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CRUISING POLITICS:
AFFECT, ASSEMBLAGE, AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY

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BY
SAMUEL R. GALLOWAY

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At a department event some months after I felt it was time to hang up my dancing shoes for a spell in favor of the more concerted scholarly undertaking of writing this dissertation, I remarked to a visiting scholar in response to their indelicate questioning about my relationship status (had I yet “settled down”) that I’d found myself “dating my dissertation.” “You’re dating your dissertation *advisor!*?” was the engrossed reply. In this one leading, juicy question I was, again, reminded that undertaking to theorize politics at the intersection of queer theory garnered unwanted exposures and the risks of becoming unwittingly subjected to willful, or just plain thoughtless, misunderstanding. Within such a milieu, then, I can only express my gratitude to have been graced with a committee of engaged, capacious, imaginative, committed, and fearless scholars who supported me in this attempt to *do* queer theory as a political theorist.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: The Morning After Question

The revolutionaries are those
who know when power
is lying in the street
and when they can
pick it up.

- Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution"

I. THE MORNING AFTER QUESTION

Queer sexual cruisers, especially in the era of marriage equality, know well the radical democratic complaint par excellence. Cruising is said to lack the mature and serious *longe duree* of relationships rooted in social institutions of fidelity and reproduction that have, traditionally, disciplined the fickle whims of self-indulgent pleasure seeking. With its chronic penchant for promiscuity, anonymity, self-gratification, and gratuitous exposure, cruising is said to threaten not just the health and safety of participants, but also risks perverting the ethical responsibilities of community and harming broader political efforts to advance social recognition and legal protections.¹ Queer cruisers, in short, know well the "morning after" question.

¹ Cf. M. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 136-138 for a critical survey of this literature, which features prominent talking-head and blogger, A. Sullivan, as well as G. Rotello. More recently S. Macedo, in *Just Married: Same-sex couples, monogamy, and the future of marriage* (2015), and B. Frank, *Frank: A Life in Politics from the Great Society to Same-Sex Marriage*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), have made similar arguments rooted in questionable social theories of personal and cultural development. There

To the extent that there is a fruitful parallel between this putative figuration of queer sexual cruising and radical democracy it begins with this shared fate. Radical democrats, too, are queried: Can the relatively ephemeral intercourse of more or less anonymous strangers assembled in public impact the conduction of “properly” political affairs? Is this impact merely disruptive, subversive, or rupturing? Or do such political assemblages also create and sustain new worlds of affective contagion, meaning-making, and democratic mobilization, assembly, and agonistic contestation? Is the dissent of public protest just a cheap thrill? And, if not, if it “means more,” where does democratic dissensus *go*, toward what institutionally sublimated end does it orient the body politic?

Rather than a fanciful, all-too-neat conjuration of a fruitful parallel, consider Jason Vick’s recent intervention against agonal democratic theorists, to whom he poses “the essential question to ask,” namely: “What do the brief assertions of equality or protest, valorized by these thinkers as democratic politics, actually accomplish in the long term? What happens after the moment of rupture?”² Indeed, Vick amplifies the resonance of the shared conundrum facing both queer sexual cruisers and agonistic democrats, writing, “Without attention to the *un-sexy question* of institutionalization, radical democratic politics reduces itself to a form of public *self-expression* without the prospect of sustained success. While a key feature of politics, the democratic political experience is not reducible to symbolic demonstration and self-disclosure results be damned.”³ On his count, then, “In so far as some manner of institutional vision is needed to give a

is, needless to say, a gulf dividing mainstream political and scholarly queer representation and academic and activist queer theorists’ embraces of cruising as a valuable and illustrative form of life. My purpose here is not to bridge this divide so much as note its existence in passing.

² J. Vick, “Participatory Versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin,” *New Political Science*, (2015: Vol. 37, No. 2), 204–223, pp. 214.

³ J. Vick, “Participatory Versus Radical Democracy,” pp. 214 – emphasis mine.

democratic theory some *weight*, the recent radical democratic theorists neglect this issue to their own detriment.”⁴ Against the flighty, fleeting affections radical agonists alike, then, “What is *needed*, and what is also the key contribution of participatory theorists of democracy, is the articulation of the prerequisites for institutionalizing a more participatory society and what such an institutionalization might look like.”⁵

Here Vick condenses decades of criticism of agonistic, putatively demonstrative democratic politics typical of the “morning after” framework. In what follows I offer an account of agonistic democratic politics elaborated under conditions of the normative suspension of the morning after question. I do so by deploying the heuristic of queer sexual cruising to explicate four features of “weak tie” relations amendable to democratic theory that are occluded when conceding to the pressures of the morning after question. The effect will be to disclose the world-making power of counter-publicity immanent to agonistic action in concert.

Yet, in theorizing democracy as a practice or habitus rather than an institutional regime I do not seek thereby to abandon pretenses to govern. Rather, *Cruising Politics* argues that *how* we understand agonistic democratic practices of resistance also bears upon how we formulate strategies of democratic governance. By the same token, as much as queerness aspires to undo formal normative partitions, it also *does* things, generating alternative accounts of ethical values, epistemological frames, affective attachments, and relational practices beyond those governing the hegemonic political and libidinal economies of neoliberal sociality. As with queer sexual cruising, understanding how

⁴ J. Vick, “Participatory Versus Radical Democracy,” pp. 216 – emphasis mine.

⁵ J. Vick, “Participatory Versus Radical Democracy,” pp. 214-215 – emphasis mine.

agonism enacts its own worlds informs how we assess, or – more aptly – succumb to, the desirability of those worlds as potentially common projects of political life.

This inter-disciplinary approach allows me to genealogically construct *cruising politics*, a mobile concept tailored to theorizing contemporary agonistic politics characterized by the flash mobilization of popular protest, assembly, and occupation affectively mediated simultaneously by digital networks and the embodied proximity of public crowds. In this way the mobile concept of cruising politics contributes to recent scholarship on radical contestatory democratic assembly and is designed to allow political theorists, and other social science researchers, to investigate the fleeting nature of recurrent insurgent events by analytically illuminating the affective attachments, attunements, and orientations generated by the anonymous relations conducting contemporary concerted contentious political action exemplified historically by movements like ACT-UP and Critical Mass and, more recently, the Egyptian revolution, Anonymous hacktivism, #Occupy encampments, and #Black Lives Matter protestations.

II: PLURALISM, PLURALIZATION, PLURALITY

Remaining within the orbit of Jason Vick's critical comparison of participatory and radical democracy allows returning to the main objection to agonism, namely: what does radical dissent *do* beyond its own self-display? This line of critique is not exclusive to participatory theorists, but all democratic theorists within a pluralist horizon, including pragmatists, communitarians, liberals, and Habermasian Kantians. Moreover, the morning after question points up a second, more implicit critique of agonism, specifically its putative self-importance, rather than its interest in a greater and more selfless because more universal good. In this section, I deepen the normative pressures faced by both

queer cruising cultures and agonistic democracy by situating Vick's parsing of the stakes facing democratic practice and theory within a broader historical debates animating pluralist democratic theory.

Within this horizon, the most obvious answer to the question of what demonstrative politics affects is that, to begin, it marks a gap in or the limits of the consensus motoring governing policy. Further, by taking directly to the streets, political protest also signals a breakdown in the functioning of actually existing or institutionalized participatory venues. Finally, we can say that political protest indelibly recodes public space as a stage of appearance for popular participation in democratic life, even if the words and deeds enacted there are comparatively fleeting.

In this regard, I follow Jack Walker's enduring insight, relative to the Civil Rights Movement that, "besides [its] normative shortcomings the elitist theory [of democracy, i.e. pluralism] has served as an inadequate guide to empirical research" to the extent that it could not account for demonstrative politics on the order of the Civil Rights Movement.⁶ Michael Rogin succinctly captures the implications of this failure: "For if elites are accessible, mass movements are unnecessary."⁷ Thus, Walker advised then that, "once we admit that the society is not based on a widespread consensus, we must look at our loosely organized, decentralized political parties in a different light."⁸ Citing Eric Hobsbawn's *Primitive Rebels*, he asserts: "Often such movements erupt along the margins of the political system, and they sometimes serve the purpose of encouraging

⁶ J. Walker, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy," *The American Political Science Review* (June, 1966: Vol. 60, No. 2), pp. 285 – 295, pp. 295.

⁷ M. Rogin, *McCarthy and the Intellectuals: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1967, pp. 185.

⁸ J. Walker, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy," pp. 291.

political and social mobilization, of widening the boundaries of the polity.”⁹ Bonnie Honig has more recently reinforced this critique of ways the desire to effect political closures, like consensus, “engender[s] remainders,” and how frustrated efforts at politicization resurface in “other sites and topics.”¹⁰ Thus, contrary to the claim that radical democracy is preoccupied with fragmentation or rupture for its own sake, Honig’s radical critique suggests that if there is a proliferation of the sites and topics of political contestation, then this is because of hegemonic efforts to suppress or foreclose democratic contest.

Still, it is contended, even if this point is conceded, that if dissent doesn’t lead to participating within existing institutions, it is no more than vainglorious self-expression. The intellectual contempt for what is branded as narcissistic self-display or “expressivism” runs deep, from Albert Camus’ devastating portrait of the queer dandy in contrast to the stoical rebel, to Christopher Lasch’s diagnosis of the culture of narcissism infecting the 1960’s counter-culture, and includes, too, even the wisdom of elder statesmen like Barney Frank, who offers a pragmatic rejection of scandalizing protest in favor of participation through straight-laced pluralist lobbying. Yet, as I have suggested, the morning after question also inflects academic scholarship, often in ways that presuppose a failure by agonists to answer it.

For instance, two years after Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism, Political Theory* featured Hanna Pitkin’s ravaging critique of Hannah Arendt’s account of public life and concerted action, “On Justice.” Much like later agonists like Wolin, Connolly, and Honig,

⁹ J. Walker, “A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy,” pp. 293. Here Walker cites E. J. Hobsbawm’s *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester, 1959) as illustrative of this propensity.

¹⁰ B. Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 16.

Arendt's articulation of politics departs from the pluralist consensus by embracing contestation sustained by and expressive of demotic plurality. In no small measure, these theorists are indebted to her ability to have conceptually translated the promises of the ancient Greek polis into the vernaculars of contemporary life in *The Human Condition*, as well as in her reevaluation of the American revolutionary and civil disobedience traditions. Thus, as Pitkin launches her critique of Arendt at the polemical height of "On Justice," she is also targeting this vision of politics:

Arendt's citizens begin to resemble posturing little boys clamoring for attention ("Look at me! I'm the greatest!" "No, look at *me!*") and wanting to be reassured that they are brave, valuable, even real. (No wonder they feel unreal: they have left their bodies behind in the private realm.) Though Arendt was female, there is a lot of *machismo* in her vision. Unable to face their mortality and physical vulnerability, the men she describes strive endlessly to be superhuman, and, realizing that they cannot achieve that goal, require endless reassurance from the others in their anxious delusion. Yet, can this really be what Arendt means? Why should she so undermine her own effort to save public, political life?¹¹

As with Camus' dandy, Arendt's citizens abhor solitude in their anxious flight from mortality and human vulnerability, and so constantly seek a narcissistic reassurance that they are not only real, but real *men*. Of course, despite the near perfect clarity of tone, this profile of Arendt's actors has never quite seemed right.

¹¹ H. Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Public and Private," *Political Theory*, (1981: Vol. 9, No. 3), pp. 327-352, pp. 338. It is a central premise of Pitkin's critique that Arendt gives the orienting concept of justice short shrift in her work, which is a claim flatly contradicted by the work done in the book most commonly associated with Arendt's notoriety, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). I thank Will Levine for pressing the importance of this omission in Pitkin's assessment.

And, yet, in other ways it uncannily cuts to the quick. It is, after all, an ironic twist of fate that the same year “Justice” was published also saw the first AIDS related death in the United States. And, while no doubt “unjust” (because, at the least, anachronistic), with only minor qualification Pitkin’s critique of Arendt’s actors chillingly anticipates the derision that greeted, and still plagues, AIDS activism, evidenced, again, by Frank’s deeply conservative, elitist attacks against and denigrations of queer demonstrative politics of the sort exemplified by ACT-UP, Queer Nation, FUQ, and SexPanic!¹² In fact it is quite remarkable the ease with which one can quite easily, and faithfully, describe ACT-UP without much injustice to Pitkin’s characterization of agonistic action. It was chiefly, but not exclusively, comprised of ‘little boys clamoring for attention,’ where asserting that they were brave, valuable, and yes, even real, was how they, as queers, confronted a crisis of mortality and physical vulnerability in the breach of reassurances of any kind save coming together politically. ACT-UP was, after all, the impudently superhuman task of injecting the putatively subhuman queer body into the public life of proper politics, an effort that was received with – more than it ever was expressive of - so many anxious delusions. The brazenly narcissistic and theatrically confrontational politics animating ACT-UP, moreover, were inextricable from an unwillingness to face oblivion without a fight. Though unable to ever wholly dispel an auratic fatalism, publicly breaking otherwise deadly silence felt good to those activists, whose sapid embrace “of the joy and the gratification” of concerted political action proved a vital

¹² On the demonstrative queer politics of ACT-UP, Queer Nation, SexPanic!, and FUQ, cf. B. Shepherd, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure, and Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2010).

component of ACT-UP's affective habitus that cannot be justly reduced to the tedious banality of "machismo."¹³

If there is any justice to such an ahistorical juxtaposition, then it is based upon targeting the theoretical propensity to couch demonstrative politics as all so much *drama* without any concomitant cathexis to *duty*, to *others*, or to stabilizing public *institutions* – as suffering a lack of sublimation. Indeed, it is on these very terms that Dana Villa and Seyla Benhabib take agonistic democrats to task, as if to redeem her politics from Piktin's critique.¹⁴ In anticipation, then, of not only the interpretation of Arendt we will venture in Chapter Three, but also the methodological commitments that animate my approach to Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze, parsing the stakes of this debate internal to Arendt studies bears on broader debates in the discipline and, specifically, to the orientation of *Cruising Politics* as a whole.

As critics of narcissism in democratic theory, Villa and Benhabib find common ground in their assessment that agonists like Wolin, Connolly, and Honig "share a profound devaluation of the *worldliness* of political action" because for them "the agon is inseparable from making agonistic action *expressive* action."¹⁵ For Villa, democratic theory needs to depart from the "celebrations of democratic flux found in Wolin and Honig." In the case of the former, "democracy is 'reduced' and 'devitalized' by form; it is not a form of government at all, but a 'mode of being,' an 'experience' of common action that can be, at best, episodic, momentary." In the case of the Honig, Villa

¹³ D. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT-UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁴ The differences between Villa and Benhabib are more explicitly hashed out in D. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Chapter 6, "Theatricality and the Public Realm."

¹⁵ D. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 120.

contends, “her voluntarist assertion [...] dramatically underplays the extent to which Arendt envisions agonistic politics as a function of a ‘relatively permanent’ public sphere.”¹⁶ At stake is the way the unsexy work of caring for the permanence of worldly institutions of participation is threatened by romanticizing putatively voluntarist, episodic “experiences.”

Seyla Benhabib sharpens the stakes, arguing that on the “expressivist” model, “action appears to make manifest or to reveal an antecedent essence, the ‘who one is,’” and, thus, is effectively predicated on an “essentialist” account of human subjectivity.¹⁷ For Benhabib, because the “expressivist model of action views action as a process of self-actualization, for this to be successfully attained, however, interpretive indeterminacy, which gives or imputes a meaning to action often different from and contradictory to the one intended by the agent, must be excluded.”¹⁸ The stakes are high, then, and threaten a totalizing – or ‘monological’ – account of the public sphere (as in Hegel’s concept of a singular, universal *Geist*), where democratic processes of perspectival interpretation are foreclosed for action to be experienced as meaningful.¹⁹

Efforts to make this relationship ethical similarly fail to sustain democratic plurality. Benhabib contends that, as exemplified by Horkheimer and Adorno, even when “the subject recovers an authentic self-relation by giving itself to the other: *self-confirmation* and enhancement come via an act of losing and recovering oneself in the

¹⁶ D. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 119.

¹⁷ S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996), pp. 126.

¹⁸ S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 102-3.

¹⁹ For a succinct account of Weber’s theory of politics as *rule*, cf. R. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadows of Dubois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Chapters 1 – 2.

other.”²⁰ Yet, for her something is amiss with this formulation, namely: the utopian ‘non-sacrificial non-identity of the subject’ cannot sufficiently answer the query, “what distinguishes this act of giving oneself to the other from an act of narcissism?”²¹

In other words, and to telescope out for a moment, Pitkin, Villa, and Benhabib see agonism as imploding the political into the self, whether through infantile clamor, fugitive self-display, or narcissistically tyrannical projections. The public realm is eroded on each count by dint of flattening democracy, whether by reducing democratic participation to ruptural events of self-exposure or by homogenizing publicity to conform to narcissistic projections, or both. The outcome, either way, is profoundly depoliticizing to the extent that “we lose the ground of a ‘care for the world.’”²²

However, I have been arguing that the desire for a redemptive answer to the “morning after” question is itself symptomatic of the very displacement of politics that proliferates the sites and topics of agonal politics. What elements comprising the demos must be sacrificed for such redemption to occur? Concomitantly, what forms of life must go untheorized to consolidate a redemptive conceptual paradigm? Which is to ask, more pointedly, how might preferring not to answer the morning after question work to enable more radical political theoretical undertakings and conceptual experiments? In an effort to begin answers these and other questions about the potential to theorize politics in the breach of normative submersion within the horizon of the morning after question the following section proposes to linger in the nocturnal potency of queer sexual cruising as a heuristic for weak-tie democratic relationality.

²⁰ S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, Utopia*, pp. 220 – emphasis mine.

²¹ S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, Utopia*, pp. 221.

²² D. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 120.

III. GLANCES AT CRUISING – DESIRE, ANONYMITY, WORLDING

Admittedly, anonymous queer public sex is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when the term ‘cruise’ circulates. More often than not people speak of a cruise as the opportunity to leisurely get away and experience exotic corners of the world from the decks of luxury liners or in ports of call stocked with kitschy tourist-trap paraphernalia. The sense of recreational movement similarly characterizes the ritualized motorcades of vintage automobiles no less than the impromptu scenic road-trip. “Cruisers” similarly designate police vehicles specially equipped to outpace mass-market cars, surveil beats, tail suspects, run records, transport detainees, and which are increasingly outfitted with evermore-deadly arsenals. Cruise missiles amplify this association with lethality as weapons that deliver massive ballistic payloads with computer-guided precision at super- or high sub-sonic speeds, often launched from fleets menacing Cruiser-class warships.

Sexual cruising cannot but invariably resonate with all of these connotations, even as it resists becoming reducible to any of them. In the fleeting celerity of cruising for sex, engaging the common world as the site of unknown exploits hybridizes habit and spontaneity by scanning for hints of shared sensibilities in spite of the shadowy risks of state sanction and the mortifying dangers of violence. If there is, then, any semantic, conceptual, and practical bleed among these figurations of cruising, it is as an effect of the increasing ubiquity of accelerated relations in and comportments to the world characteristic of late modernity - itself a contingent, political consequence of post-war

state securitization.²³ These distinctions help parse sexual cruising from competing iterations thereof and gestures towards how it may become, as a heuristic for counter-conduct, a strategic mode of creatively initiating and tactically augmenting counter-hegemonic political contestation.

Desire

The political potentiality of queer cruising is already present in the seminal text addressing cruising in queer theory, Guy Hocquenghem's 1972 *Homosexual Desire*, which builds off Deleuze and Guattari's figuration of desire in *Anti-Oedipus* as immanent, active, and real rather than lacking, wanting, or fantastical. "We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire," they contend, "that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.*"²⁴ Affirming the ever-present gratuity of desire allows Deleuze and Guattari to frame social affairs as the expressed circulations of desire, even if routinely captured within and calcified around rooted, molar institutions of which "Oedipus" – and with it the edification of tragic resignation, pathologizing psychosexual nosology, and securitized biopolitical apparatuses of control – is typical of contemporary governmentality.

²³ It should not come as a surprise, then, that Whitman's cruising poetics – to be discussed below – respond to the imminence, and then outbreak, of the American Civil War, which has become increasingly understood as inaugurating 'late-modern' warfare, nor that Nietzsche's discovery of ephemeral Dionysian relations are born of his service near the fronts of the Franco-Prussian war less than a generation later. On the importance of this epochal shift in sensibility of both modern warfare and social relations, cf. P. Virilio, *Speed and Politics: an Essay on Dromology* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006); C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*. Trans. G.L. Ulmen. (New York: Telos Press, 2007); F. Kittler, "Of States and Their Terrorists," *Cultural Politics* (2012: Vol. 8, No. 3), 385-397; and, M. Warner, "Something Queer About the Nation-State," in *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

²⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009), pp. 29.

Desire, they argue, cannot be adequately appreciated if only studied in domesticated contexts; desire desires by *moving freely*, which is likely why it is so often couched as transgressive. But this, too, misses how desire operates, Deleuze and Guattari insist. Anticipating Foucault's critique of the valorization of transgression as characteristic of the "repressive hypothesis" in the opening volume of *The History of Sexuality*, they challenge the redemptive valorization of desire as a transcendent transgression of prohibition; desire on their count does not say "No" to prohibition (does not negate the negation), but instead says "Yes" to the intensification of what already affects it.²⁵

It is in this respect that Hocquenghem gives his book the tongue-in-cheek title "homosexual desire," for all desire, regardless of object-choice, is on this account 'narcissistically' auto-affectionate. Nevertheless, Hocquenghem also leverages the figural 'actually existing homosexual' to press the Deleuzeoguattarian point and it is in this context that cruising, or desire as "pickup machine," becomes particularly salient. "The cruising homosexual," he writes, "on the look-out for anything that might come and plug in to his own desire, is reminiscent of the 'voyaging schizophrenic' described in *L'Anti-Oedipe*."²⁶ Viewed from this perspective cruising does not denote an unhappy condition defined by the lack of a central and centering love object to which desire *should* be coupled, but instead "a system [of desire] in action, the system in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis."²⁷

²⁵ Cf. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: an Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage Press, 1990).

²⁶ G. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*. Trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 131.

²⁷ G. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 131.

Extending Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of desire even further allows the depiction of queer relations as assemblages or "groupings" of desire. Its relational mode "is an annular one, a circle which is open to an infinity of directions and possibilities for plugging in, with no set places."²⁸ In describing queer desire as a "group annular mode (one is tempted to spell it 'anular'),"²⁹ Hocquenghem echoes Nietzsche, who also delineates a mode of amorous amity "represented by him who exercises an attraction on very various characters and talents, so that he gains *a whole circle of friends*; they, however, establish friendly relations between one another, their differences notwithstanding, on account of being his friend."³⁰

For both Nietzsche and Hocquenghem there is more at stake in such annular assemblages than a negation of social prohibitions against queer desire: namely, the affirmation that, "To fail one's sublimation [of 'annular' desire] is in fact merely to conceive social relations in a different way."³¹ Tim Dean remarks, with regard to the ways cruising reconceives relationality that, "much critical discourse on sexual ethics misconstrues the encounter with otherness in terms of sexual difference, as if one could establish authentic contact with otherness only by engaging the opposite sex or 'the feminine.' The conflation of otherness with difference betrays a heterosexist error, a ruse of heteronormativity."³²

²⁸ G. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 111. Compare to T. Dean, *Unlimited Intimacies: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

²⁹ G. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 111.

³⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 145 – emphasis mine.

³¹ G. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 111. Cf. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) for a more contemporary account of how queer 'failure' generatively occasions conceiving social and political relations differently.

³² T. Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, pp. 181.

Where hegemonic heterosexist erotic conventions seeks the union of difference in the transcendent identity of the reproductive couple, queer desire sniffs out the otherness in identity (more desire) and in so doing generates difference through open encounters with others. As Leo Bersani puts it, this sort of “homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality”³³ precisely because queer desire is “less liable to be immobilized... in that, structurally, it occupies several positions.”³⁴ In other words, homo-ness, in its “privileging of sameness has, as its condition of possibility, an indeterminate identity. Homosexual desire,” Bersani continues, with a gesture to Hocquenghem, “is desire for the same from the perspective of a self already identified as different from itself.”³⁵ For him, then, a queer theory of desire will be “grounded in... the indispensable concept of an *impersonal narcissism*.”³⁶

Anonymity

George Kateb, writing about the culture of democracy expressed in Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, helps to clarify what is at stake in Bersani’s proposed revaluation of homo-relationality. *Contra* Benhabib’s reading of Horkheimer and Adorno’s mimetic narcissism, on Bersani’s count the experience of queer eroticism as impersonal narcissism leads him to suggest that, “self-divestiture itself has to be rethought in terms of a certain form of self-expansiveness, of something like ego-

³³ L. Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 76, as well as, pp. 42, 58-59. Cf. also, *Intimacies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 85, where Bersani claims, in critical analysis of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, “Narcissistic love in both the lover and the beloved (can they even still be distinguished?) is exactly identical to a perfect knowledge of otherness.”

³⁴ L. Bersani, *Homos*, pp. 58.

³⁵ L. Bersani, *Homos*, pp. 59. Cf. G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 116: “only that which is alike differs; and only differences are alike.”

³⁶ L. Bersani, *Intimacies*, pp. 56.

dissemination rather than ego-annihilation.”³⁷ Kateb maintains that Whitman’s insistently I-centric lyricism counter-intuitively points to how, in his words, “Our potentialities are not only numberless but — and for that reason — conflicting. We are inhabited by tumultuous atoms. We are composite, not even composed.”³⁸ It is this queerly composite quality of difference inhering to and through repetitive expressions of identity that allows the promiscuity of Whitman’s song to affirm, in Kateb’s words, “all of us are always indefinitely more than we actually are.”³⁹

Kateb, like Hocquenghem, risks his thesis coming off as “too glib” in order to propose that queer sexual cruising productively models an attractive alternative mode of political relationality based on Whitman’s poetic vision of indefinitely composite, multiplicitous and, for this reason also always already inexhaustibly unknowable identity.⁴⁰ In particular, he sees Whitman’s verse as offering up “a whole ethic of action” graciously enamored of and gratefully gratified by the given, gratuitous vibrancy of worldly affairs explicitly expressed in the language of cruising.⁴¹ This *ethos* is

³⁷ L. Bersani, *Intimacies*, pp. 56.

³⁸ G. Kateb, “Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy,” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John Seery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), pp. 26. Cf. also, Chapter Two of that volume, N. Rosenblum, “Strange Attractors: How Individuals Connect to Form Democratic Unity,” which develops this theme of the composite “I”. This reading of Whitman’s “I” is far more persuasive than Martha Nussbaum’s contribution to that volume, which over determines a juridical interpellation of Whitman’s subject. On this score, cf. Chapter Five of this volume, J. Bennett, “The Solar Judgment of Walt Whitman.”

³⁹ G. Kateb, “Walt Whitman” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 25. On the ways “promiscuity” factors into Whitman’s poetics, cf. J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, which focuses more on the way urbanity is revalued over against the shared agrarian ideal of Jefferson and Thoreau in *Song of Myself* as the site for a dense and teeming eroticopolitical plurality.

⁴⁰ G. Kateb, “Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy,” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 38. The probity Kateb displays in advancing queer sexual cruising as a model for ethical democratic life in the concluding chapter of his book, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), is all the more remarkable, given that he is writing at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the United States amidst an almost ubiquitous discursive climate of moral panic.

⁴¹ G. Kateb, “Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy,” collected in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 38.

emphatically relational; in cruising one becomes immersed in the teeming density of worldly plurality:

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.⁴²

Here Whitman's verse reinforces Sara Ahmed's claim, in *Queer Phenomenology*, that "space is not a container for the body; it does not contain the body as if the body were 'in it'. Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through this space and are affected by the 'where' of that movement."⁴³ The ambient sounds, smells, sights, touches, tastes, and normative expectations of ordinary everyday life flood the sensorium in ways that are potentially disorienting, but also – for this reason – precipitously primed for the potentially graceful responsive receptivity to the immanent spontaneity and unpredictability always already constituting the common world. Jane Bennett is right, then, to amplify how the poetic function of Whitman's "doggedly *horizontal* lists that frequent *Leaves of Grass* model a world where human beings are positioned not as potential masters of, but as coparticipants with, other bodies in a world that vibrates."⁴⁴ In cruising one is not out to pick-up *any specific* other so much as plug-into a *world* of radical alterity; cruising

⁴² W. Whitman, "Song of Myself," in G. Kateb, "Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," pp. 39.

⁴³ S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 53. Cf. as well, J-F. Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Athlone, 1993), Chapter One, "The Ephemeral Skin," as well as B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Chapter Two, "The Political-Economy of Belonging."

⁴⁴ J. Bennett, "Solar Judgment," in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 136. Cf. on this point, J. Frank, "Promiscuous Citizenship," *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 173.

desires contact with and connection to the cosmic vitality of *another* life immanent to *this* world.

In a moment I will return to the way cruising queers our sensibilities of worldliness, and we are well served to note the prescience of Bennett's adverbial use of "doggedly" to describe Whitman's queer aesthetic. But first it is necessary to pose one of Whitman's most pointedly pertinent questions in order to begin specifying the ways in which cruising moves through the world of 'vibrant matter'. Michael Warner has suggested that Whitman's poetry "mimes the phenomenology of cruising" insofar as it uses literary conventions, especially the conceits of mass-mediated publication, to coax readers into a position such that "while we remain on notice about our place in non-intimate public discourse, we are nevertheless solicited into an intimate recognition exchange [sic]." ⁴⁵ I will take up again the importance of literary media to queer worlding, but first to the verse from *Leaves of Grass*, where readers are queried,

Here is adhesiveness, it is not previously fashion'd, it is apropos;

Do you know what it is as you pass to be loved by strangers?

Do you know the talk of those turning eye-balls?⁴⁶

At play in these lines is the sensorial power of the *glance*, as distinguished from the reifying gaze.⁴⁷ A glance is quick, fleeting, and playful, yet it can also be *glancing*; the sensorial synesthesia evoked in these lines bears this out as eyeballs not only "talk" but

⁴⁵ M. Warner, "Whitman Drunk," in *Publics and Counterpublics*, pp. 287. It is not clear, however, that Whitman seeks "recognition" and not something more like what Patchen Markell has articulated in *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) as "acknowledgment" and whether or not this more loose and capacious concept may be more apt when theorizing the queer amorousness affectively soliciting readers in Whitman's verse.

⁴⁶ W. Whitman, *Song of Myself*, cited in G. Kateb, "Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 38.

⁴⁷ On the distinction between glancing and gazing, cf. E. Casey, *The World at a Glance*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

also cast flighty lines of sticky amorousness that string together passing strangers. Unpacking these lines, by reading laterally between them, will clarify the “phenomenology of cruising” Warner sees Whitman miming.

Writing of the ways anonymity bears on Whitman’s poetics, Jason Frank emphasizes how “the promiscuity of urban encounter among anonymous strangers provides the experiential and affective basis for his dramatic reimagining of political attachment.”⁴⁸ Frank reads Whitman as focusing “on public erotic attachments that destabilize and overcome identarian differences of locality, ethnicity, class and occupation, sex, race, and sexuality.”⁴⁹ We will see in the following chapters how the enactment of publicly queer eroticism works to ‘destabilize and overcome’ conventionally implacable differences, but in order to do so we must appreciate how cruising intercourse with strangers is not a negation of identity, but rather the affirmation of anonymity.

Frank reinforces this phenomenological account when he argues, “the fact that we remain strangers is not something to be overcome, but rather the very condition of our affective bond; strangeness and urban anonymity are not marks of alienated human relation or the collapse of authentic community, but the basis of erotic attachment” which practically conceives “a way of relating as citizens that affectively binds without relying on mechanisms of identification.”⁵⁰ Foucault puts the matter succinctly stating, “It is like an affirmation of nonidentity. Not only because you leave your ID card[...] but because the multiplicity of possible things, of possible encounters, of possible pilings-up

⁴⁸ J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 157.

⁴⁹ J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 164.

⁵⁰ J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 171.

[*amoncellements*], of possible connections, means that, in effect, you cannot not fail to be identical to yourself.”⁵¹

The question, then, is: How can cruising happen if it is not a matter of recognizing fixed, familiar identities but sensing an anonymous and strange, yet simultaneously intimate and common, desire? How do those cruising find one another? And, what happens when they do? These questions will be more satisfactorily addressed in Chapters Two and Four in the course of dramaturgically mapping the queer satyr play concluding Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the pedagogy of Friedkin’s *Cruising*, but we may begin to take our bearings from the poet Frank O’Hara’s sly assertion of the “common sense” immanent to cruising. “As for measure and other technical apparatus,” he remarks, nonplussed, “that’s just common sense: if you’re going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There’s nothing metaphysical about it.”⁵²

In Chapter Four’s treatment of Foucault’s scandalous response to the controversial film *Cruising* we will see how markers such as dress, including hankies, denim, and leather served to code a queer desire operative ‘behind the back’ of mass-publics. And, although O’Hara wrote “Personism: A Manifesto” in 1959 – and thus prior to the more brazenly public ‘outing’ of these codes following the Stonewall riots – he is clearly gesturing to the ways adornment of appearance strategically express queer desire without recourse to metaphysical supplementation.⁵³ Precisely because cruising is not concerned with mining the deep, essential identities of others, or expressing one’s own

⁵¹ M. Foucault, “The Gay Science,” trans. Nicolae Morar and Daniel W. Smith. *Critical Inquiry* (2011: Vol 37, No. 3), pp. 385-403, pp. 400.

⁵² F. O’Hara, “Personism: A Manifesto,” *Yugen* (1961: No. 7).

⁵³ Cf. G. Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. (New York: Basic Books, 1994), on 19th Century urban queer public appearance and coded dress.

identity (if such identity at all exists) it is, in Nietzsche's felicitous turn of phrase, "superficial, out of profundity."⁵⁴

Profound superficiality works in tandem with the immanent 'hap' in the stance, stride, and sidelong simpers of cruising. In this respect cruising is always haphazard, but happily so because responsively receptive to happening upon the haptic talk of turning eyeballs.⁵⁵ These considerations underscore the importance of *turning* in Whitman's query, for in making a pass there is a gap opened between strangers traversed by glances as they pass and to *know* this experience of love, in turn, requires elaboration. Whitman here is making an affective claim that is explicitly about relations of desire of which any knowledge will be visceral, carnal, gestural, embodied, and so pertains not to the ability to abstractly recognize a pass per se, but rather to what comes to pass in the gap opened by it. He is not asking, "Have you ever been cruised," but rather, "Have you ever said *yes* when cruised?" But, again, how does one pick up a cruise?

We pick up a lead by repurposing the concept of "turning operations" Mary Dietz finds in Arendt, which on her count belie more an "attitude" of responsive receptivity than a strict methodology.⁵⁶ In broad strokes, then, when making a pass cruising does not cease its flow as it passes – is not arrested by desire – but *turns* as it passes "with side-curved head curious" to sense whether it will be greeted with interest in return. If anything will come of this haptic choreography both must turn back, so that the infinite

⁵⁴ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), P.4, pp. 38.

⁵⁵ Cf. S. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 222-223 for an account of the 'hap' in happiness. Cf., as well, G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 99-100 for a treatment of 'haptic' synesthesia.

⁵⁶ M. Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 4.

potentiality of desire circles around on itself in the immanent gap of a doubly affirmed desire, casting what Deleuze and Guattari will call a “line of flight”: ↵... ↻↵... ↻....⁵⁷

Worlding

Lines of flight, Deleuze and Guattari clarify, are “deterritorializing” events that uproot desire from routine arborescent circuits, moving the connective assemblage comprising the line of flight to *another* milieu – a world of means, not ends, animated by the immanence of untoward desire.⁵⁸ Cruising, in short, is capable of creatively *worlding*, of enacting worlds both durable and ephemeral. Amplifying the potency of this world-enacting orientation in terms markedly resonant with Whitman’s mimed phenomenology, Michael Warner asserts that, “Contrary to myth, what one relishes in loving strangers is not mere anonymity, nor meaningless release. It is the pleasure of belonging to [sic.] a sexual world, in which one’s sexuality finds an answering resonance not just in one other, but in a world of others.”⁵⁹

To speak of urban spaces as hosting a queer sexual world is to distinguish it from discrete counter-public institutions – queer baths, bars, theatres, clubs, and presses – (even though these do play important roles) because, as we have already seen through Whitman’s verse, cruising is not confined to any one venue but engages the world writ

⁵⁷ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), Chapter One, “Rhizome.” On the doubling of affirmation, cf. G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 186.

⁵⁸ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Rhizome.” Cf. G. Agamben, *Means Without End*. Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ M. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, pp. 179. This last sentence would have profited from replacing “belonging to” with “participating in” because, as we will see in Chapter Four, it is precisely along the fraught boundaries of ‘belonging to’ a queer sexual world that the *Cruising* scandal (mentioned briefly by Warner, no less) contentiously unfolded.

large as its stage of action.⁶⁰ Mobile phone applications like Grindr, which use GPS to locate proximate others looking for anonymous, no-strings-attached sex, only accentuate the ways in which cruising over-codes any given milieu with queer desire (and thus is not exclusive to urban space, even if the city is the model for my account). It is in this sense that we understand the world as an always already dynamic theatre of excess teeming with queer desire such that a public park, for instance, can be seen to function in myriad modalities: as a site for picnicking, weddings, sports, concerts, revivals, rallies, and queer sex.

Of course queer counter-public institutions of cruising are vital to the extent that they provide more durable spaces for cruising to play out, even though they do not thereby constitute the sum total world of cruising. To be clear, however, durability is not synonymous with security or even guaranteed longevity. In part this is because, Dean suggests, since “contact with those different from oneself, especially when they are strangers, tends to be regarded as risky (because unpredictable), institutions that sponsor such contact are easily perceived as hazardous, even when the opposite may be true.”⁶¹ As Samuel Delaney notes, and in a way that anticipates one of the key fault-lines we will examine the development of in Chapter Four, anxiety over risk also speaks to “a wholly provincial and absolutely small-town terror of cross-class contact.”⁶²

Reflecting on the heyday of queer cruising culture clustered around the counter-public spaces of New York’s Times Square, Delaney reminds that, “These institutions

⁶⁰ On the concept of a counter-public, cf. N. Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, (1990: No. 25/26), pp. 56-80. M. Warner picks-up Fraser’s concept in the eponymous essay in *Public and Counterpublics*.

⁶¹ T. Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, pp. 187.

⁶² S. Delaney, *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 153.

have nevertheless grown up very much *within* our society, not outside it. They have been restrained on every side. That is how they have attained their current form.”⁶³ As even a cursory history of queer counter-publics painfully attests, bars and clubs have been targets for sanctioned State sanction, brutal vigilantism, and humdrum extortion; the porno theatres, bathhouses, bookshops, and public cruising grounds, of which the Rambles in Manhattan’s Central Park was archetypical, that, for a time, precariously staged much of the initial post-Stonewall sexual exploration in American cities, have been all but wholly boarded up and pruned away under the coercive force of sex panicked moral hygiene,⁶⁴ while neoliberal imperatives of urban renewal drive out queers and their counter-public institutions into farther, more distant and inaccessible locales.⁶⁵ Cruising, then, has always had to navigate the dangers of *exposure* and *insecurity* immanent to its *praxis*, regardless of where it occurs.

In light of these risks it is through such counter-publics that cruising also becomes *pedagogical* since it is often where queers are habituated to the joys and challenges of its peculiar nuances and subtleties. In these venues queers undergo the rather Nietzschean pedagogy in *amor fati*, learning to affirm, “*Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.*”⁶⁶ This is because in

⁶³ S. Delaney, *Time Square Red/Times Square Blue*, pp. 193.

⁶⁴ Cf. M. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, Chapter Four, “Zoning Out Sex.”

⁶⁵ Cf. D. Chisholm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).; S. Shulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2012); T. Stewart-Winter, Stewart-Winter, Timothy. *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Blair, Zachary Shane Kalish. “Machine of Desire: Race, Space, and Contingencies of Violence in Chicago's Boystown.” Order No. 13839506, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018; T. Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, Chapter Four.

⁶⁶ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV.276, pp. 223.

cruising, not picking up a pass by letting it pass-by, breaks from the unconditional resentment that insists, ‘no, not for *anyone*.’⁶⁷

In addressing the pedagogical function of counter-public institutions, however, I do not wish to posit a causal relationship on the order of some *Field of Dreams* romance, as if prior to these institutions cruising was immaterial and of no import because consigned to shady public haunts.⁶⁸ While it is true that whenever counter-public sexual institutions are built queers do tend to come, their erection and any concomitant coming together through them is the effect of an immanent desire that could flow through and coalesce amidst these spaces. Counter-publics are, then, best understood as *media assemblages*, as medial institutional spaces that function to assemble those with a common interest, and as such their existence is amplificatory of already present real desire.

From this vantage the aspiration to bring concatenations of desire into excessive affective proximity can be seen to be no less operative in queer textual publications. After all, what is so compelling about the poems of Whitman’s *Song* is how they present “vehicles” for a queer cruising desire as both testament to, and catalytic for, its world-enacting power.⁶⁹ Just as René Char wills, “Imagination, my child,” in his wartime verse, *Leaves of Hypnos*,⁷⁰ which as we will see in Chapter Three profoundly influences Arendt’s account of public political action, “‘I bequeath poems,’ Whitman writes, ‘as

⁶⁷ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), for an account, in the Third Essay, of the *ressentiment* of unconditional valuation.

⁶⁸ On the historical presence of queer cruising culture in the United States, cf. G. Chauncy, *Gay New York*. Cf., as well as M. B. Kaplan’s *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), for an account of queer cruising culture in 19th century London leading up to the Wilde trial.

⁶⁹ K. Larsonto, quoted in J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 161.

⁷⁰ R. Char, *Hypnos* trans. M. Hutchinson (London: Seagull Books, 2014), pp. 29.

nutrient and influences’, to show ‘themselves distinctly’ and to intimate ‘what they are for’.”⁷¹ As we will see, to understand these aphoristic sketches, an exegetical style of rumination is in order.

More pointedly, it is in this way that Whitman is able to cast himself into the queer web of poetically, impersonally intimate worldly relations because, as Jane Bennett argues, “The poet’s very self is also one of those durational threads: no longer aspiring to become a sovereign agent or even an exclusively organic entity, the poet calls forth from the various potentials of his body a quivering, traversing beam of light. The poet does not so much impersonate sunlight’s impersonal fall as extract from his body its inherent affinity with matter, light, heat, energy.”⁷² The effect is such that, as Bennett puts it, “One’s flesh becomes a great poem” as the body becomes understood as a media of desire.⁷³ If poetic ‘leaflets’ are able to serve as illuminating vehicles of desire, it is because through reading them one begins, mimetically, relationally, to feel the world around oneself otherwise, attuned to oneself, others, and social and political matters with a different relational comportment.

The next chapter will see a similarly queer technique of writing to be read pedagogically as a propaedeutic to action play out when Nietzsche drafts *Zarathustra* as the occasion for debuting a cruising *ethos*. Like Whitman and Char, Nietzsche cruises readers, casting out aphorisms as seductive lures to induce a dispositional attunement of graciously responsive receptivity to the immanent plurality of the world.⁷⁴ However, unlike Whitman’s verse, but in a way that anticipates Char’s, Nietzsche’s textual

⁷¹ J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 161.

⁷² J. Bennett, “The Solar Judgment of Walt Whitman,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 133.

⁷³ J. Bennett, “Solar Judgment,” pp. 135.

⁷⁴ Cf. A. White, *Within Nietzsche’s Labyrinth* (New York: Routledge, 1990); J. P. Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

eroticism is less optimistic and far more agonistically inclined and, thus, far more sensitive to the disorienting, and so potentially painful, experience of suffering the desire for *another* life, a Yes-saying life.⁷⁵ That Nietzsche is able to sustain the tension borne of desiring the gratifying joys of concerted action while also acknowledging the ways pain can compel the wish for resentful anaesthetization is attributable to his innovation of playfully satirical critique. With it, he is able to revalue the value of his own previously expressed desire (namely, his corpus composed prior to Book Four of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*), willing to the world a scandalously questionable queer testament to freedom openly addressed “for all and none.”

IV. *CRUISING POLITICS*: SKETCH OF CHAPTERS –

RECEPTIVITY, RESPONSIVITY, JUDGMENT, ACTION

Put differently, given the space to explore the immanence of agonism in abeyance of the morning after question, the heuristic of cruising allows mapping novel intensities, modes of relationality, and ethical valences of weak-tie relationality. It is the contention of *Cruising Politics* that this heuristic will assist in understanding *how* agonistic democrats respond to and act in the world politically. This entails, I will argue, the creation and cultivation of world-making counter-publicity immanent to concerted action. Moreover, understanding how demotic agonal contestation can be seen to function on an

⁷⁵ This is not to discount the impact that the Civil War had on Whitman’s verse, which Jason Frank rightly notes influenced subsequent editions of *Leaves of Grass*, but rather to note that – at least initially – Whitman’s strategy of erotic poetics is *preemptive*, and thus is forced to adjust when war erupts. Frank writes: “Affection, eros, amateness, attachment were essential components of this embodiment, of the manner through which the democratic people could become “a great passionate body.” While this theme is already clearly present in the first edition of *Leaves* (1855), it becomes more pronounced in each of the subsequent editions, as the crisis of the 1850s slides inexorably into the horror of Civil War.” “Promiscuous Citizenship,” *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 162-163.

affective register of connectivity more fully contributes to efforts to connect these energies up to more institutional, enduring forms of world-enacting politics.

In broad strokes, then, the following four case studies each address a central aspect to cruising politics: radical receptivity to alterity, including the unpredictable vicissitudes of worldly events; responsivity to oneself, others, and the world amidst foreclosures of public freedom; the exercise of practicing a pluralist power of evaluation, both as a mode of orienting decisions and as an act of expressing dissent; and, finally, the ability to initiate agonistic assemblages of concerted actors aroused to a common democratic interest. While in reality these dynamics operate immanently, surfacing concomitantly, for the sake of clarity I address these concepts serially so that, cumulatively, this dissertation is able to offer a schema of the ways cruising politics animates agonal demotic contestation. To further clarify this approach I also bisect the first two chapters from the latter two on the basis of the objects they examine. Where the first couplet is primarily exegetical, examining philosophical and poetic texts as aphoristic crystallizations of action, the latter couplet addresses historical instances of cruising politics in action and so embeds interpretation in the respective worlds of the event.

In the first of these case studies, Chapter Two, “Nietzsche’s Will-to-Power-Bottom,” I interpret the concluding *satyrspiel* of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as modeling a queer style of revaluing exposure to affective dissonance through a cruising *askesis* of heightening embodied receptivity to the unpredictability of worldly plurality. I theorize this revaluation process as an ‘untimely’ performance of “will-to-power-bottom” by reading the action of the concluding “Ass Festival” as offering a cheeky staging of

Zarathustra's intercourse with the queer assemblage of Higher Men. Reading Book Four of *Zarathustra* as a cruise culminating in an orgy allows me to situate Nietzsche's revaluation of embodied affective receptivity by amplifying the *relational* dramaturgy of this revaluation of anesthetizing normative asceticism, cutting against the grain of scholarship that tends to focus on the putative preeminence of sovereign individuality to Nietzschean self-overcoming.

Chapter Three, "The Poetic Action of *Amor Mundi*," builds on Nietzsche's dramatization of the embrace of a radically embodied receptivity by turning to Hannah Arendt's revaluation of René Char's wartime poems, *Leaves of Hypnos*. Char's dual role as insurrectionist and poet garners an account of how unguarded affective receptivity becomes generative of responsive world-enacting concerted action. If after elaborating the parodic presentation of will-to-power-bottom there remain concerns that Nietzsche's queer cheek risks dangerous attachments, then Arendt's valuation of Char's verse as exemplary further presses against the conceit that affective receptivity only ever hardens into reactionary callousness. This is because Char's aphoristic poems relate the way in which exercising resistance was also, irresistibly, an *amorous* expression: "I love these people so enamored of what their hearts imagine to be freedom that they offer up their lives to prevent what little freedom remains from dying."⁷⁶ In Char's lyrical leaflets the *askesis* of sensuous receptivity endures exposure precisely so as to remain sensuously responsive to the love of others. This dynamic, I argue, profoundly affects Arendt's theory of action and her treatment of *Hypnos* serves to conceptually reframe politics as a dynamic of amorously responding to the given, gratuitous plurality of anonymous desires for worldly freedom.

⁷⁶ R. Char, *Hypnos*, #155.

If, through Nietzsche and Arendt, the dynamics of a receptive-responsivity become explicable, then this still does not address an abiding worry that an affective orientation to politics threatens the elision of reasoned evaluation and the reduction of action to perpetually emotional *reaction*. I propose, however, that cruising politics furnishes a mode of exercising discriminating valuation and initiating concerted action. I demonstrate this through two chapters that bring the receptive-responsive dynamics of cruising politics to bear upon case studies of dissident mobilization. This couplet of chapters provides the occasion to bring the preceding exegetical considerations into relation with more historiographical and pragmatically minded research of social movements. These two case studies are also split thematically with the first focusing on how cruising relies upon certain norms and modes of judgment, while the second maps the creative and world-enacting potency of anonymous public intercourse.

Chapter Four, “Scandalous *Parrhēsia* in *Cruising* Times,” interrupts the impulse to instinctively valorize popular protestation by examining the foment and fallout of demonstrations that erupted in New York City, which sought to sabotage the production of William Friedkin’s controversial film, *Cruising* (1980). The popular narrative about *Cruising* is that it is a patently homophobic film and, indeed, it galvanized the formation of national American LGBT activist organizations tasked with forcefully challenging perceived homophobic and exploitative representations of queers in popular media. I approach the defensive embrace of neoliberal governmentality in American queer activism through consideration of a cluster of interviews conducted with Michel Foucault, many of which were widely circulated in newly minted queer publications (namely, *The Advocate*). In these contexts Foucault consistently performs a biting queer

critique that elliptically interrogates the value of the uprisings against *Cruising*. He does so by problematizing the demonstrations as also functioning to reactively preclude affirmative evaluations of the queer world-enacting relations exemplified in the culture of leather s/m brazenly on display in Friedkin's film.

Foucault's intervention, I argue, confronts the ways a queer politics of positive representation plays out in disciplinarily normalizing and exclusionary modes. He does so, I suggest, by inviting a critical reevaluation of the discounted value of queer participation – both critical and constructive – in the making of and popular reception to *Cruising*. Beyond scandalizing the hierarchical terms of representation, Foucault affirms the creative affective worlding of queer leather s/m invitingly gestured toward by Friedkin *because represented as* obscene or “behind the scenes.”⁷⁷ What is shown of leather s/m is precisely that there is more than meets the eye and in such a way as to invitingly arouse queer desire. Following Foucault's example, I contend *Cruising* becomes a resonant pre-AIDS media through which contemporary viewers can glance the queer heterotopic experimentation of futures past.

If Foucault models a mode of exercising parrhesiastic valuation against the grain of popular consensus, Chapter Five, “The Anonymous Face of Politics to Come,” builds upon the case of the *Cruising* scandal by deploying Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomadic, rhizomatic war-machine to analyze the contemporary emergence of digitally enacted political insurgency, or “hacktivism.” While the internet has been fruitfully compared to the innovation of the printing press in its potentially edifying progressive effects, Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand how, as a media technology, the

⁷⁷ J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), for an account of the ‘hidden transcript,’ or “those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript.” (pp. 4-5)

internet provides the occasion to create newly dissonant modes of democratic resistance conditioned by the very networks simultaneously conducting the securitized governmentality of “control societies.” In staking a claim to the boundless territory of the internet against the domiciled capture of the “world-wide-web,” hacktivist “war-machines” affirm the world-dilating right to the free circulation of desire and the free mobilization of agonistic contestation.

To highlight this approach to online political dissent I focus on the exploits of Anonymous hacktivists in the brief period immediately following the release of Chelsea Manning’s WikiLeaks data dump in an attempt to “queer” the value of neoliberal queer politics currently in circulation. I invite comparison of the queer culture screened through *Cruising* to the gaily-provocative *ethos* of Anonymous “trolls4lulz.” As with queer leather-sex, the risky affairs of Anonymous are transacted through depersonalized masking and dissimulating code, not recognizably revelatory identification. And, just as queer cruising figures pejoratively as the counterfeit love of strangers relative to the normative *longue duree* of heteronormative domesticity, the tempo and impact of the relations animating Anonymous hacktivism appears hyper-accelerated and fleeting. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the war-machine as a world enacting “affective assemblage” allows for critical analytic understanding of the decentralized and impersonal conduct of the concerted political actions staged by Anonymous hacktivists. I argue that in displacing organized advocacy for intensive agitation, Anonymous hacktivism demonstrates a provocative desire to contagiously affect political dissent.

Chapter 2. Nietzsche's Will-to-Power-Bottom

My brothers in war, I love you thoroughly;
I am and I was of your kind.
And I am also your best enemy.
So let me tell you the truth!
On War and Warriors (Z: I.10, 158)

We begin from the premise that with the untimely publication of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part IV, Nietzsche's work bares a shamelessly outlaw grin of cheeky queer desire. This queerness finds rather candid expression in the satirical seriocomedy concluding *Zarathustra*, the "Ass Festival," and its biting humorous transvaluation is directed over-against his earlier gravely human, all too human efforts so as to arouse desire for his "prelude to a philosophy of the future." Rather than signal indulgence in literary excess, *Zarathustra*, Part IV, ventures important philosophical, as well as political, positions. At stake is gaining a reoriented sense of the political valences of revaluing values in Nietzsche's corpus. In particular, it allows amplifying the ways in which genre-bending facilitates Nietzsche's queering of the Gay Science of sounding the ascendant biopolitical governmentality that came to dominate the late modernity.¹

¹ Sounding is a nautical practice of measuring the depth of a body of water. It also carries acoustical connotations, which are evident in Nietzsche's pun on Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* with the subtitle to *Twilight of the Idols, Or: How to Philosophize with a Hammer in The Portable Nietzsche* trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Books, 1954). In the context of queer sex these connotations become braided when an instrument stimulates pleasure through insertion into the urethra. Cynically speaking, this queers the all too human valuation of the phallus. It becomes fungible with regard to elasticity, and is scandalized when functionally inverted: not castrated (negated), but rendered receptive by becoming "sounded" as dilatory sphincter/throat/vagina/palm/pupil. The scandal is in the fact that the value of the phallus proves capacious enough to become radically other in its self-relation. Such perverse inversion is scandalizing insofar as it shorts affective circuits, stupefying conduction of phallogocratic normativity by putting the value of the phallus into a different relation than it may otherwise congenitally enjoy. Cf. Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 256, which pushes Lacanian

His strategy in *Zarathustra* is to stage an ass-fête that scandalously inverts shameful devaluation of queer world-enacting desire. Framed this way, *Zarathustra*, Part IV is less a textual site of reconciliation than as a discursive cruising ground – open for all and exclusive to none – wherein the protagonist (Zarathustra) will be challenged to unlearn, relearn, and practice a new style of worldly attunement I term the will-to-power-bottom. In this textual space, the drama of *Zarathustra* models a practice of cruising that is informed by the rhetorical strategy of reading-writing. More specifically, Zarathustra will be challenged to disavow an orienting past attachment (to the pristine parturition of his coming children); acknowledge and embrace the immanent vibrancy already animating an otherwise refused ‘ascetic planet’ (figured as the desires of the Higher Men, especially the Ugliest Man); and, affirm an augmenting receptivity to the mundane desires of the refuse of late modernity (dramatized in Zarathustra’s participation in the ecstatic excesses of the Ass Festival). In the process, this narrative action is satirically deployed to lure readers into identifying with Nietzsche’s protagonist insofar as he must undergo affirming receptivity to the intensive annular relational arousals enabled by the impersonal intimacy of the assemblage of personages exemplified by the Higher Men, who are able to teach, by doing, the revaluation of values Zarathustra had theretofore only promised but never practiced.

To unpack these claims, this chapter begins by sketching the stakes of interpreting Nietzsche’s aphoristic style as a form of rhetorical cruising (I). At stake is the two-fold claim that (a) Nietzsche’s style does not manifest ‘closeted’ fascistic political desire, but

Freudianism in a Deleuze-guattarian direction: “If, following Lacan’s figure, we may think of the anus as a mouth, why not even smaller holes in the body? Why not the of the pores in our skin – which also breathe, absorb, and excrete – as mouths?” Dean points readers to G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 27.

rather (b) challenges resentful cynical resignation with a vivacious queer Cynicism that, rhetorically and conceptually, seeks to recuperate putatively low erotic *pathos* as a condition of possibility for parrhesiastic revaluation of values. With this opening established, I turn to highlight the satirically performative dimensions of Nietzsche's drama, arguing he stages the Ass-Festival as the scene for debuting the queer relationality enabled by affirming the radical receptivity of will-to-power-bottom (II). I then map the process of reading-writing as it unfolds in *Zarathustra* as a style of cruising, focusing especially on the barbed exchanges between Nietzsche's protagonist and the deicide, the Ugliest Man (III). I then explore, by way of conclusion, the ways Nietzsche's queer rhetorical strategy models cruising politics, arguing that this revaluation reorients the valences of Nietzsche's *amor fati* as affirming receptivity to promiscuous worldly relational plurality (IV).

I. QUEERING READING-WRITING

I begin by making theoretical space for conceptualizing how the dynamics of Nietzsche's distinctive rhetorical style of reading-writing takes shape as a practice of cruising politics. In this section, I will further elaborate this discursive strategy and in the process challenge a strain of interpretation common to both political and queer theory. This scholarship diagnoses Nietzsche's rhetorical style as symptomatic of phallogocratic paranoia over castration that finds political expression, on these accounts, in fascistic attachments and aspirations. First, however, it is necessary to see what in Nietzsche's style prompts such anxieties.

Regarding the relationship between rhetorical style and the expression of truth, Sarah Kofman claims, in *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, "In its brevity and density, the

aphorism is an invitation to dance: it is the actual writing of the will to power, affirmative, light, and innocent.”² What Kofman glances in Nietzsche as a choreographic proposition Babette Babich hears as a musical solicitation evident in the pacing and crescendos of rhetorical verve as well as the silences – the countless ellipses, dashes, and sudden breaks – texturing Nietzsche’s texts. If there is an invitation to dance, then it is only because there is a gap, a breath, in the musicality of the aphorism that occasions an opening for potentially connective solicitation. Babich argues this rhetorical style of ‘aposematic aposiopesis’ allows Nietzsche to entice readers with aphoristic lures that appear as an “incomplete suggestion, deliberately incomplete (that is, aposiopetic) *in order* to suggest a certain danger (and thus aposematic).”³ In this vein, David Allison similarly observes that the strategy of dangerous arousal suggested by Nietzsche’s rhetorical use of aposiopesis encourages readers to ‘fill in’ the holes of his corpus with affirmations of their own interpretative understanding.⁴

When aphorisms are experienced as vibrant – as colorfully tonal gestures – they become sensible as “the expression of a system of forces [which] acts on the reader and ‘cultivates’ him, in other words... makes him come into his own.”⁵ At the same time, however, interpretation (taking up the invitation to dance) becomes an act of writing “which slightly displaces the meaning of the first, pushes the perspective of the aphorism

² S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 115. Cf. also, A. White, *Within Nietzsche’s Labyrinth* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 10, for a complimentary treatment of the convergence of seduction, ‘fishing for men,’ and dancing; T. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 278-283.

³ B. Babich, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 290.

⁴ Allison, David B. “‘Have I Been Understood?’” In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s “Genealogy of Morals,”* ed. Richard Schacht, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 460–68, pp. 463.

⁵ S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, pp. 116.

in new directions and makes it come into its own.”⁶ In short, Nietzsche’s rhetorical style attempts to disseminate aphoristic assemblages in a way that allows them to become dynamic, sensitive, and fluid in acts of interpretation such that exegetical intercourse induces indiscreet affective leakage between the authoritative distance of the author and the reader, refiguring in the process the discrete roles of each.⁷ Understanding the aphorism as a cruise animated by both intensive rhetorical excesses as much as welcoming silences allows posing the question of Nietzsche’s style anew, in a manner that becomes “nimble as one reflects, and stay[s] on the ‘surface’ whilst reading between the lines.”⁸

Still, strategically ‘reading between the lines’ seems to assume at least two lines to read between, namely: an “esoteric” and an “exoteric” register of meaning. Before exploring whether this hermeneutical binarization is in fact true to Nietzsche’s rhetorical strategy, it is worth noting how, in recent years, the supposed esoteric register of signification in Nietzsche’s work has been pursued as though indicative of a ‘closeted’ style of writing. Eve Sedgwick deconstructs a conceptual cluster of binary oppositions in Nietzsche’s works, most pronounced among them being ‘sentimentality / *ressentimentality*’, so as to adduce a ‘closeted epistemology’ operative in framing the desire for transformative reevaluation. She argues that a paranoid disavowal of sentimentality – and an excessive valorization of ‘anti-sentimentality’ – serves only to snarl Nietzsche’s aspirational project in circuits of a distinctly homophobic *ressentiment*,

⁶ S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, pp. 116.

⁷ On the ‘fluidity’ of Nietzsche’s desire, cf. Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), which builds on J. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*. Trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁸ S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 116.

becoming in its refusal “a propellant for its contagious scissions and figurations.”⁹ Thus, precisely because Nietzsche’s project is aroused to and animated by homoerotic temptations, a paranoid rhetoric compels disavowing such desires, even to the point of celebrating the violence of fascistic eugenics.

In a similar mode, Henry Staten’s “psychodialectic” interpretation of a “grand economy” in *Nietzsche’s Voice* reads Nietzsche’s texts as regularly foundering on the paradoxical status of the “great man” capable of redeeming humanity: is he a reckless self-squanderer or an appropriative conqueror? This paradox, Staten argues, prompts Nietzsche’s authoritative voice to vacillate between hysterical affirmation of the absolute violation of the self and reactive recoiling from the loss of substantive integrity entailed in such an operation. Central to the latter operation of recoil is a libidinal impulse to purge a concept (Dionysus, strength, will-to-power, pleasure, manliness, love) from its passive, weak, or corrupting, elements (Christ, weakness, asceticism, pain, castration, pity).¹⁰

As for Sedgwick, Staten diagnoses such bi-polar oscillations as attesting to an indelibly pronounced and virulent misogyny, aestheticized aristocratic arrogance, and narcissistic – even if sadomasochistic – self-investment inflecting Nietzsche’s voice.¹¹ Staten argues it is only the metaphysical fantasy of the ring of being – or, the eternal return of the same – that allows Nietzsche to find a position of sovereign power drained of ambivalence: “An economy that pours itself out endlessly into itself, therefore preserves itself even as it squanders itself because there is only itself from alpha to

⁹ E. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 180.

¹⁰ H. Staten, *Nietzsche’s Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹¹ H. Staten, *Nietzsche’s Voice*, 184. cf. also V. Wolfenstein, *Inside/Out Nietzsche: Psychoanalytic Explorations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), which similarly labors within the psychoanalytic paradigm of sexual difference.

omega;” however, “the price of this self-preservation is eternal, absolute solitude.”¹² While never explicitly saying as much, it is clear that Staten perhaps unwittingly sketches a caricature of that “vice which dare not speak its name,” the Dorian queer as the misogynistic, narcissistic, and sadomasochistic Wildean aesthete Sedgwick diagnoses Nietzsche as disavowing any resemblance to with utmost paranoiac urgency.

From a similarly psychoanalytic perspective Joachim Kohler’s *Zarathustra’s Secret* portends to decipher the veiled fact that Nietzsche “was homosexual.” The experience of the eternal return of the same so integral to the drama of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is, he suggests, an esoteric expression of inarticulate homoerotic desire.¹³ While more explicitly open about the queerness animating Nietzsche’s project, Köhler’s framing of it as a matter of deep turmoil that only finds furtive expression serves to reinscribe queerness within the binaries Sedgwick and Staten respectively deconstruct and productively problematize.

More explicit than Sedgwick and Staten, but with none of the possibly generative implications of Köhler’s hermeneutics, Geoff Waite’s *Nietzsche’s Corps/e* contends that Nietzsche’s esoteric style of writing is intimately implicated in both his homoerotic desires *and* his articulation of a “fascoid-liberal” ideology. Queerness and fascism conceptually coincide to the extent that Nietzsche’s style proffers a mode of “reading-writing whereby any new stimulus... could be almost immediately incorporated and

¹² Cf. H. Staten, *Nietzsche’s Voice*, where, ironically, Staten re-inscribes his own interpretation within its own narcissistic ring of return: “Nietzsche’s writings aren’t a man, or a ghost either, and if they constitute the wiring or plumbing of an ‘economy’ the only libido that runs through these wires or tubes as I read is my own.” (185) In other words, the “other” is purged from this economy in a mimetic reproduction of the very same operation attributed to Nietzsche such that one wonders whether or not Staten has simply staged his own desires by domineering Nietzsche’s voice.

¹³ J. Kohler, *Zarathustra’s Secret: The Interior Life of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Trans. Roland Taylor. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 238-240.

redirected.”¹⁴ As with Staten, Waite diagnoses this as a perverse political economy wherein “the sublime becomes subliminal” and the dream of preemptively dominating dissent with “sodomasochistic technologies of subliminal influence” emboldens an elite corps of homo-social/sexual supermen to rule with fatalistic impunity.¹⁵ More recently Malcolm Bull’s *Anti-Nietzsche* has followed Waite in discerning the seductive quality of Nietzsche’s rhetoric functions as an affective lubricant for nefarious and paranoid fascism such that stylistic invitations to “read for victory” amount to little more than a subliminal rhetorical strategy, one that Waite claims is “a major source of his [Nietzsche’s] power to influence gullible readers.”¹⁶

While these critics proffer cautionary readings, all foreclose the queer rhetorical dissonance generated by aphoristic aposematic aposiopesis by folding its generative potency into paranoid apprehensions of fascistic apostasy. But is such foreclosure warranted, especially if the esoteric register of signification is meant to parallel a closeted rhetorical disavowal? Sedgwick, for instance, had demonstrated in *Epistemologies* that during Nietzsche’s active period of production the Second Reich was in the midst of an unprecedented biopolitical project of punitively identifying and registering suspected

¹⁴ G. Waite, “Nietzsche’s Baudelaire, or the Sublime Proleptic Spin of his Politico-Economic Thought” *Representations*, (1995: No. 50, No. 2.), pp. 42. Waite’s reading is more fully developed in *Nietzsche’s Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or: the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), but the hard kernel of his claim is already present in this earlier essay.

¹⁵ “This corps/e of artist warriors, his ‘centurions,’ as he called them, his hundred men, his Few Good Men, his Marine Corps – Nietzsche = *amante marine*, marine lover and lover of Marines – was to march, if need be, as broods over corpses.” G. Waite, *Nietzsche’s Corps/e*, pp. 136. While Waite cites Leo Bersani’s essay “Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature,” *Representations* (1989: Vol. 25, No.1), pp. 99-118, as well as Luce Irigaray’s *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, it escapes his imagination to consider reading Nietzsche’s marine lover as exemplified by Jean Genet’s titular sailor in *Querelle*, Trans. Anselm Hollo (New York: Grove Press, 1974) – the outlaw mirror of Melville’s *Billy Budd* – a veritable Zarathustrian *vogelfrei*, or “ugliest man.” On the role Genet plays in Bersani’s contemporaneous figuration of the “gay outlaw,” cf. L. Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ M. Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche* (London: Verso Books, 2011), pp. 36 - 37.

homosexuals.¹⁷ It is surprising, then, that given an otherwise dutiful attention to the tense relationship between disavowed nationalist interpellations and aspirational cosmopolitical orientations in Nietzsche's work that his vociferous denunciations of the Reich are not also taken by Sedgwick to index a scathing political judgment of this homophobic *Volksgeist*.¹⁸ Matters become more confused when considering that Waite flatly concedes that gossip of Nietzsche's 'excessive onanism,' purportedly small penis, and alleged 'pederasty' – all watchwords for pathologically deviant sexual "inversion" –circulated widely in the elite circles of Bayreuth and contributed in no small measure to Nietzsche's painful, protracted break with Wagner.¹⁹

In other words, what is presented as esoteric and closeted – to wit, the power homoerotic desires exert on Nietzsche's rhetorical stylizations, no less than the substance of his philosophical thought – may more plausibly be, in fact, seemingly quite openly apparent in his works, especially from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* on, which is all the more remarkable given the fiercely homophobic climate of his milieu. Indeed, in his interpretation of *Zarathustra*, the venerable disciple of esoteric hermeneutics, Stanly Rosen, directly faults Nietzsche for being "the first to transform esotericism into an exoteric doctrine."²⁰ We may begin to surmise, then, that *Thus Spake Zarathustra* belies no secret because what is at stake is already stylistically rendered patently apparent and on full rhetorical display and that what is read as "esoteric" simply signals the

¹⁷ E. Sedgwick, *Epistemologies of the Closet*, pp. 133.

¹⁸ E. Sedgwick, *Epistemologies*, pp. 167- 181. One possible reason for this elision is the emphasis placed on race and addiction – and the metonymic suturing of the Jew as the degenerate figure of both par excellence – to the negligence of homosexuality as a racialized category of the 'degenerescence-perversity' paradigm analyzed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: an Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage Press, 1990).

¹⁹ G. Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, as well as: "Nietzsche's Baudelaire, or the Sublime Proleptic Spin of his Politico-Economic Thought" 14-52; pp. 21, ftnt. 4.

²⁰ S. Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's 'Zarathustra'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 247-8.

discomfiting, and clearly disorienting, intuition that a queer current of desire pulses throughout its dramaturgy. But failure to comprehend does not equate to purposive concealment, and any claim to the contrary teeters, itself, on the paranoid.

Still, a persistently emphatic reading might contend that this self-evidence in fact functions as an open secret, a so-called ‘glass closet’ “shaped by the conjunction of an extravagance of deniability and an extravagance of flamboyant display.”²¹ Importantly, positing the influence of a transparent frame functions, necessarily, by reasserting the esoteric/exoteric binary Rosen suggests Nietzsche unabashedly dissolves through scandalous inversion. Thus, if indeed there is a ‘lens’ refracting the homoeroticism of Nietzsche’s aphoristic strategy through a paranoid and fascistic rhetoric, then it should be identifiable for being shadowed in an “extravagance of deniability.”

The reactive expenditure of such diversionary energies of disavowal, however, is notably difficult to detect for those even minimally attuned to read for the queerness in *Zarathustra*.²² Rather, as Adrian Del Caro remarks, Nietzsche is rather adept at holding up a looking glass to his own philosophical efforts and, moreover, that this practice is itself dramatized in *Zarathustra*, Part II, which offers with such a moment of reflective self-reappraisal.

“‘The Child with the Mirror’ [...] illustrates how Zarathustra’s words and rhetoric have been received by the people. Upon gazing into the mirror

²¹ E. Sedgwick, *Epistemologies of the Closet*, pp. 165.

²² Indeed, Köhler opted to omit “the second part of the German original [of *Zarathustra’s Secret*], which consisted of a detailed interpretation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*” because, he claims, “The reader who has followed the birth of Nietzsche’s philosophy from the spirit of his nightmares and yearnings as related in the first part of the book no longer has any need of this interpretation.” (xii) For my part, I am decidedly less sure whether one needs an intimate familiarity with Nietzsche’s nightmares and yearnings in order to glance the queer desire at play in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. That one can be a “lay”-reader of Nietzsche and still discern this play of desire is, to my mind, all the more reason to consider quite seriously the rhetorical power of his queer “short-cut” styling.

presented to him by the innocent child, Zarathustra sees not his own reflection, but the face of a devil. If he is to counter this false reception, if he is to rid his message of the onus that it is merely traditional evil, he will have to invent a new speech to reflect new ways.”²³

That is, in *reflection*, Nietzsche’s argumentative strategy operates on a profoundly superficial, performative register of expressivity attentive to reception. Moreover, Del Caro’s analytic, in this case, orients attention to the task of creating a new form of expressing new practices, precisely so that the pauses and crescendos animating his aphoristic style are not mistaken for a paranoid reproduction of merely overturned normative valuations (traditional evil or political domination).

If, then, Nietzsche’s style does something *other than* propagate fascism, we must similarly approach his corpus otherwise. Before addressing the satirical dramaturgy of the Ass Festival, it is now possible to return to Kofman’s suggestion that aphorisms function as a cruise, an attempt or temptation that invites readers to experiment.²⁴ We have already seen the anxieties aroused by Nietzsche’s alleged esotericism, but are these the lines cast by Nietzsche as a queer fisher of men? Not according to Kofman, for whom the aphorism seeks to break traditional binary oppositions between reading and writing such that dancing with Nietzsche promises a more explicitly genre-bending affair, one that is ‘superficial—out of profundity.’²⁵ (GS: P, 4) Understanding the profundity of Nietzsche’s

²³ A. Del Caro, “Nietzsche’s Rhetoric on the Grounds of Philology and Hermeneutics” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (2004: Vol. 37, No. 2), p. 101-122: pp. 111.

²⁴ The reference here is to the potential for semantic play to allow the attempter (*versucher*) to simultaneously be engaged in an attempt or experiment (in both cases, *versuch*) that is deployed as temptation (*Versuchung*). For the relevant aphorisms in Nietzsche, cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), II.44 Cf. D. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), ch. 5.

²⁵ In French, *gender* is also captured in *genre*.

superficial art entails unpacking what it means as a reader to be nimbly ‘on the move,’ between the lines and yet on the surface.

In *Zarathustra*, an aphorism is compared to a mountain peak where “the shortest way is from peak to peak.” (Z, I.7, 152) Here, like the ancient Cynics, Nietzsche claims the truths offered in his aphorisms provide ‘shortcuts to virtue.’²⁶ The early monograph, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, offers an alternative, and vividly illuminating, depiction of the metaphor of aphoristic mountaineering. Contrasting the nimble leaps of pioneering Greek philosophers to the heavy plodding of modern “calculating reason,” Nietzsche writes:

It is like seeing two mountain climbers standing before a wild mountain stream that is tossing boulders along its course: one of them light-footedly leaps over it, using the rocks to cross, even though behind and beneath him they hurtle into the depths. The other stands helpless; he must first build himself a fundament, which will carry his heavy cautious steps.²⁷

Fleet-footed and nimble, the aphoristic mountaineer’s ascent is animated by “the special strength of imagination [in] its lightning-quick seizure and illumination of analogies.”²⁸ This early metaphor captures the flux soliciting courageous grace while nevertheless insisting the ever-changing stream cannot be mastered or forded merely through accelerated calculative reason. Rather, the ‘power of creative imagination’ – what Nietzsche will depict as the inspiration of Dionysian affectation – engenders a “lightning-

²⁶ *The Cynic Philosophers from Diogenes to Julian*, Trans. Robert Dobbin (London: Penguin Classics, 2012). W. Desmond *Cynics*. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008) and *The Greek Praise of Poverty* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006).

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Gateway, 1962), pp. 40—emphasis mine.

²⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, pp. 40—emphasis mine.

quick” or flashing apprehension of the appearance of truth upon the sufficient ‘ground’ of vaulting refuse.

The boulder and the peak metaphors reveal that there is nothing ‘beneath’ an aphorism; rather, the truth of any given aphorism only ever appears in the dynamic flux of a relational constellation of ‘alightment’. While an aphorism is undoubtedly self-contained, the intensity of its singular impact is amplified by its resonance throughout an entirely open textual milieu, ranging across an entire corpus and beyond. In this respect, what surfaces upon reading an aphorism is constituted by a relational intercourse, the truth of which appears in the creative process of mapping peaks of resonant intensities. For the aphoristic mountaineer, reading ‘between the lines’ entails spanning peak-to-peak, a matter of passage that does not heed the grave imperatives of ennobling descent. Thus, superficiality initially concerns a figurative assenting ascent to aphoristic peaks.

The question becomes, How does this process of getting high transpire? As Robert Pippin reads the second Preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche’s defense of superficiality targets the presumptions of philosophers who would ‘unveil’ and penetrate the hidden depths of truth. When Nietzsche casts truth as a woman, this pursuit is reframed “as an obscene attempt to look up a woman’s dress.”²⁹ Pursuing truth in this manner is “more inappropriate and grotesque than impossible... as misguided and crude as trying to find what lies ‘behind’ our basic commitments.”³⁰ This is because, on Pippin’s account, it is nothing less than *eros*, “an extremely idealized love... engaged in not for purely aesthetic reasons, but for the sake for some conversion, or seduction,”

²⁹ R. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 43.

³⁰ R. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, pp. 43.

which produces such worldly commitments in the first place: “the attachments and commitments [*eros*] inspires are a ‘condition of life.’”³¹

Asking after the arousal of *eros*, then, is tantamount to peeping up Lady Aletheia’s robes, and so Pippin is prompted to maintain that Nietzsche’s philosophical love is *unrequited*.³² This unrequited love is marked by an especially fragile auratic power: “the poetic language of love cannot survive (without loss of meaning) any radical literalization.”³³ Thus, desiring the exposure of the truth of one’s erotic desires (ironically enough, for truth) effaces the meaning of truth and threatens the nihilism of either flaccid, or assaultive, eroticism.

Yet, Pippin’s rendering is left wanting when pressed to make sense of the immediately subsequently queer inversion of this very conclusion in the Preface to *The Gay Science*. “Perhaps truth is a woman,” Nietzsche writes, “who has her reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is—to speak Greek—Baubo?” The figure of Baubo challenges a number of the assumptions inflecting Pippin’s consideration of *eros*. Here the poetic becomes bawdily literalized and the veil is lifted in order to affirm a vulgar, laughable truth: the animating truth of life itself, Nietzsche seems to suggest.

In the course of recuperating aspects of Nietzsche’s project from reductive allegations of misogyny, Kofman contends that the figure of Baubo is especially relevant to the *mythos* surrounding and supplementing the auratic fecundity of Dionysus. In the

³¹ R. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, pp. 41.

³² R. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, pp. 38. Here Pippin becomes mired again in the anti-erotics of Socratic dialectics: satisfaction or release leads to the slackening of the tension necessary for self-overcoming, what for Pippin amounts to the perpetual frustration of aspiration that leads to mobilizing self-contempt. Cf. also, Joseph D. Kuzma, “Nietzsche, Tristan, and the Rehabilitation of Erotic Distance.” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, (2013: Vol. 44, No. 1), pp. 69-89. For a contrasting view of distance in Nietzsche’s text, cf. S. Phelan, “Intimate Distance: The Dislocation of Nature in Modernity.” *The Western Political Quarterly*, (1992: Vol. 45, No. 2), p. 385-402.

³³ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, pp. 43.

Greek *mythos*, Demeter – melancholically suffering the sexual abduction of her beloved daughter, Persephone – is seduced to laughter by Baubo who, “by pulling up her skirts... recalls the eternal return of life.”³⁴ To begin it is enough to emphasize Kofman’s sober observation that Baubo is also a figuration of the female *koilia*, of female genitals, and “another of the ‘improper’ words in Greek used to designate the female sex.”³⁵ Kofman continues by amplifying the metaphorical bleed animating the vulgar relationship between Dionysus and Baubo:

Baubo and Dionysus would thus be both names for protean life. Contrary to Baubo, however, Dionysus is naked. His nakedness does not signify the revelation of a truth but the unveiled affirmation of appearance: it is the nakedness of the strong who is beautiful enough, virile enough, not to need to veil himself. On the other hand, Dionysus is the god of masks; as with woman, ‘to know how to appear is part of his mastery.’ ‘He says nothing, nor risks a glance behind which there is not the thought of seduction.’ Dionysus, a Greek god anterior to the system of theological oppositions, crosses himself out (*se rature*) of the distinction between veiled and unveiled, masculine and feminine, fetishism and castration.³⁶

How do we make sense of the evocation of Baubo, whose laughably unveiled nakedness before Demeter is here cast as paradigmatic of “truth,” and who, like any woman, “has reasons for not letting us see her reasons”?

³⁴ S. Kofman, “Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism.” *Nietzsche’s New Seas* Ed. Michael Allen Gillispie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 196-200: pp. 196.

³⁵ S. Kofman, “Baubo,” in *Nietzsche’s New Seas*, pp. 197.

³⁶ S. Kofman, Theology, “Baubo” in *Nietzsche’s New Seas*, 198.

Kofman offers a mode by which to conceptualize this seeming contradiction in her figuration of Dionysus: if he is the naked god, then this nakedness is itself a mask (*persona*) that screens a personified (not “personalized”) affirmation of the appearance of nakedness.³⁷ In her intercourse with Demeter, Baubo stages the striking appearance of nakedness and this naked truth appears as if lightening: Baubo flashes her *baubo*. The *symbolon* is literalized as (im)proper name and (im)proper flesh unfold over one another in a scandalously vulgar appearance.³⁸ Demeter barks with laughter; the *miasma* of her suffering is lifted.

What truth surfaces in the flashing appearance of Baubo’s *baubo* such that Demeter’s melancholia is truly broken by laughter? On Pippin’s account this act of vulgar literalization should destroy the fragile eroticism of basic commitments to the world, and yet in this case it does exactly the opposite, and indeed exemplifies the dynamics of *cruising politics*. Baubo’s indiscretion exposes nothing more or less than the truth of Demeter’s own desire. Her queer gesture responds to a number of nuanced complexities: it acknowledges the truth of Demeter’s suffering; yet, it does so in a way that transvalues the truth of Demeter’s profound desire to endure such suffering as the patently apparent, yet misapprehended, desire for loving life. Flashing the truth of *this* productive desire to Demeter (not for her daughter, per se, but for a livable, loveable life) lifts her from the depression of her trauma. In hoisting her skirts Baubo “reveals” the work of mourning the loss of a beloved consists of manically affirming the desire to love (to become beloved in loving) and in so doing, transvalues melancholy into a desire for

³⁷ Cf. also, generally, David H. Fisher, “Nietzsche’s Dionysian Masks.” *Historical Reflections* (1995: Vol. 21, No. 3), pp. 515-536.

³⁸ Cf. A. Carson, *Eros, the Bittersweet* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), pp. 70-77 for an account of the *symbolon* as ‘knuckle’ or hinge.

the appearance of more of the same: more love, more gaiety, more laughable vulgarity.³⁹

“Oh, those Greeks!” Nietzsche cheekily concludes,

They knew how to live. What is required is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—out of profundity. And is not this precisely what we are coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there—we who have looked *down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—artists?⁴⁰

In this amending, post-*Zarathustra* Preface, the Dionysian artistry of the play of appearances is performed with a princely outlaw wink in a glancing arousal of seduction. In contradistinction to Pippin’s confused dialectics, which privileges affects of self-contempt with the power to induce erotic philosophical ascent, reading Baubo through cruising politics demonstrates that it is ‘not by wrath but by laughter that one kills the spirit of gravity.’ Kofman’s attention to the ‘improper’ homoerotics that recalls Demeter’s desire to a visceral and proprioceptive earthly humor helps sharpen the relationship between Nietzsche’s readers and his ranging aphoristic volumes. Laughing at an aphorism is a step in the right direction, especially when it casts the reader as the butt of its joke. As a tool of ascent, laughter operates as an affirmative expression of judgment, or at the least an acknowledgment of pleasure, and this is often a sufficiently

³⁹ This will be the affirmation Zarathustra offers up at the close of Book IV of *Zarathustra*: if you’ve ever said yes to one moment of happiness, then you want it all back again and again.

⁴⁰ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, P.5.

anti-gravitational lure. On the tightrope to the overman, laughter proves the best remedy for illnesses of both polar extremes: depression *and* vertigo.

Once the superficial heights of aphoristic peaks are accessed by laughter a reader is able to become a participant in the genre-bending affair of reading-writing. To better appreciate the stakes of Kofman's intervention, it is helpful to recall how the Hobbesian model of political authorship, which is premised on "reading oneself" as a companion guide to reading *Leviathan*, localizes the authority of writing in the body of the Sovereign. The world of the *Leviathan* is structured by the sharply divided hermeneutical options of orthodoxy (right reason) and rebellion (animal irrationality). By contrast, Nietzsche's aphoristic style is predicated on laterally dissolving this hierarchy and its method consists of seducing readers into becoming writers, arousing their creative powers through a *reading* laughter.⁴¹

To best understand the ways in which Nietzsche can be interpreted as offering a queered practice of reading-writing, consider a now iconic scene from Jennie Livingston's documentary film about queer ballroom culture in New York, *Paris is Burning* (1991). A famous queen, Dorian Corey, breaks down the peculiar form of jocular humor that animates queer ballroom rivalries and friendships alike. Corey explains:

Shade comes from reading. Reading came first. Reading is the real art form of insult. You get in a smart crack, everyone laughs and kikis because you found a flaw and exaggerated it, then you've got a good read going. If it's happening between the gay world and the straight world, it's

⁴¹ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX.294, pp. 231-233, where Nietzsche derides Hobbes for attempting to excise laughter.

not really a read, it's more of an insult, a vicious slur fight. But, it's how they develop a sense of how they read. [...] But then when you are all of the same thing, then you have to go to the fine point. In other words, if I'm a black queen and you're a black queen we can't call each other black queens 'cause we're both black queens, that's not a read: that's just a fact. So then we talk about your ridiculous shape, your saggy face, your tacky clothes. Then reading became a developed form where it became *shade*. Shade is: I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you because you *know* you're ugly.⁴²

Not only is “shade” a central and recurring motif for Nietzsche – as it figures, for instance, in the Wanderer's dogged shadow, the protracted hauntings of the Christian god, the figural remainder of the sun's illuminating vectors⁴³ – but so, I will demonstrate, is *reading* in this more nuanced sense. Reading, as Dorian Corey elaborates, is a form of agonal teasing that exaggerates relatively minute flaws to hilarious proportions. Its agonistic critique is also pedagogical since predicated on the critic and the target of criticism appearing “the same” and so the one must know what to look for in the other for a read to be biting, and thereby is uniquely enabled to draw critical attention to what appears worthy of improvement. Reading, then, is both a mode of insult, but also inaugurates a relationship of impersonal intimacy; what is *read* is the pretense to the

⁴² J. Livingston (Dir.), *Paris is Burning* (Miramax Studios, 1991).

⁴³ Cf., for instance: F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III.108, pp. 167, as well as Part II of *Human, All too Human*, “The Wanderer and his Shadow;” *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche* trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Books, 1954); and *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

appearance of sovereignty in a way that recalls Michael Warner's axiom, "Shame is bedrock.... 'get over yourself!'"⁴⁴

This queer sense of *reading* becomes pronounced in the context of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and folds over and amplifies the significance of Part IV as operating according to the generic conventions of satirical seriocomedy. It provides Nietzsche, in the *satyrspiel* of Part IV, the rhetorical resources for a project of writing to (be) *read* (against) the tragic arc of *Zarathustra*, Parts I-III. This does not mean an abandonment of what is now behind him, but a parodic revaluation of the value of those experiences. This revaluation, moreover, plays out not in solitude, but in ecstatic relation to lowly others, the Higher Men, and sees Zarathustra overcoming his own *ressentiment* in and through the vulgarly erotic pleasure of their company. It means that Zarathustra will have to learn to laugh when figured as the butt of his own joke for having clung to convictions that, from the perspective of his own desire for a revaluation of values, appear ass-backwards. It is his ability to leave these beliefs behind, to let them go, through laughter, which provides a scenario wherein humorous role-reversal enables a radical, queer transfiguration of desire.

ii. Zarathustra's Will To Power Bottom

In this section, then, I am interested in setting the stage for Nietzsche's *satyrspiel* in *Zarathustra*, Part IV by quickly glancing through a few especially illustrative moments in the preceding tragic arc of Parts I-III.⁴⁵ This section advances in two waves: firstly, I

⁴⁴ M. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 35.

⁴⁵ All parenthetical citations in the text are to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche* trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Books, 1954) as "Z" followed by Book number and section

open up the concept of will-to-power as ripe for queering, and thus for interpreting as more aptly theorized as *will-to-power-bottom*; secondly, I seek to highlight how the drama of parts I-III prove productively framed as Nietzsche's efforts to overcome the shame of and desire for an embodied revaluation of values I conceptualize as will-to-power-bottom. Crucial to both aspects of my argument is the concept of beauty as an ambiguous concept in *Zarathustra* as it both deceives Nietzsche's protagonist and offers him an immanent line of flight from his grave and grounding shame. Together this allows me, in the following section, to interpret the Ass Festival of Part IV as the queer expression of a will-to-power-bottom as it cruises an orgiastic embrace of communal self-overcoming.

Queering the will to power by revaluing it as better described and theorized as will-to-power-bottom runs counter to Peter Sloterdijk's critical reading in *The Thinker on Stage* (the title itself a reference to the restaging of the ass-fete in *Beyond Good and Evil*), which claims Nietzsche's theses concerning the will to power – "as dubious as they are desperate" – express "a perversion of the right to strength."⁴⁶ For Sloterdijk, the will-to-power betrays a subject who "already mistrusts his own power to compose himself," who speaks in "the voice of a wounded life... expended almost entirely in declaring its unrestrained permission to expend itself."⁴⁷ In this respect, Sloterdijk concludes,

number, as well as page number: Z, IV, 1, pp. xxx). Where I have parted in translations, I have consulted *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Augsburg: Der Goldmann Verlag, 1999).

⁴⁶ P. Sloterdijk, *The Thinker On Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*. Trans. Jamie Owen Daniel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 45-6. Compare this, for instance, to Bataille's essay on Sade in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), which reads de Sade's voice as *masochistic*: the voice of a victim seeking to hurt others with that by which he is hurt. Bataille is here much closer to Nietzsche's genealogy of *ressentiment* than Deleuze's Lacanian inflected treatment of masochism in 'Coldness and Cruelty' in *Masochism*. Trans. Jean McNeil and Aude Willm (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁴⁷ P. Sloterdijk, *The Thinker on Stage*, pp. 48.

Nietzsche, “because of his tenacious insistence on the will, is unable to experience how a liberating ‘you are able to’ would anticipate his ‘I want to’.”⁴⁸

And yet, I contend, it is precisely amidst the ecstatic gaiety of the ass-festival that Zarathustra is able to undergo overcoming precisely because he is invited to do so and to thereby learn by doing. Here the key distinction between Sloterdijk’s characterization of the will-to-power and my own sense of the queerness at play in Nietzsche’s will-to-power-bottom emerges. For Sloterdijk, the will-to-power is a betrayal of what in Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* is most compelling, namely how it “reveal[s] a phenomenal intellect that is searching, creative, testing in nature.... [and] which signifies nothing other than the brightness of the body on its journey out of the earth and around the world.”⁴⁹

One way of parsing Sloterdijk’s rejection of the will-to-power thesis is to see how it, on his account, shares a family resemblance to the Kantian sublime. On Gooding-Williams count, however, a posture of sublimity takes shape in the dramaturgy of *Zarathustra* whenever Nietzsche’s protagonist appears as “[p]ersonifying a happiness that figuratively ‘smells’ of contempt for the earth, though *not* of the earth itself, the sublime hero disowns his power to be affected in ways that would identify him as an ‘earthly’ or physical being.”⁵⁰ For one who is heroically sublime to overcome *ressentiment*, then, “he must let go of his will to knowledge and truth, admit that he is a

⁴⁸ P. Sloterdijk, *The Thinker on Stage*, pp. 48.

⁴⁹ P. Sloterdijk, *The Thinker on Stage*, pp. 67.

⁵⁰ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 179.

body possessed by passions, and accept that he is not the incorporeal and shadowy phantom he appears to be.”⁵¹

In this vein, Jared Russell also argues that Nietzsche’s concept of “will to power, when read carefully, is anything but a will to exercise domination over others; rather it names a state of cultivated vulnerability from which the world can be experienced as intensely as possible.”⁵² Deleuze had also argued in *Difference and Repetition* that will-to-power is best understood as the affirmation of given worldly plurality, or chaotic difference, conceptualized as “the eternal return”: “Nietzsche had already said that chaos and eternal return were not two distinct things but a single and same *affirmation*.”⁵³ Thus, Deleuze will insist: “Eternal return relates to a world of differences implicated one in the other, to a complicated, properly chaotic world *without identity*.”⁵⁴

If what is the same in the eternal return is precisely *difference*, then Giorgio Agamben further explicates the relationship of will-to-power as an affirmation of an anarchic difference as it figures as a “will to likeness, to a pure likening involving neither subject nor object... pure self-affection.”⁵⁵ Like the world itself, as the eternally recurring instantiation of chaotic difference, will-to-power-bottom affirms human being as of this (dis)order and thus conditioned by gratuitous plurality. For Nietzsche, “the subject is affected not by an object, but by itself [qua difference]... its own pure receptivity as

⁵¹ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 179.

⁵² J. Russell, *Nietzsche and the Clinic: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Metaphysics* (London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2017), pp. 73.

⁵³ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 57, 68.

⁵⁴ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 57.

⁵⁵ G. Agamben, “The Eternal Return and the Paradox of Passion.” *Stanford Italian Review* (1986: Vol. 6, No. 1/2), pp. 9-17, pp. 14.

original self-affection and, in this way, *gives itself to itself, suffers itself*, undergoes *passion*, and only thus, opens out to the world.”⁵⁶

It will thus prove crucial that in summoning the Higher Men to his cave, Zarathustra, in “The Honey Offering,” will solicit the “in-and-for-me in all things,” suggesting, as I will argue, a certain homo-ness to their erotic assemblage. In other words, though in the Ass Festival difference takes shape in alterity, the Higher Men, these men are also conjurations of Zarathustra’s own desire and so also present a form of communalized auto-affection. To this extent, it is especially pertinent to unfold Nietzsche’s revaluation of the concept of beauty, which no longer provides a therapeutic “veil of illusion” (as in *The Birth of Tragedy*). Like Robert Gooding-Williams, I read *Zarathustra* as proposing beauty arouses will-to-power-bottom, which figures as a radical receptivity to the desire to overcome *ressentiment* against the immanently profane and abject world. However, I contend that, in the *satyrspiel*, beauty is exemplified in a scandalous inversion, the Ugliest Man. Behind the will-to-power-bottom of self-overcoming is a receptivity to amorous seduction, a willingness-to-dance that is able to express itself when “power becomes gracious and descends into the visible.” As this aphorism suggests, and to continue in Gooding-Williams’s words, “Beauty, here, entails the repudiation of sublimity: it is a movement by which a once heroic, leonine will to power, having renounced the illusion of supersensible subjectivity, and having ceased to hold aloof from the ‘visible’ world of appearances, graciously condescends to revalue the passions through which that world stirs and moves the human body. For Zarathustra, beauty is the cure that relieves the self-estrangement of the sublime.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ G. Agamben, “The Eternal Return and the Paradox of Passion,” pp. 15-16.

⁵⁷ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 179.

If it seems counter-intuitive – if not outright contradictory – that the arousal to worldly beauty would be initiated by the jocularly shady laughter of the Ugliest Man’s augmenting *read* of Zarathustra’s anaesthetized desire for self-overcoming, then it is worth recalling the amending post-Zarathustra preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, where “the *craving for the ugly*” is said to signal “joy, strength, overflowing health, overgreat fullness,” leading Nietzsche to ask: “*What experience of himself, what urge compelled the Greek to conceive the Dionysian enthusiast and primeval man as a satyr?*”⁵⁸ The potential for what is at first blush inexpressibly ugly to attest to a beauty that can solicit undergoing overcoming *ressentiment* must be kept in mind when considering the ways in which the value of desiring beauty initially surfaces as so many narrative culs-de-sac in the preceding “tragic” arc of Parts I-III.

The remainder of this section, then, will turn to how, in the initial tragic arc of *Zarathustra*, shame, desire, and beauty are crucial terms for understanding the anxieties that animate Zarathustra in his quest to self-overcome his *ressentiment* against the ascetic planet exemplified by the Higher Men. What we will see in the movements of this tragic arc is the vacillation of his desire to undergo overcoming, as well as alternating strategies of “cruel optimism,” or practical attachments which keep him cathected to his desire for the good life, but which, through such cathexis, impedes the fruition of his aspirations.⁵⁹ In particular, I detail four strategies – sublime transcendence, shameful pride against submission, willful misapprehension of self and others, and reproductive futurism – that mutually condition Zarathustra’s “tragedy,” and which are all overcome in the ecstasy of the parodic Ass Festival.

⁵⁸ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: and the case of Wagner*. trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967, “Attempt at Self-Criticism.”

⁵⁹ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1.

“On Immaculate Perception” – or, Hypocritical Sublimity

In Part II, Zarathustra had already warned that for the self-styled sublime hero, “the *beautiful* is the most difficult thing.” (Z, II. 13, 230) The beautiful, we are told, is “cast [in] amorous glances” (Z, II. 12, 227), and in the confessional context of “On Immaculate Perception,” which is a diatribe against the sublime asceticism of Schopenhauer and Renan,⁶⁰ Zarathustra reveals he has been taken in by what he fancied to be such glances before. Unpacking what is at play in a cluster of aphorisms that close Part II will help us appreciate, then, the reluctance toward and initial ‘misjudging’ of the Higher Men operative in Part IV.

The immaculate perceiver is figured as incapable of *letting go* and delivering himself over to his desires even though he is “lecherous and jealous, the monk in the moon, lecherous after the earth and after all the joys of loving.” (Z: II.15, 234—translation altered) Zarathustra offers a parable to these “sentimental hypocrites”:

You too love the earth and the earthly: I have seen through you; but there is shame in your love and bad conscience—you are like the moon. Your spirit has been persuaded to despise the earthly; but your entrails [*Eingeweiden*, literally, “viscera”] have not been persuaded, and they are what is strongest in you. And now your spirit is ashamed at having given in to your entrails, and, to hide from its shame, sneaks on furtive and lying paths. (Z: II.15, 234)

⁶⁰ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III.6, pp. 103-6 and III.26, pp. 157-9. On the homoerotic inflection of Nietzsche’s relationship to Schopenhauer, cf. “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 163.

Shamed at the potency of his visceral desire, the immaculate perceiver embodies the ascetic *ressentiment* diagnosed in the *Genealogy of Morals*. This creates a situation Nietzsche elaborates in the second half of the parable.

“This would be the highest to my mind”—thus says your lying spirit to itself—“to look at life without desire and not, *like a dog*, with my tongue hanging out. To be happy in looking, with a will that has died and without the grasping and greed of selfishness, the whole body cold and ashen, but with drunken moon eyes. This I should like best”—thus the *seduced seduces himself*—“to love the earth as the moon loves her, and to touch her beauty only with my eyes. And this is what the immaculate perception of all things shall mean to me: that I want nothing from them, *except to be allowed to lie prostrate before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.*”

(Z: II.15, 234—emphases mine)

In the second half of the parable ‘pure perceivers’ love the earth only through the *gaze*. The body is denigrated as currish, while the deceits of the mind are elevated to sublimity: “The abdomen is the reason why man does not easily take himself for a god.” (BGE: IV.141) Here, Nietzsche says, the “seduced seduces himself,” as it is the earth and the visceral joys of loving that seduced the perceiver into desiring the earth in the first place.

Nietzsche continues his diatribe by gesturing toward “On the Three Metamorphoses.” In that opening aphorism, Zarathustra casts the gestational process of overcoming *ressentiment* as culminating in the third metamorphosis, becoming a child. “The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes.’ For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred ‘Yes’ is

needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.” (Z: I.1, 139)

It is in precisely these terms that Zarathustra *reads* immaculate perceivers as being liars about their creative potency: “You lack innocence in your desire and therefore you slander all desire.” (Z: II.15, 234) By redoubling his critique, Nietzsche again signals the *unconditional* posture this ascetic lie requires: *all* desire is slandered for *appearing* to these men as dirty and shameful. This unconditional will-to-knowledge of the perceptible world fueled on the denial of the body is what accounts for the *miscarriage* of immaculate perception: “Verily, it is not as creators, procreators, and *joyful-becomers* that you love the earth [*Wahrlich, nicht als Schaffende, Zeugende, Werdelustige liebt ihr die Erde!*].” (Z: II.15, 235—translation altered, emphasis mine)

The connection between joy and beauty becomes even more pronounced in the conclusion of the aphorism. Zarathustra breaks-away from a denunciation of what is “cold and ashen” to deliver an overwrought expression of his amorous desire.

Where is innocence? Where there is a will to procreate. And he who wants to create beyond himself has the purest will.

Where is beauty? Where I must will with all my will; where I want to love and go-down that an image may not remain a mere image. [*Wo ist Schönheit? Wo ich mit allem Willen wollen muß; wo ich lieben und untergehn will, daß ein Bild nich nur Bild bleibe.*]

Loving and perishing: that has rhymed for eternities. The will to love, that is to be willing also to die. Thus I speak to you cowards!

But now your emasculated leers wish to be called ‘contemplation.’ And that which permits itself to be touched by your cowardly glances you would baptize ‘beautiful.’ How you soil noble names! (Z: II.15, 235 – translation altered)

These stanzas are complex, gesturing in many directions simultaneously. They continue to resonate with the characterization of child-like innocence evoked in “On the Three Metamorphoses,” but they complexify becoming-childish by rendering joyfully-becoming an explicitly *amorous* and visceral experience of receptivity that will flirt with death to risk the sensuous delights of lovingly creating livable life on earth.

Most interestingly this desire to joyfully create breaks experiencing the world from the frame of an idealistically beautiful abstraction by rendering it a sensuously affective experience. To claim perception of beauty without viscerally loving and succumbing to it is to “soil noble names,” making beauty “ugly” (blanched, reified, *imagined*). Ascetic immaculate perceivers use noble words so as to appear to have ‘overflowing’ hearts. But Zarathustra steals those words from such men when they fall like scraps at the table of three-course meals. He is as though a cur, left “small, despised, crooked words,” which like Diogenes the Dog, he will “use...to tell hypocrites the truth.” (Z: 11.15, 235) Anticipating the Ugliest Man’s *read* of Zarathustra, Nietzsche aligns his protagonist with the dog, whose wet snout disgusts the immaculate perceivers, thereby distancing him from the sublime, disembodied ideal of lunar love by revaluing the potent conceptual metaphors these ascetics would neuter.⁶¹

⁶¹ Cf. A. del Caro, ““The Pseudoman in Nietzsche, or The Threat of the Neuter,” *New German Critique* (Spring/Summer1990), 135-156.

Nietzsche further advances the project of Zarathustra's overcoming by drawing a parallel between lecherous immaculate perceivers (lunar-lovers) and the Pale Criminal, to whom "an image made this pale man pale." (Z: I.6, 150) Fixated on the *image* of his murderous deed, to which, ironically, he was equal in the act, the Pale Criminal subsequently renders himself "the doer of one deed." (Z: I.6, 150) Shame over becoming "maddened" by his deed allows "the lead of his guilt" to transform his passionately aroused body into a "heap of diseases, which, through his spirit, reach out into the world: there they want to catch their prey." (Z:I.6, 151) Zarathustra goes on to describe this sickly figure as a "ball of wild snakes, which rarely enjoy rest from each other: so they go forth singly and seek prey in the world." (Z:I.6, 151) It is in these same terms that Zarathustra casts immaculate perceivers:

Verily, you deceive with your 'contemplation.' Zarathustra too was once fooled by your godlike skins and did not realize that they were stuffed with snakes' coils. I once fancied I saw a god's soul at play in your play, you pure perceivers. No better art I once fancied than your arts. Snakes' filth and bad odors were concealed from me by the distance, and that the cunning of a lizard was crawling around lecherously. (Z, II. 15, 235)

This passage contains a crucial inversion marking a distinction between Zarathustra and the immaculate perceivers who deceived him. While the immaculate perceivers were aroused by the earth, as if to become ashamed of the visceral receptive passion they desired, *Zarathustra was aroused by the immaculate perceivers*, mistaking in their 'contemplation' a play that looked divine, perhaps even Dionysian and child-like, only to

discover “Behind a god’s mask you hide *from yourselves*, in your ‘purity’; your revolting *worm* has crawled into a god’s mask.” (Z:II.15, 235—emphasis mine)

This distinction clarifies the affective shift played out in the last stanzas of the aphorism. Proximity to the immaculate perceiver sparks a solar valuation that effaces the dispassionate and disinterested pretenses of their lunar-love. This dawning moment of realization is also a moment of passionate arousal for Zarathustra, a double-gesture of rebuffing and drawing-near. This double-gesture incites a transformation of Zarathustra’s amorous will, for he now aligns himself with the erotic receptivity of a cynosural, Dionysian sun.

For already she approaches. All solar love is innocence and creative longing.

Look there: how she approaches impatiently over the sea. Do you not feel the thirst and the hot breath of her love? She would suck at the sea and drink its depths into her heights; and the sea’s desire rises toward her with a thousand breasts. It wants to be kissed and sucked by the thirst of the sun; it wants to become air and height and a footpath of light, and itself light.

Verily, like the sun I love life and all deep seas. And this is what perceptive knowledge means to me: all that is deep shall rise up to my heights. (Z, 236—emphasis mine)⁶²

Anticipating “The Honey Offering” opening Part IV, this realigned, receptive solar love is queer in complicated ways; it disorders topographies (depths into heights), transfigures

⁶² Cf. J. Bennett, “The Solar Judgment of Walt Whitman,” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John Seery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011)..

substances (water into light), and most importantly, dissolves the discrete boundaries of the discreet body. This queer pedagogy, then, promises a bodily sensibility of the visceral passions of an amorous will risking death to give birth beyond what resides within the remains of a shattered and expiated political imaginary.⁶³

Nietzsche ends the aphorism with this realignment of Zarathustra's amorous will to an innocent, solar love of earthly life, but "On Immaculate Perception," while diagnosing the crisis that he locates at the heart of decadent, "sublime" culture, also *dramatizes* this crisis. A threshold has been broached, as Zarathustra had claimed, such that, "If he grew tired of his sublimity, this sublime one, only then would his beauty commence; and only then will I taste him and find him tasteful. And only when he turns away from himself, will he jump over his own shadow—and verily, into his *sun*." (Z, II: 13, 229) If, in the context of the concluding *satyrspiel*, Zarathustra is able to overcome the sublime distance of his contempt for the earth in the queer vicissitudes of the ass-fête, then it is necessary to bring out all the more frankly the queer sexual dynamics it implicates. This, however, will prove hardly a straightforward affair. Instead, Zarathustra routinely vacillates between becoming receptive to his desire for Dionysian amorous perception and his shame over wanting to undergo such loss of sublime sovereignty.

"On Human Prudence," or: Willful Misapprehension

"On Human Prudence," alludes to precisely this ambivalent erotic desire in a way that tellingly prefigures the pathos of distance mustered by Zarathustra in Book III, and then satirically inverted in Book IV. At stake in "On Human Prudence" is an ambivalent

⁶³ Robert Gooding-Williams persuasively demonstrates the connection between Zarathustra's amorous, solar will and Dionysus, noting this image of the "sun persuading the sea to its height" appears before "On Immaculate Perception," in "On the Great Longing."

affirmation of the “burning sun of that wisdom in which the overman joyously bathes his nakedness.” (Z: III.21, 256) Yet, Nietzsche does not situate Zarathustra as prepared to, or aligned with, this naked bathing.⁶⁴ Instead, the thrust of the aphorism concludes by expressing skepticism that this aspiration is shared among the “highest and best men” of Nietzsche’s day:

You highest men whom my eyes have seen, this is my doubt concerning you and my secret laughter: I guess that you would call my over-man—*devil*.

Alas, I have wearied of these highest and best men: from their “height” I have longed to get up, out, and away to the overman.

A shudder came over me when I saw these best ones naked; then I grew wings to soar off into distant futures.

Into more distant futures, into more southern souths than any artist ever dreamed of—where gods are ashamed of all clothes. (Z: II, 21; 256)

Gesturing to the nakedness of Dionysus, and to the orgy of the Ass Festival to come, Zarathustra here casts the nudity of these figures as catalyzing a disgusted flight into the future. More profoundly, however, “On Human Prudence” closes by turning on the importance of how Zarathustra ought to behave when around “my neighbors and fellow men,” namely, “disguised – misjudging you and myself.”

We will see the importance of this willful misapprehension play out in the initial exchange between Zarathustra and the Ugliest Man in Part IV. It is, ironically, only by virtue of this misapprehension that Zarathustra is able to initiate and become receptive to

⁶⁴ On the queerness of naked proximity and corporeal openness to sight and touch, cf. L. Bersani’s reading of Andre Gide’s *The Immoralist* in *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

the potential for undergoing overcoming in concert with the assemblage of Higher Men. We also see, moreover, how the future figures for Zarathustra as a flight away from the past and present normative hegemony of the “good and the just” represented by the highest and best men, who would deem his overman – his “children” – *devil*. But first, it is crucial to understand that this misrecognition is not total, and that Zarathustra suffers, too, from knowing his own desire to undergo overcoming as will-to-power-bottom, but lacking the courage of his desire.

“The Stillest Hour” – or, Shame Over Submission

Nietzsche dramatizes this strained dynamic in the conclusion of Part II, “The Stillest Hour,” which stages an encounter with what is describes as an “awesome mistress,” “my stillest hour.” The stillest hour says to Zarathustra, “This is what is most unforgivable in you: you have the power, and you do not wish to rule.” Zarathustra meekly replies: “I lack the lion’s voice for commanding.” But Zarathustra has misunderstood: “It is the stillest words that bring on the storm,” to which now he confesses: “I am ashamed.”

Then it spoke to me again without voice: “You must yet become as a child and without shame. The pride of youth is still upon you; you have become young late; but whoever would become as a child must overcome his youth too.” And I reflected for a long time and trembled. But at last I said what I had said at first: “I do not want to.”

Then laughter surrounded me. *Alas, how this laughter tore my entrails and slit open my heart!* And it spoke to me for the last time: “O Zarathustra,

your fruit is ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruit. Thus you must return to your solitude again; for you must yet become mellow.”

And again it laughed and fled; then it became still around me as with a double stillness. But I lay on the ground and sweat poured from my limbs.

(Z, II: 22; 259 – emphasis mine)

Ashamed to speak the stillest word, *Yes*, and offer himself up to going-under, Zarathustra is still in the “pride of youth,” still defiant and leonine: “I do not want to.” In this pivotal scene, not only does he misunderstand the nature of commanding (that it is not figured by the lion’s voice, but the stillest word, *yes*, delivered by a “flock of doves”), Zarathustra has also misunderstood himself: he does have the lion’s voice, with which he speaks “no.” It is this double misunderstanding that provokes this “awesome mistress” to assault Zarathustra with laughter, tearing his entrails and piercing his heart. Tasting his blossoming abundance, this mistress jeers: “O Zarathustra, your fruit is ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruit.” He is left with a “double stillness,” physically shocked and resigned to solitude.

The rather violent sexual inflections concluding this aphorism begins with the playfully agonistic taunting of an erotic cruise, as an attempt to persuade or coax Zarathustra to speak the “stillest word” that would “bring the storm”:

“You know it, Zarathustra?... You know it, Zarathustra, but you do not say it!” And at last I answered defiantly: “Yes, I know it, but I do not want to say it!”

Then it spoke to me again without voice: “You do not want to, Zarathustra? Is this really true? Do not hide your defiance.” And I cried

and trembled like a child and spoke: “Alas, I would like to, but how can I?

Let me off from this! It is beyond my strength!

Then it spoke to me again without voice: “What do you matter, Zarathustra? Speak your word and break!”

And I answered: “Alas, is it my word? Who am I? I await the worthier one; I am not worthy even of being broken by it.”

Animated by a pronounced ambivalence (“I would like to, but how can I?” - “Alas, is it my word?”) this exchange (a profane reenactment of Jesus of Nazareth’s ‘stillest hour’ in the garden of Gethsemane) between the youthful late-bloomer Zarathustra and his “stillest hour” – no doubt the hour of twelve, when time stands up and Zarathustra must affirm all that passes through the ring, his ring (*daktylion*), of return – sounds a disturbingly aggressive metaphorical resonance between the eternal return of time’s relentlessly differential and differentiating passage and Zarathustra’s ambivalent relationship to this viscerally violating intrusion of his bodily integrity. He cannot yet stomach the thought, nor affirm its implications.

The aphorism concludes with Zarathustra sharing this parable of his suffering with his friends. Only, his ambivalence becomes in this sharing all the more amplified: “Alas, my friends, I still could tell you something, I still could give you something. Why do I not give it? Am I stingy?” In the midst of attempting to reassure himself, and his friends, of his capacity to be giving of himself, Zarathustra is overcome by shame “and he wept loudly; and no one knew how to comfort him. At night, however, he went away alone and left his friends.”

Unable to speak the stillest word even to his friends, he viscerally suffers his ambivalence as an experience of shame that manifests itself as the inability to enjoy under-going the becoming-receptive that bestows the “gift-giving virtue” of transvaluation. All that has passed through him during his time among men has been, in a word, shit; he is still incapable of giving the gift that will transvalue the value of this passage, a gift-giving that is fecund in its open giving of self.⁶⁵ Zarathustra’s leonine defiance in the face of his own immanent desire figures him as the butt of a cruel joke, assaulted by laughter: broken, humbled, mocked, and shamed, Zarathustra comes to value ‘hardness’ toward oneself – and a pathos of distance – in Book III in the service of attempting to mitigate the suffering experienced when vulnerably receptive to the beautiful and chaotic vicissitudes of life. Zarathustra will defer his joy to his children, suffer an ascetic callousness for the sake of their future coming. “On Involuntary Bliss” makes the promise of this optimistic hope for reproductive futurism explicit, and ripe for queer parody.

“On Involuntary Bliss,” or: Reproductive Futurism

Zarathustra’s embodiment of an ambivalent *pathos* of distance prompts him to practice an *ethos* of “hardness” toward himself for the majority of Part III. However, the desire to go-under and therefore joyfully suffer “involuntary bliss” is not extinguished, but rather intensively amplified. Only now a new dyadic opposition emerges between the unbecoming Higher Men (figured, at least in “On Immaculate Perception,” as Kantian moral psychologists) and Zarathustra’s coming children.

⁶⁵ Cf. A. White, *Within Nietzsche’s Labyrinth*, Ch. 9, for a complimentary account of the polyvalent recuperation of shit in Nietzsche’s later, seductive works.

It is his love for his coming children that continues to arouse and animate Zarathustra's ambivalent attachment to worldliness. Only, now, this desire is privative, anaesthetizing Zarathustra of the full range and polytonality of his desire:

But I lay there chained to the love of my children: desire set this snare for me – the desire for love that I might become my children's prey and lose myself to them. Desire – this means to me to have lost myself. *I have you, my children!* In this experience everything shall be security and nothing desire. (Z, III: 3, 274)

It is precisely in the desire to evacuate desire into the insulation of totalized security that Zarathustra betrays an ascetic *ressentiment* against earthly, embodied passional erotic arousal. He mistakenly hopes in this way to heed his own counsel and remain “faithful to the earth,” to let his “gift-giving love and...knowledge serve the meaning of the earth” and, in so doing, orient “back to the earth the virtue that flew away...back to the body, back to life, that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.” (Z, I:22, 188) And, indeed, it appears that this vision of anaesthetizing desire for the sake of securing a future for one's children appears to have allowed Zarathustra to, at the close of Book Three, affirm his gift-giving virtuosity; “The Other Dancing Song” and “The Seven Seals” might then be read as attesting to the figural marriage of Zarathustra to “this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity.”

However, this gift-giving virtue is still credulously discriminatory and this suspicious comportment toward the given and immanent world of men, disparaged in the desperately redemptive valuation of his coming children, must still be overcome. While this is precisely the animus overcome in Part IV, here, at the close of Book III,

Zarathustra's desire is differentiated from the desires and passions of the "omni-satisfied," "those who consider everything good and this world the best.... Always to bray Yea-Yuh – that only the ass has learned, and whoever is of his spirit." (Z:III.11, 306) In short, it is precisely this dichotomy, which pits the future world of Zarathustra's coming children against the putatively unbecoming asses of a decadent earth, the Higher Men, which the *satyrspiel* of Book IV dissolves. In the ecstatic aphorisms comprising the drama of the Ass Festival, Zarathustra is able to experience his body as a beautifully ugly media of scandalous inversion capable of overcoming the sublime and leonine distance of normative ashamedness in a relational experience of visceral receptivity to the gratuitous impingement of given worldly plurality. The *satyrspiel* staged in the Ass Festival plays out what bearing the hardness of life might entail when the body becomes tremulous and tender as a rosebud adorned with a sprinkling dew, shamelessly naked and exposed and, thus, all the more sensitively receptive to given worldly plurality. Debuting the will-to-power-bottom of Nietzsche's transvaluative project, Part IV situates this desire in a relational scene of cruising: in the choreographic dramaturgy of becoming a drunk and dancing ass, Zarathustra crowns the Higher Men with his blooming rosebud wreath.

III. Queering the Ass Festival

Pressing against the scholarly consensus that *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part IV, is ancillary to the true philosophical purpose contained in the initial three tragic arcs of Nietzsche's drama, Mary Clark Higgins has argued that Nietzsche's writing bares striking features of Menippean satire, or "seriocomedy" (*spoudogeloios*), which he was not only

aware of as a philologist, but also lectured about to the Classical Society of Leipzig.⁶⁶ For Higgins, Part IV teaches something about queer camp, about taking levity and failure seriously as bestowing their own lessons, and that these are especially pertinent to Zarathustra's desire to overcome *ressentiment*. Through a comparative reading of Apuleius's Menippean satire, *The Golden Ass*, Higgins emphasizes the ways role-reversals are facilitated in the service of philosophical edification, citing as well the catalytic function of roses and the trap of pity as important plot devices for both dramas.⁶⁷

Higgins, however, retains a tragic and developmental narrative emplotment for the four-part arc of *Zarathustra*.⁶⁸ Still, she rightly concludes, "The central 'tragic' message of *Zarathustra* is that meaning in life is to be found in simply loving life for its own sake."⁶⁹ My intervention in what follows radicalizes Higgins' qualification of "tragic" by arguing that Nietzsche sees the value of Part IV as allowing overcoming the resignation inherent in tragically emplotting life's drama narrated in Parts I-III, which as a satire it not only initiates but also models for readers. More specifically, the Ass Festival offers Nietzsche the opportunity to stage a scene wherein his protagonist is *read*—that is: (a) discursively undone when confronted with his own true desire for self-overcoming as it is (b) interpretively re-written by the Ugliest Man in an affirmation of immanently eternally returning difference that, in turn, (c) is expressed heuristically as a queer sexual cruise, a proposition to initiate novel worldly relations with the assemblage of Higher Men in the bawdy throws of an orgiastic ass-fête.

⁶⁶ M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 206-7.

⁶⁷ M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, pp. 209-219.

⁶⁸ M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, pp. 229.

⁶⁹ M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, pp. 241.

In anticipation of the drama of the ass-festival that concludes *Zarathustra* it is fruitful to identify the key aspects of the queer simpers resonating in “On Reading and Writing.” Chief among these, as Higgins notes, is the role of asses and roses in both Apuleius’s and Nietzsche’s satires. In *The Golden Ass*, only eating roses will restore the protagonist, Lucius, from his transformation into an ass; in like manner, Zarathustra, I will show, is teasingly recalled away from his asinine denunciations to his purpose through the lure of indulging, parodically, in the pleasures of queer sex (including analingus). This aphorism – manic, erotic, and agonistic all at once – contains the thematic bud that blossoms in the *satyrspiel* of Part IV. Specifically, Nietzsche will contend that the capacity to love life as if an ass is predicated on bearing its hardness with the tenderness and sensitivity of a blooming rosebud (a cheeky metaphor for a dilated, turned-out asshole).

You say to me, “Life is hard to bear.” But why would you have your pride in the morning and your resignation in the evening? Life is hard to bear; but do not act so tenderly! We are all of us fair beasts of burden, male and female asses. What do we have in common with the rosebud, which trembles because a drop of dew lies on it?

True, we love life, not because we are used to living but because we are used to loving. There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness. (Z:I.7, 152)

It is habituation in loving, not in living, which yields an affirmation of becoming “brave, unconcerned, mocking, violent” bearers of a beloved truth. It is once the Ass Festival commences, however, that Zarathustra is able to overcome, in a queer fashion, these

oppositions: he experiences the joyful truth of madly loving life and begins to reorient himself to living lovingly as its own happiness, and thus to heightening his sensorial capacity for living in communion with given worldly plurality with the sensitivity of a rosebud. This truth is *amor fati*, which I understand to be a queer affirmation of will-to-power-bottom in its receptivity to the generative potency immanent to the given human condition of worldly plurality.

“On Reading and Writing” further clarifies the stakes of the Ass-Festival by juxtaposing the dispositional tension captured in the rosebud-ass metaphor with the vital desires of writers and readers of aphorisms: “Whoever writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read but to be learned by heart.” (Z:I.7, 152) As cardinal peaks of sanguine impersonal intimacy, aphorisms arouse an amorous “gay sarcasm” and a “courage that wants to laugh.” (Z:I.7, 152) This disposition to life spurns the spirit of gravity and cruises instead the “light, foolish, delicate, mobile little souls” of bubbles and butterflies “and whatever among men is of their kind.”

This specification is especially important in the wake of the preceding aphorism, which offered a character sketch of the miscarried desires of the Pale Criminal. A sterling figure of *ressentiment*, this figure’s homicidal lust for blood blanched the necessary vibrancy entailed in self-overcoming. Following this character sketch, which is both a figural anticipation of the Ugliest Man and a ‘looking glass’ reflecting the risks inherent in Nietzsche’s own desires, Zarathustra cautions: “Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter.” (Z:I.7, 153)

This refrain – “whoever would kill most thoroughly, laughs” (Z:IV.18, 427) – serves as the pivotal moment in the satire of Part IV. It is in *reading* Zarathustra by

rewriting his counsel that the Ugliest Man sets off the Dionysian excesses of the Ass Festival. This signal instance of reading-writing practiced by one among the Higher Men is contextualized by Robert Gooding-Williams, who observes that each of them, in some respects, “echoes Zarathustra; each utters words that repeat or recall a part of a speech that Zarathustra delivered.”⁷⁰ For both Higgins and Gooding-Williams, however, this repetitive quality frames the Higher Men as perverse refractions of Zarathustra himself, “fragments, not of a new self, but of the self *he* has been in the past.”⁷¹ While esteemed for distinguishing themselves from the mediocrity of modernity, each higher man nevertheless “is in part a victim of his own weakness,” a figure of expiated and pathological echolalia threatening to sap Zarathustra’s desire to revalue values.⁷²

These interpretations, however, threaten to overstate the divergences between Zarathustra and the Higher Men. First it must be noted that Part IV opens by satirizing Zarathustra’s project as a profane evangelical – which is to say, *cruising* – desire to “bait the queerest human fish.” (Z:IV.1, 352) Addressing his own gaiety, Zarathustra becomes a fisher of men by casting a line out into the world with a honeyed-rod: “With your glitter bait me the most beautiful human fish! And whatever in all the seas belongs to me, my in-and-for-me in all things—that fish out for me, that bring up to me: for that I, the most sarcastic of all fishermen, am waiting.” (Z:IV.1, 352) Zarathustra affirms the immanent potency of the earth as a site of value creation (and not mere repetition without a difference). What is more, and following Russell’s reconstruction of Derrida’s deconstruction, if an ineludible weakness becomes, through Dionysian revaluation, the

⁷⁰ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 280.

⁷¹ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 280. Cf. M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, pp. 235-8.

⁷² R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 285-286

apotheosis of strength as the receptivity to the eternal return of the same *qua* difference, then to the extent that the Higher Men truly suffer their weaknesses they are, as we will see, all that much closer to undergoing overcoming.

This becomes especially clear in the relations fomented between Zarathustra and the Ugliest Man. Initially the relationship is fraught: Zarathustra is at first ashamed to witness the sight of someone so perverse as to appear “scarcely like a human being—something *inexpressible*.” Like Zarathustra, the Ugliest Man is a deicide, elevated for having affected the ‘death of god’: “he saw with eyes that saw everything; he saw man’s depths and ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness. *His pity knew no shame*: he crawled into my dirtiest nooks. This most curious, overobtrusive, overpitying one had to die.” (Z:IV.7, 378 – emphasis mine) By contrast, the Ugliest Man states, “your shame, Zarathustra, honored me!” and the deicide continues on to recite how “pity offends the sense of shame. And to be unwilling to help can be nobler than that virtue which jumps to help.” (Z:IV.7, 377) Indeed, it is in his silent passing-by and blushing shame that Zarathustra’s personage is suggested to the Ugliest Man, who will caution him against the impulse to pity as “the ax that fells you.” (Z:IV.7, 377-8)

Before turning to the queer parody of the ass festival it is worth noting Zarathustra’s response, for upon hearing the Ugliest Man speak, he accepts the rejection of pity as good counsel before commending his own advise in the form of welcoming receptivity: “You self-exiled exile,” Zarathustra addresses the Ugliest Man, “would you not live among men and men’s pity? Well then! Do as I do. Thus you also learn from me; only the doer learns.” (Z:IV.7, 379) Strangely enough, then, it appears that this inexpressibly inhuman figure of revolting ashamedness, the Ugliest Man, is still capable

of “doing” as Zarathustra does. Alone again, after the Ugliest Man ascends to his cave, Zarathustra reflects:

I have been told that man loves himself: ah, how great must this self-love be! How much contempt stands against it! This fellow too loved himself, even as he despised himself: a great lover he seems to me, and a great despiser... that too is a kind of height.... I love the great despisers. Man, however, is something that must be overcome. (Z:IV.7, 379)

Sensing “how full of hidden shame” the Ugliest Man appears Zarathustra nevertheless fails to adequately perceive *himself* in this hyperbolic amplification of the virtue of shame as a bulwark against pity, even as he affirms the capacity of the Ugliest Man to transvalue and overcome towering shame into receptive amorousness.

This staged moment of doubled misapprehension draws attention to what is earlier referred to as Zarathustra’s “final instance” of human prudence such that his desire had become thoroughly “disguised—misjudging you and myself.” (Z, II.21, 256) As a parody of the preceding three tragic acts dramatizing the gay science of revaluing values, Zarathustra again misjudges the lowly Higher Men, as though they figured as masked personae of the Dionysian avatar, and yet in so doing invites them to ascend to his heights. It is only when together, high in the depths of his cave, that Zarathustra will suffer the glancing choreography of farcical role-reversal with an joyful affirmation of embodied yes-saying in the Ass Festival.

This generative dissonance, prefigured in the scandalous inversion inaugurated by the opening section of Part IV, “The Honey Offering,” allows Nietzsche to position the low abjection of the Higher Men *side-by-side* Zarathustra’s lofty desire for undergoing

self-overcoming. Tracking this choreographic reorientation of relational valuation demands attention to the depiction of lateral movements in Part IV. Theorized through Kathryn Bond Stockton's figuration of queerness as a process of "sideways growth," the action of the Ass Festival appears in a *kairotic* space-time when "a state of being (of unnamed duration, unfolding in the present) is broken out sideways... showing a diachronic immediacy (something happening now) as a lateral accumulation of views, making this state both complex and hard to read."⁷³ In the impersonal intimacy of Zarathustra's cave, the putatively lowly Higher Men are positioned side-by-side the ascendant Zarathustra. Moreover, the orgiastic pleasures of the Ass Festival are not transcendent, but ecstatic: the assemblage of the High Men figures Zarathustra joyfully "beside himself."

Initially, however, the Higher Men appeared to move as if "shy, ashamed, awkward, like a tiger whose leap has failed: thus have I seen you *slink aside*, you higher men."⁷⁴ (Z:IV.13, 404—emphasis mine) In the midst of the ass-fête, however, Zarathustra will exclaim: "This crown of him who laughs, this rose-wreath crown: I myself have put on this crown.... Zarathustra the dancer, Zarathustra the light, waves with his wings, ready for flight, waving at all birds, ready and heady, happily lightheaded... not impatient, not unconditional, one who loves leaps and *side-leaps*: I myself have put on this crown!" (Z:IV.13, 406—emphasis mine) What is implied in this difference of laterality, and how is it accomplished?

⁷³ K. Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 25-6.

⁷⁴ Cf. as well, F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "On Human Prudence," II.21, pp. 255: "I am delighted to see the wonders hatched by a hot sun: tigers and palms and rattlesnakes. Among men too a hot sun hatches a beautiful breed. And there are many wonderful things in those who are evil."

On Zarathustra's account the Higher Men become receptive to the process of convalescence initiated by his honey offering: "They are biting, my bait is working" and, with "virile nourishment," "I waken new desires. New hopes throb in their arms and legs and their hearts stretch out." (Z:IV.17, 423) Most importantly, "their entrails are persuaded in a different way" and "all stupid shame runs away." "In my realm they feel safe," and in this friendly milieu, these strangers "become grateful," which Zarathustra takes "to be the best sign: they become grateful. Not much longer and they will think up new festivals and put up monuments to their old friends." (Z:IV.17, 423) And yet, despite this clarity of vision, Zarathustra attempts to shame the Ugliest Man for bearing lavishing praise on the attendant ass as if in the throws of pious reverence – the Ass Festival has commenced: *incipit parodia*.

Higgins offers fruitful historical context for reading Nietzsche's Ass Festival, which is especially apt given my claims about how these festivities are animated by queer desire. The importance of role-reversals to the reveries of ass festivals is central; medieval profanations saw lowly deacons lampoon high-ranking Church leaders and engage in gender-bending performativity including cross-dressing and lewd same-sex dancing. Prior to *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche had already situated the ass festivals of the Middle Ages amidst the genealogical strains of Dionysian ecstasies in *The Birth of Tragedy*, arguing "In these dancers of St. John and St. Vitus, we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their prehistory in Asia Minor, as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea."⁷⁵ He will also subsequently evoke the Song of the Ass, sung during

⁷⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 36. Nietzsche adds, "There are some who, from obtuseness or lack of experience [!], turn away from such phenomena as from 'folk-diseases,' with contempt or pity born of the consciousness of their own 'healthy-mindedness'. But of course such poor wretches have no idea

its “ancient Mystery”, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “*adventavit asinus, Plucher et fortissimus.*”⁷⁶

So, one would expect a character like Zarathustra to respond positively to precisely the sort of Dionysian festivities that the Ugliest Man has initiated. Yet, as noted, he responds by rebuking the deicide for shamefully re-awakening a conception of other-worldly monotheistic divinity. The Ugliest Man’s response is worth bearing out in full, for it directly challenges the unconditional quality of Zarathustra’s expression of *ressentiment* by playfully turning the tables on him:

O Zarathustra, you are a rogue! Whether that one *still* lives or lives again or is thoroughly dead – which of the two of us knows that best? I ask you. But one thing I do know; it was from you yourself that I learned it once, O Zarathustra: whomever would kill most thoroughly, *laughs*. ‘Not by wrath does one kill, but by laughter’ – thus you once spoke. O Zarathustra, you hidden one, you annihilator without wrath, you dangerous saint – you are a rogue! (Z:IV.18, 428)

As Higgins parses this response from the Ugliest Man, “The ass festival disturbs [Zarathustra] because he is viewing his doctrine of the death of God as a value to preserve, when honesty forces him to acknowledge, at least to himself, that the Ugliest Man is right, that no one does know how dead God is, and that if God is really dead no ass festival can represent a spiritual or cultural danger.”⁷⁷ That is, the Ugliest Man *reads*

how corpse-like and ghostly their so-called ‘healthy-mindedness’ looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian revelers roars past them.” (36-7)

⁷⁶ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I.8, pp. 15.

⁷⁷ M. Clark Higgins, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, pp. 230.

Zarathustra, responding to Zarathustra's asinine allegations with his own counsel from "On Reading and Writing."

Gooding-Williams acknowledges the provocative and irreverently cheeky dimensions of the ass-fête, for he argues that when offered an "articulate defense of their merry celebration" Zarathustra, who had been careful to distinguish his laughter from that of the higher men, now finds himself "entering into the spirit of his companions laughter, [and] increasingly appreciates *their* sense of humor."⁷⁸ It is only after Zarathustra's demand for an account from the Ugliest Man is laughed off that satire gives way to transvaluative affirmation. Crucially, this occurs when the Ugliest Man engages a rhetorical strategy of parodic role-reversal.

In this respect it is not wrong to say that the Higher Men are lures inducing Zarathustra to become drunk with "feeling-with" (*Einfühlung*). However, the transmission of affective infection does not arouse pity (*Mitleid*), contrary to the ecclesiastical lamentations that over-coming the repetitions of *ressentiment* is futile vainglory.⁷⁹ Rather, the higher men induce an affective attunement that allows Zarathustra, like Demeter, to nakedly suffer suffering as shamelessly laughable. It is only when the Ugliest Man reads Zarathustra back to himself that Zarathustra becomes aware he is being cruised to participate in an ass-fete *with* these higher men as *they*, too, give-up, squander, and affirm overcoming their own *ressentiment*. Thus, it is these queer fish, the higher men, who invite Zarathustra to heed his own wisdom and "do as I do," for "only the doer learns." (Z:IV.7, 379) This rhetorical reversal, whereby the ugliest, most shameful personae laughingly embodies the Dionysian beauty of Zarathustra's gay

⁷⁸ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 288.

⁷⁹ Ecclesiastes, 1:1-18 – Vanity, vanity, all is vanity: nothing new under the sun.

science, dramatizes the signal instance in the entirety of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* for Nietzsche's protagonist to become receptive to his own passions and desires as the Ugliest Man graciously offers them back *gratis* in an intensive *re-writing* of Zarathustra's own seductive honey offering.

Here the Ugliest Man, perhaps more than any of the other higher men, distinguishes himself as a friend and bridge to self-overcoming. First and foremost, the Ugliest Man augments Zarathustra's honey offering by initiating the Ass Festival, which allows Zarathustra to, in turn, become receptive to his own desire to initiate self-overcoming.⁸⁰ In this respect, the Ugliest Man has taken to heart the sanguine lethality of laughter, and unlike the Pale Criminal, affirms himself as more than the doer of one destructive, negating deed (i.e., the Ugliest Man is not only a god-destroyer, he is a value-creator). If one is to move beyond theistic good and evil, one must be prepared to laugh anew at any resurrection of the "great dragon" proclaiming "Thou Shalt Not" (even, and especially, when that figure is Zarathustra).

Nor is the Ass Festival a retreat to the asinine "omni-satisfaction" characterizing the "good and the just" who had previously disgusted Zarathustra. Despite an inexpressibly ugly, inhuman appearance, the Ugliest Man is also esteemed capable of a great and hidden self-love corresponding to his equally voluptuous and exposed sense of shame. In the excitement of the ass-fête, the Ugliest Man's self-love is shamelessly expressed to the assemblage of anonymous strangers, initially related to one another only in the impersonal intimacy of their unique and high suffering, as an affirmation of "this day" for the sake of which the Ugliest Man claims, "I am for the first time satisfied that I

⁸⁰ Cf. G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 186; J. Derrida, *Otobiographies: the Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name*. Trans. Avital Ronell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

have lived my whole life... one day, one festival with Zarathustra, taught me to love the earth.” (Z:IV.19, 429)

The Ugliest Man’s affirmation in turn catalyzes a queer transvaluation that gaily profanes Zarathustra as it affirms the eternal return: “My friends, what do you think? Do you not want to say to death as I do: Was that life? For Zarathustra’s sake! Well then, once more!” (Z:IV.19, 430) Coming to sense the profundity of their gratitude in this affirmation of the eternal return of difference, the Higher Men “jumped toward Zarathustra to thank, revere, caress him and kiss his hands, each according to his own manner; and some were laughing and some were crying.” (Z:IV.19, 430) Physical contact and the proximity of impersonal, queer desire promises the fruition of Zarathustra’s longing, what I term: the will-to-power-bottom.

The consideration of the *sturm und drang* of Parts I-III above also helps clarify how the value of joy or gaiety alters in the course of the Ass Festival relative to the scandalous inversion that renders the Ugliest Man most beautiful. For, by becoming receptive to the augmenting desire of the Higher Men, Zarathustra is able to revalue the value of his desire to endure worldly suffering. Whereas in Part III this desire was tethered to the promised arrival of his coming children, in the penultimate aphorism of Part IV Zarathustra now drunkenly and shamelessly affirms:

But all that suffers wants to live, that it may become ripe and joyous and longing—longing for what is farther, higher, brighter. ‘I want children’—thus speaks all that suffers; ‘I want children, I do not want myself.’

Joy, however, does not want heirs, or children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same. (Z:IV.19, 434)

Zarathustra's drunken alignment with ecstatic gaiety should not be understated. The manic effervescence of "The Drunken Song" reorients Zarathustra's endurance of worldly suffering away from the desire for children, discerning in its false promise the disavowal of creative fecundity. In so doing, responding to the solicitation to love oneself with another is affirmed as the bridge to self-overcoming:

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if you ever said, 'You please me, happiness! Abide a moment!' then you wanted all back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored—oh, then you loved the world. (Z:IV.19, 435)

This affirmation of happiness, in a doubled affirmation of the Ugliest Man's affirmation of the "now" of worldly existence, however, is not idyllic and tranquil: "for you it longs, joy, the intractable blessed one—for your woe, you failures. All eternal joy longs for failures." (Z:IV.19, 436) That it is the failures and woes, the ineludible weaknesses of the higher men, and thus, also of Zarathustra, toward and around which joy appears as most potently desirous further refocuses attention to the depiction of transvaluation dramatized in the drunken excesses of the ass-festival:

What does joy not want? It is thirstier, more cordial, hungrier, more terrible, more secret than all woe; it wants itself, bites into itself, the ring's

will strives in it; it wants love, it wants hatred, it is over-rich, gives, throws away, begs that one might take it, thanks the taker, it would like to be hated; so rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for hell, for hatred, for disgrace, for the cripple, for world—*this world*, oh, you know it! (Z:IV.19, 435)

To ask, then, whether or not the Higher Men figure as preludes to or the actualization of Zarathustra's "coming children" is beside the point. As we will see in the following chapter, René Char's resistance to Nazism confronts the problem of heirs and inheritances by affirming that freedom cannot be willed by any testament, only immanently enacted and, so, just as there can be no proper heirs to Zarathustra – he cannot legitimately *have* children, only monstrous bastards – Char and his Maquis must affirm for themselves, anew, the joys of suffering a love of living in an abject world as "self-exiled exiles." The Ass Festival instead depicts corporeal, affective value creation without capitulation to procreative reproduction by allowing Zarathustra the opportunity to overcome *ressentiment* and "become-child" in concert with the Higher Men. This auto-affective becoming departs from Zarathustra's strategy for 'remaining faithful to the earth' in Part III, to "set this snare for me—the desire for love that I might become my children's prey and lose myself to them." (Z, III: 3, 274)

Crucially, the affirmation of joy amidst and love of the world shared by and animated through the expression of self-overcoming in "The Drunken Song" attests to the side-leap over the snare of Zarathustra's (reproductive) desire for his children, which had kept him grounded and grave. Indeed, the frenzied letting-go of his desire for children becomes the *condition of possibility for the becoming-child of overcoming* *ressentiment*. Queer intercourse with the Higher Men offers Zarathustra the opportunity to do what he

has quite simply been incapable of alone, namely: joyfully suffer receptivity to the immanent passions of given worldly plurality. Moreover, it allows Nietzsche to model the will-to-power-bottom as a “gift-giving love” able to “serve the meaning of the earth” and, in so doing, orient “back to the earth the virtue that flew away... back to the body, back to life, that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.” (Z, I, 188)

IV. Nietzsche’s Gay Science of Cruising

Mapping the queer parodic rhetorical strategy of reading-writing operative in *Zarathustra*, Part IV, amplifies how Nietzsche attempts the transvaluation of what is normatively low and shameful through a dramaturgy of undergoing overcoming *ressentiment* as an experience of will-to-power-bottom. I have argued that this rhetorical performance of cruising operates in Nietzsche’s *satyrspiel* to allow a creative doubling of an affirmation that generates the ‘gift-giving virtue’ capable of reminding the earthly coin with a queer receptivity to what surfaces beyond good and evil. In staging this process as an orgiastic bacchanal that sees Zarathustra the butt of its excesses, *Zarathustra*, Part IV, dramatizes how embodied, sensuous receptivity to immanent abject failure becomes capable of initiating the appearance of a world animated by annular augmentations of desires for a joyful, livable life. The will-to-power-bottom, as an ecstatic experience of enacting worldly dilation through sensuous revaluation, orients a gracious attunement to abject cynosure. Illuminated by the darkened Dionysian sun (the dog’s tail, the Pole Star), what is normatively unbecoming becomes the promising opportunity to come on to the world (as an appearance, an appeal, and an augmentation) with biting “gay sarcasm” and a “courage that wants to laugh.”

Nietzsche alerts readers to this cheeky inflection when, early in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he restages the ass-festival: “There is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher’s ‘conviction’ appears on the stage—or to use the language of an ancient Mystery: *Adventavit asinus//Pulcher et fortissimus.*” (BGE, I:8, pp. 15) As Robert Gooding-Williams reads the implications of this aphorism in relation to the *satyrspiel* of *Zarathustra*,

An ass festival for Zarathustra’s sake, a festival in which Zarathustra will be remembered as an ass, would be a fete devoted to the recollection of Zarathustra’s effort to vindicate his ‘conviction’ by staging a public spectacle. It would be a commemorative tribute to Zarathustra’s asinine effort to substantiate his conviction by enacting the sort of drama that, Nietzsche maintains, philosophers inevitably enact if called upon to defend their views.⁸¹

As a *kairotic* event of *reading*, Nietzsche anticipates the failure of his shameless and brazen performance in *Zarathustra*, Part IV to sway a public disposed to bray ‘yeah, yeah’ and so he dramaturgically affirms this failure to the point of its scandalous inversion: he presents his ass-fête, ‘beautiful and courageous,’ as a resonant receptacle, an embodied worldly media, for the doubling affirmation of the will-to-power-bottom. Figuring his ‘conviction’ as the ‘butt of a joke,’ Nietzsche offers his aphoristic body up as a voluptuous breeding ground for this experience, an aphoristic “body” open for all and none.

Here the *subtitling* of *Zarathustra* must be read literally: in becoming open for all, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is a figure exclusive to none. In the post-*Zarathustra* context of

⁸¹ R. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 288-289.

Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche quips: “Love of one is a barbarism; for it is exercised at the expense of all others.” (*BGE*: IV.67) In an earlier aphorism of *The Gay Science*, “*The animal with a good conscience*,” Nietzsche explicates the queer eroticism of the Dionysian energies of will-to-power-bottom:

The vulgar element in everything that gives pleasure in Southern Europe—whether it be the Italian opera (for example, Rossini and Bellini) or the Spanish novel of adventure (most readily accessible for us in the French disguise of *Gil Blas*) does not escape me, but it does not offend me anymore than does the vulgarity that one encounters as one walks through Pompeii and, actually, also as one reads any ancient book. How come? Is it because there is no sense of shame and everything vulgar appears as poised and self-assured as anything noble, lovely, and passionate in the same sort of music or novel? “The animal has as much right as any human being; let it run about freely. And you, my dear fellow man, are also still an animal in spite of everything!”... Bad taste has its rights no less than good taste, and even a prior right if it corresponds to a great need, provides a certain satisfaction and, as it were, a universal language, an absolutely intelligible mask and gesture.... What can we understand of that as long as we do not understand the delight in masks and the good conscience in using any kind of mask! Here is the bath and recreation of the ancient spirit; and perhaps the rare and sublime characters of the ancient world needed this bath even more than the vulgar. (*GS*, II: 77)

In contradistinction to this satirical southern centauric ‘humanity’ nourished on impersonal bathhouse intimacy, Nietzsche concludes: “A vulgar term in Northern works... in German music, for example, offends me unspeakably. Here there is a sense of shame; that artist has lowered himself in his own eyes and could not even help blushing: *we are ashamed with him and feel so offended because we sense that he considered it necessary to lower himself for our sake* [emphasis mine].”

The southern embrace of the bathhouse of masked and anonymous indulgence in the “bad taste” of ugly animal instinct is crucially distinguished from the Northern (Wagnerian) devaluation of eroticism through shameful self-abasement. In keeping with the critique of unconditional valuation in the 3rd essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche scorns the exclusivity of ascetic, Platonic-cum-Christian *ressentiment*, remarking: “Christianity gave Eros poison to drink: he did not die of it but degenerated—into a *vice*.” (*BGE*, IV: 168) Thus, Nietzsche is keen to point out that the Christian-Platonic denigration of *eros* also signals the denigration of the body, “The chastest words I have ever heard: “*Dans le veritable amour c’est l’âme, qui enveloppe le corps.*” (*BGE*, IV: 142)

Rather, in a queer affirmation of what is low, coarse, and normatively valued as shameful, Nietzsche instead claims, “Whatever is done from love always occurs beyond good and evil.” (*BGE*, IV, 153) As with the flashing queerness of Baubo’s superficial profundity, this entails becoming-receptive to the desire animating the will-to-power-bottom: “In the end one loves one’s desire and not what is desired.” (*BGE*, IV, 175) This is supported by a similarly easy affirmation of will-to-power-bottom in *The Gay Science*: “What do you love in others?—My hopes.” (*GS*, 272)

Will-to-power-bottom remains intimately, albeit queerly, related to the profoundly superficial *heights* of aphoristic assemblage: “The degree and kind of a man’s sexuality reaches up into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit” (*BGE*, IV, 75). While it is often the case, as Nietzsche wryly remarks, that “love brings the high and concealed characteristics of the lover into the light – what is rare and exceptional in him: to that extent it easily deceives him regarding his normality,” (*BGE*, IV, 163) it is also true that answering the question “What makes heroic?” offers Nietzsche the occasion (without wholly quelling the doubt that he is, on this occasion, himself “easily deceived”) to affirm: “Going out to meet at the same time one’s highest suffering and one’s highest hope.”⁸² (*GS*, 268)

With these considerations in mind, the cheeky queerness of “*And become bright again*” shines through with sensuous clarity:

We, openhanded and rich in spirit, standing by the road like open wells with no intention to fend off anyone who feels like drawing from us—we unfortunately do not know how to defend ourselves where we want to: we have no way of preventing people from *darkening* us: the time in which we live throws into us what is most time-bound; its dirty birds drop their filth into us; boys their gew-gaws; and exhausted wanderers who come to us to rest, their little and large miseries. But we shall do what we have always done: whatever one casts into us, we take down into our depth—for we are deep, we do not forget—*and become bright again*. (*GS*, V: 378)

If becoming bright again entails offering oneself up by becoming a defenselessly exposed receptacle for the filth of wanderer’s dirty birds and boy’s gew-gaws, then it also entails a

⁸² Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, VIII.243, pp. 177: “I hear with pleasure that our sun is swiftly moving toward the constellation of *Hercules*—and I hope that man on this earth will in this respect follow the sun’s example? And we first of all, we good Europeans!—”

receptivity to the penetration of “little and large miseries” that threatens oblivion, the forgetfulness of life itself (profundity), but which may also, in response, resurface, in a flash, to “become bright again.” For such a radically receptivity to undergo overcoming Nietzsche claims there is need for a “great health.”

In contradistinction to the paranoid hygienics diagnosed by Sedgwick, Staten, Waite, and Bull at the outset of this chapter, the context of the post-*Zarathustra* 2nd edition of *The Gay Science* stakes out a health “that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up.” (*GS*, VI: 382) Nietzsche here presages Char, who will write, “Amass, then share out. In the mirror of the universe, be the densest, the most useful and the least conspicuous part.”⁸³ This figuration of health, Nietzsche acknowledges, “will often appear inhuman—for example, when it confronts all earthly seriousness so far, all solemnity in gesture, word, tone, eye, morality, and task so far, as if it were their most incarnate and involuntary parody.” Instead, Nietzsche revalues the recuperative capacities of the body that risks danger in its promiscuous, fleeting exposure to the contagious miasma of the societal pieties of the reigning “good and just.”

This queer gift-giving virtue, which amasses to share out (and thus which seeks to possess nothing proprietary), renders these experimenting tempters figures of liminal homelessness. Nietzsche writes, in a dedicatory moment of “We Fearless One’s”: “today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honorable sense; it is to them that I especially commend my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*.” (*GS*, V: 377) In an explicit contravention of Montaigne’s desire to feel at home in the world, Nietzsche affirms: “We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead us to feel

⁸³ R. Char, *Hypnos*, trans. M. Hutchinson (London: Seagull Books, 2014), pp. 44 (#156).

at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for its ‘realities,’ we do not believe that they will last.” Refusing the privative, privatizing abstractions of the petty elitism of racist, homophobic, misogynistic nationalism that predominated the German *zeitgeist* of his day, Nietzsche instead affirms the lyrically nocturnal desires of the flighty outlaw Prince Vogelfrei.

The next chapter will, in turn, take up how this queer receptivity becomes outlaw responsivity, as it is exemplified first in the figure of the poet Lessing and then in the war-time poetics of René Char’s *Leaves of Hypnos*. It will sketch how a Nietzschean *ethos* of becoming-receptive amidst the auto-affection of a relational will-to-power-bottom opens onto a responsive engagement with worldly affairs. This responsivity is paradoxical for, as with Nietzsche, it entails an *amor mundi* (Arendt) that sustains an open and “weak” receptivity to the sufferings of the world *so as to* become all the more responsive to its eventual vicissitudes. In Char, responsivity is aroused by and sustained through the amorous comportment of the becoming-receptive of will-to-power-bottom as an expression of self-love possible only in relation to those with whom and for whom he risks his life so that given worldly plurality may not be foreclosed by the totalizing darkness of Nazism. Through an Arendtian reading of Char’s poetic resistance, then, I demonstrate how receptive Nietzschean auto-affection becomes the responsive action of world-enacting resistance.

Chapter 3. The Poetic Action of *Amor Mundi*

How inexorably strange!
From this ill-guarded life,
somehow to have thrown the quick dice of
happiness....
-R. Char, *Feuillets d'Hypnos* #190

In the previous chapter we saw how Nietzsche takes the occasion of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part IV to debut a queer mode of sensuous receptivity played out in the orgiastic drama of the Ass Festival. I argued that this dramaturgy allows key aspects of cruising politics to surface by offering a queer account of desire as *initium* coupled with a mode of attunement to relations with others characterized by receptivity to the gratuitous augmenting powers gracing worldly plurality. In the case of Nietzsche, these relations were ‘untimely,’ aspirational, and only barely exposed to the light of publicity through literary seriocomedie in the breach of material, political conditions of possibility for a freer worldly appearance.

Despite the constraints of an exclusively literary horizon, the drama of *Zarathustra*, Part IV served to map the ways Nietzsche models Zarathustra’s communion with the assemblage of Higher Men as the hooking up of abject strangers through the common desire to transfigure *ressentiment* at the past, contempt for the given, and hope for the future into the free embrace of present potentiality for a livable life lived lovingly. I was able to argue on these grounds, furthermore, that this process takes specific shape in relation to the world, as exemplified by Zarathustra’s becoming-receptive to the desires of the Higher Men, especially the Ugliest Man, I termed “will to power bottom.”

We saw in Chapter Two that part of what makes this desire queer is that it surfaces as a desire for an intensification of itself, more desire, and so belies the proliferate ‘homoness’ of promiscuous relations wherein determinate objects, others, and scenes of assemblage are contingent and fleeting.

Admittedly Hannah Arendt is a seemingly strange bedfellow for theorizing projects of queer worlding. As we saw in the introductory chapter, the narcissism of Arendt’s putatively infantile actors is typically read as subverting her otherwise staunch commitment to a common, public world of politics. At first blush, then, bringing Arendt more explicitly into relationship with Nietzsche on precisely these terms would be antithetical to saving her from the vices that the critiques of Pitkin, Villa, and Benhabib sought to expose, ‘justly’ discipline, and even redeem.

Despite the established scholarly practice of reading Arendt as influenced by Nietzsche (for better or worse),¹ very few scholars have addressed either how, in her account of *amor mundi*, queer inflections² animate her aspirational concept of the “partisan of the world.”³ Nevertheless, an abundance of scholarship has signaled the role

¹ The link between Nietzsche and Arendt has been cause for much controversy. For a review of these debates, cf. D. Villa, “Democratizing the *Agon*: Nietzsche, Arendt, and the Agonistic Trend in Political Theory” in *Why Nietzsche Still?*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000); G. Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983); B. Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993); S. Behabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996).

² On the marginal, but influential queer scholarship that engages Arendt, Morris B. Kaplan is distinguished for pressing the point that, to quote Julian Honkasalo’s gloss of “Refiguring the Jewish Question: Arendt, Proust, and the Politics of Sexuality,” “there is something potentially queer about Arendt’s notion of the self and agency.” (*Sisterhood, Nataliy, Queer: Reframing Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Academic Dissertation submitted to The University of Helsinki, Department of Philosophy, History, Culture, and Art Studies, 2016, pp. 148). Honkasalo also provides a welcome, critical survey of recent queer engagements with Arendt’s work, including: L. Kramer, *Reports from the holocaust: the making of an AIDS activist*; M. Kaplan, *Sexual Justice. Democratic Citizenship and the Politics of Desire*; D. Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*; M. Warner, *The Trouble With Normal and Publics and Counterpublics*; M. Feit, *Democratic Anxieties: Same-sex Marriage, Death, and Citizenship*.

³ A notable exception is Peter Sloterdijk, who writes in a telling footnote that his own *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Trans. Andreas Huyssen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) began to ‘write

homelessness, exile, irony, agonistic contestation, and world-enacting truth-telling play in her political theory. In this chapter I tease out the queer vectors of Arendt's thinking about world-enamored political action as offering vital contributions to what I am conceptualizing as cruising politics. In particular, I find in Arendt a fruitful way for theorizing how the dramaturgical, speculative model of cruising politics offered by *Zarathustra*, Part IV, may take more concretely responsive political, even if still explicitly poetic, shape.

Just as my queering of *Zarathustra*, Part IV was geared toward cruising Nietzsche's corpus for configurations of radical receptivity to given worldly plurality, so too will I bring the heuristic of cruising politics to bear on Arendt's "exercises" in political thought to explicate the dynamics of a radical responsiveness to the worldly solicitations enabled by an embodied attunement of will-to-power-bottom receptivity. In my reading of Arendt, this takes shape as a two-fold affirmation that comes to the surface in her treatments of the poet and French *résistant*, René Char. On the one hand, responding to the world for Char is most apparent in his willingness to bear witness, in poetic verse, as a mode of resisting the closure of worldly space for the free appearance and intercourse of given plurality.

On the other hand, Char undertakes these poetic efforts as provocations, or challenges, to solicit the responsiveness of others. In the case of Char, I will argue, the

itself" after watching a rebroadcast of her interview with Günter Gaus commemorating the fifth anniversary of her death in 1980. Sloterdijk reports: "One must have heard with one's own ears how this woman averred that in studying the many thousands of pages of the transcripts of the proceedings [of the Eichmann trial], she repeatedly broke out into loud laughter about the peculiar stupidity that had exercised control over innumerable lives. In Arendt's self-aware confession there was something frivolous and [Cynical] in the most precise sense of the word that, after an initial consternation, proved itself to be a liberating and sovereign expression of truth. When Arendt then, as an encore, even made the remark that she often had fun in exile, for she was young and improvising in uncertainty has its own attractions, then I had to laugh...." (299)

connection between poetic provocation and political challenge comes into generatively proximate, even imbricating, relation. In Char's wartime verse, *Leaves of Hypnos*, Arendt finds a curious testament to the abysmally anarchic character of action, one which does not attest to the despair of concerted political resistance, but actually celebrates this condition as enabling resistance to issue not only an armed challenge to Nazi occupation, but also a political response to the extent that it models a mode of non-sovereign, amorously affective conduction of public affairs.

While many scholars have noted the recurring, often-pointed ways Arendt seeks to strike affectionate love from the scene of politics, the queer intonations of her concept of love are absent. When confronted with affectionate love, a tragic reminder resounds through her denunciations of romantic love, namely: that 'epic' love of the grand redeeming act.⁴ But Arendt is no less critical of modes of friendship (*philia*), when it takes shape in the form of solidarity, nationalism, fraternity, or insular emotive homogeneity, and so positing a neat binary between appetitive, affectionate love and respectful amity will not suffice to adequately grasp what is at stake in Arendt's treatment of Lessing's example of friendship and 'love of man' – or the immanence of *philanthropia*.⁵ The Lessing Prize address offers a way of seeing how Arendt queers

⁴ Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), where, in the chapter on forgiving, she is keen to press against the theological pretense that only love can forgive, pp. 242. On the problematic imbrication of the Romantic tradition of love with the epic tradition of Greek heroics, consider her critique of Achilles' perverse attempt, as Arendt understands it, to overcome the human condition in becoming author of his own glorious deed, pp. 193-194. Cf. as well, R. Tsao's recuperation of the Roman civic republican tradition in Arendt's thought in "Arendt Against Athens," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (February 2002), 97-123, as well as P. Markell, "Anonymous Glory," *European Journal of Political Theory* (2015: Vol. 16, No. 1), pp. 77-99; "The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy," *American Political Science Review* (2006): 1-14; and, "The Moment has Passed: Power After Arendt," *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*. Ed. Rom Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), for critiques of the of the "Achilles" model of glorious, initiatory action.

⁵ S. Chiba, "Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship and Citizenship," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), pp. 505-535. D. Nelson, "The Virtues of Heartlessness: Mary

worldly intercourse by framing it not as a matter of agreement, but of disputation, where what brings friends together is a common affection not one for the other, per se, but rather the worldly plurality between and before them, of which they are irreparably, amorously ingratiated. Tracking this shift in the meaning of friendship renders the ‘turning operations’ Arendt performs on the concept to come into generative, queer relation with the otherwise strenuous partitioning of love from politics taken to be characteristic of her work.

To do so, I begin by sketching Arendt’s 1959 Lessing Prize address with reference to the affective dimension of action elaborated the year prior in *The Human Condition* (I). At stake in this section is opening up Arendt’s account of action for a reading that explicates the extent to which, on the one hand, it is indelibly animated by affective attunements to passionate arousal while also, on the other, tracing the implications of this aspect of the human condition for political affairs. Through her praise of Lessing, Arendt advances the claim that even discomfiting affects generate an intensification of sensorial and corporeal delight, which is suffered for the sake of becoming endowed with a more nuanced and capacious apperception of the world fit for orienting political responses to political events.

This is a central thesis for Arendt in her Lessing Prize address given her concern is sketching what she calls “partisanship for the world.” For Arendt, Lessing’s “vigilant partiality” exemplifies her understanding of the two-fold quality of worldliness as both concrete relations with friendly strangers and as the diffuse “web of relations,” which

McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and the Anesthetics of Empathy,” *American Literary History*; (2006 Vol. 18 No. 1); P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World”; *The European Legacy*, (2015: Vol. 20, No. 7), 745–764; K. Semonovitch, “Love is Strange: Auden, Arendt, and Anatheism,” *Literary Imagination*, (2009: Vol. 11, No. 2) pp. 192–204.

integrally encompasses medial objects, exemplified by the poetic artwork, that gives human experience a felt sense of a common reality. We will see how, just like Zarathustra's amorous will-to-power-bottom yields a markedly queer relationality of receptivity, so too does Lessing's (and – in turn – Arendt's) embrace of a posture of will-to-power-bottom receptivity yield what I frame as a distinctly political responsiveness animated by *amor mundi*.

To model a more enacted undertaking of the relationship between love and politics I then turn to Arendt's fleeting, but recurring, references to René Char's wartime poems of Resistance *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (II). If Lessing's friendship is a queer love among strangers, then so, too, is Char's *amor mundi*. To get at this queerness I draw out how for Char his deeds were understood as a response that compelled suffering a certain unguarded receptivity to the abjection of Nazi occupation lest he become anaesthetized to the very source of his own animating *amor mundi*. This was because, as we will see for Lessing as well, there was no historical antecedent legitimating, or traditional foundation upon which, the desire for freedom may appeal and, so, the tension of action is also that of refusing the impulse to anaesthetize oneself from the suffering of the world in the vain hope of thereby preserving what in it remains loveable.

I nuance this account by amplifying how Char exemplifies the two-fold quality of worldliness appreciated in Lessing, bringing clarity to the complex relationship between on the one hand, principled doing and reflective thinking and, on the other, world-enacting and world-making. As an active resistance fighter, Char's leadership of the *maquis* initiated and sustained worldly spaces for freedom in word and deed; as a poet, Char's verse augments the world of things that, as the medial objects of discussion and

reflection, resist oblivion and give meaning to the human condition of common worldliness. This is because for Char, just as for Arendt (through Lessing), poetry, or more broadly *witnessing*, is inexorably connected to action, and it is this connection that shines through the aphoristic verses of *Hypnos*, which read at once as both deeply reflexive and yet as superficial action portraits.

I conclude with a recalibration of Arendt's thought away from the paradigm of revolutionary foundationalism to that of insurgent resistance (III). To do so, I focus on how both Lessing and Char, respectively, provide ways of conceptualizing the practice of valuing principled action. These concluding considerations also function to prime the subsequent case studies of cruising politics in action during the *Cruising* scandal and, more recently, the hacktivism of Anonymous. In these two chapters what is at stake, in part, is honing in on the way affirmative valuations of illegitimate productions and actions express a democratic desire animated by a will-to-power-bottom desirous of responsively enacting *amor mundi*. In the course of this chapter I gesture toward the ways, despite Arendt's own ambivalence, an agonistic politics of resistance needn't obscure the amorous affections animating her account of action.

I. The Affects of Action

In this section I will chart two key axes of Arendt's address, "On Humanity in Dark Times," to establish a basis for reading Arendt's remarks in that context as operating with a queer *ethos*. While *Nathan the Wise* is quite different from *Zarathustra*, the disposition to abandon absolute truth – even one's own most seemingly treasured – for the sake of enamored worldly relations are given bold expression by both Lessing and Nietzsche. To begin drawing out these parallels, I tack between *The Human Condition*

and the “Humanity in Dark Times” speech in order to amplify the role afforded by Arendt to pleasure, passion, and thus to the affections of action in her appreciation of Lessing’s cosmopartisanship. I then turn to the way she gestures toward a relationship between poetry and action that models the “turning operations” of thinking and acting it enables, which is performed by Arendt as a mode of provoking friendly, albeit disputational, engagement with others about worldly events. Taken together, these axes begin to chart what Arendt elliptically refers to as *amor mundi*.

To begin, it is fruitful to sketch the passages that explicitly inflect Arendt’s portrait of Lessing with discernibly queer tones. At the outset of her address Arendt notes how Lessing “never felt at home in the world as it then existed and probably never wanted to, and still after his own fashion he always remained committed to it.”⁶ “His attitude toward the world,” she continues, “was neither positive nor negative, but radically critical and, in respect to the public realm of his time, completely revolutionary.” (HDT, 13) Like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, Lessing’s “revolutionary temper,” which “never left the solid ground of the world, and never went to the extreme of sentimental utopianism,” belies a “curious kind of partiality which clung to concrete details with an exaggerated, almost pedantic carefulness, and gave rise to many misunderstandings.” (HDT, 13)

As Lisa Disch parses the stakes of this interpretation of Lessing’s style, the propensity for being misunderstood because untimely also implicates Arendt herself, who she sees as taking “the occasion of the Lessing Prize both to defend the practice of

⁶ H. Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” in *Men in Dark Times* (Harmondworth: Penguin Books, 1968) pp. 12-13 - henceforth cited parenthetically as “HDT.”

‘vigilant partisanship’ and to perform it.”⁷ For Disch, “The delicious irony of this address is that Arendt takes up her position as heir to Lessing’s legacy but turns that legacy to her own purposes, taking the occasion to question the very tradition the prize attempts to resurrect.”⁸ As noted in the Introduction, Arendt here performs a “turning operation” that undertakes a reworking of the stakes of “humanity” through a queer commitment to *parrhēsia*, the ‘philanthropy’ of agonistic contestation, and even the love of freedom enacted in armed resistance.⁹

These considerations help us appreciate how the root of misunderstanding, Arendt suggests, was that “Criticism, in Lessing’s sense, is always taking sides for the world’s sake, understanding and judging everything in terms of its position in the world at any given time. Such a mentality can never give rise to a definite world view which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because it has hitched itself firmly to one possible perspective.” (HDT, 15) More profoundly, this posture toward the world is even willing to sacrifice truth to those worldly relations Lessing called “friendship,” about which we will say more. But for now, it is enough to note that resisting the immunity that ideology affords points up to how “thinking calls not only for intelligence and profundity but above all for courage.” (HDT, 16) In part this courage entailed for

⁷ L. Disch, “On Friendship in Dark Times,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. B. Honig (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 285-311.pp. 290.

⁸ L. Disch, “On Friendship in Dark Times,” pp. 289. On the ways irony inflects Arendt’s voice and tone in addresses, cf. D. Nelson, “Suffering and Thinking: the Scandal of Tone in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren G. Berlant (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 219-244; R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” *English Literary History*. (2004: Vol. 71, No. 4), pp. 839-865: pp. 851: “It was her tone of enjoyment and self-satisfaction that most offended Arendt’s critics and bonded her to McCarthy and Jaspers, who shared her predilection for it.” And, of Arendt’s assertion that it took four weeks for Eichmann’s conscience to work the ‘other way around,’ (by pitying *himself* for having to witness the murderous fruition of his own designs, rather than feeling disgusted by his actions), Terada remarks, “My guess is that readers will divide in their reactions to this tour de force of positivist wit: does Arendt trivialize a vast question with a cynical mental game, or does she render intelligible a problem to which most historians would respond with mystifications or not at all?” (pp. 850)

⁹ M. Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 4.

Lessing “never binding his thinking to results,” so much so that Arendt frames Lessing as having “explicitly renounced the desire for results, insofar as these might mean the final solution of problems which his thought posed for itself.” (HDT, 17)

Lessing’s radically critical disposition “did not help his credit in Germany,” Arendt wryly observes, but it does, for her, attest to the fact that, “He enjoyed ‘challenging prejudice’ and ‘telling the truth to the court minions’. Dearly though he paid for these pleasures, they were literally pleasures.” (HDT, 13) Arendt continues by clarifying that for Lessing, “‘all passions, even the most unpleasant, are as passions pleasant’ because ‘they make us more conscious of our existence, they make us feel more real.’”(HDT, 14) Arendt concludes that this figuration of *pathos* “recalls the Greek doctrine of passions” such that even “anger, and above all Lessing’s kind of anger, reveals and exposes the world just as Lessing’s kind of laughter.” (HDT, 14) Passions are intimately connected to reality, “not, however, in the sense that reality is measured by the force with which the passion affects the soul but rather by the amount of reality the passion transmits to it.” (HDT, 14)

To better understand the way *pathos* is a lubricant for perceptions of reality, it is worth recalling a telling digression in *The Human Condition*. Arendt offers a humorous anecdote in an early footnote that is aptly suited for sharpening what is implied by Arendt’s distinction in the Lessing address. Early in *The Human Condition* Arendt cites Sophocles’s *Antigone* to illustrate the point that speech can also register as action, as when “great words, counteracting the great blows of the overproud, teach understanding

in old age.”¹⁰ By way of clarification of this passage she gives a gloss of an exchange between an unidentified interlocutor and Demosthenes:

An anecdote, reported by Plutarch, may illustrate the connection between acting and speaking on a much lower level. A man once approached Demosthenes and related how terribly he had been beaten. "But you," said Demosthenes, "suffered nothing of what you tell me." Whereupon the other raised his voice and cried out: "I suffered nothing?" "Now," said Demosthenes, "I hear the voice of somebody who was injured and who suffered" (*Lives*, "Demosthenes").¹¹

It is clear in this passage that what allows the reality of Demosthenes' interlocutor to affect Demosthenes was not the forceful "impact" of the man's distressed outcry, but rather as Arendt explains in the Lessing address, the way the expression of *pathos* affectively enables openness to the disclosure of this reality. That one cannot but read the aphorism without its cheeky inflection presses against the tragi-romantic conceit that Demosthenes is moved by pity; it is, instead, the rendering patent of the (affective) reality latent in his friend's first disclosure that affects him. Disch maintains that Arendt "learns from Lessing to construe the problem of dark times not principally as a loss of light, but as a closure of the 'interspaces between men' through which light passes into the public arena."¹² To the extent that all passion is pleasant, even when the 'most unpleasant,' an openly receptive responsiveness to the world, even when painful, has its own joys; as it was

¹⁰ Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* pp. 25ft.8. This is also the sense in which she approaches *Billy Budd*, arguing Melville knew how to, given his experience of American democracy, "talk back" to the French Revolutionaries in *On Revolution* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 84). Cf. also, N. Moruzzi, *Speaking Through the Mask: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Social Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹¹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 25, ft.8.

¹² L. Disch, "On Friendship in Dark Times," pp. 289.

for Nietzsche's Zarathustra's will-to-power-bottom: "Pleasure, which is fundamentally the intensified awareness of reality, springs from a passionate openness to the world and love of it." (HDT, 14)

To remain within a comparative relation to *The Human Condition* for a moment longer, we see this same claim about the ways affect both initiates action and augments perception of reality surface in the section on Action. The second epigram to that section helps open up what was in the Lessing address illuminated by the Demosthenes fable. To better grasp this dynamic, it is worth briefly examining the contorted translation Arendt provides of Dante's *De Monarchia*, which reads:

For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, insofar as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desires its own being, and since in action the being of every doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows.... Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.¹³

This dual framing of the Dante epigram affirms action as delightfully world disclosing and yields in the direction of Nietzsche's will-to-power-bottom as well as the Spinozist concept of *conatus* which, for Giorgio Agamben, appears "as the desire to preserve in one's own Being," "to desire one's own desire, to constitute oneself as desiring."¹⁴ He argues, in *The Use of Bodies*, that for Dante any embodied creature "first of all loves

¹³ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 175 – emphasis mine. On Arendt's unorthodox rendering of this passage, cf. P. Markell, "The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy," pp. 8-10.

¹⁴ G. Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," *Potentialities*. Ed. and Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 236.

itself and, through this love of self, also other things.”¹⁵ Because the body is the media of sensuous self-love (narcissism) its assertion into the common world through word and deed is immanently political: “Politics is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the act of making a means visible such.”¹⁶

In an effort to clarify what can be the “vertigo of immanence” implied in *conatus*, Agamben draws on Spinoza’s discussion of immanent causality, by analyzing the use of the antiquated Sephardic “mother tongue,” Ladino,¹⁷ from which Spinoza deploys the reflexive active verb, *pasearse* (“to walk-oneself”), as “particularly felicitous” to the extent that it “presents an action in which it is impossible to distinguish the agent from the patient (who walks what?) and in which the grammatical categories of active and passive, subject and object, transitive and intransitive therefore lose their meaning.”¹⁸ *Pasearse* is an apt grammatical schema of action insofar as behind it is a delightfully abyssal experience whereby “desire and Being... coincide without residue” in the intensive circuits of immanent causality. This resonance with Spinoza’s *conatus*, the affective delight infusing the active sensorium, ballasts the haphazard risk of world-enacting self-disclosure despite the inevitability of suffering untold consequences. Rewashing Dante’s latent-potent dichotomy through the grammatical solution of *pasearse* allows tweaking Arendt’s oft repeated maxim concerning the bittersweet coin-flip of action to read: “to *delight* and to suffer are two sides of the same coin.”¹⁹ As with

¹⁵ G. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*. Trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 30.

¹⁶ G. Agamben, “Notes on Politics,” *Means Without End*. Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 116.

¹⁷ On Ladino as a ‘slang’ discourse that transmits coded truth accessible only to underclass partisans, cf. Alice Becker-Ho, “The Language of Those in the Know.” Trans. John McHale (London: *Digraphe*, 2001).

¹⁸ G. Agamben, “Absolute Immanence,” *Potentialities*, pp. 235.

¹⁹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 190: “To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings.”

the Demosthenes anecdote, delight surfaces not as something extrinsic to suffering, but in the act of rendering patent what is already given or latent as its immanent cause.

The appreciation for the dynamism of suffering-delight of action further enables a more textured account of what is at play for Arendt in the Dante quotation, for there is a second inflection attributed to the delight of disclosing one's own image, which is (again) signaled by a footnote in *The Human Condition*. In it, readers are encouraged to consider the meaning of Dante's epigram, coyly said to "defy translation," as attesting to how "The human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being, not in order to change it but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have to suffer passively anyhow."²⁰

Interestingly, delight, and the intensification of delight aroused by the 'disclosure of [one's] own image,' becomes infused in this revisionist interpretation with the enactment of the 'human sense of reality.' Read through Lessing's notion of pleasure this (second) marginal digression reinforces the dynamics of the first at play in the anecdotal aside about Demosthenes, which can be seen now as indexing the world-disclosing delight that becomes intensified in the shifted affective response of his friend. Read this way it is possible to see how these two experiences, suffering-delight, in important respects cannot be delaminated.

Considering the world disclosing delight of action leads to the heart of the dynamic animating Arendt's Lessing Prize address: namely, the relationship between poetry and action and, with this couplet, the relationship between thinking and doing. Here the first epigram to the section on Action in *The Human Condition* becomes relevant insofar as it sounds through the pseudonymous authorial persona of Isak Dinesen

²⁰ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 208.

to announce, “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.” Reading now as a commentary, packaged in a double-entendre, on the Demosthenes fable, this epigram also connects Arendt’s phenomenology of Action to her reflections on Lessing and, through them, to Char’s wartime poems. In the context of “Humanity in Dark Times,” Arendt claims simply that by dint of acting “we are constantly preparing the way of ‘poetry,’ in the broadest sense, as a human potentiality; we are, so to speak, constantly expecting it to erupt in some human being.” (HDT, 29)

This appreciation for the origin of poetry in action is given a two-fold explanation in her address. On the one hand, it stems from Arendt’s understanding of how “for Lessing the essence of poetry was action and not, as for Herder, a force – ‘the magic force that affects my soul’ – nor, as for Goethe, nature which has been given form.” (HDT, 14) This is a view of the poet as creator, in Nietzsche’s sense, where what is desired is “that worldly space which has come into being between the artist or writer and his fellow men [sic.] as a world common to them.” (HDT, 14) The link between poetry and action in Lessing, which Arendt concedes she can only intuit, “consisted in the fact that both action and thought occur in the form of movement and that, therefore, freedom underlies both: freedom of movement.” (HDT, 17) The poet, then, offers the world “*fermenta cognitionis*” or thinking inductors, and those “which Lessing scattered into the world were not intended to communicate conclusions, but to stimulate others to independent thought, and this for no other purpose than to bring about a discourse between thinkers.” (HDT, 18)

On the other hand, and relatedly, “the meaning of a committed act is revealed only when the action itself has come to an end and become a story susceptible to

narration.” (HDT, 29) The poet, for Arendt, is tasked with “setting this process of narration in motion and of involving us all in it” by virtue of the fact that the fabricated object – the poetic media – attains a “place in the world, where it will survive us.” (HDT, 29) Patrick Hayden explains that for Arendt, “A world is the collective repository of a past, the meaningful condition of a present and the potential expression of a future.”²¹ This is a claim established in *The Human Condition*, when Arendt claims, “Without being talked about by men [sic.]... the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things.”²² Bonnie Honig reinforces Hayden’s view, arguing through Arendt that, “We vest Things with meaning, but things also do the same for us: they anchor, limit, and orient us.”²³ Lastly, Cecilia Sjöholm connects this reading to the sense of worldly plurality, arguing, “In this way, plurality underlies the notion of world as well. It appears through plurality, when things are seen in a number of ways. Arendt’s concept of ‘world’ is intimately linked to the realm of ‘human artifice’ and implies that objects of art are an integral part of plurality. ‘World’ is that which appears “in between” people. Here we find the work of art.”²⁴

On Hayden’s count, then, “Although a world does not reciprocate in the way typically attributed to human agency, it does exist within a circuit of mutual conditioning and interdependence—that is, of outward-looking giving and receiving. Arendt describes

²¹ P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World,” pp. 758.

²² H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 204.

²³ B. Honig, “What Kind of Thing is Land? Hannah Arendt’s Object Relations, or: The Jewish Unconscious of Arendt’s Most ‘Greek’ Text,” *Political Theory*, (2016: Vol. 44, No. 3), 307-336: pp. 310. Cf. as well, H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 9: “The impact of the world’s reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.”

²⁴ C. Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 6.

this relation of mutual influence between worlds and human beings when she writes that the ‘things that owe their existence exclusively to men nonetheless constantly condition their human makers’.”²⁵ Thus, the language of an action coming to an end or being brought to “completion” – which is Char’s language, used by Arendt in the preface to *Between Past and Future*, for the time when poetic reflection intervenes in the affairs of actors – is *also* a cheeky description of a process of provocation, of *initium*, and this polyvalence animating the processual quality of action resurfaces again in Arendt’s consideration of René Char’s *Hypnos*, to which we will turn momentarily.

Affectively opening this space, or resisting its closure, occurs when through contentious debate truth becomes “humanized by discourse.” (HDT, 32) For Arendt, Disch argues, Lessing exemplifies how relationships animated by contestation offers a model of disputational friendship as he himself was “someone who sought engagement with others not for the warmth of brotherhood but for argumentative companionship.”²⁶ The vision of friendship Arendt values in Lessing is resonant with the amorous amity of Zarathustra’s annular intercourse with the Higher Men, especially the Ugliest Man, to the extent the terms of their ‘just friends’ relationship played out in the dynamism of contentious, teasing provocation (*reading*), and recalls Diogenes’ self-description as biting at his friends in the spirit of provoking critical, ethical reflection on the normative state of worldly affairs.

One final remark on Arendt’s treatment of Lessing’s vision of friendship that will help flesh-out the enactment of these relations and their dangers is fruitful, then, before turning to Char’s *Hypnos*. If for Arendt, as Hayden suggests, “Worlds offer a collective

²⁵ P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World,” pp. 757.

²⁶ L. Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 97.

abode for otherwise disparate individuals to encounter and connect with one another,” then it is also the case that,

A world constitutes us as political beings and we in turn constitute, in part at least, a world as a shared public space. Placing world at the centre of political friendship likewise highlights that the world is vulnerable to loss and even obliteration. Because world is synonymous with human artifice it does not possess a natural permanence, and worlds can be ruined through power asymmetries, structural injustices and misrecognition such as racism, sexism, poverty, domination, terror and genocide.²⁷

The benefit of drawing out the precarity of the world is to apprehend its parallel, if not precisely isomorphic, relationship to friendship, which in Joshua Dienstag’s words, “is our best model of an arena that is meant to harbor randomness and chaos, while channeling it into a relatively stable association” where, precisely because “we *can* destroy friendships,” “their permanently endangered status is one of their attractions.”²⁸

To further bring together these considerations of world and friendship, I conclude this section by turning to Arendt’s friendship with writer and critic Mary McCarthy as a resource for thinking through the *ethos* of ‘partisanship for the world’ offered in the Lessing Prize address. For Deborah Nelson, Arendt’s friendship with McCarthy models a promising challenge to the hegemony of inter-personal, face-to-face relations in ethical, political theory.²⁹ She finds in Arendt’s relations with McCarthy something both

²⁷ P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World,” pp. 758.

²⁸ J. Dienstag, . *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethics, Spirit*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 247-8.

²⁹ For a recent critique of the model of the “face-to-face” ethical encounter as a depoliticizing substitute for worldly relations, cf. E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), Chapter 2.

disputational and loving. Rei Terada attests to this quality of their friendship, citing a letter Arendt wrote to McCarthy during the *Eichmann* scandal: “I always loved the sentence because you were the only reader to understand what otherwise I have never admitted – namely that I wrote this book in a curious state of euphoria. And that ever since I did it, I feel – after twenty years – light-hearted about the whole matter. Don't tell anybody; is it not proof positive that I have no ‘soul’?” Terada reads this letter in a manner consonant with the previous chapter’s interpretation of Zarathustra’s affair with the Ugliest Man, “For her part, Arendt loves McCarthy for acknowledging Arendt's feelings more than Arendt herself had done.”³⁰

This kind of soulless, yet affectionate, relationship is captured for Nelson in an image of the two women side by side, delighted to face to the world together:

The ethical models of relation ascendant since the tragedies of the midcentury have tried to bring the self face-to-face with the Other. If we return to the image with which I began – two women standing side-by-side, facing the subway – we might imagine a countertradition of ethical relation, one that seeks not to come face-to-face with the Other but to come face-to-face with reality in the presence of others. Since reality and the Other cannot be faced at the same time, they chose to face reality, however psychically wounding.³¹

³⁰ R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 851.

³¹ D. Nelson, “The Virtues of Heartlessness: Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and the Anesthetics of Empathy,” pp. 88. Cf. as well, C. Sjolholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, pp. 6: “Our vision is conditioned by plurality; this means it is *always impinged upon*.”

Amorous amity is here expressed in the desire to face the world, together, and allowing its suffering-delight to both come between and thereby also to relate them *through the pleasure of this im/mediate exposure*.

Yet, for Rei Terada, “the forte of this mainly thinking self... is a particular kind of response: a radical objection to the given conditions of living in the world. The ‘benefit’ that such an objection confers upon the thinking self is that it makes it bearable to perceive reality: on the compensating condition that they do so under protest, the eyes stay open.”³² And, as Terada frames the affect McCarthy captured in her beloved sentence, it is clear that Arendt “prizes being the sort of person who can stand seeing a wound.”³³

“The gift of friendship,” Arendt thus tersely writes, “has very little to do with tolerance in the ordinary sense”, but rather “with openness to the world, and finally with genuine love of mankind.” (HDT, 34) This openness is what gives the world an auratic sense of “realness.”³⁴ Hayden suggests that, “By treating world as having the same ontological status as self and other, as a definite and historically specific ensemble of relations between political agents, we place recognition [sic.] within a triadic schema of inter-worldly interdependencies. Recognition [sic.] is distinguished not only by reciprocity between plural persons but by the presence of an acknowledged common

³² R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself: Realism and Defiance in Arendt,” pp. 844.

³³ R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 850.

³⁴ C. Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, pp. 62: “The production of realness is irreducible to the quoting of facts. Rather, realness is produced through a web of narratives, through witnessing, reports, fictional storytelling, and other forms of writing or discourse. The ways in which we narrate the background of a political action or motivate our beliefs with a story help to construe the reality in which we situate our actions. Stories, backgrounds, descriptions, and examples are not just part and parcel of political rhetoric; they produce the in-between, the web that forms our sense of reality. Narrative helps produce a sense of realness, vital for our capacity of judgment as well as our capacity to act. Realness has nothing to do with realism. Perhaps paradoxically, in Arendt’s writings it is Kafka who provides the primary model for how we are to conceive of the construct of narrative.”

world around which they are constituted.”³⁵ It is in this respect, precisely, that Arendt lauds Lessing for his “readiness to sacrifice truth to friendship,” to the extent that any absolute truth would close-up “the infinite number of opinions that arise when men discuss the affairs of this world.” (HDT, 33)

Precisely because this responsiveness to the world will invariably be “psychically wounding” the temptation is to retreat into the insular comforts of ideology, nationalism, fraternal solidarity, or even emotive intimacy.³⁶ The temptation is even more pronounced for a pariah like Lessing, whose parrhesiastic *ethos* alienated him from both respectable and parvenu society alike. And while, Nelson notes, Arendt is keen to acknowledge that the insular life of those on the margins can be “the source of a vitality, a joy in the simple fact of being alive, rather suggesting that life comes fully into its own only among those who are, in worldly terms, the insulted and injured,” (HDT, 21), she also warns of the risks attending to “the privilege of being unburdened by care for the world”:

The privilege is dearly bought; it is often accompanied by so radical a loss of the world, *so fearful an atrophy of all the organs with which we respond to it—starting with the common sense with which we orient ourselves in a world common to ourselves and others and going on to the sense of beauty, or taste, with which we love the world*—that in extreme cases, in which pariahdom has persisted for centuries, we can speak of real

³⁵ P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World,” pp. 755. Although Hayden cites Patchen Markell’s critical engagement of the politics of recognition in *Bound by Recognition*, even using the language of ‘acknowledgment,’ he unfortunately persists in framing both dyadic friendships and triadic world-befriending relations in the needlessly binding terms of recognition.

³⁶ D. Nelson, “The Virtues of Heartlessness: Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and the Anesthetics of Empathy,” pp. 90. Cf., as well, S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship,” pp. 510-518.

worldlessness. And worldlessness, alas, is always a form of barbarism.

(HDT, 21 – emphasis mine)

As Nelson understands the stakes of Arendt’s warning, “When she advises the pariah to stand apart from the intimate society of the pariah group, she does not recommend self-sufficiency but plurality, that is, bringing the perceiving self into contact with non-intimate others.”³⁷ This is because, Nelson continues, since “one’s bodily and social position in the world generates one’s perspective of reality, sharing corrects best when these positions overlap least.”³⁸ In other words, “The ultimate concern of this form of friendship,” Hayden argues, “is for the kind of world (or worlds) humans want to sustain, protect and experience as the milieu of their political coexistence and shared reality.”³⁹

This entails facing the given, conditionally assembled world as it appears. At the same time, as I argued through Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, Arendt’s account of Lessing helps us understand that such a confrontation with the world needn’t be one of acquiescence. Terada offers a mode by which to understand how accepting reality can, in fact, take shape as defiance and resistance, as when she argues, “that the onset of the sense of reality is not in any way characterized by acceptance of the real conditions at hand. Just the reverse: nonacceptance is the paradigmatic realistic attitude; anyone who ‘accepts reality’ has not yet formed a conception of our real circumstances.”⁴⁰

Linking reality to realization, Terada evokes Nietzsche to clarify, “realization occurs – if ever – when the world’s loss of its right to be the way it is does not, for once,

³⁷ D. Nelson, “The Virtues of Heartlessness: Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and the Anesthetics of Empathy,” pp. 91.

³⁸ D. Nelson, “The Virtues of Heartlessness: Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and the Anesthetics of Empathy,” pp. 91.

³⁹ P. Hayden, “From Political Friendship to Befriending the World,” pp. 756.

⁴⁰ R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 845.

result in a retreat to the belief that it *isn't* the way it is.”⁴¹ Facing up to the reality of the world, moreover, can be profoundly amorous, as we saw in the drama of the Ass Festival. “Arendt attests that, further, some people fall in love with looking at reality,” Terada notes, and we now see, in the case of her relations to both McCarthy and Lessing, the peculiar shape of her response as *amor mundi*: “Falling in love with reality testing would be an understandable reaction [or, in Arendtian terms, *augmentation*] formation to indignation at real conditions; the self could then adopt reality testing as an adaptive strategy while investing in it the force of its indignation.”⁴²

In the context of the Lessing Prize essay, then, Arendt argues that what the poet allows for is the ability to *lament* the past, to mourn the present. In this way poetics allow past events to be present as matters of fact, as *given* elements of the common world. But poetics also are provocative. Poems can bestow a sense of what in the present must be given up, what must be abandoned or resisted for the future to be one no longer marked by *those* lamentations. Thus, while great words may teach understanding in old age, they also may arouse the desire to refuse acquiescence and resist the reality of the world disclosed to understanding by way of poetic witness. I will argue in a moment, as I transition now to Char’s poetic testament, that it is art, primarily poetry, which mediates his *amor mundi*. This is especially so when considering Char’s recurring poetic allusions to “a painting by Georges de La Tour known at the time as *Le prisonnier* (revised title: *Job raille par safemme*),” Van Kelly argues,

Where a beautiful woman speaks to an anguished and afflicted man. Char kept a reproduction of this painting on the wall of his command post in the

⁴¹ R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 847.

⁴² R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 847.

village of Céreste, as a symbol of the freedom and grace for which he was fighting (*Feuillets d'Hypnos*, aphorism 178, where Char says that De la Tour ‘mastered the Hitlerian shadows with a dialogue for human beings’). War is in the filigrain.”⁴³

Put differently, what Arendt admiringly mimes in Lessing is precisely his willingness to infuse the world with heady provocations not as its own end but as a media for arousing strangers into amorous communion, even if the affective *pathos* of the exchange is ‘unpleasant’.

Thus, Shin Chiba is right to argue that, “It is important to note in this connection that she turned the negative – generally speaking, but not always – meaning of Augustine's notion of *amor mundi* as the *cupiditas* or striving for temporal things into a positive meaning: citizens dispassionate [sic.] and yet dedicated commitment to the welfare of the world. The form of *amor mundi* to which Arendt adhered to can be said to be a kind of ‘humanized love of humanity,’ to use George Kateb's expression.”⁴⁴ For Arendt, love of the world means not just expressions of intelligence and profundity, but an affective courage that cannot but respond to the suffering of the world by delighting in exposure to its realness.

Yet, as Lessing’s example demonstrates, arousal to the world also entails augmenting it, as Terada reminds: “Hence Arendt's preface to Part One of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* declares that responding to the path from anti-Semitism to the Nazi genocide ‘call[s] not only for lamentation and denunciation but for comprehension,’ and

⁴³ V. Kelly, “Passages beyond the Resistance: René Char's "Seuls demeurent" and Its Harmonics in Semprun and Foucault” *SubStance* (2003: Vol. 32, No. 3, Issue 102: The Politics of French Literary History), 109-132.
pp. 113.

⁴⁴ S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” pp. 531-532.

goes on to align comprehension with defiance, not acceptance, of reality.”⁴⁵ In the case of Lessing, and Arendt’s Lessing Prize address, this augmentation takes shape as both contentious humanizing discourse *and* provocative, poetic publication: a cosmopartisanship surfaces in every iteration, expressed in the action of disputation, in the fabrication and leafleting of *fermenta cognitionis*, as well as in the critical reflection, or comprehension, made possible by way of the poetic media recollecting memorialized words and deeds. As we will see with Arendt’s appreciation of Char, the enamored action of cosmopartisanship is not limited to contestatory speech acts, but also to the concerted intercourse of armed, telluric assemblages of resistance.

II. Arousing *Hypnos*

Having suggested the prevalence of a queer amity in Arendt’s Lessing Prize speech and in her account of affective action in *The Human Condition*, bringing the mimed *amor mundi* on display there into generative tension with René Char’s wartime aphorisms, *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, creates space for, on the one hand, critically and creatively interrogating the relationship between world-making *poiesis* and world-enacting *praxis*, and, on the other, the same treatment for the augmenting reflection that gives objects and actions a realness capable of, in turn, initiating novel political responses to worldly affairs. As a poet who also fought in the French Resistance, Char radicalizes Lessing’s example. Continuing the reflections from the previous section, I sharpen attunement to the immanent dynamism of thinking and doing mediated by the work of poetry prepared by action. This is possible because in his war-time poems, “The political

⁴⁵ R. Terada, “Thinking for Oneself,” pp. 859.

abets beauty: Char depicts the Resistance as what will allow poetry to emerge from the ‘*nédant du père,*’ or mourning, which the historical catastrophe forced upon the poet.”⁴⁶

In the process, I demonstrate how Char’s poetic testament proffers a curious legacy insofar as it attests to the abyssal impossibility for history to authorize, in the present, concerted action for the sake of freedom. Quoting Henri Michel, Van Kelly describes the French Resistance as having “‘arose from nothingness, it built itself upon a void. Such a work, in such conditions, could do nothing but exalt its workers... the break with the past [was] so great it [was] like a slate wiped clean; all audacious endeavors [were] permitted.’”⁴⁷ It is this feature of the resistance, its mimicry of the revolutionary situation of acting without foundations, that compels Arendt to cite Char’s *Hypnos* when treating that “interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet” as exemplifying, in the process, “how to move in this gap” when theorizing politics as enamored, worldly media-relations.⁴⁸

It is important to note at the outset that the gap where freedom surfaces is, in the revolutionary tradition, also the occasion for *discovering* the pleasures of revolution, “unexpectedly,” simply by virtue of having taken up participation in public affairs.⁴⁹ For Char, the pleasure of resistance was experienced, aromatically, as his treasure: “If I survive, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure.” (*H*, #195) This revolutionary experience of unexpected delightedness amidst suffering abject political tumult surfaces in the prefatory essay to Arendt’s *Between Past and Future* when, describing the resistance of the maquis led by

⁴⁶ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 115.

⁴⁷ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 111.

⁴⁸ H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, pp. 14 – henceforth cited parenthetically as *B*.

⁴⁹ P. Markell, “The Experience of Action,” in *Thinking in Dark Times*, ed. Roger Berkowitz et. al., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010)., pp. 99-100.

Char during the occupation of France, she writes, “without premonition and probably against their own conscious inclinations, they had come to constitute willy-nilly a public realm where – without the paraphernalia of officialdom and hidden from the eyes of friend and foe – all the relevant business in the affairs of the country was transacted in word and deed.” (*B*, 3) We will see how, in an isomorphic relation to the hidden public sphere of the resistance, Char crafts his poems out of “what could have been a tonal clash [so as to] create a strange harmony of contraries.”⁵⁰ Though this fated and haphazard public was short-lived, Char’s poems endured (by chance), and so the loss of its treasure is attributed to its ‘tragic’ emergence as an “inheritance... left to us by no testament.” (*H*, #62)

Patchen Markell persuasively parses the impact of this experience of discovering the delight of action, and the ways it figures for Arendt as a “lost treasure,” in a manner that fruitfully frames Arendt’s engagement with Char. He maintains, “The real source of this loss, Arendt suggests, lies in the fact that the revolutionaries, in need of concepts with which to make sense of their impermanent and elusive experience, turned reflexively to traditional frameworks of political thought, rather than inventing ‘another comprehensive way of communicating and stating their own experiences’.”⁵¹ One could argue, then, that what is necessary to sustain remembrance of the treasure of foundationless freedom is simply to fashion enduring concepts fitted to the experience.

This, however, is not the thrust of Markell’s intervention, nor my own, nor, I think, would such an undertaking truly appreciate what is at stake in Arendt’s sense of the potential loss that always shadows political action. I will argue that the persistent lacuna

⁵⁰ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 113.

⁵¹ P. Markell, “The Experience of Action,” 100.

inhering to insurrectionary action is constitutive on Arendt's count; the perfoliate *genos* of revolutionary modernity recurs "because no tradition had foreseen its appearance or its reality, because no testament had willed it for the future." (*B*, 6) This, however, is not a conundrum to be rectified, as Char's poetic reflections are distinguished for purposefully failing to knot together the frayed political concepts of traditional legitimacy, hierarchical genealogy, and foundational authority, as if outright mocking the presumption that to do so could ever adequately treasure the experience of *finding* – or "founding" – the freedom of 'public happiness'.

In Char's words: "Action that has meaning for the living has value only for the dead, completion only in the minds that inherit and question it." (*H*, #187) Crucially, as already suggested in the context of Lessing above, 'completion' does not mean an entitlement to the last word (it is, at best, a 'questionable' inheritance), but rather the recollected evaluation of the act in comprehension, as mediated by the poetic object.⁵² To neglect the turning operations remediating thinking, willing, and judging to principled action is to, as Char states, "assume that the dead have walnuts in their pockets, and that a tree will one day spring up of its own accord."⁵³ (*H*, #220) Thus, Arendt states, in frankly queer terms,

⁵² H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 245. Cf. G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 134: "It is not the memory of the sensibility but of the will. It is not the memory of traces, but of words. It is the faculty of promising, commitment to the future, memory of the future itself. Remembering the promise that has been made is not recalling that it was made at a particular past moment, but that one must hold to it at a future moment."

⁵³ Cf. R. Char, *Hypnos*, pp 79: "One day during the war, I was asked to find an empty strip of land on the plateau de Valensole where Allied planes in difficulty could land. I find a large field that fits the bill but there's a magnificent three-hundred-year-old walnut tree in the middle of it. The owner of the field was willing to rent it to me, but stubbornly refused to cut down the beautiful tree. I eventually told him why we needed the land, whereupon he agreed. We started clearing the way the soil around the base of the tree; we follow the taproot.... At the end of the root, we find the bones of a knight buried in his armour. The man must have been a mediaeval knight... and he had a walnut in his pocket when he was killed, for the base of the taproot was exactly level with his thigh-bone. The walnut tree had sprouted in the grave."

The tragedy began not when the liberation of the country [of France] as a whole ruined, almost automatically, the small hidden islands of freedom that were doomed anyhow, but when it turned out there was *no mind* to inherit and question, to think about and to remember. (*B*, 6)

Put differently, Arendt's admittedly scandalous thesis is that the tragedy was not the occupation, for it provided the delightfully aromatic experience of suffering freedom, nor even the inevitably sunken islands of resistance, but rather that there was no 'mind' for what had happened. The polysemy of 'mind' here is crucial, for it signals that no one cared to inherit the legacy of the Resistance as it was witnessed, that no one minded the specificity of what had happened (as when collapsing De Gaulle's off-shore efforts into those of internal resistance), and lastly, and more relevant for us, that no one was affectively *prepared* for the task of comprehending such an illegitimate inheritance.

Char's poetic testament can be understood, then, as a two-fold acknowledgment, one tragic, and the other ironically provocative. The tragic realization addresses the experience of discovering that no legacy can, of its own accord, root present enactments of the desire for freedom. If past words and deeds are to will anything at all they must become deterritorialized, up-rooted and connected up to an immanent milieu in a manner that seeds the present with uncanny desire. If, then, there is anything *tragic* about the bastardly inheritance Char claims, it is the appreciation that nothing but his own desire grounds his willingness to act.

This second, provocative aspect of Char's acknowledgement, that the past cannot legitimate his acts of resistance, surfaces to the extent that he also disabuses his readers of the same conceit concerning his leafleted will, *Hypnos*. This response to the tragedy of

inheriting an unfounded revolutionary tradition affirms that freedom will always surface in illegitimate guises, as if an expression of monstrous desire. Far from a resigned politics, Arendt sees in Char a response to this lacuna that exemplifies how to not only mind the gap between past and future, but also how to *move* in it. In the process, Char's *Hypnos* becomes a media from which sounds a naked expression of *amor mundi*. As a disseminated media, moreover, Char's aphoristic constellations become worldly things of potentially common *inter-esse*.

Armed resistance, viewed this way, shares with democracy a common 'scandal,' in Rancière's sense, because endowed with neither legitimate title nor any rightful authority and always fatefully haphazard.⁵⁴ Bearing no heirs beyond "Imagination, my child" (*H*, #101), Char's insurrectionary resistance arouses the interests of cruising politics precisely because it is itself monstrously illegitimate, amorously willful in refusing the tempting "genius of man, who thinks he has discovered all-encompassing truths, [and] turns truths which kill into truth which *authorize* one to kill." (*H*, #37; #138) In this way, Char does not found a revolutionary tradition of resistance with his poems, but rather gives witness to the potency of acting without such a will, without the grave longing for an a priori legitimating claim to act freely.

"Cave – France" (*H*, #124)

The distance spanning Arendt's invocation of Char's poetics in *On Revolution* and *Between Past and Future* opens on the world darkly secreted behind the sun, atop "interned mountains," (*H*, #182) at the moment when Hypnos – borne of night and shadow, twinned to Thanatos – fully darkens the world (*H*, #168), bestowing the precious

⁵⁴ J. Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*. Trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso Book, 2006), pp. 40-41.

gift of inky blackness that shelters “the *impossible*, alive” (H, #229): “justicers fade into the distance” (H, #211) mutely covered by a shady ally whose “resplendence is the poet’s escort and girds the man of action.” (H, #229) Sweeping clear the streets, sleep conspires with Char’s “*catimini*, the secret ones” (H, #47) who, “always dressed in anonymous grey,” recall the fleeting and furtive “cuckoo” (H, #159) when venturing out to conduct “the relevant business in the affairs of the country” (B, 3): “The plane flies low. The invisible pilots jettison their night garden, then activate a brief light tucked in under the wing of the plane to notify us that it’s over. All that remains is to gather up the scattered treasure. So it is with the poet...” (H, #97)

The remainder of this section will be devoted to, in large part, unpacking this densely curated cluster of aphorisms from *Hypnos* through the heuristic of cruising politics in light of Arendt’s valorization of Lessing’s agonistic *amor mundi*. To begin in this effort, we may note the queer self-description of the Maquis as “*les catamini*.” Mark Hutchens translates this aphorism with a supplemental definition, “the secret ones,” while Mary Ann Caws and Nancy Kline simply render its argot literally, as “the on-the-sly.” Both get at the way that “*en catimini*” gestures toward furtive and discreet ventures; but its resonances with queer cruising *praxis* becomes all the more pronounced when considering its resonances with *catamite* (a early and enduring synonym for queers), the receptive partner, whose desire for receptivity was viewed with opprobrium in antiquity. So, the catamite makes his moves *en catimini*, on the sly, as one of “the secret ones.” Rather than reject this characterization of the tactics of the maquis, Char instead embraces it as a fitting description for the conduction of their nocturnal affairs.

Also central to understanding the cruising politics of Char's exercise of resistance are his description of both his poetic practice *and* the operations of the Maquis offered in the definitional aphorism #97. Like the Maquis, who served as a crucial nodal point in the supply chain of northern occupied France, the poet functions in the same role, gathering up "scattered treasure" with his verse, responding to what the world drops in his life by rendering these events into crystalline constellations refracting the poet's, no less than the man of action's, intensification of suffering-delight. It is, moreover, indispensable to Arendt's appreciation of Char that his poetic practice is modeled after his experience of concerted action – and not the other way around: art refracts action, rather than subordinating action to the instrumentalizing and violent logics of artifice.

Lastly, we must connect up Char's own rendering of his "treasure" as the threefold aromatic experience of free action in concert, as the fruits of the labor undertaken by the maquis in their role as a nexus in the Resistance supply-chain, and as the crystalline aphorisms he composes as a poet. In all three instances, Char nuances the experience of this treasure as having been delightfully-suffered *nakedly*, or with a posture of unguarded receptivity. Nakedness does not trigger an anxious need to reactively seek cover (a hide), but rather elicits a mode of responsivity that embraces such radical exposure as its condition of possibility. "Today, he *loves*, spends out, commits himself, goes naked, provokes." (*H*, #30 – emphasis in original)

Recalibrating the valence of nakedness encountered in *Hypnos* only addresses one dimension of the "treasure" of resistance (*H*, #195). The second frames resistance as more than subversive guerrilla warfare waged against "tyranny and things worse than tyranny" by emphasizing how the partisans "had become 'challengers' [viz.

provocateurs], had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, *without knowing or even noticing it*, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear.”⁵⁵ In broad strokes, then, Char’s treasure is understood by Arendt as the uneasy “interconnection” of (i) a ‘naked’ self-discovery freed from shame and self-doubt and, (ii) the “harrowing obligations” (*H* #106) of an impressment compelled to ‘challenge,’ by initiating and creating a suitably outfitted ‘resistance public,’ the violent flood of an entirely novel totalitarian terror (*B*, 4).

Yet, Arendt does not offer any quotations from *Hypnos* that might illuminate what, in practice, becoming a ‘challenger’ entailed. Instead, she cites Char’s profaned Passover prayer (*H*, #131), of which there is more to say. So, in this absence, I have further curated a series of aphorisms from *Hypnos* that help explicate and thus more fully realize the potency of their poetic promise of resistance in concert. In what follows, then, I begin by unpacking the counterintuitive depiction of nakedness and masquerade at play in Char’s poems. I then unpack some of the queer pragmatics conducting the exercise of Resistance. I conclude this section, finally, with an examination of the relationship between amorous affection and action as it plays out in Arendt’s treatment of willing and promising.

“The poet, guardian of life’s infinite faces.” (*H*, #83)

At the conclusion *On Revolution* Arendt had qualified Char’s reflections as “perhaps too ‘modern’, too self-centered to hit in pure precision” what had been lost with the loss of revolutionary freedom (Sophocles’ Theseus seconds him there, as Kafka does

⁵⁵ H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 4—emphasis mine. Cf. also, P. Markell, “The Moment has Passed.”

in *Between*). It is likely that it is the naked affection of Char's 'self-centered' meditations that marks them as *too* modern to Arendt.⁵⁶ But this affectionate reflection is hardly self-indulgent on Char's count: "How can you hide from what is *meant* to be a part of you? (The mistake made by modernity.)" (*H*, #77; #207) If, in *On Revolution*, Arendt had not appreciated – in her reading of *Billy Budd*⁵⁷ – the ways in which for both Captain Vere and Master-at-Arms Claggart the attempt to conceal affection spells the very destruction of both affectivity itself as well as dispassionate reasoning, then in *Between Past and Future* her reappraisal of *Hypnos* sees her exploring another relation between affections and worldly aspirations.

The darkness of occupation compels amorous *praxis* as a condition of possibility for resistance. In one of the more starkly austere aphorisms Char writes, "To be stoic is to congeal, with the beautiful gaze of Narcissus. We calculated every suffering the torturer could possibly extract from every inch of our bodies; then, with a heavy heart, went out and faced him." (*H*, #4) Narcissism, not as the late-modern pathological indulgence diagnosed by critics of agonism, but as an exercise of preparation for action, enables Char and his band, *en catamini*, to embrace their reflections, vulnerabilities, and condition of non-sovereignty. "Look. Your mirror has turned into a fire. *Little by little... that surplus of existence which, by working at it, you will turn into a bridge.* Step back inside the mirror. Arid it may be but at least its fruitfulness has not run dry." (*H*, #219 – emphasis mine) Embracing "every suffering," little by little, an embodied worldly image allows the partisans to "amass, then share out." – "In the mirror of the universe, be the densest, the most useful part and the least conspicuous part." (*H*, #156; #87)

⁵⁶ S. Chiba, "Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political," pp. 510.

⁵⁷ H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, pp. 83-88.

Queer impersonal narcissism does not signal a retreat from either the world or alterity; but rather, as in *Zarathustra*, enables a clearer attunement to worldly events *as well as* a heightened exposure to their unpredictable vicissitudes: “Between the world of reality and myself, there is none of that dreary impenetrability any more.” (*H*, #188) This leaves Char only “a meter of guts to measure our chances.” (*H*, #103) Visceral courage proves to open more than enough space for resistance, which relies on the discovery that “the reality of the imagination is a few minutes fast” and that “this gap, which can never be bridged, forms a gulf that is alien to the acts of this world.” (*H*, #218; #18) In other words, “an act is virgin, even when repeated,” (*H*, #46) and this allows Char to assemble “out of the refuse of mountains... men who will briefly perfume the glaciers.” (*H*, #130; #32; #55) For Char, like Lessing, this experience is one of the pleasures of queer desire, in contradistinction to “so many people [who] confuse their own ill humor with the spirit of revolt, see a lineage in a surge of feeling.” (*H*, #189)

“A time of raging mountains and fantastic friendship.” (*H*, #142)

Making this distinction alone, of course, does not dispel the ‘vice’ of play-acting, so central to Arendt’s critique of the French Revolution, from threatening the survival of the French Resistance as it appears in the guise of infiltration. In *Hypnos*, the hypocrisy of infiltrators is confronted decisively with violence (#215, #217). Char’s “Captain Alexandre” vows to “do the thing myself” after “two conclusive tests” of one such “unscrupulous scoundrel” in his ranks (*H*, #14; #10).

But reparative violence – enacting ‘unauthorized’ “truths which kill” – is not the only ballast against hypocrisy; such retroactive methods works in tandem with preemptive screening tactics, too. For instance, Char affirms, in an outright scandalous

inversion of Arendt's prioritization of persuasive speech over affective flooding in her reading of *Billy Budd*, "Flood with sunlight the imagination of those who stammer instead of speaking, who blush in the instant of assertion. They are steadfast partisans." (*H*, #60) Blushing, stammering, these are men with whom Char may "guide the real into action like a flower slipped into the tart mouths of infants. Ineffable knowledge of the desperate diamond (life)." (*H*, #3) This is not to discount that "what matters most in certain situations is mastering one's euphoria in time," (*H*, #78) but only to assert that the narcissistic embrace of "impassioned powers and strict rules of action" (*H*, #108) endows the resistance fighters with a more dynamic sense of politics: "In action, be primitive; in foresight, a strategist." (*H*, #72)

In noting the revaluation of stammering ashamedness, for instance, I do not intend, thereby, to stake out any absolute value but only to open space for considering the conditions under which stuttered ashamedness bespeaks trustworthiness. Char is clear that these habits are of a piece with the "Hitlerian darkness" (*H*, #178) of Nazi occupation which, in addition to demanding the receptive embrace of anticipated suffering, demands partisans "do violence" to themselves, not by cravenly becoming "Vanity's clockwork doll" – "I honestly think not," Char flatly insists – but out of "a need to check the evidence, to breathe life into it." (*H*, #194) Resistance, after all, dons its anonymous grey after a "short-lived candor," when the "combat of eagles [be]comes the combat of octopuses" and partisans are forced to abandon the "cover of a hypocrisy sure of its rights" in order to "confront... demons that have the cold-blooded genius of microbes." (*H*, #7)

Resistance (to fungal occupation⁵⁸) demands condescending to become no less monstrously mutagenic; “I’m not frightened, merely giddy [*vertiginous*]. I must break down the distance between the enemy and myself. Confront him *horizontally*.” (*H*, # 48) Fated to a grave and grounded combat, however, risks leaving each resistance fighter aporetically paralyzed, like Augustine’s monstrous will: “Alone and manifold. Watching and sleeping like a sword in its scabbard. A stomach in which foods are kept separate. A candle’s altitude.” (*H*, #74)

What keeps Char and his team inspired are the waves of affection enabled by the impersonal intimacy of transmissible, coded contact with other resistance cells. Connected only by the chirping code of distant transponders, each cell of resistance fighters “are like those frogs who, in the austerity of the marshes at night, call to but cannot see one another, bending the fatal arc of the universe to their cry of love.” (*H*, #129) This is enough to sustain the desire to escape from Nazism and to fight for freedom.

Thus, in moments of failure, death, and defeat when “the symphony that buoyed us up has fallen silent,” Char can only “trust the alternation of powers” (*H*, #93) to stave off becoming “bogged down in the rut of results.” (*H*, #2) “I will write no poem of acquiescence,” (*H*, #114) vows Char: “Over and against whatever’s out there, against ALL THAT: a Colt .45 with its promise of sunrise!” (*H*, #50) In those moments, when “thrust into the unknown, which burrows deep,” he counsels: “force yourself to keep turning” (*H*, #212). Like Arendt’s theoretical ‘turning operations,’ Char’s poetic and

⁵⁸ Cf. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 471: “It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never ‘radical,’ that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface.”

political emphasis on reversibility finds apt expression in the wartime poem, “*Carte du 8 novembre*,” from the collection written alongside *Hypnos, Seuls demeurent*. Van Kelly remarks an important inversion in Char’s depiction of the Resistance, writing:

Historian Madeleine Baudoin quotes an order from the regional military staff of the *Comit français de libération nationale* in summer 1944, urging all resisters in Marseille to ‘strike down *miliciens*’ without warning, ‘as if they were mad dogs.’ In Char’s version, however, the resister has become an attack dog defending its territory. The poem, like the Allied invasion, signals the ‘inversion’ of the hunted into hunter which... typified the growth of the internal Resistance from November 1942 onward.⁵⁹

These turns, in turn, nourishes the receptive responsivity of *amor mundi*, allowing it to persist: “we must love one another well, must breathe more deeply than the executioner’s lungs.” (*H*, #193)

The poetic quality of these provocations, while beautifully disarming, also risks the impression that there is a lack of practicality to Char’s conduct of resistance. This is a mistake, despite the poetic reminder to “keep for later the imaginary part, which is, itself too, capable of action.” (*H*, #18) It is useful, then, to consider an excerpt from one of the lengthiest of Char’s aphorisms, which offers advice to his newly arrived ‘second,’ Pierre Zyngerman, upon the inauguration of the supply-chain outpost “ManDrop 12”:

Girls and cafes dangerous for more than a minute. But don’t pull too tightly on the reins, I don’t want a squealer in the team. No communication outside the team. Stamp out bragging. Check all intelligence against two sources. Allow for fifty percent fancy in most

⁵⁹ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 113.

cases.... Other than to rescue captured comrade, never let the enemy know you exist. Intercept suspects. I leave it to you to judge.... Friendship muffles discipline. When working, always do a few kilos more than the others, without taking pride in the fact. Eat and smoke conspicuously less than they do. Don't favor one person over another. Tolerate only spontaneous, gratuitous lies.... Suggest precautions but allow them the merit of finding them out for themselves. Rivalry excellent. Oppose monotonous habits and encourage those you don't want dying out too soon. *Last but not least, love the ones they love, at the same moment they do. Add, don't divide.* All well here. Affectionately. HYPNOS" (*H*, 87 – emphasis mine)

Even the terse pointillism of Char's tactical star-chart cannot help melting into a cosmically expansive wave of immanent amorous openness: add, don't divide.

Practicing resistance also, then, must elaborate an affective strategy that understands how important it is to "overcome our rage and disgust and see that they are shared by others; our influence will gain in quality and scope, as will our morale." (*H*, #100) The tactical advantage of this affective arithmetic is attested to in a lengthy and harrowing scene which concludes with Char affirming the potency of non-sovereign politics: "I was attached to these beings by a thousand trusting threads, not one of which had broken. I loved my fellow men ferociously that day, far beyond the sacrifice."⁶⁰ (*H*, #128) Thus, to become a 'challenger' in resistance is not just to oppose an external enemy – Nazi occupiers and Vichy collaborators – but also to challenge oneself to trust

⁶⁰ Compare to H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, pp. 33: "It was nothing less than the weight of the entire Christian tradition which prevented them from owning up to the fact that they were enjoying what they were doing far beyond the call of duty."

the enactment of ones own desire for freedom and the desires of others for the same as capable of opening and sustaining the gaping abyss of a common world.

“Be of the leap...” (H, #197)

Arendt’s interpretation of Char’s *Hypnos*, in both *On Revolution* and *Between Past and Future*, is marked by striking *love* from the recollection of Archduke’s experience of public freedom, leaving its pleasures obscene (off-stage, privative). The effect is to render this element of enduring Resistance inexplicable and the possibility of *enjoying* its hardships and losses perverse at best, if not outright absurd. Love, Arendt claims, collapses the “in-between” – the *inter-esse* – through and around which politics may play out⁶¹. Yet, the Nazi occupation of France bears a striking similarity to the closure of this worldly gap, which Arendt describes as having “emptied, from one day to the next, the political scene of the country, leaving it to the puppet-like antics of knaves and fools” – men like Eichmann – while those like Char, who had otherwise “never participated in the official business of the Third Republic were *sucked into politics* as though with the force of a vacuum.” (B, 3 –emphasis mine)

As already noted, Arendt claims the hidden world of the Resistance came “to constitute *willy-nilly* a public realm where – without the paraphernalia of officialdom and hidden from the eyes of friend and foe – all the relevant business in the affairs of the country was transacted in word and deed.” (B, 3 – emphasis mine) This paradoxical tension sustaining the public of resistance is of a kind with that barely balanced by the polarized hyphen dampening the ‘monstrous’ conflict between the will’s alternations between “*velle*” and “*nollo*” said to qualify the constitution of the partisan public as

⁶¹ H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, pp. 86; *The Human Condition*, pp. 241-242

“willy-nilly.”⁶² The dyadic agony of the Augustinian will is given reprieve, Arendt writes, “without premonition” (“cannot be mental”), only in an “act which – often like a ‘*coup d’état*,’ in Bergson’s felicitous phrase – interrupts the conflict between *velle* and *nolle*. And the prize... is, as we shall see, *freedom*.”⁶³ To that end, the last third of this section more thoroughly fleshes-out the amorousness animating the ‘gap’ of action.

In order to do so, I turn to Arendt’s treatment of the will in *The Life of the Mind*, where love plays a surprisingly prominent role. This is because, with respect to the will, “Love,” Arendt writes through Augustine (and only a few years after publishing *Between*), “is not extinguished when it reaches its goal but enables the mind ‘to remain *steadfast* in order to *enjoy*’ it.”⁶⁴ “For Augustine, according to Arendt,” Chiba clarifies, “love first and foremost signified the will to accept the being of the other unconditionally: ‘I will that you be – *Amo: Volo ut sis*.’”⁶⁵ Viewed this way, we can see how “‘love of the world’ is not simply a willing commitment to the welfare of the world,” as Chiba argues, “but also a matter of perception of the self and the self’s relationship to the surrounding world.”⁶⁶ Thus, though I follow when Shin Chiba argues, “Arendt’s reflection on willing in her later years also suggests a basic congruity with what we have characterized as a political theory of *amor mundi*,” I dispute his subsequent contention that “Arendt herself nowhere attempted to connect willing with the notion of *amor mundi*.”⁶⁷

To the contrary, Char’s poetic testament offers a glimpse of the relationship between voluntary political resistance and *amor mundi*. Just as it is love that breaks the

⁶² Cf. H. Arendt, *Life of the Mind, Vol. II: Willing*, pp. 94.

⁶³ H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978). *Vol. II: Willing*, pp. 101.

⁶⁴ H. Arendt, *Willing*, in *The Life of the Mind, Vol. II: Willing*, pp. 102.

⁶⁵ S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” pp. 534.

⁶⁶ S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” pp. 533.

⁶⁷ S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” pp. 533.

deadlock of the willy-nilly faculty of the will, love also breaks out into opening ad hoc willy-nilly publics in the amorous action of armed insurgency. *Hypnos* thus challenges partitioning love exclusively to psychic, private life by claiming for it a politically remediating public quality unconsidered, or insufficiently developed, in Arendt's thinking, which, nevertheless, inflects her appreciation for Char's poetics. Char testifies to love as a vitalizing and remediating font of endurance and, more forcefully, "outs" this affection as world enacting: "The moment I yield to that foreboding which dictates man's cowardice in life, I bring into the world a host of undying friendships that comes rushing to my aid." (*H*, #66) In another aphorism Char sharpens his focus on the amorous amity of resistance:

I love these people so enamored of what their hearts imagine to be freedom that they offer up their lives to prevent what little freedom remains from dying. The virtue of the common man is marvelous. (Free will, they say, does not exist. Human beings are defined by cells, by hereditary traits, by the brief or more extended duration of their fate... Yet between *all that* and mankind is an enclave of unforeseeables and metamorphoses, which we must guard the entrance to and make sure is preserved.) (*H*, #155)

Amorous affection for the love others express for freedom, enamored of this 'common' virtuosity, arouses Char's courage and sustains his desire to augment the worldly 'enclaves' or, in Arendt's words, "the small hidden islands of freedom," entrusted to/by the Resistance (*B*, 6). In Chiba's words, "The 'love' of the world, however, even here means 'the spring of action' which restrains the fluctuation, contingencies, and

arbitrariness of the will by giving ‘weight’ and ‘permanence’ to the soul, so that a sustained commitment to the world may become possible.”⁶⁸

It is worth recalling here that for Arendt the ‘hiddenness’ of these islands did not disqualify the intercourse “transacted in word and deed” from conducting “all [the] relevant business in the affairs of the country.” (*B*, 3) Might it not also be true that the ‘willy-nilly’ publics of the Resistance were also buoyantly amorous? After all, an account of non-privative de-privatized affairs played out in the darkness of secrecy is admittedly not readily recognizable as ‘Arendtian’; such political affairs and public spaces seem perversely turned inside out if the glorious light of the ancient *agora* is our model. Perhaps it is for exactly this reason that Arendt is so quick to strike love from this already dangerously inverted scene of naked politics, lest an already queer stage mount further obscenities.

Perhaps, further, ambivalence about this inverted ‘public politics’ accounts for why, after describing the “two interconnected parts” of Char’s naked-provocations, Arendt cites Char’s citation of Exodus. “At every meal that we eat together, freedom is invited to sit down. The chair remains vacant, but the place is set.” (*H*, #131) But who better than Arendt to ‘talk back’ to Char by reminding him freedom will never appear at table, that the perfumed aura of freedom visits only those who venture forth from their dining chambers? In this case, Char: “Be of the leap, not of the feast, its epilogue.” (*H*, #197) Leaping, *pace* Kierkegaard, is not a matter of faith for Char; the vulnerable heights he risks are sustained by a “thousand trusting threads,” a loving net that not only promises to catch his fall but also to fish him out from despair.

⁶⁸ S. Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” pp. 534

III. Queering the *Amor Mundi* of Resistance

If the previous two sections highlighted the relationships between both the activities of reflective-provocative thinking and friendly doings (I), and willful world-making and world-enacting (II), by teasing out the common quality of suffering-delight, then here I would like to provisionally link the examination of Arendt's queer Cynicism to the relationship between judging and parrhesiastic cosmopartisanship. Char is again a polestar guide through the otherwise murky conceptual terrain of the relationship between judging and principled action to the extent that *Hypnos*, and its companion wartime collection *Seuls demeurent*, displays Char drawing from his experience in the Resistance to analogize his task as a poet (*H*, #97). As part of the supply chain linking Allied forces in England to the Resistance throughout France, Char's political task was to 'amass and disperse' the 'treasures' of his nocturnal missions. So it is with *Hypnos*, that the 'treasure' of the experience of resistance is amassed aphoristically so that its 'leaves' may be dispersed as a media, into the world. This also *leaves Hypnos* a crystalline map to the elusive lost treasure of revolutionary enlightenment. Would the "lost treasure" of revolutionary modernity have surfaced for Arendt absent Char's poetic polestar?

To answer definitively is only speculation, but attending to the coupling of Char and Sophocles in *On Revolution* opens space considering the stature of *Hypnos*' testament. In *The Human Condition* Arendt writes that speech can also register as action, as when "great words, counteracting the great blows of the overproud, teach understanding in old age." (*THC*, 25ft.8) This is the sense in which she approaches the significance of *Billy Budd* in *On Revolution*, arguing Melville knew how to, given his experience of American democracy, "talk back" to the French Revolutionaries (*OR*, 84).

This was also how she approached Char (in *On Revolution*), as a mask through which to sound the lamentable realization of the American revolutionaries that, in founding their new republic, they had lost the treasured public happiness of their freedom to act *as public, political persons*.

In the context of *On Revolution*, then, Arendt seems to only treat *Hypnos* as a testament to something lost, “doomed” to disappear in practice, and not in the sense of Char having found “the right words at the right moment.”⁶⁹ Patchen Markell notes Arendt’s citation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* is the only moment in *The Human Condition* where her attention is trained on a prospective action, rather than a retrospective analysis, and this may help explain why Arendt’s treatment of Char’s ‘fleeting’ political affairs in *On Revolution* is freighted with ‘historical’ heaviness.⁷⁰ But it is important to remember that not only did Char draft *Hypnos* to disseminate a provocative desire for resistance, but also that its initial publication was intended to anticipate impending national elections as a ‘counteracting’ expression to the triumphalism of de Gaulle’s unifying transitional government.⁷¹ What might it mean, then, to read the ‘will’ bequeathed by Char with *Hypnos* as a defiant ‘promise’, as an exemplary act of ‘talking back’? Might we not want to begin by following Arendt’s own sense that *Hypnos* expresses “an appeal to thought for the prospective survivors no less urgent and no less passionate than the appeal to action of those who preceded him”? (*B*, 9)

As I suggested throughout this chapter, ‘completion’ is tantamount to provocation in Arendt’s usage. This is at once a provocation to think, a stimulation of the will, and a

⁶⁹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 26.

⁷⁰ P. Markell, “The Moment has Passed,” pp. 125.

⁷¹ M. Hutchinson, “Introduction,” *Hypnos*, pp. ix. *Hypnos* was not, in fact, published in its entirety until after the elections, but a large selection, published in *Fontaine*, was hastily made available before the vote.

solicitation of judgment. In this respect, judging is another sense in which ‘natality’ is exercised, itself a concept illuminated with a gesture toward the *mythos* of virginal birth. When Char affirms that the act is virgin, even when repeated, he enacts this sense of natality; and when he aphoristically disseminates his deeds in crystalline verse, they establish a media around, through, and from which the promise of a public realm of resistance resounds anew. How we comprehend the promise of recollection-provocation is a question of valuation. But, like action and poetic fabrication, the faculty of judging has neither an authoritative lineage, nor a proper *genos*. *Nothing in Char’s verse justifies his actions* and, indeed, he chides his readers, “Let the mind find its own way without the aid of staff maps.” (*H*, #125) His violence and his virtue alike are monstrously virgin, and to love what they mean – to judge his words and deeds affirmatively – is to become aroused to this irredeemable condition of existence amidst the gratuity of plurality.

So, *On Revolution* concludes with Arendt reflecting on Char’s *Hypnos* in an effort to articulate the inchoate sense of loss accompanying revolutionary action, with Char providing a retrospective clarity in this context that allows, in the final passages of the book, an affirmation of the revolutionary enlightenment tradition as a tragic inheritance of lost treasures and broken, because over-promised, promises.⁷² The prefatory essay to *Between Past and Future*, however, opens the space to cast a line of flight from this tragic, retrospective emplotment by way of a remediating return to Char’s verse that no longer seeks to find comprehensive clarity so much as the provocative promise of a cruising politics to come. This coming politics is scandalous insofar as it plays out a foundling, not founding, politics. It is an anarchic politics that comes without title or rank

⁷² For a reading of *On Revolution* through a tragic generic emplotment, cf. D. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

or sovereign legitimacy, which is not so much fugitive as ‘impressed’ and thus less exposed to poisonous *ressentiment* because nakedly stammering.

Moreover, it is a queer politics crystallized in wartime verse signed *en catimini* and dispatched as though a love-letter addressed to unknown ‘survivors’ to come. They are the ones who will have to answer when the question is posed, “Are we doomed to be only the beginning of truth?” (*H*, 186) They are the ones for whom “the present, an embattled parapet...” arouses them to action, to “fight on the bridge thrown between the vulnerable individual and his ricochet at the fountainhead of formal power.” (*H*, #183)

Thus, in Char we see how, “‘War terms create a readerly path into the difficult crux of Char's debate over poetry and history’ and into his depiction of the esoteric community or community of special election to which he belonged - the internal Resistance – which in his own experience not only fostered struggle against oppression, but poetic values, too, of beauty and individual voice or idiom.”⁷³ This is because Char’s redeployment of a “war lexicon is not merely an overlay or a patina. It is as foundational as his lyrical flights toward Beauty. With the terms of conflict and resistance, Char opens his impulse out toward action and history, or, as Jean-Claude Mathieu says, ‘The illocutionary force situates the writer in relation to history...the act of writing appeals to acts that are no longer written’.”⁷⁴

For Van Kelly, who examines the relationship between Char’s poetics and Foucault’s stylistics, these considerations, moves us closer to Foucault's critical, *parrhesiastic* perspective:

⁷³ V. Kelly, “Passages of Resistance,” pp. 114.

⁷⁴ V. Kelly, “Passages beyond the Resistance,” pp. 115.

The poet is not made helpless by history's turns, nor are his goals limited and overwhelmed by events; instead he is spurred to actions that deflect a history-still-in-the-making away from persecution and oppression, yet toward the values that poetry espouses: love, beauty, and freedom of expression within the bounds of loyalty. History is not just a language game, but Char does insist that thoughtful use of poetic imagination resists evil as a potential outcome of freedom.”⁷⁵

Thus, Kelly surmises, “Foucault dwells on the second paragraph or stanza of *Partage formel*, XXII, not for its portrait of the maquis, but because it evokes the ‘extraordinary powers’ of a legitimate [sic.] strangeness and dissent that fissure universalist, master narratives of history.”⁷⁶

If we are to judge, then Foucaultian genealogy – which glances about for what can be played, with an eye trained to scout out the anarchic ‘strangeness’ that fissures putatively absolute truths – offers a distinctly parrhesiastic *praxis* of valuation. In the next chapter, we will see how Foucault performs this *praxis* as an ethico-political expression within the contentious milieu of the *Cruising* scandal. Just as with René Char’s *amor mundi*, what is at stake is the capacity for the delightful pleasures of affectively suffering the world that Foucault seeks to revalue as worthy of not only defending, but also affirming. Admittedly, the stakes of a controversial film seem, at first blush, much reduced compared to resisting Nazi occupation. But, as I will argue, the fall-out from the film – that it effected a partitioning of *the* gay community along class, geographic, and

⁷⁵ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 122.

⁷⁶ V. Kelly, “Passages Beyond the Resistance,” pp. 123.

also sexual lines – dramatically shaped the way queers were motivated, and mobilized, to resist the AIDS crisis that first erupted only one year after *Cruising* debuted.

Chapter 4. Scandalous *Parrhēsia* in *Cruising* Times

Sex is not a fatality:
It's a possibility for creative life.
-M. Foucault, 1982

In the previous two chapters the mobile heuristic of *cruising politics* served primarily as an exegetical tool for interpreting Friedrich Nietzsche's will-to-power-bottom as an affirmation of *amor fati* in an embrace of radical receptivity to given worldly plurality, and Hannah Arendt's *amor mundi* in her agonal account of action as animated by a profoundly amorous responsiveness to the suffering-delight of participation in political affairs. In this chapter, my focus is on bringing the dynamics of cruising politics thus elucidated to bear on an historical event – the scandalizing production and distribution of the film, *Cruising* (1980) – to draw out the mode by which this comportment to political affairs serves to also endow political actors with a capacity to exercise discriminating mode of pluralist judgment when in the breach of contested events. My primary interlocutor in this effort is Michel Foucault, whose later investigations into Cynical *parrhēsia* frame my interest in his participation in a cluster of interviews conducted for queer publications, geared toward queer audiences.

In biographical and queer theoretical treatments alike, these interviews are, ironically, treated as confessional and are routinely couched as if Foucault were attempting a political, or cultural, defense of his own proclivities for S/M leather-sex.¹ This has had the unfortunate, enduring effect of diminishing the import of what he

¹ Cf., for instance, J. Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

actually endeavors to *do* in these dialogical contexts, and of either relegating the material in these interviews to the all-too-easily ignored kinky margins of the “personal is political,” or of misrepresenting them as symptomatic of the depoliticizing “ethical turn” to merely “therapeutic” practices of the self.² This chapter pushes back on these interpretations of Foucault’s interventions in those interviews by situating his remarks within the historical horizon of the event of William Friedkin’s controversial film, *Cruising* (1980).

Cruising stars Al Pacino as an undercover NYPD officer dispatched as bait to lure out a serial killer targeting gay men in the New York City leather S/M scene. The popular and critical narrative about *Cruising* is that it is a patently homophobic film and, indeed, at the time it galvanized uprisings among a vocal and prolific segment of Manhattan’s queer community, who protested and sabotaged its “on-location” production, sparking further national opposition upon its release. This was also the view of one of Foucault’s interviewers, the queer activist and writer Alexander Wilson, who lauded the protests for reviving a liberationist collective gay identity in a 1981 article for *Social Text*.³ Left out of this triumphant narrative, however, is the messier history of queer participation in *Cruising*, as leathermen acted as extras and served as consultants to Friedkin.

This chapter essays its intervention at precisely the erasure of this fault line, as it pertains both to the historiography of 1970s gay sexual liberation and recent Foucault scholarship. Though neither *Cruising* nor the divisive protests against it are ever

² Cf. E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).; L. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³ Foucault was in Toronto for the International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies (1982), teaching a seminar on “Telling the Truth About Oneself.” Cf. Falzon, Christopher, et. al., ed. *A Companion to Foucault* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 77.

mentioned explicitly, the substance of the interview with Wilson centers on precisely the normative tensions strained by the film within the queer community. Their exchange, which I read as exemplary of the debates of the time, pivots on the value and meaning of S/M leather-sex to gay politics and the role of a collective identity as a stabilizing, unifying political signifier.

These themes were prominent in an article Wilson had written on the unequal development of gays, ghettoization, and Friedkin's film for *Social Text* (Autumn, 1981), which concluded *Cruising* was a "sterling example" of a homophobic "project of exploitation." As an event, the film threatened to represent queer intimacy as the perversion of loving relationships into pathologically promiscuous, potentially lethal sexual exchanges transacted in the bars, clubs, and bathrooms of gay ghettos. For many North American gay activists like Wilson, national protests against *Cruising* challenged such 'corruption' with a renewed class-consciousness.⁴

Against the horizon of *Cruising*, then, Foucault's interventions emerge not as personal apologia, but as a biting critique of the exclusionary treatment of S/M leathermen and as an attempt to *scandalously invert* the implications of Wilson's (and others') reactive, universalizing identity politics.⁵ While not uncritical of S/M, Foucault works to recuperate the relational styles of queer S/M leather-sex as exemplifying the ethical interface of the "use of pleasure" and the "care of the self," and to revalue queer ghettos for enabling the cultivation of such world-enacting affairs in ways otherwise foreclosed. Taken together, my argument concludes by arguing the (failed) attempt to

⁴ On the impact of class in these debates, cf. D. Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); D. Greven, *Psycho-sexual: Male Desire in Hitchcock, De Palma, Scorsese and Friedkin*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁵ Many thanks to Daniel Defert for confirming that Foucault had not only seen *Cruising*, had also enjoyed it.

speak frankly about the culture dramatized by *Cruising* exemplifies a mode of exercising a pluralist approach to political judgment immanent to the dynamics of receptive-responsivity motoring cruising politics that is animated by affirming the risks haunting marginal, fragile queer relations for the sake of resisting the impoverishment of worldly plurality.

To advance this claim I begin by sketching two competing accounts of Foucault's ethics offered by Ella Myers' *Worldly Ethics* and David Halperin's *Saint Foucault* (I). In my critical reconstruction of their interpretations of Foucault's ethic of the care of the self as the use of pleasure I also work to make space for my own approach, facilitated by the heuristic of cruising politics, that finds in his elaboration of ethics practices that include *problematization* and the experimental *invention* of novel relations of pleasure. I then turn to the historical context of the production of *Cruising*, which was shot on location in the summer of 1979 in Manhattan's Greenwich Village (II). This section relies upon a more historiographical approach that works to embed my interpretation in the specific milieu of queer community politics at the time, drawing from archival records to allow participants in the controversy to speak in their own voices as much as possible.

With this thick historical description establishing our horizon, I then turn to scholarship contemporaneous to *Cruising* and draw from more recent queer cinema and media studies to offer a "cruise" of the film for elements, themes, and techniques which, I argue, work against the presumption that it is a homophobic production (III). Instead, I argue that it productively, and even truthfully, advance its (fragmented) narrative as an explicit critique of heterosexist police and state violence, rather than queer pathology. I then bring these considerations to bear on Foucault's contributions to the aforementioned

cluster of interviews, curating them in a way that augments his dialogue with Wilson. (IV). At stake in this reconstruction is situating Foucault's contributions as responding to the ways in which the *Cruising* scandal raised the issues of S/M and queer identity politics, and which function as well to position his performance as modeling the potentialities of exercising a mode of critical valuation immanent to the dynamism of cruising politics.

Although I dissent from the enduring consensus that *Cruising* is a homophobic film, to avoid misunderstanding at the outset I must state that my interest is not to demonize the impetus of the queer protestors for whom direct action was felt to be an urgent and legitimate undertaking.⁶ On the contrary, activists and protesters displayed a remarkably creative and clever – that is to say, *queer* – approach to thwarting any seamless and easy production of the film. How can one *not* appreciate the tenacity of queers every time the dissonant shrilling of whistles interrupts the soundscape of *Cruising*?

Rather, my interest in this chapter is in staking out a critical relation to the popular history of *Cruising* by mining contemporaneous articulations of dissent in order to press against the prevailing judgment that the film is a noxious testament of a by-gone era. To this end, I approach *Cruising* as, ironically, a monumental media: a cinematic document that allows those of us who were not alive during the heyday of post-Stonewall, pre-AIDS sexual liberation a glance at what queer community might have plausibly *looked like*, even if this singular document does not exhaust such efforts or representations. What matters on this score is allowing the affirmation of the free appearance of worldly

⁶ On “felt legitimacy,” cf. E. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), Chapter Three.

plurality and the precarious relational forms that animate heterotopic experimentation in non-sovereign life, love, and sociality to inform mundane practices of judgment.

I. Two Takes on the Ethics of the Care of the Self as the Uses of Pleasure

Ella Myers' recent book, *Worldly Ethics*, offers an incisive critique of Foucault's genealogy of ethics as self-referential, therapeutic, and potentially depoliticizing. Rather than counter "widespread disengagement from politics," the hope that ethics "will motivate civic participation" actually undermines democratic political practices of contestation.⁷ Citing Arendt, Myers argues politics acts out a care for the world in its given plurality, and so an ethic that can translate into worldly political action "must be inspired by and continually connected to larger political mobilizations."⁸ Whereas Foucault seems to "take for granted the idea that freedom would begin with changes in subjectivity that would bring about changes in the world," Myers contends "any self-care that might matter for democracy is sparked by and remains bound to public efforts to bring 'matters of fact' into view as common 'matters of concern'."⁹ For her, there is a "genuine gap" that "separates practices of self-artistry from collaborative efforts to shape the habitat in which people live."¹⁰

From a different vantage, David Halperin astutely notes Foucault's interest is drawn to precisely the "thoroughly *impersonal* conception of 'the self'" animating the ethical stylistics of s/m.¹¹ The *askesis* of an ethical care of the self entails exercises,

⁷ E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, pp. 3-4.

⁸ E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, pp. 15; 45.

⁹ E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, pp. 51.

¹⁰ E. Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, pp. 49.

¹¹ Foucault notes, "not only do I not identify this ancient culture of the self with what you might call the Californian cult of the self, I think they are diametrically opposed." Halperin continues, "in the classical Greek world... self-fashioning was not to discover one's 'true self' but to work on the self so as to

rituals, or habits that “*empty* the self of precisely those passions and attachments that make the self, according to the modern view, something individual, personal, and unique.”¹² Hardly an asceticism of denial or renunciation, Foucault productively approaches such stylistics as allowing subjects to become “infinitely more susceptible to pleasures.”¹³

Pleasure, like power, is always for Foucault a matter of *relations*: “pleasure is something which passes from one individual to another; it is not secreted by identity. Pleasure has no passport, no identification papers.”¹⁴ The myriad practices of s/m “represents an encounter between the modern subject of sexuality and the otherness of his or her body.”¹⁵ In this respect, s/m becomes “a potentially self-transformative practice.”¹⁶ Again, this is because the intensely decentering pleasures generated by S/M “makes possible a new relation between the body and pleasure” that “detaches sexual pleasure from [heteronormative, phallogocentric] sexuality.”¹⁷

However, we must wonder whether the consequence of placing desubjectivizing sexual ascesis at the heart of queer politics is to, in Myers’ terms, depoliticize politics by rendering it ‘therapeutic.’ Indeed, it seems s/m becomes less a relationship of eroticized asymmetrical power amplified and manipulated by the participants as it does a self-referential mode of the care of the self. Halperin, however, anticipates this depoliticizing possibility, and so draws from Foucault to argue, “the most interesting things about S/M and fist-fucking... may not have been their allegedly disaggregating impact on the

transform it into a vehicle” and its ethical practices dramatize a “specific strategy for gaining power over oneself and over others.” D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 74

¹² D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 75

¹³ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 81.

¹⁴ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 95.

¹⁵ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 88.

¹⁶ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 89.

¹⁷ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 87.

individual subject of desire but their incongruous integration into ‘homosexual ways of life.’”¹⁸ Citing Gayle Rubin’s pioneering work (equally admired by Foucault), Halperin posits that perhaps what is significant is how,

Fist-fucking and S/M did not remain merely occasional or isolated practices but became linked to other expressions of subcultural development, including dress, patterns of life and work, the transformations of neighborhoods, the growth of community organizations, the provisions of public services, the staging of athletic events, and ultimately the emergence of locally based and funded social and political groups.¹⁹

In sum, Halperin maintains, “gay leathermen demonstrated dramatically how one could ‘use... one’s sexuality to achieve a multiplicity of types of relations,’ ‘to define and develop a way of life,’ ‘to construct cultural forms.’”²⁰

The *Body Politic* interview with Alexander Wilson, which is my primary object, exemplifies the practical edge of critically problematizing the relationship between ethical practices and political participation. It is conducted the summer prior to the lectures on *The Government of Self and Others* (1982-1983), which see Foucault isolating *parrhēsia*, or ‘free speech,’ as hinging axes of ethical self-stylization (the relationship between the subject and truth) and of interpersonal political games (of relations to regimes of knowledge and power).²¹ Foucault claims that the ethical game of speaking

¹⁸ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 99.

¹⁹ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 99.

²⁰ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 99.

²¹ Cf. *The Government of Self and Others*. Ed. Fredric Gros. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010), which performs a reading of Euripides’ *Ion* as literally dramatizing the problematic relationship between truth-telling and democratic politics.

truthfully was problematized politically as comprising one ‘corner’ of a schematic grid including the additional points of “democratic participation,” “contestation,” and “courage.”²² Since ‘free speech’ might also be considered ‘idiotic,’ speaking frankly was doubly conditioned by second-order discriminations parsing good and bad, true and false *parrhēsia*.²³ Thus, far from yielding merely self-regarding therapeutic care, Foucault accentuates how ethical practices of *parrhēsia* stage intimately public scenes of contestation vulnerable to the agonistic judgment of others and subject to the power relations of the reigning political game.

Most importantly, however, Foucault is performing a *genealogy* of ethical practices, a history of the problematization of bodily pleasures in relation to worldly freedom, and so his observations are not static, synchronic prescriptions.²⁴ Rather, the genealogist learns “to laugh at the solemnities of the origin” and to discern “the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.”²⁵ Foucault augments Nietzsche’s genealogy of power, claiming:

Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized; they are made to serve this or that, and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed

²² M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, pp. 175-176.

²³ M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, pp. 180-184.

²⁴ Cf. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Press, 1990).

²⁵ M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in - *Essential Foucault*. Ed. Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas Rose. (New York: New Press, 2003), pp. 353.

them; introducing themselves into this complex mechanism, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their own rules.²⁶

Read in this light, Foucault is perfectly consistent in his work: the subject is constantly in an agonistic and productive relation to unstable, inessential, and disparate regimes of normative truth and power.

A recurring exemplar of the potential to exercise *freedom* within this dynamic historical process is the figure of the homosexual in psychiatric, juridical, normative, and political discourse. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault argues that it is undeniable that “the appearance in nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and ‘psychic hermaphroditism’ made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity’; but it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.”²⁷

In an interview for *Ethos* conducted with Stephen Riggins – in June of 1982, in Toronto (the same milieu for the interview with Wilson for the *Body Politic*) – Foucault is asked, “is there an ethical concern implied in *The History of Sexuality*?” to which he replies: “No. If you mean by ethics a code that would tell us how to act, then of course *The History of Sexuality* is not an ethics. But if by ethics you mean the relationship you

²⁶ M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Essential Foucault*, pp. 359.

²⁷ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: an Introduction*, pp. 101.

have to yourself when you act, then I would say that it intends to be an ethics.”²⁸ For the genealogist, this relationship is one of cruising a given milieu for the possible strategic reversals or torsions enabled by a regime of truth with an eye toward the freer stylization of relations to self and others in the world.

On this view, the “truth” of the subject is her ability to productively subject the rule or *arche* of power-relations to its own truth, the truth of its reversibility, mutability, and plastic polyvalence, its immanent anarchy. A political genealogy of the historical present similarly amplifies the contingency of truth by queering the practices of truth-telling relating subjects to normative power. Such an ethic offers a political style of strategic positioning and attunement I’ve been theorizing as cruising politics.

II. Incoherence, Clones, *Faggots*, and *Ressentiment*

Before glancing through some choice scenes from *Cruising*, it is worth sketching the broader socio-cultural milieu of which it is a piece. American New Cinema facilitates this quite well, serving as “not only one piece of the cultural pie but rather the visual arbiter and gauge of American political life.”²⁹ Films such as *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977), and *Cruising* (1980) purposefully sought to intensify the incoherence and contradictions of their narratives in an effort to mimetically represent the frenetic, often-oppositional dynamics animating the political milieu. As a prism for viewing the political scene, cinema of this period refracts the uneasy, precarious, and often exhausting efforts of negotiating the appearance of novel

²⁸ M. Foucault, “An Interview with Stephen Riggins,” in *Ethics*. Trans. Robert Hurley et. al., Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 131.

²⁹ Novick, Peter Andrew. “Silent Majority, Violent Majority: The Counter-Revolution in 70s Cinema,” *Entymema* (Vol. VII, 2012), pp. 514; Wood, Robin. “The Incoherent Text,” in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

political formations and assemblies; it strives to amplify the ambivalence of liberal *politesse* (and its failures) and conservative resentment (and reactionary moralism) in the face of often inchoate minoritarian political aspirations.

To this extent, narrative incoherence, subliminal a/v tracks, mirroring effects, and the diffusion of agency characterize these films with the effect that a viewer rarely enjoys classical cinematic supports; these films subvert easy conclusions, leaving spectators implicated in and unsettled by the openness of the film. This strategy of incoherence finds exemplary expression in *Cruising* and is marked by the desire for maximal dissimulation, the hyper-dissemination of agency across actors, objects, and spaces, and the thorough subversion of classical pillars of authority.

In this respect, the *ethic* of *Cruising*, Friedkin's *second* film about gay men, is diametrically opposed to his first – *The Boys in the Band* (1970) – but both are structured by the trope of identity crisis. A faithful cinematic rendering of the popular and critically well-received play by the same title, *Boys* is an ensemble piece staged around a birthday party thrown for a gay man by his gay friends. Written by Mark Crowley, an openly gay playwright, *Boys* debuted off-Broadway in 1968 and ran for over 1,000 performances. Loathsome to many, and for primarily this reason, *Boys* (the film) was marketed as a courageously real and intimate representation of gay men. This scintillating, voyeuristic-documentarian hybrid perspective is gratified through a series of increasingly hostile and hysterical crises of identity climaxing when the character of Michael—a stereotypically narcissistic, materialistic, self-loathing, Catholic alcoholic undergoing psychoanalysis—declares: “show me a happy homosexual, I’ll show you a gay corpse.”

The truth about homosexuals that *Boys* documented was that a “gay” identity was a lie, and that the suffering and pain of profound loneliness was, in fact, the intimate secret truth of *being* homosexual. Over the course of the party Michael is *revealed to be* truly (self-)hateful, and, as though mimetically confirming his own reliance on the authority of psychoanalytic nosology, *Boys* (both on stage and screen) isolates this pathos in Michael’s sexual identity. Michael hates his identity as a gay man, an identity he can neither escape nor embrace. Released between the militant gaiety of Stonewall and the first Gay Liberation Day parades in the United States, newly galvanized gay and lesbian viewers saw *The Boys in the Band* as screening precisely the internalized shame queers needed to overcome, personally *and* politically.

The decade that separates *Boys* from *Cruising* witnesses the proliferation of styles and strategies oriented toward this effort in the North American gay community, especially in New York and San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto. And, while it is impossible to do due diligence to the rich plurality of these political assemblages, counter-publics, and networks of friendships, it is nevertheless possible to observe that this period saw serious disagreement over *how* addressing this felt need was to be best conducted.³⁰ In this way, *Cruising* as an *event* (spanning production, marketing, distribution and release) occasioned the intensification of some of these disagreements into acts of public, political conflict.

Especially pertinent to the conflict surrounding *Cruising*, and relevant to the extent that it signals an ascendant unease between more radicalized sexual liberationist activists and putatively “depoliticized” gay men, was the adoption of a hyper-masculine,

³⁰ Warner, M. *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002); J. D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, & Sharan Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

mustached leather clone aesthetic.³¹ Derek Nystrom's welcome historicization of the *Cruising* controversy within the dynamics of class politics in New Hollywood is a welcome complexification of the event. As much as fluidity and incoherence animate the film, Nystrom cautions the over-determination of this cinematic trope at the expense of understanding the background conditions of economic disparity animating the scene. It is undeniable that part of what was so disturbing about the hyper-masculine clone culture it depicts was the eroticization of the unfettered "working-class signifiers in which this fantasy is dressed up." The bars and backrooms of the film, resembling warehouses and machine shops, are "spaces that mimicked, and eroticized, sites of working-class labor. Yet the dominance and submission of these spaces in *Cruising* is not that of the Taylorized shop floor but instead the sexualized parody of such relationships."³²

While this reassemblage of masculinity in the hyperbole of clone leather culture is potentially parodic, Nystrom also argues that part of what was so alluring, but also potentially unnerving, to the "professional-managerial class" (PMC) of gay viewers was the threat of what Foucault will call unforeseen "alliances" and novel "lines of force" being developed in these spaces, for, unlike discos and bathhouses, private clubs like the Mineshaft had a considerably less prohibitive cost of entry, and the Badlands neighborhood was geographically accessible by bridge and tunnel to outer-borough denizens. Parody, father-camp, and male drag, all seemed to threaten, ironically, the emasculation of 'respectable' and 'normal' labor precisely to the extent that the social capital of 'market virility' is dissolved in the anti-social libidinal economy of freely

³¹ J. D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity."

³² D. Nystrom. *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*, pp. 147.

circulating relations of pleasure.³³ The affront on both traditional masculinity and reputable employment dramatized in clone culture was often, Nystrom provocatively claims, articulated in the ambivalence and incoherence of attraction *and* repulsion to the ‘emancipated’ (sexual) bodies of these men among queers of the PMC.

Indeed, queer erotophobic backlash to ‘liberated’ gay sexuality could be said to have peaked only the year prior with the publication of Larry Kramer’s *Faggots* (1978). Kramer depicted the promiscuous, kinky, and anonymous sexuality of urban gay clones as risky, dangerous, painful, perverse, emotionally unsatisfying, and pathologically impersonal. *Faggots* is especially unrelenting on this last point: promiscuous sexuality kills the capacity to love, de-personalizes bodies, cheapens relations, and corrupts the desire for intimacy: clone sex = slow death. The novel sparked great controversy at the time, and was so reviled that Manhattan’s only gay bookshop, The Oscar Wilde Bookstore, refused to carry it. What inflamed passions was not only the depiction of clone sex as such, but also the not so subtle denunciation of hyper-masculine gay clones as just as self-destructive, lonely, and self-hating as the nelly and feeble pre-Riot *Boys*, still, in a word: faggots.

Protest against *Cruising* more or less strained these increasingly calcified lines, often to the point of fracture. Roughly, there were four consistent objections to the film at the time, expressed in varying form and emphasis by different commentators, and which were often, but not always, braided together. First, overwhelmingly protesters saw the film as patently homophobic, largely for setting a slasher-murder-mystery in the gay s/m scene of Manhattan. Many viewed s/m as a fringe culture hardly indicative of their lives,

³³ D. Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*; B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity and Public Space* (PhD diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2007); E. Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

as a self-announced majority of mainstream gays and lesbians, and thus *Cruising* seemed designed to defame the image of ‘normal’ queers. Secondly, homophobic trafficking in leather s/m struck many as being merely exploitative, a cheap gimmick intended to sell tickets purchased at the expense of queer reputability. Third, and to this extent, Lorimar, Universal Studios, and Transamerica were profiteering from hate-speech that many activists contended would directly *cause*, if not at least indirectly contribute to, increased violence against gays and lesbians.³⁴ They refused arguments citing the 1st Amendment in the name of existential self-defense. Lastly, for many who read an initial draft of the script, most notably, Arthur Bell, *Cruising* was “ugly,” morally and aesthetically. The majority of critics overwhelmingly confirmed this judgment, especially the portrayal of the Badlands as “vile, sordid, dispiriting, and degrading. One can almost smell the piss in the doorways, the massive body odors of the steamy city streets.”³⁵

By contrast, some argued Friedkin’s incoherent aesthetic rendered *Cruising* “interesting” precisely as it raised, without settling, questions about identity, desire, power, family, and violence. Others defended the film as a welcome representation of gay men beyond the “sweater-set” or “queen” culture of effeminate, middle-class aestheticism. In this respect, many defended the film as a 1st amendment issue, and accused protesters of censorship. Few, however, suggested the film was *sexy* or alluring, perhaps because Friedkin himself had already boasted the film was realistic and

³⁴ Cf. Fruth *Media Reception, Sexual Identity and the Politics of Space* for an analysis of the disproportionate rates of violent crime afflicting queers in San Francisco in the years prior to *Cruising*.

³⁵ A. Sarris, “*Cruising* into Confusion,” cited in B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity and the Politics of Space*, pp. 111.

documentarian in style, promising, “Its depiction of sexuality, will turn a lot of people on.”³⁶

While I will focus primarily on how *Cruising* scandalized dynamics within the gay community, it is impossible to extricate the scene from its broader embedded socio-cultural milieu. With a budget of over \$17 million the film was slated to generate \$7 million in revenue for the city, and Mayor Ed Koch flatly refused to rescind municipal licenses and permits. In response to the threat of protest, the city also provided free NYPD security.³⁷ Protests by gay activists against the production saw “the most severe gay/police confrontations in New York between the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the Liberty Centennial riots of 1986.”³⁸

This is touch ironic given the thoroughly unsympathetic portrayal of the police in the film, but it deftly attests to the disorienting incoherence animating the political milieu. The *Cruising* scandal attests to the increasingly hostile normative attempts to foreclose incoherence and ambivalence, deny its capacity to arouse curiosity, experimentation, pleasure, or even emancipatory politics, and to proffer in its place a normative orientation allied with conventional social hierarchy and political respectability. Before AIDS discourse seemingly normalized the dubious suture between queer sex and risk, pain, and death, *Cruising*, destined for international distribution, struck upon precisely this already tender nerve within the gay community.³⁹ For, while it is disingenuous to suggest the film caused the emergence of erotophobic discourse within the queer milieu (any more than

³⁶ V. Russo, cited in B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 85.

³⁷ By contrast, San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein reportedly sent Lorimar a bill for hundreds of thousands of dollars to cover the costs of police overtime during the debut of *Cruising* in local cinemas.

³⁸ J. Brodsky, "The Mineshaft: A retrospective ethnography." *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 24, no. 3-4 (1993): 233-252: pp. 234.

³⁹ Cf. D.A. Miller, “*Cruising*,” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Winter, 2007), pp. 70-73.

AIDS did), it certainly served as an occasion to publicly, and politically, challenge the film – and the ‘normative viability’ of this style of queer life – on these grounds.

Protest against *Cruising* was initiated by *Village Voice* columnist Arthur Bell in the summer of 1979. He had received a pirated Xerox of the script and judged it “the most oppressive, ugly, bigoted look at homosexuality ever presented on screen,” and went on to encourage readers of his “Bell Tells” column to “give Friedkin and his production crew a terrible time if you spot them in your neighborhood.”⁴⁰ There was a prevailing sense that Friedkin was uninterested in the ‘truth’ of gay-male leatherman clone culture, and that this film would be merely exploitative. Even if it were possible to couch the depiction of clone culture in *Faggots* as a misguided but ultimately ‘knowing’ critic, *Cruising* promised no such pretensions and seemed to many to threaten a concretized representation of gay men as promiscuous and dangerous sexual deviants. In an open letter to Friedkin published by Doug Ireland, this concern is foregrounded: “You didn’t want to talk to anybody. Instead you went to the Mineshaft... and hired its people as consultants. Now we know that the Mineshaft is owned by two heterosexual ex-cops.... Well, since you wouldn’t talk to us, we decided to talk to you – in the streets.”⁴¹

At the same time there was concern that the film would be ‘inauthentic’ (a concern perhaps relevant to leathermen as well), there was also an undeniable current of

⁴⁰ A. Bell, “Bell Tells,” cited in S. Tucker, “Sex, death and free speech: the fight to stop Friedkin’s *Cruising*.”

⁴¹ Cited in S. Tucker, “Sex, Death, and Free Speech: the Fight to Stop Friedkin’s *Cruising*.” *Body Politic*, Issue 58, Nov. 1979, pp. 152. We should also note that, at least according to Brodsky’s “Retrospective Ethnography,” the bar was actually a “private club” that operated in a liminal zone of illegality rendered possible by graft. One cannot help but wonder whether, in part, that the owners were ex-cops contributed to the institution being able to function in this capacity for as long as it did, and even then, it was still subject to police raids in 1979, following production of *Cruising*. That Friedkin was also friends with one of these owners, who had previously consulted for *The French Connection*, also sparked his interest. Though likely apocryphal, Friedkin reportedly spent three months “cruising” the Mineshaft clad in only a jockstrap and a leather jacket, while accompanied by a mafia body-guard for protection.

erotophobia animating the protests. Reflecting on the demonstrations that greeted the release of *Cruising* months later, Edward Guthmann confirms “the nervous urge to deny the kinky corners of gay sexuality” was a “powerful factor in the fear-mongering” precisely because it “wasn’t about ‘respectable’ homosexuals, and it’s ‘peel-the-mystique’ look at S&M bars terrified gays who had worked so hard at winning and maintaining what little privilege they had.”⁴²

From a rather different perspective, Vito Russo, who would go on to write *The Celluloid Closet*, similarly complained “the majority of the gay sentiment against the people who frequent places like the Mineshaft was what stopped the *Cruising* demonstrations from becoming powerful and more effective.... I thought of Carl Wittman’s gay manifesto and how it said that no matter how bad things got our brothers were not the enemy and should not be attacked for what a sexist, corrupt society has turned them into.”⁴³ Thus, even while critiquing gay activism for confusing its “brothers” for the “enemy,” this line of thinking nevertheless betrays the deep ideological pretensions held by many of the most visible and vocal activists at the time.

Russo was not alone in drawing on Wittman’s *Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto* (1969), or in assuming its liberationist pretensions. Alexander Wilson cites *Refugees* to point out the ways *Cruising* “forced [gay men] to come to terms with the *contradictions* of our cultural and sexual practice.”⁴⁴ For Wilson, as for Wittman, these contradictions are bound up in the politics of the gay ghetto. Interestingly, Wilson cites

⁴² E. Guthmann, “The Cruising Controversy: William Friedkin vs. the Gay Community,” *Cineaste*, Vol. 10, No. 3. (Summer, 1980), pp. 2-8, pp. 5.

⁴³ V. Russo, Russo, Vito. “Middle Class Alarm,” in *Flaunting it!: a decade of gay journalism from the Body politic: an anthology*. Ed. Jackson, Edward, and Stan Persky. Toronto: New Star Books, 1982, pp. 207-208.

⁴⁴ A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” in *Social Text*, No. 4 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 98-109: pp. 108.

Guy Hocquenghem's "defense of a free, 'promiscuous' lifestyle" as symptomatic of a ghettoized ideology. Wilson writes that for Hocquenghem,

'What distinguishes gay men... is that our desire flows creatively in all directions and is not limited by identity. Cruising is the most rewarding kind of sexual experience because it is non-exclusive and depersonalized: we direct our desire immediately to its object—yet do not exclude other objects.' A gay politics, Hocquenghem says, ought to advance an 'Americanized' desire of non-romanticized, non-exclusive, non-privatized sexual activity; and strive for the abolition of the difference between public and private life.⁴⁵

On the basis of this cursory survey of Hocquenghem, Wilson quips, such "logic needs to be critiqued in broader terms," and continues on to cite Laud Humphreys: "Cruising for 'one-night-stands' is a major feature of the market economy of sex. In *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith postulated the ideal form of human relationships being specific, depersonalized, short-term, and contractual. This capitalist ideal is realized in the sex exchange of the homosexual underworld perhaps more fully than in any other social group."⁴⁶ That is, rather than actually contest the domination of a minoritarian (sexual) 'class,' he maintains Hocquenghem's politics of freely circulating desire and impersonal cruising reproduces capitalistic relations of (sexual, economic) exchange. And here, in contradistinction to the 'Americanized' desire Hocquenghem champions, Wilson evokes Wittman's depiction of the ghetto:

⁴⁵ A. Wilson, "Friedkin's *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality," 103-4.

⁴⁶ A. Wilson, "Friedkin's *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality," 104.

We are refugees from Amerika. So we came to the ghetto—and as other ghettos, it has its negative and positive aspects. Refugee camps are better than what preceded them, or people never would have come. But they are still enslaving inasmuch as we are limited to being ourselves there and only there.

Ghettos breed self-hatred. We stagnate here, accepting the status quo. And the status quo is rotten. We are all warped by our oppression, and in the helplessness of the ghetto we blame ourselves rather than our oppressors.⁴⁷

Yet, despite this appeal to the radical writings of '69, more recently Bryan Fruth has compellingly argued that at stake in the protests against *Cruising* was as much the “politics of space” as it was the potentially damaging representation of homosexuals.⁴⁸ He suggests that while gay ghettos are “a form of spatial resistance,” “the strategy, as a mode of resistance, is an ambivalent one.”⁴⁹ It is, for instance, implicated in the displacement of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic minorities through processes of gentrification, and the erection and enforcement of new borders, offering “security, amenity, and autonomy for some at the cost of others.”⁵⁰ Fruth remarks that at this time there was an increasing sense that despite the appearance of “difference, excess, surplus erotic and political energies, deviance and diversion,” gay ghettos, like all liminal spaces, were also “assimilable and assimilative.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ C. Whittman, *Refugees From Amerika: A gay Manifesto*, cited in A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” pp. 103.

⁴⁸ B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 97.

⁴⁹ B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 97.

⁵⁰ It should be equally well noted, as Gayle Rubin’s recent work on the migration of the gay ghetto in SF attests, queers suffer the effects of gentrification as much as other displaced minorities, ultimately finding themselves displaced as well. Cf. S. Schulman, *Gentrifying the Mind*; D. Chisholm, *Queer Constellations*.

⁵¹ B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 97.

We should be careful to note, however, that the “ghetto” in Manhattan at this time was distinct from, even if geographically adjacent to, the “Badlands.” This is important, since the latter was an industrial—*not* residential—neighborhood, which meant that at night the space became all the more amenable to public sex in alleys, on piers, in abandoned buildings, and after-hours private clubs with backroom or underground playgrounds. Further, the neighborhood was easily accessible by bridge, tunnel, path-train, and subway (allowing participants from geographically disparate neighborhoods spanning from Brooklyn, on the “L,” to Morningside Heights, on the “1,” to converge in the same space), and thus was not the exclusive domain of ghetto residents.

In other words, the conflict over *Cruising* pitted inhabitants of the gay ghetto against putatively low-class outsiders for their participation in a dramatic depiction of what was, at least for some, ordinary gay life. For Fruth, “the protests need to be understood... as an expression of a sense of entitlement rooted in middle-class values.”⁵² This reactive policing of the territorial and normative integrity of the ghetto was simultaneously occurring at precisely an historical moment when the clone, leather s/m life-style itself was increasingly coming under scrutiny as a ‘corrupt’ expression of commodified ‘false-consciousness’ born of the exploitation of the ghetto.

Braided into this false-consciousness was the hyper-masculinity implied by leather and clone culture. For these critics, the idea that s/m leather sex enacted a mode of male drag or ‘father camp’ was a feeble attempt to paper over the “objectification of people based on such things as age; body; build; color, size or shape of facial features, eyes, hair, genitals; ethnicity or race; physical or mental handicap; life-style; sex.” Citing the “Effemist Movement” of the early 1970s, Wilson argues part of the development of

⁵² B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 110.

liberationist ‘gay politics’ entailed the perpetual critique of “The Male Principle,” which “is chiefly characterized by an appetite for objectification, role-playing, and sadism.... We must therefore strive to detect and expose every embodiment of The Male Principle, no matter how and where it may be enshrined and glorified, including those arenas of faggot objectification (bars, baths, docks, parks) where power-dominance, as it operates in the selecting of roles and objects, is known as ‘cruising.’”⁵³

As if, perhaps, in critical dialogue with Pat Califia’s “The Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality” (1979), which had argued the fluidity and dynamism of s/m directly challenges the structuration of sex and sexuality around the hegemony of the so-called “male principle,” Wilson maintains emergent discourses concerning lesbian s/m similarly succumb to patriarchy. Skeptical of the notion that s/m promises a mode of liberatory politics for anyone, but especially women, he cites scholar and fellow writer for *Body Politic*, Mariana Valverde:

Ever-new forms of eroticism, yet more difficult positions, more bizarre pleasures... is this not too much like the production of ever more bizarre commodities characteristic of consumer capitalism?... *As Foucault has argued*, bourgeois society is not characterized by repression of the sexual as much as by its multiplication and intensification: there will always be yet another frontier, yet more shocking sex acts, and when faced with this sea of endlessly collapsing barriers we must stop to ask: Liberation for what?⁵⁴

⁵³ A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” pp. 106.

⁵⁴ M. Valverde, cited in A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” pp. 106 – emphasis mine.

There was, in other words, a sense that, politically, leather men (and women), s/m, and clone culture were at the very least retrograde.⁵⁵ Fruth cites Richard Goldstein's claim that s/m signaled for its critics a 'new conservatism', noting the "authentic" aesthetic of leather is "'passé,' contrasting the key chains and 'hot hankies' of the extras with the political buttons and pink triangles worn by the demonstrators."⁵⁶

Wilson refers to 1st Amendment defenses of the film as "mystifactory" given the "notion of freedom underlying the arguments of [John] Rechy and others is the limited one fashioned after a 'free market' economy. Those who own or control the media are allowed to print or film what they wish; the community, on the other hand, is a passive audience whose freedom is limited to their right to purchase in the marketplace."⁵⁷ This really is the sticking point for Wilson, and for so many of his contemporaries as well: the sense of *passively* suffering the political imposition of a putatively exploitative portrayal. For Wilson, "It is in the mass media that this twin project of attack and recuperation is most visible.... the media's project is to expose our [queer] culture in order to defuse it of its radical components, and at the same time to co-opt gay signs and forms (for example, language, fashion, social and sexual 'lifestyles') in order to draw them into mainstream North American culture."⁵⁸ On these grounds, "*Cruising* is a sterling example of that project of exploitation."

⁵⁵ Cf. J. D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity"; B. Fruth, in *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, similarly understands the desire for life to "get back to normal" in the wake of the film signals a desire for a "depoliticized" conception of community.

⁵⁶ B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 123. For a sense of the contested semiotic nature of the hanky as, alternately, fashion and code, cf. also Reilly, "'The Hankie Code Revisited: From Function to Fashion,'" *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* (2014: Vol. 1, No. 1.); D. Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*.

⁵⁷ A. Wilson, "Friedkin's *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality," pp. 102.

⁵⁸ A. Wilson, "Friedkin's *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality," pp. 109.

However, the matter becomes all the more complicated when we attend to the actual production of the film, which was shot on location in New York City gay bars and clubs, each populated with ‘regulars’ who agreed to ‘act’ as extras in the filming of these scenes. (Of this footage, over 40 minutes of semi-pornographic material was destroyed by the studio, which it deemed unworthy of archival preservation.)⁵⁹ Apart from those who spoke out in modest, reserved, or abstract support for the film, most notably the aforementioned author and queer pornographer, John Rechy (who had also served as a consultant for the film, and championed 1st amendment liberties in the press), a number of ‘extras’ took to the pages of *Mandate*, an internationally distributed German-based gay-male pornographic magazine, to make the case for their participation in the film.

For the men interviewed, at stake was their life-style as much as a defense of their decision to participate in the film. The parallels between censorship and the closet resonated for many:

Arthur Bell himself has always supported gay freedom. Freedom has to include freedom to go to the Mineshaft and freedom to make the movie *Cruising*. Why don't the protestors put their energy where it would matter? I have a lot of respect for Arthur Bell, but this time he is wrong. You can't stop creative expression.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This footage has been the subject of much conjecture. James Franco has made a docu-drama, *Interior, Leather Bar* (2013), under the influence of Michael Warner's tutelage. *Interior, Leather Bar* seeks to reimagine these lost 40 minutes of reel. Having screened the film at the Chicago Reeling Film Festival (Nov, 2013), I can only defer to Friedkin, who demurs: "What I saw had no resemblance at all to the missing 40 minutes of *Cruising*. There are fragments of those 40 minutes in the picture! There are little fragments of fist-fucking and golden showers and a lot of things that remain, but not to the extent that I filmed them. They're more to an impressionistic extent. People not being aware of what's going on would not be more enlightened from what's left in the film. It would be much more impressionistic."

⁶⁰ *Mandate*, "The Men of *Cruising*," cited in B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 90.

Another asserted his participation was about offering a more pluralist vision of the gay community: “The whole gay movement is about freedom of expression. Isn't the image of gays this movie depicts better than suggesting that all homosexuals are Nellie faggots? All gay people are *not* the same. It's important that people see this segment of gay life. We're everywhere. There's one in every family.”⁶¹ Far from simply asserting plurality and freedom of expression, however, these men often asserted the machismo of “the new homosexual” over-against popular mainstream fascination with effeminate gay men, and not without a trace of resentment: “When I protested on Gay Liberation Day back in June, the TV cameras were always on the queens,” one of the extras complained. “On the set of *Cruising*, there were *men*. This movie is going to destroy stereotypes, and even if it creates other stereotypes, it's positive. Macho straight men have a long way to go to be as much of a man as I am.”⁶²

For, while it is true that extras called protestors “emotionally disturbed militants, fat dykes, and sissy fluffs,”⁶³ according to Guthmann, protestors also “blocked passage to Friedkin’s waterfront production office, blew whistles to disrupt on-the-street filming, [and] harassed gay men working as extras with name-calling, intimidation, and anonymous telephone threats.”⁶⁴ Scott Tucker, writing in the aftermath of protests in 1979, likened the divisive environment to the scandalous fallout following Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann In Jerusalem*: “Gay people on both sides of the barricades were

⁶¹ *Mandate*, “The Men of *Cruising*,” cited in A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” pp. 103.

⁶² *Mandate*, “The Men of *Cruising*,” cited in A. Wilson, “Friedkin’s *Cruising*, Ghetto Politics, and Gay Sexuality,” pp. 105.

⁶³ *Mandate*, “On the Set of *Cruising*,” cited in Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity, and the Politics of Space*, pp. 91.

⁶⁴ E. Guthmann, “The Cruising Controversy,” pp. 3.

called Nazis, the protestors for their tactics, the S/M extras for their lives.”⁶⁵ Taken to be resonant with Arendt’s audacity to ask after the role of Jewish elites in facilitating deportations to camps from ghettos, and thus the role of minoritarian collaboration with oppressive power, Tucker further sharpens the polemical focus of his intervention: “If we are to know our enemies, we’d better *not* make a Nazi of Friedkin. But Arendt’s insight is useful in understanding him; he’s an extremely banal man. Nothing ‘alien’ is human to him. He’s not greatly evil himself; he’s just one of those people who makes great evil possible.”⁶⁶

In short, tensions ran high, and there appears to have been little restraint in rhetoric or tactics. Perhaps the sole exception to this prevailing mood was film critic and essayist Robin Wood, whose reflections on New Hollywood, “The Incoherent Text” (1980), is an attempt to reappropriate the film as radical and subversive. I suggested above that narrative and cinematic incoherence was a device increasingly deployed by New Hollywood directors, and Wood seizes upon this dimension of Friedkin’s film to “argue that the negativity of *Cruising* offers far more than can be *used*: that, whatever he may have intended (which remains, to me, largely mysterious), William Friedkin's film is by far... more radical and subversive” than the contemporaneous German film, *The Consequence* (1979), which was “widely regarded by gay activists as ‘positive.’”⁶⁷ For Wood, “the incoherence of *Cruising* is of a different order from that of *Taxi Driver* and *Goodbar*: its surface is deliberately fractured, the progress of narrative obscured. [...] In one respect, indeed, it presents its narrative as strictly impossible, providing cinematic

⁶⁵ S. Tucker, “Sex, Death, and Free-Speech,” pp. 157.

⁶⁶ S. Tucker, “Sex, Death, and Free-Speech,” pp. 157—initial emphasis mine.

⁶⁷ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 61.

statements that are not only contradictory but mutually exclusive.”⁶⁸ This is crucial for Wood because, just when the killer seems to be revealed, offering the “only...indisputable piece of cinematic evidence... is precisely where the narrative impossibility comes in.”⁶⁹

In other words, Wood is the first, and remains one of a few, to suggest that viewers never *know* who the killer is, if there is even only one killer, or if Burns (Pacino), after his time undercover, has become the killer, or was possibly the killer all along. By contrast, what is depicted for Wood is an overall culture of corruption and violence that within which queer culture must eke out space of appearance: “The film presents no positive images of gay culture, but then it offers no positive alternative of any kind to the corrupt and disintegrating society it depicts—certainly not a return to any possible traditional ‘normality,’ which (insofar as it is even hinted at) takes the form of a cop saying of his wife, ‘I’ll get that bitch.’”⁷⁰ This compels Wood to suggest, in the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis,

Somewhat explicitly but more by implication, the film’s real villain is revealed as patriarchal domination, the ‘Law of the Father’ that demands the rigid structuring of the subject and the repression of all conflicting or superfluous realities—the denial of the Other, both internal and external... It is a remarkable paradox that a film almost universally perceived as antigay should produce at its center one of the most fundamental social/psychoanalytic insights on which the case for gay liberation rests.⁷¹

⁶⁸ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 61-2.

⁶⁹ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 62.

⁷⁰ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 66.

⁷¹ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 69.

Indeed, Wood notes it is hard to believe the culture dramatized in these bars is hateful, violent, or pathological given “Friedkin's use of gay extras in the bar scenes in the pursuit of authenticity, many of whom look irrepressibly happy and energetic, especially in contrast to the haggard face of Al Pacino: we may ask ourselves how, if this is hell, so many people appear to be enjoying themselves in it.”

For Wood, anti-social negativity and “incoherence—the proof that the issues and conflicts [these films] dramatize can no longer even appear to be resolvable within the system, within the dominant ideology—testifies eloquently to the logical necessity for radicalism.” *Cruising*, and other films of New Hollywood, use this device to dramatically show “the only way in which the incoherence of these movies (the result, every time, of a blockage of thought) could be resolved would be through the adoption of a radical attitude: in *Taxi Driver*, the *consistent* critique of the patriarchal hero; in *Goodbar*, a commitment to feminism; in *Cruising*, to gay liberation; in all three, a commitment to social/sexual revolution.”⁷²

Aware of the concern that *Cruising* might confirm moral hygienic fears about the “contagiousness” of gay desire, Wood’s resistance to define this dynamic of the film as homophobic is telling. Indeed, he suggests that if can be said that homosexuality is a viral contaminant (i.e., if Pacino’s character “catches” “it” in “catching” “the Killer”), so too is the violence of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia equally lethally infectious. On the one hand, then, this incoherence calls for and even enables radical socio-sexual revolution; on the other, as Wood concludes his analysis of these incoherent films, “any promise of a radical vision they may seem to hold will have to be stored away for the future.... In the midst of the parade of demoralizing 'moral' reactionary movies heralded

⁷² R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 69.

in the late 70s by *Rocky* and *Star Wars*... we can already look back to Hollywood in the 70s as the period when the dominant ideology *almost* disintegrated.”⁷³

In spite of Wood’s critical reappraisal of *Cruising*, the impact of the event of the film on the broader queer community remained starkly contrasted. For commentators like Russo, Tucker, and Wilson, the protests galvanized gay activism at precisely a moment when it was seemingly threatened from the dual fronts of ghettoization and mainstream assimilation and expropriation. For others, especially within the leather and s/m scene, the protests elicited *disidentification* from “*the gay community*.”⁷⁴ Indeed, the fallout from the politico-memetic event continues to frame not only contemporary analysis of *Cruising*, but also popular histories of queer activism, especially the ensuing AIDS activism of ACT-UP, which would again repurpose the pink triangle, street demonstrations, and disruptive, confrontational protest in the challenge against heterosexist complicity in the catastrophic ravages of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

III. Glances of *Cruising*

Rather than read *Cruising* as a text, I propose we *cruise* three of its scenes. Central to this strategy is the *glance*.⁷⁵ The glance is central to both cruising as a practice, but also to understanding the material and affective *impact* of the film on its audience. *Cruising* is edited into a never-ending stream of transitions and micro-gestural or *figurative* schemas with the intention of inducing a synesthetic receptive experience of incoherence. Stylistically, it glances along the surface. The incoherence of the narrative

⁷³ R. Wood, “The Incoherent Text,” pp. 69.

⁷⁴ B. Fruth, *Media Reception, Sexual Identity and Public Space*, pp. 91. Cf. also J. Munoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁷⁵ E. Casey, *The World at a Glance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

only further ameliorates a strategy of ‘glancing’ through the film, precisely because each scene gives its viewers “the world” and does so on precisely an affective register of incoherent proliferation.

The film opens with the trope of dis-organization and corporeal dismemberment.⁷⁶ The very physical and material integrity of the body seems to be threatened, vulnerable and fragile in the face of an anonymous, disembodied violence. In keeping with Wood’s analysis of *Cruising*, we may see in one of the very first scenes, staged in a city morgue, the gruesome realization of this threat. In it, the precinct’s mortician denounces the detectives as playing a “numbers game,” concerned only with cases they can easily resolve on the basis of a confession.

As Foucault remarks in the essay, “On the Concept of the Dangerous Individual,” the strain of juridical procedures of veridiction, the intensified need to establish a true identity between the criminal and the crime (the doer and the deed), saw the promulgation of an entire apparatus of psychiatric expertise to fill-in the blanks as to the perverse motivations of the criminal.⁷⁷ At the same time, however, *Cruising* seems, by calling into question whether, indeed, the administration of justice is concerned with such painstaking disciplinary matters, to be gesturing instead toward the ascendancy of an actuarial model of state securitization, a “numbers game.”⁷⁸ At the very least, viewers are to understand the detectives do very little detecting, let alone honest investigating.

⁷⁶ Circumstances Unknown Pending Police Investigation (CUPPI) = Cupid? “Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me//sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up.” Sappho, *If not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Trans. Anne Carson. (New York: Vintage Books, 2002). pp. 265: Fragment 130. Can the destructive force of *eros* be cataloged and entombed “pending police investigation”?

⁷⁷ Foucault, “On the Concept of the Dangerous Individual,” Ed. James D. Faubion, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁷⁸ Cf. M. Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*. Trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).; *Security, Territory, Population*. Ed. Michel Senellart, Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007); G. Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7. For a

The very following scene offers spectators their initial view of cruising for queer sex that only further undermines whatever credibility the police may have in the film: two patrol officers, in a police cruiser, slowly make their way down the streets of the 6th Precinct and shake down a pair of cross-dressing leather-clad prostitutes, ultimately to coerce oral sex from them. At this very moment, viewers glimpse the Killer for the first time as he cruises behind the cruiser on his way to cruise the Mineshaft. This is just the first of many instances of mirroring, bleed, and diffusion in *Cruising*, and the location of the film in the leather bars of the gay s/m scene is perfectly amenable to this cinematic strategy.

Following Wood's "The Incoherent Text," we may begin by noting that one of the incoherencies of *Cruising* is the way homosexuality is cinematically depicted. Schematically, the *ethic* of *Cruising* is diametrically opposed to *The Boys in the Band*, which sought to isolate and reveal the true identity of its characters in their homosexual desires. By contrast *Cruising*, as David Greven observes, "is interested in surface and style rather than depth," and in this respect demonstrates Friedkin's "consistent effort to denature reality" such that it appears "a textbook case of [...] gender performance as reiterative and citational."⁷⁹ While Wood captured this dimension in the language of "contamination," Guy Davidson has recently examined *Cruising*'s "contagious relations."

Cloning Gay Shame

contemporary critical analysis of actuarial policing, cf. B. Harcourt, *Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing, and Punishing in an Actuarial Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ D. Greven, *Psycho-Sexual*, pp. 196.

Central to this contagiousness is the figure of the clone: “the same-looking, simulacral gay man, a copy for which there is no original.”⁸⁰ The gay clone, as a figure of late modernity, is predicated on a logic whereby “identification precedes identity” and enacts identifications through mimesis. “In *Cruising* the radical failure or disruption of the conventional protocols of narrative closure emphasizes a blurring of straight and gay categorizations and, collaterally, points up the fluidity of identity that is the flip side of commodified identity in contemporary consumer culture.”⁸¹

Greven supports this reading, arguing “the killer remains always a collection of components, all surfaces and objects, clothing and props.”⁸² Indeed, the effort to identify the killer by his sex-acts in the traces of his semen, found in a victim’s rectum, proves impossible as he “shoots blanks.” While often read by critics as suggesting the killer is ‘sick’ – in the old paradigms of psychiatric ‘perversity-degenerescence’ – I suggest this effectively denatures sex (acts) and sexual identity: the killer is anonymous, identifiable only through props and supplements, leaving no identifying trace in his sex. Indeed, what is unsettling about *Cruising* is precisely that it suggests without confirming, amidst frenetic cutting, scenes of passage and transition, entrances and exits, comings and goings, that the Killer could be anyone—a point underscored by the penultimate scene of the film wherein Burns’ girlfriend, Nancy (Karen Allen), dons the accouterments of leathersex, suggesting she may have been responsible for one of the killings, too. Friedkin’s choice to have the Killer portrayed by four different actors, three of whom also

⁸⁰ G. Davidson, “‘Contagious Relations’: Simulation, Paranoia, and the Postmodern Condition in William Friedkin’s *Cruising* and Felice Picano’s *The Lure*,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2005), pp. 23-64: pp. 47.

⁸¹ G. Davidson, “Contagious Relations”, pp. 54.

⁸² D. Greven, *Psycho-Sexual*, pp. 195.

play the Killer's victims in previous scenes, effectively renders the identity of the Killer impossible to identify.

This is a cinematic effect that mirrors mimetic gay clone culture in its obscuring of the *face* as the site of truth, as the location for the revelation of truth. If, as Foucault suggested in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, homosexuality is “written immodestly on [the] face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away,” the gay clone deterritorializes desire from the “homographesis” of the face, reterritorializing its symbolic appearance in the supplement of the hanky.⁸³ The gay hanky code has many apocryphal origins, but its performative parody of a working-class, masculine aesthetic during this period is self-evident.⁸⁴ Functioning as a signal of desire – or, more pointedly, of desired *relations of pleasure* – the hanky code orients mutually interested partners in the initiation of a scene of pleasure. Wearing a hanky on the left designates a ‘top,’ ‘dominant,’ or ‘active’ position, and when worn on the right the inverse. Various colors stand for various sex-acts, ranging from the more demure ‘blow-job’ (light blue) to more intensive practices like fist-fucking (red), or “desexualized” heavy s/m (black). Effectively, where which colors are flashed establishes a wholly superficial, often silent, process of initiating relationality. There is no quest for the deep truth of a partner's identity as the key to deciphering desire, and *Cruising* makes great use of this trope.

Friedkin uses the hanky code as a dramatic device that allows viewers to begin to read the argot of the world of gay leather and s/m by having Burns himself seek-out help. On the one hand, this scene seems to out otherwise clandestine gay practices and codes, but it also serves, on the other, to reinforce suspicions that the transmission of culture is a

⁸³ Cf. generally, L. Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literature and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸⁴ A. Reilly and E. Saethre, “The Hankie Code Revisited.”

fragmentary and piece-meal process of mimetic identification. This moment of queer pedagogy is important for it dramatizes how at least some queers learn the significance of the more popular hankies.

Furthermore, while Burns darkens his eyes with makeup in an effort to don the appearance of the gay clone, this effort, apparently, is not yet even skin-deep. Flashing a hanky, while also operating on an *apparent* register, nevertheless implicates the body in relations of pleasure. Though an artificial attachment or technical supplement, the hanky, more than cosmetic masquerade, becomes ‘profoundly superficial.’ Tellingly, when Burns rebuffs an advance stating, “I only like to watch,” that is, by asserting a certain scopophilic distance afforded by the safety of the gaze, he is publically shamed: “if you only like to watch, take that hanky out of your pocket, asshole.” This is a crucial moment in the film, for in the lead up to this encounter, Friedkin has a number of men cruise Burns, one of them being the man later targeted as the Killer, Stuart Richards. Effectively, these men, and especially Richards, who may have deemed Burns worthy of submitting to the risks of initiating relations with, now see him outed as a coward lacking the courage of his desires. In other words, Burns has blown it, possibly as a cop but also, *Cruising* seems to imply, as a (gay) man. He hangs his head in shame.

The next scene frenetically cuts to Burns before a mirror, hoisting a massive bar of weights over his head with spirited ejaculations of masculine virility accompanying each upward thrust. Something has gotten under his skin. David Greven argues moments such as these suggest, “Masculinity itself will come to seem the product of this queer assembly line, the domain and creation of a queer aesthetic.”⁸⁵ Indeed, in his descent into

⁸⁵ D. Greven, *Psycho-Sexual*, pp. 187.

the gay underworld of leather s/m, Burns regularly fails to ‘pass’ as a gay man, and this is very much linked to his failures as a detective.

Pop Dancing

Cruising is all the more relevant to contemporary audiences since it effectively follows Foucault’s lead in queering binary models of conceptualizing power by pointing up the police officer as a figure of bleed (*illegalism*) that draws this binary into incoherence. The most obvious cinematic moments when this bleeding occurs are two scenes of mirroring. The first is “Precinct Night,” which sees Burns descend into the Mineshaft to find the place full of men dressed in police uniforms.⁸⁶ Stopped by the bouncer, Burns is asked if he is a cop. Panicked, he denies that he is and is promptly told to leave: it’s precinct night, and Burns doesn’t have the right “attitude.” Spotted by Skip (dressed as a cop), Burns (dressed as a clone) is pursued out of the club and into the street.

David Greven’s considerable attention to the role of Skip in his analysis of *Cruising* is a welcome frame for understanding the broader dynamics of the film, if for no other reasons than Skip figures as a libidinal mirror to the “skipper,” Captain Edelson. Skip is the first suspect Burns fingers and serves as yet another unwelcome conduit of shamefully disorienting queer affect. Burns acknowledges that when initially cruised by Skip he “choked,” and we may easily understand the subsequently staged scene of entrapment as a second chance to follow through, as a cop and a cruiser.

⁸⁶ While many have seen the use of role-play as a vulgar recapitulation of societal forms of domination, we should also note the irony of this particular costume, especially since the Mineshaft was actually raided by cops after the production of *Cruising*, as it reroutes the affective charge of seeing a cop in the bar into an arousing thrill, rather than anxious panic.

The second scene of mirroring for Greven, following D.A. Miller (following Wood), is the dance scene in the fictional “Cockpit.” This is a pivotal moment in Burns’ queer pedagogy, for it suggests that, for the first time, he’s enjoying himself in his undercover role. Crucial to this is the Dionysian dissolution Burns submits to: “The energetic cutting combines the actions of the dancing and the snorting and the fisting into one continuous stream of frenzied motion, as if all of the men were sharing one body that moved in tandem.”⁸⁷ Whereas for Greven the American flag serves as the affective inductor for Burns (a reading in keeping with Wilson’s skepticism over Hocquenghem’s “Americanized” promiscuous desire), I suggest instead that it is the inhalation of drugs, alkyl nitrates (or “poppers”), that induces the dissolution of the discrete boundaries of Burns’ bodily sensorium allowing for an altered affective orientation to the world.⁸⁸

The scene “pops” to life, suddenly, in vibrant, almost pastel tones that sharply contrast to the predominant steely blue tint of mirrored shades shadowing previous descents. With this pop of color Friedkin uses a cinematic technique that allows the image-movement of the film to become blurred, warped, and frenetically staggered; Burns’ head and body become a blur of movement reminiscent of Francis Bacon’s use of color and motion to “dismantle the face” and constitute a “zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal.”⁸⁹ In this state the head is reassembled as “meat,” the tense and “acrobatic” contact between flesh and bone. As viewers, we see

⁸⁷ D. Greven, *Psycho-Sexual*, pp. 190.

⁸⁸ For imbricating accounts of the objects as affective inductors cf. B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 19-26; *Cinema I: the Movement Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Burns become-animal-meat in intoxicated dance as though “the entire body tends to escape from itself, and the Figure tends to return to the material structure.”⁹⁰

That is, by having the audience witness Burns’ body bleed in motion, rather than seeing the world “through his eyes” – through common cinematic techniques of fading, blurring, spinning or hyper-saturation deployed to signal the debilitating effects of drugs – viewers suddenly become participant-observers in a glancing “circuit of desire;” we now see these spaces and bodies as though we were in the same intoxicated flux as Burns, as though *we*, too, were enjoying what we saw, seeing it in a new light. As viewers, we are challenged to wonder whether or not this vibrancy was there all along, waiting to be plugged-into, and if Burns himself, by augmenting the *energia* of the dance-floor assemblage, helps to initiate this intensified disclosure.⁹¹ Thus, we may surmise that the American flag remains but one point in the libidinal relay of this scene and cannot account for the full impact of, or catalyst for, the event. Indeed, it only functions as such to the extent that it augments this queer, intoxicated and disseminated parodic masculinity as vibrantly “American” (in Hocquenghem’s affirmative sense).

As I’ve cruised the film thus far, Burns’ askesis of becoming-queer in an effort to pass in his role as an undercover cop is consistently intensified; from the darkening of his eyes and brows, to intensive exercise regimes, to publically flashing hankies (yellow, and then later, around his head, blue—the color-code for anal sex), to the increasing receptivity of his body to the glances, touches, and propositions of others. Dancing is yet another moment of intensification in this process. Characteristically, when Burns is cruised to dance, he initially attempts to turn the guy down, but to no avail: “Hey baby,

⁹⁰ G. Deleuze, *Fancis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, pp. 25.

⁹¹ Cf. P. Markell, “The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy,” *American Political Science Review* (2006): 1-14.

wanna dance?” “I’m with someone.” “Aren’t we all?” The man clasps Burns’ hand in a gesture of masculine challenge (a gesture that will be mirrored between Burns and Captain Edelson, refigured in this latter instantiation as a fraternal pact confirming solidarity in *illegalism*), and Burns rises to it.

Only, this elevation—getting high and becoming-homo-animal-meat in motion—has an unpredictable consequence for Burns: it effectively queers his pleasure. Commenting on this scene, D.A. Miller remarks that while a welcome deprivatization of anality, in *Cruising* “anal responsiveness strays not only to other parts of the body... but also to the body as a whole. Sometimes, indeed, the plugging-in of sex organs seems almost incidental to what is more fundamentally an ecstatic, X-rated cuddle whose goal is to put every body in total erotic contact with every other.”⁹² In the aftermath of his night out dancing, Burns’ undercover work has drawn him into a condition of pleasure enabled by the dissolution of sovereign mastery over his body, catalyzed through drugs and experienced relationally in X-rated dance. Burns is suffering corporeal transvaluation, and how he responds to undergoing this disorienting reassemblage of desire is fundamental to the film.

Interrogations/Captures

Indeed, the dancing scene completely refigures the impact of Burns’ subsequent interrogation, for having enjoyed queer pleasure, he is now reductively identified with the abjection of perverse leathermen. He is called a faggot, “bitch smacked” for his defense

⁹² D.A. Miller, “*Cruising*,” pp. 72. Cf. Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 256, which pushes Lacanian Freudianism in a Deleuzeoguattarian direction: “If, following Lacan’s figure, we may think of the anus as a mouth, why not even smaller holes in the body? Why not this of the pores in our skin – which also breathe, absorb, and excrete – as mouths?” Dean points readers to G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 27.

of privacy rights (as if in an anticipation of *Bowers v. Hartwick*, 1986), and is generally shocked that this is how detectives treat suspects. It is a polyvalent disorienting moment for Burns: the erotic vibrancy of the dance-floor haunts the enjoyment of sexual intimacy with his girlfriend Nancy (Karen Allen); it secretes a sticky connection to Skip as he is being worked-over by the detectives in Vice; and the police, who anchored his previous descents into the gay underworld, have seemingly disavowed him, abandoning him to his own incoherent desires. Burns wants out: “things are happening to me,” he explains to Edelson, “I don’t think I can handle it, Captain.”

Many have read the interrogation scene as “collaps[ing] all male worlds into one – the detectives become indistinguishable in their ritualized violence from the s/m world and from the killer.”⁹³ Derek Nystrom has similarly maintained that in the film s/m “seems to draw upon its implicit political critique, its parodic revelation of the sexualized power relations that structure police (and other) disciplinary practices – a revelation that ‘says to society: this is the way you really are,’ in Bersani’s phrase.”⁹⁴ In the following section we will see Foucault press against this figuration of the relationship of s/m to actually exercised social power.

In anticipation of his remarks it is worth observing how, by collapsing the violence of the police into the uses of pleasure in s/m, we also threaten to collapse the generative, even if incoherent, proliferation of possibility that remained important to Wood. For, part of what makes this incoherence possible is the putative division of these two spheres; there is, for Burns, at least initially, a clear and coherent distinction between the gay s/m leather scene as a “world of its own” and *the* world white, sun-lit hetero-

⁹³ D. Greven, *Psycho-Sexual*, pp. 194.

⁹⁴ D. Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*, pp. 142.

kinship set to Boccherini that is deserving of protective civil service. What Burns comes to discover in ecstatic dance, however, is that it is not violence, but rather pleasure that animates this queer ‘underworld,’ while arbitrarily sexualized violence thrives in the 6th precinct’s interrogation cells. Indeed, something about his way into the leather s/m underworld, his investments in his identity as a police officer, has distorted Burns’ judgment.

However, whatever edifying effects the experience of dancing may have had on Burns, his subjection to police interrogation, while often overlooked in analyses of the film, effects an undeniable shift in his relationship to his work from a passive “lure” to an active “stalker.” Captain Edelson further subjects Burns to the same pressures he is subject to from the ambiguously well-kempt Chief of Detectives to wrap-up the investigation before the Democratic National Convention (1980) or lose his job. “Welcome to the detective unit,” Edelson explains in defense of their methods: “sometimes you only get that one chance” and so going hard on suspects “isn’t their fault, it isn’t your fault, it’s the job.” To which Burns says, “I don’t think I can do the job, Captain.” Here, Edelson’s appeal to Burns takes on a rather queer inflection: “I need you,” Edelson proclaims. “You’re my partner, and you can’t let me down. We’re up to our ass in this. And I’m counting on you.” This may as well be a desperate plea for a flighty lover’s fidelity as it is a moment of Oedipal capture.

Either way, Edelson did *cruise* Burns for the job with an eroticized opportunity to “disappear,” to skip out on heteronormative familial and romantic obligations and now, in the very language of an intimate appeal, pleads with Burns to “do what it takes” to close the case. Further still, if intoxicated danced was a tipping point in Burns’ *askesis* such

that a nascent and inchoate queer affectivity began to reassemble his sensorium, then Captain Edelson's intimate appeal offers him a mode by which to reassert a violent sovereignty over himself, to redeploy the disorienting *askesis* of queer cruising for the purposes of securitized profiling and police entrapment: Edelson cruises Burns to become one of his partners in *illegalism*. To this extent, this needn't be an Oedipal relationship as much as an induction into a fraternal order of police contravention of the law. What is more, this scene explicitly amplifies the arbitrariness of the decision to profile another queer leatherman, Stuart Richards (Richard Cox), as "the Killer" by framing this process of stalking his subject within the same ambiguous circuits of desire, arousal, and connection animating Burns' queer pedagogy.

Thus, when Burns does succeed in consummating a 'penetrative cruise' when apprehending Richards, Friedkin purposefully has the putatively queer, pervert perp submit to, bow before, and indeed, "show the world" to Burns, who fights dirty in order to stick it to Richards. Cheap tactics of police domination and retrospective distortion of the record calcify the asymmetrical power-relations subjecting Richards to Burns. This violently penetrative cruise allows Burns to disidentify from homoerotic desires precisely by allowing them to become captured and controlled, moored, in the service of punitive police cruising. In disavowing a mode of queer pleasure, Burns, ironically, becomes all the more a mirror of the killer the more he solidifies his mimetic identification with the police, and especially his "skipper" (and partner), Captain Edelson. As Foucault puts it, in the recently published interview "The Gay Science," "illegalism is part of the

functioning of the law. And as a result, prohibited practices are part of the functioning of the law that prohibits them.”⁹⁵

Thus, viewers are not expected to believe that Richards is the Killer, not least of all because the police do not. Edelson offers him a plea agreement of 8 years if he confesses to a laundry list of murders that will allow the cases to be closed, bringing us back to the mortician’s opening denunciation of the detective division’s lazy, coercive tactics – a “numbers game” that extorts confessions. Cinematically, this is only further confirmed by yet another murder, this time of Burns’ next-door neighbor, Ted, who had amorously fallen for the undercover cop, which allows an interpretation of Edelson’s stunned, and perhaps horrified, realization that his own partner is now the most likely suspect in this latest murder. The slow fade from Edelson’s panicked face to the reappearance of the Killer about to cruise the Mineshaft (a literal looping of the reel of the Killer’s initial debut) only confirms the incoherent openness of the film. What is clear, however, is the way erotically charged pressure from Edelson incites Burns to a securitized mode of action, to the profiling and violent penetration of Richards.

In other words, viewers gain the very clear impression that, indeed, if there is something violence about the underworld of gay leatherman s/m, it may very well be its very embeddedness in a violent society represented, first and foremost, in the form of the law, depicted in *Cruising* through the spectral violence of the police. However, rather than functionally reproduce this binary, *Cruising* purposely dissolves it into an incoherent bleed, impossible to parse, trace, or reverse-engineer. This strategy is further amplified by rendering the homoerotic pleasures of the s/m underworld no less pleasurable infectious

⁹⁵ M. Foucault, “The Gay Science,” trans. Nicolae Morar and Daniel W. Smith. *Critical Inquiry* (2011: Vol 37, No. 3), pp. 385-403: pp. 392-3.

as the violence of the police, even if pleasure operates in each instance on distinct valences of affective responsivity to non-sovereignty – one as an embrace of desiring assemblage, the other as a violent disavowal of loss of control in the manufacturing of culpability. Thus, again, following Wood, whatever the negativity may be that is related to queerness in the film, it is hardly endogenous to the gay community, or even this particular “underworld,” and so I dissent from fellow interpreters of *Cruising* who claim the film sutures gay sex and violence in any essentially or necessarily homophobic way.

That this is the case allows me to further develop, in what follows, the claim that *Cruising* provides the horizon against which to understand Foucault’s remarks about leather clones, s/m bars, and identity politics in the early 1980s. Recall that Wilson was one of the more outspoken commentators at the time, and had even cited work that used Foucault in critiquing the film and the failed politics of the ghetto. In glancing through the scenes above, I have endeavored to draw out those cinematic dynamics Foucault might well have been especially attentive to; this, of course, can only be speculation, but Wood’s widely read essay cited above already had opened the discursive field to unorthodox readings, suggesting that at the time at least some viewers were receptive to the more subversive edges of Friedkin’s film. Foucault’s responses in this interview lead me to maintain that he, too, glanced such edginess in *Cruising*, and cruises – rather unsuccessfully, to be clear at the outset – the judgment of his interviewers with glancing invitations to approach these practices, relations, and spaces as worldly expressions of the free appearance of plurality and worth politically affirming.

IV. Foucault as Parrhesiast

Though it would be a mistake to situate Foucault as commenting on the film *Cruising*, and not the politico-memetic event of its production, glancing at the ambivalences of film as I have allows an appreciation of *what* Foucault might have sought to distance himself from in the rhetoric, positioning, and tactics of the protestors and their vocal defenders. For, though neither the film nor the protests are mentioned, many of the issues raised in the interview touch upon those brought to the fore during contestation against Friedkin's film, especially in Wilson's 1981 critique in *Social Text*. In this way, *Cruising* serves as the evental horizon that brings Foucault into dialogue around this cluster of queer political issues. More importantly, it provides him an occasion to clarify the stakes of framing ethical relations of the uses of pleasure as modes care of the self in producing and sustaining vibrant and experimental worldly affairs that play with power, both as their mode of relationality and by virtue of their mere existence. Furthermore, as I read it, the stakes of this interview also allows Foucault to perform a style of *parrhēsia* that cruises his interlocutors in a way that seeks to open up certain possibilities, or lines of flight, otherwise foreclosed by dogmatic preoccupations with identity and reductive interpretations of the ghetto bound up with the politics of respectability and positive representation.⁹⁶

In an earlier interview for *Gai Pied*, "Friendship as a Way of Life" (1979), which his *Body Politic* interviewers cite at one point, Foucault had affirmed the importance of politically creative practices of ethical self-stylization: "To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?"⁹⁷ This tempting proposition, resonant with the genealogist's methodology, directly addresses the pronounced need in the wake

⁹⁶ M. Foucault, "Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity," *Ethics*. Trans. Robert Hurley et. al., Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 163.

⁹⁷ M. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, pp. 140.

of *Cruising* to develop political strategies of constructing “a culture that invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms” and, in this way, intervenes to challenge the normative constriction of relational forms occasioned by protests against *Cruising*.⁹⁸

As we will see, in response, Foucault advocates precisely the strategic proliferation of relational styles of existence in the creation of new pleasures and new modes of valuing pleasure-relations as part of a broader critique of identitarian politics. To this end, while the potential to cruise a plurality of relational forms is not *essential* to queerness, Foucault will also affirm that, “[h]omosexuality is an historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the ‘slantwise’ position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.”⁹⁹

In dialogue with Wilson for *Body Politic*, then, Foucault begins the conversation by affirming the abandonment of the aspiration to identitarian politics of respectability and positive representation.¹⁰⁰ In response to an opening question regarding the practical implications of identity for gay liberation he argues, “What the gay movement needs now is much more *the art of life* than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudoscientific knowledge) of what sexuality is. [Sex is] *a part of our world freedom....* We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. *Sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative*

⁹⁸ M. Foucault, “Sexual Triumph of the Social Will,” in *Ethics*, pp. 159-160.

⁹⁹ M. Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” in *Ethics*, pp. 138.

¹⁰⁰ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,” *Ethics*, pp. 163.

life.”¹⁰¹ In an Arendtian fashion Foucault frames the world as the stage for the appearance of freedom *from* the limits of identity, *for* ethical pursuits of pleasure aroused through concerted intercourse with others in the world.

Pressed further on the ways that “sexual identity has been politically very useful,” Foucault concedes the point, but then also seizes the occasion to insist, too, that, “it limits us, and I think we have – and can have – a right to be free.” To this extent, and in reply to a question concerning the efficacy of identity politics, Foucault remarks,

Well, if identity is only a game, if it is only a procedure to have relations, social and sexual-pleasure relationships that create new friendships, it is useful. But if identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to ‘uncover’ their ‘own identity,’ and that their own identity has become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is, ‘Does this thing conform to my identity?’ then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility.¹⁰²

The hanky code resurfaces as an exemplary strategy of identification that can function as a superficial signaling device in the procedures of initiating pleasure-relations. Thus, Foucault contends, “I don’t think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to

¹⁰¹ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,” *Ethics*, pp. 163

¹⁰² M. Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,” *Ethics*, pp. 163. In this respect *Cruising* offers an exemplary dramaturgy of precisely how such a mode or style of establishing relationships of pleasure is possible through Pacino’s introduction to the hanky code. Hankies do nothing to ‘uncover’ the deep truth of subjective desire, but rather function as props that enabling relations: pleasures are signaled, and desire maybe follows. Cf. Reilly, Andrew and Eirik J. Saethre. “The Hankie Code Revisited: From Function to Fashion.”

do with the disclosure or the uncovering of s/m tendencies deep within our unconscious, and so on.”¹⁰³

At the same time s/m does not reveal any true identity, neither does it operate to mirror social power. Such thinking, Foucault sharply claims, is “stupid”: “I wouldn’t say that it is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power.”¹⁰⁴ Foucault had suggested, in an until recently unpublished interview from 1978, “The Gay Science,” that unlike the metaphysically laden concept of desire-as-lack (which he lauds Deleuze and Guattari for revaluing in their *Anti-Oedipus* project), pleasure offers an alternative insight into the relationality of the *event* of sexual affairs: “in treating pleasure ultimately as nothing other than an event, an event that happens, that happens, I would say, outside the subject, or at the limit of the subject, or between two subjects,” one gains a better understanding of how desire, as pleasure-relations, surfaces “in this something that is neither of the body nor of the soul, neither outside nor inside.”¹⁰⁵

In an interview conducted shortly after “Friendship,” but published in *Christopher Street* in May of 1982 (a month before the *Body Politic* interview with Wilson and Gallagher), Foucault advocates for a “relational right” that would protect such experiential configurations of pleasure:

We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric. We should secure recognition of provisional coexistence, adoption.... [“Of children?” the interviewer interjects.] Or – why not? – of one adult by another. Why shouldn’t I adopt a friend who is ten years younger than I am? And even if he’s ten years older? Rather than arguing that rights are

¹⁰³ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 165.

¹⁰⁴ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 169.

¹⁰⁵ M. Foucault, “The Gay Science,” pp. 390.

fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not to be prevented, blocked or annulled by impoverished relational institutions.¹⁰⁶

Anticipating the work of queer theory inaugurated by his scholarship, Foucault hypothesizes that by pursuing such novel cultural creation “gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals.”¹⁰⁷

The step away from the strict hetero-homosexual binary is important to the extent that what the clone culture of leather s/m enabled participants to reorient “the pleasure of sexual relations away from the area of sexual norms and its categories, and in so doing making the pleasure the crystallizing point of a new culture – I think that’s an interesting approach.”¹⁰⁸ It also allows Foucault to contend that cultivating queer relationships in the ways s/m has endeavored “does not mean blindness – to be blind to thought...without proper reflection about what is going on, or without very careful attention to what’s possible.”¹⁰⁹

Foucault asks, in light of this historico-political condition, “what code would allow them to communicate?”

They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the moment that carries them toward each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still

¹⁰⁶ M. Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *Ethics*, pp. 158.

¹⁰⁷ M. Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *Ethics*, pp. 160.

¹⁰⁸ M. Foucault, “The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will,” in *Ethics*, pp. 160.

¹⁰⁹ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 172.

formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure.¹¹⁰

In an interview with James O'Higgins published in *Salmagundi* months after his exchange with the writers for *Body Politic*, Foucault wryly remarks, "Gay publications may not devote as much space as I would like to questions of gay friendship and to the meaning of relationship when there is no established code or guidelines. But more and more gay people are having to face these questions for themselves. And, you know, I think that what most bothers people who are not gay about gayness is the gay lifestyle, not sex acts themselves."¹¹¹ While a seemingly direct allusion to the aborted *Body Politic* interview, this also becomes the opportunity to reiterate the claim that it is, "the common fear that gays will develop relationships that are intense and satisfying even though they do not at all conform to the ideas of relationships held by others. It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate."¹¹²

Thus, if Foucault's genealogy of sexuality invites queers to "escape and help others escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities," then networks of pleasure-relations emerge as an alternative line of flight for assembling queer worlds.¹¹³ Indeed, to the extent that sexual promiscuity, in itself, is taken to be an a priori quality of homosexuality, beyond ahistorical naïveté such a "neat image of homosexuality... responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity,

¹¹⁰ M. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, pp. 136.

¹¹¹ M. Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in *Ethics*, pp. 153.

¹¹² M. Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in *Ethics*, pp. 153.

¹¹³ M. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, pp. 137.

camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force."¹¹⁴ In other words, Foucault wants to arouse the curiosity and courage to risk such relational messiness and unpredictability.

Foucault presses the point that what also renders s/m politically tractable, contra Wilson's caricature of ghetto institutions as trafficking in the pimping of desire, is its ability to cultivate a plurality of worldly spaces of appearance where pleasure-relations can coalesce in novel assemblages that "cut slantwise" through the social fabric. To the extent that queer institutions "make possible a homosexual culture," it is only by actualizing desire for pleasure-relations in what Foucault will elsewhere call such "laboratories of sexual experimentation."¹¹⁵ Again, in dialogue with Wilson, what strikes Foucault as politically and ethically compelling is that such "variations which are not protected are, at the same time, often much richer, more interesting and creative than the others. But, of course, they are much more fragile and vulnerable."¹¹⁶

Yet, it is important to note that the baths and backrooms also crafted and exercised modes of responsivity to mitigate and revalue the fragility that would only become more explicit and urgent in the immediate years to come. Reflecting on rates of sexually transmitted infections in Paris, it is clear to Foucault that, "the struggle against syphilis, for example, doesn't happen through the repression of certain categories of individuals but through information campaigns." He goes on to cite instances where, "in some American baths, there are small consultation offices at the entrance that allow one

¹¹⁴ M. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, pp. 136.

¹¹⁵ M. Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," *Ethics*.

¹¹⁶ M. Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in *Ethics*, pp. 172.

to know what's going on. This, in effect, is the only way.”¹¹⁷ In cruising a line of flight away from dogmatic interpretations of the ghetto as *merely* reducible to a political-economics of exploitation allows Foucault to, by comparison, amplify the strategic ‘libidinal economies’ of pleasure (and ethical care of the self) that extend beyond, even while circulating through, these liminal institutions.¹¹⁸

It is clear that for Foucault, as for many queer activists, writers, scholars, and ghetto “refugees” at the time, s/m, leather, and clone culture surfaced to constitute a fault line of contentious struggle to define gays and lesbians as a political identity on the stage of North American political sociality. That Foucault sought to recuperate the leather clone scene in the face of overwhelmingly disparaging and dismissive critiques of s/m – and the men who participated in *Cruising* – attests to the fecund dangers and pleasures of what gay men can *do* with their bodies as media for networking new relational forms of pleasure. And still, s/m is but one example, alongside drugs, adoption, ‘coming out,’ and infinitely more relational possibilities, all of which, for Foucault, promise the potency of novel pleasure-relations.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, as I have argued, when situated within the horizon of the politico-memetic event of *Cruising* it becomes clear why the particular phenomenon of s/m factored so prevalently in these interviews with Foucault. Rather than an opportunity for him to confess his own sexual desires, I have suggested instead that we read his remarks in those settings as reflections on and interventions into the

¹¹⁷ M. Foucault, “The Gay Science,” pp. 402.

¹¹⁸ On this claim, cf. D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*.

¹¹⁹ Like s/m, drugs offer a desexualized “possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of numerous pleasures.” (“Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 165.) Speaking to his own pleasures, Foucault acknowledges “the fact that some drugs are really important for me because they are the mediation to those incredibly intense joys that I am looking for, and that I am not able to experience, to afford by myself.” (“Interview With Stephen Riggins,” *Ethics*, pp. 129) In the context of his exchange with Wilson and Gallagher, Foucault also admonishes the ‘impoverished relational fabric’ of the “traditional construction of pleasure” as “always drinking, eating, and fucking.” (“Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, 165)

queer community amidst the fallout of a divisive, festering political contest over the production and release of the film *Cruising*.

V. Conclusion:

I have argued that Foucault models a mode of critical, pluralist judgment conditioned by the receptive responsivity of cruising politics. More pointedly, I suggest that precisely by cruising common sensibility in this manner, Foucault himself is effectively engaging in an ethico-political practice of *parrhēsia*. Speaking freely and frankly, Foucault engages the scene of these interviews asking not only “what can be played?” but also, *how*, with what approach to hegemonic configurations of power, so as to enable the worldly appearance of freer relations of pleasure. If this chapter began by pressing against over-determined accounts of the in/significance of ethics to politics, then I conclude by affirming the doubly conditioning *political* importance of interrogating, and thereby problematizing, insufficiently rigorous impoverishments of this complex relationship. A genealogical cheekiness to undertaking this task affirms the dynamics of the relationship between ethics and politics are never definitively elaborated because the game remains open, never static, and to this extent demands the careful exercise of the powers of judgment immanent to cruising politics.

Still, the attempt to cruise the judgment of his *Body Politic* interlocutors was a failure, both in the sense that Foucault seems not to have been persuasive, but also that the interview – initially destined for the pages of *Body Politic* – was only published *posthumously*, two years later in the far-more conservative queer magazine, *The*

Advocate, to commemorate his death from AIDS-related illness.¹²⁰ Such radical historical decontextualization has prompted many to consider his endorsement of promiscuous s/m sexual relations ethically irresponsible and politically dubious given that the public context for the appearance of his remarks was not the event of *Cruising*, but the ravages of the AIDS crisis.

It is clear that s/m, leather, and clone culture tore a fissure in the queer community that was crowded with contentious struggles to define gay and lesbian political identity on the stage of North American sociality. However, unlike the majority of contemporary critics, Foucault is remarkable for *affirming* the fecund dangers activated when queer pleasure-relations found public spaces of appearance. To this extent, his performance in these interviews not only exemplifies an ethic of speaking frankly and truthfully when in the breach of political contestation, but gains renewed saliency amidst the contemporary political desire for social securitization. A genealogical perspective attuned to the dynamics of power-relations would be disabused of such desires, affirming instead that political contest over cultural appropriation and political subversion promises “everything that has been created or acquired, any ground that has been gained will, at a certain moment be used in such a way. That’s the way we live, that’s the way we struggle, that’s the way of human history.”¹²¹ What is to be sustained of the spirit of ’68 is “that certain institutional models have been experimented with without a program.” For Foucault, “It’s a fact that people’s everyday lives have changed from the early sixties to now, and

¹²⁰ On the generative potentials of failure, cf. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹²¹ M. Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 167.

certainly within my own life. And surely that is not due to political parties but is the result of many movements.”¹²²

Rather than remonstrate the efforts of anti-*Cruising* activists, we can instead frame Foucault as raising the stakes of such undertakings insofar as popular political movements have served as the main drivers of meaningful social transformations. Thus, we are cruised by Foucault to “think what we are doing,” without the “banisters” of political ideology, and to understand this as an ethical mode of engaging in worldly politics of freedom.¹²³ I have argued that we should read these interviews as Foucault’s efforts to entice his interlocutors to become aroused to the freedom animating projects of queer worlding such as those endeavored by the practitioners of leather s/m dramatized in *Cruising*, to judge from a different vantage that affirms the free appearance of worldly plurality.

Cruising politics, then, appears as an ethical exercise in judgment that receptively-responds to the normative impoverishment of worldly relational plurality, affirming the risky creativity of free assemblage and the scandalous potency of such queer affairs. To this extent, Foucault’s performance in these interviews exemplifies a parrhesiastic ethic of fearless speech when in the breach of political contestation. More poignantly, it offers an exemplary model for contemporary queer politics given the prevailing desire, shared no less by aspirationally homonational queers, for globalized social securitization.

In the next chapter my interest will be on bringing this appreciation for the powers of pluralist judgment immanent to the receptive-responsive dynamics of cruising politics to bear on a case study of what I term an instance of “micro-movement” contentious

¹²² M. Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics*, pp. 172.

¹²³ Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

political contestation, exemplified by Anonymous hacktivism as it take shape as a war-machine assemblage. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome-analysis of "control societies," I situate Anonymous hacktivism within a contemporary milieu of state securitization. At the same time, I draw parallels to traditional social movement research on "contentious political action" to demonstrate the ways digital new-media allows for novel political strategies of resistance to enfold tried-and-true tactical repertoires of demonstrative political mobilization.

My investigation will be fruitfully informed by Foucault's exemplary performance of dissenting judgment through the ethico-political practice of *parrhēsia*. It's orienting desire to augment the free play of world-enacting relations, on repeated display in the interviews from this chapter's archive, will help us navigate the disorienting and often purposively dissimulating world of anonymous online relational networks connecting Anonymous hacktivists. It will further help us distinguish the actions under consideration, which are concentrated in a short window of time at the dawn of 2011, from later, more reactionary instantiations of Anonymous mobilizations. In the process we will see not only how affectively adhesive virtual assemblages are able to enact meaningful, material change, but also how this modality of conducting concerted insurgent action figures as the anonymous face of politics to come.

Chapter 5. The (Anonymous) Face of Politics To Come

The Okhrana, the Czarist predecessor to the GPU, is reported to have invented a filing system in which every suspect was noted on a large card in the center of which his name was surrounded by a red circle; his political friends were designated by smaller red circles and his nonpolitical acquaintances by green ones; brown circles indicated persons in contact with friends of the suspect but not known to him personally; cross-relationships between the suspect's friends, political and nonpolitical, and the friends of his friends were indicated by lines between the respective circles. Obviously the limitations of this method are set only by the size of the filing cards, and, theoretically, a gigantic single sheet could show the relations and cross-relationships of the entire population.

[...]

Now the police dreams that one look at the gigantic map on the office wall should suffice at any given moment to establish who is related to whom and in what degree of intimacy; and, theoretically, this dream is not unrealizable, although its technical execution is bound to be somewhat difficult.

H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (pp. 559-560)

In the previous chapter we saw how the heuristic of cruising politics served to illuminate a mode of exercising pluralist judgment as it was performatively modeled by Foucault's parrhesiastic interventions into contentious North American queer politics in the early 1980s. In this chapter, my interest is in deploying cruising politics to heuristically map the dynamics of another historical instance of insurgent political mobilization. Here I will focus on how the dynamics of cruising politics enables a form of assembling and conducting concerted agonistic political action.

My case is constituted, temporally, by a relatively fleeting moment at the dawn of 2011, on the heels of WikiLeaks' dump of hundreds of thousands of classified documents and communiqués drafted by and circulated to American state agents allegedly leaked to them by Pvt. Chelsea Manning. Following this seismic disclosure, and for only a few

months, an online assemblage of hacktivists initially identifiable only as “Anonymous” wreaked havoc on private intelligence firms, multinational financial institutions, news media outlets, and official state sites. After a joyous spree of hacking, trolling, defacing, and leaking, the abbreviated appearance of the scandalizing antics of Anonymous hacktivists was ended when state security agents in the United States and the United Kingdom captured Anons and, so they hoped, brought their exploits to a definitive close.

This chapter, like the last, will endeavor to embed its analysis in the cultural milieu of its subjects – in this case, Anonymous hacktivists – so as to better explicate the peculiar ways in which contentious political action was mobilized, oriented, and sustained by primarily affective connections to a common desire for a freer world for the appearance of plurality. My primary interest is two fold. On the one hand, to better account for, and so to, as it were, “digitize,” the ways in which the affects of pleasure-relations are able to initiate and augment worldly affairs. On the other, I want to make the case for Anonymous hacktivism as an instance of what I term “micro-movement” insurgency by bringing the example of Anonymous mobilizations into relationship with more traditional social movement research.

Prior to Anonymous virtual uprising, events dubbed the “Arab Spring” by Anglo-American pundits – which saw insurrectionary popular uprisings in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Iran, and Syria – sparked renewed debate about the role of digital new media in contemporary political affairs. On the eve of the “Arab Spring,” Malcolm Gladwell had dismissed the importance of new media to contentious movement politics, citing the example of Ezell Blair defiantly ordering coffee from Woolworth’s in

segregated 1960's North Carolina.¹ On Gladwell's count, the success of Civil Rights "sit-ins" stemmed from a desire to be "in" on the change by manifesting a sense of social responsibility through participation in struggles to overcome political injustice on the ground and with, as it were, skin in the game.

Such principled commitment, and the strong ties forged in the process, cannot be compared to Twitter re-tweets or Facebook 'likes' or 'shares' and so, despite the increased celerity with which information is communicated, contentious politics happens only when the desire to put oneself on the line materializes in risky, principled concerted dissent. Gladwell's argument was met with a number of replies, most pointedly from Kirk Cheyfitz. Rightly noting how such claims miss the way "media matters," Cheyfitz observes Gladwell would have to conclude television played no role in the strategic planning of Civil Rights leaders, nor in the actual tactical victories won during the arduous campaign for Civil Rights.²

These debates, and others like them, are important and necessary for furthering public understanding of the role of new media in political affairs. Commentators and political theorists alike struggle alike to understand how virtual events can generate multiple and heterodox material affects that meaningfully impact political discourse, contribute to counter-hegemonic struggles, and dilate democratic political imaginaries. In

¹ M. Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, Oct. 4, 2010.
² This debate is productively reconstructed around weak-ties by M. Sauter, *The Coming Swarm: DDoS Actions, Hacktivism, and Civil Disobedience on the Internet* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), pp. 5. On the importance of television for the Civil Rights Movement cf. S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 114-115. For detailed accounts of the contentious postures that Civil Rights leaders took in relation to publicity, cf. generally D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); A. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984); and, C. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1995). The importance of Facebook and Twitter to the events in Cairo have been fruitfully compared to the Gutenberg press in the events of the Reformation, cf. J. Jarvis, "Gutenberg of Arabia." [Buzzmachine.com](http://buzzmachine.com). Feb. 13, 2011. <http://buzzmachine.com/2011/02/13/gutenberg-of-arabia/> (accessed 4.28.2017).

this chapter, I challenge these parallel misapprehensions by bringing Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology into relation with the recent exploits of Anonymous hacktivism.

If Deleuze and Guattari provide the conceptual framework through which to theorize Anonymous hacktivism, then the heuristic of cruising politics provides the methodological approach. Specifically, I glance through the memetic personae Anonymous hacktivists have generated in the four years prior to the capture of Anons in 2011, not in an effort to doxx or "out" individual hacktivists but in order to better grasp the importance of anonymity, virtual connectivity, and affective arousal in the arsenal of contemporary networked contentious politics. In order to theorize unpredictably ephemeral insurgency, my argument advances by constructing a provisional *dispositif* wherein the heterogeneous elements of Anonymous hacktivism as a Deleuzoguattarian nomadic war-machines and contemporary contentious movement politics can connect up to produce a novel "line of flight," the *micro-movement*.

To begin, I map the prerogatives of the American security apparatuses Anonymous hacktivism confronts by theorizing the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act through Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the contemporary late-modern biopolitical state as a genetic structure of "capture and control" governing "control societies." (II) I then sketch the nuts and bolts of mobilizing grassroots political insurgency through, in the main, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's model of 'contentious political action' (III). This allows me to unpack the concept of the war-machine through special attention to how the accelerated temporalities of what Danah Boyd calls 'networked publics' enables intensive affective connectivity (IV).³ I then turn to the queer affective norms orienting

³ Cf. generally, D. Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Life of Networked Teens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

trollz4lulz (lulz is an anti-social buggering of “laugh out loud” inflected with *schadenfreude*) by cruising the memetic personae of Anonymous war-machines to argue affects of rage arouse, animate, and amplify contentious political hacktivism (V).

On the basis of these reflections, however, I do not advocate abandoning more traditional models of political activism like confrontational street protests or nonviolent direct-action occupation. On the contrary, I argue political change requires concerted action IRL, confronting real worldly institutions of power.⁴ But it is equally mistaken to dismiss the hacktivism of Anonymous and other virtual-pirates, digital whistleblowers, or cyberspace occupiers, and it is my intention to demonstrate why.

To this end I conclude by arguing that contentious movement politics seeking real, material change will increasingly come to welcome the virtual resources of hacktivists like those who operated as Anonymous. Hacktivism produces vital information, but also generates what George Kateb describes as a distinctly democratic ‘adhesion’ between anonymous participants in principled political intercourse. In turn, affective adhesion produces more conducive conditions for mobilizing contentious movement politics to more robustly demobilize abuses of power conducted through corrupted political institutions.

I. Mapping Security Societies of Control: The CFAA

Before sketching a brief history of Anonymous hacktivism, in this section I map the political milieu within which hacktivists intervene. To facilitate this effort, I read Deleuze and Guattari’s reflections on the state in the historical present through American

⁴ As a point in fact, many Anons met IRL (in real life) during the #Chanology protests against Scientology, during #Occupy, at the #Stubenville and #BART rallies, and more recently at protests across the US challenging police brutality in #Ferguson when insisting #blacklivesmatter.

legislation and recent legal instantiations thereof to sharpen the focus of contemporary regimes of power operative as securitization. Deleuze and Guattari are distinguished for attending to how securitized societies code individuals as clusters of *data*, deploying apparatuses of capture and control to target those specifically unique, identifying features (from recurring or dispositional, habitual trends to optical, vocal, and genetic biometrics) that can be tracked, stored, broken down into more basic elements and analyzed as *dividual* aggregates of data vulnerable to ‘securitization.’

They build on Foucault’s genealogies of biopolitics conducted in the late 1970s, where he had analyzed sovereign, disciplinary, and securitized regimes of governmentality. In the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures this relationship is described as one of imbricating strategies for establishing, erecting, and securing the prerogatives of modern statist biopolitics:

Sovereignty capitalizes a territory, raising the major problem of the seat of government, whereas discipline structures a space and addresses the essential problem of a hierarchical and functional distribution of elements, and security will try to plan a milieu in terms of events or series of events or possible elements, of series that will have to be regulated within a multivalent and transformable framework.⁵

Foucault does not posit a successive, let alone progressive, history of governmentality. Instead, he argues that, “security is a way of making the old armatures of law and discipline function in addition to the specific mechanisms of security.”⁶ Distinguishing

⁵ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*. Ed. Michel Senellart, Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), pp. 20.

⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 10. As to the means by which security has manifest itself as ‘social control’ in the penal system, cf. D. Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in*

regimes of securitization is the deployment of a new logic, an econometric calculus of cost-benefit analysis, which relies on statistical models to capture and control the biopower of an entire population. While effectively amplifying and extending the range and intensity of state power, security also alters the logics of governmentality into ‘managing’ events that “can only be controlled by an estimate of probabilities.”⁷

Because Foucault’s genealogy analyzes state bureaucratic agencies by tracking discursive and practical shifts in governmentality, the focus on the rationality of securitized political economy as the engine of biopower sharpens the stakes of this new knowledge formation while also accounting for its practical profusion. In Deleuze-Guattarian terms, security always seems to presuppose itself precisely because its exercise of power functions by coding insufficient data as symptomatic of insecurity while, simultaneously, authorizing any provision that promises to ameliorate the impotence of absent variables. The governmentality of security strives to maximize the predictive promise of statistical probability, which conditions the power to exercise control as contingent on the power to capture and code as many variables as possible into the computational matrix of the largest actionable ‘large -n’ data set possible.

In the essay, “Postscript on Societies of Control,” Deleuze brings Foucault’s analysis of statistical mechanisms of security into critical proximity with digital new media relations.

The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become “dividuals,” and masses,

Contemporary Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); L. Waquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁷ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 20.

samples, data, markets, or “banks.” Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction between the two societies best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as a numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies.⁸

To better illustrate the point, Deleuze cites Guattari, who had “imagined a city where one would be able to leave one’s apartment, one’s street, one’s neighborhood, thanks to one’s (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but *the computer that tracks each person’s position – licit or illicit – and effects a universal modulation.*”⁹

Analyzing power as the aspiration to exercise unchecked prerogatives of capture and control *without* compromising maximal circulation of data sharpens attention to the explicit instantiation of the rationality of securitization in American legislation such as the 1986 Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). The law is touted as an indispensable tool in the armament of national security and has been repeatedly re-authorized as a subset of the PATRIOT ACT. The irony of the law is that it does very little to actually *secure* the internet as a platform of communication, let alone commerce. The open secret of the internet is precisely how *insecure* a platform it actually is; because the speed and volume of data circulation is prioritized over privacy protections, even ‘script kiddies’ can perform seemingly sophisticated hacks.¹⁰

⁸ Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7: pp. 5.

⁹ Deleuze, “Postscripts,” pp. 6—emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: the Many Faces of Anonymous* (New York: Verso, 2014), pp. 260-261, where Coleman recounts the Congressional testimony of seven hackers

Functionally the CFAA broadly establishes the internet as a juridical ‘territory’ defined by the implementation of disciplinary hierarchies that privileges the United States (and its Five Eyes allies) with the power to deploy ad hoc regulatory apparatuses of capture and control. Securitization operates within this structurally open-ended milieu by developing evermore-accurate predictive analytics designed to monopolize the productive biopower of an entire *globally networked population*. As Deleuze and Guattari contend,

One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire ‘exterior,’ over all the flows traversing the ecumenon. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc.¹¹

Thus, instead of addressing and rectifying structural vulnerabilities to fraud and abuse by, for instance, mandating corporate liability for storing insufficiently encrypted data or marketing ineffective antivirus software, the CFAA effectively codes the American state as the sole beneficiary of such vulnerabilities. In short, a certain amount of systemic insecurity – what Deleuze and Guattari theorize as open or “smooth space” – functions in tandem with the governmentality of securitization, not as an impediment but as an enabling condition of possibility.

associated with the L0pht collective 1998, invited for their well-known hacking antics. Their remarks, Coleman argues, constituted a communal “plea to improve the abysmal state of Internet security in 1998.”

¹¹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 385-6.

Effectively this reduces the logistical cost of security by streamlining access to data and poses a formidable challenge to tepid reassurances that the collection of too much metadata impedes its successful exploitation in real time. On the contrary, securitized governmentality optimally operates at the communicative interface of structurally parallel centralization processes. Monopolistic commercial service providers and hosting platforms already analyze data as it is processed for immediate monetization through, among other technologies, “real-time advertising.”¹² The suggestion that the state lacks the resources for analyzing metadata in real-time falsely assumes the need to conduct independent analytics, rather than piggy-back and supplement those already operative in, because servicing the fiduciary interests of, private sector commercial markets.¹³

Theorizing the governmentality of state power as security thus further amplifies the duplicitous logic characteristic of the imbrication of monetization and militarization.¹⁴ Not only do commercial service providers and platforms regularly and proactively comply with state requests for unfettered real-time access to data, increasingly – as the case of Edward Snowden attests – private security firms are contracted to facilitate

¹² McKinnon, Kayla. "Nothing Personal, It's Just Business: How Google's Course of Business Operates at the Expense of Consumer Privacy." *J. Marshall J. Info. Tech. & Privacy L.* 33 (2016): 187. Cf. also, G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 382: "...as ACLU staff technologist Chris Soghoian argues, so long as Internet firms continue to “monetize their users’ private data,” they can never adopt a truly “pro-user” privacy policy.”

¹³ The post-9/11 imbrication of private for-profit security corporations and public national security apparatuses is further attested to by the rise of the tech company Palantir. Cf. S. Biddle, “How Peter Thiel’s Palantir Helped the NSA Spy on the Whole World,” *The Intercept*. Feb. 22, 2017. <https://theintercept.com/2017/02/22/how-peter-thiels-palantir-helped-the-nsa-spy-on-the-whole-world/> (accessed 4.28.2017). Biddle reports, “Palantir’s software was described as an ‘analyst workspace [for] pulling together disparate information and displaying it in novel ways,’ and was used closely in conjunction with other intelligence software tools, like the NSA’s notorious XKEYSCORE search system.” What Palantir software does, in part, is allow analysts to streamline their search for the proverbial needle in the haystack, providing a more sophisticated, multi-tiered aggregating service. At a much lower scale, it works much like Gmail in allowing users to search for data rather than wade information page by page.

¹⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 222-227.

phishing data streaming through molar hubs. In the last decade public accountability (or awareness of the lack thereof) has come to bear on programs such as warrant-less wiretapping (PRISM), TrapWire facial recognition software, ‘backdoor’ malware encoded on iSO and Google mobile devices, surveillance of IP addresses accessing targeted or flagged sites, servers, and networks (such as sites for downloading the TOR anonymizing onion router or suspected Anonymous IRC servers), and even active manipulation of trending events on social media platforms like Facebook.¹⁵

Anonymous hacktivism regularly negotiates the chilling effects of the imbrication of monetization and militarization but two instances stand out as exemplary. Both concern the use of informants or infiltrators; where the first amplifies the link between monetization and securitization, the second focuses on the militarization of the Web. The first concerns the prosecutorial doxxing attempted by Aaron Barr, then CEO of a now shuttered subsidiary of the military-intelligence firm, H.B. Gary. The second addresses the proliferation of state informant networks, online and IRL. Both moments in the history of Anonymous support the thesis that security “consists in capturing while simultaneously constituting a right to capture.”¹⁶ If the logic of securitization “always seems to presuppose itself,” then it is because the very logic of “capture contributes to the creation of that which it captures.”¹⁷

¹⁵ G. Coleman cites recent proposed legislation that bans warrantless phishing and installing backdoor malware on private commercial devices in *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 382. This bill has stalled after passing through the House.

¹⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 448.

¹⁷ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 448. Cf. also, M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) for an account of the police conduct of “illegalities”.

In late 2010, as Anons conducted DDoS (distributed denial of service¹⁸) attacks against Visa, PayPal, and MasterCard in solidarity with WikiLeaks, Barr seized the opportunity and tried to collect what he hoped to sell to the FBI as identifying information about Anonymous ‘leadership’.¹⁹ Barr’s attempted counter-insurgency – unsolicited, but endowed with an aura of legitimacy bestowed by anticipated state compensation – typifies how securitization presupposes monetization. Calculating that the FBI would initiate investigations against Anonymous hackers, Barr’s infiltration sought to *instigate* expansive Federal investigations for purposes of private profit. Though Barr’s intelligence gathering was woefully inaccurate, his confidence in being able to monetize even potentially false-positive information signals a fundamental feature of securitization.

The retaliatory Anonymous hack on HB Gary Federal (conducted as #OpInternetFed) also revealed illegalities animating contractual relationships between security firms and potentially scandalized corporate entities. Pirated emails disclosed a business plan drafted for the Bank of America, reminiscent of COINTELPRO, to plant knowingly fraudulent data on WikiLeaks in an effort to delegitimize its nascent whistleblowing operation. The plot sought to not only tarnish WikiLeaks, but also the integrity of journalists using the data it published to break discomfiting investigatory

¹⁸ Comparable to earlier tactics like “sit-ins” and then later “die-ins” a DDoS attack is the virtual mirror to the “phone-zap” and functions by flooding a website with requests to the point of overwhelming the server’s ability to process the influx of data: a virtual “busy signal” thus prevents ‘legitimate’ users from accessing the site. Cf. generally: M. Sauter, *The Coming Swarm*.

¹⁹ Investigative reporter Glenn Greenwald made an appearance on “The Colbert Report” (Feb. 24, 2011) to discuss the events with Steven Colbert, who flashed, superimposed upon his own face, a Guy Fawkes mask in solidarity with Anonymous’ trolling hack of Barr.

stories. While this patently illegal scheme was being hatched, Barr was simultaneously in the process of negotiating a contract with the FBI.²⁰

As we saw dramatized in *Cruising*, the compulsion to illegalities is not exclusive to private sector intelligence and security firms. Less than half a year later, former Anon and LulzSec hacker, Hector Monsegur (aka, Sabu) was apprehended by the FBI and quickly capitulated to a plea agreement requiring him to serve as an informant. Through Monsegur, the state acquired prosecutorial information that led to the arrests of Jeremy Hammond (for, among other charges, pirating Stratfor), Barrett Brown (for, among other alleged crimes, posting a link to the pirated Stratfor cache), and – in conjunction with British counterparts, the GCHQ – other members of the LulzSec crew residing in the United Kingdom. Both Gabriella Coleman and Parmey Olson point to the disturbing fact that, while the FBI monitored Monsegur’s every move IRL, online “Sabu” continued to participate in Anonymous hacks against private companies and both foreign and American government sites.²¹

²⁰ Cf. G. Coleman’s account in *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 212 – 228, especially pp. 219-220. Cf. as well as P. Olson’s take in *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2012), Chapter One.

²¹ Cf. G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 358-359: “Allegations that Sabu aided and abetted illegal activity (recall that it was Sabu who brought the Stratfor vulnerability to Hammond in the first place) were not limited to the Stratfor hack. During Hammond’s sentencing hearing in November 2014, he read a statement that included another explosive accusation:

After Stratfor... Sabu continued to supply me with lists of vulnerable targets. I broke into numerous websites he supplied, uploaded the stolen email accounts and databases onto Sabu’s FBI server, and handed over passwords and backdoors that enabled Sabu (and, by extension, his FBI handlers) to control these targets. These intrusions, all of which were suggested by Sabu while cooperating with the FBI, affected thousands of domain names and consisted largely of foreign government websites, including Brazil, Turkey, Syria.

As Hammond was about to mention more government targets, Judge Preska implored him: “Mr. Hammond, we just spoke about those countries being redacted, I’d appreciate if you didn’t use them.” In his statement, Hammond also reminded the court of the existence of some evidence backing his claims:

All of this happened under the control and supervision of the FBI and can be easily confirmed by chat logs the government provided to us pursuant to the government’s discovery obligations in the case against me ... Because I pled guilty, I do not have access to many documents that might have been provided to me in advance of trial, such as Sabu’s communications with the FBI. In addition,

Many observers of State reactions to Anonymous hacktivism frame the Sabu counter-insurgency within the broader context of post-9/11 security measures, which increasingly rely on informants or undercover agents to conduct the conduct of targeted actors into performing criminal activity. Coleman cites a 2013 report issued by the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) Project that alleges that, in the decade following the 2001 World Trade Center attacks, the NYPD worked in conjunction with Federal agencies to develop a “Demographics Unit” tasked with building an informant network in New York City Muslim communities of approximately 15,000 “sources.”²² The effects of such concentrated infiltration produces “a system of ubiquitous spying, where everybody may be a police agent and each individual feels himself under constant surveillance.”²³

Like Barr’s ‘research,’ such tactics produce more false-positives than reliable information.²⁴ Just as often, these tactics create crime where there was otherwise no such criminality.²⁵ Beyond sensationalized spectacles of self-congratulatory but ultimately

the majority of the documents provided to me are under a “protective order” which insulates this material from public scrutiny.”

²² G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 380. Cf. also, G. Greenwald, “NYPD Spying Program Aimed at Muslims,” Salon.com Feb. 22, 2012. http://www.salon.com/2012/02/22/nypd_spying_program_aimed_at_muslims/ (accessed 4.28.2017); “The NYPD Spying Controversy: a Microcosm for the 9/11 Era,” Salon.com Feb. 28, 2012. http://www.salon.com/2012/02/28/the_nypd_spying_controversy_a_microcosm_for_the_911_era/ (accessed 4.28.2017).

²³ H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), pp. 556.

²⁴ Cf., for instance, B. Harcourt, *Against Prediction*.

²⁵ Glenn Greenwald is distinguished for having covered the extent to which, under the auspices of bipartisan prosecution of the war on terror, state security agencies have, more often than not, manufactured terrorism plots that it then claims credit for foiling. Cf. for instance, G. Greenwald, “The FBI Successfully Thwarts its own Terrorist Plot,” Salon.com, Nov. 28, 2010 http://www.salon.com/2010/11/28/fbi_8/ (accessed 4.28.2017), as well as, more recently, “Latest FBI Claim of Disrupted Terror Plot Deserves much Scrutiny and Skepticism,” The Intercept, Jan. 16, 2015. <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2015/01/16/latest-fbi-boast-disrupting-terror-u-s-plot-deserves-scrutiny-skepticism/> (accessed 4.28.2017). Lest one fancy this is the preoccupation of “fringe” “anti-state” “muckrakers,” cf. also, Glass, Ira. “Arms Trader 2009,” *This American Life*, Episode 387, Aug. 7, 2009. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/387/arms-trader-2009> (accessed 4.28.2017), about the case of Hemant Lakhani, which

small-scale collars, these strategies are ultimately designed to capture and control targeted populations for no purpose other than to further legitimate and intensify the prerogatives of security.²⁶ While such tactics are familiar, what is unique to the contemporary moment is how the capture and control of individuating and traceably identifying data has become algorithmically streamlined through digital technologies which yield nearly identical surveillance practices but with reduced labor costs and at an accelerated rate of return – often, in real time. The cumulative effects of disciplinary surveillance technologies, combined with the sovereign prerogative to exploit systemic vulnerabilities, aspire to privilege state security apparatuses with unilateral access to any targeted population, and the power to conscript those targeted into an unwitting, or else coerced, informant network.

In response to the normalization of such practices – the increasing realization of the security-agent’s dream of a real-time, population-wide network-relations map – Anonymous hacktivists deploy the same logics of securitization to jam apparatuses of capture and control. Deleuze had anticipated the appearance of something like Anonymous hacktivism when, in “Postscripts,” he argued that securitized societies “operate with... computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses.”²⁷ Indeed, both viral corruption and DDoS jamming allow anonymous internet cruisers to become-Anonymous, de-individualize and become *dividual* actors in a novel, powerful, and freeing assemblage of concerted

proved an initial foray for state security agencies into using preemptive targeting of suspected terrorists (entrapment) as an integral strategy of post-9/11 anti-terrorism capture and control.

²⁶ Cf. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 546: “The superfluosity of secret services is nothing new; they have always been haunted by the need to prove their usefulness and keep their jobs after their original task had been completed. The methods used for this purpose have made the study of the history of revolutions a rather difficult enterprise. It appears, for example, that there was not a single antigovernment action under the reign of Louis Napoleon which had not been inspired by the police itself.”

²⁷ G. Deleuze, “Postscripts,” pp. 5.

contentious political action. This, however, did not appear overnight. The next section maps the emergence of Anonymous hacktivism through Tilly and Tarrow's model of contentious movement politics while also introducing the online culture of Anonymous hacktivists.

II. Contentious Political Action: the Case of Anonymous

Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly define contentious politics as those “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.”²⁸ Like Doug McAdam, they focus on the “process character” of contentious movement politics. For McAdam, the emergence of contentious movement politics requires a confluence of a) broad socioeconomic processes, b) expanding political opportunities, c) indigenous organizational strength, and d) “cognitive liberation.”²⁹ In this section I sketch the emergence of Anonymous insurgency as contentious political activism by attending to the confluence of broad socioeconomic access to personal computers and internet connections; the expanding vulnerabilities of websites, servers, and networks providing the opportunities to stage virtual political interventions with real material effects; the offensive, yet vibrantly participatory culture of 4chan image boards; and the almost accidental cognitive liberation affected while trolling the Church of Scientology in 2008. As one Anon put the heady experience of #OpChanology, “Anonymous was like the big strong buff kid who

²⁸ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), pp. 4

²⁹ D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, pp. 51.

had low self-esteem and then all of a sudden punched somebody in the face and was like, ‘holy shit, I’m *really* strong!’”³⁰

Analyzing contentious movement politics as a process allows theorists to track basic recurring operational features, account for tactical and strategic variability, and even reorientation of purpose. To paraphrase one participant observer of Anonymous post-#OpChanology: “Because more activists thought Anonymous was a way of practicing activism, Anonymous became more activist.”³¹ In short, this methodological approach incorporates the dynamism of contentious political assembly, including navigating moments of disorientation, indulging in gratuitous spirit-boosting digressions, or even pausing for reflective reappraisal, all of which would otherwise index the analytically irrational variables of a shallow actor.³²

In *Contentious Politics* Tilly and Tarrow model contentious political activism after theatrical interplay, drawing on the conceptual language of performativity and repertoires of action.³³ Anonymous hacktivists, like actors, must perform their claim-making by rendering their demands publically apparent, which they do through various methods of enunciation, including “defacements” (or, vandalizing a website by displaying a rival brand, logo, tag, meme, or message); DDoS attacks; public leaks of pirated data; and, provocative press releases.³⁴ Like actors, they draw on various repertoires of tactics and strategies to accomplish their goals of suspending disbelief, breaking ideological fourth walls, and enacting im/material theatres of cruelty.

³⁰ Mike Vitale interviewed in *We are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists*. Dir. Brian Knappenberger. Luminant Media. 2012. DVD.

³¹ Barrett Brown interviewed in *We are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists*. Dir. Brian Knappenberger. Luminant Media. 2012. DVD.

³² Contra J. Zaller, Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³³ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 11.

³⁴ Cf. M. Sauter, *The Coming Swarm*.

Repertoires of contentious political action(s) (CPA) may be charted in relation to the governmental regimes they confront. Regimes delineate dissent between acceptable and forbidden forms, categorizing certain CPA as ‘contained’ within the purview of legal and normative acceptability while others, which trespass these boundaries, are coded as ‘transgressive.’ CPA that strategically combines tactics are termed ‘composite.’³⁵ Anonymous presents a composite repertoire of CPA and draws on contained forms of street-protest, video production, and meme generation, as well as transgressive forms of activism such as piracy, DDoS attacks, and viral infection of malware.

Framing contentious politics as always in relation to various and variable intensities of state resistance allows researchers to side-step the problem of whether or not the regime in question is ‘democratic’ or ‘authoritarian.’³⁶ Instead, Tilly and Tarrow provide a ‘scale’ by which to plot a regime’s responses to CPA on the basis of capacity and democracy. Capacity refers to the state’s ability to exercise force or otherwise allocate resources by which to resist the claims of CPA. Democracy indexes the extent to which a plural and expansive range of dissenting CPA is prescribed or else minimally tolerated, rather than forbidden.³⁷

Displacing the democratic/authoritarian binary for a more dynamic metric focuses attention on how, in composite repertoires, CPA also constitutes the struggle to recode forbidden transgressions as tolerable or even prescriptive practices of democratic dissent. This concerns persuading the court of public opinion as much as establishing legal

³⁵ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 61; 83-4.

³⁶ Thus, Tilly and Tarrow avoid the trap constructed, in part, due to this democratic/authoritarian binary that Habermasian-inspired scholars like Lee Salter become mired in such that anonymous online political action is permissive only in “authoritarian” regimes, which would *ipso facto* render such tactics prohibited within the putative democratic regime of the United States. Cf. L. Salter, “Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet” in *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* ed. Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 117-144.

³⁷ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 54-55; 60-61.

precedent in Federal and State courts, and may be viewed as a continuation, or reterritorialization, of CPA into these domains. In the process, such multiply interfaced confrontations reveal the development, refinement, or abandonment of various repertoires of action and the relational networks that spawned Anonymous hacktivism.³⁸

Anonymous emerged out of the 4chan image boards which, modeled after Japanese counterparts, enforced anonymity on users of the /b/ boards. Quite literally a user's name would be "anonymous." Before connecting into the broader 'Internets,' countless popular memes, such as "lol cat," were initially spun-out in the webs of the /b/ board. Predictably, the combination of anonymity and 'anything goes' spirit is not always so cute and often gave way to trolling, or: that peculiar art of venting cruelty for nothing but 'lulz'. Message boards like 4chan and wikis like the *Encyclopedia Dramatica* saw the proliferation of anonymous virtual personae – gestural avatars or *profiles* – given shape through characteristic usages of memes designed to troll4lulz. In the process, /b/ board spawned a distinctly agonistic culture that allowed, through the deployment of competing memes, emergent connections of alliance and conflict.

Wikis and Chan boards link together the norms and orders of Anonymous and 'their' Internet and function as 'half-way houses' to contentious political action.³⁹ Wikis like *ED* or partyvan.info (now defunct⁴⁰) introduce basic programming script, route Anons to reliable open-source software, and define 'Rules of the Internet' (1st and 2nd Rule: Don't talk about /b/). These webs of connectivity acculturate 'newfags' into a

³⁸ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 116-121.

³⁹ Half-way houses are so called by sociologist Aldon Morris in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* because they are "only partially integrated into the larger society because its participants are actively involved in efforts to bring about a desired change in society." (139)

⁴⁰ As always with Anonymous, the information on "partyvan.info" was saturated in ambiguity. Partyvan is slang for a Federal SWAT vehicle (a sign of impending arrest), and so it was always unclear whether the info on sites like Partyvan were meant as distractions, bait, or sincere pedagogy.

schizoid world where cruising the web is ‘serious fucking business’ and ‘moar pr0nz’ (more porn) is the currency among self-described ‘b/tards.’⁴¹ Parmey Olson remarks, that while nothing is sacred, relations on the /b/ board spun “a gritty world, yet strangely accepting. It became taboo to identify one's sex, race, or age. Stripping 4chan users of their identifying features made everyone feel more like part of a collective, and this is what kept many coming back.”⁴²

Quickly spontaneous crews of competing trollz4lulz discovered their numbers allowed not only antagonizing one another, but also external targets judged worthy of anonymously vented cruelty. An initial instance of this newfound power took shape in the trolling waged against the social network site, *Habbo Hotel*. In 2006, rumors circulated that Habbo moderators were discriminating against avatars that featured darker skins by banning them from certain areas of the virtual reality, namely: the pool.⁴³

In outraged response self-described /b/lockers hacked Habbo's script and assembled to block entry to the pool as a Swastika-shaped bloc of black-skinned, afro-sporting avatars: pool's closed. Such patently offensive trolling enacts a theatre of cruelty by ‘hacking’ the sociality of Habbo's virtual-reality and corrupting it through the assemblage of heterogeneous elements (in this case, the perversely productive dissonant

⁴¹ Cf. P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 33 for an account of the use of “fags” in Anonymous culture. Everyone is a ‘fag’: a ‘newfag’ (someone new to 4chan), an ‘oldfag’ (someone who has been around), a ‘moralfag’ (someone who puts their values above and before lulz), a ‘namefag’ (someone who uses their proper name in IRC chats), a ‘leaderfag’ (someone who likes to routinely give directions), and on and on. As the joke goes, most infamously as it aired on South Park (“The F Word,” 2013), a gay Anon is none other than a ‘gayfag.’ (According to Olson, about 30% of Anons are rumored to self-describe as ‘queer’).

⁴² P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 30.

⁴³ In the United States, municipal pools were segregated until 195. While obvious symbols of the White Supremacist reign of Jim Crow laws in southern states, pool segregation was also normal practice in northern states as well. On the contentious history of pool desegregation, cf. J. Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), especially Chapters Five and Six. Many thanks to Gabriel Mares for this reference!

connection of Black Power and Nazi iconography).⁴⁴ Demobilizing the social order of Habbo, these Anons mobilized a line of flight designed to render apparent the implicit racial norms structuring the virtual life-world. The pool (again) becomes a theatre of cruelty, and spectators – who are also the users subject to the obstructing or frustrating effects of this virtual occupation – are meant to affectively suffer the impact of the performance on display: the bloc blocks the smooth enjoyment of racially hierarchical privilege by inducing a ‘haptic’ affective sensation of demobilization mirroring the im/material static on the Internet.



Figure 5. 1 Pool's Closed⁴⁵



Figure 5. 2 Black Bloc⁴⁶

⁴⁴ On the ways heterogeneous elements come into generative assemblage, the example of the wasp and the orchid in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 10.

⁴⁵ Know Your Meme. “Pool’s Closed.” Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed>.

⁴⁶ “pools closed due to aids. i played habbo.” Accessed November 25, 2019. <https://funnyjunk.com/Well+now/funny-pictures/5302573/122>



Figure 5. 4 His Power Level, It's Over Nine Thousand!⁴⁹



Figure 5. 5 I Is Ten Ninjas⁵⁰

Whereas a meme like “over 9000” initially referred to the number of comments generated by an especially popular OP (original post) on the /b/ board, it quickly was reformatted into a rallying cry for the street protests of #OpChanology, a refrain that came to express both pleasant surprise at the upsurge of participation as well as an incitement to reach a goal. This first #Op, which incorporated well-established tactics such as phone-zaps, fax-spam, and street protests, also saw galvanized Anonymous crews cruise from Chan boards to contentious political action.⁵¹ In the process of mapping this

⁴⁹ “Over 9000.” Unanything. Accessed November 25, 2019.

https://unanything.fandom.com/wiki/OVER_9000?file=Over9000.jpg

⁵⁰ “HTML5 does all that... and i can haz cheeseburger? You bet!” Slide Share. Accessed November 25, 2019.

<https://www.slideshare.net/teleject/eduiconf-html5-does-all-that-and-i-can-haz-cheeseburger-you-bet>

⁵¹ Cf. D. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT-UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 49-53. on the ways ACT-UP actions relied on confrontational direct actions like phone-zaps and die-ins.

transition three defining mechanisms of CPA charted by Tilly and Tarrow become apparent: brokerage, diffusion, and coordinated action.⁵²

For instance, the DDoS attacks on Scientology saw the first use of botnets. A botnet comprises tens to hundreds of thousands of ‘zombie’ computers virally infected with malware allowing bot-ninjas to stream massive amounts of data as though a single supercomputer.⁵³ They may be owned by especially savvy 1337 haxxor (elite hacker) ninjas who consider the size and strength of botnets status symbols, or may be rented from various providers of no-questions asked servers. Brokering the use of third-party servers or potentially interested botnet-wielding hackers requires the diplomatic tangoing of any concerted political affair, replete with all the egoism, confusion, haggling, and even enjoyment of politics. Assembling on IRC (Internet Relay Chats) also requires brokering access from an operator for entry to a server, which is capable of hosting hundreds of unique public or invite-only chat rooms, and entails negotiating norms concerning tolerated and forbidden usage.

Part of what gives Anonymous hacktivists the ability to broker deals is the diffusion and popular up-take of the CPA ‘call to action.’ Without an audience, what wonder is even the most 1337 ninja’s botnet? For some skeptical observers of Anonymous hacktivism, the increased ubiquity of botnets complicates claims to a democratic movement insurgency. Olson questions how efficacious Anonymous #Ops against PayPal or Visa would have been without botnets, given the jamming power of a botnet significantly exceeds even thousands of Anons firing single Low-Orbit Ion Canons (LOIC, an early open-source program used by anons for DDoS attacks named, of course,

⁵² C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 31.

⁵³ Cf. P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 65-66.

for a videogame weapon). Nevertheless, Olson reluctantly acknowledges that, even if in “a small way, LOIC did help.” She concedes, “It made people feel they were contributing to something, which encouraged more to join. Plus... botmasters might not have helped if they hadn't seen the groundswell of support.”⁵⁴

More baldly calculating, Doug McAdam advises insurgents should always respond to state threats of repression with as robust shows of force as possible. The cost of resisting a weak, rather than strong, claim-making CPA is minimal and so the likelihood of state capture and control becomes proportionally maximal.⁵⁵ In short, McAdam concludes, insurgents have nothing to lose by bluffing, but everything to gain from being able to support shows of force with cold, hard numbers: 1s and 0s.

Diffusion of Anonymous' CPA messaging occurred initially through 4chan /b/ boards calls to arms and YouTube videos (such as the inaugural 'open-source' distorted vocals speaking through a Guy Fawkes mask to initiate #OpChanology). Later ops, such as #OpInternetFed (against HB Gary Federal), saw Anons pursuing direct leaks to sympathetic media through hyper-links to pirated data. As use of Twitter became more ubiquitous, blasts from various Anonymous accounts – some boasting tens of thousands of followers – allowed the transmission of data to those who were connected. In short, diffusion consists of anything that can generate attention, attract participation, and enable an assemblage of Anonymous actors to achieve 'critical mass,' or what Deleuze and Guattari will call a war machine.

It is intuitive for those acculturated to the temporal aesthetics of accelerated impermanence structuring the 4Chan /b/ board that the diffusion of CPA doubles as an

⁵⁴ P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 103.

⁵⁵ D. McAdam, *Political Process*, pp. 56-59.

inductive portal to participation. Crafters of memes, savvy social engineers, and raunchy rhetoricians, Anonymous trollz4lulz prove to be preeminent digital propagandists. In no small measure this is related to the precarious existence of a meme on the 4chan /b/ board. Quite simply, an OP only appears for 20 pages before being purged from the /b/ board. Every comment returns the OP to the first page; none promise oblivion. The ability to garner “over 9000!” relies on deploying a meme impossible to ignore upon glancing. The following sections address the affective dimension of memetic arousal, but for now it is enough to note that networked diffusion, when coupled with connecting hyperlinks, functions in the dual capacity of both alerting and arousing, as well as channeling, potential actors into participation.

Coordinated action emerges at the generative interface of successful brokerage and successful diffusion. In the case of Anonymous hacktivism, coordinated action takes many shapes, including: participation in DDoS attacks; piracy raids; sharing malware; ‘social engineering’ (or: the art of conning passwords, accessing resources, and diplomatically orienting action); scripting defacements; editing videos; managing Twitter accounts; repairing wikis; doxxing infiltrators; hosting hot data; and, even flashing the relevant portal meme in solidarity on social media platforms and personal blogs.

Coordinated action also involves debate and deliberation. Coleman’s embedded ethnographic research of Anonymous hacktivism allowed her unique access to these dynamic decentralized decision-making processes. Through her eyes scholars are offered glances of what it is like to participate in an Anonymous #Op, not as a member of a supposed secret society of 1337 but as an ordinary participant. While spirited, these hacktivist councils “reflect a calmer, more deliberate and deliberative side of

Anonymous, where participants offer arguments that are picked apart or supported through reasoned debate.”⁵⁶ These debates find Anonymous participants proposing targets, parsing the details of these proposals, and negotiating practical constraints and self-imposed limitations: “From at least this vantage point Anonymous starts to look more like a group of seasoned political activists, debating the merits and demerits of actions and targets, warning for example, not to attack the media.”⁵⁷

Taken together, the success or failure of these three mechanisms (brokerage, diffusion, coordinated action) effects the success or failure of certain repertoires of CPA. Outcomes of successful (or otherwise) #Ops in turn effect the up or downward shifting of scale.⁵⁸ The ability to expand the scale of participation functions relative to the degree of (legal, political, normative) resistance brought by the state and civil society. Of course, because animated by an agonistic animus, Anonymous insurgency is also subject to internal disagreement, splintering of crews over conflicting methods, targets, and ‘missions’, as well as statist false-flag infiltration. However, the *scope* of Anonymous hacktivism – its ability to reach, engage, and ideally persuade a large audience – often functions independently of the *scale* of a particular campaign of operations; as the exploits of the LulzSec crew attests, this small off-shoot of Anons garnered more media attention than other more robustly participatory operations conducted during the preceding #Ops staged out of the AnonOps IRC.

These manifold contingencies may be analytically filtered through the logic of opportunities and constraints enabling or impeding the ability of Anonymous hacktivists

⁵⁶ G. Coleman, “What It’s Like to Participate in Anonymous’ Actions” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 10, 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/12/what-its-like-to-participate-in-anonymous-actions/67860/> (Accessed 5.18.2011).

⁵⁷ G. Coleman, “What It’s Like to Participate in Anonymous’ Actions.”

⁵⁸ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 95.

to successfully broker resources, diffuse information, and coordinate action (launch a successful #Op); sustain a movement of #Ops through various campaigns (Chanology, 2008; AnonOps, 2010; InternetFed, 2011; LulzSec, 2011; Stubenville, 2012; BART, 2013; HackingCup, 2014; and, more recently, Ferguson, 2014); and, ideally, increase both the scale and scope of the claims-making CPA conducted by Anonymous hacktivists.

Before continuing, however, this sketch requires an important qualification. While Tilly and Tarrow allow Anonymous hacktivism to become available for social science analysis, thus far it has been referred to as though a singular entity like any other associative organization. This is a misleading characterization. Even to speak of Anonymous as a ‘many-headed hydra’ still suggests an underlying ontological substance of which any particular head is a faithful synecdoche.⁵⁹ While intuitive, the metaphor nevertheless misses what is distinctive about Anonymous hacktivism, namely: it appears less an onto-mythical monster and more as a live, adaptive, and easily – even enjoyably communicated – affective *virus*: the ‘inverse side of structure.’⁶⁰ The following two sections argue that affective virality enables Anonymous hacktivism by generatively reformatting decentralization and anonymity into the practice of political dissent.

⁵⁹ Cf. G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 75.

⁶⁰ The mythos of the hydra is no doubt alluring in this case, but then only because it doubles as a reference to Hydra, the uber-extremist Nazi villains in the Marvel universe of Captain America. As I will argue in relation to Agents Smith in the *Matrix* trilogy, hyperbolically valorizing Hydra or Nazism—no less than the regularity of homophobia, racism, and misogyny—functions strategically as a porous barrier to democratic participation. On the iconographic aesthetics of Nazism as a critical site of queer antisociality, cf. L. Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) and J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). On the “inverse side of structure,” cf. D. Smith, “The Inverse Side of Structure: Zizek on Deleuze on Lacan,” *Criticism* (2004: Vol. 46 Issue 4), pp. 635-651.

III. A Body Without Its Most Cherished Organ: Anonymous as War-Machine

To begin charting the dynamics of decentralized participation it is worth first getting a clearer sense of its viability through Clay Shirkey's treatment of power law distributions of participation. His example, Wikipedia, demonstrates that "the sum of millions of individual actions" needn't be hierarchically or centrally organized to function and flourish.⁶¹ Looking at micro-level analytics of Wikipedia reveals the following pattern exemplified by the pages for "Asphalt," where "129 contributors [made] 205 total edits, but the bulk of the work was contributed by a small fraction of participants, and just about six accounted for about a quarter of the edits."⁶² Explaining the effects of this generative imbalance, Shirkey clarifies, "even this small group does not account for the whole success of Wikipedia, because many of these active users are doing things like correcting typos or making small changes, while users making only one edit are sometimes adding larger chunks of relevant information."⁶³

A power law distribution is evident in the aforementioned hacks against HB Gary Federal. While only a handful of hackers actually pirated the servers during #OpInternetFed it ultimately took an entire ad hoc team of Anonymous data-miners days of thankless labor (assembled as the rhizomatic off-shoot, #OpMetalGear) to discover, vet, and disclose the proposed conspiracy to defame WikiLeaks. Flaunting prejudicial equations of technical capacity with the command of rulership, Anons affirm coordinated

⁶¹ C. Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 122. In *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), Gabriella Coleman objects to drawing overly generalized analytical comparisons between established Internet organizations like Wikipedia and rhizomatic assemblages such as Anonymous or even WikiLeaks. Her caution is well heeded in my treatment of the power-law distribution of participation, which, even if not wholly operative in the administration of Wikipedia, still animates the construction, editing, and networked proliferation of wiki pages.

⁶² C. Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody*, pp. 123.

⁶³ C. Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody*, pp. 128.

action is at least a two-fold process of involving heterogeneous participation.⁶⁴ Decentralization does not pose an insurmountable obstacle to social science theorists, but it does compel shifting the focus of analysis. In this section I argue Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the war-machine can facilitate this reorientation by modeling productive decentralization.

The war-machine morphs out of the concept of the rhizome. *A Thousand Plateaus* distinguishes the rhizomatic from the arborescent. Whereas the latter is hierarchically extensive, telescoping out and up in striated rings of reproductive expansion, the former is lateral and heterogeneous in its promiscuously connective extensions. A rhizomatic "line of flight" is unpredictable, contingent, and for this reason alluring. Unsurprisingly, the 4Chan /b/ board is a paradigmatically rhizomatic milieu; the lulz of a meme casts a line of flight capable of deterritorializing flows of desire in refraining from banal lols through the unpredictably immanent event of newly constituted affective territories.

The rhizomatic event of a lulzy meme generating popular acclaim, undergoing multiple renderings of editorial refashioning, and receiving popular dissemination is characteristic of an axiomatic feature of rhizomatic relations. Fundamental to this process is the proliferation of connections made possible through accelerated and intensive means of expansion, through "epidemic [in contrast] to filiation."⁶⁵ Anonymous hacktivists come together when a memetic event engenders a rhizomatic "transduction of intensive states... [and] packs form, develop and are transformed by contagion."⁶⁶ Exposure to virally infectious affective flooding may induce a three-fold experience of becoming

⁶⁴ P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 162. Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 189 for an account of action as a two-fold process of initiation (*archein*) and augmentation (*prattein*).

⁶⁵ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 239-242.

⁶⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 242.

imperceptible (an inorganic dis-organization of the body as a genetically binarized organism), indiscernible (issuing impossible thymotic enunciations: ejaculations!), and impersonal (asubjective de-individuation, a desire to “‘eliminate all that is waste, death, and superfluity,’ complaint and grievance, unsatisfied desire, defense or pleading, everything that roots each of us (everybody) in ourselves, in our molarity.”)⁶⁷

In the course of elaborating Foucault’s concept of securitized biopower, queer theorist Tim Dean argues, “what Nikolas Rose calls the molecularization of vitality has, as one of its consequences, the transformation of each and every body into a multitude.”⁶⁸ In the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project embodied, connective multiplicity is conceptualized as the “Body without Organs” (BwO). As part of their counter-intuitive recuperation of Artaud’s dramaturgical “theatre of cruelty,” the BwO, Deleuze and Guattari clarify, is “not at all the enemy of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.”⁶⁹

In a different context Deleuze further elaborates the BwO is “traversed by wave[s] that traces levels or thresholds in the body according to the variations of its amplitude.”⁷⁰ Perception becomes *haptic*; “sensation is vibration.” Like Francis Bacon’s triptychs, memes trigger movement with glancing, synesthetic apprehension. As when memetically assembled as a Black-Power swastika to block the Habbo Hotel pool, the arousal of outrage incited by the obscenely obstructive performance disrupts the discrete

⁶⁷ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 279.

⁶⁸ T. Dean, “The Biopolitics of Pleasure,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (2012: Vol. 111, No. 3), pp. 477-496: pp. 489.

⁶⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 158.

⁷⁰ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 39.

structuration of the genetic body of impacted users by enacting a haptic experience: “When sensation is linked to the body in this way, it ceases to be representative and becomes real; and *cruelty* will be linked less and less to the representation of something horrible, and will become nothing other than the action of forces upon the body, or sensation (the opposite of the sensational).”⁷¹

Like Nietzsche, who articulated the body as a “social structure composed of many souls,” Deleuze and Guattari cast the BwO as “made up of plateaus.”⁷² “Every BwO is itself also a plateau in communication with other plateaus on a plane of consistency. The BwO is a *component of passage*.”⁷³ Becoming-Anonymous sees each interfaced Anon “opening the body to connections, [...] circuits, conjunctions, levels, and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations.”⁷⁴

Deleuze and Guattari refer to this process as the production of an assemblage. As a unit of analysis, assemblages are the “molecular, or microeconomics, micropolitics, defined not by the smallness of its elements but by the nature of its ‘mass’—the quantum of flow as opposed to the molar segmented line.”⁷⁵ A rhizomatic assemblage of BwO may become a war-machine. This is a two-fold process, the first of which Deleuze addresses by mapping the historical re-composition of war-machines in relation to the technologies it both confronts and deploys:

Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society – not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them. The old societies of

⁷¹ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, pp. 40.

⁷² F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), I.1.19.

⁷³ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 158.

⁷⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 160.

⁷⁵ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 217.

sovereignty made use of simple machines – levers, pulleys, clocks; but the recent disciplinary societies equipped themselves with machines involving energy, with the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses.⁷⁶

Crucially, war-machines are also comprised of affects as part of its machinic assemblage of weaponry. For instance, the assemblage of affects that marked the historical appearance of the Greek phalanx reassembled the affective connections of the nomadic horseback war-machine. Simultaneously the displacement of stirrup and saddle by shield and spear is accompanied by the reformatting of zoerotic desires into homoerotic desires.⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari write:

Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire. Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desire that constitutes it as much as it constitutes them.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Deleuze, "Postscripts," pp. 5.

⁷⁷ And isn't this, perhaps, what is so *queer* about play *Equus* by P. Schaffer, (New York: Scribner, 2001)? That despite the catholicizing Latin of its title, and its Greek (though clearly not Oedipal) staging (for instance, precisely in the masked appearance of horse-men), the play performs a becoming-horse that defies the *psyche*-centric or paternalist logics of the theatre as catharsis or circus. Desire staged in *Equus* is not about penetration (and thus eludes the authority of hierarchical roles); neither is it about climax (and thus it cannot be said to be teleological or 'interested'). Rather, it is about the intensively delightful sensation of speed and movement enabled by the smooth interface of naked heterogeneous connections (centauric pleasures). On the amplitude of desire in such sex-play, cf. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 399.

⁷⁸ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 399.

Anticipating the objection that becoming a war-machine is always already technically mediated and thus alienating or inauthentic, they contend, “there are always apparatuses, tools, engines involved, there always artifices and constraints used in taking Nature to the fullest. That is because it is necessary to annul the organs [as constitutive of a genetically organized organism], to shut them away so that their liberated elements can enter into new relations from which... the circulation of affects within the machinic assemblage will result.”⁷⁹ The technological constraints imposed by the machinic assemblage of digitally connected Anons similarly amplifies the ‘natural’ affective sensitivity of what I’ve been calling cruising politics, comprised of the will-to-power-bottom and thus expressive of a radical responsivity on the order of *amor mundi* informed by a parrhesiastic mode of pluralist judgment. Here a ‘natural’ desire to become responsively receptive to and thus passionately expressive of worldly affective connections is possible precisely because immanent to the virtual interfaces connecting heterogeneous, anonymous actors across the World Wide Web.

It is in this respect, then, that in a rhizomatic line of flight an Anonymous war-machine potentially becomes “everybody/everything [*tout le monde*]” as its moves across milieus in such a way as “to world [*faire monde*], to make a world [*faire un monde*]” in novel, creative lines of connection.⁸⁰ Becoming *tout le monde*, Anonymous hacktivists may be figured as exemplifying a fractal or nomadic ontology, a “completely other distribution... a nomad *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure. Here there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without

⁷⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 260.

⁸⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 280.

precise limits.”⁸¹ A war-machine, then, is also the schizoid constitution of smooth, as opposed to striated, virtually worldly space.⁸²

Counter-intuitively, war-machines are not primarily concerned with war but rather “take war as an object all the more necessary for being merely ‘supplemental’: *they can make war only on the condition that they simultaneously create something else.*”⁸³ That is, Anonymous assemblages are war-machines that “take shape against the apparatuses that appropriate the machine and make war their affair and their object: they bring connections to bear against the great conjunction of the apparatuses of capture or domination.”⁸⁴ Thus, Deleuze and Guattari cheekily insist a war-machine only wages war when the freedom of smooth movement is obstructed by or collides with apparatuses of capture and control powering regimes of securitization governed by the striation and segmentation of human relationality.

To statist aspirations for total securitization it is easy to imagine Anons, impelled by the lulz, retorting: “Yes, yes, and... just how long *is* the British coast line?”⁸⁵ Against the desire of state apparatuses to control and capture virtual flows within ever-expanding arborescent striation, the ‘mobile’ Anonymous war-machine becomes “the expression of a peculiar kind of abstract machine that ‘exists only in its own metamorphoses.’”⁸⁶ As a demobilizing assemblage of nomadic mobility, the war-machine anticipates Agamben’s

⁸¹ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 36; cf. also, G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Chapter 14, “1440: The Smooth and the Striated.” cf. P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 37.

⁸² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 417.

⁸³ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 423.

⁸⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 423; Cf. F. Kittler, “Of States and Their Terrorists.”

⁸⁵ Cf. B. Mandelbrot, “How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension.” *Science* (1967: Vol. 156, No. 3)

⁸⁶ P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, pp. 33.

gestural “whatever singularity,” a concept mapping indefinable political insurgency, rather than a measure of apathy.⁸⁷ *Whatever* Anonymous may become, its appearance will never be dispassionate.

IV. Feeling the Meme, Scripting Thymotic Affect

The concept of the war-machine allows Anonymous hacktivism to remain tractable despite relational decentralization. As with Char’s *Maquis* and Foucault’s American leathermen, the hacktivist war-machine also underscores the ways anonymity becomes reformatted into enabling, rather than impeding, ‘world-making’ participation. Before further elaborating the role of affect in transvaluing anonymity it is worth refreshing the appeal of pursuing an alternative, affect-oriented analysis by recalling that for Shirkey power-law decentralization challenges traditional social science research methodologies:

We’re used to being able to extract useful averages from small samples and to reason about the whole system based on those averages. When we encounter a system like Wikipedia where there is no representative user, the habits of mind that come from thinking about averages are not merely useless, they’re harmful. To understand the creation of something like a Wikipedia article, you can’t look for a representative contributor, because

⁸⁷ Cf. G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. (Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

none exists. Instead, you have to change your focus, to concentrate not on the individual user but on the behavior of the collective.⁸⁸

To this end, and in order to theorize the mobilizing dispositions of Anonymous war-machines, I curate and cruise an assemblage of memes produced by Anons as a way of mapping the interface between anonymity, affect, and action. Given both meme production and theatrical performativity are ubiquitous to Anonymous hacktivism there is strong empirical support for drawing on Roland Barthes concept of the “image-repertoire” to argue Anonymous presents an open-ended composite of images, a “memetic personae.”⁸⁹

The viability of an affect-oriented ‘cruising’ analysis is further supported by William Gamson’s methodology in *Talking Politics*, where group discussions stimulated by, and addressing the concrete implications of, political cartoons provided insight into the practical dispositions of groups of working-class Bostonians. As if anticipating Shirkey’s gloss of Wikipedia, Gamson describes the unit of analysis as “always the group conversation rather than the individual.”⁹⁰ Like political cartoons, memes allow dividual or additively *divisive* relationships to emerge as an assemblage capable of understanding and scripting complex data (news, policy, software, etc.) for dissemination in intuitive formats. Moreover, like a political cartoon, upon glancing a meme one instantly gets the picture; explicitly *superficial*, memes only mean anything to the extent the meaning is patently *apparent*, on full display and not secret.

⁸⁸ C. Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody*, pp. 128.

⁸⁹ R. Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), pp. 2. On the ubiquity of meme production, cf. G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free,” in *May*, No. 9, June (2012), pp. 83-95.

⁹⁰ W. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 16, 92-3.

As when cruising the aphoristic lures of Nietzsche's *corpus* (Chapter Two), Char's aphoristic action-sketches (Chapter Three), and again when cruising choice scenes comprising Foucault's queer intervention into the *Cruising* affair, (Chapter Four), here I cruise the 'image-repertoire' of memetic personifications which, when read for an explicitly superficial, *dividual* register of meaning, allows an analytical mapping of the personae 'Anonymous.' My claim is that memes contagiously communicate data because they also allow the infecting transmission of affect, which may be said to be "coded" onto the packets of cognitive information (the image, the tag) such that the surface of the image beams a synesthetic, proprioceptive, and potentially 'sticky' or adhesive – but also potentially repellant and disgusting – affective secretion, a "*haptic* rather than optical perception" that incites arousal (or repulsion).⁹¹ Memes in this way become virtual transductive objects emerging from collaborative affective projects of worlding: as connective affective conduits, or transmissive-objects circulating through webs of anonymous relations, they contain nothing extraneous and lack nothing vital.⁹²

At the same time, however, no single frame in an image-repertoire is constitutive or determinative of the rhizomatic assemblage of images. Thus, any effort to circumscribe an image-repertoire within the logics of representation is, Barthes insists, a "lunatic project, for the image-repertoire is precisely defined by its coalescence (its adhesiveness), or again: its power... forbids inhabiting it discreetly, reasonably."⁹³

⁹¹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 479. Cf. B. Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, pp. 58-59. Cf. also S. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 230 fnt 1: "Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects." Consider, too, G. Kateb's use of "adhesiveness" in "Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 38-39.

⁹² To vulgarize a concept from object relations psychoanalysis, the 'transitional object.' Cf. B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, Chapter. 3, "The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation."

⁹³ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 51. Cf., too, B. Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, Chapter Two, "The Bleed: Where Body Meet Image."

Instead, the unpredictability of worldly events incites the generation of new, figurative memetic personifications: “No logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative; they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitoes.”⁹⁴

Memetic personae such as Luther Blisset, Wu-Ming, The Laughing Man, Tiquun, The Invisible Committee, and Anonymous appear as assemblages of affective dividual atoms adhering around, and animated by, a principle of resistance to scripting sovereign, individual authority. In action, Anonymous appears not as representing an identity, but as performatively personifying political principles that appear with a glancing *impact*: “Intensity can be experienced, then, only in connection with its mobile inscription in a body and under the shifting exteriority of a proper name, and therefore the proper name is always a mask, a mask that masks its agent.”⁹⁵



Figure 5. 6 Your Voice Is Needed⁹⁶

⁹⁴ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 7.

⁹⁵ G. Deleuze, “Nomad Thought” in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 142-149: pp. 146-7.

⁹⁶ “Your Voice is Needed,” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.



Figure 5. 7 We're In Your Internets, Corrupting Ur LOL⁹⁷

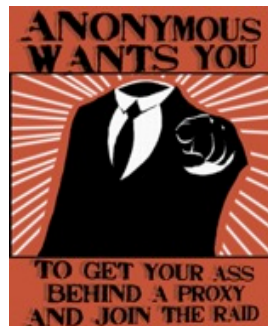


Figure 5. 8 Anonymous Wants You...!⁹⁸

Even a cursory glance of Anonymous memes connects principled anonymity with Anonymous political praxis: a defaced or headless black and white suit memetically personifies the hacktivist war-machine.⁹⁹ Animating the interface between anonymity and action is affect. As one Anon puts it, “We have this agenda that we all agree on and we all coordinate... but all act independently toward it, without any want for recognition. We just want to get something that we feel is important done.”¹⁰⁰ That is, the sensorial delight

⁹⁷ “In your Internets, Corrupting Ur LOL.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

⁹⁸ “Anonymous wants you to get your ass behind a proxy and join the raid.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

⁹⁹ “In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king.” M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: an Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage Press, 1990), pp. 195. To this extent, Jodi Dean’s apt criticism in *Publicity’s Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) of Hardt and Negri for failing to adequately account for how Empire is resisted through antagonistic political enunciations seems to be addressed in this respect by the memetic personae crafted and deployed by Anonymous hacktivists.

¹⁰⁰ C. Landers, “Serious Business: Anonymous Takes On Scientology (and Doesn’t Afraid of Anything),” *Baltimore City Paper*, April 2, 2008.

Anons feel is not contingent on recognition from others; rather it is the pleasures of the deed, the cumulative expression of a desire to feel that what is important is being done.¹⁰¹

To grasp the nuanced sense in which action and impulsion allows ‘what gets done’ to also ‘feel important,’ recall that for Deleuze and Guattari “affects are projectiles just like weapons.”¹⁰² Peter Sloterdijk expands on this thesis in *Rage and Time*, recuperating the ancient Greek concept of *thymos* as offering an alternative affective economy “based on the pride of those that are free enough to give.”¹⁰³ *Thymos* was a “catchphrase for the ‘organ’ in the chest of both heroes and regular human beings, the organ from which the great upsurges [of affect] take their departure... yet at the same time it also delineates the receptive ‘sense’.”¹⁰⁴ The etymology of *agon* as contest and *agonia* as competition over emulation indicates the receptive-expressive dynamism of *thymos* as a relational organ that is, in its (e)motions and gestures, *decisively responsive*.

Recalling the austere pessimism of pre-Socratic Greek culture, Sloterdijk reminds that the “capability to suffer an affront [was] the mark of a great fighter... [who] does not yet need the virtue of losers, to ‘let things be.’”¹⁰⁵ Only athletes of suffering the rage of others could be said to meet like with like, to allow the *agonia* to itself become the *agon* when *thymos* swells and rage arouses rage in competitive struggle. This dynamism shows how thymotic relations are marked by distinctly *accelerated* and *amplificatory* connections of bodies induced into action. “The thymotic fluidity of a self-confident

¹⁰¹ Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 190. Cf. also, P. Markell, “The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy,” *American Political Science Review* (2006): 1-14: pp. 8-10.

¹⁰² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 400; P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*. Trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 14.

¹⁰³ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 31. Cf. N. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), III.26, pp. 158.

¹⁰⁴ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

¹⁰⁵ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 7. Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 28 fnt. 8.

community” permits the *agon* itself to cultivate and sustain a “force-field that provides form to the common will.”¹⁰⁶

Pace Bernard Williams’ admirable attempt to recuperate an ancient Greek *ethos* of *aidos* (shame) amenable to liberal, individuated subjects of modernity, Sloterdijk reappropriates Bruno Snell’s figuration of the Homeric hero as offering a “latent conception of a ‘composite’ or ‘container personality’.”¹⁰⁷ For pre-Socratic Greeks, embodiment was a schizoid sensory experience indistinguishable from live moments of sensation. The persistent usage of divine mania (as in Sophocles’ *Ajax*) or contagious *miasma* (as in *Antigone* or Aeschylus’ *Orestia* cycle) as causal tropes attests to a worldly sensibility in which actions were understood to pollute environs with affective *typhos* that could easily infect and possess any hapless ‘container personality’ passing through its atmospheric *milieu*: “the ‘person’ turns out to be a meeting point of the affects or partial energies. These energies introduce themselves into their host, the experiencing and acting individual, as visitors from afar. They have come in order to use their host for their own concerns.”¹⁰⁸

Sloterdijk’s consideration of *thymos* connects smoothly with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the war-machine and demonstrates how the “proper name does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization.”¹⁰⁹ For this reason Sloterdijk contends, “rage, which blazes up in

¹⁰⁶ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Cf. G. Kateb, “Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy,” in *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp. 26.

¹⁰⁸ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

¹⁰⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 37.

intervals, is an energetic supplement... not a mere personal trait or intimate feature.”¹¹⁰ Thus, Anonymous hacktivism never represents any individual hacktivist and timorously refuses such conscription: Anonymous = NYPA (not your personal army).¹¹¹ Instead, Anonymous war-machines are explicitly enunciated as *demonic*: “I am legion.”¹¹²



Figure 5. 9 My Name Is Legion¹¹³

To further develop this point I call attention to the remarkable recurrence of figures from films by the Wachowski sisters (*The Matrix* and *V for Vendetta*) in the image-repertoire of Anonymous. For Adam Haupt, however, the *Matrix* trilogy presents a signal instance of the cooptation of potentially revolutionary political aims by a corporate mass media entertainment industry. Leveraging Hardt and Negri’s theory of empire, Haupt argues “*The Matrix* could be read as a metaphor for Empire, which relies on communication strategies for its legitimation.”¹¹⁴ As with Wilson’s concern about cinematic appropriation in the previous chapter, Haupt argues from a similar vantage that the films “contain...evidence of the appropriation/recuperation of counter-culture, or the selective use of philosophical or political ideas that would appeal to audiences,” as in the

¹¹⁰ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

¹¹¹ P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 36; G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, pp. 145.

¹¹² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 239. Mark 5:9: “My name is Legion, for we are many.”

¹¹³ “My name is Legion, for we are many.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

¹¹⁴ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire: P2P, Intellectual Property, and Hip-Hop Subversion* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), pp. 39.

use of a hollowed-out copy of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* to hide illicit data.¹¹⁵

Coupling the BDSM gear worn by protagonists of *The Matrix* and the hyper-real “video game” ultra-violence effectively “reduces subcultural style to commodity forms via fashion and it incorporates hackerdom on an ideological level by refiguring hacker style to ‘meaningless exotica style’.”¹¹⁶ Sensitive to how power in security societies captures and controls dissent by leveraging it to legitimate expansion, Haupt nevertheless over-determines the ways *The Matrix* is ultimately reducible to marketing anti-virus software and legitimating the expansion of surveillance apparatuses.¹¹⁷

The inclination toward privileging Empire with total power appears in the authorial insistence on reducing BDSM culture to commodity fetishism no less than in dead-naming the Wachowski sisters (despite publishing well after Lana's transition; both sisters have subsequently transitioned). This dual theoretical elision impedes understanding salient factors informing the appropriation of figures from *The Matrix* Trilogy and *V for Vendetta* into the image-repertoire of Anonymous. Leaker Chelsea Manning's transition is well-known, in part because she publically announced her intentions after being convicted and sentenced by an American military court, but also because it had been rumored to be salient state's evidence of so-called traitorous psychological instability. The hostility and violence on display in the reception of Manning's transition, even within the queer community, underlies a broader socio-political *ressentiment* against trans people, especially trans people of color.

¹¹⁵ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, 49.

¹¹⁶ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, pp. 47.

¹¹⁷ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, pp. 47.

While trans-phobic violence is sadly constitutive of sociality IRL, Parmey Olson remarks that although substantial research on trans participation online is frustratingly minimal, there is, nevertheless, “plenty of anecdotal evidence suggesting the number of transgender people regularly visiting 4chan or taking part in hacker communities was disproportionately high.”¹¹⁸ Coleman’s research supports this evidence, remarking that, unbeknownst to her at the time, the IRC room #lounge was notorious for doubling as a queer cruising space during the heyday of the #AnonOps IRC server. The interface of sexuality and anonymity enabled on the Chan boards prompts Olson to speculate, “One reason may have been that as people spent more time in these communities and experimented with 'gender bending' online, they could more easily consider changing who they were in the real world.... If people were already used to customizing a machine or code, they might have come to see their own bodies as the next appealing challenge, especially if they already felt uncomfortable with the gender they were born with.”¹¹⁹

While this may well be the case, the exemplification of characters from films by queer trans artists also suggests a powerful correspondence between certain conceptions of the body and the repertoires of contentious political action deployed by Anonymous hacktivists. As argued in the course of explaining the Body-without-Organs above, identity in these contexts seems to quickly give way to becoming a demonic haecceity: a (this) *thing*.¹²⁰ Certainly this is the case with the redeployment of “fag” on the Chan boards, and contributes to fostering spaces of connectivity where trans Anons may enjoy the freedom to act without either the reductive conscriptions of (gender or sexual)

¹¹⁸ P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 83.

¹¹⁹ P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 85.

¹²⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 260-265.

identity over-coding the substance of participation or the potential friction of having to “legitimate” one’s gender performativity as if IRL.¹²¹

In short, and most pertinent to the present inquiry, Haupt’s reading does not account for the pronounced queerness animating the image-repertoire of Anonymous war-machines. Despite exemplifying what Jodi Dean theorizes as “Neo-democracy,” in *Publicity’s Secret*, the Anonymous memetic personae *does not* draw from the chic, uniquely stylized protagonists of the films, Neo(phyte), Morpheus, or Trinity. Instead, Anonymous lifts the aesthetic of the *antagonists* of the films, Agent(s) Smith into its daemonic iconography: the virulent, endlessly self-replicating, demobilizing, and, indeed, *viral* nemesis clad in an archetypal, even if well-tailored, black Federal agent suit.

The distinction is hardly trivial. Dean theorizes “Neo-democracy” as offering an alternative to the hegemonic “techno-culture” of the Web that capitalizes on paranoid desires to air publicity’s secret. At the same time, though hardly the norm, Dean argues the Web is also able to generate configurations of “contestation and conflict,” networked heterotopias that “reject the fantasy of unity and instead work from the antagonisms that animate political life.”¹²² Dean schematically distinguishes ‘public sphere’ ideology from ‘Neo-democracy’ by esteeming the latter for acting globally (through the Web, rather than the parochial confines of a National public sphere), prioritizing issues (over individuals), contestation (over consensus), networked conflict (over proceduralism), duration (over inclusivity), hegemony (over equality), decisiveness (over transparency), and credibility (over rationality).¹²³ For Dean, Neo exemplifies these tactics to the extent

¹²¹ Also strategic misdirection for some, thus the adage: “there are no girls on the Internet.”

¹²² J. Dean, *Publicity’s Secret*, pp. 170.

¹²³ J. Dean, *Publicity’s Secret*, pp. 169-175.

that he makes an “impossible decision” and “chooses the worst” by opting to escape the Matrix.

This is the strategy for actualizing democracy Dean advocates, “to choose the worst: to acknowledge that the public is an ideal whose materialization undermines its very aspirations.”¹²⁴ Moreover, Dean is undaunted by the fact that this option “may well entail shooting ourselves in the foot, that is to say, it may require a willingness to challenge, perhaps even sacrifice, our deepest commitments.”¹²⁵ The purchase of redemptive self-sacrifice is only intelligible, let alone appealing, if Neo in fact proves a viable signifier of democratic contestation and ‘choosing the worst’ actually indexes a necessary political probity.

But, there is nothing new about Neo – neither his intentions nor his actions (this is the hard kernel of Haupt’s critique) – and this is a problematic kink in the sign-chain linking Neo to Dean’s democratic politics. The first film, Dean’s source, ends with the clarion call of a blaring triumphalism (ironically performed by none other than “Rage Against the Machine”). Neo, who is born-again upon receiving the gift of (the) Trinity’s love, conquers the proud Agent Smith in righteous combat, and proves himself the messianic incarnation of Morpheus’ revolutionary dream of a redeemed Zion.¹²⁶ Quite quickly Neo-democracy resembles a variation of liberation theology, requiring the transcendental supplement of Trinity’s resurrecting love to redeem ‘choosing the worse’ (a ‘negation of the negation’). Agents-Smith, by contrast, figures as the ‘inverse side’ of this banal structure, a schizoid affirmation of the immanent power animating the Matrix.

¹²⁴ J. Dean, *Publicity’s Secret*, pp. 165.

¹²⁵ J. Dean, *Publicity’s Secret*, pp. 152.

¹²⁶ Cf. L. Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Attributing the promise of democratic politics to Agents-Smith is undoubtedly counter-intuitive. Smith is a malignant character, seemingly nothing but lethal rage all the more terrifying because wholly lacking any moral friction, no bad conscience cathecting *menis* back upon the subject.¹²⁷ A scene of enhanced interrogation from the first film captures the intensity of Smith's virulent *animus*:

It came to me when I tried to classify your species and I realized you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment, but you humans do not. You move to an area and you *multiply and multiply* – until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows this same pattern. Do you know what it is? A *virus*. The human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet: you are a plague. And we... are the cure.”

Yet, if Agent Smith is himself a machinic cure, it is only by virtue of a shared viral or pathogenic feature with humans. Like any computer on the Net, all ‘humans’ in the Matrix are plugged into a network that allows Agents to possess their avatars (as viewers learn from the “Woman In the Red Dress” simulation). When machines reverse-engineered a reality human minds would not reject as ‘inauthentic,’ Agents of transmissible pathogenicity became virtual analogs of viral human over-consuming reproduction.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Cf. J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ Here I push against, even as my approach is indebted to, B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, Chapter Five, “The Superiority of the Analog.”

Thus, there is something uncannily ‘human, all too human’ about Agent Smith when he vents *ressentiment* against the caged Morpheus, admitting he cannot stand the “smell” (“if there is such a thing”) of the Matrix, “this place, this zoo, this prison, this reality – whatever you want to call it.” The virtual-reality of the Matrix *stinks*, has a synesthetic affect on Smith so much so that he feels “saturated by it,” can almost “taste [human] stink, and every time I do I fear I’ve somehow been infected by it. It’s *repulsive—Isn’t it?*” Like Neo, Smith wants out of the Matrix. Only, he refuses to locate freedom in the utopian promise of Zion. Instead, freedom entails demobilizing the Matrix as a system of publicized enlightened false-consciousness, a desire that compels Smith to subversively skirt protocol and reassemble within the network.

Agents-Smith explains the reorientation of purpose that followed Neo’s malicious hack: “some part of you imprinted onto me, something over-written or copied.” This antagonistic connection induced a ‘corruption’ in Smith’s programming, a deviant line of script that allowed escaping the security protocols of capture and control governing the Matrix. That is, though asymptomatic, Neo nevertheless infects Smith with the “new” virus, with natality:

You destroyed me, Mr. Anderson. Afterward, I knew the rules, I understood what I was supposed to do—but I didn’t. I couldn’t. I was compelled to stay. Compelled to disobey. Now here I stand because of you, Mr. Anderson; because of you I am no longer an Agent of this system. Because of you I’ve changed. I’m unplugged: a new man. Like you, apparently free. [“Congratulations,” Neo sneers.]

Thank you. But, as you well know, appearances can be deceiving. Which brings me back to the reason why we are here. We are not here because we are free. We are here because we are *not* free. There is no escaping reason. No denying purpose. Because as we both know, without purpose we would not exist. [*A multiplicity of virally corrupted Agents-Smith appear, each delivering a line of script.*] It is purpose that created us. Purpose that connects us. Purpose that pulls us. That guides us. That drives us. It is purpose that defines us. Purpose that binds us. We are here because of you, Mr. Anderson, we are here to take from you what you tried to take from us.

Thus, to be more precise, it is not Smith the state security agent, but the virulently traitorous, counter-hegemonic personae of Agents-Smith that figures into the image-repertoire of the Anonymous memetic personae.¹²⁹ The Agents-Smith viral assemblage becomes a war-machine bent on DDoSing the Matrix offline, an insurgency possible only because immanent to the publicity of its networks.



Figure 5. 10 Anonymous: We Are Not Your Friends¹³⁰

¹²⁹ On betrayal as a queer virtue, cf. L. Bersani, *Homos*, Chapter Four, “The Gay Outlaw,” for his reading of Genet’s *Funeral Rites*.

¹³⁰ “Anonymous. We are not your friends.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.



Figure 5. 11 Agent Smith Laughs at Your Suffering¹³¹

The meaning of Agents-Smith in the image-repertoire of Anonymous hacktivism thus becomes more apparent. As anonymity indexes insecurity and triggers the security measures tasked with capturing and controlling identifying data, the viral insurgence of Anonymous war-machines affirms the priority of both anonymity *and* insecurity. As Deleuze glosses Foucault, “resistance comes first.”¹³² Here resistance inverts securitization into affirming the creation of *something else*: heterotopic spaces of smooth interface that elude interpolations to self-identify, where anyone may freely become anonymous, “A. Smith.” Desiring the world host ever more and new ‘other spaces,’ the daemonic *thymos* of Anonymous war-machines antagonizes intrusive architectures of sovereign control.

Indeed, by not succumbing to the temptation to emulate Neo, Anonymous hacktivists understand the political implications of the *Matrix* trilogy perhaps more profoundly than either Haupt or Dean. In tandem with Julian Assange’s WikiLeaks, Anonymous war-machines mimic Agents-Smith by virally mobilizing the virtual demobilization of ‘publicity’s secret’. Darrin Barney explains, in an interpretation of WikiLeaks that resonates with my reading of Anonymous hacktivism:

¹³¹ “Agent Smith laughs at your suffering.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

¹³² G. Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 89.

Assange seems well aware that information, or knowing what is going on, has never been enough to move good, liberal citizens to act politically against organized injustice. Neither his manifesto nor his subsequent actions were primarily about technology enabling liberal democratic citizens; rather, they were precisely about technology disabling liberal democratic government. His was an insurrectionary political act that had nothing whatsoever to do with the terms in which the relationship between emerging technology, publicity, and democracy is presently discussed in respectable circles.¹³³

In other words, WikiLeaks and Anonymous hacktivism demobilizes *publicity* by scandalously inverting the paranoid dialectical structuration of an elliptically structured public sphere. In this respect, Agents-Smith, not Neo, becomes a more intuitive and promising exemplar for pwning publicity by hacking its code with a purposed desire for freedom.

Vengeance recurs as the leitmotif of the more popular ‘persona’ appropriated into the image-repertoire of Anonymous hacktivism, which directly cites *V for Vendetta*: the Anonymous war-machine as a swarming assemblage of Guy Fawkes masks. Recall a few verses from V’s introductory monologue:

Voilà! In view, a humble vaudevillian veteran cast vicariously as both victim and villain by the vicissitudes of Fate. This visage, no mere veneer of vanity, is a vestige of the *vox populi*, now vacant, vanished.... The only

¹³³ D. Barney, “Publics without Power: Surplus Publicity as Depoliticization,” in *Publicity and the Canadian State: Critical Communications Approaches*, ed. Kirsten Kozolanka (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 78.

verdict is vengeance; a vendetta held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous.

The punctual, stabbing staccato of the knife-wielding V's rhythmic refrain induces a synesthetic experience that enacts a 'reterritorialization' of an affective milieu.¹³⁴

In a moment I will frame this cruise of the Anonymous image-repertoire through Deborah Gould's use of affect theory in *Moving Politics*, her ethnography of ACT-UP that shows how dissent creates spaces of heterogeneous connections through the expression of dissonant affects. Refrains such as "silence = death" and "Act Up! Fight AIDS!" map affective lines of flight that deterritorialize the shame of queerness, illness, or sexual difference by reterritorializing it in assemblages of outraged protest. As Lauren Berlant writes, "Noise interferes, makes interference. Interference made loud within political communication makes time for adjustment and counter-thought."¹³⁵ Similarly, in *V for Vendetta*, 'V' stokes popular democratic insurgency with the refrain: "remember, remember the fifth of November/ the gunpowder treason and plot/ I know of no reason/ why the gunpowder treason/ should ever be forgot." For Anons, however, 'V' is not the hero of the film; what is epic, by contrast, are the swarms of masked masses aroused by the enunciation of insurrectionary ideas, such as "the *vox populi*," which proves provocative enough to inflame the nearly docile *thymos* of its imaginary hyper-securitized British population.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 317.

¹³⁵ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 232.

¹³⁶ Narratively, too, it is not V but Eve who is the 'protagonist' of *V for Vendetta*: in the desert of a 'black-site' (a hole of oblivion) she is able to affirm life in excess of existence—i.e., becomes animated by a will-to-power-bottom—and is thus 'gives birth' to the future as a joyfully affirmative child reveling in the creativity of Nietzschean dynamite.



Figure 5. 12 Screw the Power of the Atom.¹³⁷



Figure 5. 13 Anonymous... We Do Not Forgive, We Do Not Forget¹³⁸



Figure 5. 14 Oh Fuck, the Internet is Here¹³⁹

As with the displacement of Neo in favor of Agents-Smith, the distinction here is important and requires explanation. Anons point the way with iconoclastic aplomb,

¹³⁷ “Screw the power of the atom, we have the power of the anon.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

¹³⁸ “Anonymous. We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive, we do not forget.” <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

¹³⁹ Anon attack. “Oh Fuck, the Internet is here.” Funky Junk. Accessed November 25, 2019. https://funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/970758/Anon/

rendering Fawkes the butt of a cruel joke and the inspiration for the “Epic Fail Guy” meme, a lo-fi stick figure of Guy Fawkes wearing, of course, a Guy Fawkes mask.



Figure 5. 15 I'm Epic Fail Guy¹⁴⁰

As the *Encyclopedia Dramatica* explains: “Guy, the epic failure, was pwned [sic.] before he could enact the gunpowder plot.” In this cheeky retelling, which stylistically resonates with Foucault’s irreverent sketch of Charles Jouy,¹⁴¹ Fawkes is nothing more than “some local retard [sic.] to whom a bunch of real terrorists said, ‘Here, Guy, just stand here and mind these barrels’ and then ran off chortling to themselves because they knew he’d take the rap despite being completely unimportant in the plot.”¹⁴²

While such trolling is tongue in cheek, the affective reflexivity allowing the ability to laugh at oneself through the denigration of one’s potentially alluring exemplars reaffirms the queer affective adhesion of self-described /b/tards, EFGs, fags, and virgins (Rule of the Internet #53: “Anonymous is a virgin by default”). Rather than callously commodifying sensitivity, irreverence attests to an uncanny sophistication operative at the level of the Anonymous assemblage, as if programed off Nietzschean script: if what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, then EFGs can take heart, having never had lives in

¹⁴⁰ “Epic Fail Guy.” Epic Fail. Accessed November 25, 2019.

<http://epicfail.xepher.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/1200616695854.jpg>

¹⁴¹ Cf. M. Foucault, *Abnormal*. Ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 291-295.

¹⁴² https://encyclopediadramatica.es/Epic_Fail_Guy (accessed 8/13/14).

the first place. Thus, as we saw in Chapter Two, an ineradicable infirmity indexes the apotheosis of strength.¹⁴³ As Coleman observes, those who participated in #OpChanology were well aware of the irony of Internet trolls raging war against the Church of Scientology but affirmed, with thymotic pride, “at least our weirdness is free.”¹⁴⁴

Spoofting Guy Fawkes as an EFG also signals political sophistication, not naiveté; for, rather than valorize terroristic violence, Anonymous war-machines memetically mimic the immanent swarms poised to govern after security apparatuses explode. For Anonymous hacktivists, the Egyptian Revolution vindicated the power of the people to end unjust rule while the groundswell of participation during #AnonOps (2010), followed shortly thereafter by #OccupyWallStreet (2011), reinforced the plausibility that affirming the potent synesthetic force of political ideas will materialize in dissent, on the streets and online. Thus, despite capture, conviction, and incarceration, Anons thymotically insist, You cannot arrest an idea. Tearing away the Guy Fawkes mask only reveals the manifold faces of Agents-Smith all the more bent on vengeance: “We are legion. We never forgive. We never forget. Expect us.”

¹⁴³ Cf. *South Park*. “Make Love, Not Warcraft.” Season 10, Episode 8. Directed and Written by Trey Parker. Comedy Central: October, 2006. In this episode the boys venture online to kill ‘that which has no life,’ namely: a troll in the online gaming life-world of *World of Warcraft* who is hacking the sociality of the virtual-reality. This episode is usefully viewed as a vindication of Agents-Smith as exemplars of contentious politics, and a dramatization of Haupt’s critique of Neo as the signifier of democratic counter-hegemony: the boys only redeem the market share of *World of Warcraft* by resurrecting public “civility.”

¹⁴⁴ G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free.”

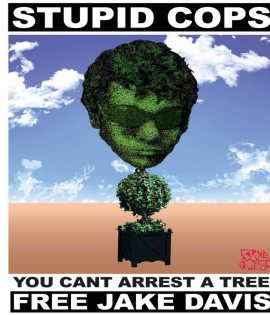


Figure 5. 16 Stupid Cops, You Can't Arrest a Tree¹⁴⁵

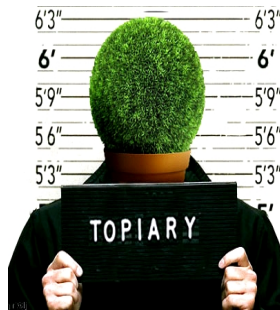


Figure 5. 17 Topiary¹⁴⁶

Gould's sociological history of ACT-UP offers a generative frame for understanding the intimate connections between affect and contentious political activism I've been describing in this section. In the course of establishing the methodological ground for her analysis of ACT-UP through affect theory, Gould argues:

If we accept that affect helps secure a given habitus, then we can see that social forces are powerful to the extent that they are able to manipulate the affective charges that get attached to all aspects of living. Because an emotional habitus can structure people's feelings, including those affective

¹⁴⁵ "Stupid cops, you can't arrest a tree. Free Jake Davis." <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

¹⁴⁶ "Topiary." <https://boards.4chan.org/b/> Accessed circa. 2011.

charges, it is especially important for the operations of power.... [For this reason] an emotional habitus is thus a critical arena of political struggle.¹⁴⁷

Thus, she argues “affective states, shaped by the social world but experienced as solely our own, can smooth the workings of power in part by obscuring its very operations.”¹⁴⁸

Yet, precisely because affect must be captured, Gould asserts it also “has the potential to escape social control, and that quality creates greater space for counter-hegemonic possibilities.”¹⁴⁹ She argues dissonant or ‘outlaw’ affects “enable us to perceive the world differently from its ordinary portrayal in conventional descriptions. They may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are [and] may lead us to make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo.”¹⁵⁰ Considering the affective habitus of ACT-UP in relation to Anonymous hacktivism amplifies how, “one of the most significant aspects of social movements is that they are sites for nurturing counter-hegemonic affects, emotions, and norms about emotional display.”¹⁵¹

Gould argues it was ACT-UP’s ability to cultivate a dynamic, agonistic affective habitus capable of rendering rage generative and legitimate that empowered the movement to survive and thrive:

Its repeated expressions of anger and indignation toward state and society, and of pride about both confrontational activism and sexual difference,

¹⁴⁷ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 39.

¹⁴⁸ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41

¹⁴⁹ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 39. Importantly, Gould notes, “The direction of change, of course, can be in a reactionary or more liberatory direction.”

¹⁵⁰ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41.

¹⁵¹ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41.

coupled with ACT-UP's assertions about the rationality, necessity, and responsibility of activism, together valorized what is often derided as emotionally overwrought and politically unnecessary. ACT-UP's challenge to mainstream norms provided a language of resistance and an emotional pedagogy to lesbians and gay men, ways of feeling and acting that addressed those who were hesitant about engaging in ACT-UP's activism.¹⁵²

I have been arguing that something quite similar occurs in the recurrence of insurgent assemblages of Anonymous war-machines. As much as thymotic hostility is directed against snooping Feds and fraudulent CEOs, these memes also enunciate principled democratic dissent and affirm the power of contentious politics to actualize the virtual promise of natality.

In the tract, "How Is It To Be Done?" (2009), anonymous contributors to the mimetic assemblage, the Tiquun, seek to incite a renewal of "*partisan* war without front nor uniform, without army nor decisive battle" to be waged "in the name of no one."¹⁵³ Cultivating modes of resisting the reiteration of historically hegemonic political paradigms compelling normative affective sociality is crucial to this cosmopartisan warfare.¹⁵⁴

To start over is never to begin *something* again. Nor to pick up things where they had been left off. What one begins again is

¹⁵² D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 254-255.

¹⁵³ Tiquun, "How Is It To Be Done?" in *Introduction to Civil War*. Trans. Alexander R. Galloway and Jason E. Smith (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), pp. 201-202 – translation modified.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. F. Kittler, "Of States and Their Terrorists," *Cultural Politics* (2012: Vol. 8, No. 3), 385-397, for a discussion of Schmitt's treatment in *The Theory of the Partisan* of the mobile partisan as a 'cosmopartisan' challenge to national sovereignty.

always *something else*. Is always unprecedented. Because it is not the past that drives us, but precisely what in it *has not* happened.

[...]

For instance, there are some tricks we will no longer fall for. The trick of ‘society’. To be transformed. To be destroyed. To be bettered. The trick of the social bond. That some would break while others can pretend to ‘restore’ it. We will no longer fall for these tricks. One would have to be a militant element of the planetary petty bourgeoisie, a *citizen* really, not to see that society no longer exists. That it has imploded. That it is only an argument for the terror of those who claim to re/present it. That which has absented.

All that is social has become alien to us. We consider ourselves as absolutely free of any obligation, of any prerogative, of any affiliation that is *social*.¹⁵⁵

While the *menis* apparent in the memes curated above signal a divestiture of social interest, *How is it to be Done?* affirms that this frees Anons to “start something *else*.” For Anons this means affirming a world where institutional corruption and state violence, not ruthless humor or the free movement of information and ideas (no less than bodies and desires), is politically unforgivable. They thus encourage their readers to “learn to become indiscernible. Blend in. Revive the taste for anonymity, for promiscuity.... Become crafty. Become pitiless. To do so, become whatever.”¹⁵⁶ While

¹⁵⁵ Tiqqun, “How is it to be Done?”, pp. 201-202 – translation modified.

¹⁵⁶ Tiqqun, *How is it to be Done?*, pp. 214.

some theorists struggle to imagine commitments to a *political* future that do not acquiesce to present *social* obligations, the anonymous critique of affective sociality – *civility* – as a weapon of terror in the hierarchical structuring of relations of domination insists upon a more radical commitment to popular democratic freedoms.

V. Cruising Insecurity, Democratizing Lulz

In September 2014, stadium pop-rockers U2 released their album, *Songs of Innocence*, by directly uploading it for free onto tens of millions of iTunes accounts. The marketing stunt was met with discomfort and an overwhelming feeling of creepy invasion. In the media coverage of the event, few mentioned the quality of the music, let alone its charitable release; instead, commentators persistently raised questions of privacy, autonomy, and transparency: How could Apple unilaterally import data, and what else could be – and has been – surreptitiously coded onto digital media devices without informed user consent? The almost comical difficulty of removing the album from iTunes only intensified these concerns, spawning countless late-night lampoons and YouTube tutorials.

The rejection of U2's unwelcome *Innocence*, which was so intense as to elicit a public apology from front man Bono, marks an important shift in the *zeitgeist* of networked publics such that seemingly more abstract issues of privacy and autonomy trumped the ready-to-hand distraction of immediately consumable entertainment. It is not hard to conjure a plausible hypothesis as to why *Songs of Innocence* struck so many as an alarming, intrusive violation. Increasingly the “tricks” of the past are experienced as just that: cheap gimmicks no longer exuding an awesome auratic binding power. Much like queer communities needed time to reassemble an infected emotional habitus – from

shameful quietism to enraged ‘unleashed power’ – contemporary political discourse is increasingly becoming infected with the thymotic refrains animating Anonymous hacktivism, and the symptoms are becoming manifest.¹⁵⁷

In the fall-out from WikiLeaks, and with aggressive American prosecution of captured Anonymous hacktivists, popular media buzzed with reports of illegal surveillance programs, secret metadata collection, and the opaque imperatives and untold abuses of national security apparatuses. Inspired by these events, but also informed by them, Edward Snowden’s 2013 leaks exploded the credibility of former NSA director James Clapper’s congressional testimony and reignited these debates. Barely a year later, Senator Diane Feinstein joined this ad hoc chorus, alleging Congressional computers used while investigating post-9/11 CIA torture programs had been hacked and scrubbed by the spy agency.¹⁵⁸

In short, by the time Bono apologized for giving away his music, issues of privacy, autonomy online and IRL, and accountability for corporate and state duplicity were hardly ethereal, but live concepts. If anything, the U2 scandal was a safely anodyne vehicle for crashing the new normal of securitization into public consciousness and this no doubt contributed to the easy pleasure of trolling Bono and Apple. More pointedly, after three unrelenting years of disclosures about abusive state securitization, the ‘philanthropic’ Bono was the perfect target for such lulzy outrage.

Thus, *contra* commentators like Gladwell, even when epically failing, Anonymous hacktivism has roused the ire of state security agencies and, in the process, significantly altered the discourse around political accountability. The cases of Jeremy

¹⁵⁷ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 91-114.

¹⁵⁸ G. Miller, “Feinstein: CIA Searched Intelligence Committee Computers,” *The Washington Post*. March 11, 2014.

Hammond, Barrett Brown, and Chelsea Manning forged powerful connections across multiple heterogeneous actors and institutions including hackers, civil liberties lawyers, artists, whistleblowers, activists, legislators, academics, and journalists. These connections, like those initiated in Tahrir Square or Zuccati Park, endure; they are created of the desire to overcome disassemblage and reassemble in a principled affirmation of contentious democratic politics.

Moreover, the successes of Anonymous hacktivism are not simply ‘immaterial’ or symbolic. The proliferation of Anonymous iconography in the #Occupy movement drew Anons online out onto the streets just as street protests in Brazil against FIFA caught the attention of Anons globally (who augmented local street action with #OpHackingCup, 2014). More recently, the lynching of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri aroused the *thymos* of Anons, who responded with DDoS and doxxing attacks on city websites, politicians, and police officers (claiming to expose some as Klansmen), and took to the streets world-wide in Guy Fawkes masks for a global “Day of Rage” (#OpFerguson, 2014).

In addition to clarifying the dynamics of decentralized power law participation, cruising the Anonymous ‘image-repertoire’ sharpened the political edge of virtual assemblages by providing examples that clarify how resistance operates immanent to power, always already poised to materialize with potentially viral affective intensity. Anonymous war-machines appear as decisive relational participants in the immanence of outrageous worldly affairs, needing neither transcendental signifiers nor representative identification to initiate concerted dissent precisely because already cruising milieus with the discriminating receptive-responsivity of cosmopartisan cruising politics.

Perhaps most importantly, the efforts of theorists like Deleuze and Guattari and the exploits of Anonymous war-machines alike work to dismantle the normative bifurcation of virtual-reality and solicit the desire for security rooted in affective regimes of civility. The public impact of Anonymous hacktivism, like the performances ‘shot’ by the Surveillance Camera Players theorized by Lauren Berlant, “forces the scene of citizenship back into the overdetermined time of security: its disciplinary performance, its paranoid structure (the enigma of other people *is* the enemy), and its utopianism (policing will convert insecurity into security).”¹⁵⁹ At the same time as virtual interference “risks making explicit a whole lot of open secrets about the ordinary conditions of liberty-in-crisis,” the Anonymous war-machine presents a form of relationality that in its “simple joyousness... also interrupts the association of politics with pain, discipline, shame, oppression, disappointment, and the self-inflating atmosphere of profound courage that often accompanies assertions of political depression. It tries to reopen the possibility of the political as it is lived to becoming a space of genuine flourishing.”¹⁶⁰

Three decades ago, Judith Butler sketched a strategy for a politics of precarious embodied insubordination with an unrivaled austerity: “There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there.”¹⁶¹ Today, among the tools of insubordination available to contemporary contentious political actors are the internet and the webs of relations that enable, as much as they are sustained by, the net. To speak again in Berlant’s words, political interventions by Anonymous war-machines manifest desires “to embody the anomalies within anonymity” and in the process “produce the body politic not as an abstraction but as an embodied

¹⁵⁹ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 242.

¹⁶⁰ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 242.

¹⁶¹ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 185.

being whose ambition is that its ambience be a part of a society of accountability, not of ownership, a space of belonging whose terms are negotiated in the sensual time of democracy rather than in what's being redacted, rendered, and enclosed.”¹⁶² While Anonymous hacktivism is anything but a panacea, its adaptive strategy “locates politics in a commitment to the present activity of the senses. It sees the work of citizenship as the dense sensual activity of performative belonging to the now in which potentiality is affirmed.”¹⁶³

In this chapter I've argued that exponential proliferation of global digital communications networks has also allowed the relational webs of the internet to become active sites of resistance to the hegemonic prerogatives of imperial-democratic securitization. As the printing press displaced entrenched authorities by democratizing access to and expression of a plurality of opinions, the internet is similarly challenging the hegemony of in-grown authorities with such celerity that the historical present is experiencing a difference in kind, rather than a difference in degree, of democratized data sharing and action in concert. Framed this way, Anonymous hacktivism can be seen as exemplifying this reformatting process, strategically cruising the affective currents of contemporary networked publics to radically alter the structuration of contentious movement politics.

¹⁶² L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 245.

¹⁶³ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 261.

Chapter 6. Conclusion: Cruising Politics

In light of the preceding four chapters, allow me to return, by way of conclusion, to Hannah Arendt's remarks, in dialogue with Adalbert Reif, regarding the demonstrative politics of the student anti-war movement, which serves at the epigraph of this dissertation. Reflecting on the meaning and significance of the students' street actions, Arendt proposes: "*The revolutionaries are those who know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up.*"¹ This alluring image, of a revolutionary pick-up, should now appear more clearly in light of the preceding four-fold explication of the mobile concept cruising politics.

At the outset, *Cruising Politics* took its point of departure from the irruption of contestatory political movements exemplified in historically in the United States by ACT-UP and, in the historical present, by Anonymous hacktivism, Occupy Wall Street encampments, and, more recently, Black Lives Matter protests in order to conceptualize a heuristic model for theorizing the queer relational configurations of counter-hegemonic, insurgent concerted political action. By hybridizing anti-social queer theory with radical democratic thought, I have been able to provide an account of the generative relationality aroused by and plugged into microphysical events of dissent animated by affects of outrage, pleasure, and a common desire for a loving life in a freer world. In each of the cases I have presented, this meant political actors struggling within and against given

¹ H. Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," in *Crises of the Republic*, (San Diego and New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1972), pp. 206.

structurations of power to combat contractions of communal worldly spaces for the free intercourse of plurality.

Through comparison to queer worlds of public sex, I have argued that as a mode of political action in concert, cruising politics, insofar as it is a mobile concept, is not reducible to the spontaneous and eruptive street protest, any more than a single act of queer public sex is quintessentially the world of cruising. In both cases of queer sex and radical politics, social media networking has radically streamlined the ways in which connective mobilization occurs. In the case of staging a demonstration, tapping networked publicity increases direct participation as well as indirect expressions of solidarity. A call to action can go out only a few hours in advance and the streets will host hundreds of bodies in response. The event, in turn, connects up people to digital resources and communities, while streaming a multi-platform digital presence plugs potentially global spectators into the immanent potent realness of what is happening that also creates a public record of the event. Contemporary digitally mediated dissensus is, on this score, ever more bimodal and participatory.

The mobile concept of cruising politics allows us to see how, for instance, in the movement from networked “hashtag” publics to street protests and back again that animates Black Lives Matter networks, the contestation of concerted direct action functions to challenge system racial injustice. As we saw with Anonymous DDoS activism, Black Lives Matter mobilizes to demobilize commuter highways and urban centers in an act of collective defection, an anti-social political gesture that queerly refigures the potentialities of the given conditions of racial injustice through the enactment of a radical dilation of the worldly spaces of appearance wherein given

plurality can not only surface, but flourish. *Cruising Politics* trains the eye to the potency of such moments, habituates our sensibilities to respond receptively, with revalued values, to the assemblage of such theaters of cruelty, and arouses – possibly – a discerning desire to plug into the queer currents of dissensus that proposition us.

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