. 73-74. For instance, Goodchild puts this in perspective with his example of the employee who "has to accept the fixed relations of production provided by the employer," while the employer remains unfazed. The employee must adapt to the codes, but the employer does not have to accommodate the employee. He also gives the example of a rape victim, "forced to submit to the drives of the rapist, while being unable to shape or affect them" (74).

Sal describes Dean as a vagrant or hobo and the qualities that the narrative amplifies are

significant because of the repression of authenticity that containment culture promotes. They

engage in the following discussion:

> Dean: "You see man, you get older and troubles pile up. Someday you and me'll be
>
> coming down an alley together at sundown and looking in the cans to see."
>
> "You mean we'll end up old bums?"
>
> "Why not, man? Of course we will if we want to, and all that. There's no harm
>
> ending that way. *You spend a whole life of noninterference with the wishes of others,*
>
> *including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it*
>
> *your own way.*" I agreed with him. He was reaching his Tao decisions in the simplest
>
> direct way. "*What's your road, man? – holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road,*
>
> *guppy road, any road.* It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow. Where body how?
>
> […] *You've* seen me try and break my ass to make it and *you* know that it doesn't matter
>
> and we know time – how to slow it up and walk and dig and just old fashioned spade
>
> kicks, what other kicks are there? *We* know." (251, italics added)

The praiseworthy characteristics of the hobo include mobility and a desire that is untouched by

social conditioning. Dean acknowledges that hobos are unfazed by politicians and social

normative behavior, such as domestic ideology encourages – marriage, family, and the home. A

hobo can "make his own way," or, live his life authentically by detaching his desire from any

type of interference from others. In this passage, the pattern of the societal relationship of

marriage between husband and wife is interfering with Dean's authenticity and with his desire to

journey on the road with Sal – Dean as the husband should be "breaking his ass" to "make end's

meat," while Inez, the wife, is also "contained" by the script of the mother-figure who should

birth their children and stay home to take care of them.

Of course, Kerouac's novel presents the gendered assignments that containment culture

promotes in terms of the road versus the home, for Sal and Dean are the masculine figures who

take to the road, while the women are either left at the home to tend to the children, or represent "passengers" in the masculine automobile of "kicks." As Sidonie Smith notes, *On the Road* is the "quintessential tale" of "man, auto, motion, and masculinity." She reveals how the car provides the opportunity for men to escape domestic responsibilities and work obligations, and in *On the Road*, "'girls' enter the narrative as passengers in automobiles, passengers in the ride of life." I agree with Smith regarding the way in which the mid-century viewed the automobile, the road, and gendered identities in relation to the car and motion, but I disagree with her overall evaluation claiming that "an integral part of [*On the Road*'s] journeys and that narrative is the 'making' of girls."[305]

I speculate that part of the problem most likely stems from the identities of the novel's protagonists. Dean is married to three different women (Marylou, Camille, and Inez). And when Smith discusses the road as a way for the man to escape domesticity, while the woman is "dependent and sessile," having "no place and no way to go" but to stay at home, which is then representative of "a site not of leisure, consumption, and pleasure, but of dead-end dreams and captivity," the reader can certainly think of Inez in this situation.[306] However, Sal is not married, and as the narrator, he includes a perspective of road life that, while it captures the gendered dynamics of the postwar period, it remains more focused on the social implications of mobility. For instance, Smith points out how the automobile is "associated with male sexual prowess" and she asserts, "with cars, men can pick women up, feel them up, knock them up. In front seats and backseats they can assert their attractiveness to women and their power over them."[307] While I am not trying to argue that *On the Road* is *not* a text full of masculinity, I am pointing out that the type of sexual prowess that Smith discusses in relation to the automobile is hardly the central focus of the novel. Rather, the novel is better understood as a commentary of the social

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[305] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: 20th-Century Women's Travel Writing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 177; 178.
[306] Smith, *Moving Lives,* p. 189.
[307] Ibid., p. 183.

production of desire in an era of containment that constructed the home as the immobile base of operations. Kerouac's narrative captures a resistant ethos from a male perspective only, whereas Beverly Donofrio's autobiography, *Riding in Cars with Boys*, provides a female perspective regarding the home and mobility from a female perspective, albeit a decade later and from a younger perspective.[308] Nonetheless, Kerouac describes how Dean ultimately rejects the containment narrative of domestic stability, and instead, tells Sal he "ain't a man 'less he's a jumpin man," and that "no matter where I live, my trunk's always sticking out from under the bed, I'm ready to leave or get thrown out" (251). In this way, he overcodes the containment narrative of domesticity by desiring mobility, which calls for a departure from the home in opting for the road. The road again is the object that offers the authentic, for it opens up potentiality as it can be "any road." Dean comments on how they "know time," they know how to "slow it up" and "dig kicks," and it is through this language that *On the Road* (over)codes desire and the authentic.

One of the references to the authentic in *On the Road* is through the ambiguous and elusive referent of "IT." In the back of a tourist car, hitching a ride, Dean tells Sal that the alto man the previous night had "IT." The narrative reads,

> I wanted to know what "IT" meant. "Ah well" – Dean laughed –"now your asking me
>
> impon-de-rables- ahem! Here's a guy and everybody's there, right? Up to him to put
>
> down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas,
>
> people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All
>
> of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it* – everybody looks up and
>
> knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with

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[308] See Beverly Donofrio, *Riding in Cars with Boys*. C*onfessions of a Bad Girl Who Makes Good*. New York: Morrow, 1990. This book demonstrates how a woman can resist the gendered assignment of the home by taking to the road, for Smith states that when women sat behind a wheel, they are "radically displaced" from the home – "A woman out for a drive was a woman out of place" (Smith, 173). Donofrio's autobiography features her behavior of riding around acting like boys by "enact[ing] certain kinds of behaviors inside the automobile in mimicry of (auto)masculinity" (Smith, 187).

the substance of lives, confessions of this bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas,

rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with

such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows

it's not the tune that counts but IT –" (207-208)

Ben Giamo refers to the moment of "IT" as a "transcendent state of pure excitement" that

"springs" Sal and Dean "from the prisoner house of calendar and clock into an eternal now"

through the act of "improvisation."[309] Jason Haslam also calls "IT" a "transcendental moment,"

one that is "epitomized in the road," and "available through drugs and jazz," but notes "ITS"

"community-building manner" and "form of universal communication."[310] Erik Mortenson also

touches upon the transcendental nature of "IT" as a product of jazz music, but points out that "IT"

symbolizes "empty space where time stops [and] brings together individuals to form a

collective."[311] Marco Abel points out a connection between "IT" and a Deleuzian becoming,

stating, "this 'IT' eludes Sal as long as he conceives of it as an object that can be attained," but

that Sal "realizes that he has been encountering the 'IT' all along, since the mysterious 'IT'

structures an algorithm for traveling, rather than being a code or symbol in need of

interpretation." Abel claims "IT" only occurs "as the road itself, only in and as the process of

their becoming-road."[312]

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[309] Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist As Spiritual Quester*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2000, p. 29; 35. Also, see Regina Weinreich, *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of the Fiction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987. Weinreich describes "IT" as "a form of instant gratification, a thrill for the moment, an epiphany" (54); and Omar Swartz, *The View from on the Road: The Rhetorical Vision of Jack Kerouac*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. Swartz calls "IT" an "existential moment, perhaps *the* existential moment," a "state of religious exultation and exuberance, an expression of orgasmic oneness and unity of creation" (20). He says it is a "spiritual apex," claiming "where the consciousness of an individual is transformed by some catalyst, usually sex or drugs or intense deprivation and despair" (20).

[310] Jason Haslam, "'It Was My Dream That Screwed Up': The Relativity Of Transcendence In *On The Road*." *Canadian Review Of American Studies* 39.4 (2009): p. 452-453.

[311] Erik Mortenson. *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011, p. 155.

[312] Marco Abel, "Speeding Across The Rhizome: Deleuze Meets Kerouac *On The Road*." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 48.2 (2002): 243.

However, I disagree with Abel that the novel features a "becoming-road" as if the road is an extension of Sal and Dean, and instead I argue that the road is a pathway, the "plane of immanence," leading to authenticity. I assert that what "IT" represents is an authenticity that is akin to a Deleuzian becoming-authentic, and one of the more important features in this process is this notion of time – "Time stops." The other important aspect of "IT" is this notion of change, of a difference unfolding – the alto man "lines up his ideas," and "somewhere" in space and time, he "gets it," and when this transpires, everybody knows a transformation has taken place. The alto man fills the "empty space with the substance of lives." Therefore, the authentic moment of the "IT" consists of separate lives, separate histories coming together in the present moment when IT has come to pass. "IT" and "knowing time" *are both about consciousness, but in "knowing time," the alto man, Sal, and Dean are able to produce a reality*. "IT" connects to the "new vision," the attempt to view the world in an authentic, meaningful way, pinpointing a new value system that praises authenticity because "IT" evades fixed social parameters.

I argue that authenticity is what Deleuze and Guattari call in *Anti-Oedipus* an "intensive state": "There is a schizophrenic experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable – a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form" (AO 18). This "intensive state" relates to the moment of "IT" Dean identifies in this passage. The alto man is – perhaps suffering is an acceptable term due its emphasis on being overwhelmed by the intensity of a feeling – suffering from the moment of experiencing "IT" as a "pure state" "stripped of all shape and form," as Dean describes the moment as filled with the "substance of lives," meaning, in this context, many lived experiences coming together, stripped of real or imaginary barriers that may disconnect one individual from another. In other words, it is not the individual subject that matters, the alto player himself, but the *flows* of life that come together in time. As Todd May points out, for Deleuze, "time is not a psychological matter that belongs to a single individual. Rather, it is an ontological matter that

lives itself through individuals psychologically."[313] Thus, time is perceived as constituting a whole in which each instant is a component, and "IT" is a whole comprised of single instants that are connected to one another. May argues that for Deleuze, the "content of time" is best understood as a concept of difference: "Becoming is the unfolding of difference in time and as time."[314]

"Becoming," then, regards the interplay of forces and energy amongst objects, peoples, and ideas and the *transition* that occurs when these forces come together. In the social field, individuals and social forces interact, and Deleuze and Guattari propose, "the opposition of the forces of attraction and repulsion produces an open series of intensive elements, . . . that are never an expression of the final equilibrium of a system, but consist, rather, of an unlimited number of stationary, metastable states through which a subject passes" (AO 19). Thus, the individual is not a stable construct remaining the same in the social field, but is, as Cliff Stagoll terms it, a "changing assemblage of forces."[315] The alto man suspends time and he eliminates boundaries of self and other – he fills the empty time and space and takes on the process of "putting down what's on everybody's mind," passing through the "metastable states" through the remembrance of ideas, of people, as he goes through the "soul-exploratory" process that appears to cross over the barriers of time and space.

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[313] Todd May, "When is a Deleuzian Becoming?" *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): p. 146.
[314] May, p. 146. May writes,

> "The content of the past, which exists virtually in the present, is difference in itself. It is not difficult to see why, for Deleuze at least, this must be so. If the content of the past were to consist in certain identities, then their nature as identities would have to be modeled on some original form from which they would draw their character as identities. (An insult in the past would be so in virtue of displaying "insultness," which would imply an "insultness" apart from the specific insult in question – the Platonic move.) These original forms would not themselves be in time, since the contents in time would be copies of them; rather, they would be the model for the content of what is in time. This would imply that the content of time is doubled in a transcendent nontime that forms the model for time's content. These moves – identities as copies modeled on an original, existence doubled in a founding transcendent reality – are central to the type of philosophy Deleuze is trying to overcome…. They are Plato's Forms, Descartes' God, Kant's transcendental I. Thus the content of time, since it cannot come in the form of identities or samenesses, must be difference. (146)

What Deleuze and Guattari call "intensive states," then, are an integral component in the process of becoming. The intensive states are comprised of "flows of intensity," or affects, that replace the world of the "subject." Deleuze and Guattari explain,

> These [intensive states] are often described as hallucinations and delirium, but the basic phenomenon of hallucination (*I see, I hear*) and the basic phenomenon of delirium (*I think…*) presupposes an *I feel* at an even deeper level, which gives hallucinations their object and thought delirium its content – an "I feel that I am becoming a woman," "that I am becoming a god," and so on, which is neither delirious nor hallucinatory, but will project the hallucination or internalize the delirium. Delirium and hallucination are secondary in relation to the really primary emotion, which in the beginning only experiences intensities, becomings, transitions. (AO 18-19)

Later on, they write that the intensive emotion, "affect," is "both the common root and the principle of differentiation of deliriums and hallucinations" (AO 84). The affect takes precedence in becomings and transitions, not the self. The self ceases to be the point of convergence, and the intensive states, the movements, and the flows become the focal points. Deleuze and Guattari "believe that everything commingles in these intense becomings, passages, and migrations – all this drift that ascends and descends the flows of time: countries, races, families, parental appellations, divine appellations, geographical and historical designations" (AO 85). Therefore, there is no separate self, but a subject "who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the names of history" (AO 21).

Kerouac, in a letter to Allen Ginsberg in 1955 as he is writing *On the Road* and two years before its publication, touches upon the connection between "IT" and becoming, focusing on the "primary emotion" of "*I feel.*" While he is talking about reading Buddhist sutras, the concept of

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[315] This term comes from Cliff Stagoll's entry for "Becoming" in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. See Adrian Parr, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 25-27.

"Mind Essence / The One" appears in *On the Road* and correlates with the process of becoming

as it applies to a social context of authenticity. While riding on the subway, Kerouac writes,

> I realized that everybody in the subway and all their thoughts and interests and the
>
> subway itself and their poor shoes and gloves etc. and the cellophane paper on the floor
>
> and the poor dust in the corners was all of one suchness and essence. I thought, "Mind
>
> essence loves everything, because it knows why everything is." And I saw that these
>
> people, and myself to a lesser extent, all were buried in selfhood which we took to be real
>
> . . . but the only real is the One, the One Essence that all's made of, and so we also took
>
> our limited and perturbed and contaminated minds (hankering after appointments,
>
> worries, sorrows, love) to be our own True Mind, but I saw True Mind itself, Universal
>
> and One, entertains no arbitrary ideas about these different seeming self-hangs on form,
>
> mind is IT itself, the IT . . . [316]

This letter is important because it describes, in more detail, Kerouac's philosophy of "IT," "Mind

Essence," and "The One," all of which represent the authentic, I argue. Similar to Dean's

explanation of "IT," this instance stops time – time becomes nonexistent in the moment Kerouac

is depicting. Furthermore, he fills the empty space of the subway and of the page with "the

substance of lives" – the other passengers, their thoughts and interests, ideas, etc., but everything

is interrelated. He also acknowledges the tendency of individuals to think of themselves as

separate selves, believing in a "false selfhood" which arises from social production of

"appointments" and "worries" and other social pursuits. Towards the end of this discussion, he

writes to Ginsberg, "This is not bullshit I really believe this and not only that I will prove it to you

at some time or other." Sal will say something very similar to Dean in the novel, placing this

concept in an American postwar light, as the narrative reads, "I told Dean that the thing that

bound us all together in this world was invisible, and to prove it pointed to long lines of telephone

poles that curved off out of sight over the bend of a hundred miles of salt" (211). Sal reveals the

interconnectivity of everything in the world that is at once "invisible," but also mobile, evident by the telephone lines that carry information across time and space.

6) "Down in Denver, down in Denver / All I did was die": Becoming and the "Penetration into the Heart of Things"[317]

First, the passage in *On the Road* that best emphasizes the nature of "becoming" and authenticity is the "Denver colored section" scene. After he leaves Dean in a "sullen moment," Sal reflects while walking in the "Denver colored section,"

> […] wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night . . . I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions . . . I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America. (180)

Critics tend to glean the racial insensitivity from the passage because it neglects the subjectivity of African Americans and instead focuses on Sal Paradise's appropriation. James Baldwin commented on this narrative, stating that it is "absolute nonsense . . . offensive nonsense at that," but he notes, "yet there is real pain in it, and real loss, however thin; and it is thin, like soup too long diluted; thin because it does not refer to reality, but to a dream."[318] And the subject, Baldwin

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[316] Kerouac and Charters. *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 460-461.

[317] In the following section of the chapter, the focus on this notion of the authentic from this passage will be on the notion of dying and becoming. The Original Scroll version again:

> All I wanted and all Neal wanted and all anybody wanted was some kind of penetration into the heart of things where, like in a womb, we could curl up and sleep the ecstatic sleep that Burroughs was experiencing with a good mainline shot of M. and advertising executives were experiencing with twelve Scotch & Sodas in Stouffers before they made the drunkard's train to Westchester – but without hangovers. And I had many a romantic fancy then, and sighed at my star. The truth of the matter is, you die, all you do is die, and yet you live, yes you live, and that's no Harvard lie. (Original Scroll version, 279)

[318] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*. New York: Dial Press, 1961, p. 232.

would argue, is the dreamer himself rather than the lived realities of African Americans, making

Sal's understanding of the world "diluted." Robert Holton calls the passage "a sort of fantasized

racial version of cross-dressing" and compares it to "a peculiar inversion of the earlier African-

American concern with 'passing,'" but notes, "Sal's desire to be a 'a Negro' is a very different

matter since he is seeking downward mobility in the belief that life is fuller outside the confines

of a materialistic modern white America."[319] Brendon Nicholls also claims that the passage's

representation of African Americans "sentimentalizes the carefree, musical, and ultimately

ahistorical 'Negro.'"[320] However, Nicholls is more sympathetic, pointing out that Kerouac was a

"a man divided against himself" who attempted to "map his marginal identity" by exploring his

racialized desire for African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans. As Nancy

McCampbell Grace points out, Kerouac possessed a "hybrid status" as the French-speaking son

of French-Canadian working class parents and experienced an identity crisis of his own.[321]

I agree with Baldwin and Holton that the passage is problematic, in one sense, due to the

fact that Sal fails to portray an awareness of the social oppression that led to racial exclusion, and

I most certainly agree that in passing, Kerouac fails to take into account the lived reality of black

individuals *within American history*. I also feel that the concept of "becoming" helps elucidate

the "pain and loss" that Kerouac is touching upon, and Baldwin acknowledges. Understandably,

these critics read the passage from the perspective of Sal Paradise, as the racially insensitive

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[319] See Robert Holton, "Kerouac Among the Fellahin: *On the Road* to the Postmodern." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (1995): 265-83, and Robert Holton, *On the Road: Kerouac's Ragged American Journey*. New York: Twayne, 1999, specifically pp. 89-93.

[320] Brendon Nicholls, "The Melting Pot that Boiled Over: Racial Fetishism and the *Lingua Franca* of Jack Kerouac's Fiction. *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.3 (2003), p. 533.

[321] Nicholls, p. 525. Nancy McCampbell Grace makes a similar argument in "A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac's *Maggie Cassidy, The Subterraneans*, and *Tristessa*." *College Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 1, "Teaching Beat Literature"(Winter, 2000), pp. 39-62. She begins by stating that readers must "not lose sight of Kerouac's hybrid status," as "a French-speaking son of working class, French-Canadian Catholics" who were labeled as "stupid and lazy" (40-41). She also explains how Kerouac claimed "Irish and Native-American descent, an ancestral mix that, whether actual or a product of family lore, aligned him with peoples long denied personhood" (41). John Leland also views the passage in a more positive manner, claiming that Kerouac is "not trying to develop an identity but to escape identity" in order "to invent himself anew. See John Leland, *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of on the Road (They're Not What You Think)*. New York: Viking, 2007, p. 83.

narrator of *On the Road*. However, if one reads the passage as indicative of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, Sal then becomes a "changing assemblage of forces" undergoing an intensive state.

The feeling of sadness, ecstasy, and sentiments of death are what connect this passage to Deleuze's theory of becoming. For instance, in this passage, which spans a page and a half, the narrative references sadness, ecstasy, or death three times each. In the sentences following the above excerpt, Sal progresses down the street where a softball game is playing out and he expresses, "Near me sat an old Negro who apparently watched the games every night. Next to him was an old white bum; then a Mexican family, then some girls, some boys – all humanity, the lot. Oh the sadness of the lights that night!...all I did was die" (180). This is important because the "intensive" and affective discourse here connects this passage to other narrative scenes that reveal the concept of becoming.

For instance, at other times in the novel, Sal relates the feelings of sadness, ecstasy, and death, and he expresses the yearning for "sweet nauseas of all kinds" in the "remembrance of some lost bliss" that "can only be reproduced in death" (124). The other rather explicit scene symbolizing a becoming is when Sal is in San Francisco on Market Street and while he is walking down the street, he is confronted by a proprietress of a "fish-n-chips joint." He stops and is overwhelmed with a vision – "It suddenly occurred to me this was my mother of about two hundred years ago in England, and that I was her footpad son, returning from gaol to haunt her honest labors in the hashery" (172). Sal is "frozen with ecstasy," and he does not know whether he is on "Canal Street in New Orleans" or "42nd Street in New York," and he has a "whole host of memories leading back to 1750 in England," but now he finds himself "in San Francisco now only in another life and in another body" (172). And then Sal reflects,

And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete *step across chronological time* into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, *and the sensation of death kicking at my*

heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank

where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent

and inconceivable radiancies shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotus lands

falling open in the magic mothswarm of heaven . . . . *I realized that I had died and been*

reborn numberless times but just didn't remember especially because the transitions from

life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy, a magical action for naught, like falling

asleep and waking up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it

[…] I thought I was going to die the very next moment. (173, italics added)

Sal is experiencing a becoming – a transhistorical, fantastic vision in which he is able to cross the

barriers of time and space and can embody a human history across time periods. Of course, this

is a mental vision captured literarily, but as Deleuze and Guattari show, there is no mental reality

that is separate from the social reality, and given the context of the "new vision" and search for

meaningful values, this narrative activity has a socially relevant implication in postwar society.

Similarly, in the "Denver colored section" passage, Sal is experiencing the intensity of

death that is indicative of a becoming – he desires to become a "Negro." This passage is

representative of the process of becoming, for Deleuze and Guattari illustrate that becoming is

like that cry "suspended between life and death" – it is the intensity from the forces of "repulsion

and attraction." The experience of death, they say, "is the most common of occurrences in the

unconscious, precisely because it occurs in life and for life, in *every passage or becoming, in*

every intensity as passage or becoming," and they conclude that desiring-machines "grow or

diminish according to an infinity of degrees" (AO 330, italics added). Sociality then involves

individuals that possess the potential to differ based on relations with other bodies or forces. As

Bruce Baugh explains it, "bodies experience increases or diminutions of their power or force of

existing," and when combining with other bodies that "agree with the body's constitutive

relation," "joy" is the result; when the relation is "incompatible," then the result is "sadness."[322]

Sal experiences both – sadness and ecstasy in this passage, and as a result, his encounter with the

African American man only increases Sal's intensive state.

Kerouac is attempting to celebrate something authentic in African Americans in the

passage, but unfortunately, Sal does not elaborate as to what it is exactly that makes the black

individual authentic in his eyes, but the narrative offers some postulations. Kerouac, through

literature, is trying to create a new vision for postwar existence, and his recognition of

authenticity in the marginalized presents a differing value for those on the outside of society. By

wanting to "dig" African Americans, as portrayed in this passage, Sal desires to view them on a

human level and "penetrate" the barrier that separates them. For instance, Eldridge Cleaver notes

in his memoir, *Soul on Ice*, how Kerouac and other "beatniks" "dared to do in the light of day

what America had long been doing in the sneak-thief anonymity of night – consorted on a human

level with the blacks."[323] This passage, and the desire embedded within it, resists the standard

white way of thinking that Baldwin, ironically, expresses in *The Fire Next Time.* Baldwin

discusses an "inherent superiority" that white people believe they possess over black individuals,

and the whites' ensuing failure to see black individuals as human.[324] He charges white people

with doing everything they can to secure their advantage and superiority, and one could

categorize that as a "white ambition," to put it in the "Denver colored section" context, and the

failure to acknowledge the humanity of black individuals as a "white disillusionment."

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[322] See Bruce Baugh, "Death" entry in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Adrian Parr, ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 64-65. Baugh summarizes Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the BwO as the "model" of zero intensity because the "BwO does not perform any labor," it is "catatonic" (65). He asserts, "Power is physical energy, a degree of intensity, so that every increase or decrease in power is an increase or decrease in intensity" (64).

[323] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*. New York, N.Y: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1999, p. 226.

[324] See James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. Baldwin talks about "Negro servants" who have had to steal "odds and ends out of white homes for generations," and how white people gained a sense of an "intrinsic superiority" (22). Later in the essay, he writes, "It is only the 'so-called American Negro' who remains trapped, disinherited, and despised, in a nation that has kept him in bondage for nearly four hundred years and is still unable to recognize him as a human being" (73).

However, Sal rejects the white world, the American postwar society that values

conformity, and one of the dimensions of that conformity entails white superiority. Sal is

choosing to celebrate African Americans in this scene. Because epideictic is the rhetoric of

beliefs, values, and desires, Sal is rejecting a value system in place that he finds inauthentic

because it constructs barriers that differentiate. Sal refers to himself as a "white man

disillusioned," led astray by "white ambitions" and this contrasts with the black man he sees who

is on the outskirts of the white world, but he fails to acknowledge in the passage that black men

and women were denied access to that white, privileged world. At the same time, Sal is trying to

escape the very world that produces inauthenticity, and he desires *something* authentic in the

black experience. Of course, the reason African Americas are outside of the system is because

they are forced to the margins, and this is *not* an equal "escaping field" so to speak.

Nonetheless, Kerouac is rejecting the white ambitions and trying to undo his

disillusionment by witnessing the humanity of African Americans in this passage, and his desire

is revolutionary, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, because it affects and attempts to imagine

changes to the established order of a white supremacist society. Sal's peregrination and desire in

that scene represents the "schizorevolutionary type or pole that follows the lines of escape of

desire; breaches the wall and causes flows to move . . . proceeding in an inverse fashion from that

of the other pole: I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black"

(AO 277).[325] It is at this point in *Anti-Oedipus* that Deleuze and Guattari directly mention

Kerouac as "the artist possessing the soberest of means who took revolutionary 'flight," and

"cross[ed] limits and frontiers, causing deterritorialized flows of desire to circulate" (AO 277).

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[325] This process of becoming represents the authentic because it represents the "nomadic" social
investment. Deleuze and Guattari discuss two major types of social investment, segregative and nomadic,
social investments that are associated with "two poles of delirium": a "paranoiac fascizing type or pole"
that invests in the socially produced "patterns of actions" and lead to individuals "going with the flow"
automatically ("yes, I am your kind, and I belong to the superior race and class"), and the
"schizorevolutionary type or pole that follows the lines of escape of desire; breaches the wall and causes
flows to move;…proceeding in an inverse fashion from that of the other pole: I am not your kind, I belong

When the "Denver colored section" passage is read within the context of becoming, the "Negro" characters in the scene then become infused with an American and democratic impetus, very similar to the special edition of the magazine *Survey Graphic* discussed in the Ellison chapter where Alain Locke states, "color becomes the acid test of our fundamental honesty in putting into practice the democracy we preach."[326] Kerouac recognizes the humanity of black individuals and this alternative vision resists racist scripts in postwar society that repressed and devalued African Americans. As Wright and Ellison have shown, American society around the turn of the century was a violently racist one, and a society that failed to recognize African Americans democratically, and Kerouac here does not portray Sal as expressing the sentiments of a violent racist, or one who looks down upon African Americans socially; Sal may come off as a disillusioned and superficially ignorant white man, but not the hate-filled racist white man that Wright depicted, most notably in Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945), nor the deceptive white man using black individuals for their causes like Ellison portrays in *Invisible Man*. Rather, Sal and Dean desire to know the lots of black men and women in the novel, and they view their experience as something desirous, albeit in racially assumptive ways, but as something worthy of attention and exploration. This represents a break in thinking, for not only do black individuals become more human in the eyes of white Sal, but this encounter reveals characteristics that are desirable and as something leading to the authentic. This is not the most racially sensitive passage, but it is a movement away from the racist white culture that has preceded postwar American society.

7) Conclusion

Containment narratives project an illusion, or a system of equilibrium amongst all individuals; however, as Deleuze and Guattari insist, individuals are subjects that continuously

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eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black. Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good" (AO 277).

pass through intensive, fluctuating states that produce variable intensive forces. Thus, the result

is a world inhabited by different individuals, different desiring-machines that produce positive

and negative forces. This connects to the Invisible Man's closing thoughts in Ellison's novel,

namely, the problem that Ellison so eloquently phrased – "America is woven of many strands; I

would recognize them and let it so remain," because "Our fate is to become one, and yet many."

The problem with containment culture and the conformity promulgated, is that it overemphasizes

the *one* and neglects *that which constitutes or differentiates the many*. And Kerouac protests this

way of living, and Sal and Dean's desire speaks to this sentiment through the language of

"digging" and authenticity. Kerouac, through the characters of Sal and Dean, rejects containment

culture's consumer politics as imbued in the home, and instead features mobility on the road as

leading to an American authenticity. Thus, Kerouac's novel of mobility and authenticity attempts

to preserve Ellison's formula, at least in Kerouac's "particular area of the American

experience,"[327] and he couches his critique of the postwar American experience in terms of desire

– containment culture amplifies a consumer-based domesticity in the home, and Kerouac moves

away from the home in order to get to know the many that make up the one national American

identity. In the end, Sal and Dean demonstrate the Invisible Man's admonition that "Life is to be

lived, not controlled."[328]

Desire in containment culture is socially manufactured – it is controlled. As containment

culture attempted to code the physical, suburban home as part of a politicized agenda, the

mobility *on the road* also functioned as a resistance to the sociopolitical culture of the postwar

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[326] Alain Locke, Introduction, "Color: Unfinished Business of Democracy," *Survey Graphic*. Vol. XXXI, No. 11, November 1942, p. 456.
[327] This is from Ralph Ellison's essay "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan. (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p.767.
[328] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. 1952. New York: Vintage International, 1995, Edition: 2nd, 1995, p. 577.

period. The transformation of authenticity as embedded in desire and mobility that Sal and Dean

introduce takes place against this cultural code of home, marriage, and stability. After Sal tells

Dean about wanting to get married and settle down, Dean relates: "I've been digging you for

years about the *home* and marriage and all those fine wonderful things about your soul" (117).

Yet, with the advent of a culture of containment, Sal and Dean desire mobility and they traverse

the American landscape interacting and coming into contact with various bodies and ideas. As a

result, they experience "intensive states" of becoming-authentic in *On the Road*, and it is this

process of becoming that connects the authentic to a national identification with America-as-

home in the novel.

In a very important passage following Carlo Marx's query into the meaning of their

mobility, Dean becomes "tremendously excited about everything he saw, everything he talked

about, every detail of every moment that passed. He was out of his mind with real belief" (120).

Dean characteristically discusses "knowing time," but in what follows, he bridges the concept of

authenticity from "knowing time" to "knowing America":

> "Furthermore, we know America, we're at home; I can go anywhere in America and get
>
> what I want because it's the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they
>
> do. We give and take and go in the incredibly complicated sweetness zigzagging every
>
> side." There was nothing clear about the things he said, but what he meant to say was
>
> somehow made pure and clear. (121)

These passages revolving around Dean and mobility contain the "schizophrenic" energy that

Deleuze and Guattari discuss and revolutionary potential in a postwar American climate. To put

it another way, this passage carries out the transformation of the process of becoming – as a result

of their travels, Sal and Dean now "know America," they have "IT," the "pearl." In the postwar

period, the home is connected to the ideological parameters of containment culture, i.e. marriage,

the suburbs, and consumerist spending. By declaring they feel "at home" in America after

moving around the country, they transform the concept of home from a political agent in conditioning "good citizens" to an authentic home where they "know the people" – they become-America. Dean then comes to a revelation and overcodes the home from one of marriage and stability, to America and mobility – they "*know America*" after they "give and take and go in the complicated sweetness." Now, America is not only an imagined community; with mobility, America becomes, in a way for Sal and Dean, an embodied community.

In other words, rather than sitting back at home and imagining the nation, Sal and Dean traverse the landscape attempting to discover and "dig" the individuals that make up the community. A more authentic desire exists in "penetrating into the heart of things," and Sal proclaims, "the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles across the night (5-6). Sal praises these "dingledodies" who "rush" and "dance" down the street "digging everything" and who escape "impure attachments" and "obeisance to the outside Society." Kerouac presents a neologism, "dingledodies," to represent the Deleuze and Guattari "schizophrenic" traversing the plane of immanence and desiring in free form. More importantly, Kerouac is creating his own code here through the novel's most representative language ("IT," "madness," "dig," "wow," etc.). Thus, "madness" becomes a plane of understanding and is celebrated as a praiseworthy quality, for Sal explains that he and Dean communicated with one another through "levels of madness" (4). Dean's madness opened up possibilities for him and Sal that were otherwise suppressed, or one could say "contained."

Kerouac's novel presents different values as the objects of desire and transforms what a consumerist society judges as the "good life," and this is how *On the Road* is representative of the *literary epideictic*: it amplifies the social conditions that repress authentic desire, and by displaying those conditions as unworthy or undesirable, and Sal and Dean's desire as authentic and praiseworthy, it issues a value judgment on the current state of affairs. For Kerouac, and the

Beat movement he inaugurates, the best means for surviving the conditions threatening their very

existence exists within the creation of a new way of thinking, a new way of being.

"Perhaps I know best why man is the only animal that laughs: he alone suffers so excruciatingly that he was *compelled* to invent laughter."
(Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 74)

"What springs from great books is schizo-laughter or revolutionary joy, not the anguish of our pathetic narcissism, not the terror of our guilt…. There is always an indescribable joy that springs from great books, even when they speak of ugly, desperate, or terrifying things…. You cannot help but laugh when you mix up the codes." (Gilles Deleuze, *Nomadic Thought*, p. 258)

"What, then, is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then [individuals] will be able to propitiate the gods, and defend [themselves] against [their] enemies, and win the contest." (Plato, *Laws*, vii, 803)

Chapter V: The Therapeutic Value of Play as Power:
Power, Play, and Laughter in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Introduction

This chapter presents a *literary epideictic* theory of *play as power* for reading Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. This theory combines elements of play, power, and laughter in a way that "mixes up the codes," to put it in Deleuzian terms. In Kesey's novel, play is always-already-ensconced in power. While the book in fact addresses "ugly, desperate, and terrifying things," it is also preoccupied with laughter, even when the nature of the mental ward patients' fate is not humorous. Indeed, laughter springs in *Cuckoo's Nest* when the patients "play" with the codes and as a result, play and laughter impede disciplinary power's control over them. To prioritize this argument, this chapter is predominantly concerned with *play as power*, which is narratively adjoined to laughter. However, I am not concerned with the humor or the *meaning* of laughter per se, but with its narrative presence as a representation of the "asignifying rhetorical force" to use John Muckelbauer's terminology.[329] Laughter possesses the rhetorical

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[329] See John Muckelbauer, *The Future of Invention: Rhetoric, Postmodernism, and the Problem of Change*. Albany: SUNY University Press, 2008. In discussing the scope of rhetoric, Muckelbauer explains how rhetoric has "traditionally been limited to particular concerns," what he calls "managerial rhetoric," or, the

force of *play as power*, which serves as a counterstrike to the Big Nurse's domination, or, as

Kingsley Widmer puts it, it represents McMurphy's "countertherapy in the world as psychiatric

ward."[330]

I am not making the argument that *Cuckoo's Nest* is a humorous novel, or even a text ripe

with "black humor" as some critics have claimed;[331] but just as equally, I am not saying that

humor is absent in the novel. While *Cuckoo's Nest* is not overtly humorous, it does overtly

feature power *and* play. Play and humor do not always coexist, which may seem obvious, just as

laughter and humor are not directly correlated. To put this into perspective, Brian Boyd

acknowledges in his article, "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor," that individuals

do not "only laugh at jokes," and many people find disparate things funny – "words, intonations,

accents, appearances, characters, actions, situations – whether or not they are *designed* to be

funny";[332] and Cate Watson distinguishes between laughter and humor in the following way:

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way in which "speakers turn to rhetoric only after they have decided upon the proposition that they will
advocate," and in this case, rhetoric serves as "a supplement to the proposition" (16). Additionally, Muckel-
bauer distinguishes between "acts of communication" and "acts of persuasion" – an act of communication
possesses "a signifying operation," which "envisions the proposition as a meaning, a signified content, and
attempts to transmit this meaning to another person's understanding" as "if that proposition were a
meaning, as if it were, above all, an identifiable content that can be reproduced" (17). Mucklebauer assigns
acts of persuasion an "asignifying operation," meaning they do not attempt to "reproduce" meaning, but
attempt "to make the proposition compelling, *to give it a certain force*," relying instead on the "capacity to
exert a compelling force, its ability to evoke particular responses in specific audiences" (17, italics added).
[330] Kingsley Widmer, "The Post-Modernist Art of Protest: Kesey and Mailer as American Expressions of
Rebellion." *The Centennial Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer 1975), p. 130.
[331] See Jingqiong Zhou, *Raymond Carver's Short Fiction in the History of Black Humor*. New York: P.
Lang, 2006. Zhou spends time talking about Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest*, pointing out that black humor deals
with death, decay, disease, fear, and insanity among the many characteristics, and she claims that
McMurphy is the "hero" who fights against the "system," and ultimately, the "humor of the novel, based on
a comic vision, however, prevents this oppressiveness of death and decay from becoming dominant in the
novel" (122). My argument begins with the fact that an oppressive system of control – with threats of
death and decay – is *already* dominant, and *play as power* counters that system. I also claim that the novel
is not overly humorous and McMurphy is not a hero, but he is a pseudo-epideictic rhetor. Also, see
Raymond Olderman, "The Grail Knight Arrives: Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." In
George Searles, Ed. *A Casebook for Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Albuquerque:
University of New Mexico Press, 1992, p. 75. Raymond Olderman believes McMurphy's laughter
represents "black humor" as the only method to resist the world established by the Big Nurse.
[332] Brian Boyd, "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 28,
no. 1, 2004, p. 1; 2. Boyd discusses play in animals and humans and points out that "it is the surprise
movements [in play] that produce the greatest vocal release and the greatest apparent pleasure, the
unexpected within the context of harmless play. And in human laughter we find the same" (10). And see
John Morreall, "Humor as Cognitive Play." *Journal Of Literary Theory* 3.2 (2009): 241-260. Morreall

humor is "an attitude of play and an awareness of the comic *potential* of the human condition,"

and laughter is the "interruption which brings about a change of outlook."[333]

Thus, there is a complicated relationship between play, power, and laughter. First,

laughter emerged as a "play signal"; but, as pointed out, it does not always accompany play or

humor.[334] In *Cuckoo's Nest,* the World Series debacle, for instance, is not very comedic; and on

another note, the fishing trip that the patients take *does* in fact contain humorous activity, but that

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references the work of ethologist Jan van Hooff, who has theorized that human laughter evolved from pre-human apes and functioned as "play signals" (qtd. 253 in Morreall). Morreall begins his article by discussing the difficulty in navigating theories of humor and laughter because of the similarities and associations among terms and definitions. He delves into the main three theories of humor: The Superiority Theory, the Relief Theory, and the Incongruity Theory. His theory of humor as cognitive play more closely aligns with the Incongruity theory and its emphasis on cognitive activity – "perceptions, thoughts, mental patterns, and expectations," for the Incongruity theory involves a "cognitive shift," one that is "sudden, abrupt," and is "pleasurable" (250-251). Morreall adds that humor is "a non-serious activity in which we suspend practical concern and noetic concern – concern about what is true," and Morreall believes humor is "a social experience," and "a form of play" that produces what he refers to as "mental jolts" (251). He points out that in enjoying something that violates our mental interpretations, we are not concerned with the truth or meaning, much like Mucklebauer's insistence on the *asignifying* force. Morreall claims that the suspension of practical concern is a notion of play (252-253), and he proposes that when an individual experiences a "cognitive shift," she is in "play mode," and when she finds the shift "pleasurable," she does not react with negative emotions, and this process is expressed in "laughter, which signals to others that [she] can relax and enjoy the cognitive shift" (254). For more on the different theories of humor, see John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; Cate Watson, "A Sociologist Walks Into A Bar (And Other Academic Challenges): Towards A Methodology Of Humour." *Sociology* 49.3 (2015): 407-421; and Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.

    Of course, in the context of *Cuckoo's Nest*, this needs a bit of qualifying. First, what Morreall calls "surprise movements" is the unexpected behavior of McMurphy. And there is a great notion or feeling of "harmless play" in the novel, especially in the conversations that Harding and McMurphy have in relation to flustering Nurse Ratched and their bet, for they initially comment on how she cannot do anything to McMurphy if he keeps his "cool," making it *seem* as if it is harmless activity to "get her goat."

[333] Cate Watson, "A Sociologist Walks into a Bar (and Other Academic Challenges): Towards a Methodology of Humour." *Sociology*: Vol. 49 (3), 2015, p. 417, italics added.

[334] As a case in point, John Bruns's article, "Laughter in the Aisles," discusses an incident that took place in 1994 in which two high school students laughed at a scene in *Schindler's List* that depicted a Nazi soldier gunning down a Jewish woman. See John Bruns, "Laughter in the Aisles: Affect and Power in Contemporary Theoretical and Cultural Discourse." *Studies in American Humor* 7 (2000): 5-23. Following the spectacle and the ensuing exit of the students from the theater, there was a large cultural reaction to the incident in which the students were seen as deviant and disrespectful. Bruns wants to consider the other possibilities in explaining the laughter and he concludes that there is "a possibility of seeing laughter not as reactive to power, but as altogether different, free from the terms and conditions of power so central to our cultural investigations" (5). He does a fine job at arguing that the laughter at the scene could be other than oppositional, as in "cooperative and coadjutant" if one considers the historical significance that the class saw the film on Martin Luther King Day, and the significance of the "premise of Oakland ghetto life" (10). However, in *Cuckoo's Nest*, I argue that the laughter is absolutely connected to the terms and conditions of institutional power and it is a counterforce to that power on the part of McMurphy and the patients. Laughter is a rhetoric of play *and* power, or, what I am trying to establish, the rhetoric of *play as power*.

scene is more concerned with power (and by extension, *play as power*). Secondly, laughter has

not been associated with power in a critical sense, and Gaëtan Brulotte's article, "Laughing at

Power," touches upon the complicated theoretical relationship between laughter and power. He

begins by defining power as the ability of an individual, institution, or idea to influence the

behavior of others, and he contends that laughter indeed does have power. However, when

discussing economic, political, or other discursive powers, he concedes that laughter has no place

in those realms because those with economic or political power, for example, possess "the means

of dissuasion, punishment, persuasion, or conditioning." Yet, he states, "laughter is therefore not

in power and probably never will be, since it is power's most feared enemy; *but it does have*

power."[335]

Furthermore, in discussing laughter and power, critics have employed the epideictic

language of "unmasking" and "educating" an audience in civic matters and in the development of

values.[336] Brulotte continues, using epideictic language to convey his point, stating, "the principal

aim of traditional comedy was not so much to make its audience laugh as to *unmask, avenge or*

educate. Laughter is just a means to achieve this end."[337] Therefore, the force that laughter

excoriates can be viewed as a form of "seriousness." Anca Parvulescu calls laughter's "enemies"

the "guardians of the prohibition on certain laughs … heralds of a heavy seriousness." She points

out that historically, seriousness has an "official tone," one that has "intimidated, demanded,

prohibited, oppressed," connecting to Brulotte's point about power's "means of dissuasion." She

too emphasizes epideictic themes when she discusses how authoritative figures establish "values

and rules of appropriate behavior [that] become habits of a sedentary body," communicate with

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[335] Gaëtan Brulotte, "Laughing at Power," in *Laughter and Power*. Eds. John Parkin and John Phillips. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006, p. 11.
[336] See John Parkin and John Phillips eds. *Laughter and Power*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006. For instance, Brulotte's introductory article connects laughter to epideictic's quality of mirroring the present reality, noting, "Laughter functions according to the laws of relativity, for it varies not only according to period, but also according to the individual's intelligence, quickness of mind, education, culture, social milieu, mentality and psychology as well as context" (14).
[337] Brulotte, "Laughing at Power," p. 14.

"dogmatic solemnity in language, gesture, face and tone," and make "Thou shall not laugh [their]

aegis."[338] These "heralds of seriousness" fear laughter because laughter and humor, as Michael

Billig points out, possess the power to "disrupt order."[339] Therefore, laughter, and *play as power*,

both possess an epideictic quality. Epideictic addresses matters of the present, and epideictic

evaluates the social values and conduct of a community in a present predicament, and *play as

power* addresses the spatial boundaries of social order. However, with *play as power,* the three

elements of play, power, and laughter are seldom divorced from each other, especially in Kesey's

novel, and they work together to carry out an epideictic objective.

Ken Kesey's novel is epideictic because it captures and illustrates a particular quality of

the postwar moment, one that reveals how the social environment attempted to control the

individuals within it. Kesey witnessed a society that began to experiment with modes of social

control. The late 1950s and the 1960s were impacted by government and CIA-funded mind-

control experiments with drugs, like LSD, and by psychiatry's role in "adjusting" the "insane"

with psychiatric methods, like Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT).[340] Kesey would have insider

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[338] Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010, p. 5.

[339] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage, 2005, p.
180. Billig also states that laughter and humor can "impose order" as well. He offers a social critique of
humor, claiming that laughter has a "rhetorical character" as opposed to an "inner state," and consequently,
"humour needs to be understood in relation to the social order. […] It means having a wider psychological
view about the complex relations between the individual and the social. The dynamics of humour are
situated within, as well as reacting against, these complex relations" (180).
        Both Billig and Nick Butler discuss laughter in epideictic terms. See Nick Butler, "Joking Aside:
Theorizing Laughter in Organizations." *Culture and Organization*. Vol. 21, No. 1, 2015, pp. 42-58. Billig
talks about laughter in disciplinary and rebellious language, stating it possesses the "power to enforce the
demands of social order" because forms of humor like embarrassment and ridicule (accompanied with
laughter) can "function to protect the social order, keeping social actors in line, but simultaneously it can
express pleasure at subverting that same order" (234; 235). Butler also mentions the capacity of
embarrassment and writes, "Because it has the capacity to embarrass those at whom it is directed, laughter
prompts individuals to reform their attitudes and actions," while the "fear of being laughed at – and
therefore embarrassed – serves a powerful incentive for individuals to act in accordance with the accepted
norms of a particular group or social milieu" (50).

[340] For information on the CIA's involvement in experimenting with LSD for mind control, see John
Marks, *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control*. New York: New York
Times Books, 1979, pp. 53-72. Marks had access to the documentary base of the CIA under the Freedom
of Information Act and was able to study 16,000 documents regarding the CIA's work in mind control (vii).
The project originated as a desire to control the enemies' minds with drugs, i.e. "biological and chemical
materials" (56). The investigation was titled Project MKULTRA and there began to be a shift, with the
head of the project, Sidney Gottlieb stating the purpose was "to investigate whether and how it was

access to the bowels of psychiatry from his experiences at Menlo Park Veteran's Hospital, as he

experienced both of these institutional phenomenon – his visions as a drug volunteer and as an

aide in a mental hospital allowed him to *see* the power dynamics at work in the psychiatric

profession under the aegis of therapeutic community. Kesey incorporated his experiences on the

ward into *Cuckoo's Nest*, and he even went so far as to secretly administer a "shock therapy"

treatment to write the scene where the Chief and McMurphy undergo the procedure.[341] As Rick

Dodgson notes, Kesey drew from the patients at the mental hospital where he worked as an aide

to craft the characters in *Cuckoo's Nest*, even incorporating some of their language, like Ruckly's

"Ffffuck the wife" comment, and Kesey, discussing McMurphy, even acknowledges, "Yes

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possible to modify an individual's behavior by covert means" (57). Marks explains how the CIA began to focus on "individuals," quoting an official involved with the testing as claiming the CIA wanted to know how the drugs affected "normal people, not sick ones," detailing, "We thought about the possibility of putting some in a city water supply and having the citizens wander around in a more or less happy state, not terribly interested in defending themselves" (59; 58). The CIA's academic researchers published their findings on "pulse rates" and other physiological matters, but "they would only tell the CIA how the drug could be used to ruin that patient's marriage or memory" (61). Thus, LSD and the CIA mind-control drug experiments are linked to psychiatry's use of ECT in the attempt to *alter* the mind and memory. For more information on psychiatry's use of ECT and "control," see David Ingleby, "Mental Health and Social Order," in *Social Control and the State*. Ed. Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983; and Edward Shorter and David Healy, *Shock Therapy: A History of Electroconvulsive Treatment in Mental Illness*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007; and Laura Hirshbein and Sharmalie Sarvananda, "History, Power, And Electricity: American Popular Magazine Accounts Of Electroconvulsive Therapy, 1940–2005."*Journal Of The History Of The Behavioral Sciences* 44.1 (2008): pp. 1-18.

[341] Regarding his most famous novel, in the collection of writings, *Kesey's Garage Sale*, Kesey recounts the background to *Cuckoo's Nest*, and he explains that the novel was written while on the mental ward, a ward that he would end up working at as an aide. In an episode where he describes a doctor administering drugs during the government experiments that he volunteered for, he tells the doctor that he does not hear anything, "Just the room full of men outside my door (the experiment being conducted on an actual ward) clamoring their mutual misery, calling with every word and laugh and cough for help, for light, for God at least." See Ken Kesey, K*esey's Garage Sale*. New York: Viking Press, 1973, p. 7. And as Stephen Tanner notes, while working at Menlo Park Veteran's Hospital, Kesey had experienced "unpleasant encounters with rigid and demanding nurses; he scuffled with a black aide; he attended patients with a variety of peculiar behavior patterns; and he observed generally how a psychiatric ward functions" (Tanner 21). See Stephen L. Tanner, *Ken Kesey*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983, p. 21. In reference to the shock therapy treatment, in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe describes how Kesey "even had someone give him a shock treatment, clandestinely, so he could write a passage in which Chief Broom comes back from the 'Shock Shop'" (Wolfe, 49).

McMurphy was fictional, [but he was] inspired by the tragic longing of the real men I worked with on the ward."[342]

1) "For the Patient's Good": *Parens Patriae*
and The Epideictic Exigency of Therapeutic Community

One morning, the patients of *Cuckoo's Nest* are on their way to get chest X-rays for TB, and they pass the "Shock Shop." The Chief describes the "twinkling tubes" and the screaming of the "victim," and McMurphy inquires as to the purpose of the room. Harding explains the Shock Shop's function of "brain burning," financing a "trip to the moon" with the patient's "billions of brain cells on deposit."[343] When McMurphy clarifies it as "shooting electricity through [a] skull," Harding informs him that it is "entirely painless," and does in fact have its advantages – "it's cheap [and] quick" (162). Then Harding explains the origin of the method, how two psychiatrists visiting a slaughterhouse witnessed the butchers using a "hammer" on the cows to induce an epileptic convulsion; but then Harding explains "a man wasn't a cow," and if medical practitioners were going to "knock a man in a head," the needed something they could rely upon, and they "finally settled on electricity." McMurphy, stunned, asks, "didn't they think it might do some damage? Didn't the public raise Cain about it?" Harding responds, telling McMurphy that it is for "the patient's good of course. Everything done here is for the patient's good," and he admonishes his new friend, "I don't think you fully understand the public my friend; in this country, when something is out of order, then the quickest way to get it fixed is the best way" (163).

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[342] See Rick Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013, p. 137. Dodgson includes testimony from Kesey where the author states, "I dealt with people all night long, people crazy as hell […] I'd sit in the nurses' room behind this big nice typewriter" (Kesey qtd. in Dodgson, 137). He talks about Ruckly and the Big Nurse in particular here, specifically, how the real woman the Nurse is created from was not the "villain," but a "minion." Also, see Ken Kesey, *Kesey's Garage Sale*. New York: Viking Press, 1973, p. 7 for a discussion of McMurphy's character, quoted here.
[343] Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. 1962. Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2007. All future references from *Cuckoo's Nest* will be taken from this addition and page numbers will appear in parentheses.

Harding is giving McMurphy a lesson in contemporary psychiatric treatment methods,

namely, of Electro Convulsive Therapy, or, as the novel labels it, Electro Shock Therapy

(EST),[344] and the novel's treatment of this therapeutic method connects the novel to the social

climate of the 1950s and 1960s. Laura Hirshbein and Sharmalie Sarvananda, in the article,

"History, Power, and Electricity: American Popular Magazine Accounts of Electroconvulsive

Therapy, 1940-2005," discuss ECT's tainted reputation of a psychiatry of "coercion," not only in

terms of treatments, but in terms of defining "normality." They analyze popular accounts in

magazines, journals, and media that illustrate both sides of the debate surrounding ECT between

1940-2005, specifically, whether or not ECT was a therapeutic measure to "eradicate illness," or

a method in psychiatry's (alleged) tradition of "overuse and misuse" of power.[345] They write,

"one commentator in the early 1950s identified problems that could result form the dynamic

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[344] The history of ECT originated with Italian psychiatrists, Ugo Cerletti and Lucio Bini in the late 1930s. According to historical accounts, Cerletti visited a pig slaughterhouse and witnessed how the slaughterhouse utilized electricity in the process and decided to use explore it with human beings. See Edward Shorter and David Healy, *Shock Therapy: A History of Electroconvulsive Treatment in Mental Illness*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007, pp. 36-37. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, Harding touches upon this history in his recap of the procedure to McMurphy. He says, "two psychiatrists were visiting a slaughterhouse, for God knows what perverse reason, and were watching cattle being killed by a blow between the eyes with a sledgehammer," and they noticed that "some would fall to the floor in a state that greatly resembled an epileptic convulsion." He finally states, "It was known that men coming out of an epileptic convulsion were inclined to be calmer and more peaceful for a time, and that violent cases completely out of contact were able to carry on rational conversations after convulsion. No one knew why; they still don't" (162). This reminds me of an analogy that Laura Hirshbein and Sharmalie Sarvananda include in their article, "History, Power, And Electricity," where they quote a 1998 article by a doctor whose mother had received and recovered after ECT. He states, "One doctor compared ECT to rebooting a computer when the screen freezes; it fixes the problem, although you're not sure how" (Owen qtd. In Hirshbein and Sarvananda, 12). See Laura Hirshbein and Sharmalie Sarvananda, "History, Power, And Electricity: American Popular Magazine Accounts Of Electroconvulsive Therapy, 1940–2005."*Journal Of The History Of The Behavioral Sciences* 44.1 (2008): 1-18.

[345] Laura Hirshbein and Sharmalie Sarvananda, "History, Power, And Electricity: American Popular Magazine Accounts Of Electroconvulsive Therapy, 1940–2005."*Journal Of The History Of The Behavioral Sciences* 44.1 (2008): 12; 11. Two of the more interesting accounts they juxtapose include a *Time* article and a *Newsweek* article, both written in 1972, that offer two very different interpretations of ECT. The *Newsweek* article, "Depression and Electroshock," was more neutral, and said that the ECT apparatus used to be "medieval" in its appearance, but now electrodes are placed like headphones above and slightly in front of each ear" (6). The *Time* article, "Most Common Mental Disorder," portrayed ECT in extremely negative fashion. The authors quote the *Time* article: "As practiced today, shock treatments are administered through electrodes attached to the patient's temples. A device the size of a file-card box is used to send an alternating current of about 400 milliamperes through the brain at roughly 100 volts for seven seconds (electric chairs employ a seven-ampere current at 50,000 volts)" (7). They mention that the imagery of the "electric chair" could definitely horrify readers, and controversy and criticism began to

between practitioner and ECT patient. In 1953, journalist Lucy Freeman explained that the

widespread use of convulsive therapies acted as a *quick fix* for patients and complained that this

approach interfered with psychiatrists' abilities to truly understand their patients." Hirshbein and

Sarvananda explain how Freeman insisted that psychiatrists "needed to talk with their patients

and get to know them rather than assume that psychiatric treatments administered from a distance

could solve complex human problems."[346]

Kesey actually touches upon this very sentiment in in a transcription of his "first [drug]

trip" at the Menlo Park Veteran's Hospital. As Scott Parker notes, it is crucial in understanding

Kesey as a writer, and I believe it adds to the epideictic nature of the narrative of *Cuckoo's Nest.*

The transcription reads, "Nurse: (from the hallway) 'Are you all right in there, Mr. Nichols?'

Kesey: 'Are you all right in there, Mr. Nichols?' See listen to that, that's candy from home.

They're all right. Everybody's all right. The doctors can't really give any of theirselves (sic),

which is what the patients want."[347] This conflict between the practitioners "giving of

themselves," versus "giving the push of a button" that releases electricity to be administered on

the brain, implicates the relationship dynamics between the patients and the practitioners,

specifically in regards to ECT, for the patients were rather passive in this treatment, sometimes

even unaware of ECT while it was being administered. Hirshbein and Sarvananda even conclude

that to an extent, patients undergoing the treatment have to "surrender their power" to the doctors

and staff and what they think is best for them in the end.[348]

To place this in an epideictic context, David Ingleby, in his article, "Mental Health and

Social Order," talks about the work of Robert Castel and Foucault and how the "medical model'

is defined in "a particular set of practices and power relations." He clarifies, "In these practices,

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circulate because of the public perception of "psychiatrists [who] actively sought out control over all
aspects of patients' lives and indeed anyone else who crossed their paths" (7).
[346] Ibid., p. 5.
[347] Taken from "Ken Kesey's First 'Trip.'" Reprinted in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*. Ed. Scott Parker.
Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014, p. 8.
[348] Hirshbein and Sarvananda, "History, Power, an Electricity," p. 14.

first, authority is exerted not in the name of law or morality, but by virtue of the doctor's right to

choose for the sick person what shall be done in his own interests." He goes on to explain that

when a medical practitioner's authority is "coupled with *parens patriae* – the right of the state to

manage the lives of person deemed lacking in responsibility – the doctor's power is more

formidable still; but even the private patient who voluntarily seeks treatments puts himself 'under

the doctor,' as the saying goes," submitting to the doctor's appraisal of what treatment is

necessary for "[the patient's] own good," leading to an (ir)rational trust on the part of the patient

for the doctor to select the methods that will lead to the avoidance of pain and even death.[349] In

this way, psychiatry plays an important epideictic role in "not only policing norms, but also in

creating them." Ingleby asserts that doctors have a "a domain of power all of [their] own" and

psychiatry became aligned with the state because it functioned as a "soft apparatus of control" – it

was not the "penalty" of incarceration of the prison system, but became a "parallel apparatus" to

the legal system, intervening by controlling the insane under the guise of "benevolent

paternalism."[350]

Furthermore, as Timothy Kneeland and Carol Warren explain, ECT stirred quite the

controversy over the legal and ethical implications of the psychiatric method. They suggest the

legal implications, writing, "Prior to the 1960s, mental patients were considered wards of the

state, and ECT was given without consent," but a Supreme Court decision ruled that patients "had

a right to treatment, a right to informed consent to treatment, a right to refuse treatment, a right to

access their own patient records, and a right to due process in involuntary civil commitment."[351]

Additionally, the "Foucault Tribunal on the State of Psychiatry," a four-day event in Berlin in

1998, brought together scholars, practitioners, and former patients to discuss the institution of

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[349] See David Ingleby, "Mental Health and Social Order," in *Social Control and the State*. Ed. Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983, p. 162.
[350] Ibid., p. 158.
[351] Timothy W. Kneeland and Carol A. B. Warren. *Pushbutton Psychiatry: A History of Electroshock in America*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002, p. 72. The authors discuss the Supreme Court decision of *Wyatt v. Stickney* (1972), which "gave patients the right to informed consent" (72).

psychiatry and its relationship to human rights, finding that the institution of psychiatry violated

and committed crimes against humanity, including coercion, forms of torture, and noncompliance

of therapy, from its inception until the then-present day.[352] Tristano Ajmone, president of Italian

Observatory on Mental Health (OISM), states in a speech published on the *International*

Association Against Psychiatric Assault website, psychiatry is not a "branch of medicine"

because mental illnesses are "measured by means of eye observation and verbal interaction (or

worse, often just by means of third party reports."[353] He continues, "Psychiatry performs a

function of social control on behalf of the State, it deprives of liberty people who have not

committed crimes, or it excuses people who have committed crimes on the assumption that they

were not responsible [for] their actions when they committed their criminal act."[354]

The main point regarding this correlation of psychiatry to state control is that Kesey

would have been aware of the social implications of the psychiatric treatments in vogue at the

time. To put this into perspective, during an interview where Kesey is talking about the novel, he

recalls his experiences on the ward, as a volunteer for drug experiments, and as an aide, and he

recalls,

> I saw the looks on these people's faces [in the mental institution] and realized that Freud
>
> was full of shit. Something really dug deep in these people's minds, and it wasn't the
>
> way they were treated when they were toilet trained; it wasn't the way their father
>
> rejected them when they were thirteen. It was something to do with the American
>
> Dream. How the American Dream gave us our daily energy and yet the dream was
>
> perverted and not allowed to develop fully. *Cuckoo's Nest* was supposed to be a

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[352] For more on the Foucault Tribunal, go to http://www.foucault.de. There is a video of the event on the website. For a "Statement of Charges" from the Foucault Tribunal, visit http://www.oikos.org/ectcomments2.htm.

[353] Tristano Ajmone, "The Foucault Tribunal: The Ignored Users' Voice." *International Association Against Psychiatric Assault*. N.d. http://www.iaapa.de/ft_italy.htm#foot. Accessed 20 July 2016. For more on Tristano Ajmone, see "From Psychiatric Coercion to Libertarianism: A Personal Journey." *Mad in America: Science Psychiatry and Community*. N.d., https://www.madinamerica.com/author/tajmone/. Accessed 20 July 2016.

revolutionary book. It was supposed to be about America, about how the sickness in

America is in the consciousness of the people. Not the government, not the cops, and *not*

Big Nurse."[355]

The "sickness" is *in* the consciousness of the people, and the government, psychiatrists, and the

Big Nurse – all players in Kesey's notion of the Combine – plant the seeds of the disease into the

minds of the people. They pervert the American Dream and they spread the "sickness," or, more

fittingly, *inject* the sickness into the individual consciousness of the people. Kesey is pointing out

how *Cuckoo's Nest* is misinterpreted, by readers and critics alike – it was not a novel featuring a

prankster in McMurphy, for "kicks," or to illustrate drug-influenced hallucinations on the part of

Kesey as author, and the Chief as unreliable narrator. Rather, Kesey is examining a specific form

of social control in the novel through the lens of psychiatry, connected to the cultural promise of

the American Dream. He is depicting how power relations work on the consciousness of the

people, commenting on the forms of power and control wrapped up in the invisible ideology of

the American Dream and how it is making people "sick."

Kesey, then, would have been aware on how ECT affected men in the postwar era, and he

even includes a sampling of the current social and psychiatric trend in relation to ECT in the

narrative through the character of Harding, which I will discuss shortly. Kneeland and Warren

explain how electroshock therapy was widely used by health professionals during the 1940s-

1960s to maintain fixed gender roles and normative behavior, but the coming era of social

progress would begin to challenge the treatment in this capacity. Kneeling and Warren point out

that two thirds of ECT patients in the mid-century were women, but that "men were also

hospitalized and given ECT in the context of gender and sexual roles. Males who deviated from

the prescribed sexual interest in females," and men who "behaved in ways unbecoming to men,"

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[354] Ibid.

[355] Whitmer, Peter O, and Bruce VanWyngarden. *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture That Changed America: William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, Norman Mailer, Tom Robbins, Hunter S. Thompson*. Macmillan, 1987, p. 202-203.

including dissentious behavior and a disregard for authority in relation to 1950s and 1960s

standards, were "liable for EST and other treatments."[356] Jamie Scott, a project manager for *ONE*

National Gay & Lesbian Archives, discusses how the *American Psychiatric Association*, points

out that in the mid-twentieth century, therapies for homosexuality sought to "physically" remove

the "illness." She writes, "In the 1940s, homosexuals were also involuntarily committed to

psychiatric facilities by their families, with the hospitals promising that the patient would

eventually leave the facility cured of their 'sexual illness.' Not only were they not allowed to

leave, but they were often subjected to cruel and inhumane treatments, including castrations,

torture drugs, shock therapy, and lobotomies."[357]

Harding's character serves as just one example of the *epideictic exigency* for the novel,

and also extends it to the broader social atmosphere of the time regarding power and control.

Whether or not the character is based on a real character is irrelevant. The point is that Kesey

narratively captures remnants and similarities to the social environment and mirrors the

psychiatric and social context in the novel. Towards the end of the novel, McMurphy asks

Harding what will happen after he escapes and they wake up on the ward the day after the party.

Harding goes into detail about why he is in the ward in the first place, and it is here Kesey

connects the microcosm of the "Inside" world of the ward, to the macrocosm of the "Outside"

social world of postwar America. Harding exclaims,

> "I don't think I could give you an answer. Oh, I could give you Freudian reasons with
>
> fancy talk, and that would be right as far as it went. But what you want are the reasons
>
> for the reasons, and I'm not able to give you those. Not for the others, anyway. For
>
> myself? Guilt. Shame. Fear. Self-belittlement. I discovered at an early age that I was –

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[356] Kneeland and Warren, *Pushbutton Psychiatry*, p. 62.

[357] Jamie Scott, "Shock the Gay Away: Secrets of Early Gay Aversion Therapy Revealed." *The Huffington Post*. June 28, 2013. Accessed 16 July 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-scot/shock-the-gay-away-secrets-of-early-gay-aversion-therapy-revealed_b_3497435.html. Jamie Scott works for *One Archives Foundation,* which is the "largest repository of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I

indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It

wasn't the practices, I think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger

of society was pointing at me – and the great voice of millions chanting, "Shame. Shame.

Shame." It's society's way of dealing with someone different." (265)

Here, Harding is describing his homosexuality, which is also demonstrated in the beginning of the

novel when he is the subject of the first group meeting, where the Nurse consults her log book

and summarizes, "[Harding] has also been heard to say that he may give *her* reason to seek

further sexual attention. He has been heard to say, 'My dear sweet but illiterate wife thinks any

word or gesture that does not smack of brickyard brawn and brutality is a word or gesture of weak

dandyism" (39). Later, his wife, Vera, visits the ward and tells McMurphy Harding's friends do

not stop coming by the house looking for him: "'You know the type, don't you, Mack?' she says.

'The hoity-toity boys with the nice long hair combed so perfectly and the limp little wrists that

flip so nice'" (158).

Harding is just an example of a male EST patient who fits with the social climate of the

time Kesey wrote *Cuckoo's Nest*. Harding's homosexuality clashed with social standards and

gendered roles of men and masculinity. He is an example of a homosexual man who was

voluntarily admitted to the hospital to "cure" his so-called illness. The more thing to consider,

and perhaps why Kesey does not explicitly proclaim Harding's sexuality, has to do with the fact

that Kesey is connecting psychiatric control to the larger issue of social control, and specifically,

how social relations of power are excluding, or, to put it in Kesey's wording earlier, hampering

the full development of the American Dream for all individuals. Harding is labeled "strange" and

"other," and he is placed in a mental ward for his condition of homosexuality. He reveals that

society can control individuals with shame in this instance.

(LGBTQ) materials in the world" (from the website, http://www.onearchives.org/). It is the oldest, active
LGBTQ organization (founded 1952).

It is interesting too that Harding is the character who apprises McMurphy of all the happenings of the ward – the policies, procedures, staff members and even psychiatric treatments. Harding has informed McMurphy of EST as discussed previously, and at one point, he also talks about the consequences of EST treatment. Harding focuses on how the procedure specifically can affect memory. He explains that EST is "painless," but continues,

> "The thing is, no one ever wants another one. You … change. You forget things. It's as if" – he presses his hands against his temples, shutting his eyes – "it's as if the jolt sets off a wild carnival wheel of images, emotions, memories. These wheels, you've seen them; the barker takes your bet and pushes a button. *Chang!* With light and sound and numbers round and round in a whirlwind, and maybe you win with what you end up with and maybe you lose and have to play again. Pay the man for another spin, son, pay the man." (163)

Harding uses a more playful discourse to explain EST – he frames it as a betting game or a ride in which you have to pay for admission. The images that accompany memories are conjured up in the process, but with the push of the button – "Pushbutton Psychiatry" – the images can be obliterated. The jolt of EST *is* actually painful, contradicting what he told McMurphy earlier. While the patient may be unconscious and not feel the pain of the electric current passing through, she may still lose something more painful – memories.

Harding's language of "jolt" and "memories" serve an epideictic purpose in connecting the narrative world of the novel to the social world of postwar America. "Jolt" was a popular term and metaphor for EST, as Hirshbein and Sarvananda's article points out. The authors examine popular discourse used in written accounts of ECT, specifically citing one account in 1941 that described the shock as an attempt to "jolt a mental patient out of his dream world and back into sanity."[358] Even more compellingly, the authors provide an actual real-life patient that

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[358] The article, "Electric Shock Treatment Causes Partial Memory Loss" (1941), is quoted in Hirshbein and Sarvananda, "History, Power, an Electricity," p. 4.

functions as a quasi-case study for Harding's "jolt of a wild carnival." They describe an article

from 1974 in the *New Yorker* about a woman who went to a mental hospital "for a rest and to

avoid stress;" however, they continue, "it was revealed that the woman had lost all memory of

what was happening to her at the time, or even what happened in the past. Through her inquiries,

she discovered that she had been given ECT in the hospital (with questionable consent

proceedings)."[359] The woman was Marilyn Rice, a former federal employee, who lost the ability

to perform her job due to ECT, she claimed.

This is not to say that Kesey had Ms. Rice, or any other individual, in mind when he was

crafting *Cuckoo's Nest*, but he had stated that he created the characters based on real mental

patients. The significance of Rice's account lies in the fact that it is a historically documented

case that portrays the (potential) negative effects of memory loss and how it can alter a person's

sense of self. Therefore, what is relevant is not whether Kesey knew about this specific case, but

the fact that he brings this social reality into the novel. He creates a setting in *Cuckoo's Nest* in

which the invisible power relations work on a group of individuals, and the narrative extends the

microcosm of the ward-as-world, to American society at large. It is the focus on the social issue

of control as it is implicated in the psychiatric treatment of individuals in the postwar era that

Kesey is commenting on in the narrative, and this only serves as the specific entry point for him

to critique the larger issue of power dynamics and control developing in the late 1950s.

In the face of coercive and unassailable power, Kesey's novel counters the dominant

forces with a new and developing way of acting in the world, and laughter signifies *play as power*

and its epideictic ability to recreate. Epideictic is the rhetoric concerned with values and how

communities uphold or repress certain values among its members, and as a result, epideictic

discourse possesses great power itself – it has the power to deconstruct and to recreate, and, as

Robert Danisch points out, the power of self-creation. In his article, "Power and the Celebration

of the Self," Danisch acknowledges that epideictic "involves telling the history of the present so

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[359] Hirshbein and Sarvananda, "History, Power, an Electricity," p. 7.

that one can understand how subjects are constituted in a given historical moment so that one can begin the project of self-creation."[360] However, Danisch does not acknowledge that when the dominant values of a collective are controlling, suffocating, or viewed as undesirable, epideictic rhetoric's role is made more difficult as it must topple the dominant viewpoints in place before it can (re)create.

One of the ways Kesey's narrative creates a sense of self for the patients is through laughter. For instance, Brulotte goes on to explain the many facets of laughter's capable and, I argue, epideictic influence, such as its expression of "a revolt against power or against boundaries in life"; its signification of "solidarity" and "social cohesion"; its power of exclusion; its ability to identify with a group and invite sympathy or other shared experiences; and lastly, its ability of "making contact with others and with the world."[361] He concludes, "if [laughter] possesses any kind of power, it is the power to free us from servitude and illusion."[362] It is this language of "making contact" and "freeing" individuals from "servitude and illusion" that resonates with *Cuckoo's Nest*. Within a disciplinary environment where the Nurse exercises absolute power and control, McMurphy code-switches – rather than meet her and the staff head-on with acts of rebellion and physical brawls, he primarily employs forms of play: teasing gestures, "horsing around," jokes, and game-like behaviors make up his resistant scheme to her dominant power. While the Big Nurse resorts to disciplinary and psychiatric methods to "make contact" with McMurphy and the other patients, Kesey offers a narrative that features *play* and *laughter* as the pathways to making contact with the patients, ultimately developing what I term the epideictic theory of *play as power*.

2) *Cuckoo's Nest* and the Epideictic Function of Laughter

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[360] Robert Danisch, "Power And The Celebration Of The Self: Michel Foucault's Epideictic Rhetoric." *Southern Communication Journal* 71.3 (2006): 293.
[361] Brulotte, "Laughing at Power," p. 12-13.
[362] Ibid., p. 15.

After McMurphy arrives on the ward, he learns more about the patients and the way

things are run on the Inside. He observes that the group of men is "scared to open up and *laugh*,"

and he charges, "Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your *footing*. A man go around lettin'

a woman whup him down till he can't laugh any more, and he loses one of the biggest edges he's

got on his side" (63, italics original). Here too Kesey infuses the narrative with *play as power*,

for the ability to laugh is connected to an advantage ("edge," i.e. play), and to avoid getting

"whupped" (a power issue). Within the paradigm of play-as-strategic-conflict, laughter then

operates like the Big Nurse's authority – within the narrative, it actualizes *play as power* as a

form of resistance to psychosocial control.

Of course, the theme of laughter has been thoroughly discussed in scholarship. Stephen

Tanner refers to McMurphy as "an unlikely savior disseminating a gospel of laughter."[363] Others

view McMurphy's laughter as ushering in salvation, making McMurphy the hero,[364] while other

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[363] Tanner, Stephen L. "Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* and the Varieties of American Humor." *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor* 13.1-2 (1993): 9. Tanner claims that the novel endorses "frontier humor," and he goes on to describe how McMurphy is an archetypal Westerner, embodying the "frontier spirit," and he proposes that Kesey "used the patterns of frontier humor not simply for comic effect but because he wished to assert the values embedded within them against a constricting and depersonalizing urban mass society." McMurphy is described as wandering restlessly, gambling, and moving around constantly and he is referred to as a cowboy, talks and acts like a cowboy, and engages in carnivalesque-like behavior. Also, see Stephen Tanner, "Salvation through Laughter: Ken Kesey & the Cuckoo's Nest." *Southwest Review* 58 (1973): 128. Nicolaus Mills disagrees with Tanner's claims regarding the novel's "therapeutic nature of laughter," and instead sees laughter as connected to the patients' struggle for liberation, insisting that laughter in *Cuckoo's Nest* "does not simply provide a release of tensions," but on "one level seeks to demonstrate the weaknesses (not merely the wrongs) of Big Nurse's world and at another level offers the men immersed in that world the courage to accept their freedom." See Nicolaus Mills, "Ken Kesey and the Politics of Laughter." *The Centennial Review,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter 1972): 86.

[364] There are many scholarly articles relating McMurphy to a savior, hero, or even Christ-like. For McMurphy as Christlike, in addition to Tanner's article, "Salvation through Laughter," see the earlier anthology, *A Casebook on Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Ed. George J. Searles. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992, specifically Bruce Wallis's article, "Christ in the Cuckoo's Nest: or, the Gospel According to Ken Kesey." For articles discussing McMurphy as a "hero-type," see Raymond Olderman's article in Searles, "The Grail Knight Arrives: Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*"; and Thomas H. Fick, "The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 1/2 (1989), pp. 19-34. Fick sees McMurphy as a hipster-hero, which he defines as a "philosophical psychopath on the fringes of society" that "invests his energy in disruption rather than flight" (19). He views McMurphy's "stories" as his mode of resistance: "McMurphy most clearly reveals his dedication to process through his stories, which stand equally opposed to institutional stasis and to private revelations" (21).

critics focus on the gendered dynamics of McMurphy's battle with the Big Nurse.[365] I do not

intend to ignore the gendered implications, but they have been addressed elsewhere, and Kesey

qualifies his portrayal of the nurse in "The Art of Fiction," stating, "[Big Nurse] is not the villain.

She might be the minion of the villain, but she's really just a big old tough ex-army nurse who is

trying to do the best she can according to the rules she has been given. She worked for the

villain and believed in the villain, but she ain't the villain."[366] I fall in line with Michael

Boardman, who assigns a rhetorical purpose for the instances revolving around the sexist

portrayal of the Big Nurse, which are designed to allow the reader to experience McMurphy's

fate as "moving and significant," stating, "the last thing Kesey needed was a 'humanized portrait

of Big Nurse,'" as that would only cloud the tragic path McMurphy was following. He argues

that the novel employs a "rhetoric of tragedy" that explains its "teleology."[367] Elaine Safer also

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[365] For an article dealing both with McMurphy as hero and the gendered dynamics of the struggle between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched, see Daniel J. Vitkus, "Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's* Nest." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. No. 14, *Madness and Civilization*. (1994): pp. 64-90. Vitkus analyzes what he calls rhetorical "constructs" of gender and the male myth of the American frontier hero and labels the conflict between the Nurse and McMurphy as "a struggle of a male community against the women who oppress [it]," and he writes, "[f]rom a masculinist perspective, it offers a charismatic hero in McMurphy, a figure of spiritual strength and sexual energy, whose laughter restores the men to life and confounds the Combine's machines" (65).

For more on the gendered struggle, See Elizabeth McMahan, "The Big Nurse as Ratchet: Sexism in Kesey's Cuckoo's Nest," in George Searles, *A Casebook for Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992, 149; and Richard Maxwell, "The Abdication of Masculinity in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," also in Searles, *A Casebook*, pp. 135-144. Elizabeth McMahon calls the novel "sexist" and she views the Big Nurse as a "victim" due to the fact that the members of the ward blame her for all of "society's failings," whereas Richard Maxwell claims that the men "allow" females to dominate them by giving away their masculinity consensually. In "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the High Cost of Living," Terrence Martin views McMurphy's singing and laughter as "evok[ing] the choked-off manhood of the men on the ward and a sense of freedom they have forgotten, or not known" (in Searles, *Casebook*, p. 33).

[366] Robert Faggen, "Ken Kesey: The Art of Fiction No. 136." In *Conversations with Ken Kesey*. Ed. Scott F. Parker. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014, p. 157.

[367] Michael Boardman, "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: Rhetoric and Vision. *Journal of Narrative Technique*. Fall 1979; 9:3, p. 177; 178. In regards to "teleology," Boardman writes, "All of the rhetoric of the book is designed to make plausible his final attack on the nurse, and act he cannot avoid that will destroy him, and yet one that is out of character for the cagey Mac" (178). For one of the only rhetorical focuses on *Cuckoo's Nest,* see Lars Bernaerts, "Interactions in *Cuckoo's Nest*: Elements of a Narrative Speech-Act Analysis." *Narrative* 18.3 (2010): p. 294; 289. Bernaerts analyzes the literary speech acts within the novel, pointing out that the communication between Ratched and McMurphy "deteriorates into speech-act battles," in which Ratched "commands and accuses while McMurphy refuses to comply" (285), and this "reflects some of the irreducible tensions in society – say, between resistance and immobility" or deviance and conformity (286). He comments on how McMurphy employs the "power of humor,

qualifies the gendered context and categorizes the novel as an American Comic Epic, which

employs epic rhetorical devices and "uses a comic book style, reducing exalted, multifaceted

figures and their opponents to cartoon representations of good and evil."[368] Both Boardman and

Safer suggest that the pivotal focus of the battle between good vs. evil subsumes the focus on

gendered relations.

What is important about the conflict between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched for my

purposes is how these two characters engage each other and set up the conflict between *play* and

power. The former critics have discussed humor and laughter detached from theories of play, and

many have looked at McMurphy as a hero, or the power struggle as gendered. I am focusing on

how *play as power* is an epideictic construct. This reading views laughter as a narrative and

rhetorical "unveiling" of the characters' use of "play" as a counter-strategy against the Nurse's,

and the Combine's, disciplinary power and control. As a result, *play as power* is epideictic

because it attempts to challenge the values of asceticism and overly stringent behavior, and it

attempts to recreate a new value system praising the "natural elasticity of life" that play and

laughter presents.[369]

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nonsense, and madness to attain his goals," and how both Ratched and McMurphy are "manipulative," claiming that speech act analysis reveals similarities between the two characters that might not be readily apparent (287). While that may be an interesting and a compelling argument, the novel relies on the ever-looming conflict between the two and their similarities are not as relevant. What is important about the conflict in the narrative is not how these two characters are similar, but how the conflict sets up and informs the concept of *play as power*.

[368] Elaine B. Safer, *The Contemporary American Comic Epic: The Novels of Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis, and Kesey*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, p. 20; 152.

[369] I borrow the phrase "the natural elasticity of life" from Nick Butler and his article, "Joking Aside: Theorizing Laughter in Organizations." *Culture and Organization* 2015, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 43. Butler, in his study of laughter and organizations, claims that humor serves as both "a mode of worker resistance and a resource for management." In terms of worker relations, humor can provide a "coping mechanism" for employees dealing with problems or tense relationships within the organization (44). For management, humor can be used as a means of increasing motivation and for accomplishing corporate objectives (45). He claims that "laughter tends to be collective and corrective in its manifestations," it can express "'pleasure at subversion' at the same time as it 'ensures social compliance' with accepted norms within a given milieu." He argues that "laughter is directed by some (those who laugh) at others (those who are laughed at) in order to rectify overly rigid behavior that has temporarily disrupted the natural elasticity of life" (43).

While Christian Messenger argues that play is "enervating and *not* a truly revolutionary force,"[370] Scott MacFarlane touches upon the resistant force of play in his book, *The Hippie Narrative*, and even uses the phrase "play as power," albeit, extremely superficially. MacFarlane comments on how the "spirit of protest" in *Cuckoo's Nest* is linked to McMurphy and "is best exemplified through Kesey's portrayal of McMurphy's laughter, a robust laugh of humanity in the face of authority and in a ward where nobody laughed," and he sees McMurphy as sporting a style of "pranksterism" that carries an "eccentric theatricality," or a notion of "play as power."[371] Firstly, MacFarlane leaves it to the reader to infer what he means by "play as power," and even then McFarlane's definition of "play as power" pertains to a "behavioral strategy" of the hippie culture that embraced fun and pranks in order to "be heard and seen" and to "draw attention to a cause."[372] Secondly, McMurphy exhibits the extreme opposite qualities of a hippie way of life – McMurphy is a brawler, a hustler and criminal, who "disrupts" for the "sake of disruption" and who has been arrested for "Disturbing the Peace," rather than spreading the message of peace (24; 40) – all of which MacFarlane fails to point out. Lastly, MacFarlane only mentions "play as power" on four extremely brief occasions in his chapter, and never fully unpacks what "play as power" *is*, or means. He fails to see the power of play to reverse the terms – he relies too much on the notion of "fun" and "pranks."

Certainly McMurphy engages in pranks and at times seems to be having fun, but the theory of "play as power" I am developing does not mainly rely on play as (merely) amusement. There are many times when events in the novel are not humorous, are not "fun," *and* are not tied to pranks, but yet, McMurphy's and other characters' laughter reigns – the laughter resists the

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[370] Christian K. Messenger, "The Dynamics of Ritual and Play: Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. *Arete: The Journal of Sport Literature*. Fall 1(1) 1983, p. 105; 106. In his article, Messenger looks at the "ritual sports hero" in American fiction, with its emphasis on competition and a creative, imaginative energy, and he concludes that Nurse Ratched is the authority who "grants" play. His main argument is that the play helps the men accept the final sacrificial ritual of McMurphy's lobotomy and death in the end. In essence, Messenger values the ritual aspect more than the play-ful aspect.

[371] Scott MacFarlane. *The Hippie Narrative: A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2007, p. 30; 34.

dominant power dynamics rather than creates an awareness for some cause. MacFarlane and the other critics on laughter and play miss this important implication or differentiation. *Play as power*, and by extension, laughter, is not always tied to the humorous or to pranks, but in *Cuckoo's Nest*, it is *always* linked to power relations.

In order to demonstrate this, I apply Michel Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* to *Cuckoo's Nest*. Only Andrew Pepper has written on the affinities between Kesey's novel and Foucault's thought, but he only focuses on the issue of power and (in)visibility, and I agree with his argument in that capacity. Pepper claims, "the question of who exercises power, for Foucault *and* for Kesey, is inextricably linked to the question of *how* power is exercised." Pepper states that *Cuckoo's Nest* represents the Foucauldian conceptualization of power as "a boundless network of decentered force relations in the guise of the Combine," but that it would not be accurate to equate the state with the Combine.[373] He explains how, for Foucault, power cannot be "seized" in any direct manner as there is no single point of control in society, claiming, "overt practices of domination are less important than invisible strategies of normalization."[374] I agree with Pepper's reading of Foucauldian power dynamics in the novel, but I disagree with his conclusion where he states, "Kesey's attempts to get to grips with the amorphous nature of modern power – *a power that is not necessarily tied to leaders or even to institutions* – makes this a prescient and foreboding novel."[375] Kesey's novel is definitely commenting on the notion of psychiatric power and control, and this is linked to state control, and this serves as the epideictic exigency calling forth the novel.

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[372] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[373] Andrew Pepper, "State Power Matters: Power, the State and Political Struggle in the Post-War American Novel." *Textual Practice* 19 (4), 2005, p. 472.

[374] Pepper, 471. Furthermore, Pepper reiterates how Foucault reveals that "social control depends not upon the repressive capabilities of the state but rather on the dispersed circulation of knowledge throughout society and the internalization of this knowledge by self-policing subjects" (471). Pepper mentions the "docile, self-policing subjects" of Harding, Billy, Cheswick and even Bromden as evidence of a "regime of introspection, surveillance, and confession that has been instituted in the ward with the patients' own consent" (473).

[375] Pepper, 474, italics added.

Additionally, Pepper does not address the complexity of the intersection of Foucault's

Discipline and Punishment and *Cuckoo's Nest*; he merely assumes it. However, there are some

major correlations between *Discipline and Punish* and *Cuckoo's Nest* that *are* worth stating, even

if rather obvious, for the principles in Foucault's text are necessary in order to establish the

backdrop against which *play as power* operates in the narrative. For instance, while Pepper

notices how *Cuckoo's Nest* illustrates invisible power networks at work, Kesey's novel is actually

concerned with visibility quite a bit – the Chief as narrator can "see" the powerful network of

"wires" and "machinery" that operate and "install things" in the patients in order to control them.

Of course, these are attributed to hallucinations and unreliability,[376] but Kesey, and Foucault,

thought the "mad ones" could see a "truth."[377] Even more interesting is the narrative's continuous

obsession with commenting on the visibility of faces, which are the portals of insidious smiles

and/or resistant laughter.[378] In other words, the novel's slight preoccupation with these types of

visibility *is connected to the power dynamics*. For example, Miss Ratched is described by

Harding as "our sweet, smiling, tender angel of mercy, Mother Ratched," and the Chief describes

her with a "painted smile [that] twists, stretches to an open snarl, and she blows up bigger and

bigger, big as a tractor, so big [the Chief] can smell the machinery inside" (55; 5). However,

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[376] See for instance, Elaine Safer, "It's the Truth Even If It Didn't Happen": Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 5.2 (1977): pp. 132-141; Fred Madden, "Sanity and Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner." *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 32, Number 2 (Summer 1986), pp. 203-217; and Peter Beidler, "From Rabbits to Men: Self-Reliance in the Cuckoo's Nest." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 56-59.

[377] See Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, p. 136. In an interview in 1961, Kesey is talking about the psychiatric "nuts" he observed, and he expresses how he could sense, in his "altered" state, how they could "see a truth that the doctors couldn't see." For Foucault's thoughts on the matter, see *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* London: Routledge, 2003. The introduction begins, "Madness has in our age become some sort of lost truth," and later refers to the Madman as "the guardian of truth – playing here a role which is the complement and converse of that taken by madness in the tales and the satires" (vii; 11).

[378] For instance, see Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2007. This edition includes illustrations and an introduction by Kesey, titled "Sketches." He writes about his experience at Menlo Park and talks about the patients' "faces all ghastly confessions," stating, "More was revealed in a human face than a human being can bear, face-to-face." He talks about how on the ward, he carried a "little notebook, to scribble notes," but he recalls how he "also scribbled faces. No that's not correct. As I prowl through the stack of sketches I can see that these faces bored their way behind my forehead and scribbled themselves" (vii; viii).

what is striking is the idea in which the power dynamics that inconspicuously operate on the ward can be counteracted, which consequently complicates the relationship between power and (in)visibility.

Therefore, the question becomes, why embed a narrative about (in)visible power dynamics with laughter? Laughter preserves a type of visibility because one can "see" the face and the opening of the mouth of one laughing. So, while Nurse Ratched uses electroconvulsive therapy and lobotomy as *threats* in the novel, her power is not *solely* an "invisible strategy of normalization" as Pepper contends. The Big Nurse's *actualized* power, while couched in the discourse of discipline and punishment, can manifest into visible acts designed to punish the body of the individual. Additionally, while her threats are not always explicit, and the times the narrative features actual EST episodes are not extremely numerous, her ever-present command over the patients is something that is visible – to the Chief, to McMurphy, and to the others. Because power began to evolve from overt authoritative measures towards more shrouded means of imposition, alternative methods for countering forms of social control equally became more or less indeterminate. And as such, the opposition the novel offers follows suit, I contend – it must "mix up the codes." "Mixing up the codes" becomes necessary because of the nature of power to "switch" its expression from explicit to implicit authority.

Thus, the counter method of *play as power* to overt and/or anonymous authority is also something that is not as readily perceivable; meaning, many do not see, understand, or value the power of play, especially in the way that Kesey's novel features it – laughter severed from the humorous and paired with the power-ful. Or, to put it another way, the theory of *play as power* shifts the emphasis of play from the humorous toward the powerful; it replaces leisure and pleasure with power dynamics. Kesey is creating a novel that uncovers the values of social order and control, and exposes the power relations at work in the ward-as-social-world. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, laughter signifies the shift in the characters' perceptions of the world and the laughter registers within the situated context of the postwar social milieu and countercultural period.

While critics pick up on different components of the concept of *play as power*, none of them have considered the interplay of play, power, and laughter that I am proposing.

3) Play and Conflict in *Cuckoo's Nest*

In *Cuckoo's Nest,* play exists in many forms,[379] and the narrative does not advance more than a few pages without some reference to a form of play or an expression of laughter. Among the many examples, the narrative mostly includes countless references to the activities of card games and gambling, like poker and monopoly (out of the many occurrences, see pages 9; 38ff.; 100ff.); storytelling and countless jokes (42 – "Do I look like a sane man?"; 139; 261); watching television and the World Series (103ff.); swimming (146ff.); a basketball game (177); a fishing trip (178ff.); the party in the ward (218; 251ff.); singing and whistling (81; 87); and sex (210ff.; 263). Throughout all of these events, the narrative records endless smiles, grins, and laughs. Yet, what is most important about "play" in the novel is how it is used, and how it encompasses the power dynamics and the main conflict between the Combine and the individual, and between Nurse Ratched and the Chief, McMurphy and the other patients.

Essentially, in *Cuckoo's Nest*, broadly speaking, play is a strategic conflict – a conflict between the patients and the Big Nurse, and, with the arrival of McMurphy, a conflict between disciplinary power and *play as power*. In fact, that main conflict also originated as a "playful" game or bet between McMurphy and Harding. The notion of adult play as a form of conflict comes from Brian Sutton-Smith's work in *The Ambiguity of Play*. In *The Ambiguity of Play,* Sutton-Smith navigates the ambiguous field of play studies and he is interested in the way "play

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[379] See Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 4-5. He lists the categories of "mind or subjective play" (fantasy), solitary play (hobbies, writing, etc.), "informal social play" (joking, dinner parties, etc.), "vicarious audience play" (television, music, movies, etc.), "performance play" (playing music, etc.), "celebrations and festivals" (birthdays, holidays, etc.), "contests" (games, sports, etc.), "risky or deep play" (kayaking, sky jumping, etc.). Sutton-Smith lists these same activities and many more activities and states of mind that are considered to be forms of play under various categories, and under "playful behaviors," he lists "playing tricks"; "informal social play" includes travel, joking, "getting laid"; "vicarious audience play" includes television, sports; and "contests" includes games and sports, as well as card games, etc.

rhetorics" are part of the larger cultural rhetorics and a part of the social value systems in which cultures construct meaning.[380] He offers seven rhetorics of play, out of which I am only interested in the rhetoric of play as power.[381] The rhetoric of play as power, Sutton-Smith declares, "is about the use of play as the representation of conflict and as a way to fortify the status of those who control the play or are its heroes."[382] Sutton-Smith claims the major form of human play is contest, and he explains how contests play a role in the process of civilization. In the chapter, "The Rhetorics of Power," Sutton-Smith writes,

> On the social play level, the general idea of the power rhetoric is that play or games or sports or athletics that have to do with some kind of contest and reflect a struggle for superiority between two groups (two people, two communities, two tribes, two social classes, two ethnic groups, two or more nations) exist because they give some kind of representation or expression to the existing real conflict between these groups. Whichever side wins the game or contest is said to bring glory to its own group, bonding the members together through their common contestive identity.[383]

Sutton-Smith ultimately defines play as "a facsimilization of the struggle for survival as this is broadly rendered by Darwin."[384] He connects play to evolution and references the work of Jay Gould and his emphasis on "variability" over "precision." In his book, *Full House,* Gould writes,

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[380] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*. Sutton-Smith is not concerned with the "substance of play," but rather with "the rhetorics of play [that] express the way play is placed in context within broader value systems, which are assumed by the theorists of play rather than studied directly by them" (8). Sutton-Smith looks at the underlying values that inform many different types of play, a concept he claims that everyone can relate to, but one in which there is little agreement among scholars, thus, contributing to an overbearing ambiguity. Sutton-Smith talks about how play is ambiguous, saying, "We all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us [scholars], and much ambiguity" (1). The important point is the "silliness" and lack of agreement, which he gleans from the blurred boundaries of these activities, like how we know certain behaviors as other activities, "such as entertainments, recreations, pastimes, and hobbies, as if it would be an embarrassment to admit that they can also be called play" (4).

[381] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, pp. 9-12. The seven rhetorics are *the rhetoric of play as progress, the rhetoric of play as fate, the rhetoric of play as power, the rhetoric of play as identity, the rhetoric of play as the imaginary, the rhetoric of the self,* and *the rhetoric of play as frivolous*.

[382] Sutton-Smith, p. 10.

[383] Ibid., p. 75.

[384] Ibid., 231.

> Precise adaptation, with each part finely honed to perform a definite function in an
> optimal way, can only lead to blind alleys, dead ends, and extinction. In our world of
> radically and unpredictably changing environments, an evolutionary potential for creative
> responses requires that organisms possess an opposite set of characteristics usually
> devalued in our culture: sloppiness, broad potential, quirkiness, unpredictability, and,
> above all, massive redundancy.[385]

The key, Gould declares, "is flexibility, not admirable precision," and Sutton-Smith develops his own theory, what he terms "variability" and "adaptive potentiality," based on this evolutionary finding by Gould. Sutton-Smith defines "adaptive potentiality" as play that "prepares for the unforeseeable future, not the foreseeable one," and a concept of play that "produces an array of responses of potential value."[386] He discusses how certain cultures, ones founded upon rigidly prescribed roles, do not allow for time and space for play, and it is here where Sutton-Smith could note the *power potentiality* of play in social contexts, specifically, situations in which power dynamics are at work and govern the relations among individuals and groups, as opposed to recreational play situations. In the mental ward of *Cuckoo's Nest*, the Big Nurse attempts to control play by only allowing precisely timed and scheduled leisurely activities, and she most

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[385] Jay Gould, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*. New York: Harmony Books, 1996, p. 44.

[386] See Brian Sutton-Smith, "Play as Adaptive Potentiation." *Sportwissenschaft* Vol. 5 (1975), page, 107. Also, see Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*. In *Ambiguity of Play*, borrowing from Gould, Sutton-Smith offers his theory of adaptive variability. First, he mentions how evolution is characterized by Gould as including "quirky shifts and latent potential" (222). He describes play as unpredictable and improvisational. Second, Gould emphasizes evolutionary "redundancy," the reproduction of similar structures as seen in genetic cloning processes. In play, children for example tend to engage in the "endless reproduction of games of 'house' or 'trucks,'" while adults reproduce sports games, card games, etc. And finally, is the notion of "flexibility," the theory stemming from Robert Faggen's theory on animal play. Sutton-Smith references Faggen to explain that flexibility involves the ability to maintain, enhance, or innovate existing skills in new contexts which "free" individuals from the "unanticipated limitation of these routines" (Faggen qtd. in Sutton-Smith, 31). Sutton-Smith asserts, "If quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility are keys to evolution, then finding play to be itself quite quirky, redundant, and flexible certainly suggests that play may have a similar biological base" (224). He states that "play as potential behavior may actualize what are otherwise only potential brain and behavior connections" (229). He discusses the notion of the "transfer of play skills to everyday skills," which he defines as "adaptive potentiation": a "trickle-down" theory of play's adaptive value and gives the example of a baseball pitcher who may become an

definitely stifles laughter, and in essence, any type of play that might effect laughter on the ward. The narrative touches upon the establishment of her dominant will – the patients "were all *afraid* to loosen up; it'd been too long" (72).

While Sutton-Smith tends to focus on how the rhetoric of power informs play and play theories, he does not reverse that relationship to discuss how certain forms of (adult) play can inform, or even *perform* acts of power. *Play as power* can establish a will, and it can resist a dominant will thrust upon it. For instance, Brian Boyd has also noted the potential value of play in an evolutionary sense, and in his article, "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor," Boyd argues that play was useful in training early humans "for coping with the unexpected." This theory rests upon the finding of evolutionary psychology that the mind "is crammed with expectations, built in first through natural selection and then added to by experience," most specifically, the "expectation of danger, the unexpected manifestation of an expected threat."[387] What Boyd means by the "unexpected manifestation of an expected threat" is analogous to the "startle reflex," or surprise movements. In play, animals – and Boyd extends this to human beings – can enact situations that provide the opportunity for "surprise movements" and can prepare for the unexpected.[388]

"outstanding thrower of hand grenades," denoting the flexibility to see connections and transfer skills from play contexts to real, social contexts (46).

[387] See Boyd, "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor," p. 7; 9. In making these evolutionary claims, Boyd acknowledges,

> As a species and as individuals, we were human and laughed before we had language, and we descend from creatures that have been playing and panting for pleasure for many millions of years, as sociality slowly strengthened, as creatures evolved that could have ever more complex expectations of their world and kind. An evolutionary approach to humor can explain its origins and impact, and the powerful social bonding that comes both through sharing expectations and through using that sense of shared expectations against those who violate them. (18)

Boyd also references the work of Dutch primatologist Jan van Hoof, who "locates the origins of laughter in the relaxed open-mouth face that primates and other mammals and even birds display in play" (6), concluding, "in humans, and in some other primate species, van Hoof observes, the laugh and the smile, although they have different origins, tend to converge, so that a smile can seem like a weak laugh, a laugh like a strong smile" (9). See Jan A.R.A.M. Van Hoof and Signe Preuschoft, "Laughter and Smiling: The Intertwining of Nature and Culture," in *Animal Social Complexity: Intelligence, Culture, and Individualized Societies,* ed. Frans B. M. de Waal and Peter L. Tyack (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[388] Boyd, "Laughter and Literature," p. 9. In discussing the "unexpected manifestation of an expected threat," Boyd gives the example of young birds that are unfamiliar with encountering hawks. They will

Needless to say, this works differently with the literary epideictic theory of *play as power* in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Rather than prepare the patients for "expected danger" exactly, *play as power* works to open up alternative visions and activities that perhaps challenge the dominant systems of control, or, the dominant value systems currently guiding the communal progress. In fact, the Chief describes himself and the other patients, *and* Nurse Ratched even, as caught off guard by McMurphy's playfulness. In social contexts with rigidly prescribed norms and standards, such as in the mental ward, the engagement of play, which has been shown to include an almost limitless catalogue of activities and has been shown to be quite ambiguous, can serve as a method to counter forms of power and *play as power* can pose a threat or danger.

A very similar scenario relating to the discussion of play and the notion of surviving (un)expected dangers as established by Sutton-Smith, Gould, and Boyd plays out in the narrative of *Cuckoo's Nest*. The patients already possess a natural fear of danger as it pertains to the Outside world. When McMurphy finds out many of the men voluntarily committed themselves, he blurts out, "you guys could get along outside if you had the guts." Billy replies, "Sure! … If we had the g-guts!", chastising McMurphy further, "But did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you. No, because you're so b-big and *tough!*" (167, italics original). The patients have retreated from the threat of societal interactions that include a ridiculing form of laughter, which has manifested itself as a threat to their well-being as Billy describes here – they felt the need to remove themselves from society and enter the Inside world of the mental hospital. However, the narrative illustrates how the ward and the Big Nurse have "unexpectedly manifested" a new form

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panic when a "bird-shaped kite with wings toward one end is towed overhead so that its wings are at the front, but will be unperturbed if it is towed the other way, so the wings are at the back and the shape seems more like a duck than a hawk" (9); in humans, he provides the example of "peek-a-boo games," which "primes alertness." These surprise movements "produce the greatest vocal release" and pleasure, and Boyd argues that in human play and laughter, we can find similar expressions (10). He explains that these situations "simulate risk" and "recovery." Of course, Boyd's comparison is designed to explain how "play with expectations offers a better explanation for humor than incongruity resolution" (10). He argues that there is a good chance that something humorous is not incongruous – a exaggerated example of a person slipping on a banana peel in a cartoon – but it can "play" with what our expectations are. Regardless, I am taking these points about the "play" with expectations in order to show how "play" has power to open up alternative ways of acting in the world, especially in the ward-as-world of *Cuckoo's Nest*.

of an "expected threat" to their well-being: the power dynamics have *added* the expectation of danger from failing to comply with ward policy. As Harding points out, the Chief is the symbol at this point in the novel of a severe form of punishment, and he serves as a threat to the other patients. Harding states that Chief suffered more than "two hundred shock treatments" and refers to him as "your Vanishing American, a six-foot-eight sweeping machine, scared of his own shadow. *That, my friend, is what we can be threatened with*" (62, italics added).

In addition, the first instance of *play as power* in terms of Sutton-Smith's theory of adaptive variability unfolds as the novel introduces its narrator, Chief Bromden, and establishes the control the ward has over him, as well as his use of "play" to adapt to the power dynamics in progress. First, however, there is a "play" on the Chief's name by the members of the staff, accompanied with a ridiculing laughter that the Chief's "play" subverts. The narrative begins with the Chief mentioning the "Black boys in white suits" who "hate everything," and as they come across Chief Bromden, one of them announces, 'Here's the Chief. The *soo*-pah Chief, fellas. Ol' Chief Broom. Here you go Chief Broom….' Stick a mop in my hand and motion to the spot they aim for me to clean today, and I go. One swats the backs of my legs with a broom handle to hurry me past" (3). This opening demonstrates what Michael Billig calls in *Laughter and Ridicule* "disciplinary mockery": "The ridicule of onlookers may be necessary to ensure that the mechanism of embarrassment acquires and retains its power to enforce the demands of social order."[389] One of the men continues, "Haw, you look at 'im shag it? Big enough to eat apples off my head an' he mine me like a baby," while the Chief notes, "they *laugh* and then I hear them mumbling behind me, heads close together. Hum of black machinery, humming hate and death and other hospital secrets. They don't bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I'm nearby because they *think* I'm deaf and dumb. *Everybody think so*. I'm cagey enough to fool them that much" (4). This mockery, a form of play by those in power, works to keep the Chief in

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[389] Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, p. 234.

his station, and to keep the social order of discipline and routine functioning, and the aides play with the Chief's name in an attempt to have it mirror his duty.

The Chief actually incorporates adaptive variability as a way to ward off danger, and more importantly, to acquire agency and power. While the men ridicule Bromden in a way that upholds the order of the ward through the disciplinary measure of maintaining the hospital, he is sidestepping the disciplinary mockery through his playing deaf and dumb and acquiring power instead – the ability to lurk in the halls and observe the power dynamics unfolding. Although this is not a game, the Chief employs strategy and cunning in order to gain power and access to information. He is able to trick the staff into thinking he cannot process its communication, all the while he is privy to the staff's secrets and "hate." The Chief's ploy even gets him on the "inside" of the staff room in order to perform his hospital duties during staff meetings, and at one point in the novel, the Chief worries that he may have been found out and he explains, "That's why they have me at the staff meetings, because they can be such a messy affair and somebody has to clean up, and since the staff room is open only during the meetings it's got to be somebody they think won't be able to spread the word what's going on. That's me […] I move around in my chores, and they see right through me like I wasn't even there" (131). This access allows him to report "horrible things," like "poisons" that are "manufactured right out of skin pores and acids in the air so strong enough to melt a man," and the time when the staff "kept talking about a patient so long that the patient materialized in the flesh, nude on the table in front of them, vulnerable to any fiendish notion they took" (131).

Interestingly, these individuals, the staff, a.k.a. "The Black Boys," and Nurse Ratched, dehumanize "ol' Chief Broom" by refusing to grant him agency and treating him in like fashion to Ellison's "invisible" narrator – they refuse to recognize him and they underestimate his power. And although they "see" Chief Bromden, they carry on as if he is unable to interpret their actions and words, which fails to recognize the utility of his gaze and grant it any power. But in actuality, Kesey constructs a novel that establishes his gaze as a narratorial, epistemological apparatus.

Stephen Tanner mentions how Kesey wanted to create a narrator who "leaves the ground and breathes in print."[390] By assigning Chief the role of the narrator, Kesey gives him authority of breathing life into the actions of McMurphy and the others that represent struggles for personal liberty using *play as power*.   Kesey has assigned Chief Bromden *the* authoritative, narratorial gaze as the entire novel is filtered and told through his consciousness.

While most of the discussion (Madden; Beidler; Safer) on the narrator Bromden mentions the potential issue regarding his (un)reliability due to his paranoid nature and the statement, "But it's the truth even if it didn't happen" (*CN*, 8), I maintain that Kesey's assertion and the novel itself ultimately grants Chief Bromden agency. The novel is told through Chief's consciousness, and the events are narrated through his narratorial gaze. Throughout the novel, layers of history are revealed that relate the oppression he had suffered, and he explains, "it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all" (179).[391] However, the Chief has taken that experience and has *adapted* it in order to survive on the ward. His "dumb and deaf" routine, as he refers to it, opens up access to information, and although this knowledge and visibility, so to speak, of the Combine's power *catalyzes* the paranoid visions he suffers, the Chief's condition of muteness is not based on a diminished intellectual capacity, which would lead to potential unreliability, but it is a conscious and active maneuverability and is not reducible to a "mental illness," but a form of high-stakes play-acting.

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[390] Kesey qtd. in Tanner, *Ken Kesey*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983, p. 23.
[391] Most significant is the event regarding his father and the tribe's dispossession by members of the US government. The narrative recalls when the Chief was ten years old, and some white men came to his house looking for the Chief, his father. He explains how the men came and were "all looking off from me like they'd soon I wasn't there at all" (182). They begin to talk about the hot weather and the sun and they ridiculed the young Chief, stating, "Look, look how overdone little Hiawatha is here" (181). In the end of the scene, a woman with the group of men talks about how the Chief, his father, is married to a white woman and suggesting that they mail the offer to her because they "may run up against an untold amount of Navaho stubbornness and love of – I suppose we must call it home" (183), she ends by stating, "As my sociologist professor used to emphasize, 'There is generally one person in every situation you must never underestimate the power of'" (184).

In essence, the Chief is more important to the novel than McMurphy, even in spite of the fact that McMurphy is the protagonist. The Chief tells the story – in terms of communication, he is the epideictic rhetor revealing *play as power*. In an important section of the novel, the Chief wakes up and he mentions how he is usually the first one up in the morning in an attempt to "watch what machinery they're sneaking onto the ward or installing in the shaving room," but he notices that McMurphy is up before him. He notices the *variability* of the routine: "But *this* morning I hear McMurphy out there in the latrine as I come out of the covers. Hear him singing! Singing so you'd think he didn't have a worry in the world," and he comments on how "everybody's thunderstruck. They haven't heard such a thing in years, not on this ward" (81). He wonders why the "black boys haven't hushed him up," how they "never let anyone raise that much racket before," how he's "a man made outa skin and bone that's due to get weak and pale and die, just like the rest of us," and wondering if "these things make him just as vulnerable to the Combine as anybody else" (82). He discusses McMurphy's ability to evade the control of the Combine, describing the "schizo" reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*: McMurphy is a nomad, "batting around from one place to another, never around one town longer'n few months," "logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling light-footed and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed," because "a moving target is hard to hit" (*CN* 82).

However, what is most important here is the event(s) of *play as power*, which is comprised of McMurphy's singing and the resulting effect it has – what the Chief calls "get[ing] that black boy's goat like not many men could" (84). The first thing to notice is here, and elsewhere in the novel, when the narrative is describing the conflict between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched getting each other's "goat," Kesey narratively describes the activity through playful discourse. The phrase "to get someone's goat" represents *play as power* because it means

to annoy someone in a deliberate way as to "gain a psychological advantage."[392] The term is

thought to have originated in horse racing whereby racers would have a pet goat in the stable of a

rather highly temperamental racehorse in order to keep the horse calm. It was believed that goats

did not get flustered very often and had a calming effect on the horses. Rival competitors would

"kidnap" the goat from the stall of a racehorse that is scheduled for an upcoming race, thereby

making it upset and performing poorly in the race.[393] While I am not claiming that Kesey

intentionally chose this idiom for the narrative, it is very interesting that the phrase has origins in

"play," and that it is an utterance designed, originally *and* narratively, to work an advantage and

gain power.

To put this into perspective, in the narrative, this scene leads into one of the Chief's many

tangential visions.[394] After reflecting upon McMurphy's deployment of *play as power* in this

instance, the episode with the singing and "getting the black boy's goat" evokes memories of the

Chief's "Papa," and he recalls how his Papa also "got the white man's goat" on one occasion.

When the US government officials came to speak to Chief Bromden (Papa) about his land, the

Chief looked up at the sky and said, "Canada honkers up there." The men, confused, look up,

exclaiming, "What are you – ? In July? There's no – uh – geese this time of year. Uh, no geese."

Chief Bromden the narrator recalls how they talked to his father like "tourists from the East," all

the while his father looked up, saying, "Geese up there, white man. You know it. Geese this year.

And last year. And the year before and the year before." The Chief-as-narrator finally shares,

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[392] See Jonathon Green, *Cassel's Dictionary of Slang*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005, p. 588.

[393] Robert A. Palmatier, *Speaking of Animals: A Dictionary of Animal Metaphors*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1995, p.144. Also, see S. Upendran, "What is the meaning and origin of 'get someone's goat'?" *Today's Paper: Education Plus. The Hindu.* January 2, 2006. Accessed 18 July 2016. http://www .thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-educationplus/what-is-the-meaning-and-origin-of-get-someones-goat/article3209463.ece. Very interestingly, the phrase has international appeal as the article from *The Hindu* explains the saying and its origin.

[394] While the Chief has many visions, I am mostly relying on his narratorial depictions of *play as power*, and this vision in particular due to its more positive note. Many of the other visions are rather horrific and deal with the Combine and its power and manifestations. Here is a list of page references to many of them, but this by no means is an exhaustive list or an authoritative categorization of the visions. These include the machinery (4; 14; 16; 32-33; 36; 74-81; 155; 238; 245-249; 263); "wheels and gears, cogs" of the

By the time it dawned on the government men that they were being poked fun at, all the council who'd been sitting on the porch of our shack, putting pipes in the pockets of their red and black plaid wool shirts and taking them back out again, grinning at one another and at Papa – they had all busted up laughing fit to kill. Uncle R & J Wolf was rolling on the ground, gasping with laughter and saying, "You know it, white man." It sure did get their goat; they turned without saying a word and walked off toward the highway, red-necked, us laughing behind them. I forget sometimes what laughter can do. (85)

In the memory the Chief rehashes, the government men were the ones with all the power. They were there to "negotiate buying off the treaty" (84). They had money and official standing – they had the power. Yet, in this scene, Papa engages in play, a misdirection so to speak, for the government men "were being poked fun at" with his goose bit. And the men erupt in a laughter "fit to kill," and the government men walk off, *dis*empowered. The older Chief Bromden "got their goat" by implementing a form of play which triggered laughter. *Play as power* operates here because the laughter reverses the power dynamics of the players involved in the scene – the white men leave the reservation without accomplishing their initial objective and have failed to enforce their power. It is McMurphy's laugh that triggers this memory for the Chief, and it is interesting to note that the Chief is often commenting on McMurphy's laugh (the "first" and "real" laugh he's heard, p. 11), which connects to the presence of *play as power*.

More importantly, the Chief is engaging in a particular type of play – the play of daydreaming or reminiscing. John Caughey has commented on the playfulness of daydreaming, stating, "In our society, at least, when an individual's attention is not fully taken up by demanding tasks or engrossing actual experience, his or her attention characteristically shifts inward to a curious subjective world of silent language and imagery."[395] Erving Goffman too has commented

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Nurse's "wicker bag" (4); the fog machine (7; 37; 69-70; 112-124; 140-144); visions of the past (112-114; 179-184, 245-249).

[395] John L. Caughey. *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, p. 120.

on this notion: "While outwardly participating in an activity within a social situation, an individual can allow his attention to turn from what he and everyone else considers the real or serious world, and give himself up for a time to a playlike world in which he alone participates."[396]

While these occasions appear detached from the present reality, *play as power* adapts the "playlike" subjectivity of the act Goffman addresses, especially in the realm of *literary epideictic*. The *narrative* memory amplifies *play as power* by interweaving the memory against the backdrop of power relations and it does so purposively. Therefore, while Caughey and Goffman are talking about a disconnect from the serious reality in which an individual finds herself engrossed, the kind of reminiscing that falls under *play as power*, which the Chief demonstrates in *Cuckoo's Nest*, is *not* a detached form of escapism. And perhaps no better testament to daydreaming as *play as power* exists in the novel than the memory the Chief has when he and McMurphy receive EST – a memory of a childhood game, "Tingle Tingle Tangle Toes." The narrative streams,

> Ting. Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she's a good fisherman, catches hens, puts 'em inna pens … wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock … one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest … O-U-T spells out … goose swoops down and plucks *you* out.
> My old grandma chanted this, a game we played by the hours, sitting by the fish rack scaring flies. A game called Tingle Tingle Tangle Toes. (246)

While the Chief is undergoing EST, he has this vision and memory. He has disconnected from the reality of the "actual experience" of shock therapy, and has entered a subjective world of Tingle Tingle Tangle Toes imagery. However, *play as power* has a more serious social context, and in this instance, the Chief is not daydreaming or reminiscing about an old memory for pleasure or leisure, but to stave off the dangerous threat of EST, and in doing so, he is disrupting the process, for EST is said to make your memories vanish (in the novel and in real life).[397] It is

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[396] Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*. (New York: Free Press, 1963), 69

[397] See the Introduction chapter and the section titled, "The Literary Epideictic, the Epideictic Exigency, and The American Social Protest and Countercultural Novel in the Postwar Period" (p. 31). For more on this history, see Shorter and Healy, *Shock Therapy: A History of Electroconvulsive Treatment in Mental Illness*; Hirshbein and Sarvananda, "History, Power, And Electricity: American Popular Magazine

no wonder then that the Chief, on more than one occasion, says, "I forgot what laughter can do," because on the ward, memory is not the only thing patients stand to lose. The patients have lost the ability to laugh, for after Harding asks McMurphy how he can beat the Nurse "other than laughing at her," the patients notice her "looking out through her window," and when she sees them looking at her, she "nods and they all turn away" (64); this is the same gesture she performs towards McMurphy later, when he "walks past the window where she's glaring out at him and grins at her like he knows he's got her whipped now. When he tips his head back and winks at her she gives that little sideways jerk of her head" (124).

The narrative establishes this key conflict of the Nurse's power to shut down laughter not long after McMurphy is admitted into the ward and the patients have their first group meeting. Just when Nurse Ratched insists that Doctor Spivey explain the "theory of our Therapeutic Community," Ruckly intervenes with the utterance, "Ffffuck da wife." McMurphy, who has been observing his new surroundings, raises his hand above his mouth and asks, logically perhaps, "Whose wife?" This is an interesting moment because of the dynamics of humor, laughter, and power, especially in how they intermingle in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. For one, McMurphy is trying to attain information to follow along with the discussion. It is not really a joke, but a question, and yet, he anticipates laughter at his inquiry. The Chief narrates the central dilemma of Kesey's novel, one involving the interplay of laughter and power, and in the beginning of the novel, he frames the narrative absence of laughter:

> There's a puzzled expression coming over [McMurphy's] face. Something strange is going on there, he's finding out. He can't quite put his finger on it. Like the way nobody will laugh. Now he thought sure there would be a laugh when he asked Ruckly, "Whose wife?" but there wasn't even a sign of one. The air is pressed in by the walls, too tight for laughing. There's something strange about a place where the men won't let

Accounts Of Electroconvulsive Therapy, 1940–2005."; and Kneeland and Warren. *Pushbutton Psychiatry: A History of Electroshock in America*.

themselves loose and laugh, something strange about the way they all knuckle under to

that smiling flour-faced old mother there with the too-red lipstick and the too-big boobs.

And he thinks he'll just wait a while to see what the story is in this new place before he

makes any kind of play. That a good rule for a smart gambler: look the game over awhile

before you draw yourself a hand. (43)

Not only does this passage reveal that the ward environment is ensconced in power dynamics –

the men "knuckle" under the authority of the "matriarchy" as Harding puts it – but it also places

this discussion in *play as power* discourse. First, the Chief notes that the "air is pressed in by the

walls, too tight for laughing," which indicates the invisibility of the controlling power, while

McMurphy is a "gambler" who scans the playing field of the "game" so to speak, thinking up his

next strategy of play. Furthermore, it suggests that on the ward, the men are forbidden to laugh

due to a rational mannerism of etiquette, enforced by the mother-figure, and laughter then would

signify an impoliteness. As Anca Parvulescu historicizes, the civilization process has "pruned"

laughter to moderation to the point where "passional laughter" is condemned by the "Western

polite world."[398] There has been a lot of energy, she states, that has gone into laughter's

"management." Parvulescu then discusses the "closed mouth" of a subtle smile that "accompanies

seriousness in its pursuit of its projects," revealing, "*the opening of the mouth into loud, passional

laughter is a revolt against seriousness*."[399] And this is why the Nurse is only depicted as smiling

– she is never laughing, but smiling her "cold," calculating smile that is connected to a project of

seriousness: "Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll,"

and she carries a smile "crimped between her chin and her nose," even though she is "tense as

steel," because she will not "relax a hair till she gets the nuisance attended to – what she calls

'adjusted to surroundings'" (*CN* 6; 25).[400]

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[398] Parvulescu, p. 24.
[399] Parvulescu, p. 5. For more on the mouth and its relation to laughter and seriousness, see pages 7-11.
[400] Interestingly, Bryan Boyd discusses the differences in evolutionary research regarding the smile and the laugh. See Boyd, "Laughter and Literature," p.9. Boyd explains how smiling seems to derive from a fear

McMurphy soon finds out how the ward is run under the direction of the Big Nurse, specifically, the way she can manipulate questions, insinuation, and evaluation into a force of control over the patients. For instance, Harding acts as a guide for McMurphy after he arrives, informing him of life on the ward – its rules and regulations, actions and consequences, and the players. Harding explains to McMurphy that in the hospital, Nurse Ratched holds all the power because she possesses the power to "insinuate": "She doesn't need to accuse. She has a genius for insinuation" (55). This invisible form of the power of coercion threatens the patients and causes them to submit to the Big Nurse, and obey her commanding will. And when McMurphy encourages some of the patients to push back and let Nurse Ratched know they cannot be pushed around, he learns that one of their only mechanisms for change, for any type of resistance to the Nurse's regime, is the "democratic-ward manure" of "taking a vote," and he states, "Don't you see you have to do something to show you still got some guts? Don't you see you can't let her take over completely?" (63).

However, the Nurse has the power to code any patients' behavior as "assaultive" and there is a system of discipline and punishment that will then take over, one that results in the loss of privileges, mostly tied to play. The control over forms of play that the Nurse wields is usually enough to keep the patients in check, and the bodily punishment of EST and other measures looms as a pending threat, the "unexpected manifestation of an expected threat." After learning about the Nurse's authority, McMurphy counters that he will just "tell her to up and go to hell." Another Acute answers him, "Okay, you tell her that and you're listed as Potential Assaultive and shipped upstairs to the Disturbed ward," where the patients do not get to watch TV, enjoy

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grin, a baring of the teeth shown by a subordinate to a dominant, a nervous signal of submissiveness common in many species, including many parts of the primate line." In humans, he notes the traces of this evolutionary development in the "smile of apology," or social awkwardness. He references the work of van Hooff who claimed that the two overlap somewhat, "so that a smile can seem like a weak laugh, a laugh like a strong smile" (9). I think what is interesting is how the nurse only smiles while McMurphy laughs, and how her smile can be viewed as a "fear grin" fearing laughter's representation of *play as power*.

Saturday movies, or play cards. Harding explains more grave consequences for that type of

delinquent behavior:

> "And, my friend, if you *continue* to demonstrate such hostile tendencies, such as telling people to go to hell, you get lined up to go to the Shock Shop, perhaps even on to greater things, an operation, an –"
>
> "Damn it, Harding, I told you I'm not up on this talk."
>
> "The Shock Shop, Mr. McMurphy, is jargon for the EST machine, the Electro Shock Therapy. A device that might be said to do the work of the sleeping pill, the electric chair, *and* the torture rack. It's a clever little procedure, simple, quick, nearly painless it happens so fast, but no one wants another one. Ever." (62)

Harding calls it a "joint" procedure of therapy and punishment for his "go-to-hell behavior."

McMurphy finally hatches a plan and says to Harding,

> "But you say … she don't send you up to that other ward unless she gets your goat? Unless she makes you crack in some way and you end up cussing her out or busting a window or something like that?"
>
> "Unless you do something like that…. She's powerless unless you do something to honestly deserve the Disturbed Ward or EST. If you're tough enough to keep her from getting to you, she can't do a thing." (65)

Harding says, "Those are the rules we play by. Of course, she always wins, my friend, always"

(65).

Thus, the central conflict is established in the novel and the narrative features both play

and power discourse by presenting the *play* terminology of a contest and a bet, and the *power*

allusions to authority and weaponry. The coexistence of these two discourses includes behavioral

approaches that involve strategic conflict, play, laughter, discipline, punishment, and control. For

example, McMurphy presses on, "What I want to know is am I safe to try to beat her at her own

game?". He refers to the Big Nurse as the undisputed "champ" of the ward and then he goes on

to "put a little money" on this venture. But Harding is not confident, stating that "laughter" is not

a "weapon" to combat the Nurse's authority, charging, "[d]o you think, for all your claimed

psychopathic powers, that could effectively use your weapon against our champion?" (64). But

Harding misses the power behind laughter. In order to demonstrate how laughter represents *play*

as power in the novel, it is necessary to establish the overarching conflict that actually subsumes

the conflict between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy and the patients – that of disciplinary power vs. *play as power*.

5) Disciplinary Power vs. *Play as Power*

Because epideictic discourse attempts to *re*create an authentic reality that individuals can relate to, in order to display and perhaps adapt communal value systems, it is necessary to establish the backdrop of "power" that "play" is countering in the novel. I argue that in order for *play as power* to manifest, there must first be instigation. In order to present *play as power* as a counterstrike, I need to frame that which it is countering – disciplinary power. The notion of disciplinary power comes from Michel Foucault's revelations in *Discipline and Punish*, which resonate profoundly with *Cuckoo's Nest*, and especially the epideictic exigency that is calling forth such a narrative. For instance, the narrative – and furthermore, my attention – is not concerned with the meaning or details of the patients' madness. Rather, the novel, like *Discipline and Punish*, is concerned with power and the way in which discipline is carried out. Foucault even extends his work in *Discipline and Punish* to mental hospitals: "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"[401]

The most important part of this immense work that connects to the narrative, and my reading of it, pertains to the Panopticon, the definitions of disciplinary power, and the written records and formation of individual knowledge. First, Foucault addresses an important definitional element of power. He writes, "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted *distribution* of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (*D&P* 202). In discussing discipline, Foucault turns to the Panopticon as the architectural tower shifting the nature of prison

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[401] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995, p. 228. All future citations will be taken from this edition and include the abbreviation *D&P* along with the page number in parentheses. In tracing the *Birth of the Prison*, to use text's subtitle, he points out that the prison transforms the power to punish into a "disciplinary power to observe," due to "a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (224).

functionality. He talks about the central tower, ring-shaped, looking over a building divided into cells, with a supervisor situated in the main tower, overlooking the collection of separated individuals, which introduces a very nuanced relationship of visibility. He writes, "Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce the inmate in a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power," making "surveillance permanent in its effects." This arrangement of space and bodies becomes a "machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it" (*D&P* 201).

The ward in *Cuckoo's Nest* definitely meets the parameters of the Panopticon – the Nurse hides behind her "glass" and observes the patients and records events. The Chief, describing a day in the ward, depicts the Nurse as walking to the "glass Nurse's Station where she'll spend the day sitting at her desk and looking out her window and making notes on what goes on out in front of her in the day room during the next eight hours" (*CN* 5); and later, he accounts, "Seven-thirty back to the day room. The Big Nurse looks out through her special glass, always polished till you can't tell its there" (*CN* 29). This meets the criteria of the Panopticon, which is "visible and unverifiable," because the patients know that she is watching them, but they are never certain as to whether or not she is seeing, or hearing, everything that is transpiring. For instance, the Chief refers to her as the "watchful robot, tend[ing] to her network with mechanical insect skill" (*CN* 26). She dispatches her "minions," the aides who "never make any noise when they move," but "materialize in different parts of the ward every time a patient figures to check himself in private or whisper some secret to another guy" (*CN* 27). Thus, in order to remain safe, they can only assume that she will receive information of the ward happenings, and this belief alters their behavior. The Nurse, behind her glass, represents the "disciplinary mechanism": she sits and observes an "enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and the periphery, in which power is exercised without division" (*D&P* 197).

Nurse Ratched establishes a relation of disciplinary power not only through the situation of bodies on the mental ward with her central post in the Nurse's station, but also through situating the patients in a communal group and coding the ward space under the aegis of a therapeutic community. Foucault calls the "chief function" of disciplinary power "training," and the patients represent what he refers to as "docile bodies," a body that is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (*D&P* 136). The Big Nurse's mission is to train and to discipline the patients and to get them "adjusted to their surroundings," turning the ward into a "little world Inside that is a made-to-scale-prototype of the big world Outside," one to which the patients will one day return (*CN* 44). The Chief describes the theory of the "Therapeutic Community" in the narrative: how an individual has to "get along in a group" before he is deemed fit "to function in a normal society," and how the communal group can show him "where he's out of place;" purporting to be, under the direction of the Big Nurse, "a democratic ward, run completely by the patients and their votes, working toward making worth-while citizens to turn back Outside onto the street" (*CN* 44).

What the Chief is talking about, and what the Nurse establishes, is the invisibility of power that Foucault describes: "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a *state of consciousness and permanent visibility* that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*D&P* 201, italics added). In terms of *Cuckoo's Nest*, the automatic functioning is wrapped up in the ward's theory of a "therapeutic value" – The Nurse explains, "Please understand: We do not impose certain rules and restrictions on you without a great deal of thought about their therapeutic value…. I tell you this hoping you will understand that it is *entirely for your own good* that we enforce discipline and order" (*CN* 170). Everything is intended for "therapeutic value," for the patients' "own good," including their own regulation of one another: "Talk, [the doctor] says, discuss, confess. And if you hear a friend say something during the course of your everyday conversation, then list it in the logbook for the staff to see. It's not, as the movies call it, 'squealing,' it's helping your fellow. Bring these old sins out into the open where they can be

washed by the sight of all [….] There should be no need for secrets among friends" (*CN* 44). The patients become a self-policing unit, contributing to the "automatic functioning" of the Combine and increasing its force and control.

However, what is important is the irony of the theory of therapeutic community in terms of its promulgated mission to "fix" or "adjust patients" to their surroundings, and what really takes place in the novel is discipline and punishment in order to control the patients and exercise authority. For instance, the Big Nurse runs the ward, and "the ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for *fixing up mistakes* made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches" (*CN* 36). The Chief defines the "Combine" as a "*huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside*" (*CN* 25, italics added). The Chief explains that the Nurse does not work alone, for she is a "high-ranking official" for the "nation-wide Combine that's the really big force" (*CN* 164). The Nurse operates a panoptic wavelength, what the Chief labels, "The Big Nurse's frequency." He describes it by explaining how she "never has to give orders," or write things out for her staff, because the staff is "in contact on a high-voltage wavelength of hate" with a love of "efficiency" (*CN* 29). The Chief continues,

> And I've watched her get more and more *skillful* over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now *she wields a sure power that extends in all directions* on hairlike wires *too small for anybody's eye* but mine; I see her sit in the *center* of this *web* of wires like a *watchful robot*, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, *know every second which wire runs where and just what current to send up to get the results she wants*. (*CN* 25-26, italics added)

The way disciplinary power works is not necessarily or always visible, as the Chief points out, for only he has the ability to see it in the narrative world. For instance, he reflects, "[the Combine] work[s] on you ways you can't fight! They put things in! They *install* things. They start as quick as they see you're gonna be big and go to working and installing their filthy machinery when you're little, and keep on and on an on till your *fixed*!" (*CN* 189, italics in original). What this

intense surveillance achieves is the elimination of any type of play that is associated with "adaptive variability" that Sutton-Smith, Boyd, and Gould discuss. The patients are not allowed the freedom to be "unpredictable," or the freedom to arrive at "creative responses" to their current situations, but they must relinquish all forms of play to the Big Nurse's controlling authority that is bent on "fixing mistakes." However, the Combine, and in turn, the Nurse, are the authorities in terms of what constitutes a "mistake," and the Chief relates that the Big Nurse is not intent on bettering the patients; rather, she transmits currents of "hate" that collaborate to achieve the "results she wants," which is ultimate control and authority.

All throughout the novel she controls the patients' lives by structuring time, for even Harding says, "with the element of time working for her she eventually gets inside everyone. That's why the hospital regards her as its top nurse and grants her so much authority; she's a master at forcing the trembling libido out into the open" (*CN* 65). She carries out what Foucault labels the "strict" "time-table," the "establish[ing] of rhythms," the imposing of "particular occupations," the regulation of "the cycles of repetition," which, he points out, were soon found in hospitals, and here, in the mental ward (*D&P,* 149). The narrative describes the Big Nurse as running the ward "like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine," constructing a "world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable" (*CN* 25; 26), incorporating language of the disciplinary "control of time" consistent with Foucault's discussion of time "without impurities or defects, a time of good quality throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise" (*D&P* 151). And in the context of *Cuckoo's Nest,* the bodies are applied to the Nurse's exercise of disciplinary adjustment.

Lastly, Foucault discusses how individuality became a prominent feature in the exercise of power, claiming that the individual may now be "described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality," and how the individual is the one "to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." (*D&P* 191). Talking about "administrative

documentation," Foucault touches upon the power of writing to "integrate individual data into cumulative systems … so as to arrange things that an individual could be located in the general register and that, conversely, each datum of the individual examination might affect overall calculations" (*D&P* 190).

The Nurse keeps written records of what transpires on the ward, and in doing so, she is accumulating knowledge and amassing power all in one. An example of the power of writing in regards to Foucault's discussion of record keeping as the simultaneous accumulation of knowledge and power occurs when McMurphy is newly on the ward. When McMurphy is beginning to show signs of challenging the Big Nurse, she turns to his "folder." The scene continues with the Nurse mispronouncing McMurphy's name,

> "McMurry, Randle Patrick. Committed by the state from Pendleton Farm for Correction.
> For diagnosis and possible treatment. Thirty-five years old. Never married.
> Distinguished Service Cross in Korea, for leading an escape from a Communist prison
> camp. A dishonorable discharge, afterward, for insubordination. Followed by a history of
> street brawls and barroom fights and a series of arrests for Drunkenness, Assault and
> Battery, Disturbing the Peace, repeated gambling, and one arrest – for Rape." (*CN* 40)

Following this proclamation, the Nurse refers to McMurphy as "our new Admission," and the Chief notes that as she passes his folder to the doctor, it seems as if "she's got a man folded up inside that yellow paper and can pass him on to be looked over" (*CN* 41). What is interesting here is the addition of observing individual patients in the ward-as-Panopticon – the narrative is suggesting how the written records of individuality are something to be observed too, much like the physical body objects of patients or prisoners. Like Foucault states, the Panopticon employs a "system of individualizing and permanent documentation" in an effort to constitute a "body of knowledge," which the Chief here fittingly describes with the reference to McMurphy's folder. The body of knowledge, Foucault points out, was used in order to assess whether it would be

possible to "transform" the "inmate" into a useful member of society (*D&P* 250-251). Thus, the individual has become a body of knowledge, an individual "to know."

It is here that Foucault distinguishes the "delinquent" from the "offender," also fitting because McMurphy is transformed from an offender of the law to a mental patient. But what Foucault says about the delinquent pertains to this scene in which the Big Nurse looks over his file – "The delinquent is to be distinguished from the offender by the fact that it is not so much his act as his life that is relevant in characterizing him" (*D&P* 251). The purpose is to discover the "dangerous proclivities" and "harmful dispositions" of the delinquent and try to *transform* him. This is exactly what happens with McMurphy on the ward. During the staff meeting where the doctors and the Big Nurse meet to discuss McMurphy's fate, one of the doctors states, "Even if you haven't *read his history* all one should need to do is pay attention to his behavior on the ward to realize … he is definitely a Potential Assaultive…. Don't you recognize the arch type of psychopath? I've never heard of a clearer case. This man is a Napoleon, a Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun" (*CN* 133). The other doctors throw in more diagnoses – "schizophrenic reaction," "Latent Homosexual with Reaction Formation," and "*Negative Oedipal*," which receives praise (*CN* 136); finally, one doctor sums up the body of knowledge accumulated on McMurphy, drawing upon written historical records *and* observation, stating, "His history shows, Alvin, that time and again he has acted out his hostilities against authority figures – in school, in the service, in *jail!* And I think that his performance after the voting furor today is as conclusive an indication as we can have of what to expect in the future" (*CN* 134). The doctors in this scene rely upon the written records and observations of McMurphy to classify him one way or another in order to determine what should be done regarding McMurphy, mainly, whether or not they should send him to Disturbed.

However, what is interesting in this scene is the use of this accumulated knowledge to categorize the individual in order to exercise disciplinary measures, *juxtaposed* with Nurse Ratched's reaction to the discussion unfolding. The narrative reveals that she has lost "control"

over the patients at this juncture, due to an insurrection against house chores in relation to the

World Series televised game. Yet, the Big Nurse insists that McMurphy is not "extraordinary"

like the doctors suggest, but he "is simply a man and no more." She insists that they keep him on

the floor in order to "subject" him to "all the fears and all the cowardice and all the timidity that

any other man is subject to." In other words, the Nurse is not bent on reform or training the

individual McMurphy in order to improve one of society's citizens, but she is preoccupied with

imposing her dominant will in order to establish her control and power and deflate McMurphy's

accumulating power. As a result, she informs the staff that the "length of time [McMurphy]

spends in this hospital is entirely up to us" (137). When McMurphy first arrives, he represents a

threat that will "disrupt" the disciplinary flow of the ward, and the Nurse charges that McMurphy

is a "manipulator," one who will use anything he can to carry out the "actual disruption of the

ward for the sake of disruption," and that "it may take months to get everything running smooth

once more" (24-25). But, she is blinded by her power. She fails to see what is really taking place

on the ward. He is not intent on disrupting the ward for the sake of disruption, but of

implementing laughter as the interruption of psychosocial control, and ultimately, he is a threat to

her "seriousness" project.

5) The World Series Vote: *Play as Power* and Revolt

The Big Nurse's, and the Combine's, disciplinary will and power instigate the need for

play as power and its representation, laughter. Their project of "seriousness" allows for

vulnerabilities and gaps where *play as power* can counter.[402] For instance, Nurse Ratched has

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[402] This notion of "vulnerabilities" in authoritative institutions I borrow from Hub Zwart. See *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter: The Structure of Moral Transformations*. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996. Zwart explores the function of laughter to "expose" the "defects" of dominant discourse and his work contributes to the epideictic function of laughter. He declares that certain authoritative discourses have established a profound dominance with "such a capacity of resistance or incorporation, such an ability to conceal its basic vulnerability, that its validity simply seems beyond contestation" (10). One of the strategies of countering dominant discourse, Zwart notes, is critical argument, but he explains that individuals can find themselves unable to successfully challenge dominant forces because they are "faced with a certain *rationality*, a moral regime that dominates moral discourse to such an extent that they cannot offer any resistance without raising the suspicion of being *unreasonable*"

established and maintained control over the Acutes and the Chronics, but McMurphy will model

a different mode of behavior that the patients will adopt. In this way, McMurphy is not so much

a savior as he is a quasi-epideictic rhetor or educator. This "learning" is epideictic because

somebody has to first reveal the vulnerabilities of those in power, and then display new values or

codes of behavior. Therefore, *play as power* does not function without the backdrop of

domineering power. While the patients appear to be "docile bodies" in Foucault's sense, critics

fail to recognize what type of "subjects" they truly are – "inter-passive subjects," patients at one

time passive and controllable, but individuals who participate in an Other's *play as power*, and

who end up undergoing a transformation, thus becoming actual "players" themselves.

Perhaps no other event in the novel captures *play as power* in this context quite like the

scene dealing with the World Series vote. The World Series scene represents *play as power*

because McMurphy uses the game of baseball and various "play" signals to change the structure

and governing of the ward, while the patients enjoy the rebelliousness of McMurphy, ultimately

transposing their enjoyment and benefit onto McMurphy. In essence, they rebel through another.

The narrative explains how McMurphy had been taking bets from the patients regarding the

World Series, and he anticipated watching the games on TV despite the fact that the games did

not air during "regular TV time." During the group meeting, McMurphy proposes an alternative

timeframe for attending to the chores – he suggests that they work at night, during regular TV

time, and watch the games during the afternoon, which was the designated "ordinary" timeframe

for chores. Yet, it is not the promulgated "democratic ward manure of taking a vote" that brings

about change to the ward's operation – it is the result of *play as power*.

(Zwart, 10, italics added). He notes that the individual is ensconced within the discourse, but that at times, certain "vulnerabilities" of the dominant regime are "revealed" - "and this is the experience of laughter," for while the established authority "cannot be criticized, it can be ridiculed" (10). Laughter then serves as the gap of narrative vulnerability in *Cuckoo's Nest*, for as Dale Sullivan reasons, epideictic offers a process of evaluation and unveilment: "Unveiling a text can be an uncovering of the value system implicit in the text," thus "exposing the value system of a text or person to the gaze of spectators" (342). See Dale Sullivan, "The Epideictic Character of Rhetorical Criticism." *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), p. 342.

This event illustrates not only *play as power*, but it also features Slavoj Žižek's notion of "interpassive subjects." In the essay, "The Interpassive Subject," Slavoj Žižek discusses relationships of substitution in terms of enjoyment – the "outsourcing" of enjoyment onto some other object.[403] While Žižek is talking about works of art and how they provide passive participation for their viewers, this theory has implications for the narrative of *Cuckoo's Nest*, not in its reading reception, but in how the characters of the ward function as interpassive subjects, participating in rebellion and laughter through their delegate, McMurphy. Žižek extends his concept of interpassivity to include laughter through the concept of "canned laughter" in a section of the essay dealing with feelings and attitudes, Žižek expressing, "with watching a TV mini-series with canned laughter, where, even if I do not laugh but simply stare at the screen, tired after a hard day's work, I nonetheless feel relieved after the show," thus describing a situation in which a viewer's "most intimate feelings can be radically externalized; I can literally 'laugh and cry through another'" (Žižek). The patients experience – and perhaps, one can say that they even enjoy – *play as power* through McMurphy.

The patients are (inter)passive in the scene because they do not engage in the conflict, but enjoy the results of McMurphy's playful contestation of the Nurse's power and schedule of activities. For instance, Cheswick is often depicted as having grievances with certain policies, but he does not receive any attention from the patients or from the staff, nor does he experience any powerful outcomes through his objections. However, when the Nurse attempts to shut down McMurphy's request, McMurphy counters with "Yeah, perhaps we should get on with the sonofabitchin' meeting," and Cheswick agrees, "yeah, get on with the godblessed meeting," with the Chief reporting Cheswick looked "pleased to be sitting next to McMurphy, *feeling brave like this*" (104, italics added). While Cheswick does utter forth his sentiment, his feeling of braveness comes through McMurphy, for this is a literary depiction of an interpassive subject – meaning,

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[403] See Slavoj Žižek, "The Interpassive Subject." *Traverses, Centre Georges Pompidou*. 1998. Accessed 16 July 2016. Available at: http://www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou.htm.

Cheswick's announcement is not the *initial* utterance of dissatisfaction. It is McMurphy who first

verbally suggests a change in policy, and when he is met with resistance, he voices displeasure

with his surly expression. Additionally, the narrative has not described Cheswick's feelings of

"enjoyment" before, despite the fact that he has had previous complaints about ward policies

(enjoyment here meaning a sense of satisfaction for challenging the Big Nurse and her policies,

and in this case, despite the fact that McMurphy's and Cheswick's declaration reflect a tone of

irritability, Cheswick's feeling of bravery possesses a positive quality).

Thus, when it comes time to take a vote for changing the scheduled routines, the patients,

like Cheswick, participate interpassively. The Chief describes,

> The first hand that comes up, I can tell, is McMurphy's, … and then off down the slope I
>
> see them, other hands coming up out of the fog. It's like … that big red hand of
>
> McMurphy's is reaching into the fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by
>
> their hands, dragging them blinking into the open. First one, then another, then the next.
>
> Right on down the line of Acutes, dragging them out of the fog till there they stand, all
>
> twenty of them, raising not just for watching TV, *but against the Big Nurse, against her*
>
> *trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she's talked and acted and beat*
>
> *them down for years*. (121, italics added)

What is interesting to note here is that the activity in the scene seems involuntary, almost as if the

men are not willingly choosing to team up with McMurphy. However, *the* event of the novel –

the communal laughter of the patients on the fishing boat, which will be discussed shortly – is

beginning to develop at this stage; it is in the process of "becoming" and this scene marks a

significant point in that event. This is one of the early formations of *community* in the novel, for

the men will eventually rebel against the Big Nurse through McMurphy in this scene. They are

interpassive subjects participating in, and enjoying, the defeat of the Big Nurse. And here is *play*

as power at work – the men are not voting to watch TV and enjoy the game of baseball *ipso facto*.

The game of baseball (play) has much more at stake (power) for the men and ward-life. This act

can disrupt the Big Nurse's plans of sending McMurphy to Disturbed, for instance, and it also carries with it past grievances and acts as a stand against "the way she's talked and acted and beat them down for years" (121).

However, the Nurse too employs *play as power* back at McMurphy by falling back upon the "rules of the game," so to speak, regarding the voting process on the ward, which mandates a majority vote to change ward policy. While there are forty patients overall, twenty of the patients, the Chronics, are not rationally coherent or even communicative. She relies on the "ward constitution" and that alone has the authority to override what McMurphy has accomplished in terms of a united front. In spite of this fact, McMurphy does not give up and he moves along the Chronics without success until he comes to Chief Bromden. The Chief registers the final vote in the World Series debate, and when McMurphy is trying to get him to raise his hand, the narrative reports,

> It's too late to stop it now. McMurphy did something to it that first day, put some kind of hex on it with his hand so it won't act like I order it. There's no sense in it, any fool can see; I wouldn't do it on my own. Just by the way the nurse is staring at me with her mouth empty of words I can see I'm in for trouble, but I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it, lifting it slow just to get me out of the fog and out into the open where I'm fair game. He's doing it, wires … *No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself*. (123, italics added)

Here again is where interpassive subjectivity comes again, with a twist on Žižek's focus on objects and works of art. In a literary narrative, the patients represent interpassive subjects because the only way to illustrate their "enjoyment," or interpassive activity, is through instances like the one the Chief described. In these two passages concerning the vote, the men are portrayed as *both* being manipulated by McMurphy, and as acting agents – they decided to continue to stand along with McMurphy rather than retreat and go back to being passive. While McMurphy may be depicted as "plucking" them out of the fog and draggin them into the conflict,

the Chief describes how they vote against the Big Nurse and her power, emphasizing that McMurphy did not work the "wires," but the truth is he "lifted [his hand] himself" (123).

However, Žižek argues situations involving interpassive subjectivity are not as "stupid" or "primitive" as one might think, "for they harbor a momentous liberating potential." He continues, "By way of surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrificed instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I have paid for my guilt, and so on" (Žižek). The patients all throughout the novel struggle with laughing – for one reason or another, usually tied to fear and power; as the narrative has iterated, they are unable to loosen up and laugh.

Yet, the scene following the vote better illustrates the nature of narrative-interpassive-subjects in the novel. McMurphy looks at the clock, which rules the activity on the ward and is currently denoting chore-time, but McMurphy attempts to recode the agenda of the ward, and go against the Big Nurse's disciplinary structure. The narrative reports that McMurphy says "it's time for the game" and he leaves his "scouring rag where it lies" while "nobody else stops work." Then, "McMurphy walks past the window where she's glaring out at him and grins at her like he knows he's got her whipped now" (124). The narrative reveals that everyone keeps on with their chores "but they all watch out of the corners of their eyes while he drags his armchair out to in front of the TV set, then switches on the set and sits down" (124). Here it is interesting that the narrative includes the dominant gaze of Nurse Ratched from her Panopticon position, along with the rebellious gaze of McMurphy sporting a grin, *and* the interpassive gaze of the patients watching this power conflict unfold. The Nurse eventually turns the TV off from the control room, but McMurphy "don't even let on he knows the picture is turned off," and he "sits that way, with his hands crossed behind his head and his feet stuck out in a chair, a smoking cigarette sticking out from under his hat brim – watching the TV screen" (125).

However, McMurphy's laughter has filled the ward and carries with it *play as power*, for the Chief explains that McMurphy did something to him on that first day. In the beginning of the novel, when McMurphy arrives, the Chief notices his laugh, and how "there's nothing funny going on," but the laugh is "free and loud," and the Chief "realize[s] all of a sudden it's the first laugh [he's] heard in years" (11). A very interesting connection exists despite the fact that Žižek is referring to the "canned laughter" of the TV show; while the "canned laughter" enjoys and laughs for the interpassive subjects, McMurphy pretends to watch baseball and *rebels* for the interpassive patients. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, McMurphy is purportedly watching a baseball game on the television set; however, the Nurse cuts the power, and McMurphy acts as if the game is still on, enjoying it as if he were actually watching it. The patients begin to respond to McMurphy's pleasure so to speak, and engage in the game and McMurphy's behavior. The real significance lies in the fact that there is no televised game, and the patients are essentially reveling in the act of rebelliousness, as opposed to enjoying the pleasure of sporting-entertainment. The patients, then, can remain passive while McMurphy acts and rebels, and essentially, laughs, for them.

In reality, the scene has nothing to do with the game and play of baseball. Harding tells McMurphy that a "baseball game isn't worth the risk," but in American and/or game culture, a game of baseball is not really a risk of anything, but more of a game for sport and enjoyment; but when power dynamics are intermingled with the game, as the social context of *Cuckoo's Nest* indicates, a game of baseball certainly poses a risk when interpreted within the mental ward framework of discipline and punishment. The *play as power* resides in the act of *pretending* to watch baseball on the blank screen while the Nurse's power is diminishing as a result of that act (of play essentially).

For instance, the Nurse tells McMurphy he is supposed to be helping with the "housework," that it is time for "working," and she "warns him":

> "You're committed, you realize. You are … under the *jurisdiction* of me … the staff." She's holding up a fist, all those red orange fingernails burning into her palm. "Under the jurisdiction and *control* -"

> Harding shuts off the buffer, and leaves it in the hall, and goes pulls him a chair up alongside McMurphy and sits down and lights him a cigarette too.
> "Mr. Harding! You return to your scheduled duties!"
> I think how her voice sounds like it hit a nail, and this strikes me so funny I almost laugh. (125, italics original)

Eventually, the other men follow, Cheswick, Billy Bibbit, then Scanlon and Fredrickson and Sefelt pull up chairs and they sit there watching a blank TV screen like they could "see the baseball game clear as day," and the Chief notes, "If somebody'd of come in and took a look, men watching a blank TV, a fifty-year old woman hollering and squealing at the back of their heads about *discipline and order and recriminations*, they'd of thought the whole bunch was crazy as loons" (126); or, they would have witnessed the *power of play*.

Following the World Series scene, the narrative reveals that McMurphy kept on the Big Nurse and the staff "just as hard" as he ever was, "hollering up and down the hall, *laughing* at the black boys, frustrating the whole staff," "*and the patients were loving it*" (138; 137, italics added). Rather than just skirting his duties all together, McMurphy engages in forms of play, mostly in the context of humor and sarcasm in this instance. He "thanks" the Big Nurse for "latrine duty," telling her he would "think of her every time he swabbed out a urinal"; and he responds to the Big Nurse's criticism that his performance was an "outrage" with the quip, "No; that's a toilet bowl … a *toilet* bowl" (138). The other men too began to avoid their chores, all of them lining up during the "non-ordinary" time for TV, despite the fact that "the power was shut off in the Nurses' Station and [they] couldn't see a thing." In spite of the Nurse's attempt to control the situation by cutting off the supply of electricity to the television, McMurphy would again use play to "entertain" the group for hours, telling the patients "all kinds of stories," and he would "whack his leg and throw back his head and laugh and laugh, digging his thumb into the ribs of whoever was sitting next to him, trying to get him to laugh too" (139). The Chief reveals the significance of how the laughter represented *play as power* at work. He explains,

> There was times that week when I'd hear that full-throttled laugh, watch him scratching
>
> his belly and stretching and yawning and leaning back to wink at whoever he was joking

with, everything coming to him just as natural as drawing breath, *and I'd quit worrying*

about the Big Nurse and the Combine behind her. I'd think he was strong enough being

his own self that he would never back down the way she was hoping he would. I'd think,

maybe he truly is something extraordinary. He's what he is, that's it. Maybe that makes

him strong enough, being what he is. The Combine hasn't got to him in all these years;

what makes that nurse think she's gonna be able to do it in a few weeks? He's not gonna

let them twist him and manufacture him. (139-140, italics added)

McMurphy's laughter in this passage ridicules the Big Nurse's authority, exposing the

vulnerability in her already-established power to control. It has caused the Chief to reduce his

fear and worry over the Combine.

Additionally, McMurphy's use of *play as power* has united a communal affront on Nurse

Ratched, and the significance resides in the before-and-after transformation the Chief describes

here. Prior to McMurphy's arrival, the Chief and the other patients could not imagine a way to

counter the Nurse's and the Combine's controlling power. They were too enveloped in the

dominant discourse of the therapeutic community. However, McMurphy has not only instituted

play as power, but he has initiated the "adaptive variability" that Sutton-Smith and Boyd have

discussed through his play antics. However, rather than behavior that pertains to a "play-sphere,"

or a domain of leisure and entertainment, this usage of *play as power* has real productivity in

resisting and acting out against the dominant regime, with the biggest result being the

transformation of (inter)passive subjects into acting agents.

6) "Realizing the Power of Mental Illness": The Fishing Trip and *Play as Power* Actualized in Laughter

The patients transform from interpassive subjects to actual "players" during the fishing

trip. In this scene, the patients themselves play with the truth of their identities and situation in

order to gain power. Initially, the disciplinary power of the mental ward has *disempowered* them

– their diagnoses, what are the result of institutional control via classification and judgment,

constitute what they take to be the "truth," with no opportunity for variability or creative response; however, they take their power back by playing with that truth, or, more along the lines of adapting to the situational context. For instance, when they embark on the fishing trip and stop at a service station for gas, the employees begin to gaze at the men and inquire as to their origins, asking them if they are "from that *asylum*" (201). The workers laughed at the doctor when he stated that they were a work crew, and as a result, the Chief infers that they would sell them gas that "would be weak and dirty and watered down and cost twice the usual price," in addition to unneeded oil filters and wipers (202). The men at the service station will take the group's mental-patient-status and use it to their own advantage and benefit from it. The Chief notes how the doctor's "lying made us feel worse than ever – not because of the lie, so much, but because of the truth," the truth that they were indeed from "that asylum" and *not* a work crew (202).

Interestingly, when McMurphy – who was absent for this initial greeting – comes back, he explains that the confusion over whether or not they were inmates or a work crew was "just a kindly precaution to keep from *startlin'* you folks with the *truth*" (202), which McMurphy ultimately spins, adapting the men's individual stories in an attempt to counter the service employees' *affronting* behavior. McMurphy goes on to describe the group in ways more affiliated with the *un*truth: they are "hot off the criminal-insane ward, on the way to San Quentin," Billy was an "insane knife artist that killed three men," Harding was "unpredictable as a wild hog," and the Chief "beat six white men to death with a pick handle," while McMurphy himself was a "back-lot-boxer" who "killed a man in the ring" (203). The mechanic more fittingly calls McMurphy a "back-lot-bull-thrower," which is more along the lines of the truth. However, while the *real* truth made the men feel bad, why is it that McMurphy's "bravado" could make them feel better, more powerful?

As Chief established, there is a conflict between the truth and falsehood, and it would appear that the made-up identities of the men and the amplification of their mental illness is to credit for their feelings of worth. However, that is not the case. What makes them feel powerful

is the effect *play as power* offers them – a form of agency. After McMurphy models *play as power,* the men take ownership of this "adaptive variability" and utilize it *themselves* – they play *with the truth*, or adapt the fact that they are mental patients, and use that playfulness as a means of attaining power – the ability to get others to act on behalf of their own will. McMurphy only showed them the way.

For instance, the narrative reads, "By the time he got back everybody was feeling cocky as fighting roosters and calling orders to the service-station guys … just like we owned the show," and Harding tells a man passing by who asks if they are in a "club," "No, my friend. We are lunatics from the hospital up the highway, psycho-ceramics, the cracked pots of mankind. Would you like me to decipher a Rorschach for you? No? You must hurry on? Ah, he's gone. Pity." He turns to McMurphy and says, "never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power, *power*. Think of it: perhaps the more insane a man is, the more powerful he could become" (204). Harding's statement includes the repetition of the word "power," and he claims that the mental illness possesses the aspect of power. However, in 1950s and 1960s American society, mental illness was not so much as power-ful as it was dis-empowering. What Harding is really touching upon is the use of *play as power* – the way he and the other patients play with their mental illness to adapt to the changing environment outside of the ward.

While the men began the scene disempowered and ashamed, they have transformed into agents who utilize play to influence the situation. The men bark orders to the service employees, who originally were intent on ripping them off, and now those same men are doing as they are told. Harding even goes so far as to incorporate humor through metaphoric and psychiatric language. He refers the group to "psycho-ceramics, the cracked pots of mankind," and then asks if the bicyclist would like a "Rorschach" deciphered; his statements serve as epideictic discourse with the decorous language and the critique of psychiatry's methods of evaluation. However, in the end, the Chief also explains that the "tough looks were all show, because [McMurphy] still wasn't able to get a real laugh out of anybody" and that they were having "fun pretending to be

brave" (205). The men have learned the power of play, but have yet to actualize *play as power* through laughter.

This is setting up the culminating event of the novel, the scene on the boat where all the men finally give in and "lose their footing" and *laugh*. What is important thus far is the community that is forming – first with the World Series vote and *revolt*; then the patients communally share a real-world encounter with others trying to disempower them; and finally, they participate in McMurphy's display of *play as power*. As a result of the experience – mostly in reference to the fact that the men were only "pretending to be brave" because they hadn't really laughed yet – the Chief, fittingly touches upon a definitional component of *play as power*. He juxtaposes play on the one hand, and dominant power on the other. He observes, "you can't really be strong until you can see a *funny side to things*," while at the same time, he mentions "*the other side*," the powerful "pressures of the different beams and frequencies coming from all directions, working to push and bend you one way or another" (205, italics added). At this point in the narrative, the backdrop for the Event of laughter as a representation of *play as power* has been set up.

The scene on the boat represents *play as power* finally actualized through the laughter of the characters. The episode begins by featuring the patients' activity *in* the world Outside. The fishing boat scene amplifies narrative activity on the boat in order to pit play against power. Interestingly enough, the patients *have* adjusted extremely well to their surroundings on the Outside, but it is not because of the disciplinary agenda of the ward. Their laughter defies the type of seriousness and "precision-made" structure that the Big Nurse desires *in order* to adjust them for the Outside. The result of the action of the scene is a fit of laughter that goes against the seriousness and disciplined order the Nurse wishes to enforce. The activity is chaotic, playful, and the scene reads humorously rather than seriously.

For instance, the novel records numerous instances of McMurphy trying to get the patients to laugh, the entire time the text commenting on how they are all too scared or powerless

to laugh in the face of the Big Nurse. Her mission to discipline and punish the patients into well-

adjusted citizens drives her to utilize any means necessary to make "rational contact." This

project of rationalization opposes the irrational, which comes in many forms, but in the narrative,

the irrational expresses itself predominantly in play and laughter. Kevin Casper contends that

laughter "produces effects by means of an asignifying force, one that exceeds signification and

rational control."[404] Deane Davis, in her book, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of

Laughter*, shares an interesting anecdote regarding an incident that occurred when she was an

adolescent in church battling an oncoming fit of laughter, and it establishes how laughter signals

such a loss of rational control:

> My whole being wants desperately *not* to laugh, and yet it's clear to me that my will is
>
> not in control; something else has hold of me – I wonder if it's God. Despite my
>
> willpower, despite my squirming and my clenched teeth, I hear mySelf beginning to
>
> "crack up," both literally (the stability of the "I" is challenged when it becomes the *object*
>
> of this laughter's force) and figuratively. I feel harsh eyes boring into me from all sides,
>
> and I fight desperately for control. But to no avail. My body has been possessed by the
>
> force of laughter. Despite my reason and my will, laughter bursts out. The battle is over.
>
> "I" have been conquered.[405]

Aside from the religious overtones, Davis's reflection could replace any one of the patient's inner

monologues, including the Chief's. Looking back at the World Series vote, when the Big Nurse

is yelling at the men to get back to their duties, screaming about "law and order," while they sit in

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[404] See Kevin Casper, "I Didn't Do It, Man, I Only Said It: The Asignifying Force of *The Lenny Bruce Performance Film*. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 347. Casper focuses on the comedian Lenny Bruce and *The Lenny Bruce Performance Film*, which chronicles the comedian's obscenity charges and his performance in August of 1965. The film demonstrates, Casper points out, how the "asignifying force of laughter moves simultaneously within and beyond traditional conceptual barriers and Bruce's act "moves back and forth between the courtroom and the nightclub, [and] his performance plays up the 'considerable confusion' that surrounds notions of performativity" (348). Most importantly, Casper explains how the effects of Bruce's utterances rely on the "use of contextual elements like voice, tone, style, and delivery," which clearly "do things" (350).

[405] Deane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter*. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000, p. 22.

front of a picture-less television, he states, "I think how her voice sounds like it hit a nail, and this strikes me so funny I almost laugh" (125). Yet, the Chief does not allow himself to "crack up." The Nurse and the Combine always have "eyes" on him, the Chief at one point commenting on how the Nurse "stabs me again with both eyes," glaring at him "suspicious" of something (131). Davis discusses the struggle the men have experienced on the ward, but she allows herself to be "conquered" by the irrational. She argues that human beings are "caught in a co(s)mic sweep, seized by outside forces," which result in "bursts of irrepressible laughter," claiming that "to be possessed by this movement of energy, laughed by a co(s)mic Laughter, is to be thrown into a *petit mal* in which one's consciousness, one's capacity for meaning-making is suspended. And/but to fight with the sweep is to fight with *life*."[406]

While Davis discusses how she is *not* in control of her will to laugh (or to not laugh), in *Cuckoo's Nest* the patients are too *afraid* to laugh, thus submitting their will to an external authority founded upon rationality and discipline that overrules the oncoming fit of (irrational) laughter. Davis uses very interesting language in connection to *Cuckoo's Nest*. She refers to the onslaught of laughter as being thrown into a *"petit mal,"* and in the novel, only the electroconvulsive therapy or the patients with epilepsy experience this lapse in consciousness, both instances due to psychiatric contingencies. Davis, in this recollection, despite her attempt at rationality, suffers defeat – she is "laughed by a co(s)mic Laughter," whereas the patients suffer defeat to a system of discipline and punishment. The patients never allow such a loss of control prior to this scene. They permit their fear of Nurse Ratched to extinguish any oncoming bouts of laughter. Davis's concluding point regarding fighting with the "sweep" of "co(s)mic" energy as fighting with life also has an important implication for *play as power* as an alternative way of life. Considering Parvulescu's point about the "energy" placed in laughter's management by the

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[406] Davis, p. 18. Davis establishes the notion of "discursive laughter," which she defines as laughter that encompasses "the posthumanist notion that human beings are always already functions of other functions," the condition that "human beings are unceremoniously possessed by outside forces or 'rhythms' that have little to do with social norms" (23).

"heralds of seriousness," the energy from laughter functions as a revolt against rationality and seriousness, or, discipline and order (laughter can be aligned with the nonrational if seriousness and the management of laughter both depend upon rationality).

Previously, the patients were stuck in a routine and were not *living* much of a life, but the activity on the boat depicts the opposite. On the boat, they are not afraid to laugh, or to give in to the oncoming burst of laughter, and the effect has a profound transformation for them. In a lengthy, but absolutely crucial passage, in arguably the apex of the novel, the Chief narrates,

> The scramble of action holds for a space, a second there on the sea – the men yammering and struggling and cussing and trying to tend their poles while watching the girl; the bleeding, crashing battle between Scanlon and my fish at everybody's feet; the lines all tangled and shooting every which way with the doctors glasses-on-a-string tangled and dangling from one line ten feet off the back of the boat, fish striking at the flash of the lens, and the girl cussing for all she's worth and looking now at her bare breasts, one white and one smarting red – and George takes his eye off where he's going and runs the boat into that log and kills the engine.
>
> *While McMurphy laughs*. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, *spreading his laugh out across the water – laughing at* the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier and the bicycle rider and the service station guys and the five thousand houses and the Big Nurse *and all of it*. Because he knows *you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance*, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girlfriend has a bruised breast and the doctor is losing his glasses, but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain.
>
> *I notice Harding is collapsed beside McMurphy and is laughing too*. And Scanlon from the bottom of the boat. *At their own selves as well as at the rest of us*. And the girl, with her eyes still smarting as she looks from her white breast to her red one, she starts laughing. And Sefelt and the doctor, *and all*.
>
> It started slow and *pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger*. I watched, part of them, laughing with them – and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water and skating the wind with those black birds, high above myself, and I could look down and see myself and the rest of the guys, see the boat rocking there in the middle of those diving birds, see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people, and watch them, us, *swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles, farther and farther, until it crashed up on beaches all over the coast, on beaches all over all coasts, in wave after wave after wave*. (214-215, italics added)

Stephen Tanner interprets the scene in the following way: "The cosmic dimension of this scene – the novel's epiphany – epitomizes Kesey's playfully-conveyed theme of salvation through

laughter."[407]   However, Tanner's reading elevates McMurphy above the other men and he

neglects the community formed here. The patients, who have been interpassive subjects, have

experienced interactions with members of society – i.e., adjusted individuals who live in the

Outside world – but this time, the patients do not only enjoy through McMurphy; they join him in

interacting and utilizing "play" in the ensuing social interactions. And, it is the Chief who is

elevated, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who proclaims, "You look upward when you long for

elevation. And I look down because I am elevated. Who among you can laugh and be elevated at

the same time? Whoever climbs the highest mountain laughs at all tragedies, real or

imaginary."[408] While McMurphy is able to see the "funny side of things" more, the Chief

resembles Zarathustra in the ability to recognize that there is a "painful side," but that one must

"laugh at the things that hurt you to keep yourself in balance." The Chief, prior to this scene,

questions as to whether or not McMurphy is "blind to the other side" of the "funny side of things"

– i.e., the nature of the Combine to "twist and manipulate" individuals (205). Furthermore, during

the communal laughter, the Chief reflects upon the scenery, stating, "I could see the signs of what

the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country," things like "five thousand

houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town," and

McMurphy and the other men may have been able to "feel the pressures of the different beams

and frequencies," "but [the Chief] was able to "*see* it" (206, italics original). More importantly,

the Chief can "see" the power of McMurphy's laughter, which spreads and directs itself *towards*

the "five thousand houses and the Big Nurse," and "all" of the Combine's work.

    In the first part of the passage, the Chief's narrative amplifies the activity of the scene,

complete with "yammering," "cussing," and "struggling" with the fishing poles, action that would

never be permitted on the ward. This is not the rational, disciplinary activity of the ward; rather,

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[407] Stephen L. Tanner, "Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* and the Varieties of American Humor." *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor* 13.1-2 (1993): p. 3.
[408] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 119.

the men are far from the activities of "group meetings" and "house chores" that Nurse Ratched has scheduled for them. Additionally, the chief describes how this "scramble of action holds for a space, a second there on the sea." Time has been recoded into the play-sphere and is no longer the disciplinary time of the ward, but it has been suspended, and just like Davis insinuates, "meaning-making" too has been discarded – the patients are not trying to process any of the action or make sense of what is happening. While the therapeutic community insists that the others help each other process and interpret every action, decision, or spoken word, they finally allow themselves to "crack up" without worrying about the psychological complexities. They are possessed by the co(s)mic sweep and they do not fight with life, meaning, they do not fight the "smarting" nature of existence, but allow themselves to be taken over by outside forces that care little about social norms or disciplinary methods of order and control.

After the break in time and space that allows the Chief to observe the scene, there is another break – the narrative action is ruptured by McMurphy's laughter. The situation described is not *inherently* humorous, but McMurphy sees the absurdity and the extraordinariness of the activity on the boat, and once George crashes the boat, time stops once again and laughter erupts. McMurphy's laughter is contagious and it spreads, but its object is more than just the action unfolding in the scene – like Davis explains, it "laughs" the other individuals on the boat and individuals beyond. This is how laughter is a representation of *play as power*, which is itself an alternative way of living in an environment of social control. The laughter of the scene expands over time and space, for it is a laughter directed at the "captain back at the pier," the "bicycle rider and the service station guys and the five thousand houses and the Big Nurse and all of it." The laughter "swells" the men. The Nurse and the Combine have beaten them down and made them small, but laughter makes them "big" again.

This is *the* "Event" of the novel – all the other events the novel records flow into this one major Event.[409] An Event is the "turning point," the moment of "tears and joys" (both of which this passage contains) that mark a transformation, a "becoming." The Chief even announces the transformation after the fishing trip when the men dock the boat and see the same individuals that ridiculed them prior to shipping out, noting, "They could sense the change that most of us were only suspecting; these weren't the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse that they'd watched take their insults on the dock this morning" (218). The "play" involved in the excursion transposed the men from the ordinary space of the mental ward to the non-ordinary space of the boat on the sea, and in doing so, provided a different system of governing principles that were detached from the mental hospital's system of discipline and control. However, it is not just the change of scenery that offers the patients the opportunity to wield a form of power, for the men

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[409] I am using the term Event as it is employed by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*. See, Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Deleuze writes, "But the paradoxical instance is the Event in which all events communicate and are distributed. It is the Unique event, and all other events are its bits and pieces" (56). What are events? Events are "singularities," a set of points "characterizing a mathematical curve, a physical state of affairs, a psychological or moral person," and they are "turning points and points of inflection," including "points of tears and joy" (52). Events are "ideational singularities" that "communicate in one and the same Event," and as a result, they speak to an "eternal truth," meaning, they are neither the past, present, or future, but rather, they subsist in the "Aion," defined as "the past-future, which in an infinite subdivision of the abstract moment endlessly decomposes itself in both directions at once and forever sidesteps the present" (77). H also explains that singularities are "actualized," which means that they are "extended over a series of ordinary points," "to be incarnated in a body; to become a state of a body," or, put simply, "To be actualized is to be expressed" (110). Deleuze does point out that there is a "present moment" of actualization, when the event is "embodied in a state of affairs or person." He gives the example of a "tree greening" – "the tree greens" (21; 112). Deleuze distinguishes between events and essences, saying that there is no particular essence inherent in a thing apart from the events that signify and actualize it as that particular thing. In other words, events are singularities coming together and producing an effect or change produced or effected at the moment of the interaction of forces, bodies, or singularities. Also, see Cliff Stagoll, "Event," in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Ed. Adrian Parr. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 89-91. Stagoll writes, "An event is neither a beginning nor an end point, bur rather always 'in the middle.' Events themselves have no beginning - or end-point, and their relationship with Deleuze's notion of dynamic change - 'becoming' - is neither one of 'joining moments together' nor one in which an event is the 'end' of one productive process, to be supplanted or supplemented by the next. Rather, becoming 'moves through' an event, with the event representing just a momentary productive intensity" (91). This explains the laughter in the fishing boat scene. The events of the novel lead up to this Event, and *play as power* is actualized in the bodies and states of the patients. The novel features many events in which various forces, bodies, ideas, states, etc. interact and create the "the potential immanent within a particular confluence of forces" (90). Laughter signifies *play as power* actualized, as the product of the internal dynamics of power – laughter is the expression of the actualization of *play as power* and it marks a transformation, especially in the communal sense of laughter here.

take their transformed selves back to the ward and enact *play as power* on the Big Nurse's

hospital floor.

7) Conclusion

The conclusion of the novel deals with power in all its complexity as presented in the

narrative – physical power, the power of containment, and the power of play, ultimately

concluding the literary epideictic theory of *play as power*. In the context of the novel, and as it

reflects the contemporary issue of social control and psychiatry, the use of EST to "make contact"

with patients carries the risk of erasing memory. While EST threatens to erase memories, *play as*

power works in the opposite direction – McMurphy's presence and *re*coding of the ward space

into a play-sphere *created* memories for the patients. More importantly, memory – as it serves as

a playful form of reminiscing in terms of leaving the boundaries of time and space, of ordinary

space – is another facet connected to *play as power* as the novel closes.

When McMurphy and the Chief are subjected to EST treatments, the narration follows

the Chief's internal line of thought and the text actively portrays Harding's description of EST as

a "wild carnival wheel of images, emotions, memories" (163). However, rather than "lose" this

figurative "game" as Harding describes it, the Chief wins with these memories in tact, which

overcomes the power of EST to "change you," to make "you forget things" as Harding puts it

(163). The Chief notes how McMurphy does not "look a bit scared" and that he is "grinning."

As the aides put the "robot arms" on McMurphy's temples, "he's singing to them, [and] makes

their hands shake" (244). He gives Chief a "wink," and "says something to [Chief] around that

rubber hose," but the Chief cannot make out what he says (245). Then, the Chief recalls, right

before he comes out of his unconsciousness,

> What did you say to me when you winked?
> Band playing. Look – the *sky*; It's the Fourth of July.
> Dice at rest.
> They got to me with the machine again … I wonder …
> What did he say?
> … wonder how McMurphy made me big again.
> He said Guts ball. (248)

Prior to their turn at the "Shock Shop," the lifeguard who is committed and used to be a former football player, the same individual who inadvertently informed McMurphy about the indeterminate sentencing time for committed patients, yells "Guts ball, guts ball" right before he undergoes EST (243).

The significance extends broadly. First, the phrase comes from a character who is primarily identified with "play" and the game of football. Second, it refers to "any kind of fiercely aggressive and competitive ball game."[410] Third, and most important, it alludes to the earlier event in which the patients form a basketball team and play the staff. In the game, McMurphy gets into a fight with an aide and assaults him in the face and draws blood. What is significant is the way in which the "play" of the game recoded the governing principles of the ward in that moment.

For instance, if McMurphy would have assaulted the aide outside of the play-sphere of the basketball court, he would have been sent to Disturbed, but because the game of basketball contains the *possibility* of something like that occurring within the nature of the game, he cannot be punished for it as an intentional act. McMurphy took advantage of the game and its conventions to strike back at the aide, in essence, playing the "fiercely aggressive and competitive" guts ball game. And most importantly, the phrase possesses power in this scene. McMurphy says "guts ball" to the Chief *prior* to the administration of the Chief's EST. After the Chief receives the EST and the "carnival" of "memories" unravels, he comes out on the other side and *remembers* what McMurphy said to him. His memory stayed in tact throughout the EST. The phrase "guts ball" has provided a narrative litmus test in order to demonstrate *play as power*'s victory over the disciplinary power behind EST. The Chief then reflects upon how long he has been unconscious, and shares, "It's fogging a little, but I won't slip off and hide in it. No

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[410] See the entry, "guts ball," in Jonathon Green, *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. London: Chambers, 2010.

… never again," recognizing that he'd "never worked at coming out of it before" and that he finally "had them beat" (249).

Memory also plays a role in the final scene, when the Chief liberates McMurphy and himself from the "mechanical grips" of the ward. After the Chief suffocates McMurphy, freeing him from being "an example of what can happen if you buck the system," Scanlon suggests he escape (278). The Chief replies, "Oh, yeah, just like that. Just ask 'em to unlock the door and let me out," and Scanlon retorts, "No. He showed you how one time, if you think back. That very first week. You *remember*?" (279, italics added). Interestingly, Scanlon triggers a memory that pertains to the control panel. Earlier in the novel, the patients are discussing how McMurphy would break out of the hospital and after contemplating the various objects in the room, McMurphy settles on the control panel, and the narrative reports that it is "steel and cement" and "probably weighs four hundred pounds." McMurphy once again utilizes *play as power*, making this endeavor of lifting the control panel, which is ultimately the concluding climax of the novel, a game, or a bet – "nobody's gonna convince me I can't do something till I try it. Five bucks …" (109). McMurphy puts forth grueling effort, but he is unable to achieve the feat, but he states, "But I tried though, … Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?" (110). The significance of this moment is couched in *play as power*'s "adaptive variability." McMurphy, while portrayed as "always *winning* things" (233, italics in original), is really trying to show the other Acutes potentiality – what seems like the impossible can be overcome.

This episode is setting up the future event, which is the bet between McMurphy and the Chief regarding the Chief's strength to lift the panel, but more importantly, it provides the narrative opportunity for the Chief to define his philosophy of "big." McMurphy asks the Chief why he won't "lay into" the staff, and the Chief says that he is not as big and tough as McMurphy. McMurphy is confused because the Chief "stands a head taller'n any man on the ward." The Chief corrects McMurphy, stating he used to be big, but not anymore (187). The Chief then tells McMurphy about his mother, who was "bigger" than him and his father

combined, and he alludes to what being "big" really entails: having "fight" in you, standing one's

ground, and "not giving in" (188). And this amounts to a type of liberation from social control,

like a wandering nomad free of social constraints, and he gives his father as an example of one

who evaded the government's attempt to take the tribe's land, and to "pay for a way a man lives"

(189). McMurphy then says, "when you were full-sized, when you used to be, let's say, six seven

or eight and weighed two eighty or so – were you strong enough to, say, lift something the size of

that control panel in the tub room?" (190-191). The Chief again accesses his memory, recalling

the oil drums he lifted in the Army and how that should equate to lifting the control panel.

McMurphy ends by explaining the secretiveness of their deal, for "blowin' a man up to full size is

a secret you can't share with everybody, be dangerous in the hands of an enemy" (191).

McMurphy and the Chief are talking about *play as power* – they are both playing with the

language and this concept of "bigness," which does not have to do with physical size, but with the

ability to evade the Combine's domineering power.

　　The control panel serves as an object of *play as power*, for it originally represented

"play" as it functioned in the bets circulating among the men, but it also possesses great power for

it ends up liberating the Chief from the ward. In the final scene in the narrative, the Chief heaves

the panel through the window and flees, reflecting, "I felt like I was flying. Free" (280).

Immediately following the Chief's escape, the novel once again hones in on memory – the Chief

wants to go back to the Dalles where he was from and "look over the country around the gorge

again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again. I been a way a long time" (281). The

Combine diminished his size, and on the ward, it attempted to diminish his memory. However,

the notion of *play as power* returned the Chief to his "big" size and allowed him to overcome the

deleterious power of the Combine and EST to take away his power through the erasure of his

memories.

　　Although the Chief's liberation is the final scene of the novel, and a very important one,

the true significance of Kesey's text is *what* the Chief leaves the ward with – a recognition and

awareness of a counter strategy to forms of social control. Perhaps the most poignant concluding

narrative moment occurs during the party on the ward, which is the true transformation of the

"ordinary" ward space into the "non-ordinary" play-space. Once a place of "house chores,"

precision, surveillance, and fear, the ward becomes part-saloon, part-brothel, part-amusement

park – the men are drinking, they have girls to dance and socialize with, and they are taking the

hospital wheelchairs for rides, etc. However, at one point, Harding makes what functions as a

quasi-prayer, but it takes a more rhetorical and epideictic form of speaking — he *re*codes the

prayer with humor, subversion, and essentially, play. He proclaims,

> "Most merciful God, accept these two poor sinners into your arms. And keep the doors
>
> ajar for the coming of the rest of us, because you are witnessing the end, the absolute,
>
> irrevocable, fantastic end. I've finally realized what is happening. It is our last fling. We
>
> are doomed henceforth. Must screw our courage to the sticking point and face up to our
>
> impending fate. We shall be all of us shot at dawn. One hundred cc's apiece. Miss
>
> Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we'll face the terrible maw of a muzzle-
>
> loading shotgun which she has loaded with Miltowns! Thorazines! Libriums! Stelazines!
>
> And with a wave of her sword, *blooie!* Tranquilize all of us completely out of existence."
>
> (262)

The beginning of Harding's plea takes on a serious tone, and it shifts following his assertion that

they will all be "shot at dawn." Rather than an execution-style shooting, the patients will receive

psychiatry's catatonic weaponry – the bullets of tranquilization. As David Ingleby reveals in

"Mental Health and Social Order," "the main achievement was the development in the 1950s of

the major tranquilizers for treatment of the psychoses."[411] This gives the passage further social

import, for it connects the narrative to not only EST, but to the institution of psychiatry as an

institution of social control, experimenting with physical and nonphysical methods of treatment,

and essentially forms of coercion. Ingleby also points out that psychiatry's "drug revolution,"

along with the awareness of the negative effects of institutionalization, began to phase out the "asylum," and there was some speculation that the drugs made it more difficult for patients to adapt to life outside of the asylum, or, as Nurse Ratched says, "adjust to their surroundings." When play and laughter attempted to resist disciplinary measures in the novel, the subjects were threatened with tranquilization – the Big Nurse relied on psychiatric drugs and other forms of therapeutic measures to control the patients' behavior, in essence, "tranquilizing them out of existence." However, at this point, the patients have learned *play as power* as a way to evade the clutches of institutionalized control.

While Harding demonstrates the combination of "play" and "power," the Chief expresses the outcome of *play as power* and its relation to laughter – i.e., how laughter resists forces of power, like the Nurse's and the Combine's. It is as if Gaëtan Brulotte has the Chief in mind when he writes, "with laughter, the social machine creaks, its herd-like unanimity falters, its habitual cohesion breaks up, and its mechanical reactions break down."[412] In a telling passage, the Chief reflects,

> As I walked after them it came to me as a kind of sudden surprise that I was drunk, actually drunk, glowing and grinning and staggering drunk for the first time since the Army, drunk along with half a dozen other guys and a couple of girls – *right on the Big Nurse's ward*! Drunk and running and *laughing* and carrying on with women square in *the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold*! I thought back on the night, on what we'd been doing, and it was near impossible to believe. I had to keep *reminding* myself that it had *truly* happened, that we had made it happen. We had just unlocked a window and let it in like you let in the fresh air. *Maybe the Combine wasn't all-powerful*. What was to stop us from doing it again, now that we saw we could? Or keep us from doing other things we wanted? I gave a yell and swooped down on McMurphy and the

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[411] Ingleby, "Mental Health and Social Order," p. 166.
[412] Brulotte, "Laughing at Power," p. 15.

girl Sandy walking along in front of me, grabbed them both up, one in each arm, and ran

all the way to the day room with them hollering and kicking like kids. I felt that good.

(263)

This experience of *play as power* is what the Chief takes with him when he flees the ward. He has

experienced the overcoding of serious, disciplinary space with play, and he has felt the power

behind it as he relates his resistance to the Combine, or the invisible network of power relations.

He has learned play's "adaptive variability," for play has taught him how to survive the

paralyzing fear inflicted upon him from the Combine. Additionally, the passage features traces of

memory, of "remembering" and "thinking back," something the Chief will now be able to do

when he is free. The Combine's control over him did not just dissipate on the ward; he feels the

possibility of being able to do "other things" on the Outside too. While the control panel freed

him, *play as power* has evolved him for survival on the Outside and he is taking his newly

recreated self out into the world. The Chief transforms through *play as power*; and as for the

Combine – it has lost its all-power-full-ness.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

In the article, "Alas, Poor Richard," James Baldwin recounts his troubled relationship with Richard Wright following the publication of his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in which Baldwin criticized the protest novel for failing to capture human dignity, and in the case of *Native Son*, for Bigger Thomas's inability to transcend his blackness. Baldwin recalls a time when he and Wright had a conversation about the purpose of protest literature, and Wright proclaimed, "*All* literature is protest." Baldwin replied that while "all literature might be protest [not] all protest was literature," to which Wright countered, "here you come again with all that art for art's sake crap."[413] The debate Baldwin narrates here inspired this dissertation. As discussed in the Introduction, classical rhetorical traditions subsumed all literature under the catch-all category of epideictic rhetoric, mainly because of literature's and epideictic's specific use of ornate and decorous language to "praise or blame" a person, event, or thing.

However, while epideictic's origins are found in oratory, the progression of literary history and literary developments modified the relationship between literature and epideictic, especially when it comes to the work of "decorous" language. For one, not all literature is epideictic, and while most scholars and readers can argue that all literature comments on social issues and can be viewed as a form of protest, not all protest literature qualifies as epideictic, for the literary epideictic is less concerned with figurative or flowery language as it is with creating a narrative discourse that depicts individual and collective experiences as they are rooted in historical and institutional contexts. The *literary epideictic* develops out of a history of protest literature and it comprises a specific brand of protest writing, one that utilizes a strategic rhetorical approach, and as a result, not all protest literature qualifies as *literary epideictic*. In other words, the *literary epideictic* is more concerned with the epideictic function of the literature than with the literature *in and of itself* – the texts are performative, and they represent what Walter Beale proposes as the "rhetorical performative."

Beale defines the rhetorical performative as a "unified act of rhetorical discourse which does not merely say, argue, or allege something about the world of social action, but which constitutes (in some special way defined by the conventions or customs of a community) a significant social action in itself."[414] Revisiting J.L. Austin's concept of the "performative," Beale observes that in the case of epideictic speeches, there is a particularly important context that enters into the meaning or force of the rhetorical composition, what he terms "*nuclei*," or "*unities*" of social, cultural, or institutional dimensions that give "rise and sanction" to the speech. These unities, Beale states, identify what a speech amounts to – as a "defense," "celebration," or "condemnation" of something.[415] Beale points out that in the traditions of deliberative, forensic, and informative rhetoric, the audience is primarily directed to the "facts of the case," or the "locutionary aspect – one is given a speech that involves the framing of discourse *to maintain or argue something about the world or action*" – while in traditional discourse situations associated with epideictic, the audience is chiefly presented with "the communal or historical significance of the speech itself," or the "illocutionary aspect." Beale writes, "[the epideictic] involves the framing of discourse in the *performance of or participation in an action*. The epideictic or 'rhetorical performative' act is one that participates in the reality to which it refers."[416] Beale

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[413] See James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*. Dial Press, 1961, p. 197.
[414] Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1978, p. 225.
[415] Walter Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall, 1978), p. 229. To begin with, Austin defined the "constative" as utterances that "say," "describe," or "report" something, and the "performative" as utterances that carry out "the doing of an action." The locutionary act is "a performance of an act *of* saying something," the illocutionary act as the "performance of an act *in* saying something," and the perlocutionary act as "the performance of an act *through* saying something" (Austin, pp. 94-100). Beale articulates that in a performative utterance, the utterance is part of "the doing of an action" as opposed to "just saying something." See Beale, pp. 226-228; 232-233, and J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962, pp. 1-5.
[416] Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse," p. 225-226; 229, italics original. Beale writes, "Those discourses which involve a nucleus of performative speech acts and which are delivered in and sustain rhetorical situations in which the audience's attentions are directed principally toward the illocutions of the discourse, as opposed to its arguments or the 'facts of the matter,' are *rhetorical performatives*: these are the kind of discourses that have been traditionally classed as epideictic" (232). A vital distinction exists between speech acts and rhetorical acts for Beale. Whereas speech act constitutes any meaningful utterance, Beale states that a rhetorical act is comprised of a "rhetor's response to a rhetorical context." The distinction between "speech act" and "rhetorical act" according to Beale lies in the particular "qualities in

argues that Austin failed to pay attention to the "extralinguistic," or the social and rhetorical

components of discourse, and based on this observation, he proposes his new theory of epideictic

performative discourse.

In discussing epideictic and rhetorical performative discourse, Beale presents three

defining features: "(1) the 'illocutionary force' of the speech – that is to say, what it 'amounts to';

(2) its setting; and (3) its origin."[417] In regards to the first element, the "illocutionary force," Beale

once again calls upon Austin's subclassifications of speech acts, and the category of

"behabitives" is the most useful and applicable to the *literary epideictic*. "Behabitives" act as "a

kind of performative concerned roughly with reactions to behaviour and with behaviour towards

others and [they are] designed to exhibit attitudes and feelings."[418] Ultimately, "behabitives" are

directed towards "social behaviour," and some of the examples include "apologizing,"

"protesting," "challenging," "criticizing," "congratulating," and "blaming." This language and

these acts are highly indicative of epideictic discourse, and "behabitives" in the *literary epideictic*

are represented by the literary speech acts that perform a critique of American postwar societal

relations. For instance, *Native Son* deplores the racialized fear instilled in the consciousness of

black individuals, and it carries out an indictment of a racist society that imposes violent, racist

social scripts. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison challenges the reification of democratic ideals when he

narratively demonstrates the *non*recognition of a black protagonist in a democratic context, and

his novel calls for democratic consubstantiality. Kerouac criticizes a postwar consumerist desire

fostered by the political influences of domestic containment, and *On the Road* conducts a search

for authentic desire detached from political ideology and material goods. And in *Cuckoo's Nest*,

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the specific unities of speeches within a social or institutional dimension, rather than in the forms of the utterance *per se*." (232-233). Furthermore, Beale articulates that rhetorical acts are "more complex, more deliberate, more artistic or crafty," and the speaker(s) and the audience is more or less aware of the "factors that control public speech." See Walter Beale, *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, p. 82; and Karl R. Wallace, *Understanding Discourse: The Speech Act and Rhetorical Action*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970. Beale cites Wallace's study as the origin of the distinction.
[417] Beale, p. 235.

Kesey resists systems of discipline and punishment, and his novel "plays" and "laughs" in the face of power and control.

What distinguishes the four novels I have looked at in my dissertation as epideictic (and others like them) is the way they use a rhetorical-narrative approach to make their interventions. In the case of *The Ethos of Dissent*, it is the rhetorical performative discourse of *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *On the Road*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that is created by, and responds to, each text's *epideictic exigency*. This objective of the *literary epideictic* connects to Beale's component of "setting," and my dissertation's discussion of the "social environment." The *literary epideictic* connects the narrative world to the social reality the novels reflect, and therefore, these texts comment upon and attempt to alter the social imaginary. Wright, Ellison, Kerouac, and Kesey employ this rhetorical-narrative strategy in their novels to expose instabilities, and to create literary "dwelling places" for citizen-readers to contemplate the values that are operating in postwar American society, specifically, the values that govern individuality. In this way, the authors and their novels answer Ellison's call by "reporting what is going on in [their] particular American experience," targeting what they view as societal failings, and ultimately imagining other possibilities.[419] Thus, what distinguishes the *literary epideictic* from other types of literature is the relationship between the *epideictic exigency*, the narrative and affective discourse, and epideictic's main concern with upholding, challenging, or recreating communal values.

While all literature attempts to mirror a social reality, the *literary epideictic*, as featured in *The Ethos of Dissent*, does so more precisely; the narratives, the social and cultural moment, and the *affect* the texts produce unite for a common end – to expose the way "Anonymous Authority" governs individuality, and to envision alternative ways of living. For instance, in *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas's situation closely resembles the historical account of the Robert

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[418] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*. The Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 83.

Nixon case, and as a result, Wright creates a narrative that demonstrates the intense racialized

fear produced by a racist social environment that controlled Robert Nixon's activity, fear, and

fate. His narrative asks readers to consider their complicit roles in creating such a reality.

Invisible Man is a very complex narrative, but in terms of carrying out the objectives of the

literary epideictic, the novel's theme of invisibility is portrayed through events that comment

upon the lack of recognition for African American individuals. The narrative theme closely

resembles the social environment that refuses to *recognize* African Americans as worthy of

democratic values, much like institutional powers refused to see the WWII veteran Isaac

Woodard, who was blinded for failing to act in accordance with racialized scripts, worthy of

justice. Therefore, the novel features a character suffering a social death because he is not

granted equal rights by those who refuse to "see" him, and in the end, the narrator attempts to

imagine a shared democratic fate.

On the Road comments on the behavior of mass society as it is influenced by the political

strategy of domestic containment. Kerouac's narrative challenges the social production of a

consumerist desire that determined "good" citizens in the postwar period, and it constructs a

rhetoric of desire represented by mobility and authenticity as the antithesis to the social and

cultural doctrine of containment. Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* creates a microcosm of society in the

mental ward, and the narrative activity is confronted with threats of discipline and punishment

that are the byproduct of a social environment attempting to control individuals; in the end, Kesey

champions play and laughter as the counter-activity to systems of control. In the end, these

novels contain affective discourses that are related to the social environments influencing the

texts, and in this way, the narrative worlds, the social realities, and the emotionally-laden values

are congruent in a way unique to the *literary epideictic*.

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[419] See the "Introduction" of *The Ethos of Dissent*, and Ellison, "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy." In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, p. 763.

Of course, the four authors featured in *The Ethos of Dissent* are male, but that does not exclude female writers. The four authors were chosen because each of one of them was a literary icon – Richard Wright became the face of postwar African American protest writing after the publication of *Native Son* in 1940; Ralph Ellison eventually became regarded the preeminent author of the American novel; Jack Kerouac was the King of the Beatniks and the face of a generation; and Ken Kesey was influential in creating the 1960s counterculture, as well as the upcoming Hippie movement. *The Ethos of Dissent* could have easily included Ann Petry's *The Street*, published in 1946, shortly after *Native Son*. Petry's novel added the complexity of gender to the race issue that Wright had tackled. Her character, Lutie Johnson also battled racism and classicism, but she had to endure sexism in a manner that Bigger Thomas did not. Similarly, the countercultural writer Sylvia Plath could also have had a place in *The Ethos of Dissent* for her novel *The Bell Jar*. Plath's novel, published in 1963, provides the perspective of a woman suffering from mental illness in the 1960s. Esther Greenwood's battle with depression and her attempt at suicide also lead to electroconvulsive therapy, and the text considers how gender implicates such psychological hardships and therapeutic measures in a way that *Cuckoo's Nest* does not. Wright's, Ellison's, Kerouac's, and Kesey's position as cultural and literary spokespersons connects back to epideictic's history of featuring distinguished speakers with communal authority, something American male writers had more of in the American postwar period. However, following World War II, female authors began to experience more opportunities to voice their experiences in the social, cultural, and literary arenas, and their work is just as important for the *literary epideictic.*

While my starting point was the African American protest novel, and after connecting countercultural literature back to a literary protest tradition, I will turn my focus towards the ways in which the *literary epideictic* framework changes or is modified by ethnic American perspectives. For instance, both protest and countercultural literature *reveal* inequities or instabilities related to America's cultural scripts of individuality, and ethnic American authors

carry out a similar task. Epideictic is the rhetoric of self and community, and Robert Danisch

notes how epideictic captures the present moment in which the self is constituted. Connecting

epideictic to Foucault's work on genealogy, Danisch explains how epideictic constructs a history

of the present, and how epideictic is concerned with the self because the history of the present

determines self-creation and individual action.[420] Thus, epideictic pertains to writing a history of

the present in order to demonstrate how an individual is shaped not only *within*, but also *by* a

historical moment.

Applying an epideictic framework to ethnic American literature will help illuminate how

the texts' hybridized discourse represents the tension between cultural identity and assimilation,

and how the narratives capture the self-creation of individuals with hyphenated identities. To

place this in perspective, Oscar Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) recreates

Kerouac's *On the Road*, and although at times crude and sexist, Acosta provides an ethnic

perspective of the individual quest for identity *on the road* in the heyday of the 60s

counterculture; but after returning home to Mexico hoping to find his purpose, he ends up feeling

neither Mexican nor American. Dejected, he heads back to the United States and learns of the

Chicano movement developing in East LA, and the novel ends with the narrator arriving in Los

Angeles to begin a revolutionary movement, the Brown Buffalos, connecting the novel to the

epideictic exigency represented by the Chicano movement and the La Raza Unida party.[421]

Another example of characters struggling to bridge two cultural worlds in America is

seen in Diana Abu-Jaber's novel, *Arabian Jazz* (1993), which chronicles the lives of the

Jordanian family of Matussem Ramoud and his two daughters, Jemorah and Melvina. After their

American-born mother, Nora, dies after visiting Jordan, the Ramoud family insists that

Matussem, Jemorah, and Melvina return to Jordan. The Ramoud family experiences racism in

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[420] See Danisch, "Power and the Celebration of the Self," pp. 291-307.

[421] See Acosta, Oscar Z. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. Vintage Books, 1989; and Ontiveros, Randy J. *In the Spirit of a New People: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Movement*. New York University Press, 2014.

upstate New York, and when they decide to stay in America, they struggle to assimilate two

cultures and two identities. Matussem's sister, Fatima, tries very hard to convince Jemorah and

Melvina to marry Arab men and follow Arab conventions.[422] Through Fatima, Abu-Jaber

criticizes traditional Arab cultural expectations of Arab women, and the novel presents patriarchal

views of both cultures, "the whites," and the Arabs, and from both female and male characters.

However, through the characters of Jemorah and Melvina, Abu-Jaber challenges patriarchal

ideals and preconceptions of Arab and Arab-American women, for the young women are not

interested in marriage or children, they do not wear makeup, and they refuse to submit to male

authority. Instead, they are educated and employed, and they value their personal and financial

independence. *Arabian Jazz* perhaps responds to the larger cultural backlash that Arab-

Americans were suffering during the 1980s and 1990s in America.[423] Abu-Jaber even stated in an

interview that her intention was to fulfill a gap by providing a closer look into the lives of an

Arab-American family, thus creating a *literary epideictic* text that challenges societal and cultural

misconceptions, and endorses a feminist perspective and alternative values.[424]

Similarly, Chimamanda Adichie explores the complexities of race in the different

contexts of Western and African societies in *Americanah* (2013). Her novel features the story of

the main character, Ifemelu, and her relationship with Obinze, whom she fell in love with in

Lagos. After leaving Nigeria for educational opportunities abroad, Ifemelu ends up at Princeton

University, where she experiences racism as she lives and studies in America, and Obinze works

menial jobs in London and eventually ends up returning to Nigeria. At one point, Ifemelu tells

her liberal friends that she did not consider herself "black" until she came to America because in

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[422] Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Arabian Jazz*. Norton: 2003
[423] For instance, see Maxwell Leung, "The Politics of Arab and Muslim American Identity in a Time of Crisis: The 1986 House of Representatives Hearing on Ethnically Motivated Violence Against Arab-Americans." *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2014, pp. 94–113. Leung points out that this hearing demonstrates the first time anti-Arab violence was acknowledged on a federal level, and how the inflammatory rhetoric of political leaders conjoined with hostile U.S. foreign policy in some Arab nations influenced race relations in the U.S. and potentially inspired attacks against Arab-American under the "banner of patriotism" (96-97).

Nigeria she did not experience the level of hostility that America's racial politics seemed to bestow. She eventually starts a blog, "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," so that she could voice her experiences of "becoming black" in America, and interpret the racially complicated world around her. She includes posts that examine how language inadequately captures authentic experiences of race and blackness in America, posts titled, "Not All Dreadlocked White Guys Are Down," "Badly Dressed White Middle Managers from Ohio Are Not Always What You Think," "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women—Both American and Non-American—Love Barack Obama," "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?," and "What Academics Mean by White Privilege, or Yes It Sucks to Be Poor and White but Try Being Poor and Non-White."[425] What is fascinating about these blog posts is how they function epideictically, serving as a narrative platform for Ifemelu's social commentary. In the blog, Ifemelu can reveal an underrepresented perspective – that of a "Non-American Black" – on race issues within American society, and in essence, she explores the cultural attitudes, norms, and assumptions of race, and, as a result, she challenges the values that underscore American race relations.

What these narratives present, and what epideictic can help reveal, is a challenge to the idea of America as a melting pot. Rather than portray a seamless transition, they operate more like counternarratives in that they depict the struggles the characters experience in trying to negotiate their identities with American cultural values. I think epideictic can help readers attend to the narrative negotiation of old versus new identities, and it can help readers acknowledge this struggle, as opposed to non-epideictic textual interpretations that make readers feel sympathetic or "good" about multicultural literary perspectives. While I have offered a very limited sampling of literature outside of this dissertation's focus, what this demonstrates is the application and

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[424] Curiel, Johnathan. "An Arab American Writer Seeks Her Identity." *SFGate*, 24 May 2004, https://www. sfgate.com/entertainment/article/An-Arab-American-writer-seeks-her-identity-2773799.php.

reach of epideictic as an interpretive framework for texts from different time periods and literary genres.

Furthermore, and most excitingly, I am interested in expanding epideictic's reach to include new media. As the blog posts in *Americanah* illustrate, blogs themselves supply individuals a platform to comment on social issues with their very own audience. One major difference between epideictic oratory and the *literary epideictic* is the way these rhetorical compositions are impacted by time and space – epideictic speeches possess a sense of immediacy that the *literary epideictic* does not. While a speech could potentially be more empowering on an emotional level as a result, a *literary epideictic* text is an artifact of cultural rhetoric that can transcend the boundaries of time and allow individuals the opportunity to contemplate its words for ages to come. Likewise, new media texts that follow an epideictic paradigm differ from epideictic oratory and literature when it comes to presentation, publication, or "sharing" so to speak. The epideictic rhetor of new media texts can create an account with a digital platform that can send her/hir/his observations worldwide at the click of a button. I am interested in researching how blogs and social media function as epideictic platforms for citizen-rhetors, specifically how they provide an individual the power to question authority, present diverse ideas and values, and campaign for social change on local and global levels; and I am also interested in researching how professional blogs and social media accounts might be instrumental in creating social awareness and leading to change.

In conclusion, using the rhetorical theory of epideictic rhetoric along with affect theory, I have created a framework for interpreting postwar American novels that helps track the literary and cultural development of postwar dissent. One of epideictic's objectives is to expose societal ills and call for change. However, in order to persuade a collective audience, epideictic seeks to establish a common ground amongst a group of individuals, and epideictic's main strategy in this regard is to initiate identification with communal values.

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[425] Adichie, Chimamanda N. *Americanah*. Anchor Books, 2014.

One of the insights my dissertation adds to theories of epideictic is that, within the narratives of social literature, the epideictic is used to *revise* communal values by *exposing* the failure of a predominant value system. In this way, the *literary epideictic* infuses its narratives with rhetorical performative discourse that imagines alternatives to the current state of social and political affairs. Perhaps the focus on inclusivity vs. exclusivity in regards to the *literary epideictic* is the wrong approach. What this dissertation offers is a paradigm for acknowledging the power of language to act as an instrument for personal, social, and political change, a rhetorical framework that ultimately investigates the relationship between words, values, and actions as they perform in textual, physical, and digital spaces.

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