Ideological Adaptation in the American Century

By

Shama Rangwala

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Department of English and Film Studies,

University of Alberta

Abstract

The texts under analysis in this project narrativize the tension between individual agency and the systemic limits that structure the American nation, particularly focusing on the entanglements of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. It takes a cultural studies perspective to interrogate the representation of the American nation through its iterations in narratives of the exceptional subject, figures manifested in characters who embody American sovereignty and the promise of freedom—in other words, characters whose narrative trajectories test the limits of these ideals. Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) foregrounds the relationship of feminized labour and the image within a social realm of inequitable market relations; F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby* (1925) punctures the American Dream by showing the limits of "greatness" for even such a deliberately exceptional figure such as Gatsby; Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* (1927) puts forth socialist values only to contain them through a narrative that reinforces the brutal systemic triumph of capitalism; and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) imagines the unbounded desire of the transcendent character Janie. In what I identify as ideological adaptation—both in terms of adaptations whose choices are necessarily ideological and the adaptation of ideology itself—the filmic 21st-century iterations of these literary texts exploring the American sovereign subject in the cultural imaginary provide case studies for examining the multifarious ways that national mythologies are adapted to new formal and historical contexts. My analysis interrogates the complex ways that adaptations illuminate how the ideologies that sustain the American nation are themselves adaptable and adapting through their repeated representations in the cultural imaginary.

Preface

This thesis is the original work of Shama Rangwala. An earlier version of an excerpt of Chapter One was published as "Visibilities of Exchange Across Forms: A Case Study of *The House of Mirth*" in *Public* no. 55, Spring 2017, pp. 72-83. A modified portion of Chapter Two was published as "Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Repetitions of *The Great Gatsby*" in *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 43, nos. 2-3, 2018, pp. 91-116. A few paragraphs of the conclusion are adapted from my article "No Future" in *Jacobin Magazine*, November 1, 2017.

Dedication

For Mom and Dad,

and Fritz.

Acknowledgments

I wrote this dissertation on Treaty Six territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Metis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Michael O'Driscoll, who supported me throughout this process, asking incisive questions that pushed me to be a more rigorous thinker. I am grateful to my readers, Nat Hurley and Mark Simpson, and my examiners, Dia Da Costa and Rinaldo Walcott, for their thoughtful engagement.

Other professors have provided support along with lively conversation, and deserve special mention here: Cecily Devereux, Teresa Zackodnik, Corrinne Harol, Ono Okome, and Karyn Ball, Imre Szeman, and Mary Ingraham. I would also like to thank Sheena Wilson, for her guidance not only in the processes of academic publishing but also in how to be a generous and effective leader and collaborator. Chenjerai Kumanyika's visit to the University of Alberta re-energized my investment in this project and reminded me of the importance of critical and political scholarship; his public engagement is an ongoing inspiration for me. Kim Brown and Mary Marshall Durrell keep the department running and are always quick to give harried graduate students information and encouragement.

This dissertation would have been impossible without my colleagues, comrades, and co-conspirators: Brent Ryan Bellamy, Sean O'Brien, Kate Meloche, Lisa Haynes, Beth Capper, Rob Jackson, Emily Tyler, Desmond Cole, Laura Schechter, Danielle Paradis, Rich Cole, Russ Cobb, Michael Granzow, David Janzen, CJ Bogle, Mikey Litwack, Anna Sajecki, Zeina Tarraf, Thomas Dessein, Kristin Moriah, Holly Luhning, Marc Ducusin, Alanna Thain, Monique Morgan, Matt Schneider, Katie Lewandowski, Adam Carlson, Alex Carruthers, Sylvie Vigneux,

Aurina Chatterji, Marcelle Kosman, Melissa Stephens, Rosalba Colangelo, Owen Jung, Connor Byrne, Gregory Phipps, Trevor Mowchun, and Jessica Jackson. I would like to thank the artists and researchers at Banff Research in Culture, 2015, in particular Sina Rahmani and Oliver Baker. I am a better scholar, teacher, and person because of all of you.

I am grateful to my sister, Sanjida Rangwala, who is so passionate about making her community better, and my brother-in-law Tim Dennis, who is both adventurous and grounded. Justin Tetrault provides a much-needed perspective and asks questions that make me understand my research better; his care and generosity are boundless. I cannot imagine the years of my Ph.D. without Helen Frost, my chosen family, whose intellectual rigor and deep compassion are unmatched.

My parents' support throughout my life never fails to surprise me. They have been unwavering despite the Humanities being somewhat foreign in our STEM family. I cannot thank them enough.

Being struck by autoimmune encephalomyelitis in the second year of my doctoral program meant negotiating short-term illness and long-term disability; this experience has affected my research in innumerable material and immaterial ways. I am forever grateful to the nurses and doctors who cared for me through that event and beyond.

This dissertation is focused on the sovereign individual, and despite the emphasis on the individual in the academy, I undertook this project from an ethics and politics of collectivity, looking at the texts of the past to critique hegemony in the present. I am unspeakably grateful to those who have been on this journey with me as we imagine a radical future together—one that would not be the adaptation of the past.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." – Thomas Jefferson

"The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me." – Frederick Douglass

Ideological Adaptation in the American Century examines the American sovereign subject through its cultural representations, interrogating the production, critique, maintenance, and reproduction of national mythologies of liberalism, individualism, meritocracy, and democracy. In the epigraphs above, the Founding Father and civil rights activist put forth contrasting visions of America's guiding ethos and its material reality, hinging on who is included or excluded—that is, who counts as a sovereign subject in this newly free nation. In "The Declaration of Independence," Thomas Jefferson proclaims Enlightenment values of equality as the guiding principles of the new democracy, a natural law that does not require the divine right of monarchs or religion; the socio-political unit in this conception is the free individual. Frederick Douglass reveals the injustice of enslavement as the counterpoint to this narrative of self-determination and democratic rule: rather than the individual with agency over their own fate, he foregrounds the limits of systemic power, here the white supremacy that legitimizes enslavement. These two quotations are a distillation of the contradictions at the heart of the American project.

The texts under analysis in this project narrativize the tension between individual agency and the systemic limits that structure the American nation, particularly focusing on the entanglements of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. My project takes a cultural studies perspective to interrogate the representation of the American nation through its iterations in narratives of the exceptional subject, figures manifested in characters who embody American sovereignty and the promise of freedom—in other words, characters whose narrative trajectories test the limits of these ideals. Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) foregrounds the relationship of feminized labour and the image within a social realm of inequitable market relations; F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby* (1925) punctures the American Dream by showing the limits of "greatness" for even such a deliberately exceptional figure such as Gatsby; Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* (1927) puts forth socialist values only to contain them through a narrative that reinforces the brutal systemic triumph of capitalism; and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) imagines the unbounded desire of the transcendent character Janie. In what I identify as ideological adaptation—both in terms of adaptations whose choices are necessarily ideological and the adaptation of ideology itself—the filmic 21st-century iterations of these literary texts exploring the American sovereign subject provide case studies for examining the multifarious ways that national mythologies are adapted to new formal and historical contexts while imagining a projected, illusory future. Following Lee Edelman, this project reads "every political vision *as a vision of futurity*" (13, original emphasis); the repetition through adaptation here is not only about reproducing a vision of an idealized genesis, but also what this representation can tell us about the future of the mythological sovereign subject as it relates to the futurity of the nation more generally.

The periodization of my texts, moving from the early-20th to the early-21st centuries, may on the surface appear to have much in common with a shift from modernism to postmodernism according to conventional disciplinary categories. It is tempting to view adaptation as merely a form of pastiche, the cobbling together of readily legible narratives evacuated of signification and reduced to spectacle in an imagistic medium. While postmodern theory may be useful in reading particular aspects of some adaptations, I derive my periodization from theorists such as Giovanni Arrighi whose work on political economy posits a "long 20th century" dominated by American hegemony, with novels from a period that sees the emergence of American dominance and film adaptations from a period of potential decline. This dissertation does not seek to interrogate this model of political economy but rather to use it broadly as a framework through which to examine the cultural objects at two inflection points in history, admittedly among several, in which American national mythologies are interrogated and reproduced through the adaptation of narratives in a shift of medium.

Examining the representation of American mythologies through figures that illuminate the American sovereign subject first calls for a general outline of American exceptionalism and mythologies. The American Revolution emancipated the colony from British rule to establish a state based on shared liberal Enlightenment values. To use Louis Althusser's terms, the reinforcement of power shifted to emphasize increasingly ideological state apparatuses cloaked in the rhetoric of liberal consensus. Corrinne Harol and Mark Simpson define liberalism as "a commitment to freedom, rights, and self-determination as facts and norms of human culture" (7); of particular significance here is the ways that these norms are naturalized as fact through ideology. Furthermore, in Sylvia Söderlind's succinct encapsulation, "the core of the country is neither a nation nor a state, but an *idea* that somehow possesses the force to guarantee the safety

of the country's citizens" (2, emphasis added); or, as Slavoj Žižek claims, "the ideal levelling out of social differences, the production of the citizen, the subject of democracy, is possible only through an allegiance to some particular national Cause [. . .]. [T]he national Cause is ultimately the way subjects of a given nation organize their collective enjoyment through national myths" (165). Without the divine right of kings, the institutionalization of hierarchies in an inherited nobility, or the brute repression of absolute rule, structures of political, economic, and social power are determined, maintained, and reproduced in ways that required the liberal fantasy of individual agency and merit rather than kin or genealogy.

The American Dream, as *ur*-text of American mythology, provides a narrative template foregrounding individual achievement and freedom from systemic limits, individualizing failures and universalizing success as an aspirational model anyone can follow. In this way, the Dream narrative naturalizes the ideologies that maintain systems of power. In his detailed study of the American Dream, Jim Cullen explains the impossibility of the Dream, which necessarily retrenches into oppression if it offers too much freedom:

> In an important respect, however, the Dream of Upward Mobility, particularly in the South, was actually *too* successful: it quickly became apparent to those who employed servants that it was in fact quite expensive to support them and that they would become dangerous competition when they moved on. Better, they concluded, to invest in slaves, who cost more initially but who had no payoff price and even rose in value. (61, original emphasis)

Oppression, in his estimation, is not incidental but rather essential to the freedoms enjoyed by those historically included in the category of American sovereign subject. Indeed, in *The*

Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America, Louis Menand claims, counter to Enlightenment natural law:

> Coercion is natural; freedom is artificial. [. . .]. One person's freedom is therefore always another person's restriction: we would not have even the concept of freedom if the reality of coercion were not already present. We think of a freedom as a right, and therefore the opposite of a rule, but a right *is* a rule. [. . .]. We also think of rights as privileges retained by individuals against the rest of society, but rights are created not for the good of individuals, but for the good of society. Individual freedoms are manufactured to achieve group ends. (409, original emphasis)

Indeed, the ideology of liberal individualism itself serves group ends: inclusion and exclusion in fictitious categories of race, the perpetuation of capitalist accumulation, and the patriarchal relations that regulate reproductive futurity in the nation. Like all ideology, this conception of individual freedom must be made to seem natural, with subjects choosing their subjection freely. Moreover, nature is no mere or incidental metaphor in the American project; emphasizing this connection, Myra Jehlen locates the roots of American individualism in nature: "Grounded, literally, in American soil, liberalism's hitherto arguable theses metamorphosed into nature's material necessities" (3). In her analysis, American exceptionalism is tied to the land itself, and the possibilities of a sovereign subject on that land. Jehlen further elucidates:

> The European immigrant who became an American saw himself not as entering a better society but as leaving society altogether. And in the reconciled natural civilization that once and for all transcended the old world's successive dialectical compromises, he assumed a natural, therefore absolute and not politically

> disputable, dominion. [. . .]. Thus, incarnate in the continent, the elsewhere embattled ideal of liberal individualism established itself in America as simply a description of things not only as they are but as they manifestly need to be. (5)

Of course, the intrinsic, structural contradiction is that the discursive liberal democratic ideals of its foundation are only possible through the material exploitation of land and people, in precisely opposite ways to its stated values: emancipation and enslavement, settlement and theft, equality and social death, access and exclusion all coexist, costumed in the mythology of American liberal democracy.

In defining the form and function of myth, the influential cultural theorist Roland Barthes' comprehensive work is illuminating: "What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality [. . .]; and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality" (142, original emphasis); furthermore, "what is more *natural* than the sea? and what more 'political' than the sea celebrated by the makers of the film *The Lost Continent*?" (144, original emphasis). Myth, then, is not the disavowal of ideology but its foregrounding to the extent that it is made to seem as if it is natural. The actual sovereignty of the American subject—repeatedly foregrounded in various narratives, such as those under analysis here—necessarily exists only in the realm of myth; that is, the sovereign subject is as mythic as it is hypervisible and pervasive. Lauren Berlant differentiates between the sovereignty of the monarch or the law and the sovereignty of the subject under structures of hegemony:

> Sovereignty, after all, is a fantasy misrecognized as an objective state: an aspirational position of personal and institutional self-legitimating performativity and an affective sense of control in relation to the fantasy of that position's offer of security and efficacy. [. . .]. It is also a distorting description of the political,

> affective, and psychological conditions in which the ordinary subjects of democratic/capitalist power take up positions as agents. These states might best be redefined as only partially (that is to say fantasmatically or not) sovereign. (98)

This reification of ideologies of American sovereignty is, of course, not a straightforwardly deterministic system; Jehlen explains, "American ideology and culture, then, represent the transforming completion of *both the possibilities and the problems* of political and cultural liberal individualism" (18, emphasis added). The narratives of my case studies foreground the potentials and limits individual agency and thus reify the fantasy of sovereignty in the cultural imaginary—here, literature and film. Indeed, Harol and Simpson emphasize the relationship between literature and liberalism: "Literature has alternately been seen as the foremost fortification for liberal ideas of progress or as the principal conscientious objector to liberalism's excesses and blind spots. Whether correlated negatively or positively—whether estranged or collaborating—literature and liberalism have always been entangled" (7). In the case of the texts under analysis in this project, repetition through adaptation illuminates how the limits of American liberalism are tested through narrative representation across history.

This dissertation examines narratives that foreground the contingently (partially, fantasmatically—to use Berlant's terms) sovereign subject and their adaptations within and between media; narrative and character in these objects are the key specificities that expand to illuminate structural political claims both on the level of form and history as well as myth-making and ideology. As Frederic Jameson famously claims, narrative as an "aesthetic act, is itself ideology, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (*The Political Unconscious* 79). With echoes of Jameson,

Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean argue that myths are "the stories we tell each other as a culture in order to explain complexities and to banish contradictions, thus making the world seem simpler and more comfortable for us to inhabit. [. . .]. [M]yths are ideological because they are concerned primarily with the ways in which particular images of the world are conveyed and reinforced through texts and practices" (9-10). Texts that reify American liberal ideology reflect the operationalization of narrative as truth-telling, from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography that textualizes—replete with editorial errata—his life story and Horatio Alger's tales promising class mobility to presidential speeches in our contemporary moment that harken back to an earlier idealized period. It is important here to consider Michael Thomas Carroll's assertation that "the presence of transhistorical constructs does not invalidate or trivialize that which is peculiar to a given epoch, and in terms of popular modernity, one great particularity comes in the form of the technoeconomic and managerial structures of the secondary enabling technologies that create, distribute, and to some extent modify mythic narrative" (191). That is, while these narratives may gesture to transhistorical myths, to examine the adaptation of ideology it is imperative to consider the contexts in which they emerge and re-emerge. Moreover, while narrativization is a process of suturing over social cleavages to present coherent and legible claims, these claims can also be contested—as any serious reader might confirm.

Narratives generalize the specificity of character through thematizing universal terms, legible to subjects who are themselves under hegemony. Put in spatial terms, narrative provides us with orientation. Carroll argues that narrative:

> reveals our location, what we might term a "meaning-locus," identified by the common phrase "my place in the world," which of course does not refer to physical emplacement at all. The narrative technology, as a revealer of location, is

> part of a family of technologies: the clock and the calendar reveal to us our location in time; maps reveal our location in space; narratives reveal our location in meaning, or, more accurately, what we believe to be our location in meaning. (188)

Identifying narrative in a succession of technologies that include clocks and maps is telling: just as clock-time and cartography are ideological but made to seem natural and absolute—and easily readable—through convention and consensus, so too are narratives. That the narratives of myth must be both legible and repeated is crucial to my perspective on ideological adaptations. As Eirik Frisvold Hanssen emphasizes: "adaptations take part in creating and proliferating national and cultural mythologies, where narratives can first and foremost be regarded as immaterial mental constructs and fictional characters become 'part of our extra-literary mythology'" (136).[1] Mythical narratives have purchase on culture through the tropes that give them legibility: here, the exceptional subject who can test the limits of agency in a system of power that disguises itself as freedom. According to Barthes, "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them" (143)—moreover, as I argue, not only to talk about them, but to talk repeatedly about them, a key claim informing my methodology of examining adaptation as the repetition of narrative and the reproduction of ideology not through disavowal but through legible narrativization.

This dissertation brings together concepts and fields—American studies, adaptation studies, and cultural studies—in a necessarily overdetermined way, but focuses its investigation on texts that foreground individual agency and have enough purchase on American cultural

[1] Here, he quotes from Bazin's "*For an Impure Cinema*: In Defence of Adaptation" (1952). Regarding the texts under analysis here, Gatsby is perhaps the most obviously mythical figure that circulates beyond the texts of his instantiation.

mythologies that they are reiterated through adaptation. Importantly, my project is not primarily concerned with the actual material politics of the world but rather how these material conditions are mediated through the cultural imaginary, how literature and film represent the tension between the individual agent and hegemonic structures. My analysis extends the American fantasy of *terra nullis* into a *tabula rasa* ready for the inscriptions of America narratives and examines how hegemonic systems are critiqued or naturalized through narratives of exceptional individuals. As Jehlen writes, "The prior vacancy of the continent was their crucial founding fiction, both asserted directly and implicit in the self-conscious narrativity with which the story of America 'began.' To be born an American is simultaneously to be born again" (9); to adapt her words to my project, the American narrative demands continual re-birth and re-iteration, as does the critique of that narrative. While American narratives and counternarratives proliferate, this work specifically examines the imagination of nation in relation to the mythically sovereign subject of American exceptionalism. The methodology of examining the *repetition* of narratives reflects the *reproduction* of ideology through these cultural imaginings. Pointing out these contradictions in the American national project is not new, but the intervention of this dissertation is that it focuses on what the repetition of narratives can tell us about the reproduction of the ideological resolutions necessary to the coherence, legibility, and reproduction of nation.

Adaptation Studies

Adaptation studies is a field that devotes much energy to justifying its own existence and assuaging anxieties that its objects of analysis are subordinate to what they are adapting. Recent work in adaptation studies has focused on bringing together film and literature, as Thomas Leitch

argues, under the aegis of "textual studies," or maintaining distinctions of production, form, and reception; other studies have focused on the avant-garde, new media, and genre. Most works aim to develop a theory of adaptation and provide case studies as examples of how certain concepts or methodologies are put into practice. A significant portion of this work focuses on the formal aspects of literary to film adaptation, drawing from image-text studies, reader-response, or spectator theories. Leitch outlines, "If medium specificity was the lodestar of Adaptation Studies 1.0, intertextuality was the leading principle of Adaptation Studies 2.0" (3). My project examines what Leitch claims in the recent tome, *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, is an "area explored but not resolved": "the status of different fictionalized figures as tropes for adaptation" (15), that is, how the imaginary American sovereign subject is re-imagined and adapted as it moves through iterations of narrative. Each chapter in this dissertation addresses film adaptation, but this project is more specifically concerned about what happens to the political claims of narrative when it is transposed into another period and another medium; attending to both history and form, the intervention here is more narrowly focused on the ideological shifts that occur through adaptation rather than developing a structural or formal theory of adaptation itself. This perspective interrogates adaptation as a broader form of repetition that manifests beyond literature and film to the adaptation of ideologies—specifically, national mythologies—thus connecting the repetition of narrative to the contested reproduction of ideology in the ongoing project of signifying the nation. Furthermore, the object of analysis here is not the politics or ideology itself, but rather the mediation and narrativization of these systems through the multiple iterations of narratives of the mythological American sovereign subject.

The definition of what counts as adaptation, what texts lend themselves to adaptation and why, and the process of adapting itself is widely contested in the field. As Deborah Cartmell and

Imelda Whelehan outline, “Since the beginning of its history, terminology has dogged the field of adaptations, reflected in its many names, among them, ‘picturisations,’ ‘impure cinema,’ mixed cinema,’ ‘literary cinema,’ ‘literature on screen’ and finally, the most neutral to date and possibly the most nondescript of all: ‘adaptations’” (131). Curiously, they present “adaptations” as the most neutral, but prying open the broader meaning of the word reveals that it connotes much beyond the formal categories listed. Adaptation implies a shifting to new contexts and circumstances, histories and ideologies, and—important to my project—the possibility of a co-opting of ideological critique as ideological reproduction, which is hardly a neutral undertaking, and indeed the object of analysis here.

Mark Axelrod emphasizes legibility in adaptable narratives: “the works that generally tend to be adapted are the type that easily lend themselves to adaptability in both storyline and character” (11). The legibility of texts often depends on the intelligibility of generic conventions. On the relationship between adaptation and genre, André Bazin argues:

> The true aesthetic differentiations, in fact, are to be made not among the arts, but within genres themselves: between the psychological novel and the novel of manners, for example, rather than between the psychological novel and the film that one would make from it. Of course, adaptation for the public is inseparable from adaptation for the cinema, insofar as the cinema is more “public” than the novel. (49)

Indeed, the shift in genre is an important aspect of what happens in film adaptation as films are categorized for public consumption with legible conventions: melodrama, romance, period film, Western, etc. adjusting or revising those conventions for ideological purposes. Considering the imaginary American sovereign subject, this project examines how adaptations poach and

manipulate elements from the source material that can be reorganized for ideological purposes—the naturalization and reproduction of American myth.

Recent theorists take for granted that fidelity is a deficient criterion for evaluating adaptation. Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins instead foreground imagination in adaptation: "Adapters cannot 'transpose,' or transfer a novel, or even another film, to screen. They must interpret, re-working the precursor text and choosing the various meanings and sensations they find most compelling (or most cost effective), then imagine scenes, characters, plot elements, etc., that match their interpretation" (16). In one of the germinal texts of the recent surge in adaptation studies, Linda Hutcheon similarly emphasizes interpretation, here as a criterion for evaluation: "Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptation is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (21). Her study tackles the process of adaptation-in-general, both within and across media; while she does address formal questions, she emphasizes the need to incorporate production and reception into adaptation theory. This work is valuable not only in its rejection of the fidelity criterion—as many other studies also do—but also in its systemic dismantling of clichés that privilege literature over film. Hutcheon bases her theory on a primary distinction between the telling and showing modes of engagement:

> In the telling mode—in narrative literature, for example—our engagement begins in the realm of the imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated—that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. [. . .]. But with the move to the mode of showing, as in film and stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving

> story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception—with its mix of both detail and broad focus. (23)

While Hutcheon is not valuing one mode over the other, this seems a reductive distinction, or at least one that is limited in its usefulness when examining texts that explicitly break with conventional forms and modes. For example, imagists poets sought direct presentation through language, and regarding the objects under analysis here, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* could be considered fairly spectacular—the showing mode of engagement that Hutcheon identifies with film and stage.

Rejecting the firm boundaries of Hutcheon's distinction, Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins foreground Bakhtinian dialogism and Derridean indeterminacy; rather than viewing film as an imposition upon the viewer—"caught" in a story—they argue that adaptations:

> offe[r] signs and symbols that have always already missed reality. "Re-presentation" tales the form of various artistic endeavours to name, describe and construct *a sense* of "presence." However, rather than seeing this missed sense of presence as a failure, we want to argue that it forms the condition of art. [. . .]. The unmistakable lesson here is the poststructural injunction that texts inform other texts in vampiric, unexpected, and quite indeterminate ways. It is this sense of indeterminacy that we want to bring into the study of adaptation. (18, original emphasis)

In this framework, narrative claims cannot be totalizing—no concrete narrative, actually inscribed, is a master narrative, and thus its iterations can take a multiplicity of directions, or in Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins' phrasing, "paths the filmmakers take through source text(s) that themselves are paths through other texts" (18). This dissertation similarly conceives of

adaptations not as hermetic texts but rather part of a network of narrativizations of American mythology, not merely to describe how to film an existing story but to interrogate more broadly the contingent strategies through which narratives are adapted—that is, shifted to new formal, historical, and ideological contexts.

Kamilla Elliott dismisses both the fidelity question of Leitch's Adaptation 1.0 and the intertextuality of Adaptation 2.0 as insufficient as a novel intervention for adaptation studies. She points out that "fidelity has *always* been robustly challenged in adaptation studies" (24, original emphasis) and thus arguments against fidelity are bordering on straw-man fallacies; moreover, regarding intertextuality, "discourses on two-way media exchanges were common in the eighteenth century, entering literature and film studies in the late 1920s" (25). Elliott instead argues that "Rather than solely adapting adaptation to theories, theories also need to adapt to adaptations" (32) and that "Making new connections at both more macroscopic and microscopic levels of analysis can take us beyond both conventional theories of media, genres and forms, and free us from the vague, randomness of 'intertextuality' and 'intermediality.' Working at different levels of categorizations can help scholars to revivify cultural topics, such as nationality, economics, politics, identity politics, industry, aesthetics and historical epochs" (33). In a similar vein, historian Anne-Marie Scholz argues for the importance of:

> pay[ing] close attention to the relationship between specific films and the ways they were received at particular times and in particular places. I wish to focus closely upon individual films in order to highlight how their relationship to their precursor texts, as well as their transnational and sociocultural contexts, illuminates changing social and cultural circumstances and offers inroads into reading these films in a novel way. [. . .]. [F]ilm adaptation can function as a kind

> of cultural strategy for grappling with different types of social and cultural change. (3)

Indeed, despite not being the majority, many adaptation scholars are making these connections between adaptation and history, and I locate my work as part of this growing field.

A few examples of case studies in the existing field show similarities to the strategy of this dissertation of identifying ideological adaptation. With parallels to my reading of the iterations of *The Great Gatsby*, Hélène Charley examines the adaptation of *Shaft* from 1971 to 2000, arguing that studios:

> wanted to adapt [Ernest Tidyman's 1970] novel while responding to the racial discourses of each period. In 1971, Shaft was a black private, proud of living in Harlem's ghettos. In 2000, he became an African American detective who scorns the attitude of black people towards the police and has thus gone from racial pride to an exaltation of multiculturalism. Yet, this racial mixing found its limits, since the new Shaft does not cross intimate racial boundaries. Similarly, his treatment of suspects differs according to their racial origins. It is mostly Shaft's new position as a police detective that thus illustrates the thirty-year *evolution* of the American discourse on race relations. (115, original emphasis)

This case study involves adapting a narrative to increasingly liberal discourses, while still maintaining the foundational structures—here, of white supremacy in the form of glorifying policing and racial segregation. Shannon Wells-Lassange examines the 1999 film adaptation of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) with a similar lens of shifting politics, arguing that the adaptation puts into relief the politics of the source text: "it is an adaptation of the original novel to political and social critical stances. Warner's changes to Bowen's text tell us

much about what modern readers appreciate or find disturbing in Bowen's texts, while she holds a James Joyce-style looking-glass to both Ireland and modern society more generally" (129). This view of adaptation posits a critical interpretation that illuminates the historical period of reception and production, where "their choices [. . .] in many ways allow the viewer to better understand the political implications of the author's original plot" (138). Petr Bubeníček offers a model of ideological adaptation in his examination of Alois Jirácek's 1911 play *Jan Hus* and Otakar Vávra's 1954 film of the same name: "The screenwriters made a conscious effort to satisfy the political requirements, to bring ideological elements into the new work, and to emphasize contexts consistent with communism" (569). In this case, adaptation involves the appropriation of a text for ideological purposes, here communism; in a similar vein, the objects of this dissertation involve the appropriation of early-20th-century narratives for the ideological exigencies of 21st-century late capitalism and decline. Bubeníček identifies a shift in this adaptation from the individual to the systemic: "The authors of the film script made a conscious effort to downplay the individual dimension of Hus's life and, in compliance with the optimism of radical socialism, dropped all motifs of doubt or hesitation" (572); this adaptation enacts the inverse shift of what typically happens when texts are ideologically adapted for American liberalism, which generally entails the narrowing focus on the individual rather than collective or systems.

Broadening the historical emphases in the foregoing close readings into an interpretive framework, Yvonne Griggs stresses the specificity of reading adaptation "as a new thing that takes its place within a different set of cultural referents that relate to its *own* era of production, its *own* industry structures, its *own* issues-based agenda, its *own* cluster of narratives" (4, original

emphasis)[2]. Adaptation, in her view, involves the form of a narrative that manifests differently depending on the specific contexts: "The medium used to *tell* these recycled narratives that permeate our culture varies: but the tale and its place within our culture remains a constant in one form or another. [. . .]. The adaptive process works to ensure a story's on-going rebirth within other communication platforms, other political and cultural contexts" (5, original emphasis). Furthermore, in Hanssen's words, it is imperative to view "adaptation as refraction, with aesthetic as well as cultural and economic implications" (148). In this way, the stories under analysis here, testing the limits of the American sovereign subject, are given new purchase in culture as they circulate in different media and historical contexts. Similarly, as a historian, Scholz's critical perspective on adaptation focuses on the shifts over time:

> Current trends regarding the contemporary relations between culture and social power can often be critically illuminated by exploring these issues 'historically,' that is, over time—with an eye towards discontinuities rather than continuities and conflict rather than consensus. I also appreciate the heuristic value of close (qualitative attention to specific cultural texts rather than a more general (qualitative) attention to many texts. (13)

My methodology is aligned with this emphasis on grounding the analysis of adaptations contextually, reading the circulation of these narratives through the specificities of their moments of emergence. Examining the tension between hegemonic systems and individual agency, I look at specific case studies in which these narratives are reiterated, as they in turn illuminate elements of the *ur*-narrative of American sovereignty: meritocracy, agency, freedom, and the American Dream.

---

[2] Here Griggs draws upon Sarah Cardwell's *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (2002).

Dudley Andrews claims that "adaptation feeds cultural studies, a discipline born for this era of proliferation" (28). This project engages in literary analysis through close readings in order to make broader claims informed by a cultural studies methodology; I read these narratives as symptoms of the myth-making ideologies reproduced in different forms across particular moments in the long history of American hegemony. In Jameson's Marxist literary terms, my object of analysis is "the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than individual *parole* or utterance" (*The Political Unconscious* 76)—along with close attention to those individual utterances themselves and repetitions—in order to interrogate the re-presentation of these American narratives. My intervention in the field of adaptation studies is to develop a methodology for reading textual adaptations as symptoms of the adaptation of ideology itself, while accounting for shifts in medium within this historically grounded framework rather than the more formal theories that have historically dominated the field.

Methodology and Chapter Breakdown

Following the assertation that the reproduction of liberal ideologies is essential to the American project, this dissertation looks at narrative as a vector through which national mythologies are reified, reproduced, and interrogated. The four narratives under consideration—*The House of Mirth*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Oil!*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*— address the structures of myth, transcending their historical specificities, and are adapted into film around a century later; they are repeatable and adaptable as representations of both the "possibilities and problems"—to adapt Jehlen's phrase—of the American sovereign subject.

This project attempts to complicate perspectives that film adaptation involves merely the commodification of the art-form that is literature, arguing that film has the possibility to hold

contradictions and not merely efface difference into marketable packaging. Cultural theorist Theodor Adorno views mass culture, film *par excellence* ("The Schema of Mass Culture" 77), as directly dictated by the imperatives of market value: "The cultural commodities of the industry are governed [. . .] by the principle of their own realization as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation. The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms" (99). While this view of mass culture has some usefulness in examining the relations of production and the status of film as commodity that require money to produce and money to be made, in terms of ideological adaptations I argue that it is not as clear-cut as adaptation theories that take up Adorno's concept of the culture industry posit. In his treatment of Adorno, James W. Cook points out, "What Adorno's strict division appeared to foreclose were precisely the complex questions of use, meaning-making, and ideological struggle that had led many of us [cultural theorists] to study mass culture as a historical problem" (291); Cook further adds, "My point here is not simply that most culture industry products are ideologically contradictory, simultaneously shaped by producers as well as consumers. Rather, I am suggesting that the longer historical process of culture industry expansion has generated new forms of self-consciousness (vis-à-vis its working methods) and expertise (vis-à-vis its aesthetic practices)" (308). While it is important to keep the specificities of production and distribution in mind, narratives are more contingent or unstable than absolute, and can be taken up in a multiplicity of ways.

Therefore, this project does not view the relationship between the reproduction of myth and ideology and cultural objects through a model of direct correspondence; in other words, not all culture simply functions to reproduce dominant ideology. Campbell and Kean are careful to

point out that myth, specifically regarding nation, is not straightforwardly opposed to an absolute reality:

> ideological myths exist everywhere in American culture, helpful to shape the way people think and write about the nation, its history and its life, and they need to be interrogated and critiqued. [. . .]. Through interrogating these myths as ideologies we see the lines of power that have structured and given preferred meanings to particular renditions of the past and privileged certain groups as a result. This is not, however, a simple corrective, for that would imply that a "myth" can be opposed by a "truth," when, in fact, culture is more usually viewed as a series of dynamic and contested ideological forces and interpretations" (10).

Furthermore, Raymond Williams' concept of hegemony is helpful in building upon theories of ideology to posit a system—such as the liberal democracy of American myth under analysis here—that is crucially *adaptable*, through the "process of incorporation" ("Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" 43):

> [Hegemony] is continually active and adjusting; it isn't just the past, the dry husks of ideology which we can more easily discard. And this can only be so, in a complex society, if it is something more substantial and more flexible than any abstract imposed ideology. Thus we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture. (44)

Following these frameworks, I read the objects under analysis in this project not merely as uncritical commodified versions of critical novels, but rather dynamic objects that illuminate

both the possibilities and limits of critique—the adaptability of ideology and incorporation into hegemony. In other words, when examining the texts under analysis here I ask *both* what is being made visible or critiqued and what is being obfuscated or reproduced through the repetition of these narratives, not only on the level of form—what novels can do that film cannot and vice versa—but on the content of the narratives and their ideological claims. Moreover, it is crucial to the perpetuation of liberal hegemony that its cultural objects reproduce ideology by making allowance or accommodation for the possibility of critique, as evidenced by their adaptability. In contrast to theories of the culture industry, Jacques Rancière argues that art plays a critical function, a making-visible he terms "dissensus": "Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (*Aesthetics and its Discontents* 13). The claim of this dissertation is not that all novels or film adaptation engages in dissensus, but rather to push against postmodernist or culture industry theories that posit a direct relationship between the culture of late capitalism—film, especially—as directly reproducing hegemony.

In other words, this project argues that dissensus is not incidental or outside cultural production, but rather that the reproduction of American mythology *crucially depends* on the accommodation, incorporation, and—central to this project—the adaptation of its own critique. Williams further informs my perspective on the relationship between adaptation and the reproduction of dominant ideologies: "We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in some respects modified" (42). Williams thus illuminates the complications of hegemony and its

reproduction: just as we can speak of the repetition of the forms of white supremacy manifesting with a thickening of ideological mediation from enslavement to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, it would be reductive to overlook the many contestations from abolition to the civil rights movement to recent activism regarding criminal justice. As my object here is not the politics themselves but rather their mediations, it would be reductive to argue simply that mediation is thickened in *every* case of ideological adaptation, or that the emphasis on the individual is *always* intensified; instead, my analysis interrogates the more complex ways that adaptations illuminate how the ideologies that sustain the American nation are themselves adaptable and adapting through their repeated representations in the cultural imaginary. That is, the adaptation of liberal ideology has to be *both* strong and flexible enough to accommodate individual instances of critique or dissensus while maintaining or even reinforcing its structural integrity. Indeed, this accommodation or adaptation is what distinguishes liberal hegemony[3] from more rigid examples such as totalitarianism. Moreover, the tension here between the individual works and cultural-production-in-general parallels the tension of the sovereign subject and structures of power.[4] One might conceive of this strength and flexibility through the metaphor of the honeycomb: the individual instances of dissensus are perforations that increase its resilience and structural integrity by design, as the individual critiques are not incidental but rather function through their adaptation or accommodation to strengthen the structures themselves.

As my methodology involves reading ideological adaptations, in a practical sense each novel required a film adaptation in early-20th century. The choices of texts follow the logic of the

[3] The adaptability of liberal ideology enables its seeming inevitability, giving rise to theories such as Francis Fukuyama's end-of-history hypothesis, which cannot imagine a future beyond liberal hegemony (see Chapter Three, "Socialism and its Spectres: Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* and P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*").

[4] Consider how individual instances of critique are co-opted or adapted just as exceptional individuals as embodied in the character of Jay Gatsby are required to shore up the very structures that limit and destroy him (see Chapter Two, "Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Adaptations of the *The Great Gatsby*").

example: each text and its adaptation(s) illuminate different models of how the mythical subject of American exceptionalism is represented and reproduced. For example, while Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993) is a complex film that could fall broadly under the category of ideological adaptation and American social critique, I would argue that the character it tracks, Newland Archer, does not represent American exceptionalism but rather conventional mediocrity; Lily Bart, on the other hand, operationalizes her exceptional beauty and talent to test the limits of freedom and agency. Each text places varied emphases on the intersections of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy that I identify as the foundational matrix of the American nation. Formal specificity matters greatly to my analyses, but I do not see anything inherently political about form; for example, I do not hold with theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry that the concealment of the cinematic apparatus itself means that film's ideological effects are always obfuscation. In examining texts from the emergence to the downturn of American hegemony, the object of analysis is not the political economy itself, but rather mediations in the cultural imaginary representing the constant of myth—and the un-freedoms thus shored up by hegemonic systems—that manifest at these inflection points. Each chapter engages in a close reading of the novel and adaptation(s), and rather than a mere compare and contrast attempts to address why it matters that the adaptation engages in particular shifts.

Chapter One, "The Visibility of Exchange in *The House of Mirth*," foregrounds the image in the figure of Lily Bart as she performs labour to produce herself as a fetishized commodity for exchange in the patriarchal-capitalist market. Her narrative implies that the only possible agency for freedom outside social scripts is self-destruction; while freedom in the abstract is a national ideal, the actual exercising of freedom leads to expulsion, attrition, or death. The novel functions as a critique of the disavowal of inequality while the film perpetuates this disavowal by

costuming past inequality in sumptuous nostalgia and individuating the systemic critique. Of all four case studies, Terence Davies' gorgeously rendered adaptation most straightforwardly engages in the nostalgia of the period piece in the displacement of the systemic politics of the novel onto historical fetish. Yet in foregrounding the image in a narrative that exposes the labour of production—and indeed culminates in its exhaustion, Lily's death—it complicates conventional understandings of adaptation. Hutcheon argues that in film:

> External appearances are made to mirror inner truths. In other words, visual and aural correlatives for interior events can be created, and in fact film has at its command many techniques that verbal texts do not. The power of the close-up, for example, to create psychological intimacy is so obvious [. . .] that directors can use it for powerful and revealing interior ironies. (58-9)

Davies' film in fact does the opposite: the image does not reveal interiority but rather is explicitly a fetishistic cover; Hutcheon's influential model of formal adaptation does not account for ideological adaptations that are focused precisely on image commodification and the film's own status as commodity. Indeed, in foregrounding its beautiful packaging *The House of Mirth* adaptation places this period of inequality safely in the past through its nostalgic mode of representation. This case study provides an example of an adaptation that diffuses and contains the critique of its source material through both genre and form.

Chapter Two, "Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*," takes the canonical figure of the American Dream, Jay Gatsby, and examines its iterations in Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929), Christopher Scott Cherot's *G* (2002), and Baz Luhrmann's spectacular 2013 adaptation. The project of these adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* is to narrativize the containment of racialized threats to the futurity of the white nation, paralleling

the increasing obfuscation of the white-supremacist systems of enslavement, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. *Gatsby* is the case study with the most adaptations—the most purchase on the cultural imaginary. Each repetition of Fitzgerald's narrative engages in more containment of the systemic critique of the novel. Larsen's novel bifurcates the contradictions of the Gatsby figure into two Black women, one character embodying his cruel optimism and the other his excessive desire; *G* uses Black characters to condemn Black culture and posit its attrition. Luhrmann's adaptation has the most narrative fidelity but, significantly, it shifts the genre from social critique to romance, co-opting the figure of the hip-hop mogul to valorize Gatsby's aspirations rather than expose its cruel optimism. The first two chapters of the dissertation examine the exceptional subject who exercises agency yet cannot thrive within ultimately oppressive systems. The difference between Lily Bart—who ingests the poison of her demise, engaging finally in a politics of refusal—and Jay Gatsby—shot to death because the narrative logic, as reification of social relations, demands it—is that Wharton's novel is clear that Lily understands systemic limits while Fitzgerald's Gatsby continually disavows them, which partially accounts for how the Gatsby narrative can be so easily co-opted by its own object of critique. The choice of the Gatsby narrative for this project illuminates the thickening of mediation to accommodate the expansion of liberal inclusion on a rhetorical level while material exclusion disguises itself through the co-optation of critique—akin to the commodification of anti-oppressive politics that manifests in culture from colourblind political rhetoric to advertisements.

Chapters Three and Four, on the other hand, represent subjects who survive and perhaps even thrive. "Socialism and its Spectres: Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* and P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*" deals with capitalism foremost with very little about gender, and addresses race only through its absence; emphasizing economics, as Cullen writes of this period, "This was the age

of the Robber Barons, men who relished inequality of condition because they believed in equality of opportunity. Any poor boy could theoretically become as rich as they were (and any poor girl could marry one of them)" (116). It is a time when resource excess theoretically makes the promise of the American Dream possible. This study presents these texts as an inversion of form and content in its shift from novel to film; that is, each text performs the critiques of what it foregrounds. The novel is a *bildungsroman* depicting oil heir Bunny coming into social consciousness—with extended passages railing against systemic inequality—but ultimately shows the inviolability of American resource capitalism through the futility of Bunny's resistance. The film, on the other hand, narrativizes the totality of oil capitalism by foregrounding the oil baron Daniel Plainview rather than the coming-of-age of the son; yet through the grotesque figure of Plainview and the images of exhaustion the film performs a critique of capitalism even as it depicts the narrative triumph of its embodiment in Plainview. My examination of the novel focuses on Marxism, while I read the film through Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*—the haunting of totality. By pulling apart form and content as locations of containment and critique, this case study complicates the conventional view that adaptations directly or merely depoliticize or individuate systemic critique.

"Transcendent Desire: Zora Neale Hurston, Oprah Winfrey, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" locates the organizing agent of adaptation not as the director but producer, the mononymic cultural force that is Oprah. Out of the four texts under consideration in this dissertation, Hurston's character occupies the most marginalized structural position. Yet unlike Lily, Gatsby, and Ross/Plainview, Janie's narrative does not foreground the structural limits on individuals but rather the possibility of individual transcendence of those limits, the fulfillment of the promise of exceptionality. This chapter also considers Black exceptionalism and

individualism in the resistance to the social death of anti-Blackness, relating Hurston and Winfrey themselves to the iterations of protagonist Janie. Oprah's investment in narratives of self-actualization, the empowerment of the individual rather than the collective, dovetails with Hurston's individualism and contingent disavowal of the persistence of historical systems of oppression; Oprah's adaptation of *Their Eyes* takes the articulation of metaphors that obliquely define self-actualization in the novel and materializes it visually through dehistoricized images of bodily integration with the environment. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* foregrounds lateral agency, what Berlant defines as "a mode of coasting consciousness within the ordinary that helps people survive the stress on their sensorium" (18), rather than the overt cruel optimism of Lily Bart or Jay Gatsby. This final chapter also hearkens back to the first in its examination of the self-crafting feminized figure. While Lily exercises her agency to perfect the surface of herself as image, Janie strives to integrate herself—unmediated—with her environment, a fantasy of a non-subject outside of ideology. Moreover, Janie also embodies excessive desire that does not annihilate itself, in contrast to Clare in *Passing*. This case study illuminates how the cultural purchase of this narrative stems from its transcendent inspiration on the scale of individual resistance to oppression, even as this inspiration, I argue, actually works on a systemic scale to shore up oppression.

These four case studies provide different models of ideological adaptation, with shifting emphases on the tension between individuals and the structural matrix of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy that form the core of American liberal democracy. Ideological adaptations that reify the reproduction of American mythologies in the cultural imaginary illuminate the central claim of this dissertation, that ideology itself is adaptable.

The Visibility of Exchange in *The House of Mirth*

Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) narrates Lily Bart's trajectory from vibrant and desirable debutante to etiolated corpse in a boarding house, taking us through various social positions through the vector of a singular figure. Lily is exceptionally beautiful, both desiring and desirous, and understands the codes of her society intimately, but her narrative of decline demonstrates the lie of exceptionality, hard work, and achievement, as change, contingency, and her own incalculable desire play a crucial role in her fate. Lily fulfills the ideals of this world in particular ways—keeping up appearances, perfect gestures—but is a figure who cannot survive in this world and thus also exposes the hypocrisy at its core. Her desires thwart her own flourishing, as she is constantly labouring for a product that cannot be realized in life—the formation of her own image in a perfect setting, the ultimate self-aestheticization. Her narrative implies that the only possible agency for freedom outside predetermined social scripts is self-destruction; while freedom in the abstract is a national ideal, the actual exercising of freedom for those historically excluded—here, a woman without money—leads to expulsion, attrition, or death. Almost a century later, critically renowned filmmaker Terence Davies adapted Wharton's novel into a sumptuous costume drama. This case study demonstrates the containment of critique within ideological adaptation: the novel's foregrounding of labour is adapted formally into the fetishized film image and Davies' interpretation individuates as personal tragedy the problematic of labour, visibility, and agency that the novel examines on the scale of social, political, and economic systems.

As a melodrama that in part addresses the nostalgic desires of generic expectation, the film requires both affective stakes—constructing Lily's trajectory as tragic and expanding the importance of her romance with Lawrence Selden—and a determinate logic, that is, narrative

coherence and intelligibility. Without a narrator, the film requires interiority to be manifested through displacement: gesture, framing, light, composition, and other formal techniques; despite the hypervisibility of the screen, the film in fact reveals less than the novel because all it can make visible is surface. It dramatizes and visualizes the tension between agency and convention, the individual and systemic, by corralling an ultimately indeterminate and ambiguous narrative about risk and calculability into a self-contained logic of nostalgic affect and ahistorical fetishization. Moreover, the displacement of political stakes onto affective ones in the film has the effect of making characters' motivations more specific, explicit, and tied to their particular circumstances, further individualizing the systemic critiques of the novel.

Examining the novel in tandem with the film adaptation illuminates the ways these different forms tackle the representation of fluid subjectivity in multiple social and economic contexts—from the narrative level of Lily's trajectory between social classes to the formal level of her (self-)constructed image in the film frame. Lily calibrates her performance to different contexts; the external informs her interiority. The novel and film necessarily have different temporalities and spatialities, and these differences bring into relief the ways that agency, affect, desire, and ultimately subjectivity are made visible. The film materializes the aestheticized images of Lily's labour by placing her in a series of tableaus in the film frame. While both novel and film explore the relationship between performance and setting in subject formation, the novel provides access to interiority to which the film can only gesture obliquely. Reading moments that the film individuates and provides clear determinacy and when it steps back from narrative and character to provide broad fetishized tableaus alongside ways the novel treats these tensions of scale throws into relief the possibilities and limitations of each form in representing shifts in subjectivity in different contexts. Moreover, the different narrative closures of the two

texts and their gestures to futurity reflect the potential for a critique of the present on the one hand and a safe nostalgia on the other.

The two historical moments of the literary and cinematic texts, despite a century between, have similarities that bear upon a reading of a narrative with stakes in market rationality and its individual and social consequences. In the background of Lily's stake in creating herself as the perfect commodity—to use her invisible but exhausting labour to present a hypervisible aesthetic object for others' consumption—is others' invisible investments in finance capital and use of their facility in that realm to entrap or expel Lily. That is, Lily's skill is in self-construction and imaging in relation to the visibility of the commodity, and she goes into debt through Trenor's financial investments, which he makes on her behalf only with the goal to possess her as sexual object without providing her security in turn. The dynamic of labour and production, visibility and commodification, and the abstraction of various incalculable or incommensurable forms of capital form the core of the political stakes in the novel; the film in turn commodifies these complications into a consumable set of beautiful images that place this inequitable time in the past rather than reveal inequality as endemic to the material commodification and abstract financialization of American capitalism in general.

The House of Mirth (1905) and the Inequities of Exchange

Wharton's text maps particular subjectivities in a historical moment characterized by instability and reconfiguration, a transition reflected formally in the ways the novel engages with both intelligibility and indeterminacy. The novel gestures to the genre of American Realism through its ostensible social mapping of turn-of-the-century New York society. While Realist narrative posits a deterministic world—with identifiable cause-and-effect—Wharton's novel

recognizes the tradition of this representational mode without being beholden to it; *The House of Mirth* instead exposes the contingencies and injustice of a world that, on the surface, presents itself as intelligible and rational. Wharton's novel employs anthropological distance to depict the rules, codes, rituals, and other conventions of its social, economic, and historical moment. The text portrays and generalizes multiple spaces and positions within hierarchical structures through the trajectory of the singular figure of Lily Bart, a character at once part of this world and excluded at particular limits. Among these hypervisible conventions, Lily's narrative tracks the hidden or disavowed contingencies of a world that pays superficial fealty to American ideals—such as democracy, justice, meritocracy, agency, and progress—but whose mechanisms reproduce power and marginalize difference. Lily's trajectory depends on a number of chance encounters but her fate is not inevitable; indeed, Lily exercises her own will and desire in situations that could bring her out of this seemingly archetypal narrative of decline into another archetype of inspirational narrative. Importantly, Lily acting on her desire has a different effect than, for example, Bertha, who has the protection of her privileged position. That is, the exchange of agency for consequence is not equal. At many moments—most notably Lily's final act—the text leaves unclear the causal factor or determining agency. Thus, while foregrounding legible conventions, Wharton's work also undermines determinacy not only by demonstrating the contingencies of the narrated world, but also formally, through indeterminacies within the text itself.

The House of Mirth elucidates particular mechanisms of subjectivity within a sprawling socio-economic map. New York City of the early-20th century is a period of transition in the configuration of social classes, the visibilities of diverse subjects in the public sphere, and the increasing social prominence of image media in mass culture. The novel implies that the

mechanism of subjectivity is fundamentally performative: Lily Bart does not exist without performing and her performance requires an audience. Thus, we see the shifts in her self-construction and others' perceptions of her as she moves through different contexts.[5] *The House of Mirth* foregrounds the image—tableau or mise-en-scène—as the context in which Lily's signification is determined; through external exigencies—from physical to social survival—the narrative places her in particular sets of visual configurations that gesture to analogous social and economic situations.[6] In these contexts, Lily calibrates her expressions and gestures, her micro-movements, in order to perfect a particular image—one desirable to others and that reflects their desires back onto them.

The opening of both novel and film set up the stakes of self-imaging, agency, calculability, and social mapping. The novel begins with Selden's perspective: although Lily is the main character through whom we navigate this world, introducing her through another's perspective highlights the importance of reception and context in her self-configuration. The first lines of the text emphasize the status of the still image or tableau: "Selden paused in surprise. In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart" (37). Among the bustling masses, the Lily "was a figure to arrest" (37) and suspends Selden "as a spectator" (38). The crowd appears as predictable threads in the social fabric but Lily is exceptional, which makes her disruptive to the flow of bodies and revelatory of the imperfections and inconsistencies in others: "returning holiday-makers, [. . .] sallow-faced girls

[5] Laura Saltz makes the connection between Lily's mobility, aesthetic sensibility, and her decline explicit: "In Wharton's view, artists might be liberated from a single perspective by 'walking around a subject.' By changing perspectives, Lily too might break free of the static and class-bound vision she inherits. Her descent through the social classes enables precisely this shift in perspective, making possible Lily's visual education. In plotting Lily's social descent, *The House of Mirth* charts the course by which she acquires a vision that is active and constructive rather than simply inherited" (37). Lily's decline occurs because she does not occupy a sufficiently privileged position to allow her to deviate from the scripts and conventions of her inherited social group.

[6] Compare Lily to Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; both move both through different spaces but Janie thrives while Lily declines—one text a cautionary tale and the other inspirational fantasy.

in preposterous hats, and flat-chested women struggling with paper bundles and palm-leaf fans. Was it possible that she belonged to the same race? The dinginess, the crudity of this average section of womanhood made him feel how highly specialized she was" (39). As she is the ideal of this world, Lily paradoxically stands apart from it; although she labours to be integrated into the world, the product of her labour—her idealized image—disorders that world through its extraordinariness, as anomaly. She stops the flow of movement through the train station as people pause turn their gaze to her.[7] As the text progresses, the events of the narrative and Lily's shifting image demonstrate the consequences of her disruptive hypervisibility, both for how Lily makes herself visible and how she has the potential to disrupt or change the visibilities of others.

The novel provides readers access to Lily's actual, individual, interior machinations as she labours relentlessly to create her own image. Her encounter with Percy Gryce on the train is paradigmatic in foregrounding Lily's efforts to producing the image necessary to her social, economic, and ultimately aesthetic goals. Moreover, Lily's labour is manifestly disavowed in order to produce the ideal, fetishized object of white womanhood. After falling into Percy's arms with a "fugitive touch" (52), blamed on the train but in fact quite deliberate, Lily "perform[s] with such careless ease the difficult task of making tea in public in a lurching train" (53). In this instance of successful performance, Lily both uses external circumstances and perceived difficulty—walking and making tea in a lurching train—to her advantage while also cloaking her own strategic manoeuvrings. While Percy takes Lily as face value—indeed, as a face to reflect

[7] As Lily suspends her spectators in their gaze, the novel here prefigures its adaptation in a Mulveyan relation of fetishistic scopophilia—the image of woman stopping the narrative flow: "The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative" (Mulvey 11). Moreover, this is not the only way the novel is cinematic: Jim Ellis also argues that "the novel itself imagines the vacuity of society as a kind of costume film *avant la lettre.* [. . .]. The novel thus to some degree anticipates its own adaptation as period film, even before the idea of literary adaptation exists" (171).

back his own value(s)—Lily, on the other hand, understands Percy's internal operations: "one spring that she had only to touch to set his simple machinery in motion" (54). Indeed, "Miss Bart had the gift of following an undercurrent of thought while she appeared to be sailing on the surface of conversation" (56), further reinforcing the epistemological difference: Lily understands and (re)calibrates according to her environment while others do not gain knowledge of her but rather see her as pure surface, an empty signifier upon which they can inscribe their own fears and desires and gain self-knowledge, whether ego-stroking or unwanted revelations. Amy Kaplan argues that, "[b]y having Lily miss her chance to play this role [of the bride] in the beginning of the novel, Wharton rejects marriage as the narrative teleology of the domestic novel" (92). Yet Lily herself is the proximate cause of her failure to secure Percy's proposal; she does not fail or "miss her chance" because of insufficient labour or personal attributes, but rather her own excessive desire and will. This scene highlights how Lily can so perfectly embody cultural scripts—she is able to perform idealized roles—but her failures to thrive are due to her exercising agency, the putative promise of all subjects in liberal democracy but from which she is excluded. That is, what society lauds as freedom only exists for Lily within the circumscription of capitalist-patriarchal codes and convention. Thus, her trajectory through the narrative leads her ultimately to exercise the only agency she has—to self-destruct—rather than incorporation into the couple-form and reproductive futurity.

Thus, the figure of Lily Bart exposes both the ubiquity of the exchange economy and the disruptions of agency and desire to that system. Lily's narrative of decline indicates the threat of women's agency in white-supremacist patriarchal capitalism, where the value of white women is in marriage and reproduction; she labours to craft a desirable and legible image to others but suffers social punishment when she exercises agency or acts on desire outside of that goal. Lily

has been conditioned—in a specific sense by her mother and more generally by upper-class New York society—to be the perfect female object; what the novel foregrounds is that the construction of this object requires the substantial and continuous labour of a performing subject. Lily is a specifically aesthetic object, the apotheosis of what is considered desirable, whose excessive fulfillment of convention disrupts it whenever she deviates from that ideal, and who is unable to endure in this environment. Lily's greatest assert is her aesthetic capital—an incalculable form of currency that is hypervisible and valueless without external and ongoing recognition—both in the sense of her observable physical beauty and her creative artistic sensibility. Aesthetic capital comes from an ineffable essence or sensibility inside Lily, which her labour converts into something material; she attempts to exchange it for money, but as the inverse calculation makes clear, the exchange value is indeterminate: money cannot buy aesthetic capital[8] any more than it can buy the physical and bodily attributes that make Lily the ideal of white womanhood.

Lily directs her labour toward readily identifiable conversions of capital; *The House of Mirth* does not obfuscate the raw mechanisms of these conversions under abstract ideologies of love or enlightenment, but rather is explicit about the materiality of Lily's need to use her particular forms of capital to secure those that will ensure her survival—that is, this is not a novel of sentiment but one of visible labour and exchange, mapping the treacherous social terrain that Lily must necessarily inhabit in order to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Pierre Bourdieu's examination of the forms of capital is helpful in order to examine Lily's engagement with this socio-economic system. Bourdieu differentiates cultural and social capital from economic capital; that is, money is not the only exchangeable currency in the marketplace.

[8] Indeed, as Renée Somers explains, "Lily looks down on her cousins because they believe that money can buy taste" (130).

While the objectified state of cultural capital would include, for example, Percy Gryce's collection of Americana, the embodied state more closely aligns with what Lily has to offer: her aesthetic sensibility and her physical beauty—her aesthetic capital. Lily's mother banks on her daughter's face to secure them both material comforts in the form of economic capital and social capital, a place in the community. Lily is relentlessly performing labour in various forms: bodily, linguistic, social, and affective. The manifest goal of Lily's labour is the conversion of her aesthetic capital into economic capital, not for the sake of having money, but to have the material security to exercise her agency and desire for further aestheticization.

Lily's aberration is that while she fulfills the aesthetic objectification of white womanhood—she is beautiful, pours tea, knows how to fashion herself—she is not interested in capital accumulation or reproduction. As she tells Selden, society and money are not ends, but rather means to express her interiority through her aesthetic talents: "isn't it possible that, if I had the opportunities of these people, I might make a better use of them? Money stands for all kinds of things—its purchasing quality isn't limited to diamonds and motor-cars" (107). Her aesthetic goals hinder her achievement of the interim step of marriage, money, and security; early in the novel, she chooses a walk and conversation with her intellectual peer Selden over attending church with the dull but rich Percy. Victoria Shinbrot argues:

> Lily seems unable to subordinate fully her aesthetic sensibility to the material demands that her situation requires and which her social world defines as success. This is because Lily Bart's penchant for risk-taking is linked to an aesthetic sensibility that relies on contingency, improvisation, and skill as opposed to virtue, determinacy, and marketability. (40)

Lily has the capacity to perform social conventions perfectly but undermines those rules through her willful seizing of particular moments of incalculability. Lily operates on two levels: the visible level of social performance and the underlying level of contingent and disruptive desire and agency. Lily thus exposes both the unequal value of labour and the disruptions and limits of agency and desire. Shinbrot traces throughout the novel Lily's "desire to flaunt social and moral conventions, to elevate her own desires above the dictates of society, and to surrender to the arbitrary whims of fortune" (41). She cannot be managed or contained by others or even herself; for example in the Percy Gryce incident, at the threshold of a success she has carefully contrived, she succumbs to whim and undermines her own substantial labours. It is not merely a matter of forces working against her, but rather that the force of her own desire—her claiming of the American promise of freedom—to express her incalculable and contingent aesthetic sensibility prevents the fulfillment of her social goals.

Unlike other forms of capital, Lily's aesthetic capital has both a different temporality and materiality. Her aesthetic capital is her primary value but unlike other forms of capital—money, education, land, art collections, etc.—it has an expiration date. When Lily frets to Gerty Farish about lines on her face, it is not mere vanity but a matter of losing her greatest asset. The urgency of her narrative comes from the limited window in which she can exchange this value. In terms of materiality, Simon Rosedale converts his economic capital into social capital because it is clearly measurable—for "a half-a-million tip for dinner" (117), he has provisional access to the upper class and he is also willing to pay for the right wife to add to that social capital. The added significance of Lily's aesthetic capital is that unlike money or property it is incalculable. The novel makes repeated reference to excessiveness of Lily's beauty; the minute details—lowered

eyelashes, a flush, particular gestures—add to more than their sum.[9] Lily's beauty is not quantifiable or exchangeable, and thus compromises the illusion that the marketplace is one of determinate exchange. The other facet of her aesthetic capital, her artistic sensibility, manifests in self-presentation, in crafting her own image, such as during the *tableau-vivant* scene. While the novel makes visible the labour of this self-imaging, Lily's talent lies in obfuscating that labour. When confronted with putting her aesthetic capital into a materially profitable practice—using her artistic sensibility to construct hats and make a wage—she finds that she cannot convert her talent into economic capital because it requires knowledge of mechanical labour. Lily knows how to present herself as a coherent and harmonious ornament but not produce the constituent elements that form that ornamentation; that is, the sewing of spangles on a hat is a different skill from wearing one. Lily's value in this exchange system is unquantifiable and of a different quality than the currency of the marketplace, and she exposes its contradictions, gaps, and incalculability—she is thus someone to contain and manage for the sake of upholding that system, as her aunt Mrs. Peniston, Gerty, and Selden attempt unsuccessfully.

The inequities highlighted in the narrative between Lily's private, feminized labour and the exchange value of her public image correspond to broader forms and hierarchies of power inherent to capitalist society—in conventional Marxian terms, the conflict between labour and capital—and thus belie liberal ideals of meritocracy and individual achievement, placing the contradictions that plague Lily at the core of the American democracy. Consider the clan of upper-class New York: Lily's fellow citizens, some of whom are relatives, feel little social responsibility to her despite her membership in their group by birth. Once her parents and aunt

[9] Indeed, her image evoked in the imagination will always fall short in a materially visual medium such as cinema, a point I would argue is reinforced in the critiques of Gillian Anderson's casting as Lily Bart—the actual physical embodiment of this idealized figure of feminine beauty is impossible.

are gone she is disinherited, her social and sexual currency drained as her remaining family severs ties and her beauty fades with the inevitability of time. She has nothing left to exchange and so is left to her decline. Social responsibility, subsumed by the market, is only feigned insofar as the agents have something to offer; no collective sense of familial, social, or civic duty rescues her. Wai Chee Dimock explains: "Lily is working, after all, within a system in which nonpayment is the norm, in which violation is the only mode of conformity. She is penalized, then, not for breaking the rules but for observing them. This sort of absurdity is the logic of nightmare, but it is just this absurd logic that makes the exchange system work" (72-3). Lily's social group expects her to pay while others are expected not to, because she does not have the requisite quantity and quality of capital to naturalize non-payment. They also accept her decline as natural as she has nothing left to exchange after her disinheritance.

In terms of exchange value, Dimock argues, "two items might be yoked in one equation, pronounced of equal worth, but their 'quality' will always remain imputed rather than inherent. Prices will remain arbitrary as long as the exchange rests on a negotiated parity between the exchange items [. . .]. The manipulatable rate of exchange makes it a treacherous model for 'fair play'" (66). Lily goes into debt because the capital she does possess has unstable value in this marketplace; it cannot be quantified for the market, so she has to pay with other means not her own. Lily's position as sacrifice—the one who pays more than she acquires—exposes the hypocrisy of the American free market, a system that requires inequality under the guise of fairness. Furthermore, Dimock argues that "the marketplace is everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and invisible" (64). While finance capital—the currency of Lily's debilitating debt—may have concrete and calculable exchange value, its material manifestation is abstracted from

that value: it appears as a line in a ledger or a signature on a cheque and its signification is substantially—quantitatively—different for a rich investor such as Gus Trenor than for Lily.

This ubiquitous marketplace that Dimock identifies in this early-20th-century novel is not dissimilar from the one that Wendy Brown outlines in *Undoing the Demos* as contemporary neo-liberalism, that is, the permeation of the market into every sphere, public and private. Wharton's novel depicts a period of rapid social and economic change, witnessing the rise of different socio-economical positionalities—for example, the New Woman who works and lives alone, in the form of Gerty Farrish; the ascendant but racialized capitalist, Rosedale; or the emblem of lower-middle class futurity, the Struther family—and maps how these subjectivities come together in the city to form new social configurations. Brown identifies contemporary neoliberalism as a break from the liberal welfare state, a regime under which subjects were citizens with a sense of social responsibility: "democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement" (26). This period of citizenship never existed for large swaths of the population excluded from participation in the political and public sphere, and thus as a model of subjectivity I contend that the *homo oeconomicus*—what she identifies as emerging during neoliberalism—is as readily identifiable at the turn of the century as it is in our present moment. During times of social change, imputing calculability and quantification onto people, spaces, relations, etc. allows for intelligibility out of chaos; indeed, locating legibility in visibility is an imperative throughout the history of post-slavery American capitalism.[10] Yet what *The House of Mirth* demonstrates is that this calculability is not among equally exchangeable terms—different subjects have different relationships to exchange and some pay more than

[10] *Passing* further clarifies the imperative to connect intelligibility to visibility.

others. Belying the rhetoric of American equality, as Brown phrases it, "inequality becomes normal, even normative" (38). Lily's class sees her decline as a natural consequence of her deviation from scripts, but others, such as Gus, are allowed to deviate if their structural positionality protects them. Despite Brown's nostalgia for liberalism (and its subject, *homo politicus*) and her consequent historicization of *homo oeconomicus* as a recent phenomenon, her analysis of the effect of the ubiquitous marketplace on subjectivity is relevant for my examination of *The House of Mirth*: "neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*" (31, original emphasis). That is, no time has existed when everyone had access to inhabiting *homo politicus* or was not subject to interpellation into *homo economicus*. A reading of *The House of Mirth* in relation to our present neoliberal moment demonstrates how the inequality of market relations we identify in late capitalism is not a new phenomenon.[11]

Lily's social group expects her to pay while others are expected not to, because she does not have the subject positionality or requisite social capital to naturalize the non-payment of economic capital.[12] The novel often makes the rhetoric of exchange explicit: for example, Lily's careful calibration of her feigned interest in Americana to attract Percy Gryce; Gus Trenor's attempted rape metaphorized as paying for dinner and being allowed a seat at the table; and Rosedale's marriage proposal as a business transaction that would enhance both of their capital. The patriarchal treatment of women as property situates Lily in close proximity to the commodity form, exposing her to the impossibility of constantly calculating and calibrating

[11] However, as I argue in my reading of the film, the adaptation safely places this inequality in the past in order to disavow its present instantiation.

[12] Simon Rosedale inhabits a similar position with important differences, as he is racialized as Jewish but with enough economic capital that he can afford to pay more than others to compensate for his lack of social capital.

every gesture, action, or even desire to the exchange economy. Lily continually performs affective labour for an unattainable goal, material security to express and display her aesthetic sensibilities in an unmediated self-image—an amount of capital that will always necessarily fall short. Thus, her labour is inexchangeable for her desired outcome because it operates within the terrain of exchange for a goal that transcends exchange. Lily is figured as a commodity only to suffer for her inability to completely embody the commodity form, as she ultimately exercises agency according to her own will and desire.

Lily is an attempted but failed *homo oeconomicus*, one who exposes the impossibility of constantly calculating and calibrating every gesture, action, or even desire to the exchange economy. Lily does indeed embody many of the characteristics of this subjectivity: she lives in a perpetual present—for example, in Europe she is able to forget her past debts and push thoughts of the future aside to focus on the spectacle and comfort of yachting—and is constantly labouring for an unattainable goal, the material security to express and display her aesthetic sensibilities. She functions as an entrepreneur, with herself as the labourer as well as the product; she not only labours to construct her own image but also brands it as exchangeable—impressions of her beauty must circulate, through rumour and gossip magazines, in order to increase her value. While her manifest goal is marriage for both security and money, her actions thwart this goal, as Lily's desire for agency supersedes her material needs. Living in a perpetual present and constantly striving for an unknown, unreachable goal is a kind of non-teleological productivity. Patrick Mullen connects Lily in the novel to William James' body-subject—an embodied intelligence, with particular emphasis on the material—arguing that Lily represents a particular form of American managerial intelligence that is immanent to the flows of capitalism but also opens up space for critique: "It is an intelligence of the moment that operates until the deal is

made, when it dissipates and must be reorganized for the next deal" (41). Her material, embodied subjectivity is contingent on her context. Mullen furthers argues, "There is no essential reality that can guide action; rather there are competing fields of objectivity (of which the thinking body is but one) in which the body-subject struggles to operate" (43). Both Lily's visibility and what she makes visible depends on the present context and configuration of the socio-economic field of value and exchange.

Lily is consumed with problems of exchange and valuation; the novel's focalization through her perspective uncovers the internal labour and machinations that result from this necessarily mercenary worldview. While others such as Gerty, Rosedale, and Mrs. Peniston are calculable actors, Lily, despite knowing well what she should do to achieve her material goals, behaves in an unpredictable way—the text presents her situation as such that the reader may want Lily to behave in a certain comprehensible way to ensure her material survival, but Lily instead uses her agency for risk-taking, a willful embrace of incalculability. In this way, she exposes the illusion of determining outcomes through one's own agency in the supposed free market by demonstrating how the only way to exercise her agency is to abandon herself deliberately to risk rather than restrict herself to the predictable and calculated behaviours of a proper *homo oeconomicus*. Ultimately, however, the free exercise of agency in a supposedly free society results in punishment and death.

While Lily's relationship with Selden offers discrete moments of vitality within this trajectory of depletion, he also idealizes her perfectly composed beauty—thus maintaining the mediated distance of the image. Indeed, he sees Lily most as herself when she embodies Joshua

Reynolds' painting "Mrs. Lloyd"[13] as a *tableau-vivant*: the composition of her image "revealed the touch of poetry in her beauty that Selden always felt in her presence, yet lost the sense of when he was not with her. Its expression was so vivid that for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart, divested of the trivialities of her little world, and catching for a moment a note of that eternal harmony of which her beauty was a part" (171). Selden's reception of Lily's image here collapses sign and referent—the "real Lily Bart" is the image itself—in a way that collapses image and the labour that produces it, an error that is key to understanding Selden's relationship with Lily. The *tableau-vivant* exposes the image as image, one whose hypervisibility in fact obfuscates what is behind that image. Indeed, this passage reveals at once Selden's fetishizing of Lily's beauty and the temporality of their relationship—their moments of connection and recognition are necessarily fleeting. The labour that is literally a matter of life or death for Lily—as she struggles to meet material necessities of food and shelter—is to Selden trivial in comparison to what he idealizes as atemporal: her eternally present, visible, material beauty. In other worlds, Selden dismisses the stakes over which Lily struggles throughout the narrative. Moreover, as already noted, the aesthetic capital he so admires in her is very much temporal and indeed reaching its expiration date in a culture that values youthful femininity. The *tableau-vivant* serves as the apotheosis of the self-construction of Lily's image, her attempt to become art—a singular, irreducible image in identity with Lily herself, rather than an

[13] Clair Hughes argues that Lily's aestheticization is deliberately not contemporary, that is, not according to the shifting dictates of modern fashion but rather the timelessness of art: "Fashion had begun to tailor itself to a new way of recording its own quickening pace, and a symbiotic relationship was to be established between the camera and clothes. Lily, rather than recreating herself on contemporary lines, has deliberately located the terms of reference for her new self in an eighteenth-century painting, itself based on the lightly-clad nudes of classical antiquity—she has fashioned an image that recedes further and further into the past" (396). As I argue, the film materializes this aestheticization by placing Lily in a series of classically composed tableaus, ultimately culminating in the literal painting of the final freeze frame.

exchangeable commodity.[14] Lily's attempt necessary fails due to its (mis)reception by others: "Van Alystne conflates the image Lily presents at the *tableau vivants* with a literal advertisement [. . .]. Lily remains blind to the fact that her audience is reacting more to their well-rehearsed expectations or erotic attraction than to her aesthetic vision" (Shinbrot 49). The disjuncture between Lily and her spectators is that they are following scripts whereas her aestheticization intends to disrupt or transcend determinacy and convention. Lily explicitly states her desire to display herself in the proper setting, as a still, singularly rare, coherent, and aestheticized image. Upon seeing her cousin's wedding jewels: "More completely than any other expression of wealth they symbolized the life she longed to lead, the life of fastidious aloofness and refinement in which every detail should have the finish of a jewel, and the whole form a harmonious setting to her own jewel-like rareness" (126). The relationship between the art object and commodity is complex: in her review of David Beech's *Art and Value* (2015), Sarah Brouillette writes, "The creation of saleable singular art objects differs fundamentally from the production of commodities via labor that is formally or really subsumed to varying degrees and whose ultimate purpose is the accumulation of surplus value." Lily's fantasy of acquiring sufficient capital to display herself as a singular piece of art, unmediated by labour or calculability but rather a bare expression of aestheticized embodiment, cannot be realized in this apparently triumphant *tableau-vivant*. She is still on display for others to calculate her value—indeed, shortly after the ostensible triumph of the party Gus attempts to rape Lily as payment for his financial help. The premise of male desire for the woman-as-property requires the disavowal of her proximity to the

[14] Gary Totten directly connects Lily's aestheticization and construction of her self-image to a construction of subjectivity: "The relation between text and production, between self and representation of self, produces a specular ideology in Wharton's narrative through which Lily constructs subjectivity. Her actions assume that if she can visually construct such a subjectivity, she can actually grant herself subjectivity; indeed, by designating herself as a gazing subject, Lily re-designs the relation between an object and its image as an act of self-production" (78).

commodity form by seeing her as an art object, which the male characters in the novel fantasize lies outside commodified exchange while at the same time in a material sense still want to possess. In fact, as Brouillette argues, the relation between art and value emerges precisely "from the shifting but ultimately stably unusual position of many aesthetic practices vis-à-vis the capitalist dominant." The art object may be an unusual commodity, but it is a commodity nonetheless, and Lily's fantasy of transcending market relations and exchange through aestheticization is incommensurable with her socio-economic environment.

Having Selden as Lily's first (and final) spectator in the novel emphasizes the relationship between interiority and exteriority: unlike others, Selden purports to desire knowing what is underneath, the machinations that produce her, and remarks upon the effortless surface and the labour creating that image: "her simplest acts seemed the result of far-reaching intentions" (37). Yet Selden's musings about that labour remain superficial: "Selden's reading of Lily is that of the connoisseur: dehumanized, focusing on her curving lines, insisting on her distance from everyday reality, and yet paradoxically declaring this to be the 'real' Lily" (Hughes 396). Selden vaguely conceives of Lily as a product of labour, but without a definite sense of the agent of that labour: "He had a confused sense that she must have cost a great deal to make, that a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce her" (39). Selden's belief that the universe is a zero-sum economy reflects the pervasive need to account for her exceptionality without acknowledging the specific, individual labour that Lily herself exhaustingly enacts. The text presents Selden as an intellectual, as someone who desires knowledge, including the knowledge of production, but in fact his speculations remain on the surface of artifice: he remarks on "the crisp upward wave of her hair—was it ever so slightly brightened by art?" (39) and Lily's "art of blushing at the right

time" (40). Selden judges Lily through what he terms "'the argument from design'" (39), which raises the question of whose design and whose labour: Lily is so perfectly a product of her social milieu, but the labour of that production is entirely, exhaustingly, her own—a fact that Selden's careless pondering deliberately effaces. The pleasure he takes in Lily always relates to her as image: "As a spectator, he had always enjoyed Lily Bart" (38)—Selden is indeed always a spectator regarding Lily. The impossibility of their relationship is that while she feels most vital with Selden, that vitality is based on a shared desire for Lily-as-perfect-image, suspended in an eternal tableau.

Selden cannot save her, as his desire to efface her labour by fetishizing her perfect beauty limits his comprehension of her as a desiring subject. Mullen argues that Selden maintains a distance from the system even as he is within it, while Lily understands her position as deeply entrenched in the social and economic field that marginalizes her: "Unlike Selden who *reflects on* things from a position purportedly outside capitalism, Lily *reflects* from within the materiality of capitalism, not as an unthinking gendered object but as an embodied form of intelligence able to think with the world of things of which she is a part" (48, original emphasis). This logic imputes a binary: Selden's abstract masculine rationality as incompatible with Lily's embodied intelligence. However, the novel aligns their goals, and thus it is more accurate to reinscribe this binary of detached observer and embodied labourer as converging into a mutual desire for the ideal image that effaces labour—one that is as impossible as their happy ending in a heteronormative reproductive couple-form. Selden's perspective in fact reflects Lily's desire to be seen as an idealized image, her affective labour kept invisible. Lily's labour, after all, has as its goal the achievement of (impossibly) sufficient economic capital in which to display her aesthetic capital, to place herself in the most perfect setting, to cease her labour. Selden wants to

see the construction of her image as effortless or magical—which, while impossible, is a cessation of labour that Lily also desires and why she sees herself at her ideal in his eyes.

On the flip side of Selden's vague speculation of the "mysterious way" (39) of Lily's production, Rosedale understands the materiality of labour in the exchange economy, particularly in relation to invisible labour. Selden sees Lily's value in her beautiful presentation, the way her self-construction is seemingly effortless, and his connection to Lily stems from her own desire not to labour. Rosedale, on the other hand, values Lily's constant work and sees a connection between them in their invisible labour—unlike the idealist Selden, Rosedale is very much grounded in the material.[15] When Lily's currency is high, Rosedale proposes marriage to Lily, explaining that he desires her because she understands the relationship between labour, exchange, and appearance: "you know it's only the showy things are cheap. [. . .] I know there's one thing vulgar about money, and that's the thinking about it" (214). Rosedale's focus on the material—compared to Selden, Lily notes, "The contrast was too grotesque" (214)—points to his understanding of marriage as part of the exchange economy. Kaplan explains the social role of wives in relation to visibility: "[i]t is the dealings of the business world which seem private and unspeakable, while the cultural work of women dominates the public scene. The women of this group have a dual role: to display the wealth and social power of the husbands and to conceal the source of this power" (91). Unlike Selden, Rosedale admires Lily's labour—it is because she labours and is successful in concealing it that Lily and her skills are valuable to him. In his examination of affect and labour in the novel, James Dorson emphasizes Rosedale's materialism:

> [W]hat he is interested in is not to purchase her intimacy, her 'inmost' self, but to

[15] Indeed, Hughes argues that contrary to the generic privileging of Selden and Lily's relationship, "it is Rosedale, the self-made outside whom Lily despises, who is the romantic, not Selden" (399), as Rosedale is the one who truly understands her interiority.

> secure the benefits of her public persona, that is, her 'outmost' self. The reason Rosedale finds it so preposterous that Lily has to work is that what he admires about her is not her private struggle to be her public self, but the result of that struggle. Rosedale literally wants her at 'face value,' the social worth of her appearance and status, not what is behind it. (60)

This reading astutely explains Rosedale's motivation for marriage but does not account for his orientation toward her after she descends socially—his attraction to her has more specificity regarding labour than merely as another art object.

Rosedale understands the invisible machinations of the exchange economy and appreciates that Lily does too. He encourages her to use the letters as currency for blackmail: "the only way for you to start fresh is to get Bertha Dorset to back you up, instead of trying to fight her" (297). In Rosedale's materialistic logic, open warfare is too visible and results in destruction, but a backroom business deal leaves both with something they need. Selden would see this action as going against Lily's ideal nature, what he recognizes in her as valuable; however, Rosedale recognizes something else in Lily—her concealed hustling. After Lily takes employment with a milliner, Rosedale is appalled that she has to labour visibly. Explaining the accumulation of debt that leads to her predicament, Lily then "ha[s] a passionate desire that some one should know the truth about this transaction" (332). Rosedale, not the idealistic Selden, is that person, for his comprehension more so than for the mercenary gossip-conscious reason that he could transmit her intention to repay her debts. Contrast Rosedale to Selden, who does not act or give advice but rather serves as a reminder of Lily's ideals. Lily also recognizes in Rosedale a depth beyond his surface fixation on material exchange: "a certain gross kindliness, a rather helpless fidelity of sentiment, which seemed to be struggling through the hard surface of his

material ambitions" (340). Rosedale's understanding of payment and exchange ultimately makes him sympathetic to her even as he understands her labour but not her aesthetic ideals.

Their connection is anchored in their outsider status and their shared requirement to create a visibly legible positionality within socio-economic systems: Lily because of her lack of financial and familial security and Rosedale because he is Jewish. Lori Harrison-Kahan connects Rosedale and Lily through their class and racial performance: "Rosedale and Lily do not share the knowledge of an identity that both are endeavoring to hide, but rather the knowledge of identity as an illusion" (45)—their efforts are on side of the labour it takes to perform a particular image, whereas Selden fetishizes the image itself. If, as Dorson argues, "Selden desires to retreat from society with Lily, not to transform it" (65), neither does Rosedale; instead of transforming or escaping society, Rosedale wants to use brute exchanges of various forms of capital to reach its pinnacle.[16] His failure to be considered one of the elite despite his wealth exposes the inequities of the system of exchange, similar to the critical function of Lily's downfall. The novel repeatedly highlights Rosedale's racialization, first describing him in racial terms that relate to a shrewd materialism: "a plump rosy man of the blond Jewish type, with smart London clothing fitting him like upholstery, and small sidelong eyes which gave him the air of appraising people as if they were bric-a-brac" (48). Jewishness is destabilizing here because of its proximity to but not identity with whiteness—Rosedale's blondness is a threat because it can allow him to pass. Moreover, what Rosedale wants from Lily in the novel is for her proximity to "render his own difference less visible" (Harrison-Kahan 42). Following Jewish stereotypes, Rosedale understands the social economy of exchange and thus commodifies people in an explicit way that is conventionally implicit in dominant New York society. Lily notes that "In her little set Mr.

[16] Like fellow outsider and social climber Jay Gatsby, Rosedale is no revolutionary—instead he attempts to ascend through labour and understanding the system of exchange in relation to visibility.

Rosedale had been pronounced 'impossible,'" "the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times" (51). With the destabilizing of power structures (capitalism and white supremacy) through migration and industry, upper-class New York society clings to the belief that there is something essential to identity—that what they consider good breeding determines a person's place in society. Rosedale's ability to gain massive amounts of wealth, to the extent that old-money is indebted to him, threatens this investment in genealogy. Furthermore, a union with Lily, at her peak desirability, would incorporate him into whiteness through reproductive futurity, while at the same time destabilizing the myths upon which whiteness is upheld.[17]

Like Simon Rosedale, Mrs. Hatch is outside Lily's upper-class sphere but desires to join the elite and requires Lily to facilitate her rise. The convergence of Selden and Lily's mutual desire for the perfect image of Lily is heightened as Lily's depletion breaks down its possibility. That is, as the visibility of Lily's labour intensifies, so does the disparity between her actual circumstances and her desired idealization. Lily's new context is modern and excessive, and she cannot embody her idealized image here: "Lily found herself seated in a blaze of electric light, impartially projected from various ornamental excrescences on a vast concavity of pink damask and gilding, from which [Mrs. Hatch] rose like Venus from her shell" (312). The illumination is not merely descriptive; what is made visible in this world is the machinations behind social niceties. Indeed, the rituals and performances that produce such a glossy surface in Lily's ideal setting are absent here. Mrs. Hatch's setting and habits are foreign and vaguely immoral, "marked by an Oriental indolence and disorder" (314). As Kaplan encapsulates succinctly,

[17] Once again, *The Great Gatsby* provides a fruitful comparison: see, for example, Tom's fear of miscegenation in what he perceives as encroaching (racial) democratization: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife" (140).

"Through the novel, wealth means having the power to hide these loose ends, to render invisible the word on which one's existence depends" (100). In this new setting, not only does Lily have to make her labour visible, but the entire structure of society is laid bare: "Lily had an odd sense of being behind the social tapestry, on the side where the threads were knotted and the loose ends hung" (315). Lily is far from creating the ideal image both she and Selden desire for her, and instead finds herself in the harsh light of visible labour, in a "vast gilded void" outside "the working of the great civic machine [and] the solidarity of these traditional functions" (315). If, as Gary Totten argues, for Lily and Selden the "tableau seems to represent Lily's perfect scenario" (80), pure surface with labour effaced, her situation with Mrs. Hatch is precisely the opposite. However, in contrast to the film, Mrs. Hatch is not an unsympathetic figure in the novel, even as her setting is anathema to Lily's ideals: "in this pallid world [. . .] Mrs. Hatch was its most substantial figure. That lady, though floating in the void, showed faint symptoms of developing an outline" (313). Moreover, Mrs. Hatch is keen for Lily to educate her: "her beautiful eyes seemed to urge the plea of inexperience: she wanted to do what was 'nice,' to be taught how to be 'lovely.' The difficulty was to find any point of contact between her ideals and Lily's" (315). The work that Mrs. Hatch wants in exchange for material support is precisely the kind of education to make work invisible—Mrs. Hatch's mistake, one that Rosedale makes as well, is in treating the skill to conceal labour as one that can be purchased.

Selden visits Lily to urge her to leave, and in doing so claims that mere survival is not enough if it takes her away from "a harmonious setting to her own jewel-like rareness" (129). Selden's perspective shows his masculine privilege; he tells her, "you don't know where you are!" (319) and, in a stark reminder of their differences in positions, he states, "my right to make [comment and suggestion] is simply the universal right of a man to enlighten a woman when he

sees her unconsciously placed in a false position" (320)—false because it takes her further from deploying her aesthetic capital in an ideal setting. Selden's lack of understanding of the exigencies of Lily's survival evoke his earlier musings about her appearance that gesture to her labour in such vagueness as to diminish it. He denies her agency and understanding of her own situation, which is, of course, greater than his, as Selden in his privileged position benefits from the invisibility of feminized labour in patriarchal capitalism. He suggests living with his cousin Gerty, which at least takes her closer to society even as it is an alternative configuration to the heteronormative couple-form. Lily throws Selden's words back at him: "I don't know [. . .] why you imagine me to be situated as you describe; but as you have always told me that the sole object of a bringing-up like mine was to teach a girl to get what she wants, why not assume that that is precisely what I am doing?" (320). Yet Lily and Selden share the same goal from different perspectives and the subsequent abrupt shift in her situation belies her bristled defense of her position with Mrs. Hatch; Selden, in the novel at least, does indeed convince her to leave. In language that recalls the importance of vision, Lily tells him later, "I had already begun to see that it would be impossible to remain with her—for the reasons you gave me; but I wouldn't admit it—I wouldn't let you see that I understood what you meant" (345). After Selden's visit, both the novel and then film cut to her employ with a milliner, a failed attempt to utilize her aesthetic capital in a way that she could not with Mrs. Hatch.

Lily ultimately desires recognition from Selden as her "real" (ideal) self more than security with Rosedale. In the novel, Lily does not contemplate using Bertha's love letters to Selden as blackmail, as this act would betray the shared connection between them. Instead, she burns them in his fireplace, in a drastic preclusion of further action to prevent her decline. However, she destroys them only after confirming with Selden their mutual investment in her

perfect image and expressing explicitly to him that his faith in her potential has been a vital force. The scene is replete with language that evokes vision and spectatorship: “The library looked as she had pictured it”; “The scene was unchanged” (344); “His words recalled the vision of that other afternoon” (346); “the mere longing to see him had directed her” (346-7). What Lily makes clear to Selden in this scene is that she has accepted that she has plummeted so far from their shared vision of herself—the one briefly made present in the *tableau-vivant*—that striving for that ideal is futile. Thus, she severs their connection as well, with one last affirmation: “Whether he wished it or not, he must see her wholly for once before they parted” (347). The scene marks not only Lily’s wish for Selden to bid farewell to her, but for them both to let go of their shared ideal of the perfect image that coherently realizes Lily’s aesthetic potential without laboured artifice: Lily tell him, “There is some one I must say goodbye to. Oh, not *you*—we are sure to see each other again—but the Lily Bart you knew. I have kept her with me all this time, but now we are going to part, and I have brought her back to you—I am going to leave her here. When I go out presently she will not go with me. I shall like to think that she has stayed with you” (348-9, original emphasis). As Lily throws the envelopes into the fireplace, Selden does not see her action—“he hardly noticed the gesture at the time” (350)—but rather has a final, enduring, view of Lily-*vivant*: “he remembered long afterward how the red play of the flame sharpened the depression of her nostrils, and intensified the blackness of the shadows which struck up from her cheekbones to her eyes” (350). Lily gets a final recognition through Selden’s vision as she prepares to leave her old self behind. No longer are they performing scripts of flirtation—“In her strange state of extra-lucidity, which gave her the sense of being already at the heart of the situation, it seemed incredible that any one should think it necessary to linger in the conventional outskirts of word-play and evasion” (346)—but rather acknowledging that what “in

truth lay dead between them" (349) is beyond convention or even language, that is, the desire to escape the economics of labour and exchange. Selden's recognition is important to Lily as he sees her as her ideal self—one that, hypervisible as commodity but of incalculable value, is impossible in the domain of unequal exchange—one last time before her final decline into death.

The House of Mirth (2000): Nostalgia and the Fetishized Image

Davies' adaptation intensifies the commodification of the image over the explication of interiority through its formal rendering of Lily's objectification. Renée Somers points out, "*The House of Mirth* is one of many texts that ardently expresses Edith Wharton's theories about how the built environment contains and expresses human meaning" (129), and the adaptation in turn materializes this expressionism in the film's mise-en-scène. The stakes of visibility, commodification, and market relations in the novel manifest in the visual medium of film as a lavish fetishization of surface. The film offers a series of images that figure Lily in particular compositions, gesturing obliquely to her private interiority through its visible manifestations. It privileges the surface of the image as ahistorical commodity over the feminized, affective labour that is so explicit in Wharton's novel, with the effect of locating the conditions of her decline firmly in the past rather than a transhistorical continuity to the present.

One of the clearest indications of the film sacrificing a systemic critique in the present for a nostalgic doomed romance is the deracination of Rosedale. Instead of casting a blond actor and explicitly stating and reinforcing Rosedale's Jewish otherness, the film has dark-haired Italian-Australian actor Anthony LaPaglia play Rosedale and does not make him Jewish. Terence Davies explains, "I found the anti-Semitism the most dispiriting thing about Wharton's work [. . .]. I deleted it. I simply could not bring myself to write it or to direct an actor to do it" (qtd. in

Cahir 169). While arguably LaPaglia's Rosedale is somewhat differentiated from the WASPy upper-class, the film removes the primary aspect of how his identity is received socially. In the film, Rosedale is vaguely an outsider, and what sets him apart is that he works for his money and does not conceal his social ambitions. In the novel, Lily's motivations for disliking Rosedale are racialized,[18] indicated by her emphasis on his Hebrew given name, Simon: "*Sim Rosedale!* The name, made more odious by its diminutive, obtruded itself on Lily's thoughts like a leer. It stood for one of the many hated possibilities hovering on the edge of life" (92, original emphasis)—the compromising of her own racial position, as Harrison-Kahan claims: "If Rosedale should succeed in revealing the social construction of race, he would thus challenge on aspect of Lily's identity—whiteness—that assured her a place in the nation" (47). In the film, Lily's distaste for Rosedale appears to be more of a personal preference; she does not like how he does not conceal his motivations and goals, but he does not threaten her racial status as in the novel. The shift in the film has the effect of individuating what in the novel is a about mapping a system of unequal exchanges. In the novel, because of his Jewishness, Rosedale's material wealth signifies differently and is valued differently than the others; he has to pay more for less, just as Lily does. Intangible currencies such as whiteness and genealogy cannot be purchased by material wealth. The film instead makes Rosedale vaguely mercenary in his perspective but unconnected to the history of racialized systems. Thus, the film reinscribes as mere tragedy what the novel exposes the American myth of economic and social equality and meritocracy.

Jim Ellis situates Lily Bart in the tradition of spectacular filmic bodies, arguing that the focus of the film is not the past itself, but rather interrogating the mediation of the past, "how the past has been remembered, especially via the cinema and the particular role that cinema plays in

[18] As the ideal of white womanhood, "Lily is a hyperevolved specimen whose purity demands a life sheltered from the encroaching dinginess of American democracy" (Kassanoff 63), which, like in *Passing*, includes miscegenation.

cultural memory" (165). Engaging with the existing literature associating the cinema with trains,[19] Ellis associates Lily with the train and thus cinema itself: "the opening shot that pairs Lily with the train makes a great deal of sense, echoing cinema's primal scene [the Lumière brothers] as well as a number of other similar shots in the history of cinema that associate women with trains" (165). Ellis astutely argues that this association constructs Lily as a figure of modernity, thus connected to modern reconfigurations of time and space. His reading argues for the necessity of Lily's cinematic manifestation in fulfilling the modernist promise of the novel in the way that the novel queers subjectivity through spatial and temporal reconfigurations. Ellis argues:

> [Cinema] is a nineteenth century matter that was resolved in the twentieth. [. . .] [I]t is the filmic adaptation of the novel that makes this knowledge [of formally queer subjectivity] available to us [. . .]. [T]he period film can function as what Freud calls *Nachtraglichkeit* or deferred action, a bringing to consciousness and a making sense of some earlier traumatic experience: in this case, the trauma of modernity that gives birth to a version of the queer subject. (167)

Ellis focuses on this new form of split subjectivity, one stemming from "the new visual regime of modernity" (169), which embodies a particular kind of consciousness that performs "the self as a visual object" (169). His emphasis is on the queerness of this subject, one existing in a temporality out-of-joint, in which the cinematic and literary past haunts the late-20th-century film. Within the context of my reading, the association of Lily with the cinematic renders her as text and highlights the stakes of legibility; Lily is thus readable or not in an analogous way to the film screen. The cinematic Lily is a surface of which viewers can only have limited knowledge,

[19] See Lynne Kirby's *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* for the germinal text in this field.

while the literary Lily has explicitly rendered interiority. Thus, the shift from literature to film has an effect on what is able to be made visible—and consequently the possibility for critique on the one hand or a fetishized nostalgia on the other.

Taking a structuralist approach, Belén Vidal Villasur's reading of *The House of Mirth* makes the case for literary adaptation as an imperative step in understanding modernist textuality through an examination of the film's signification. Following Roland Barthes' examination of signs in *Image Music Text*, she elucidates how the image operates in this film: in addition to denotative and connotative meaning, Barthes also gestures to "the meaning that exceeds the operations of the sign, that is 'useless expenditure.' 'The third meaning—theoretically locatable but not describable—can be seen as the *passage* from language to *signifiance* and the founding act of the filmic itself'" (14, original emphasis). Vidal Villasur's emphasis on form and excessive signification helps illuminate a reading of both the novel and the film in relation to exchange. The excess or residue of signification on the level of image gestures to thematics of unequal exchanges and the (over/un)determination of Lily herself. Via Barthes, Vidal Villasur highlights the image—and thus Lily's—configuration through difference: "Barthes alludes to the capacity of the image to escape the symbolic, to create another order of signification that can only be understood as difference, never as the object of discourse" (14). Vidal Villasur reads adaptations primarily as sites of productive difference, particularly in the case of period films in which the body is costumed, "the coexistence of a body and its cultural disguise" (15). Thus, she argues that Gillian Anderson's embodiment of Lily Bart "not only doubles Lily's beauty as high art, but it short-circuits the representation, bringing into it its own set of meanings, transforming Lily into a writerly body" (15). Lily is an imagistic text to be read and incorporated (or not) into existing legibilities of genre and convention; yet Lily cannot be comprehended as a coherent

whole, only as negation or absence—on the one hand, her deficiencies at embodying certain ideals (caution, guile), and on the other, how her excessive incorporation of other ideals (beauty, aesthetic sensibility) is not a positive fulfillment of collective social desires but rather lays bare deficiencies and contradictions in established social structures. Vidal Villasur's article sharpens how "the adaptation operates in the difference of the literary film, understood in the Derridean sense, both as spatial being-in-the-place-of-the-other and as temporal deferral" (18). Reading *The House of Mirth* as what Vidal Villasur calls "the post-heritage literary film" illuminates the ways that the film produces meaning "from its spaces of discursive difference" (17); difference on the level of formal signification thus provides a framework for examining how meaning is produced through both excess and negation on the level of narrative and character, as the plenitude of the film image obfuscates its function as fetish.

Davies' film opens with stylized, highly wrought, and recognizably conventional flowers tracing a pattern on a green surface, establishing a visual form for the intricate social mapping of this world. The pattern is self-constructing; rather than, for example, employing a paintbrush or some agent creating the flower pattern, the film uses this image of auto-composition to demonstrate the ways social configurations happen through established convention and collective agreement—the flowers pointing to a world that is similarly intricate, regulated, and decentralized. The first post-credits image provides a geographical and temporal marker—"New York, 1905"—and shows Lily's silhouette emerging from fog, emphasizing flow and instability. The image fades to parasols and lace patterns, recalling the intricate image from the credits. Intricacy becomes legible through convention; we recognize these patterns as historically, geographically, and culturally specific. Highlighting Lily as spectacular object, the film shows Selden observing her before the silhouette (of woman) is filled in with the specific figure of Lily.

Her face is veiled with lace, another gesture to the intricate pattern—along with parasols, corsets, skirts—signalling social mapping onto the body. Not only is Lily's figure mediated in this way, but the conversation with Selden also follows conventional and intricate scripts—a performance of flirtation. The film establishes formally that this is a world of collectively agreed-upon practices and codes that conform to socially determined patterns, and that Lily is a product of this world. However, building upon Ellis' argument that Lily is also configured formally a figure of modernity, this opening scene also establishes that Lily deviates from the norms that produced her. The music, similarly stylized, builds to a cadence that ends the scene as Lily says she will "take the risk." The film does the work of world-building by showing us formally how this social and economic field is patterned and regulated and situates Lily as a product of that world; at the same time, the opening scene closes with Lily claiming agency for risk, setting her up as someone who deviates from traditional scripts, as the scene builds toward an unconventional ending—the shift from the public space of the train station to the intimate space of Selden's apartment.

Unlike Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993), which transposes Wharton's ironic narrator into an explanatory voiceover that is often drawn verbatim from the novel, Davies' *The House of Mirth* communicates through visuals and dialogue. The camera highlights the limits of knowledge: while the novel may tell us the underlying operations of Lily's labour explicitly, the film expresses this interiority through zooms onto Lily's face—as the camera closes in onto the micro-movements of Lily's face, the face expands in the frame but also makes visible the limits of proximity. It can get close but not penetrate the surface. Indeed, Lily functions doubly as a surface for her spectators, both diegetically and exegetically. The film evokes the relationship between labour and production, which the novel explicates so

thoroughly, in a displaced and mediated way, through formal effects. In multiple scenes—such as between Lily and Judy, or Lily and Mrs. Fisher—the film employs shot reverse-shot formations. The conversations centre around comprehending or persuading Lily; that is, what is at stake in the interplay between the two characters is transforming Lily's interiority. With each shot and reverse-shot, the camera moves closer and closer to the faces, thus demonstrating formally the desire for intimacy and knowledge while also brushing up against its limits; faces are not permeable, and here act as masks. The face presented to the world provides some information about interiority, through the micro-movements of affect, but also throws into relief the limits of comprehension, by zooming in on the disparity between precarious Lily's facial expressions and those of someone firmly in this social world.

Because the film does not provide explicit access to Lily's interiority, the disconnect between her invisible labour and desires on the inside and her manifest perfect image of feminine beauty and composure on the outside is made visible through what Deleuze terms the crystal image, [20] the flow between the actual and virtual image in Lily's continually shifting self-construction as she attempts to reconcile her desires with her reception. The film shows this self-conscious circuit through mirror images. Lily is constantly recalibrating her performance and creating her image to suit her present context. The first instance is in Selden's apartment: she flirts with Selden but also has a plan to seduce and marry Pryce and tries to get information on Pryce's passion, Americana, from Selden. The complications of being alone in a bachelor's domestic space, erotically engaging with him and yet aspiring to be with another, while also

[20] From *Cinema 2*: the crystal image is "an image with two sides, actual *and* virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture" (68, italics original).

defending her plan to Selden's skepticism, require Lily to balance her will, desire, and self-presentation. The film here shows Lily and her mirror image over the mantle to gesture to these multiple selves and Lily's labouring to make a coherent self visible. Similarly, after Bertha interrupts Lily's careful enticement of Gryce, the scene ends with Lily looking out the train window; however, she is not looking at the landscape, but rather her reflection in the glass—she realizes that her plan, and thus the construction of her image, requires a shift due to Bertha's interjection. In Lily's last scene as a member of the upper class, she sits at a dressing table, grooming in front of a mirror. She brushes her hair—Lily is a professional groomer—but her conversation with Mrs. Fisher demonstrates her social descent, the failure of her careful calibrations. Mrs. Fisher tells her how allegiances have shifted, leaving Lily without social allies. Mrs. Fisher explicitly states how Lily has been sacrificed in order for others to solidify their positions—unlike Grace or the gauche Gormers, Lily's calculations do not involve the sacrifice of others, only of her own desires. That is, Lily's sacrifice compensates for the nonpayment of others in order for the unequal system to sustain itself. While Lily brushes her hair and examines her image in the mirror, Mrs. Fisher tells her, "The world is vile." At this phrase, the image of Lily in the mirror dissolves to her asleep in bed, in the employ of Mrs. Hatch and out of society. The trajectory of these scenes of self-construction demonstrate the depletion of agency and Lily's ability to exchange her particular forms of capital—both her self-constructed beauty and aesthetic productivity.

Both Selden and Lily are embodied as figures in particular compositions in the film frame. Selden is not only a spectator but also part of the spectacle, as in the opening scene where both follow scripts. The film departs from the novel by emphasizing embodiment through eroticizing their interactions. Phallic, oral cigarettes take the place of actual sex, as smoke

mingles between them. They kiss in a park, as Lily deviates from her plan to seduce rich, dull Percy. The film attempts to show an intimate connection between them through this embodiment and eroticization, but thereby ends up evacuating the narrative of its critiques of convention: Lily and Selden's relationship is like any other love story on screen, and their connection is merely erotic, not on the more complicated level of sharing ideals as in the novel. Augusta Rohrbach argues, "Davies makes Lily's sexuality the transgressive element in the film—her sexual desire becomes the major stumbling block to Lily's successful completion of her mission: to marry and marry well" (20). Reducing Lily's transgressions to sexual deviance creates a disparity between her desire to inhabit a position in which she does not pay—does not require labour for her perfect image—and what causes her to deviate from her plans. If, in the film, her desire to inhabit a perfect image thwarted through sexual transgressions, then the film reduces Selden to merely an object of romantic love or sexual desire rather than the one person who shares her impossible aesthetic goal.

This categorical shift in re-inscribing the character of Selden also has the effect of evacuating Lily's agency—she is in thrall to bodily desires rather than exercising mental calculations and risks that cannot work out because she does not inhabit a privileged position that protects her from paying more than she receives. Many critics have read Selden as a weak character in the film, often blaming Eric Stoltz's performance; Rohrbach writes, "The physical puniness of Eric Stoltz, the actor who plays Selden, mirrors his emotional cowardice: he is simply not up to Lily Bart" (21). While the film indeed deliberately frames Stoltz as inferior to Anderson, the limitations of this character stem from much more than one actor's performance. The film does not provide access to Selden's spectating and speculations of Lily—significantly, the film constructs the audience as spectators to both of them as they follow social scripts, while

the novel opens with Selden observing Lily. The frank conversations in the novel—in which Selden reveals his desire to see Lily as perfect image and Lily articulates her goals, not to marry but to use marriage as a way to secure the display of her aesthetic sensibility—lead, in the film, to erotic encounters, whether actual kisses or mediated through cigarettes. Thus, the film displaces this shared idealized aesthetic vision and onto romantic love and sexual desire.

Shifting the emphasis from this shared desire to efface Lily's labour to romance individualizes what in the novel has more to do with mapping larger social economies. Indeed, one of the major changes from novel to film is merging the character of independent New Woman Gerty into cousin Grace. Rohrbach argues, "What is lost as a result of Davies' change in story line is the historical critique of the values honored by old New York society. In its place, the impact of Lily's downfall takes on a different meaning: Grace's vicious sabotage of Lily is mainly the result of a sexual struggle" (23). Furthermore, removing a character who represents an alternative path for women that does not rely on marriage shrinks the psychological depth as well. The film provides no sense of why Grace would love Selden, apart from the generic necessity of a heteronormative love triangle. In the novel, Gerty provides comfort to Lily even as she is envious of her connection with Selden, and provides insight into her complex feelings; they share a bed and she is at once maternal towards and desirous and envious of Lily. Harrison-Kahan writes, "While Gerty's instinct is to by physical with Lily, she too disavows her desire. Because the threat of women's subjectivity is specifically understood as the threat of sexual agency, both female heterosexual and homosocial desire must be suppressed" (44). In the film, however, female desire on the part of Grace-Gerty and Lily is indeed on display but safely, heteronormatively, directed toward Selden.

Following the conventions of cinema, Lily and Selden are firmly in love and their relationship is the one at stake for the narrative; they either get with each other or with no one else. The barrier to their union in the film is less lack of funds or any absolute circumstance but rather the contingencies of external forces: Percy, Bertha, Gus, and Grace. In the novel, Selden and Lily share more than an investment in their own heterosexual union, and Selden, due to insufficient wealth, does not see himself as the one who is able to facilitate her desire to cease her labour through marriage. Harrison-Kahan posits that in the novel Selden is able to see a future for Lily that does not involve marriage but rather a reconfiguration of her subjectivity in a more radical way: "the proposal of marriage that Selden never makes is displaced onto his proposed union of Gerty and Lily" (35). Selden is able to make this proposal because, unlike film-Selden, his relationship with Lily is not erotic towards each other but rather both directed toward the same ideal. Lily, of course, rejects this proposal; the intensification or perfection of her image, rather than reinvention, is the only end she can envision. Lily understands the consequences of nonconformity and her own limitations—thrown into relief by her later inability to make hats—in a way that Selden cannot. Novel-Selden prioritizes survival over their union even as he idealizes Lily, but Lily cannot merely survive; the trajectory of film-Selden culminates in his utterance of love for Lily, tragically belated as genre dictates.

As with the conflation of Gerty and Grace, the shift in Mrs. Hatch's character from novel to film reduces social complexities and sacrifices the stakes of the ideal image and setting in order to individuate the problem of Lily's employ with Mrs. Hatch. The latter in the film is not a young naïve woman in search of guidance but an older uncouth woman who, rather than desiring to learn about boundaries, explicitly breaks them, for example, by physically barging into Lily's private room to wake her. The film constructs Lily's predicament in the most visible way—Mrs.

Hatch dismisses Lily's skills and treats her as a servant, and this manifest devaluation is why Lily does not belong, not a more intangible disparity in their ideals and the making-visible of social labour. In the film Mrs. Hatch dismisses her when she successfully gets into society, while the novel maintains Lily's agency and her connection to Selden by having her leave after his visit illuminates her "false" position—the incorrect framing for her ideal image.

What is at stake in the novel and film is Lily's image, both self-constructed and as it is received, which the film puts into sharp relief by framing Lily in a series of tableaus. In an important scene, Lily recreates a painting in a *tableau-vivant* through her own embodiment. The novel emphasizes the identity of the painting's image to Lily's own self-construction: "She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself. It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into Reynolds' canvas, banishing the phantom of his dead beauty by the beams of her living grace" (171). The film further emphasizes the impossibility of Lily escaping exchange through the singular embodiments of art by repeating these tableaus throughout—like the commodities of mass culture, her displays in harmonious settings are not singular but rather reproducible. Here Mary Ann Doane's classic feminist film theory of the masquerade illuminates the specifically cinematic performance of this distance: "Masquerade [. . .] constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask—as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity. [. . .]. The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed" (138). Indeed, the film emphasizes the distance, rather than the identity, of Lily to her image by turning the painting into a metaphor for Lily's peak (and eventual decline): rather than Joshua Reynolds' intimate image of a woman in a diaphanous dress, the tableau-vivant of the film has Lily embodying Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting *Ceres*

(Summer)—a season that inevitably turns to Fall. The film does not linger on this image to highlight Lily's self-construction or becoming-art; rather, making use of the imagistic medium, the film instead places Lily in a series of tableaus—in repose on the yacht, posed with a parasol on the beach, displaying herself in scarlet at the opera, sitting on a luxurious sofa. Without making visible the interiority of Lily's labour, as the novel does, the film offers these images as fetishized commodity for the viewer's consumption. The series of figurations demonstrates an ongoing, teleological process, culminating in the ultimate telos of death, the *tableau-meurtant*. Doane's theory of masquerade claims that the deliberate performance of femininity in the cinematic image "involves a realignment of feminist, the recovery, or more accurately, the simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image" (139)—thus the impossibility of identity with the image as a reconciliation of Lily's deep desire and surface aestheticization. Indeed, Doane notes that in films exemplary of the masquerade, "the woman is constructed as the site of an excessive and dangerous desire. This desire mobilises extreme efforts of containment and unveils the sadistic aspect of narrative. In [these] films the woman dies" (140). In the tradition of the cinematic masquerade, Davies' *The House of Mirth* foregrounds the impossibility of reconciling Lily's interior and exterior, and thus after a series of masquerade-tableaus that would be impossible in the novel, the film ends with Lily becoming art only by radically removing herself from life.

Narrative Closure and Futurity

Lily and Selden's final interactions intensify the disparity between aesthetic idealization in the novel on the one hand and a focus on erotic love in film. The film treats the events leading

up to and including their final parting in a way that determines Lily's actions through external contingencies rather than a shift in internal perspective. In the novel, Lily contemplates confronting Bertha about her letters to Selden, but firmly decides against it when she recalls a past encounter with Selden: "She seemed suddenly to see her action as he would see it" and then had "the sudden longing to see him [. . .]. She had a vision of his quiet room, of the bookshelves, and the fire on the heart" (344). It is precisely through this vision that Lily recalls Selden and their connection and decides she must see him and, importantly, have him see her once more. The film instead has Lily's sexual jealousy and desire for survival inform her decision and she does indeed arrive at Bertha's doorstep only to be turned away—the film shifts agency in this event from Lily herself to a world that is aligned against her personally.

In an interview, producer Olivia Stewart explains the decision to add the scene of Lily being turned away at the door by emphasizing the affective positioning of the audience: "You, yourself are conflicted. You admire her [for her moral high ground], but you also desperately want her to do something about saving herself. [. . .]. But when she tries to, she is inept, incapable of looking after herself. [. . .]. [F]irst and foremost, *The House of Mirth* is a tragedy" (qtd. in Cahir 170). Indeed, the film individuates as mere personal tragedy what the novel maps as a system of agency, risk, and contingency. This shift has the effect of diminishing the development of Lily's character from one who is subject to contingencies to one who acts, even in ways that preclude further action. It also divorces Lily's decision regarding the letters from Selden himself—he is no longer the vital force that allows her to keep faith in an idealized self-image, but a man who received love letters from her social/sexual rival. Moreover, the film concretizes as a recognizable, conventional matter of "love" what is left as an ideal, unarticulated abstraction in the novel. When Lily leaves Selden's apartment after throwing the envelope in the

fire, “His faculties seemed tranced, and he was still groping for the word to break the spell” (350). The final words of the novel intensify this foregrounding of the inadequacies of language to describe the ideal connection between them; as Selden kneels by Lily’s beautiful corpse, “in the silence there passed between them the word which made all clear” (369). What connects them can only be articulated through silence, outside the conventions of language and social scripts. The final dialogue of the film takes the opposite approach: Selden weeps, “I love you,” a phrase that ranks high amongst cinematic conventions and centers his feelings and knowledge. The contrast between indeterminacy and cliché in the two texts encapsulates the differences in Lily and Selden’s relationship, from one whose desires relate outward to the greater system of labour and visibility in the novel to one that is oriented towards itself as the heteronormative couple-form in the film.

While the novel maintains indeterminacy regarding Lily’s agency in her demise[21]—she craves rest, but it is unclear whether she kills herself—the film frames her ingestion of the poison as a deliberate act, an assertion of agency after she has no more capital of any kind. Out of the rarified jewel-like high society, her labour has no currency in the working-class world; she has the aesthetic sensibility to wear hats and present her perfectly crafted image but not to produce the objects herself, as her failed attempt to work at a millinery demonstrates. In continuation with her farewell to Selden, Lily bids goodbye to her previous self, “her last phase of splendor” (356) by looking over her dresses, reminding herself of the art of self-imaging: “The remaining dresses, though they had lost their freshness, still kept the unerring lines, the sweep and amplitude of the great artist’s stroke, and as she spread them out on the bed the scenes in which

[21] Indeed, Shinbrot reads this act as a culmination of Lily’s imbrication of aestheticization and change: “Lily’s death can be seen as a last gesture toward indeterminacy, a final game of Russian roulette [. . .]. Faced with the irreconcilable conflict between her own desires and the demands of the social world, Lily takes one final risk and loses (perhaps to her own relief)” (57).

they had been word rose vividly before her. An association lurked in every fold: each fall of lace and gleam of embroidery was like a letter in the record of her past" (356-7). The material objects recall her perfect self-composition, the scenes that provided the context for her to craft her beautiful image.[22] Significantly, the last dress she takes out is the one from the *tableau-vivant*, which "gave forth an odour of violets which came to her like a breath from the flower-edged foundation where she had stood with Lawrence Selden" (357). The dress takes her back to the vision of herself she shares with Selden: as she said goodbye to him, and made him say goodbye to that version of herself, so does she say goodbye to her ideal image via the dress that costumed her when she was most her (desiring and desirable) self and her labour was most perfectly effaced. The period of the novel is compellingly like the historical present of the film insofar as both are eras dominated by finance capital. As Giovanni Arrighi argues, both the 19th and 20th centuries came to a close with financialization. Periods of finance are characterized by zero-sum circulation economies in which no new surplus value is produced. Finance is instead the production of debt, and so the fantasy of financialized economies is always to bring balances to zero through circulation (exchange). It is no surprise, then, that Lily's penultimate act, before ingesting the fatal dose, is to remove herself from perpetual exchange by signing a cheque to pay her debts, bringing her balance to zero. Lily may have facility in making herself legible in particular ways, but this focus on visibility makes her a superficial reader, invested in materiality of the image rather than comprehending the abstraction of financialization like Trenor does.

The novel and film both gesture outside of Lily, to a future that exists beyond the death of this particular subject. While Lily herself desires a kind of atemporal suspension of her own

[22] Mullen connects the dresses to Lily's aesthetic intelligence explicitly: "the tragedy here is that Lily has been mistaken for a thing, that the power of the commodity fetish has replaced the human. However, if Lily operates as a gendered embodied intelligence within the materiality of capitalism, the tragedy is just as the scene describes, that the loss of the materiality (the dresses) also figures as a loss of the living intelligence that Lily embodies" (50).

subjectivity in the apotheosis of her self-composition, the Lily of the novel is also invested in a kind of futurity that exists beyond the self. The novel, invested in social mapping and presenting a variety of differently classed social subjects, depicts Lily visiting the working-class Nettie Struther's home before her final act. Her previous charity work has allowed this family to flourish and Nettie idealizes and admires Lily as a fantasy role model for her child. She also realizes that connection with another person requires a knowledge that Selden does not have of her and indeed does not exist in the conventions of their upper-class world: "Lily remembered Nettie's words: *I knew he knew about me*. Her husband's faith in her had made her renewal possible—it is so easy for a woman to become what the man she loves believes her to be! [. .]. The very quality of [Selden's] love had made it the more impossible to recall to life" (359-60, italics original). Now that Lily is reaching complete exhaustion and depletion, Nettie says, "I only wish I could help *you*—but I suppose there's nothing on earth I could do. [. . .]. Lily, instead of answering, rose with a smile and held out her arms; and the mother, understanding the gesture, laid her child in them" (355, original emphasis). The novel locates reproductive futurity outside of Lily's class—New York high society and the idealized subject that cannot thrive within it may be ending,[23] but futurity is embodied in this working-class baby. As Lily holds the baby, she feels the weight of its body "penetrating her with a strange sense of weakness, as though the child entered into her and became a part of herself" (355). Later, in her final living moments, Lily notes, "All the men and women she knew were like atoms whirling away from each other in some wild centrifugal dance: her first glimpse of the continuity of life had come to her that

[23] "Lily Bart fully embodies this paradigm of apotheosis, sacrifice, and extinction. Wharton captures and immobilizes her at the moment of racial perfection, a fate preferable, she implies, to a slow demise in New York's competitive wilderness. Lily's final tableau of death thus transforms her into the period's quintessential museum piece—the perfectly preserved taxidermic specimen" (Kassanoff 70)—an elegiac pastness made explicit in the film's painterly pixilation of the final freeze frame.

evening in Nettie Struther's kitchen" (359). Her last conscious feeling is that of the weight of the child against her body. Lily cannot see a future for herself but she has facilitated a future for this child and provided an idealized image for the Struthers' fantasy. That life endures without her, that the atoms whirl and reproduce, extends history beyond the singular subject or the rigid and intricate social configurations of her upper-class world.

Rather than gesturing toward futurity in the reproductive and individual sense in the form of a baby, the film instead expands beyond the personal or even merely social to imply a global future in the form of revolution. As Lily moves through the city streets to the Bertha's house, she does not stop at Nettie's working-class home but instead walks by a protest. A man yells, "Let me tell you about the plight of the Russian people under the Tsar!" Rohrbach argues that "Davies links Lily's struggle to survive to the vocabulary of communism and the Russian revolution, marking her as one of the people, one of 'us'" (23). However, Lily does not acknowledge the protest and continues on her futile journey to blackmail Bertha, so I contend that it has the opposite effect, marking Lily as outside and ignorant of the turmoil that threatens the world that oppresses her. It is a brief moment in the film but does the work of the novel's scene in Nettie Struther's house by gesturing outside of the singular subject not to continuity as located in the working-class family but rather as expanding to a larger future reconfiguration of global socio-economic structures.

Davies' film is part of a movement of nostalgic period films during the post-Cold War pre-9/11 long 1990s. By ending with a freeze frame that pixelates into an impressionist-style painting with words designating "New York, 1907," the film firmly places this world in the past and this image as a museum relic, hanging on some virtual gallery wall. The gesture to futurity in the form of the Russian Revolution, while a radical anti-capitalist reconfiguration rejecting the

system of exchange that oppresses Lily Bart, signifies in the year 2000 as a failure of anti-capitalist resistance if we maintain the historical specificity of that particular revolution, rather than reading it as abstract anti-capitalist resistance. The key to reading this gesture to futurity in the film is to place it within the genre of the 1990s period piece. In "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?" Fredric Jameson writes about how the mode of the nostalgic period piece evacuates texts of their historic specificity in favour of rendering films as ahistorical consumer products:

> The sense that this determinate moment of history is [. . .] precursor to the present [this is how the historical novel operates in the Luckasian sense] has vanished into the pluralism of the Imaginary Museum, the wealth and endless variety of culturally or temporally distinct forms, all of which are now rigorously equivalent. [. . .]. Flaubert's Carthage and Kubrick's eighteenth century, but also the industrial turn of the century or the nostalgic 1930s or 1950s of the American experience, find themselves emptied of their necessity, and reduced to pretexts for so many glossy images. In its (post-) contemporary form, this replacement of the historical by the nostalgic [. . .] is of course at one with the disappearance of historicity from consumer society today. (285)

Ultimately, then, the gesture to anti-capitalist revolution, while functioning within the story to gesture to a future outside Lily Bart and her socio-economic system, is voided by the film's generic mode as nostalgic 1990s period piece. The novel's political stakes in Lily's disruption, her making-visible of the inequities of her social system, are displaced onto affective ones, the melodrama of her doomed love story with Selden. The final image of Lily-as-painting is another artifact in Jameson's Imaginary Museum, and a narrative that engages in social mapping in

another instance becomes just another easily digestible product for consumption, the industrial turn-of-the-century indistinguishable from other historical moments all marked as "past," from the vantage-point of a late-capitalist neoliberal consumer society that is no less inequitable than that which oppresses Lily Bart. The film thus disavows inequality in the present by implying that the commodification of subjects and bodies is in the past; that is, given the specific year, viewers can locate it safely in the past. Vidal Villasur argues that critics mistakenly read the proliferation of literary adaptations "as time-travel experiences, which can provide safe hiding places from the ironic turns of postmodernism" (6); indeed, as consumable nostalgia à la Jameson, the film participates precisely in the kind of dehistoricization that critics identify in postmodernism itself. In a national context that idealizes hard work à la Benjamin Franklin, refusing to thrive can be a radical act across historical periods. Much like Herman Melville's Bartleby[24] half a century earlier, Lily has opportunities to save herself through capitulation—from blackmailing Selden to becoming Rosedale's mistress. To resist the imperative to survive is to make visible the inequities of a system that ostensibly promotes thriving through self-determination—yet agency here is the agency to self-destruct. What these literary narratives of refusal reveal is that saving the individual does nothing to dismantle the structure: characters who self-destruct rather than submit to commodification in the inequitable social market demonstrate how mere survival within an unjust system is not thriving, and thus lay bare the inequalities endemic to American liberal democracy; in other words, the subsumption of democratic ideals to the economic imperative is not a symptom of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries but rather fundamental to

[24] What is remarkable about Melville's story is that, much like Selden, the narrator is not a directly oppressive individual, but rather benefits from an oppressive system in ways that necessary oppress others. That is, these narratives make clear that oppression is systemic, not a matter of individual behaviour. The systemic critique of both texts requires their characters, Bartleby and Lily, to claim agency and freedom through their own annihilation rather than be saved in an inspirational narrative of the kind discussed in Chapter Four, "Transcendent Desire: Zora Neale Hurston, Oprah Winfrey, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*."

the American project itself.

While Wharton's novel functions as a critique of the disavowal of inequality, Terence Davies' 2000 film adaptation perpetuates this disavowal by costuming past inequality in sumptuous nostalgia and individuating the former's systemic critique. Individuating what is systemic in the novel diffuses the political and social critique of the exchange economy that the novel foregrounds. The intensification of the commodification of art, bodies, and images in late capitalism manifested in the film adaptation takes the structures of commodification at the turn of the century of the novel a step further by the text itself embodying the ahistorical fetish. By materializing the visibility and commodification of Lily Bart as image through a series of figurations culminating in the freeze-frame of her death, the film intensifies the materialization of the self-as-commodity; through its own commodification as easily consumable ahistorical nostalgia, it places a society that punishes desire outside of convention safely in the past, dressed up in aestheticized fetishes of luxurious settings and costumes. As ideological adaptation, this case study demonstrates how a critique of the inequitable market through the foregrounding of both labour and image is contained by a film that fetishizes its own surface and status as dehistoricized commodity.

Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*

The cultural relevance of F. Scott Fitzgerald's canonical novel *The Great Gatsby* persists as an examination of a singular figure who embodies the foundational myths of the American nation. The narrative of the novel reifies the logic of hegemonic structures, and thus the titular character's desires have their source in the greater American mythology. In this way, the Gatsby narrative must contend with the policing and maintenance of the primitive accumulation—the theft of land and people—that constitutes the material conditions of the nation and the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation and white supremacy. While the Jazz Age setting ostensibly implies a revolutionary modernity—that is, a moment of transition—what matters in the novel is not the break from what comes before but the persistent repetition of that before—famously "borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 176)—and the erasure of deviance from that trajectory. Gatsby's function in the novel is to expose the limits of this mythology by being punished for fulfilling its promise greatly, excessively: the exception to the limits of structural oppression must be made visible in order to simultaneously disavow and shore up that oppression.[25] Greatness as a category here is fantastical and ideological and must remain in that realm; indeed, the narrative logic necessarily punishes Gatsby's excessive desire for legitimacy under capitalist white supremacy via Daisy precisely because he mimics it from the system he wants to inscribe himself into but which always-already excludes him. The ultimate project of *The Great Gatsby* is to narrativize the containment of racialized threats to the futurity of the white nation.

Various iterations of this narrative expose the tension between individual agency and oppressive social structures in their manifestations of different aspects of the Gatsby figure, the

[25] See, for example, the rhetoric of post-racial America during the presidency of Barack Obama, during which white supremacy was alive and well.

faithful dreamer whose desire produces a spectacular palace and the deluded social climber destroyed by his own ambition. The ideological adaptations under consideration here, Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Christopher Scott Cherot's *G* (2002), and Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013), contend with the excessively desirous figure against a structural context of racialization and reproductive futurity. Anti-Blackness has been necessary to the existence of whiteness as a category—consider the importance of the white working class agitating against their economic interests from post-bellum to the present day—but manifests in multiple forms throughout American history. In *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander examines the reproduction of forms of anti-Blackness, arguing that slavery, then Jim Crow, and now police violence and mass incarceration require increasingly ideological and rhetorical justifications. It is no accident, then, that the move from the 1920s novels to the 21st-century films gets farther away from explicit critique.

Passing explicitly realizes the racial implications of *The Great Gatsby* by bifurcating the figure into two Black women who appear white. Comparing the two texts and highlighting the idea that critical reworkings produce new readings of their antecedent texts, Charles Lewis asks, "Could Fitzgerald have borrowed from the African-American tradition of the 'tragic mulatto' narrative? Has Fitzgerald committed a kind of literary plagiarism by taking possession of the trope of racial passing, or might be describe it instead as something more like a blackface forgery?" (84). This question brings up the process of infiltration, appropriation, and containment: the threat to colonial whiteness as manifested in miscegenation and illegibility is contained through its appropriation.[26] What *Passing* reveals through adapting the *Gatsby*

[26] Countless examples abound, from the history of minstrelsy to the more recent transposition of slave narratives into white feminism in *The Handmaid's Tale*. As we shall see, Baz Lurhman's adaptation intensifies this blackface forgery in its dehistoricized use of jazz and hip-hop.

narrative is that Gatsby's passing was always-already racialized.

G takes the form of the narrative of *The Great Gatsby* and locates it in the Hamptons, from the Jazz Age to the hip-hop age. The film was a critical and commercial flop, which makes sense given its narrative incoherence; that is, the film takes the basic narrative structure of the Gatsby love triangle but engages unevenly or not at all with the critical implications of what those conflicts represent systemically. Alexander points to the cultural consequences of the age of mass incarceration when colourblindness shores up racialized oppression, arguing that the conflation of gangsta culture and hip-hop, as a way of reclaiming the stigma of Black men being presumed as criminal, has resulted in a genre of Black culture that reproduces that very stigma: "The worst of gangsta rap [. . .] is best understood as a modern-day minstrel show [. . .]. It is a for-profit display of the worst racial stereotypes and images associated with the era of mass incarceration [. . .]. Like the minstrel shows of the Jim Crow era, today's displays are generally designed for white audiences" (173). The Daisy figure, here a Black woman named Sky, ultimately dies because of her association with hip-hop; *G* presents Black culture only to condemn it as responsible for the attrition of the Black community.

Like *G*, Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* adapts the novel's narrative from the Jazz Age to the hip-hop age. The film foregrounds the love story as the pure kind of romance only possible in a film industry that packages and sells romance, with Gatsby's dream the expression of a kind of productive desire rather than an investment in reproducing the norms of patriarchy and white supremacy. Just as romance is an ideological smokescreen in Terence Davies' *The House of Mirth*, this adaptation uses the love story as a way to sell American capitalist fantasies. Joseph Vogel notes, "Jay Gatsby signifies in numerous ways as a racial outsider. Luhrmann's film mostly closes off this possibility, but in Fitzgerald's novel, it is almost impossible to ignore"

(40). The film contends with the racial politics of the novel through co-opting Black culture: as "[w]hite interest in black art, entertainment, and culture in the Jazz Age [. . .] was often grounded in primitivism, voyeurism, and exploitation" (Vogel 47), this hip-hop-era adaptation Black art is evacuated of its political critique and commodified. The Gatsby of the film is glorified for his faithful dreaming, but the film does not critique the structures of what Lauren Berlant terms cruel optimism. In the special features for the Blu-ray release, Baz Luhrmann describes his romantic encounter with the novel, reading it on a train; his film adaptation is correspondingly romantic: it is the film that Gatsby would make about himself, the fulfillment of his investments in the power of his dreaming, without any interrogation of the systems that impinge individual agency. In other words, the film reproduces Gatsby's vision, not the novel's critique.

Examining these ideological adaptations together demonstrates how hegemonic forms are reproduced across historical periods that, on the surface, seem to have undergone some transition or reformation, hinging on the Civil Rights movement that occurs between the 1920s and early-21st century of these texts. Yet the circulation of Gatsby indicates that a change in visibility is not a change in power structures, and indeed indicates here the thickening of ideological mediation. The myth of a colourblind post-racial America in fact functions to shore up white supremacy while obfuscating its operation.

The Great Gatsby (1925): The Reproduction of the White Nation

From the beginning, Fitzgerald's novel sets up issues of legitimacy, authenticity, and authority. The novel opens by establishing the bona fides of the narrator, Nick, through personal traits inherited from his father and a class position inherited from his clan. Gatsby parallels this key assertion after he tells Nick his fabricated story: "I thought you ought to know something

about me. I didn't want you to think I was just some nobody" (96). Truth here is contingent and comes from authority, which is derived from legitimacy rooted in history. While Gatsby's past is a fiction sprung from his own individual desires and ambitions, Nick authenticates his lineage in the opening frame:

> My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day. (50)

Nick's family also has a fabricated story that traces an aristocratic genealogy, but the collectivity of the clan and the inheritance through generations have established their upper-class position; clearly, class is not merely wealth and requires reproduction through the family, which explicitly excludes Gatsby, who springs from his own self-image. Nick has the legitimacy to narrate this story about a singularly American figure because his family provides him with that authority through its class power. Indeed, Nick traces his ability to "reserve all judgment" to his father's advice to "remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (49). The implication here is that these advantages—apart from the usual privileges of his position in patriarchal, capitalist, white supremacy—include a superior vantage point to evaluate others in a way that appears neutral and objective. As countless high-school students have observed, however, Nick is a quintessentially unreliable narrator who inserts his subjectivity throughout his telling: Nick's observation that "intimate revelations [. . .] are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions" (49) applies no less to his own narration. Thus, the novel

rhetorically undermines the stated authority of its narration and, by extension, the naturalness of the privileged class' authority.

Narration, understood as formal organization through textual representation, is here related to the thematics of the novel: the "fresh green breast of the new world" (176) organized by various forms of capital, along with the concomitant exploitation that this organization entails—both on the scale of nation-building terms of colonial capitalism and the individual, that is, Nick's mining of Gatsby and New York for his own vitality. The Valley of Ashes provides the starkest reification of this exploitation of land and people, both through its spatial and material position and its inhabitants: "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hulls and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (64). The pastoral fantasy of Nick's origins in the Midwest is here contrasted with the eastern reality of pollution and waste that enervates its inhabitants, manifesting visually. The relationships in the novel thus follow various forms of exploitation, waste, and surplus, reflecting larger hegemonic structures that organize the "old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes" (176)—a land of course already inhabited and violently reorganized by white settler colonialism.

Reproductive futurity in *The Great Gatsby* is to reproduce the white nation, but not all kinds of whiteness: the structure of futurity requires white workers who ditinguish themselves from people not considered white, but gives no guarantee to their futurity. Tom can associate with Wilson and Myrtle while also oppressing them, but much like Jack Bellew in *Passing* he has no connection to or knowledge of Black people. W. Oliver Baker explains the relationship between the working class and whiteness as a category:

> It was against the forced labour and unfree status of the Black slave that the exploitation of the wage labourer emerged as a market and social privilege signaling the wage labourer's unenslaveability—the political freedom and social protection from the racial dispossession of one's body. Wage-labour indicated not that one was enchained to capital but that one was, no matter how poor and exploited, a free property-owning subject and valuable market actor. (149)

The future of the white nation requires the white working class to be invested in the hope of capitalist meritocracy. Wilson, because of his whiteness, must believe that opening a mechanic shop—a step up from wage labour that gives the illusion of power—and marrying a white woman will lead to some kind of futurity, but the novel is clear about the lack of future in the literal wasteland of the Valley of Ashes. It presents Wilson and Myrtle in a structure of cruel optimism, particularly in relation to Tom, who represents hegemonic power—Myrtle through her sexual currency and Wilson on the promise that Tom will buy a car from him. Wilson himself is etiolated to the extent that his moving body "mingl[es] immediately with the cement color of the walls" (66). In this setting, Myrtle, like Gatsby and Lily, is exceptional and ultimately punished for it; her body caries "surplus flesh [. . .] [and] there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering" (66). She is a fire that does not belong in the valley of ashes: "A white ashen dust [. . .] veiled everything in the vicinity—except [Wilson's] wife" (66). Yet Myrtle's vitality is contained by consumer capitalism—"she bought a copy of Town Tattle and a moving-picture magazine" (67), drawing her desires from mass culture. Myrtle's aspiration is already in service of a structure that is configured for her exploitation rather than her futurity, and thus her social climbing is denigrated as mere vulgarity while Gatsby's desires leave room for an idealized interpretation.

Visibility and legibility are foregrounded in the Valley of Ashes, as the element that functions as a kind of transcendental signifier or organizing principle is the billboard with the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg: "They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose" (64-5). The overseer of the Valley of Ashes expands to god-in-general, the ultimate transcendental signifier: Wilson recounts to Michaelis his final conversation with Myrtle:

> "God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!"
>
> [. . .] Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.
>
> "God sees everything," repeated Wilson.
>
> "That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him. (161)

God here works on multiple levels: the reigning logic that foregrounds visibility and spectacle and thus legibility; morality and respectability politics; and the desire that fuels capitalism itself. Indeed, this specular and spectacular god is explicitly connected to Myrtle's fatal misrecognition that brings about the fulfillment of the narrative logic. On the way to New York for the confrontation at the Plaza, Nick observes, "Over the ashheaps the giant eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg kept their vigil, but [. . .] other eyes were regarding us with peculiar intensity" (136)—the eyes of Myrtle as she mis-sees Jordan for Tom's wife. It is not by accident that this failure to see accurately is metaphorized in photographic terms: "one emotion after another crept into her face like objects into a slowly developing picture" (136). Representation fails; the whole story is impossible as narrative is necessarily catechretic. The novel here explicitly parallels the eyes of god—the eyes that oversee the narrative, the transcendental signifier, the organizing logic of

representation—with Myrtle's failure to recognize. The emphasis on spectacle, seeing and mis-seeing, is thus not merely a formal characteristic of the text—the dominant sensorium of the narrative—but fundamentally tied to the thematics of legibility and organization and, ultimately, the brutal re-establishment of hegemony.

Just as New York society in *The House of Mirth* organizes itself through social convention and codes, here legibility is imposed through the assertion and reproduction of white supremacy. That is, the narrative logic is in service of the national project of reproducing and policing whiteness. Tom is a familiar figure in American culture—a man who peaked too soon or not at all, with more inherited wealth and power than critical thinking, who treats those around him as useful (or not) objects to be discarded like the wastes of capitalism in the Valley of Ashes. He reads supposedly scientific books such as "The Rise of the Colored Empires" that argue that "Civilization's going to pieces"; he tells Nick, "The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged" (58). Alberto Lena argues that Nick's unreliable narration requires a more suspicious reading of Nick's assertion that he finds "something pathetic" (58) in Tom: "Nick's narrative can be seen as a subtle account of the forces that endanger white hegemony and the need to resist them. In making Buchanan the embodiment of racism, Nick directs the reader's attention away from the fact that he, too, is toying with similar ideas" (Lena 213). Indeed, this thread of white fear and fantastical nostalgia for some previously "great" period is fundamental to the narrative, from Nick establishing his heritage at the beginning to his nostalgic remembrance of Midwestern purity at the end.

New York in *The Great Gatsby* is full of potential, in flux from changes brought on by migration, finance, and technology.[27] Tom, as a representative of hegemonic power, and Nick, who reproduces that power more subtly through narration, are molar forces imposing organization and legibility. Nick muses, "The city seen from the Queensboro bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (97). This vision of the city has no history; it is always present and potential, perpetually happening for the first time. On the way into the city, Nick juxtaposes the passing of two markers of the city's burgeoning heterogeneity: an Eastern European funeral cavalcade and the racial disorder of joyful Black people being driven by a white chauffeur. Nick's racialized language makes clear that he is using the legibility afforded by white supremacy to understand the exotic sights that New York presents to him: "the tragic eyes and short upper lips of southeastern Europe" and the dehumanizing language of "three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in a haughty rivalry" (97). Nick's laughter implies that rivalry here is absurd, in a quite literal sense, indicative of the topsy-turvy world that his touristic experience of the city affords. Nick notes, "Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder" (97). As Lena suggests, "Gatsby's mysterious social uprising corresponds to the African Americans' affluence and the social transgression of crossing the bridge in a limousine 'driven by a white chauffeur'" (214). Further to this claim, however, I would also note that Nick not having any particular wonder here highlights his lack of investment in the changing world around him, apart from some kind of isolated novel

[27] Anticipating its adaptation into the modern artform of cinema, the journey to the city is described in cinematic terms: "the sunlight through the girders making a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money" (97). Nick imposes order through proliferating narratives, imagining various lives of stock characters and legible scripts reminiscent of cinema: "I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crows and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove" (89).

experience—he can and does go back to the safety of his Midwestern family after getting his superficial thrills from both New York and Gatsby.

Scientific discourses are way of imposing legibility and have organizing power, with the consequential exploitation of whatever category is deemed surplus. Tom's white-supremacist diatribe is ultimately about who can be read as white: "'The idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, and—' After an infinitesimal hesitation he included Daisy with a slight nod" (58). The importance, then, of Daisy as object of desire is explicitly related to her whiteness—a status that must be maintained and reproduced. Like Lily—named after another white flower—Daisy's whiteness is foregrounded not only by her name but also by the insistent repetition of its assertion. That the text must call attention to her whiteness implies not only its emphatic necessity to the reproduction of the white nation but also the instability of whiteness more generally. The most important character for the ideological project of white supremacy put forth by the novel is Tom and Daisy's daughter Pam: she represents the reproductive futurity of whiteness. Thus, Daisy's whiteness must be established beyond deniability, the past of her "beautiful white" (63) girlhood in a powerful, traceable family reproduced in her child. Indeed, in Pam's brief appearance in the novel, Daisy says, "She doesn't look like her father [. . .]. She looks like me" (131). Whiteness is unstable and must be continually buttressed and policed; as Meredith Goldsmith emphasizes, "Because the word 'white' adheres to a variety of realms of identity, without fully belonging to any of them, it is particularly vital that Daisy has a child who resembles her [. . .]. The child forms the one unassailable link in Daisy's series of racialized objects" (123). Daisy's value lies in her whiteness and her ability to reproduce whiteness in a visible way—her child must also look like her to take on the mantle of whiteness. Gatsby, believing so much in the myth of self-creation, can hardly believe that Pam exists: "he kept

looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (131). Here Pam is not just proof the relationship between Daisy and Tom that Gatsby so desperately wants to erase—"He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.' [. . .][To] obliterate four years with that sentence" (126)—but also the material purpose of that relationship: the impenetrable reproduction of American hegemony.

Thus, Gatsby's desire for Daisy is a desire for the legitimacy that her whiteness brings. Indeed, as Adam Meehan suggests, Gatsby's "association with itinerant farmers may imply a family lineage that could potentially be perceived as non-white" (79). On this point, he explains to Nick, "She was the first 'nice' girl he had ever known" (152). Meehan examines this desire through a Lacanian lens, arguing that "Gatsby's symbolic transformation from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby has already set his desire in motion before he meets Daisy; she simply becomes its object manifestation, or *objet a*" (80). Gatsby desires the agency to forge himself, efface his own history, and attain power within the historically determined structures of American hegemony—Daisy is the container and vehicle for this desire. Indeed, as Meehan argues, "Because she cannot possibly live up to her symbolic overdetermination, she comes to represent not Gatsby's dream—which requires the whitewashing of his racial past—but the impossibility of its realization. We can never actually 'obtain' the object of desire, but can only circle around it in a never-ending repetition" (85). The contradictions here are of course embedded in the striving to erase history to succeed within a deeply historical system; Gatsby can create a palace out of sheer imagination—money can buy things—but he cannot "repeat the past" (127) by re-writing it to conform to his fantasy.

Significantly, Gatsby's desire for Daisy is mimetic, the copying of others' desires: "It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes"

(152). Daisy is valuable insofar as her value is visible and recognizable as such. Gatsby's greatness is not about being extraordinary but rather his faith in and facility with following cultural scripts—yet another parallel not only to Lily but also to Simon Rosedale. While these figures may transgress, none of them are revolutionaries. Indeed, Nick notes a certain familiarity to Gatsby's story: "Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago" (127). Gatsby's story is as old as America itself; indeed, the use of sentimentality as ideological cover can be traced to the very origins of narrative form. Gatsby's desires, rather than being a kind of unstable force or molecular affect in the Deleuzian sense, are very much tied to the systems of organization that inform the nation and the narrative. In Meehan's succinct summation, reading Gatsby through the lens of race and desire "offers a unique way of reconciling the symbolic duality of Gatsby's autopoietic process and America's fantasized (and racially whitewashed) mythopoetic" (78). Gatsby's desires are legible and organized along the same lines as the narrative and the nation itself, and greatness as a category here is fantastical and ideological and must remain in that realm.

The novel closes not with the death of Gatsby or Nick's return to the Midwest, but rather with the colonial image of America as *tabula rasa* and the affirmation of retrograde temporality. Yet to posit blankness only reinforces the importance of history—the novel has already discredited the myth of America as self-made from its first page. Like the beginning, the ending is also about genealogy but absent any kind of social or conventional bona fides such as Nick's family. The ending presents a vision of the American continent as the last untouched place in the world; Nick muses on the white, colonial man, "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (176). The violence of this colonization

and the erasure of people—indeed, "civilizations," to use Tom's term—is here metonymized by the "vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, [that] had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams" (176). This kind of reification into capital posits the past as blank and the future as a recession into that moment of possibility: "the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (176) is a nostalgia for the potential of blankness and a lament for a hierarchical present that could potentially organize itself differently. Indeed, time moves on but the privileged desire here is retrograde, as the last line famously metaphorizes as a stream: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly back into the past" (176). Of course, the metonymy and metaphor of these final claims is an erasure of the violence of American colonialism and the violence of reification: the theft of land and people.

The current here is the progress of history—dubious as that vision of history may be—where cities have Black people in limousines and Wolfsheim succeeds outside the system and Gatsby cannot succeed within it. Bruce Barnhart's astute analysis of jazz temporality in the novel reads this nostalgia through repetition and divergent racialized futures:

> The major operation of this text is to use the blunt force of scarcity to underwrite the transfer of affective investment from the future to the past. This is the reason for the overwhelming aura of nostalgia that permeates the novel; the past is given a weight that when combined with the belief that the future can be won only at the expense of the past requires that the cathexis of the future is an investment in nostalgia that attempts to persuade us that our future lies with Gatsby or Nick but not with the blackness in the back of the limousine that speeds past Gatsby and Nick. (116)

Indeed, in the last sentence of the novel, the "we" is clearly not Gatsby or Myrtle or Wilson—whose deaths are necessary to fulfill the logic of both narrative and hegemony—but rather the white upper-class characters. Gatsby's desire to repeat the past is impossible because it is not his past, that is, not a past to which he has ever had access. On the other hand, "the repetition that Nick inherits from his father inoculates society against change by clinging to an exact repetition of forms inherited from the past" (Barnart 118). Gatsby desires repetition but in a way that actively re-writes the past to include him within its structures of power; Nick can be passively borne back into the past because he has always been included in it. Gatsby's excessive desire—indeed, Myrtle's as well—is punished precisely because he mimics it from the system he wants to inscribe himself into but which excludes him from its genesis. What matters in the novel is not the break from what comes before but the persistent repetition of that before, and the erasure of deviance from that trajectory.

Passing (1929): Agency, Legibility, and Respectability Politics

While *Passing* is not an explicit adaptation, many scholars[28] point to thematic similarities and Larsen's likely familiarity with Fitzgerald's novel. Both Clare and Gatsby transgress, and both die; yet the novel presents alternative trajectories and posits different possibilities for agency in the figure of Clare, in the ways that she makes herself readable or not. *The Great Gatsby* foregrounds Gatsby's agency to make himself legible in ways that conform to oppressive systems—and ultimately reaches the limits of this agency—while *Passing* shifts the focus to how the illegibility of the feminized figure can facilitate transgression. Clare's desires are not something that the text can make legible; Irene notes that "Clare always had a—a—having way

[28] For example, see Meredith Goldsmith, Charles Lewis, and Sinéad Moynihan.

with her" (22), the dashes indicating the unutterable, desire without the specificities of what that having entails. Clare contrasts with Gatsby through her assertion of a radical agency outside the systems that would otherwise limit her, even if that agency is to extinguish her own life. What it looks like for that subject to claim some kind of radical agency is, ultimately, death. Gatsby is invested in convention and wants houses and the whiteness and class position that Daisy would bring but Clare strives to be free of conventions and limits.

The problem of passing, whether it is Gatsby's passing as someone with an aristocratic history or Clare passing as white, is ultimately about legibility—which involves both inscription and reception. Charles Lewis writes, "Passing is [. . .] not so much just *what* we read as it is a trope for *how* to read [. . .]. [P]assing invites us to read race as something more like a final twist: a trope for the difference that is figuration itself" (73, original emphasis). Indeed, from the first page of the novel, Clare is associated with textuality and reading; before she is even named, she appears in the form of a letter, "the long envelope of thin Italian paper with its almost illegible scrawl [. . .]. A thin sly thing which bore no return address to betray the sender. [. . .]. Furtive, but yet in some peculiar, determined way a little flaunting" (3). Clare is hypervisible but illegible; she commands attention but does not reveal. Irene notes that she takes pleasure in her unreadability: "[Irene] studied the lovely creature [. . .]. And through her perplexity there came the thought that the trick which her memory had played her was for some reason more gratifying than disappointing to her old acquaintance, that she didn't mind not being recognized" (18-19). On a practical level, of course, it makes sense that Clare would not want to be read as Black. On the specific level of Clare's legibility, though, what matters here is that Clare does not allow a reading of her body as anything more personally intimate or historically grounded than this default reading based solely on her appearance—that is the limit of her legibility.

What differentiates Gatsby and Clare is, of course, not just race but also gender. Working-class maleness signifies differently than a white woman regardless of class. The specific position of white women in reproducing the white nation allows Clare to transgress in ways that Gatsby cannot. *Passing* foregrounds the protection and passivity of white women in Irene's recollection of the day she first re-encounters Clare in Chicago, with echoes of Daisy in Louisville. It's an expressionistic scene, with the scorching heat—"a brutal staring sun pouring down rays that were like molten rain" (9)—standing in for larger, less natural, forms of oppression, where what should be respite actually intensifies its severity: "What small breeze there was seemed like the breath of a flame fanned by slow bellows" (9). Irene is navigating the city shopping for her children when:

> [R]ight before her smarting eyes a man toppled over and became an inert crumpled heap on the scorching cement. About the lifeless figure a little crowd gathered. Was the man dead, or only faint? someone asked her. But Irene didn't know and didn't try to discover. She edged her way out of the increasing crowd, feeling disagreeably damp and sticky and soiled from contact with so many sweating bodies. (10)

While Irene is a Black woman by the terms of white-supremacist rules, she is a white woman by her appearance and is treated as such in public; she does not have to do anything except refrain from revealing her history. Moreover, at this moment, the novel itself has not revealed Irene's race, and the default assumption is whiteness. People mobilize for the protection of Irene as a white woman. She starts to faint and has "a quick perception of the need for immediate safety" (10-11)—meaning to get away from the urban rabble. A cab stops and the driver "almost lifted her in" (11) and suggests a fancy hotel rooftop to cool down. When they arrive, more than one

person mobilizes to meet her needs before she expresses them: “The driver sprang out and opened the door before the hotel’s decorated attendant could reach it” (11). An elevator takes Irene to the roof: “It was, she thought, like being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below” (12). Here we see an echo of Gatsby’s recollection of young Daisy before telling Nick he “loves” her: “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (Fitzgerald 153). Irene, from her elevated position, “had been gazing down for some time at the specks of cats and people creeping about in streets, and thinking how silly they looked” (12); a person could have died in front of her on the street but it does not matter from her position. Similarly, after the deaths of Myrtle and Gatsby, Nick remarks how Tom and Daisy “smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (Fitzgerald 175). The magic carpet that Larsen evokes is in fact the quite material system of patriarchal white supremacy. This scene functions as a model for how white women, from Daisy to Irene, are protected under this system and how the mechanisms are made to appear magical or natural rather than structural and ideological.

When Irene feels threatened by Clare’s imbrication in her family and social group, she associates her with the historical construction of white woman as decoration: “She’s intelligent enough in a purely feminine way. Eighteenth-century France would have been a marvellous setting for her, or the old South if she hadn’t made the mistake of being born a Negro” (135). Noteworthy here is the emphasis on Clare both as someone who has agency—indeed, to the extent that she is implicated in her own birth as what white supremacist rules consider Black—

and someone who is not clever or crafty, whose intellectual capabilities are limited to what attracts male admiration and desire in an aesthetic and reproductive sense. Clare marshals the white nation's desire to protect white women and thus the reproduction of the white nation to transgress both race and class without having to prove herself in the way that Gatsby attempts. It is not by accident that her husband Jack Bellew, the facilitator of her class ascension and the reproduction of white Margery, is not just any white man—such as their childhood friend Gertrude's husband Fred, who does not care about race or colourism—but rather a strident patriarchal white supremacist who throws into relief the historical contingency of race. For Jack Bellew, the protection of white women and the white nation supersedes the burden of documentation: the fact of Clare's white aunts is sufficient. That is, as Clare puts it, "there are so many more of them, or maybe they are secure and so don't have to bother" (31). Clearly, this kind of security does not apply to the threat of a male infiltrator such as Gatsby, who threatens Tom in a way that Clare, though showing the bare minimum of proof, cannot threaten Jack.

Clare mobilizes white supremacy's protection of white women rather than using economic capital or documents as Gatsby does, which demonstrates a different relationship to visibility and proof. In her study of racialized surveillance, Simone Browne argues that "how things get ordered racially by way of surveillance [. . .] most often upholds negating strategies that first accompanied European colonial expansion and transatlantic slavery that sought to structure social relations and institutions in ways that privilege whiteness" (17). The surveillance of Blackness in policing race is fundamental to the origins of America, and narratives of passing trouble this order by belying the "epidermalization" of race: "Epidermal thinking marks the epistemologies concerning sight at the site of the racial body" (Browne 26). Documentation becomes important when epidermalization is secondary to the historical and social construction

of race. Browne borrows from Frantz Fanon the concept of the "mise en fiches de l'homme": "the records, files, time sheets, and identity documents that together form a biography [. . .] of the modern subject" (5). If the body cannot provide proof, then the modern subject must present documents. Consider how Gatsby's recounting of his history is accompanied by documentation. Nick doubts Gatsby's fantastical story until Gatsby shows him his medal from Montenegro and a photograph of his Oxford days; the material proof turns the fantasy real: "Then it was all true. I saw the skins of tigers flaming in his palace on the Grand Canal; I saw him opening a chest of rubies to ease, with their crimson-lighted depths, the gnawings of his broken heart" (Fitzgerald 95). The objects of proof—the fiches—transfer Gatsby's fantasy into Nick's belief. Clare, by contrast, does not need to provide proof of herself; instead, she has to appear as a white woman and withhold information rather than providing any, and secure a marriage to a white man: "In the end I had no great difficulty in convincing him that it was useless to talk marriage to the aunts. So on the day that I was eighteen, we went off and were married. So that's that. Nothing could have been easier" (35). While Gatsby has to mobilize documents and build a chateau in order to prove his (self-created) background, Clare's proof is negative: not telling, not showing, keeping him away from any knowledge of her background.

Wayde Compton's theory of pheneticizing is a useful framework here in examining the phenomenon of passing in relations to agency and legibility:

> The essential problem with the term [passing], however, is that it illogically implies that what a viewer sees is the responsibility of the person being seen. That is to say, this term we have for phenomena of misrecognition always implies deception on the part of the individual viewed. At its root, the term is about

> getting away with it, going underground, and intentionally escaping an oppressive racializing order. (21-22)

Compton borrows the term from biology, contrasting phenetics with cladistics: "The metaphor should be clear: pheneticizing, in my definition, is the classification of a person's race or ethnicity based only on eyeball examination, rather than the cladistics inquiry that would require knowing the person's actual family background" (24). In comparing Clare and Gatsby, this difference between passing and pheneticizing helps to tease out the relationship between self-construction and how one is perceived; both characters are examples of transgressive desire, but the ways that they are read are different. That is, Gatsby engages in active passing but Clare can be passively pheneticized; she does not disabuse her readers from their assumption that she is a white woman. Gatsby, as a man, must prove himself by being active and gaining material wealth; he needs to be able to support Daisy and show his masculine prowess. Clare wields her agency in order to create a passive feminine surface, which makes her attractive to a patriarch such as Jack—the cultivation of mystery works in her favour because of Jack's willful ignorance.

The fear of the colonizer to be themselves colonized is expressed in both novels through the figure of the upper-class white male: Tom Buchanan and Jack Bellew. Bellew's white supremacy makes clear that the colour of skin is not what is at stake—that is, epidermalization—but rather whiteness as a structural category. He calls Clare "nig" in front of Irene and Gertrude, and Clare slyly makes him explain the arbitrariness of white supremacists' conception of race by asking, "What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured?" (56). His reply indicates that once he believes that Clare is a white woman nothing would prevent him from protecting her; the joke of "nig" references visibility in that she is hiding in plain sight: "I know you're not nigger, so it's all right. You can

get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no nigger. I draw the line at that" (56). That is, she can be black but not Black. He can name her as black as long as he can still reads her as white and she has no proximity to Blackness, not even a Black maid: "She wouldn't have a nigger maid around her for love nor money" (57). Furthermore, Jack declares, "No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be" (56)—an impossible historical claim, considering the institutionalization of rape in slavery, as well as a demonstrably untrue present claim, as his daughter's mother is Black. Bellew's claims are only true if family is redefined outside of blood relation, just as his definition of race can overlook Clare's darkening skin. That is to say, the very definitions he uses undermine the boundaries of those categories: they are necessarily contingent and unstable. Bellew's claim that, despite never having known any Black people, "I know people who've known them, better than they know their black selves. And I read in the papers about them" (57) echoes Tom reading Goddard's pseudo-scientific argument for racialized threats: both operate on the level of white-supremacist discourse rather than anything material or corporeal. Thus, the threat of white-presenting Gatsby is a racialized one but since Clare's racialization is hidden she can be protected as a white woman despite her actual skin darkening.

Sinéad Moynihan's comparison of Daisy and Clare is an incisive analysis of what adaptation can make visible. Moynihan parallels Clare's transformation into a white identity and Larsen's critical reworking of a white text: "By rewriting *Gatsby* in *Passing*, the white-authored text becomes the passer and *Passing* becomes the text that unveils the 'truth' about the original" (47). She argues that through a reading of the policing of white femininity in *Passing*, which is explicit about the arbitrariness and contingency of racial categories, Daisy's status in the anterior text as the vector for the futurity of the white nation is destabilized: "Larsen questions *Daisy*'s

whiteness, thus exploding the idea of normative whiteness altogether. Larsen's allusion to *Gatsby* make apparent the contradictions in Fitzgerald's representation of Daisy, in which her whiteness is both questioned and unquestioned" (42, original emphasis). When Irene reunites with Gertrude and Clare, they discuss the issue of skin colour in reproduction. Despite Gertrude's white husband and mother-in-law expressing indifference to colour, she tells them, "They don't know like we do, how it might go way back, and turn out dark no matter what colour the father and mother are. [. . .]. It's awful the way it skips generations and then pops out. [. . .]. [N]obody wants a dark child" (49-50). Of course, with the parameters of whiteness policed by the one-drop rule, mixed-race children were prevalent in the Black community that Clare leaves behind: "It's only deserters like me who have to be afraid of freaks of the nature. As my estimable dad used to say, 'Everything must be paid for'" (51). This statement recalls the logic of payment and debts in *The House of Mirth*, in that Clare's transgression demands a price: whether that price is imposed on her or comes out of her own agency depends on how one reads the ambiguous ending of the text.

Moynihan argues that it is notable that, while Pam appears in *The Great Gatsby* to prove Daisy's whiteness, Clare's child Margery remains invisible: "while in some ways Clare's role as race mother to Margery troubles racial categories by having the act of 'passing' inevitably reproduce itself from general to generation, it also reveals their tenacity" (47). Gatsby can hardly believe that Pam exists, as she is the proof of the reproduction of the white nation that excludes him, but in *Passing* it is as if Clare herself can hardly believe Margery exists, or at the very least, her existence impinges on her radical agency in the way that Pam limits Gatsby's ambition; indeed, Clare tells Irene that "being a mother is the cruellest thing in the world" (101). Margery represents the always-already miscegenated futurity of Jack and Tom's white nation, the

simultaneously invisible and hypervisible haunting that indicates its precariousness. Clare must disavow Margery as the novel does in order to sever herself—eventually, through death—from race and history and the reproduction of the white nation. On the other hand, Pam makes her first appearance directly before the confrontation in the Plaza Hotel, a reminder of Daisy and Tom's futurity in contrast to Gatsby's necessary death. While Moynihan focuses on comparing Daisy and Clare—which is important to a consideration of reproductive futurity—a comparison between Clare and Gatsby can reveal the lateral possibilities and threatening transgressions of agency. Meehan suggests that Gatsby's claim to whiteness is dubious, but what matters ultimately is not if Gatsby himself is passing or not, but rather the structure of racialization. To explicitly racialize the main character—here, Clare—is to show how the myth of the self-made radically free agent is not just a classed myth but a racialized one, and must remain in the realm of myth to reproduce and legitimize the reproduction of the white nation. Clare makes visible the vagaries and unevenness and arbitrariness of racial order where whiteness is default but the racial threat is always present; indeed, Gatsby too is largely coded as white but the logical extension of his masculine threat is racialized in Tom's fear of miscegenation.

Both novels highlight copying to describe the relationship between desire, performance, visibility, and legibility. Goldsmith reads *The Great Gatsby* in terms of performance and passing; *Passing* realizes the racial implications of this interpretation. Goldsmith argues, "Like Daisy, Gatsby and the novel's female consumers transform color into a volatile tool of social mobility, using colorful costumes and objects as tools of theatrical apparatus of self-fashioning" (457); Daisy is the original—the blank whiteness to which others aspire. In Nick's introductory frame, he describes Gatsby in terms of his capability for self-transformation: "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some

heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away" (Fitzgerald 49). Gatsby's sensitivity allows him to be a more successful mimic, and "his clothing compensates for his lack of familial lineage" (447). Yet his embodiment of his aspiration fails because it is necessarily a performance: he fails at interpreting the Sloanes' gestures of not wanting him to join them for supper, and Tom mocks his pink suits. Similarly, Myrtle's fails to copy what she reads in magazines and believes will get her out of her working-class existence through Tom: "in the face of Daisy's singularity, Myrtle produces only copies" (Goldsmith 459). Goldsmith racializes this mimicry: "soap and cosmetic advertising propagated racialized ideals of beauty, linking clean, flawless skin to whiteness" (458). In a way that resonates with *Passing*, Goldsmith emphasizes that "while for leisure-class women, makeup serves as an effort to mask and enhance, it transforms independent, working-class women into degraded copies of their ostensible betters" (459). Consider how Irene judges Gertrude's appearance as a way to look down on her as working-class—she "looked as is her husband might be a butcher" (47)—despite their having started out from the same racial and class position: "Her black hair was clipt, and by some unfortunate means all the live curliness had gone from it. [. . .]. Her plump hands were newly and not too competently manicured—for the occasion, probably" (48). That these characters fail to imitate does not indicate personal failure but is rather a necessary feature of how capitalism requires a desire to self-fashion into an ideal that can never be fulfilled.

Irene's use of makeup differs from Myrtle and Gertrude because of her class position, but she too engages in an imitation of whiteness through her use of powder. Moynihan reads Irene's racial anxieties through her use of makeup; she paints a white face while Clare wears a white mask: "The slippage between white face and white mask, the fact that the two are virtually

indistinguishable, demonstrates the facility with which Clare has assumed her role as a white woman. Daisy and Clare do not need powder to make them 'white' whereas Catherine [Myrtle's sister] and Irene do. What troubles this dichotomy is the obvious fact that Clare is not 'racially' white" (45). Clare is exceptional in her ability to embody her aspiration; she is more chameleon than costume. Here Daisy and Clare are ideals to aspire to in terms of their successful whiteness but, of course, their fates are different—as narrative and hegemonic logic dictate, Clare's transgressive desire means that she cannot survive while Daisy is protected at all costs.

Indeed, Irene and Clare serve as the bifurcation of Gatsby's desire as indicated by the term "dream": dreaming is at once a kind of excessive, destabilizing desire but also points to the American Dream as an officially sanctioned lie. Within Gatsby is both the "infinite hope" that Nick identifies as his greatness and "everything for which I have unaffected scorn" (Fitzgerald 49). The dreamer is on the one hand constructed as a figure of desire, a romantic and creative visionary who looks beyond convention; yet the American Dream is definitively conventional and sets the parameters for the cruel optimism that sustains hegemonic structures. Gatsby's paradox is also located in the term "great": he is exceptional in his achievements but what he wants to achieve is the opposite of exceptional, the culturally determined version of the good life. While Clare is an obvious analogue to Gatsby in her transgressions, Irene also reflects Gatsby in her bourgeois investments.

Like Gatsby, Clare produces her own world and disavows the old one. Gatsby's "parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never accepted them as his parents at all" (Fitzgerald 118). Regarding family, Clare has "no allegiance beyond her own immediate desire" (5), and when her father dies, Irene remembers that Clare's weeping "had more the appearance of an outpouring of pent-up fury than of an overflow of grief for her dead

father" (6). Clare gets everything she could want but then she wants more—to go back to the Black community—because her desire is a continual productive force in itself. Irene, on the other hand, is heavily invested in respectability politics; her marriage to Brian gives her bourgeois legitimacy in the way that Gatsby sees a marriage to Daisy. Moreover, marriage to Brian contains Irene's homoerotic desire for Clare in a heteronormative futurity, with their children forming a nuclear family; indeed, she refuses to talk to her children about "queer ideas" (87). Gatsby is certainly not trying to help the white working class—Wilson or Myrtle—or white farmers; his achievements are individual and what he wants most is to be accepted into patriarchal capitalist white supremacy. Irene cares more about normativity and respectability than any kind of racial activism; indeed, at the Drayton when she worries about them ejecting her, she is not upset about segregationist policies, but rather "It was the idea of being ejected from any place, even in the polite and tactful way in which the Drayton would probably do it, that disturbed her" (17). When she calls her Black servant, Zulena, "a small mahogany-coloured creature" (79), she dehumanizes Blackness. She takes great pride in her relationship to the Carl Van Vechten stand-in, Hugh Wentworth; when he calls, Clare overhears and asks, "'Not *the* Hugh Wentworth?' Irene inclined her head. On her face was a tiny triumphant smile. 'Yes, *the* Hugh Wentworth'" (103, original emphasis); she then spends the fundraiser for the Negro Welfare League talking to him rather than discussing politics or activism with other Black people.

Passing reinscribes Gatsby's excessive desire and the containment of that desire in conventional forms separated into two characters. Indeed, many points throughout the novel construct Clare and Irene as doubles, uncanny in their simultaneous threat and attraction. Sigmund Freud defines "the uncanny [as] something which is secretly familiar [. . .], which has

undergone repression and then returned from it" (947). Clare returns to Irene's life years after their shared past, and desires a return to that previous time and her former community. Irene repeatedly tries to resist Clare's intrusion into her superficially perfect world, but at the same time is inexplicably drawn to her. In reading this text as an ideological adaptation, they function here as two sides of Gatsby; just as the uncanny double is unsustainable—and in *Passing* results in Clare's death—Gatsby himself must die.

G (2002): Black Legitimization of White Supremacy, or, Hip-Hop Will Get You Killed

The overall message of *G* embraces Irene's respectability politics—pretending to care about the Black community but shoring up white normativity. Blair Underwood—shortly before his representation of acceptable Blackness in *Sex and the City*—plays Chip Hightower, the Tom Buchanan character. He is firmly against hip-hop culture, and when his white friends express confusion about hip-hop he dismisses the entire culture as "bouncing cars and doo-rags." When Chip asks Tre, the Nick character, to come meet his mistress, he frames it as a way to give himself racial bona-fides in the Black community: "Just come along so that I can show her that I know some ethnic people"—not including himself in these "ethnics." A question the film repeatedly asks through Tre is, "Does hip-hop have heart?" Hip-hop here is constructed as Black community, and vilified for that very reason: in Chip's words, G's house, a Black space, has "all these roughnecks around, rapper types." Missing from this film is the long history of hip-hop as political critique; the genre and culture is reduced to its gangsta and hypercapitalist elements—basically, a caricature of hip-hop from the perspective of mainstream white culture for white audiences. Moreover, to acknowledge that activist history would be to follow the Black people in the limousine on the bridge rather than Nick and Gatsby—to imagine possibilities outside of

hegemonic capitalist white supremacy; the effacement here functions to shore up that power by using Black characters to reinforce their own oppression.

The conflict between Sky, Summer, and Chip is reduced to respectability rather than futurity; this adaptation has no Pam or Margery. When Sky uses profanity confronting Chip about his affair, he tells her, "Could you not use profanity? You are my wife and you're too beautiful for that. My wife does not use profanity." He has an image of what his wife should be that does not include profanity, which belongs in the Black hip-hop realm. Sky and Summer G broke up not because of a structural relation to the state, as in the novel—Gatsby was "at the whim of an impersonal government" (Fitzgerald 153) and went off to war—but rather because Summer G was hustling in the hip-hop world. She asks him, "Why were you so angry all the time?"—reflecting the belief that Black men should not be angry because it is not respectable. When Sky and Summer start hanging out more, Sky's wardrobe becomes more colourful, as if she is getting Blacker by association. She tells Summer, "If I leave my world, can you leave yours?" Sky and Chip have a violent confrontation, but Chip's apology and Summer's hesitancy to leave the hip-hop empire he built leads Sky to reconcile with her husband. Unlike in the novel, what forces the reconciliation is not a shared investment in their own futurity but rather respectability politics that are ultimately oppressive.

Indeed, Chip, despite his wealth, still needs to appeal to white officials to help rid himself of Summer G. At Summer G's party, a white representative from the homeowners' association complains about the loudness of the party, but G shows permits; later, Chip goes to this same person to get legitimacy for his campaign to eject Summer G from the Hamptons. Chip tells him, "Gene, this motherfu—, this guy, he's coming on to my wife!" He struggles to control his polite veneer and makes up a story about how Summer threatened him and that his mansion is a

fortress. Gene tells him to calm down and that he is friends with the chief of police, who is, of course, also in the homeowners' association, and that Chip just has to get Summer to threaten him in front of them and the police will take care of him. Here Chip allies with the police against the Black community of hip-hop culture, fabricating a story in order to have the police eliminate his rival. A concurrent storyline involves Summer telling his apprentice Craig to assert his masculinity through gun violence—to eliminate his rival through what racist mainstream culture terms Black-on-Black violence. These storylines converge at the end, with Summer announcing that he is leaving hip-hop for Sky, and Craig showing up with a gun blaming Summer for his violence: "Summer, you told me to handle my business." The police surveils from the bushes as Craig shoots into the crowd and ends up killing Sky. Sky's return to Summer is a return of Blackness, regardless of her reconciliation with Chip; she is already doomed by her Blackness, just as Daisy's white femininity saves her from prison. The message here is that hip-hop, and by extension Black culture and community, will get you killed, even if you repent and (re)invest yourself in white respectability politics.

Whereas *Passing* turns a critical eye to its characters' investments in racialized desire (Clare) or respectability (Irene), *G* unreservedly privileges respectability politics in order to show the attrition of Black futurity if it does not conform to white supremacy. Indeed, adhering to white conventions is ultimately another way to reinforce the no-future of Blackness, in its subsumption or effacement. In many ways, Chip could also be read as the Gatsby figure, in his desire to legitimate his proximity to whiteness—unlike Clare, he cannot pass, but he can side with white supremacy against hip-hop culture. Chip falls into the trap of believing that supporting structures of oppression will save him from them; Sky's death exposes this belief as fantasy. Climaxing with a police presence in a party full of Black people recalls the power of the

white supremacist state over racialized people; through Chip's alliance with the police and white homeowners' association, the film presents the ways in which white supremacy uses Black people to support the repressive and legal apparatuses of a state whose purpose across history includes the attrition of the Black community. That is, if Black culture can be critiqued by Black people, then white supremacy can maintain itself through ideology along with force. Like Tom, Chip uses his affair as a way to assert his superior position—he is not *that* kind of Black person. Gatsby, in the singular, is a classic example of Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism, but Chip in this film—because the logic of white supremacy dictates that racialized people also represent our race, not just ourselves as individuals—is working not only against his own thriving but also that of the Black community.

At the end of the film, Tre asks Summer, "one more question for the road, G, does hip-hop have heart?" G replies, "I don't know, we're a bunch of heartless bastards." Heart, here, is meaningless enough that one could inscribe almost anything onto it, but following the narrative, here "heart" means a kind of authenticity: does hip-hop believe in anything or is it just about violent competition and hustle? Certainly, to ask this question outside of a film that caricaturizes hip-hop culture is absurd, considering the history of the genre and culture. Yet that is precisely the point: in its promotion of white supremacist respectability politics, the film must neutralize the threat of hip-hop's political critique. Both adaptations that switch white characters to Black change the ending to the death of a Black woman, positing a no-future for Blackness that correlates to *The Great Gatsby*'s alliance with Tom and Daisy and Nick rather than the Black people on the bridge. Here the texts put forth the white supremacist worldview that argues that hip-hop culture, continuing the freneticism and disorder of jazz, has no future within the dominant structures of the nation.

The Great Gatsby (2013): Desire Dreamed into Spectacle

Like *G*, Baz Luhrmann's commercially successful film takes the Gatsby narrative from the Jazz Age into the post-crash 2010s, adhering to the novel much more closely than the Black adaptations. Hip-hop mogul Jay-Z is the executive producer of the soundtrack, which was successful as its own commodity. His oeuvre is a celebration of individual agency, with lyrics tracking his rise from "I used to move snowflakes by the OZ / I guess even back then you can call me / CEO of the R-O-C" to "the dude with the Lexus, fast-forward the jewels and the necklace" ("Public Service Announcement").[29] Contrast Jay-Z to Kanye West, another artist involved in the film, whose work includes lines such as, "Even if you in a Benz / you still a nigga in a coupe [coop]" ("All Falls Down").[30] These two models of individual agency within hip-hop culture point, on the one hand, to the aspiration to infinite capability within consumer capitalism and, on other hand, to the limits of individual agency within hegemonic structures. The latter is what the critique of the novel exposes and the former, espoused by an executive producer, is what Luhrmann's film promotes:

> [Jay-Z] said: 'This story is not about how Jay Gatsby made his money; it's 'is he a good person or not?'" '[Jay-Z] totally nailed that the book was aspirational," [Luhrmann] added. 'That the book was really about, if you've got a cause, you

[29] Consider how in Jay-Z's song "99 Problems" he gets pulled over by a cop who wants to search his car and raps, "I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit / Enough that you won't illegally search my shit." He acknowledges being targeted as a Black man but his response is not resistance to the system but rather claiming a facility with the system—it's not about being a revolutionary but knowing how to hustle within existing structures. In other words, hip-hop here is not N.W.A.'s "Fuck the Police" but rather Gatsby showing a card from the police commissioner to get out of a speeding ticket.

[30] The pun here pointing both to the car and to the trap of a chicken coop. Indeed, Kanye's oeuvre contains several gestures to Gatsbyesque cruel optimism. In "You Can't Tell Me Nothing," he raps, "I had a dream I could buy my way to heaven / When I woke I spent that on a necklace," here showing an awareness of the disparity between aspirational desire and the trap of consumerism. After narrating a rags-to-riches tale of a Black man and the Black woman whom he supports financially, he ends "Gold Digger," "But you stay right girl / And when you get on he leave your ass for a white girl"—pointing to the white woman as the ultimate achievement.

> can move towards a green light. That you don't reach it isn't the point; that you aspire is.' (*NME*)

This interpretation of the novel maps fairly clearly onto Berlant's cruel optimism; what Luhrmann identifies that Jay-Z "nails" is precisely the opposite, that is, the structure that the novel critiques. Of the hip-hop mogul specifically, but also a more general American ethos, Christopher Holmes Smith argues that, "in order to escape the jeremiads against the 'fabulous life' of greed and excess, one must view individual wealth and the consumptive practices that accompany it as a legitimate outcome of strenuous striving to succeed, and representative therefore of an unexpected (almost divinely ordained) social mobility" (80). Gatsby in this hip-hop film is valued for his dreaming and infinite desire, and the structures that result in his death are incidental rather than systemic. The result is a film that fetishizes Gatsby's achievement and individuates his downfall as a thwarted romance, where Tom and Daisy are merely bad people rather than a part of a structure that polices and reproduces itself.

The specific Americanness of the Gatsby narrative is exported through cinema—particularly a blockbuster high-budget film such as Baz Luhrmann's—as a spectacle of expanding American domination, which in this case flattens the critique of its antecedent. Giovanni Arrighi's distinction between British and American cycles of accumulation is helpful here in understanding how cultural products promote state interests, what he terms "domination without 'hegemoney'": "Unlike Britain [. . .] the US has no territorial empire from which to extract the resources needed to retain its politico-military pre-eminence in an increasingly competitive world" ("Hegemony Unravelling" 64). Arrighi's cycles of accumulation have three periods: innovation, domination, and financialization. The period of the novel is the transition from the British cycle to the American cycle, where the financialization of Wall Street overlaps

with technological and industrial innovation. Bruce Cummings characterizes this period: "The 'Roaring 20s' were not just an era of flappers and the Charleston, but years of pioneering innovation when Americans first sampled the seductive possibilities of mass consumption and mass culture that the rest of the world now absorbs as part of its own lifestyle" (275). Luhrmann's adaptation takes the novel from a period of burgeoning mass culture and machinic production to our current moment, paralleling the 1920s to our own period of consumption and technological acceleration. Luhrmann notes in the special features all the care that went into making sure the costumes were authentic to the period, but it is precisely this fetishization of authenticity here that evacuates the historical critique. The film may very well have clothing that is specific to the 1920s, but in paralleling the two historical moments the film collapses these different moments of accumulation. It is no surprise, then, that the political critique is obfuscated by romantic mystification. Moreover, this investment in authenticity—that the past can be reproduced, repeated—is yet again another indication that this is Gatsby's film, not the novel's. The very concept of authenticity is essential for the policing and reproducing of racial and other categories, as Fitzgerald's novel and especially *Passing* interrogate so thoroughly and Luhrmann's film mechanically accepts.

While the novel reaches nostalgically into the past and projects the future of the white nation through Tom, Daisy, and Pam, the film is excessively present in its spectacle. Indeed, contra the "tenacious hold that Puritan emphasis on the future has on the American imagination" (Barnhart 36), the film attempts to reproduce jazz temporality. Bruce Barnhart outlines how white modernists "heard in [jazz] syncopation the death knell of traditional culture and learned from it that the aesthetic forms that would reign in the emerging landscape would not be the future that had been dominant in the past. [. . .]. Jazz signified that the future could no longer

dominate the cultural imagination as it once had" (33). Jazz manifests in the film form through frenetic, syncopated editing, saturated colours evoking the textures of different instruments, and, most explicitly, the jazzified versions of contemporary hip-hop music. The film was marketed as an innovation in cinematic spectacle with its use of 3D, materializing the consumerist spectacle of the novel into an imagistic medium. Barnhart complicates the temporality of consumer capitalism:

> Despite the ideological portrayal of commodity consumption as an enjoyment of the present, such consumption is an activity with both imagined and actual ties to the future. Imagined because capitalism invites the purchaser of a commodity to see himself as transformed or completed by the object they purchase. The measure associated with each purchase is the pleasure of believing that what is being purchased is entry into an ideal future. (36)

Yet while the novel has a temporality that reconciles both its nostalgia and its future-orientation, as outlined earlier, the film posits a kind of perpetual present, collapsing the 1920s and the 2010s. The film opens with a fake old-timey black-and-white cinema and low-fi music from the 1920s; the art-deco film logo has scratches and artefacts. The logo then transitions to colour and 3D, explicitly drawing a connection between the time periods through technology: the cinema as time machine. This simulated pastness of this image correlates to the superficiality of the film's treatment of history-as-past and its reductive paralleling of the 1920s and 2010s. In making this connection without acknowledging the historical specificity, the film has a confused temporality, reducing itself to what can be sold as a timeless love story—which as a genre has a broad stake in reproductive futurity—rather than a critique of American hegemony.

One of the major changes from book to film involves the narration, with the effect of collapsing the distinction between inherited class and acquired wealth as well as the temporality of the traditional West and urban East. Bruce Jackson outlines the problems of filming the narration of *The Great Gatsby*: "The 'I' and 'eye' of the novel are coterminous [. . .]. The eye of the film, on the other hand, [. . .] is the lens." Luhrmann's film cinematizes this coterminous I and eye by making the image explicitly writerly by taking phrases from the novels and displaying the words themselves on the screen with voiceover narration. As Dana Polan notes, "the visuals also have a quotational quality: we're not so much seeing 'real life' on screen but a set of notations that refer us back to the novel and stand as rote citations of it. This film of *The Great Gatsby* is not so much adaptation as taxidermy" (399). This rendering has the function of drawing attention to the film as adaptation without transposing the function of that narration into the film. Indeed, Jackson argues that no adaptation thus far had incorporated Nick into the narrative, and cautions that Lurhmann should not make the same mistake as past adaptations:

> If Baz Lurhmann [. . .] thinks the plot is what the novel is really about [. . .] he should acknowledge what he's up to, get rid of Nick [. . .] and make a movie that works. And if he understands the centrality of Nick's narration to Fitzgerald's novel and wants to make a film of *that*, he should deal with that voice and character as something more than mere decoration. (original emphasis)

Yet Luhrmann's adaptation does not fall into this trap of the inessential-Nick, but in incorporating Nick into the narrative as a character with particular stakes, he evacuates the class politics of the novels by making him a lower-class alcoholic. Luhrmann aligns Nick with Gatsby, not through what Maggie Gordon Froehlich terms their "queer relations,"[31] but rather what they

[31] Indeed, the film takes out all homosocial overtones—even the homosexual implications of Nick's encounter with McKee—in service of its overarching investment in heterosexual romance.

have in common is an outsider status in relation to upper-class characters such as Daisy, Tom, and Jordan. Indeed, at a party, an upper-class man tells Nick, "rich girls [such as Jordan] don't marry poor girls, she's mine," whereas Jordan and Nick have a romantic relationship in the novel. Moreover, Nick ending up in a sanatorium as an alcoholic changes the temporality of the narrative; he berates Tom and Daisy for retreating into their money when he does the same, retreating to the Midwest—the novels shows the prevalent American narrative of the powerful sucking the vitality of the lower classes and continuing their futures. Yet in the film Nick is forever changed by his experience, painted instead as another victim of the "Jazz Age" like Myrtle and Gatsby.

Barnhart explains of novel-Nick, "As the narrator, Nick positions himself as a purifier of language, a filter capable of straining out the distasteful sentimentality that seems to characterize the utterances of all whom he encounters" (127)—the purification here referring to a particular kind of upper-class sensibility. While Nick of the novel begins by establishing his family history and thus his authority to tell this story and then retreats to his family after his New York adventure, film-Nick writes this story as a form of therapy in a sanatorium and repeatedly emphasises his lack of wealth or class, the two conflated here. In the special features of the Blu-Ray release, Luhrmann explains his reasoning: he wanted an interlocutor for Nick's story and researched that psychoanalysts in the 1920s would ask their patients to paint or write; he took the main character in a sanatorium idea from Fitzgerald's posthumous novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941). Yet again, this impetus to be authentic to particular details has the function of changing the temporality and class critique: Nick's encounter with Gatsby and urban life changes him irrevocably, resulting in a romanticized alcoholism that requires therapy. What appears to be pathologized here is the abstract freneticism of a dehistoricized view of the "Jazz Age," rather

than any specificity of the 1920s. The order imposed by Nick's narration—rendered formally as jumbled letters on the screen assembling into words—does not come here from any authority but rather as a kind of exorcism; the film severs the connection between the organization of narration and the organization through capital of the novel in favour of a romanticized individual tale of witnessing a doomed romance in a changing world. The film thus naturalizes romance as ideological smokescreen in the tradition of melodramas during the Civil Rights movement. [32]

The film posits desire not as the molar kind of respectability politics of Irene or Chip or, eventually, Summer G, but rather as productive desire, one that is materially generative. Through its use of 3D, the film gestures to the instability and possibility of molecular desire in the Deleuzian vein, which produces more desire: molecules of light and ash and even letters flow multidimensionally, pointing, of course, to the essential molecular constituents of cinema itself. Deleuze and Guattari take Kant's conception of desire as producing hallucinations or fantasies from the realm of psychic reality into material reality: "Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine. Desire is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it" (*Anti-Oedipus* 26). The spectacle of Luhrmann's adaptation draws attention to its own technology, to itself as a desiring-machine. Film-Gatsby's motivations are cinematic—to get the girl—without the class aspirations that are so explicit in the novel. In flashback, the film conveniently leaves out, for example, that Gatsby desires Daisy more because others have been with her, or that he was attracted to the coolness of her house and focuses instead on the saturated colours of memory and their archetypically cinematic kiss. The film formally presents itself as a celebration of a particular kind of desire—one contrasted to the cruel optimism of the novel—that is, the molecular desire of the cinematic machine rather than

[32] For a recent film that makes this connection explicitly by juxtaposing scenes of police brutality against Black activists with clips from Hollywood romances (white futurity), see Raoul Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016).

the molar aspirations of the social climber. In a line that does not appear in the novel, Daisy wonders at Gatsby's estate and asks, "Is this all made entirely from your own imagination?" Conceiving here of the desire being the cinema itself, not Gatsby as subject, the telling word is imagination: Luhrmann is well-known for his spectacles, and this film assembles the images of a cultural and social imagination, the dehistoricized "Jazz Age" in quotation marks. Gatsby here is a machine that is part of the assemblage of the desiring-machine of cinema itself.

Because the film can show the material products—the images themselves—of desire via the spectacle of its cinematic world, it throws into relief how Daisy herself is connected to a specifically cinematic desire. Deleuze posits that every film frame signifies money: "what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalized relation with money. [. . .]. Money is the obverse of all the images that the cinema shows and sets in place" (*Cinema 2* 77). The desiring-machine of cinema is the machine of money. In the novel, Nick and Gatsby discuss the charm of Daisy's voice:

> "She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—"
>
> I hesitated.
>
> "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.
>
> That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl.... (Fitzgerald 133)

This exchange does not appear in the film, where, if the flip-side of every frame is indeed money, it would be redundant: "films about money are already, if implicitly, films within the film or about the film. This is the true 'state of things': it is not in a goal of cinema [. . .] but rather [. . .] in a constitutive relation between the film in process of being made and money as the

totality of the film" (*Cinema 2* 77). Daisy and the cinema are in identity here, representing and producing desire, aspirational in the Mulveyan sense of ideal ego in the figure of Daisy-as-movie-star but also the ways that cinema more generally functions to produce cultural desire. The film is able to make clear that Daisy is an image of money and desire—the flows of various forms of capital. The dream of Daisy is the dream of cinema: indeed, this is how the classic Hollywood romance functions. Gatsby and Daisy are machines of desire, subject and object collapsed, in a film that constantly draws attention to itself as machine through its innovations in 3D technology.

If the model of the novel is a cruel optimism that attends to historical structures while the film flattens the narrative into an assemblage of spectacle, it is worth noting here how the film contrasts Gatsby and Myrtle rather than positing a continuity through their doomed investments. Myrtle is a vulgar, unsympathetic character—the archetypical gold-digger—and Tom's violence towards her is not a rupture in their drunken party but a culmination of it, the music swelling to imply that the revelry can only end in violence. She is framed as a pathetic rather than sympathetic figure, whose aspirations are excessively material, while Gatsby's material investments are in service of something greater: that pure perfect cinematic relation called love. Myrtle and Tom's sexual encounter is crass and loud, preceded by an exchange where Tom buys Myrtle a dog and magazine; by contrast, the film represents sexual relations between Gatsby and Daisy in the mode of what might properly be called love-making, with an appropriately sultry soundtrack. Nick has an unwavering faith in Gatsby in contrast to the judgmental narrator of the novel, which functions to provide an uncomplicated view of Gatsby's valorization, not as someone who has unshaking faith in a system that oppresses him, but someone whose productive desire can transcend those systems. The novel ends with the triple deaths of Wilson, Myrtle, and

Gatsby, aligning them as people whom Tom and Daisy and Nick could exploit for their own futurity. Myrtle's misrecognition in the film is an individual mistake, in continuity with her construction as a hysterical dupe rather than a narrative trope that mirrors social logic. Gatsby here is redeemed through his association with the romantic cinematic; his final utterance of "Daisy" connects him to Charles Foster Kane's "Rosebud": indeed, Steve Chinball notes that "Luhrmann's manipulation of the stereo-scopic view is analogous with Orson Welles' celebrated use of deep focus techniques" (96). Novel-Gatsby wants to reproduce the past in order to re-write it with a future that includes him. Citizen Kane's nostalgia is for recapturing the innocence of youth, and by associating Gatsby with that possibility the film effaces Gatsby's investment in patriarchal capitalist white supremacy and instead makes him a romantic figure yearning to get something he once possessed and now has lost. Thus Gatsby is idealized here as a glorious dreamer rather than one who brings about his own downfall and thereby exposes the structures of cruel optimism.

One scene worth noting for its deviation from the novel and inconsistency with Gatsby's portrayal as a consummate performer is the confrontation at the Plaza Hotel. The expressionism of the scene captures the affective tension, with sweltering heat, sweaty bodies, and Tom aggressively picking at an ice cube. Luhrmann explains that he wanted the scene to show the characters "tearing at each other others' hearts and feelings" (qtd. in Pennington and Giardina 194). Certainly, the scene formally captures the novel's use of setting to build a sense that something is going to break—indeed, a lamp eventually does. Tom starts talking about civilization going to pieces again and how the breakdown of institutions will lead to intermarriage, but the film distances itself from these specific characters' implication in white futurity by excising Jordan's assertion that "we're all white here" (Fitzgerald 140). In the novel,

Daisy turns away from Gatsby not because he is pressuring her to efface her past relationship with Tom, but rather because Tom exposes Gatsby's wealth as illegitimate:

> [Gatsby] began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling un-happily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room. (Fitzgerald 143)

Tellingly, Daisy here is reduced to her voice—the voice of money. What Gatsby has lost is his ability to buy his dreams—in Kanye's words, "to buy his way to heaven" ("You Can't Tell Me Nothing"). Moreover, the novel highlights the issue of legitimate and illegitimate fortune; America was founded on theft and thus its legitimacy must be continually policed and re-asserted. While Gatsby is talking "excitedly" to Daisy in the novel because of the revelation of his shady business dealings, here Luhrmann has him break his composure and actually throw a punch at Tom, evoking Berlant's elucidation of the failure of investment: "object loss appears to entail the loss of an entire world and therefore a loss of confidence about how to live on, even at the microlevel of bodily comportment" (16). This physical violence marks the failure of Gatsby's infinitely productive desire and a temporary realization—inconsistent with the continued valorization of Gatsby's desire that follows this scene. The film gives Daisy a motivation for leaving Gatsby that has to do with him as an individual who lost his temper rather than an illegitimate bootlegger outside her class. Ultimately the rupture must occur on the terrain of romance rather than class or legitimacy in other to emphasize individual rather than social or political stakes. This scene is not about policing the dominant class and claiming the legitimacy

of certain forms of theft over others, but rather about an individual who breaks his physical comportment because of his romantic aspiration is threatened. This is an inconsistency whose purpose is to make the romance legible as such rather than as an ideological smokescreen for the limits of individual agency within oppressive structures: it is merely romance, between individuals. Gatsby is an idealized romantic dreamer through what Nick ultimately calls his "extraordinary gift for hope" or, more accurately, his total investment in his cruel optimism.

Gatsby as an aspirational figure in this film is explicitly connected to the contemporary figure of the hip-hop mogul, with the concomitant racial erasure and co-optation. The melodramas of the 1950s and 60s—to which the film gesture through its romance—present white futurity in the heterosexual couple-form in stark contrast to its historical moment of civil rights activism, and this film similarly presents a contrast with its spectacle of consumer capitalism and hip-hop aesthetics in the wake of the Occupy Movement. Gatsby here is more accurately a hip-hop mogul than the incoherent Summer G, but his whiteness[33] evokes Charles Lewis' question of whether Fitzgerald re-writes a passing narrative in a kind of "blackface forgery" (84). Hip-hop in this film, in contrast to *G*, does not have no future, but rather it is taken out of history and co-opted by the spectacle of consumer capitalism—it has a future insofar as it participates in consumer capitalism rather than critiques it. Chinball argues that Luhrmann's adaptation "suggest[s] the continuity with the hegemony of hip-hop in our own time and allud[es] to the journey of some people of colour from contemptuously treated negro servants in a white supremacist household to stars of the contemporary cultural industries such as Mr and Mrs Carter: Jay-Z and Beyoncé" (97). This reading overlooks the very real persistence of white

[33] While whiteness is historically contingent, including the whiteness of Italians in America, Leonardo DiCaprio's golden visage is clearly meant to signify whiteness; contrast his presentation to recognizable Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan playing the racialized Meyer Wolfsheim.

supremacy today and the ways that narratives such as Shawn Carter's rise to Jay-Z, chronicled in his memoir *Decoded* (2010), buy into the myth that Fitzgerald's novel ultimately exposes as a lie.

The hip-hop soundtrack and Gatsby's gangsterish lifestyle present a world where infinitely upward individual achievement is not only possible but valorized. Hustling is not just about individual greed, but rather a value foundational to the nation, one that bypasses Puritanical moralizing. Christopher Holmes Smith's examination of the hip-hop mogul presents parallels to Gatsby that help understand him as the white version of this Black male figure. Gatsby's house and parties are required conspicuous consumption in order to make his wealth visible; contrast this visibility with Clare's self-display that requires a presentation of white femininity. Smith connects the exchange, or zero-sum, of this visibility: "The hip-hop mogul is not intelligible without credible accounts of the lavish manner in which he leads his life, nor is he intelligible unless his largesse connotes not only his personal agency but also a structural condition that squelches the potential agency of so many others" (71). Gatsby's parties do not bring about any sense of community—no one knows him or comes to his funeral: the "mogul's typical dreamscape is individualistic rather than communal" (Smith 82). While in the novel there is plausible deniability as to the violence behind Gatsby's shady business, the film shows a man being beaten, presumably at Gatsby's command, as the camera moves from the beating to Gatsby's crest on the top of the iron gate to his estate. The film here literalizes how at the margins of his luxury is always some kind of gangster violence.

Reading Gatsby as a white hip-hop mogul in relation to gangsterism also relates to the racialization of legitimate and illegitimate hustle.[34] Smith eludicates how gangsterism affords a sense of freedom outside the official systems of capital and exchange:

> Frequently, moguls [. . .] will depict themselves as 'gangsters' [. . .] in the mafioso tradition [. . .]. A major aspects of the mogul's utopian sense of freedom is one of identity shifting, or at the least, identity 'layering.' In other words, while hip-hop moguls can never be said to deny their racial and ethnic heritage, they are encouraged to use the material aspects of gangster social formations [. . .]. Moguls use 'gangsterism,' then, as a trope for escaping the limited 'place' afforded minority men of color in American society. (82)

When Gatsby takes Nick to see Meyer Wolfsheim, the soundtrack plays Jay-Z's "Izza (HOVA)" over the bridge and then "Hundred Dollar Bills" once they arrive at the speakeasy, explicitly connecting hip-hop to the kind of business that Gatsby and Wolfsheim do. Indeed, we have two gangster moguls here: Gatsby, who presents as white, and Meyer Wolfsheim, who does not. Gatsby's whiteness provides some legitimacy to his dealings and the possibility for solidifying his class and racial position via futurity with Daisy. Wolfsheim, on the other hand, has no aspirations to the future or nostalgia for the past—indeed his racialization precludes him from the particular future posited here—and thinks only in terms of the present: "'Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead [. . .]. After that my own rule is to let everything alone" (Fitzgerald 170). While this scene between Nick and Wolfsheim is not in the film, the hip-hop gangsterism of the film throws into relief racialized differences and futurity

[34] As Eithne Quinn points out, "A central theme of gangsta rap had always been the levelling out of ethical hierarchies between legitimate and illegitimate business dealings in the age of inequality: both are 'stealing'" (92)—and indeed I would argue this age of inequality encompasses the entirety of American history.

in the narrative. Along with the attrition of the white working class and the futurity of the white upper class, the narrative gestures to a persistence outside of that system of whiteness, here embodied in Wolfsheim and his racialized presentist temporality.[35]

The relationship of the film to hip-hop culture, Gatsby to the hip-hop mogul, and indeed that of whiteness to Blackness more generally, parallels the relations of the film to the novel in terms of co-optation. Smith argues that the hip-hop mogul "never had to sell his customers on anything other than his belief in his own fantasies. [. . .]. [H]e can continue to be representative of mass expectation of the good life without being responsible for its fulfillment" (80). Certainly, this emphasis on desire and fantasy fits the figure of Gatsby in Luhrmann's film, but the film itself sells both the vision and itself as commodity. Eithne Quinn's study of hip-hop mogul in the wake of Occupy is useful here in examining how emancipatory discourses get co-opted by consumer capitalism and evacuated of their critique—arguably, in the way that the novel is co-opted by the film to sell itself. Quinn quotes Mark Fisher, who "describes rappers like Carter [Jay-Z] [. . .] as prime 'capitalist realists,' who help shore up the notion that there is no alternative to the brutalizing market" (76). From this perspective, any kind of revolution of critique, such as the Occupy Movement, is necessarily absorbed and commodified by the capitalism system. Quinn argues that the hip-hop mogul, in the form of commoditized "racial difference" "has served to consolidate contemporary capitalism, both by disavowing structural inequalities through enticing bootstrap personal advancement narratives and by rearticulating collective, emancipatory notions of black freedom as individualist, consumerist ones" (77). Indeed, this move occurs not only in Luhrmann's film but also *G*. In both cases, oppressive structures are disavowed as the radical critical communal aspects of hip-hop culture are absorbed

[35] Consider also how the conflation of jazz and hip-hop in the film as racialized forms is all about frenetic pleasure in the present.

into narratives of individual achievement. Quinn points out Jay-Z's co-optation of Occupy Wall Street in selling t-shirts that say "Occupy All Streets": "But by stripping out the symbolic locus (Wall Street), with its focus on financial inequality, Carter's slogan suggests a probusiness dissipation of the movement's specificity—a literal, graffitied neoliberal correction" (87). Luhrmann's film reproduces this structure on the scale of cultural narrative; rather than effacing the racialized aspect of the film, he co-opts it through his dehistoricized and commoditized conflation of Black music, jazz and hip-hop, concurrently conflating and dehistoricizing the 1920s and the Occupy moment of the film. Indeed, Quinn goes further, identifying how "the incorporation of protest currents has been one of the key cultural trends in the strengthening of corporate capitalism" (87). Co-optation is not merely one tactic of many but a key feature of colonial and consumer capitalism: the theft extends beyond land and people to culture and ideologies. Co-optation is more successful than disavowal, as it leaves no room outside and makes it seems as if capitalism is totalizing, the only system.

Luhrmann's film takes Gatsby's fantasy and presents it as truth, privileging the dreamer aspect of his character and either effacing or co-opting any possibility of critique. It thus participates in a larger discourse of embracing rather than critiquing cruel optimism, in the vein of "do what you love" and "follow your dreams" and you will be rewarded.[36] Gatsby's desire is idealized—his will to create an empire with his sheer imagination—and his failures are individuated into mere romance. Barnhart writes of novel-Gatsby, "with this ending [Gatsby] is transformed into one of the discrete commodities in which he always had such faith" (126). The

[36] For popular texts that address this happiness-achievement discourse see self-help books such as Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* (2006) and critiques such as Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (2009).

film, materializing Gatsby's vision of himself rather than Nick's judgement or the novel's critique, is one of those commodities. Smith writes:

> [T]he American postmodern cultural logic of empire is one whereby (1) conditions arise that are ripe for the incorporation of the people's rhetoric of emancipation within the normalizing tenets of the capitalist world system and (2) narratives of utopian impulse found within many forms of black expressive culture, and particularly hip-hop culture, have helped supply the specifically American discourse of empire with the necessary manna of 'performativity' it needs to sustain itself as global Leviathan. (74)

If every frame of the film signifies money, then the film must recuperate that money by selling itself, and here we come back to the idea of American "hegemoney"—the exportation through cinematic spectacle of the values that make consumer capitalism possible: infinite desire and dreaming as a goal in and of itself, with failures that are individual rather than systemic.

Gatsby Forever

Reading these four texts together reveals how multiple facets of Gatsby manifest in different forms and historical contexts, throwing into relief the tension between individual desire and agency and systemic oppression through the organization that is narrative. *Gatsby* circulates through its making-visible of limits, conflicting models of desire, and textual poaching; Fitzgerald's novel contains paradoxes and complexities that the adaptations tease out. *Passing* foregrounds legibility and bifurcates the Gatsby figure through doubles with the threateningly desirous figure inevitably dying. *G* re-writes the characters as Black people in the contemporary Hamptons, privileging respectability politics and romance over any kind of extraordinary hope;

the film vilifies hip-hop culture and by extension Black solidarity as violent, killing the Black woman because she associates with Summer G. Baz Luhrmann makes Gatsby an infinite dreamer and achiever and co-opts hip-hop culture to subsume it under consumer capitalism. Indeed, the Gatsby figure circulates through ideological adaptations that may have little resemblance to the plot of Fitzgerald's novel, but all contend—through critique or effacement or co-optation—with how American myths of meritocracy and agency are belied by the oppression of capitalist white supremacy. The entrenchment and saturation of hegemonic power structures over time leads to an increasingly invisibility or willful blindness to their operation. The 1920s texts are explicit about racialized structures and institutional racism but the recent adaptations either have Black people vilifying other Black people or the erasure and co-optation of Black culture altogether. Indeed, it appears that the Gatsby figure will continue to re-emerge in various forms—reproducing the different manifestations of the policing of capitalism and whiteness—as long as the American nation exists.

Socialism and its Spectres: Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* and P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*

While *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* interrogate American mythologies of meritocracy and democracy by foregrounding how patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism lead to the death of the excessive or transgressive individual, Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel *Oil!* and Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) take a different approach to these mythologies by narrating an individual's triumph within these systems. In the novel, J. Arnold Ross and his son Bunny develop a patch of California into an oil fortune; the film follows the father, renamed Daniel Plainview, in his fulfilment of the inevitable teleology signaled by the title. No real threat hinders their thriving—certainly nothing on the scale of what Lily Bart or Jay Gatsby face. Oil gives Ross/Plainview the material legitimacy that Lily and Gatsby lack, as capitalism in the form of resource extraction is as much tied into the national foundation as patriarchy and white supremacy. The critical valence of these texts does not lie in exposing the fatal limits of individuals—they are largely narratives of capitalist triumph rather than decline—but rather in their relation to socio-political history, intertextuality between source novel and adaptation as well as within cinematic history, and ultimately in the logic of the very substance and status of oil itself in American mythology. The novel follows the structure of a *bildungsroman*, tracing Bunny's trajectory through various social and political scenes, while the film inverts this form by focusing on the singular and unchanging Daniel Plainview.

Both novel and film broadly sketch the acquisition and organization of land for the requirements of petro-capitalism. As Glen Coulthard argues, primitive accumulation is not just something that happened in the past:

> [W]e should see it as an ongoing practice of dispossession that never ceases to structure capitalist and colonial social relations in the present. *Settler-colonialism*

> *is territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*. [. . .]. [S]ettler-colonialism should not be seen as deriving its reproductive force solely from its strictly repressive or violent features, but rather from its ability to produce *forms of life* that make settler-colonialism's constitutive hierarchies seem natural. (152, original emphasis)

The texts maintain primitive accumulation into the present by foregrounding how land and resources are acquired along with the cultural and civic forces—politics, cinema, workers' organizations, religion, etc.—that provide cover for that accumulation and naturalize its effect on social relations. The study of oil in relation to culture is crucial to understanding nationhood and accumulation in the era of American hegemony. The burgeoning field of petrocultures examines the relationship of our carbon dependency to how we imagine our position in history: the past of primitive accumulation, the present of dependency and impasse, and the (no)future of climate crisis and apocalypse. Donald Pease emphasizes that despite oil's relative detachment from day-to-day life, "Oil remains nonetheless indispensable to the production and reproduction of American and imagined national COMMUNITY. [. . .]. As a substance that was once live matter, and that bursts into visibility with a force expressive of a vital form of life, oil invites mystification" (32-3). The language here points to the relationship between the material conditions of production and the ideologies that maintain and reproduce them. By representing their particular moments in history, Sinclair's novel and Anderson's film tease out the relationship between resources and commodities via the specificities of oil energy, making the substance visible rather than obfuscating it.

The ideological adaptation of Sinclair's novel does not merely entail its temporal transposition from modernism to postmodernism or an era of monopoly capitalism to financialization, but significantly, the formal shift into a medium inextricably tied to oil.

Focusing on the materiality of the medium, Nadia Bozak writes, "the cinematic image can be thought of as fossilized light, thus practically and metaphorically equating cinema with the geological dimension of the naturally derived (fossilized sunlight) that continue to enable industrial society and culture," thus reading "the cinematic image as a material resource, one that is refined into a political tool and employed as ideological weaponry. The war over oil, for oil, finds a counterpart in its dominant mode of cinematic representation" (13). We cannot escape oil; as Imre Szeman argues, oil is the "*ur*-commodity: the substance on which the globe depends to heat its homes, to move bodies and goods around, to build and maintain infrastructure—the substance that, for better and for worse, makes the world go round ("Introduction to Focus: Petrofictions" 3). With echoes of Jean-Louis Baudry's apparatus theory, Jonathan Beller points to the fetishizing mechanism of film: "Cinema was to a large extent the hyper-development of commodity fetishism, that is, of the peeled-away, semi-autonomous, psychically charged image from the materiality of the commodity. The fetish character of the commodity drew its energy from the enthalpy of repression—the famous non-appearing of the larger totality of social relations" (9). While the novel presents multiple commodities, from cosmetics to cars to film and the trappings of luxury, its ideological adaptation is a film of oil and about oil, one that foregrounds the resource that makes commodification possible. Pease argues that "immersion in the oil economy has rendered Americans unwilling or unable to disentangle themselves from this deadly attachment. The lack of will demonstrates how petro-capitalism has engendered structures of denial and disavowal as pervasive cultural attitudes" (33). Yet until the last scene, the flash-forward that converts resource into goods in Plainview's mansion, the film effaces not production but rather what the products make possible. The singular focus on oil itself and Plainview as the unassailable figure of petro-capitalism makes visible the permeation of oil

rather than its disavowal. The film is a petro-product that shows its own origins; oil here brings back materiality to the abstraction of financialization.

As Stephanie LeMenager points out, "Sinclair's *Oil!* is a type of peak-oil fiction, since it was written as a warning against global petromodernity from the moment of peak-oil discovery in the US [. . .] [in] the late 1920s" (63), and *There Will Be Blood* also comes at a time of peak global oil, "on the eve of the oil price spike of 2008" (79). Significantly, however, Arrighi's cycles of accumulation help theorize the difference between these periods, the emergence of American hegemony and its Autumn of financialization. Responding to Jameson's theory of postmodernism as a move to spatialisation, Joshua Clover elucidates the narrative form that materializes during this period:

> [A]t the logic of each cycle's financial period, the social logic of Autumn, is neither fundamentally spatial nor temporal. Rather it is dominated by the mutation of the processes that relate the two. [. . .]. [T]his is the larger problematic inside of which one discovers, for example, the postmodern novel's [. . .] frequent substitution of sprawl for story—thus my fundamental proposition that an organizing trope of Autumnal literature is the conversion of the temporal to the spatial. What is at stake is not the triumph of one mode or another, but the particular process of their transmutation. (Clover 42-3)

There Will Be Blood, coming as it does during late capitalism, not only shows this tension in the apparent formal level—cinema as the spatialisation of time and the temporalization of space—but also thematizes it in its content. A *bildungsroman* such as Bunny's trajectory in *Oil!* involves "the development of a character through consequent time" (Clover 42), but, as Gregory Phipps argues, "Daniel does not evolve as a character" (35). Instead of moving forward, Daniel

Plainview expands in his accumulation of land and extraction of oil, consuming both substances and bodies and earth in his voraciousness. Consider the temporality of oil and the obscurity of its scale: both as an ancient product of the earth that seems merely ready-made and as a commodity that has guaranteed a future that, because of the inevitability of global warming, is already here. Repression, in the realm of carbon dependency, is also spatialized: distance and mobility rather than causality or consequence. The title *There Will Be Blood* is the temporal indication of a promise, which the film converts into the spatial in that it is not about progressing forward but rather expanding and then folding back in on its teleological promise.

The novel highlights the move from formal subsumption of labour to capital—which the Endnotes collective explains "remains merely formal precisely in the sense that it does not involve capital's transformation of a given labour process, but simply its taking hold of it" (Endnotes)—to real subsumption, "as if capital has come to envelop the social being of humanity in its entirety; as if subsumption has been so successful that capital can now pass itself off not only as the 'truth' of the labour process, but of human society as a whole" (Endnotes). Eliding the novel's focus on workers and labour, the film focuses on Daniel Plainview as a totalizing figure of subsumption—real subsumption that functions "as if the very success of a kind of capitalist subsumption means that we can no longer grasp that which subsumes as an external position" (Endnotes). It may be tempting to posit a periodization through this framework, that the novel of the early 20th century focuses more on formal subsumption than real subsumption and the film of late-capitalist 21st century suggests no external or outside to the totality of subsumption—that Sinclair's novel is about the workers' movement, union organizing, and Bunny's radicalization, while Anderson's film is about the commodification of social relations

and the inviolable supremacy of capitalism. Yet, as Endnotes argues, using formal and real subsumption for periodizing has its limits:

> While it is true that the valorisation process of capital in its entirety is the unity of the processes of production and circulation, and whilst capital brings about transformations to the world beyond its own immediate production process, these transformations by definition cannot be grasped in the same terms as those which occur within that process under real subsumption. Nothing external to the immediate production process actually becomes capital nor, strictly speaking, is subsumed under capital. (Endnotes)

That real subsumption is always implicit leaves open a space outsize the totalizing of subsumption. Through their temporality, these texts show how a linear periodization through formal and real subsumption does not account for the complexities of value and social relations. These texts, unlike Wharton's and Fitzgerald's, foreground the centre rather than the margins; but when the centre seems all there is in its inevitable teleology is where the question arises of what permeates from outside that totality.

As Szeman argues, liberalism obscures the crisis of oil and the ability to conceive of a post-oil future, as it is invested so much in its own forms and the flexibility or adaptability within its system of relations: "As its social improvements require the energy of oil, liberalism can only imagine that there will be ever more the stuff, even it if is, by definition, a limited resource. And because what fuels liberal programs and policies is a principal cause of environmental damage and destruction, liberalism gets stuck" ("Afterword" 392). Rather than viewing these two oil texts through a liberal ontology, I contend that the key to understanding how they operate together and in their cultural and historical context as critique is through Jacques Derrida's

hauntology in *Specters of Marx*. Considering the appeal of Francis Fukuyama's claim that the current late-capitalist liberal democracy "*promises* to be victorious in the long run" (qtd. in Derrida 82, original emphasis), Derrida asks: "how is it that a discourse of this type is sought out by those who celebrate the triumph of liberal capitalism and its predestined alliance with liberal democracy only in order to hide, and first all from themselves, the fact that this triumph has never been so critical, fragile, threatened, even in certain regards catastrophic, and in sum bereaved?" (85). The emphasis on the inevitability of liberal capitalism thus reveals its vulnerability, opens it up to haunting. Derrida begins *Specters of Marx* with an epigraph from *Hamlet*: "The time is out of joint." This disjointed conception of time is essential to his hauntological project, the apparition and reapparition of spectres: "haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents" (3, original emphasis). Hauntological time is not linear; the future can come before the past, the spectres of the future and the past haunt the present—thus the "present" is always contaminated. A whole and homogenous presence does not obtain for Derrida; a heterogeneity of spectres always interjects. Beller historicizes cinema in economic terms: "cinema has its origins in the shift from market to monopoly capital and reconstitutes itself in the shift from monopoly to multinational capitalism" (19). The temporality of these texts is indeed out of joint, as the novel focusing on monopoly capitalism signals forthcoming globalization—Ross and Roscoe's Mosul concession—while the film, actually taking place during American imbrication in Mosul and elsewhere, hardly gestures outside of California. These aesthetic mediations together reveal time out of joint; that is, the texts foreground how representation has an out-of-joint hauntology embedded within it.

On first glance, the novel and film bear little resemblance in terms of narrative and character. As Peter Hitchcock points out:

> Everything about the history of the industry that had galvanized Sinclair's prose and given the struggles over oil vibrant kinesis is simply blacked out in the film. There are no strikes, Red Scares, or American anti-Bolshevik machinations in Siberia. There is no Great War as a distraction, nor any direct sense that oil has a history in America beyond the eye of its beholder. There is no Paul Watkins to speak of, and barely any Bunny. (95)

Anderson credits the novel not with "adapted from" but rather "inspired by." In "P.T. Anderson's Dilemma: The Limits of Surrogate Paternity," Julian Murphet examines father-son bonds in Anderson's oeuvre in general and *There Will Be Blood* in particular. Murphet writes, "Anderson is of course perfectly right to emphasize the generalized paternal anality that a century of oil has fostered in American culture; but it is sheer opportunism to have done so over the body of Sinclair. [. . .]. In the act of disinterring the book from its explosive political site, the film only manages more resolutely to lay to rest the event it attends to" (84). Murphet faults the ending of the film for being too hyperbolic and invested in its own cinematic spectacle rather than any positive political project, and figures Anderson's adaptation as "another case of the twenty-first century eviscerating the twentieth of its central enthusiasm [. . .]. [O]ne can slash too far" (85). However, instead of reading these texts as foregrounding opposing political perspectives, my reading here emphasizes how what is being foregrounded in each text is not presented as absolute or totalizing, but rather haunted by the possibility of its own critique: the novel narrativizes radicalization while showing the totalizing force of capitalism, while the film traces the totalizing figure of Plainview while leaving itself open formally to spectrality.

Capitalist hegemony rooted in oil energy must appear to be all there is—total—to foreclose the possibility of imaging alternatives. These two texts focusing on the centre of oil capitalism rather than the margins, when totality seems strongest, demonstrate through their formal and generic aspects the emergence of haunting. Following Derrida, this is not incidental but rather in the structure of hegemony itself: "At a time when a new world order is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. *Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony*" (Derrida 45-6, emphasis added). Derrida's hauntology explains how the exorcism of ghosts to produce totality will always fail, conjuring the return of those ghosts. According to Derrida, deconstruction is justice, exposing the inherent contradictions of every ethical decision as the only way to recognize the possibility of the incalculable. Justice, in this framework, is not about applying a codex of law to a decision but recognizing incalculability.[37] Indeed, the title *There Will Be Blood* is a performative, calculable promise; I argue here that justice in this ideological adaptation is its welcoming of specters: "This dimension of performative interpretation, that is, of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets" (Derrida 63). The spectrality of *arrivants*, of some kind of incalculable justice, haunts the totality of Plainview's narrative.

Oil! and *There Will Be Blood* expose the lie of liberalism, that a nation constructed through resource extraction and theft makes possible the conditions of freedom and justice. The texts function as inversions: the novel, as *bildungsroman*, traces Bunny's journal into radicalism

[37] Furthermore, from *Specters*: "what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today" (74).

through a variety of scenes and encounter than map the moment of expanding oil capitalism in California. The film, on the other hand, focuses on the atemporal sheer present singularity of Daniel Plainview, indicating the totalizing logic of oil capital on the level of character and narrative, but gesturing to the haunting of that totality through the incorporation of its spectral antecedents.

Oil! (1927) and Social Mapping

The epigraph of *Oil!* posits the novel as a fictional representation of its place and time that offers the truth of history through universalized elements:

> Shuffle the cards, and deal a new round of poker hands: they differ in every way from the previous round, and yet it is the same pack of cards, and the same game, with the same spirit, the players grim-faced and silent, surrounded by a haze of tobacco smoke. So with this novel, a picture of civilization in Southern California, as the writer has observed it during eleven years' residence. The picture is the truth, and the great mass of detail actually exists. But the cards have been shuffled; names, places, dates, details of character, episodes—everything has been dealt over again. (np)

This sprawling narrative represents History through its contingent characters and events, but the claim here is that it gets to some kind of absolute truth of the situation by, extending the metaphor, using all the cards of the deck. Like his other works, Sinclair's socialist realist novel has an explicit didactic function by exposing the ways that capitalism affects not only economics but also has a destructive effect on democracy and social relations. Christopher Taylor recuperates Sinclair from aesthetic criticism to privilege his political project: "to judge Sinclair's

novels as flawed naturalism devalues the very didactic, crusading elements which Sinclair saw as central to his aesthetic project" (167). The sprawling narrative attempts to provide a total view of Southern California of 1920s, to show us workers and farmers, film stars and socialites, up to politicians and titans of industry. Sinclair's project for the novel was explicitly didactic, a way to expose American mythologies around the inviolability and inevitability of capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, the shuffling of cards here gestures to adaptation: using archetypical materials—characters, literary tropes, narrative trajectories—in order to present them in a familiar way that makes visible unfamiliar or even radical politics.

Sinclair's opening metaphor of a "picture" is telling; indeed, the novel is imagistic and even cinematic. The opening of the novel gestures to the pervasive structuring of oil—speed, navigation, mapping, infrastructure, and policing—through Bunny's experience of a speedy car ride with his father on the Californian highway. Guy Debord argues that "The reigning economic system is founded on isolation; at the same time it is a circular process designed to produce isolation. Isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all *goods* proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to television, also serve as weapons for that system" (22, original emphasis). Film theorists such as Lynne Kirby have long associated the cinema, particularly the silent cinema contemporary with the narrative of *Oil!*, with train transportation as the speed of both reconfigure subjective perceptions of space and time: "the train is the mechanical double for the cinema and for the transport of the spectator into fiction, fantasy, and dream" (Kirby 2); similarly Deleuze argues that "the mobile camera is like a *general equivalent* of all the means of locomotion (*Cinema 1* 22, original emphasis). The use of the car in *Oil!* is a further step from the train along the path of capitalist development in its use of oil and privatization of space—the use of oil energy to atomize individuals. Hitchcock, in theorizing

modernity's "oil ontology," argues that "The car enables the joy of movement Sinclair describes in the opening chapter of *Oil!* but also represents a logic of production and privatisation of space in its realisation. [. . .]. Oil revolutionizes space [. . .] but also suspends the capacity to imagine beyond its logic" (91). Focalized through young Bunny, the car ride pictures a land organized for movement—of bodies, of capital—through technology, anticipating the impending flows of oil pipelines.

The highway here is a beautiful feat of engineering, "magic ribbon" (1); the opening lines read: "The road ran, smooth and flawless, precisely fourteen feet wide, the edges trimmed as if by sheers, a ribbon of grey concrete, rolled out over the valley by a giant hand" (1). The cinematic quality is heightened through the direct implication of the reader as spectator: "you had no fear, [. . .]. Sometimes you liked to put your hand up, and feel the cold impact; sometimes you would peer around the side of the shield, and let the torrent hit your forehead, and toss you hair about. But for the most part you sat silent and dignified—because that was Dad's way, and Dad's way constituted the ethics of motoring" (1). The phrasing produces a spectatorial subject in the reader, one who has particular preferences or desires—can exercise some agency—but is ultimately subsumed to the will of the Father, the ultimate figure of authority who organizes possibilities, here embodied in the capitalist oil baron Ross: "Nothing could stop Dad!" (10). As they are exceeding the speed limit, a patrol car starts following them, and Dad points out the "debased nature of the 'speed-cop'" (9) in placing limits on his velocity. As Jason Vredenburg points out, "the speed-cop's primary offense is not the fine he might impose but rather the fact that he interferes with business" (261). Yet this chase scene is rendered as a thrill, not any kind of threat to the advancement of Ross and Bunny in their car: "Oho! An adventure to make a boy's heart jump!" (9); the speed-cop is more a cartoon villain than a threat. Indeed, Ross uses

his influence to get rid of speed traps: "sooner or later he was going to make them change the law, and sure enough he did, and you owe to him the fact that there are no more 'speed-traps,' [. . .] and if you watch your little mirror, you can do as fast as you please" (11). The scene ends with the declaration, "They were their own law" (13), anticipating later political dealings and the organization not only of land for capital but of social, political, and legal relations as well.

Through the second-person address, the opening corrals the reader into the circuit of production, of labour and exchange, and here specifically into the organization of land for the purposes of capital: highways anticipating pipelines and beyond in the global movement of capital. Sinclair makes this connection specific: the highway is "this magic ribbon of concrete laid out for you [. . .] so that you always knew exactly where you had a right to be—what magic had done all this? Dad had explained it—money had done it" (5). The language of "magic" here on the road of capitalist subsumption recalls Marx's "trinity formula" and commodity mystification:

> In capital—profit, or still better capital—interest, land—rent, labour—wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations into things, the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical and social determination. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things. (*Capital* 479-80)

The novel addresses the reader as incorporated into this process of subsumption; we ourselves are part of the commodification of social relations as spectator: "You never *looked* back; for at

fifty miles and hour, your *business* is with the *things* that lie before you, and the past is past—or shall we say that passed are passed?" (3, emphasis added). The collapse of time ("past") and space ("passed") points to the immediacy of this process of mystification and commodification all under the aestheticized veneer of the speedy automobile, the technological spectacle that presents itself as totalizing. Commodification explicitly involves the erasure of the past, the fetishization of the present, and the allure of future surplus value. The opening sets up how capitalism, embodied in the figure of Ross, appears through its spectacles—of technology, organization, commodification—not to have limits, to be totalizing in its power to incorporate all it encounters.

Yet this novel has the didactic purpose of critiquing capitalism and making-visible inequities to rouse workers into anti-capitalist organization; thus, the key word here is "appears"—the novel presents capitalism as able to subsume various relations to its own exigencies no matter how diverse, but the narrative trajectory of Bunny's education involves a making-visible of the inequities beneath the glittering and exciting surfaces highlighted in the opening scene. The novel dramatizes its broad social, political, and economic claim through the trajectory of an individual who benefits from capitalism, Bunny, into social consciousness and radicalism, even against the teachings of his mostly benevolent and indulgent oil-baron father. Indeed, the villain in this novel is not the individual avatar of capitalism but rather the system itself. For didactic purposes, if the reader follows the trajectory of Bunny into radicalism, then the anti-capitalist case has a stronger persuasiveness. Taylor reads Bunny's education through Susan Rubin Suleiman's category "tales of apprenticeship," which require dual transformations, "from *ignorance* (of self) to *knowledge* (of self) and from *passivity* to *action*" (qtd. in Taylor 170, original emphasis). In Sinclair's novel, the appeal to pathos through focalization is key:

"identification with the protagonist in these transformations intensifies the persuasive force of the explicit interpretations of narrator and characters" (Taylor 170). Bunny as the main character, rather than Ross or the Plainview of the film, provides a different perspective on both how capitalism produces subjects and how those subjects can possibly resist.

Bunny's innocence makes the radical, experienced, and worldly Paul Watkins all the more attractive; Paul here serves to reflects what Taylor identifies as Sinclair "employ[ing] expert characters [. . .] to convey his theme" (172). Mark Lavoie reads Paul as a re-imagining of Mark Twain's Huck Finn, arguing that "Sinclair uses nostalgia and a quintessentially American literary icon to advance his socialist agenda. Huck [. . .] embodies America's perception of itself and is perhaps a perfect mechanism for moving Americans with a capitalist mindset towards the more altruistic ideal of Socialism" (19). The familiarity of an American archetype facilitates the persuasion. Bunny is initially attracted to Paul's work ethic and honesty, quintessential American traits. Paul runs away from his abusive family and is starving so Bunny offers him money. Paul replies, "No, sir, I don't want no money, not till I earn it" (47), "I ain't a-goin' to turn into no bum; I didn't run away for that" (48). Lavoie notes that, unlike Twain's Huck, "Sinclair cannot have a jobless character end up in the ultimate worker's party. If Paul is to enter Communism, it is imperative that work replaces play" (23). The respectability politics of Paul Watkins is necessary to counter the capitalist denunciation that communism rewards laziness. Indeed, Paul's resistance to taking money without working, coupled with his atheism—"I ain't a-goin' to believe, and I don't give a damn" (44)—the first sign of his revolutionary bent, fascinates Bunny. He cries after Paul leaves and wonders if he likes Bunny and if he will ever see him again: "Such a wise boy—he knew so many things! [. . .]. And Paul wouldn't take any of Dad's money! Dad thought that everybody in the world would be glad to get his money; but this boy had refused it!"

(50). If Dad/Ross is the figure of capitalism, Paul represents radical resistance in the form of communism; his character has little depth apart from his politics. Indeed, when taking help from Ross, Paul insists that their relationship is not based on wage labour but rather shared ownership: "Dad thought he ought to pay Paul to act as caretaker, but Paul said he wouldn't take it on that basis, he would insist on going shares" (128). Paul thus combines the appeal to logos in his explanatory and educational role with the appeal to pathos in his sympathetic and sacrificial aspects.

As a *bildungsroman*, *Oil!* tracks what Franco Moretti identifies as "the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*" (15, original emphasis). Ross wants Bunny to be educated for the cultural and social capital before entering the family business. Yet Paul makes Bunny view his formal education as inadequate: "The things Paul had learned about! He had read Huxley and Spencer, and he talks about Galton and Weissmann and Lodge and Lankester, and a lot of names Bunny had never even heard of. Poor Bunny's pitiful little high school knowledge shrank up to nothing [. . .]. Dad didn't know about these matters either" (127). Because of his secure economic position, Bunny has the leisure to embark on learning about revolution; following the didactic purposes of the novel, much of Bunny's ponderings and realizations could be read as paraphrases from *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

> Bunny was studying and thinking, trying to make up his mind about the problem of capital versus labour. It had become clear to him that the present system could not go on forever [. . .]. And when you asked, who was to change the system, there was only one possible answer—the great mass of workers, who [. . .] had

> learned that wealth is produced by toil. [. . .]. Bunny accepted the doctrine joyfully, as an escape from the tangle of commercialism and war. (316)

In the wake of the Russian Revolution, Bunny exclaims, "The workers *could* run a government! The workers *were* running a government! Just look!" (317, original emphasis), his passion serving the purpose to convince the reader as well. Bunny maintains affection and respect for his capitalist father, who benevolently indulges his burgeoning radicalism, while also exploring different forms of radicalism, those who wanted to follow Russia "for the dictatorship of the proletariat" (317) and those who thought "the attempt was madness" (317). Part of his education is seeing not only that there are alternatives to capitalism but that there are variations within anti-capitalism. Following the central conflict of the *bildungsroman*, Bunny is torn between different ideological factions: "Bunny was more perplexed than ever; life appeared so complicated, and happiness so hard to find!" (320). Moretti writes, "how is it possible to convince the modern—'free'—individual to willingly limit his freedom? [. . .] [T]hrough marriage—*in* marriage" (22, original emphasis). Indeed, Bunny's narrative ultimately requires him to tether himself to one ideological faction or another through the couple form to be happy, as "happiness is the *opposite* of freedom, the *end* of becoming" (23, original emphasis), and here, the end of narrative.

Bunny has two major heterosexual relationships: his girlfriend Vee, the glamourous movie star, and Rachel Menzies, his radical comrade. As Hitchcock points out, "Vee is well drawn [. . .] and her relationship with Bunny permits Sinclair to consider the interrelationship of cinema and oil in the formation of Southern California's economy" (94). Her association with cinema and oil is thus an association with capitalism itself, which, according to the Frankfurt School, perpetuates itself through the culture industry. Indeed, Vee and cinema here function in a reductive fashion in the way that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorized:

"Entertainment makes itself possibly only by insulating itself from the totality of the social process, making itself stupid" (115). Bunny's radicalization is fragile and made possible only by the insulation of his immense material comfort. Thus, meeting Vee affords him the opportunity to be outside "the totality of social process," but only by investing in its ideological mediations—the fantasy of mass culture and cinema in general and its avatar Vee in particular. Indeed, the initial scene of their romance takes place on a beach, in cinematic terms filtered through Bunny's fascination and fulfilling his desire for adventure: "The young philosopher decided that he had had enough, and started to swim in; but then he noticed someone on horseback, galloping down the beach towards him. The figure was bare-headed and clad in knickerbockers, and appeared to be a man; but you never could be sure these days, so he swam and waited, and presently made out that it was Vee Tracy" (337-8). In a break from his ponderings, Bunny happens upon a thoroughly modern woman. Their flirting invokes various mythologies decontextualized and placed on the California beach. Vee regales Bunny with her remembrances of a religious pageant of King Solomon she once acted in—inserting Bunny into it for decidedly secular reasons, and they race across the beach. He sees himself as if from the perspective of an audience who "stare[s] at this amazing spectacle, an entirely naked youth running a race on the beach with a woman on horseback. [. . .]. [T]his was the latest freak of the idle rich!" (339-40). Their relationship throughout is mediated by culture and gossip, a performance of modern, romanticized and indeed cinematic youth.

Indeed, a defining event in their relationship is the screening of Vee's film about the Russian Revolution. Vee plays "a beautiful princess of the old regime, caught in the storm of the revolution, falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks, and making one of her famous 'get-aways'

with the aid of a handsome young secret service man!" (359). What Bunny sees on the screen is gorgeous and glittering—recall his childhood fascination with the highway—and utterly generic:

> It was a beautiful, almost idyllic world—one was tempted really to doubt whether any world so perfect ever had existed on earth. There was only one thing wrong with it, and that was a secret band of villains with twisted, degenerate faces [. . .]. They met to concoct anarchist manifestoes, intended to seduce the sweet innocent peasants; and to make dynamite bombs to blow up the noble-minded grand dukes. (368-9)

Bunny's response to Vee's film is equally rote and mercenary: "It is up to standard. It will sell" (370). The logic that ultimately paints Vee as an unsuitable partner for Bunny—if he is to continue his education into radicalization—is precisely that of the Adorno's culture industry. Adorno argues that the culture industry's "ideology above all makes use of the star system, borrowing from individualistic art and its commercial exploitation" ("Culture Industry Reconsidered" 101). While Vee's glamour may be attractive to Bunny, it is also a hindrance to his understanding of social totality. The film itself is technically impressive saccharine schlock, with clearly defined heroes and villains displacing social struggle onto the generics of a damsel in distress with stunning sets, bullets, sexual threats, a speed-boat, an automatic weapon, a motorcar, a chase, the American Navy as deus ex machina, and ending with "Old Glory," "The Stars and Stripes Forever," and the clasping couple (369). Vee's film is the ideal of Adorno's scorned mass culture: "In the products of the culture industry human beings get into trouble only so that they can be rescued unharmed, usually by representatives of a benevolent collective; and then in empty harmony, they are reconciled with the general" (Adorno 104-5), providing cheap thrills in the glorification of national mythology.

The novel legitimizes Bunny's choice to break up with Vee because she embodies exactly what his education seeks to overturn, in both her attraction and what that attraction obfuscates: "the young oil prince did not ask the 'natural-born aristocrat' to marry him. [. . .]. There was no way for him to avoid trouble [with her], except to give up the radical movement; and it was a fact that intellectually nothing else appealed to him" (436). Indeed, Vee ends up marrying into the aristocracy; while Bunny rejects her, she lands on her feet, and all that matters in her superficial world is how gossip frames it: "she chucked [Bunny] and married the Roumanian prince" (497). The plotline with Vee is necessary both for Bunny's radicalization—he must encounter the attractive alternative and reject it—as well as Sinclair's social project of making visible how capitalism commodifies social relations and requires culture and ideology to make this commodification palatable.

Bunny eventually ends up with Rachel, a traditional socialist though not a Bolshevik—a clear contrast to Vee's glamourous modernity. Rachel recognizes Vee's movie as "obstructing the emancipation for which human beings are as ripe as the productive forces of the epoch permit" (Adorno 106): "I think it's the most poisonous thing I ever saw on the screen. [. . .]. [P]eople who helped to make it will someday have on their conscience the blood of millions of young men" (371). As a Jewish radical whose family fled anti-communist violence in Eastern Europe, Rachel sees a direct line from counterrevolution to the American culture industry: "That picture is a part of the white terror, and the people that made it knew exactly what they were doing—just as much as when they beat my brother over the head and started to deport my father" (375). Bunny and Rachel couple up due to their dedication to overthrowing capitalism; Rachel expresses envy towards Vee, "I knew she was trying to take you out of the movement; and I thought for sure she would. She had everything I didn't have" (521), and their declaration of love

coincides with a commitment to the radical movement in founding a school. The *bildungsroman* form for Sinclair's didacticism serves as an entryway for readers to see how culture in its seductive attractions reproduces capitalist hegemony so they can then reject it.

While Bunny's narrative involves a young person growing into radicalism, the character of Ross traces what happens to an individual invested in capitalism and how his personal and human aspects bring about his downfall; that is, Ross shows how it is impossible for an individual to succeed within an inhumane system. From the beginning, Ross is associated with capitalism, and indeed he succeeds at developing oil fields with little resistance. As with the judge who removes speed-traps on the highway at Ross' command, politics are subject to the capitalist imperative. The radical Paul believes that true democracy requires overthrowing capitalism: "Democracy is the goal—it's the only thing worth working for. But it can't exist till we've broken the strangle-hold of big business" (432). The novel shows repeatedly how the limit of democracy is where capitalism permits it to exist. Bunny, horrified, confronts his father, "Dad, you're proposing to buy the presidency of the United States!" (299), but Ross replies: "Well, that's one way to say it. Another is that we're protecting ourselves against rivals that want to put us out of business. If we don't take care of politics, we'll wake up after election and find we're done for" (299). As Vredenburg points out, "Ross sees this not as bribery but simply as the cost of doing business" (263). Ross' argument is precisely anti-radical, coasting on the inevitability of the current system and the imperative for an individual to find his way within it: "There has got to be oil, and we fellers that know how to get it out of the ground are the ones that are doing it. [. . .]. You can talk about laws, but there's economic laws, too, and government can't stand against them, no more than anyone else. [. . .]. This is an oil age, and when you try to shut oil off from

production, it's jist like you tried to dam Niagara falls" (300). Resource extraction and capital accumulation here are as natural as water flowing due to gravity.

Indeed, Ross and his fellow oil-baron Vernon Roscoe expand their empire by configuring politics to facilitate the accumulation and flow of capital: "Money! Money! Money! It was pouring in upon Dad and Verne. Never had oil prices been so high, never had the flow at Paradise been so rapid. Millions and millions—and they were scheming to make it tens of millions. It was a game, marvelous, irresistible; everybody was playing it" (407). Yet as much as Ross and Roscoe display camaraderie and co-operation in their personal and political lives, Ross ultimately loses much of his fortune to Roscoe. Marx writes that in addition to accumulation, which is "that simple concentration of the means of production and of the command over labour," another form of centralisation takes place: "It is the concentration of capitals already formed, destruction of their individual independence, expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, transformation of many small into few large capitals" (*Capital* 347). Indeed, power within this system is concentrated in a select few who know what to do with the money: "the oil under Watkins' land would be worthless without Ross's expertise, and so the landowner is entitled onto the value of the land itself. Ross offers another justification for not paying full price: that Mr. Watkins can't be trusted with such wealth anyway" (Vredenburg 262). Considering this move as the shift from market to monopoly reveals how the novel exposes the freedom of capitalism and the equality of access as a lie.

Indeed, rather than bestowing freedom, capitalism limits the individual only to what serves the purpose of material accumulation. Ross shows repeatedly that he does not operate solely on the basis of brute calculation. Vredenburg argues that "Ross' faith in the ability of business to solve the world's problems is presented as a kind of naïveté, the mirror image of

Bunny's own youthful idealism. [. . .]. Sinclair suggests that a belief that businessmen can be trusted in the absence of regulation to act in anything resembling the public interest is ignorant of both human nature and the realities of power" (264). It is in fact Ross' human nature that allows him to be yet another victim of capitalist voraciousness. He indulges Bunny's education with a paternalistic condescension and uses his money to bail Paul, the agent of his son's radicalization, out of prison repeatedly. This leniency towards his son's radicalization and his faith in Roscoe, ultimately combined with his own desire for accumulating something immaterial, undoes his plan to have Bunny inherit and continue his business in the grand tradition of American wealth accumulation and futurity. Near the end of the novel, he meets Mrs. Olivier in Paris who acquaints him with "SPOOKS!!" (473). Ross, declining in health, casts off his previous skepticism of religion as yet another money-making scam and gets involved with Spiritualists, searching for accumulation and futurity beyond the material: Mrs. Olivier "had a famous medium who gave seances in her rooms [. . .]. Most amazing things had happened [. . .] that had taken Dad's breath away. [. . .]. If it was really true that we lived forever, why then it would be easy to endure any temporary discomfort, it was hardly worth arguing about such things as money. This from J. Arnold Ross!" (474). Ross and Mrs. Olivier marry, go on a seance tour, and not long after, Ross passes away. As far as Bunny and his sister Bertie know, "he had made a will, of course, and that infamous woman had destroyed it" (507). Ross' new widow takes half the money, but Bunny learns that Roscoe has been scheming all along: "Learning of Dad's death, Verne had quietly transferred the securities from Dad's strong box to his own, before the state inheritance tax commissioner came along to make his records! Verne wouldn't consider that stealing, but simply common sense—the same as taking the naval reserves away from a government which hadn't intelligence enough to develop them" (508). Roscoe, arguably the

most triumphant character of the novel, embodies a kind of capitalism that naturalizes power and gestures to the militarism, colonialism, and brute theft that make American capitalism and imperialism possible.

Yet Bunny does receive a million dollars of inheritance, which he uses to plan "a labor college on a tract of land somewhere in the country" (511) with Rachel and their university comrades. In Bunny's zeal and naïveté, he proclaims, "I don't want a polite place [. . .]. I want a gymnasium where people train for the class struggle; and if can't have discipline in any other way, how about this as part of the course—every student is pledged to go to jail for not less than thirty days" (513). The law here is still an antagonist, as with the speed cop, but instead of working around the system, soft Bunny believes he can endure incarceration. Indeed, if this is the future of radicalism, not only is it only made possible by oil money, but it also seems to restrict freedom in the worst caricature of communist hardship. As they plan, rather earnestly, "how to save society with a million dollars" (511), much of their vision revolves around absolute dedication to the cause and an asceticism that seems to reinforce the critique that socialism or communism creates uniformity; Bunny opines, "I think one reason the movement suffers is that we haven't made the new moral standards that we need. Our own members, many of them, are personally weak [. . .]. If the movement really meant enough to Socialists, thy wouldn't have to spend money for tobacco, and booze, and imitation finery" (511). In particular, sexual relations seem to be a problem—"It was the sex problem which had broken up that colony" (514)—and Bunny "admitted that this worried him. 'I suppose we'll have to conform to bourgeois standards'" (514). The problem with organizing a radical commune is that ideological purity is impossible; to begin with, the funding comes from resource extraction and the exploitation of

labour, and furthermore they have difficulty agreeing on the basic configuration of labour college.

Thus, whither radicalism? The revolutionary in the novel is Paul Watkins, and his story ends with death; he is both a noble sacrifice to the radical cause and a cautionary tale that reinforces the inevitable triumph of capitalism. Unlike Bunny, Paul goes abroad and experiences American and global militarism firsthand. Arguing against reform for a true revolution, he puts the stakes in global context:

> The determining fact in the world was what the capitalist class had done during the past nine years. They had destroyed thirty million human lives, and three hundred billions of wealth, everything a whole generation of labor had created. So Paul did not enter into discussions of morality with them; they were a set of murderous maniacs, and the job was to sweep them out of power. Any means that would succeed were moral means, because nothing could be so immoral as capitalism. (447)

Paul's conviction that the revolution should be achieved by any means necessary eventually lands him in the ranks of the murdered. A mob of "patriotic soldiers" descended upon Paul and the Industrial Workers of the World, destroying their headquarters and brutally beating those gathered. Sinclair describes this raid in horrific detail, including violence against children: "The flesh had been cooked off their legs, and they would be crippled for life: one was a ten year old girl known as 'the wobbly song-bird'; she had a sweet treble, and sang sentimental ballads and rebel songs, and the mob leader had jerked her from the platform, saying, 'We'll shut your damned mouth!'" (531). Bunny notes, "It was a spontaneous mob, said these law and order newspapers. But this fact was noted: on all other occasions there had been policemen at these

wobbly meetings, to take note of criminal utterances; but this night there had been no policeman on hand" (531); police surveillance extends to worker criminality, not worker security. The significance of this clearly immoral violence demonstrates how anti-revolutionary forces are not merely the state or police or oil barons but permeates social consciousness to the extent that a mob emerges from those who are also victims of capitalism and the militaristic imperialism that sustains it globally. Paul's death compels Bunny to connect all the various structures of capitalism and militarism as well as his own complicity. Throughout the novel, Bunny's education depends on Paul: "Paul had been the incarnation of the new, awakening working-class. Paul's mind had been a searchlight, illuminating the world-situation, showing Bunny what he needed to know. Now the light was out, and Bunny would have to see by his own feeble lantern" (534). Reframing the events of the novel in light of Paul's death, Bunny recalls

> Watching Dad deprive the family of their land; watching the oil operators crush the first strike; watching the government take Paul away and make him into a strike-breaker for Wall Street bankers; watching Vernon Roscoe throw Paul into prison; watching capitalism with its world-wide system of terror drive Paul here and there, harry him, malign him, threaten him—until at least it hired the brute with the iron pipe! (534)

Bunny's coming-to-consciousness necessarily involves recognizing that the structures he once thought were neutral—from which he benefitted—are oppressive by design.

In an unusually experimental passage for a mostly straightforward novel, Paul's death scene is interjected with the radio. The radio here anticipates the association of mass-communications technology and the slide from capitalism to fascism that Adorno warns about: as the radio blares and Paul lies on his deathbed, Bunny notes, "The radio is a one-sided

institution; you can listen but you cannot answer back. In that lies its enormous usefulness to the capitalist system. The householder sits at home and takes what is handed to him, like an infant being fed through a tube. It is a basis upon which to build the greatest slave empire in history" (539). Moreover, as LeMenager explains:

> Sinclair, in rare nod to Modernist technique, intercuts the absurdly pleasant song playing on a neighbor's radio with his manifest plot. The controlling voice of the novel, at this point an earnest Socialist youth, is silenced by popular lyrics [. . .]. Given that Sinclair was not a playful prose stylist, this rare instance of heteroglossic frisson points archly to the manner in which the comic potential of a modern consumer culture already founded upon cheap energy challenges the intention of "doing," as in acting in a manner that is truly counter to petro-capitalism. (63)

This formal experimentation and the making-visible of inequality could signal a differentiation between Sinclair's novel and the culture industry that he denounces through Vee's films and the radio; however, the novel portrays capitalist imperialism as totalizing and the narrative culminates in the death of the revolutionary. Adorno writes of the possibility of art in mass culture capitalism:

> Monopoly is the executory: eliminating tension, it abolishes art along with conflict. [. . .]. [Art] transfigures the world into one in which conflict is still possible rather than revealing it as one in which the omnipotent power of production is beginning ever more obviously to repress such a possibility. It is a delicate question whether the liquidation of aesthetic intrication and development

> represents the liquidation of every last trace of resistance or rather the medium of its secret omnipresence. ("The Schema of Mass Culture" 77-78)

While this popular novel foregrounds the horrors of capitalism, it does not offer any viable way or resisting it; the mere spectacle of the horror can in fact reinforce it—the reader has done their part in witnessing this tragic tale, and need act no further. Adorno addresses this kind of commercially successful writing: "In the case of the socio-critical novels which are fed through the best-seller mechanism, we can no longer distinguish how far the horrors narrated in them serve the denunciation of society as opposed to the amusement of those who do not yet have the Roman circuses they are really waiting for" ("The Schema of Mass Culture" 68). It is hard to see a meaningful difference between a reader of this novel and Bunny: "Sitting on the deck of this floating mansion, Bunny read about the famine on the Volga" (304). Sinclair's own commune, the Helicon Home Colony, lasted only a year, and there is little indication in the novel—particularly as it foregrounds dissent within the left—that Bunny's labour college will fare better.

Indeed, despite the couple-form of Bunny and Rachel, futurity in the novel is not heteronormative reproduction but rather the expansion of capital and the attrition of labour. The ending recalls the opening, reinforcing the inviolable power of capitalism to organize not only the land into highways but social, economic, and political relations as well; "money" is the magic that creates the beautiful roads, and in the end also buys an election: "It was the money of Vernon Roscoe and the oil men, of course: plus the money of the bankers and the power interest and the great protected manufacturer, all those who had something to gain by the purchase of government, or something to lose by failure to purchase" (535). Bunny's tract—"Ross Junior," which would have otherwise allowed him to inherit his father's wealth—becomes "the Roscoe Junior tract now, by the way, one of Vernon Roscoe's four sons being in charge of the job"

(548), the fact of Roscoe's triumph as the more ruthless capitalist. Before his death, Ross was planning a "big Mosul concession," and presumably along with his absorption of Ross' wealth, "Verne would do some more hocus-pocus—organize an Anglo-California Operating Company, and lease the Mosul tract to it, and swipe all the profits!" (516). Resource extraction and capitalist expansion exceeds national boundaries, and here anticipates the global petro-colonialism of late capitalism and the post-9/11 of *There Will Be Blood*. The broad trajectory of the novel shows capitalism's control over California and then the nation and finally expanding to a global scale.

The final paragraphs reject any form of vital futurity and evoke instead the inevitable and universal telos of death. The inaugural sacrifice of Ross' oil well was Joe Gundha, who fell down the hole during drilling. At the time Ross laments, "What can you do to help men that won't help themselves?" (152), putting the blame squarely on the individual worker rather than exploitative labour conditions. Indeed, even Bunny believes it is better to efface those conditions of production: "They might get Joe Gundha by the legs and they might get him by the face—ugh, the less you thought about a thing like that, the better for your enjoyment of the oil game!" (153). In the end, Paul's sister Ruth, already a ghost "wander[ing] over these hills, and call[ing] now for the sheep which were no longer there" (547) follows Joe Gundha into the hole to meet her own end, depicting oil capitalism as both originating in and perpetuating death. The novel returns to the direct address of the opening, yet again implicating the reader:

> You can see those graves, with a picket fence around them, and no derrick for a hundred feet or more. Some day all those unlovely derricks will be gone, and so will the picket fence and the graves. There will be other girls with bare brown legs running over those hills, and they may grow up to be happier women, if men can

> find some way to chain the black and cruel demon which killed Ruth Watkins and her brother—yes, and Dad also: an evil Power which roams the earth, crippling the bodies of men and women, and luring the nations to destruction by visions of unearned wealth, and the opportunity to enslave and exploit labor. (548)

If the project of the novel is rouse anti-capitalist sentiments, it is important to recall the famous proclamation in that exemplar polemic document, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*: "The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers" (217). The graves Sinclair evokes here are quite the opposite. Rather than a system with its own downfall embedded within, capitalism here exceeds even the Father Ross, and everyone is replaceable as the machine churns. The individual cannot thrive within capitalism if they cling to relations or investments beyond material accumulation. Making explicit the reader's complicity in this system—"you"—in the final passage implies that capitalism has the force to subsume whatever is in its path. The novel gives capitalism a supernatural "Power" that exceeds the material force of subsumption. Returning to the playing-card metaphor, the novel does not imagine how to rip up the deck or to create a new deck; it provides a narrative of social consciousness, but what is ultimately affirmed is not the path of revolution but rather the inevitability and invincibility of capitalism.

There Will Be Blood (2007): Spectacle and Spectres

That the novel is so explicitly Marxist helps us understand how the film, which appears to show capitalist triumph on a narrative level, actually functions as critique; the film allows us to re-read the novel as a triumph of the savviest capitalists and recognize the ways the narrative

actually undermines the radicalism of its protagonist. The shift in protagonist shows how its ideological adaptation does a more radical critique in foregrounding how even succeeding within the system is corrosive and monstrous. Cultural objects do not necessarily have to function to reproduce hegemony, and Anderson's film, as art-house cinema, functions not as reproducer of capitalist ideology but as critique by demonstrating that when these structures of power seem most strong they are also the most vulnerable. The heterogeneity in the novel—indicated by the playing cards metaphor and social mapping—becomes a singularity in the film: the haunted figure of Daniel Plainview. As Clover argues, "The problem of imaging the sequence of accumulation (if we are at the end of a cycle) is the problem of narrative itself" (Clover 34): the narrative promise here is that, with accumulation, there will be blood. While capitalism is seemingly infinite in its voracious accumulation, petro-capitalism has an endpoint. If climate apocalypse ends cycles of accumulation, *There Will Be Blood* imagines not the post-apocalyptic future but rather how the inviolability of oil-fuelled capitalism is a fantasy and its exhaustion is teleological, that is, embedded at the very beginning of accumulation.

The opening of the film shows the landscape not through a temporal movement as in the car ride of the novel but as the vast expanse of an apparent *terra nullis*. The stark beauty of the images as film draws attention to its technique; indeed Robert Elswit won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography. The film cuts between static images of a land waiting to be exploited and organized into derricks; Beller connects the cinematic image to capitalism: "When the circulation of capital is grasped as a kind of cutting, one grasps the generalized cinematicity of social organization, the spectacular arrangement of production, in short that the world is organized like a film. Cinema then, already is implied by capital circulation; dialectical sublation, as the metamorphosis of capital, is a slow form of film" (209). If the world is

organized like a film, this film also implies in its expansive all-encompassing shots that the film is also a coherent world and its totalizing logic is that of capital. LeMenager relates oil to bodies: "The representational problem oil presents [. . .] has to do with oil's primal associations with earth's body, and there with the permeability, excess, and multiplicity of all bodies" (73). One of the most spectacular scenes in the film brings the materiality of oil and bodies back to financialization on the cusp of crash: the oil derrick bursts, the music is rhythmic percussion, and the oil bursts into rising flames.

Plainview's body is the body of petro-capitalism. After the oil explosion, Daniel is covered in oil and the screen is black: oil is all there is. LeMenager reads this scene as a kind of diabolical gesture: "the spectacle of it gushing from the earth suggests divine or Satanic origins, a givenness that confers upon it an inherent value disassociated from social relations" (73). Compare this description to the "Power" evoked at the end of *Oil!*: capitalism is unnatural and inhumane, even coming from the earth itself it is disconnected with any kind of sociability. LeMenager looks at photographs depicting "the spectacle of the gusher and its blackening of oil workers, local buildings, and landscapes": "Such photographs suggest an industrial blackface whose secret joke is the multiform agency of money, rather than whiteness. However, race played an important role in the early oil industry. [. . .]. Blackness has nothing to do with race in this image" (75). The erasure of race here is the erasure of difference in the totalizing logic of capital; considering recent debates among David Harvey, Alex Dubilet, David Roediger, and others as to "whether the production of difference is in fact part of the inner logic of capital" (Roediger 3), the film proposes that substances and bodies here are subsumed to oil capital rather than any other kind of difference. That is, the omission of race demonstrates how this film reproduces a logic of capital without difference. In this sense, the film puts forth a fantasy that

the logic of capital is complete; yet when a structure seems the most totalizing it is the most haunted, whether by Satan or other spectres. Following Derrida, Marx's exorcism of the spectral (in the constitution of a totalizing system of dialectal materialism) is, in fact, a kind of guarantee of conjuration: the spectre always returns. In this way, Plainview's exorcism is a guarantee of haunting, but here the haunting occurs on the level of form.

The ostensible main conflict in the film, between Plainview and the evangelist Eli, is not a conflict in the novel at all, which illuminates how this conflict is indeed a false one that only serves to legitimize Plainview's dominance. On religiosity in the supposedly secular American state, Marx argues:

> Religion has become what it was *originally*, an expression of the *separation* of man from his *communal* nature, from himself and from other men. It now remains only an abstract recognition of a particular oddity, of a *private whim*, of caprice. The endless proliferation of religious sexts in North American, e.g., already gives religion the *external* form of a purely individual concern. It has been relegated to its place among numerous private interests and exiled from the communal being as communal being. ("On the Jewish Question" 104, original emphasis)

The inhabitants of Little Boston—the oil-rich land Plainview is buying up—repeatedly ask him if he is religious, as if that would provide some moral comfort to this capitalist enterprise. When Paul Sunday asks Daniel to which church he belongs, Daniel replies: "I enjoy all faiths. I don't belong to one church in particular. I like them all. I like everything." He is indiscriminate in his expansion and appropriation; the figure of capitalism devours all. The people want to believe in something outside capitalism but, as Marx contends, it is a trap that only serves to further alienation and private interests, no one's more so than Eli's. As the town builds up, Eli asks if the

new road will lead to the church, but as Phipps argues, “This moment frames the rivalry not as a battle for the minds of the citizens, but rather as a competition to determine where the interlinked chain of production and transformation will lead and how it will pay off” (41). Religion and capitalism are not rival systems, but rather the former is subsumed to the logic of the latter. This effect is heightened though the uncanny doubling of the ostensible antagonist Eli and his brother Paul—both are played by Paul Dano—who makes Plainview’s oil wealth possible by showing him where the oil-rich land is located and then disappears.

Indeed, reading the film in light of the novel makes it clear that religion is subsumed to the exigencies of capitalism. In the novel, Ross schemes a new religion into existence to keep the father Abel from beating Ruth; as he does this on a lark, they are unable “to forsee the consequences of their jest—a ‘revival’ movement that was to shake the whole State of California, or at any rate the rural portion of it, and of several states adjoining!” (118). Ross is quite literally the source of Eli’s religion: “He hadn’t wits enough to make up anything for himself, he had jist enough to see what could be done with the phrases Dad had given him; so now there was a new religion turned loose to plague the poor and ignorant, and the Almighty himself couldn’t stop it” (123). Of course, the latter phrase could very well refer to capitalism as well. In the film Eli’s evangelism precedes Daniel’s arrival, and the latter’s defense of Ruth is an almost comically aggressive assertion of dominance: he lightly slaps Ruth’s shoulders and says, “Daddy doesn’t hit you anymore does he? Does he now? He better not, right? I’ll take care of you.” The camera then cuts to Abel, who has been listening the whole time. Plainview then tells Ruth, to make clear that he does not care about her but rather emasculating Abel as a father, “go play some more and don’t come back!” Ross hardly registers Eli, while much of the film involves Daniel dominating Eli until its final culmination in the promise of blood.

One difference between the church and capitalism accounts for the discrepancies in their respective forcefulness: capital is material and actual, whereas the spirit Eli evokes has no sensuality or effectivity. Among the various exorcisms in this film is literal one: Eli banishes the ghost of arthritis from one of his followers. It is a hyperbolic, theatrical performance—it is obvious to Daniel and the audience that Eli is a fraud, but also that Eli benefits greatly from this show and his position in the community is a privileged one because of it. He mimes throwing the ghost out of the church, and this gesture points to the essential lack of materiality in his spiritual endeavours—in direct contrast to Daniel's capitalism. A hint of perversity surrounds the performance, particularly with Eli and the old woman's dance. Reaction shots show Daniel's disgust, and outside the church he reminds Eli that all activity must be subsumed under the imperative to "blow gold all over the place," pointing out that they have the same goal. Daniel connects the spiritual exorcism to profane profit: "Heard you were planning some renovations. [. . .]. That was one goddamn hell of a show." This scene is formally significant for its implication of the audience in its circuit of production; as Eli does his exorcism, the camera is outside and Eli emerges from the dark church in the light of the sun, looking into the camera and throwing the invisible spirit in our direction. Beller is helpful here in understanding the position of the cinematic spectator, how we are being addressed in an analogous way as the "you" in the opening of the novel: "Along with life and labor, the very consciousness of our bodies has been and is being expropriated. For this we have become not just spectators, but specters" (295). With religion the material has to be disavowed, but with capitalism it is precisely the point—yet both operate according to the same logic.

When Eli comes to Daniel asking for money for the church, Daniel responds by pointing out that if Eli is such a great spiritual healer why can he not cure his deaf son H.W., the film-

Bunny. Daniel then throws him in a mud puddle and beats him, using the materiality of oil to humiliate Eli, as if to say, if you want money, this is the "mud" of its source. Daniel later agrees to submit himself to one of Eli's histrionic performances, but only because he needs permission from Bandy to build a pipeline through his tract. The baptism scene includes in Eli's list of Daniel's sins, "you've lusted after women," which makes the rest of it seems absurd as it is hard to imagine Daniel having any kind of sexual desire for another human. Indeed, Daniel laughs as Eli slaps him, knowing what will happen: the teleological promise of blood that Eli cannot escape. Eli's performance draws out emotion from Daniel, but his outburst appears to be, at its root, displaced anger toward Eli; the net outcome is Daniel's dominion expanded—post-baptism he proclaims quite un-spiritually, "now there's a pipeline"—and Eli's expulsion from the community due to Daniel's inaudible threat. Daniel emerges victorious even as Eli uses all the resources at his disposal to humiliate him. Daniel has a power that Eli's "song and dance and superstition" necessarily does not have. The film adds the sham antagonist of religion while exorcising the spectre of leftist revolution from the novel. Phipps writes of this shift:

> the film retroactively inflates the all-encompassing power of the oil industry by giving the race for petrodollars a new face: the smooth-speaking, rage-filled, and psychopathically competitive Daniel. In this context, then *There Will Be Blood* is a narrative that has adapted itself to the twenty-first century by omitting socialism—not to depoliticize the oil boom, but to magnify the implications of capitalistic triumph through a new and frightening persona, Daniel Plainview. (35)

Indeed, the largely benevolent Ross materializes here in the violently embodied Plainview.

For all Anderson slashed from the novel, he could have written an original script, but the film explicitly claims paternity from Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* with its initial utterance. The first dialogue of the film occurs 15 minutes in, taken only slightly modified from the novel, and points to self-genesis: "if I say I'm an oil man, you got to agree" (37), shifting to emphasize the promise of dominance in the film, "if I say I'm an oil man you *will* agree." As Phipps argues, "Daniel is a character invested in the processes of production and transformation, not only because he works to turn crude oil into money, but also because he uses the money to remake his self-definition as an 'oilman'" (36). However, it is important to note that Daniel is not *sui generis*, however, but rather an adaptation of Ross. Derrida argues that "Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task" (*Specters* 67, original emphasis). The film sets itself to the task of inheritance regarding its fathers in American cinema. Derrida reminds us of "the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance [. . .]. An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself" (*Specters* 18, original emphasis). Invoking *patrilineage* thus requires acknowledging a plurality and heterogeneity. *There Will Be Blood* inherits from many different influential markers of American cinema, but three films in particular speak to the specifically spectral and hauntological aspects of the film: Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Robert Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941).

The opening of *There Will Be Blood* is an explicit homage to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, not only on a formal level, but thematically as well, depicting the genesis of civilization. The entire opening sequence is without language in both films. Jonny Greenwood's humming strings strongly resemble the music in the opening of *2001*, Gyorgi Ligeti's *Requiem*, to the extent that they use many of the same pitches for the long sustained notes. Both films feature a small band of primates (of varying evolution) in a desolate landscape, struggling for

survival. In *2001*, the monolith appears out of nowhere, paralleling the divine or Satanic origins of oil; reading the novel, Hitchcock identifies "a community of oil, hierarchical but nevertheless bound to a common destiny in the ability to make as if from nothing [. . .]. [T]hat special American necromancy" (91) which the film makes explicit through this gesture. The monolith in *2001* instigates an awareness in the primates of the boundaries of the self and the ability to extend those boundaries through prosthesis. The bone is no longer a mere remnant of a dead animal, but can be used as an extension of the hand in order to achieve other ends, specifically violent ones. Discovering one's ipseity has a correspondence in realizing the boundaries of the other; it is a short step to comprehending that those boundaries can be penetrated. *There Will Be Blood* has an analogic scene at the end of the film, in which Daniel beats Eli with a bowling pin much as the ape beats with the bone. In Anderson's film, Daniel touching the long black (monolith-like) pillar that emerges from the earth covered in oil is also a transformative but unanticipated moment—the men were looking for gold. Daniel becomes himself—he is civilized along with the bone, the oil—in the first linguistic utterance of the film: the signing of his name claiming the contents of the mine for himself. His ipseity is inextricably linked with this signature and the stake it claims.[38] The oil he finds, like the bone before it, is no longer merely a natural object, but one with use and exchange value; indeed, as a finite substance, this *ur*-commodity has unlimited surplus value. Arguably, Kubrick's film is non-teleological; it climaxes with an incalculable, unanticipated, regenerative event, one that signals justice and a future-to-come: the birth of the star-child. The teleological ending of *There Will Be Blood* is announced by the title; when that promise is fulfilled, justice is nowhere to be found within the

[38] This is, of course, also Derridean both in the invocation of ipseity (which is closely tied to Derrida's critique of sovereignty) and the signature (which in the lexicon of non-equivalent synonyms in deconstruction is an all-important site for the deconstruction of self-presence). That is, ipseity here is not total or coherent but infused or haunted with différance.

narrative itself. That a science-fiction film that deals mainly with space travel has formal and thematic similarities with an ostensible Western speaks not only to time out-of-joint, but to the spectral inheritance that *There Will Be Blood* owes to its cinematic predecessor in terms of representing the progression of human civilization through expansion and colonialism, whether teleological or not.

Robert Altman is in many ways a cinematic father[39] to Paul Thomas Anderson. Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999) is an homage to Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) and he was the standby director for Altman's final film, *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006). Moreover, Anderson dedicated *There Will Be Blood* to Altman and the spectre of Altman's revisionist Western *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* haunts Anderson's own film about the development of the West. In *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, a man of mysterious origin, just like Plainview, comes to a Western settlement and brings civilization in the form of a brothel. The town gradually develops with the help of Mrs. Miller, the intellect behind the operation, until a crisis arrives: the actual capitalists, the ones like Plainview, offer to buy the brothel and McCabe, a terrible businessman, refuses to agree until it is too late. *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* ends with the death of the protagonist, the triumph of the community in putting out a church fire, and the numbing of Mrs. Miller through narcotics—quite a different finish from *There Will Be Blood* Yet both films deal with the cultivation and civilization—indeed, reification—of the land, the process and progress by which the earth is appropriated and organized for capital. The great ideological clash in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, between religion, McCabe's old-fashioned fecklessness, and the power of capitalism, ends in the triumph of both religion and capitalism, the former embedded in the latter. The brothel funded the development of the church and the community requires religion,

[39] Indeed, a deliberately loaded term given this chapter's attention to patrilineal inheritance.

but neither require the individual McCabe. *There Will Be Blood* argues less that the community requires the church—as *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* does—but that the church is a "song and dance and superstition" show that is always-already subsumed to capital, since Eli first requires Daniel's financing.

In making his own great American epic, Anderson could not avoid the spectre of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Both films are character studies of larger-than-life capitalists from modest and somewhat ambiguous origins, both sovereigns of their respective domains. The most striking formal similarities are between the large rooms of Xanadu and the checkered floors and open spaces of Daniel's mansion, particularly in the use of wide-angle shots. The ever-expanding ipseity of Kane and Plainview require increasingly larger spaces in which to inhabit so they can isolate themselves in their sovereign domains. Kane is a more familiar character psychologically because the film provides access to his background and the rupture with his family that instigates his need for others. Yet Kane, like Plainview, desires most to subsume others under his own sovereignty. He denies any desire or agency to his wives or associates. As a melodrama, the generic narrative structure of *Citizen Kane* inevitably points back to a nostalgic past in order to redress lack and provide narrative closure. By contrast, *There Will Be Blood* is strongly teleological; the lack that drives the narrative is the spectre of competition for Plainview—the competitors within capitalism. Once he exorcises Eli, the last of the spectres, he is "finished." Derrida describes the spectre as "the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption" (*Specters* 170): Kane's death and the revelation that he longed most for the Rosebud simplicity of childhood work to expiate his transgressions, but Plainview, on the other hand, is a figure without expiation, one who exorcises the possibility for redemption. Daniel tells Henry about a house in Fond du Lac that was "the most beautiful house I'd ever seen and I wanted it. I wanted

to live in it and eat in it and clean it, and even as a boy, I wanted to have children to run around it." Daniel explicitly denies any Rosebud circularity: "I think if I saw that house now, it would make me sick." Unlike *Citizen Kane*, *There Will Be Blood* is not predicated on any notion of nostalgia for lost innocence or of justice or expiation. Daniel Plainview is a tyrant who subsumes those around him, indeed the very earth, to his indomitable will. The film denies Daniel any redemption and instead moves toward his actualization as absolute sovereign without justice.

These three American films are spectral fathers of *There Will Be Blood*, with heterogeneous relationships that are at once one of similarity and of difference. Derrida writes, "If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, and generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice*" (*Specters* xviii, original emphasis). Justice is an integral part of the spectral, the to-come, the event. On the one hand, the film denies justice diegetically; Daniel is the decider, the calculator. On the other hand, the film treats the aesthetic and thematic arrivals of its literary antecedent and its cinematic fathers with a hospitality and a sense of doing the films justice. Instead of denying its inheritances, *There Will Be Blood* works to incorporate them into its own myth of Americanness. In addition, following the framework of Fredric Jameson's category of "the ideology of form" from *The Political Unconscious*, *There Will Be Blood* is within the tradition of the independent art-house film, as it is a co-production of Paramount Vantage and Miramax. The film is less a profit-making product of a middle-brow culture industry than the closest we have to the vision of an artist within the capitalist studio system. Paul Thomas Anderson had the creative control to express his vision, rather than that of the studios. The narrative may make a constative claim for the inviolate expansion of capitalism, but the film as an artwork performs a counterpoint to that contention.

There Will Be Blood is a demonstration of the art and expression that is still possible within the capitalist system—an immanent critique of capitalism through a capitalist art form.

That time is out-of-joint aids us in historicizing the text: Henry's claim about being Daniel's "brother from another mother" alludes to *There Will Be Blood* as a contemporary film, a period with multiple conflicts in which the spectres of oil and capitalist exchange haunt the (liberal) imperative of human rights. *Specters of Marx* points to unconditional hospitality as a way to welcome spectres as *arrivants*, rather than *revenants*, in the name of justice beyond right or law. Yet hospitality in *There Will Be Blood* is always contaminated with hostility, calculation, and denies justice—the spectres who arrive are *revenants*. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida connects sovereignty and violence to hospitality, with the consequence that "Injustice, a certain injustice, and even a certain perjury, begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality" (55). He identifies the power of violence and law on one hand and hospitality on the other as heterogenous and indissociable. The motif of penetration—the domination over *revenants* through Daniel's body rather than the welcoming of *arrivants* in the film body—throughout the film relates to hospitality in that "Crossing the threshold is entering and not only approaching or coming" (*Of Hospitality* 123). Contrast this hardness to the protagonist of the novel: "Bunny was 'soft,' He entered easily into other people's point of view" (301); Daniel colonizes others into his own worldview. Derrida identifies a perversion that occurs in the act of hospitality: "it's *as if* the master, *qua* master, were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity [. . .]. So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage [. . .]. The guest becomes the host's host. [. . .]. These substitutions make everyone into everyone else's hostage" (*Of Hospitality* 124-5, original emphasis). Several scenes of characters giving or receiving hospitality occur throughout *There Will Be Blood*, not predicated on and without

concern for justice or unconditionality; on the contrary, hospitality in the film is based on calculated exchange. If, following Derrida, we take Kant's conception of the finitude of the surface of the earth to require hospitality, then Plainview's desire to expand his sovereignty and possess the earth requires some engagement with the rules of hospitality. He depends on others in order to enter their land and possess it.

One of the first scenes depicting this tension of hospitality and hostility is when Daniel and H.W. go to the Sunday ranch. They have information in advance about the household and the land from Paul, the spectral patriarch. Paul gives them access to the Sunday home, refuses Daniel's invitation to spend the night, and escapes never to be seen again; Plainview wants to dominate Paul by hosting him, but Paul recognizes that hostility can disguise itself as hospitality. The biological father, Abel, is a weak man who nevertheless has a strong sense of hospitality: he offers them help with the fire and setting up their tent, and also provides them with milk and food. Daniel is there to look for oil and buy the land, and in that he is deceiving his hosts. The hospitality the Sundays offer to Daniel expands into a welcome from the entire town of Little Boston as he buys up each lot, piece by piece, minus Bandy's tract: Daniel refuses to go to the religious old man Bandy and accept his hospitality, because he reads Bandy's conditions through the lens of capitalism, assuming that Bandy is trying to boost his price. Daniel is welcomed into the town only to claim and transform it from the inside. He is the hostile guest who holds the hosts hostage to his will.

Daniel does welcome Henry into his home and life, after accepting the letter as proof of Henry's identification as his brother, and this narrative thread illuminates Daniel's sense of ipseity and boundaries of the self—how he views the other and conceives of incorporating him into his ipseity. He wants to hear Henry say that he would like to be with Daniel, and did not

arrive merely because of the prospect of work and money. He asks Henry if he is an angry or envious man, as Daniel himself is, and when Henry replies that he "doesn't think so, no," Daniel reveals his strongest personality trait: "I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed. I hate most people." When Henry responds that he does not feel the same way at all, after all his failures, Daniel provides an important indication of his relationship to the other: "Well, if it's in me, it's in you." He singles out Henry as someone with a blood tie to himself, but as Phipps points outs, this "shared bloodline" is only valuable "insofar as this 'blood' can be converted into oil" (37); moreover, Daniel's "'family' consists of people who are tied to him by a financial dependency that inevitably destroys the manufactured blood relation" (38). That is, the capitalist relation rooted in oil is reified in familial ties rooted in blood.

Daniel rejects human connection outside of this relation and expresses his desire to make enough money to isolate himself: "I see the worst in people, Henry. I don't need to look past seeing them to get all I need. I've built up my hatreds over the years, little by little. Having you here gives me a second breath of life. I can't keep doing this on my own, with these...people"; recall here his earlier claim about "liking everything," as both ostensibly contradictory statements point to domination and accumulation. He takes Henry along to meetings with him, just as he did with H.W. before the boy lost his hearing. His investment in Henry is as someone who has some of Daniel in him, as someone who is not foreign to the ipseity and sovereignty and dominion that Daniel is building up and fortifying around himself. The truth that Henry is actually "nobody," an impostor who stole the identity of the deceased Henry Plainview, is all the more disruptive to Daniel because it at once confirms the possibility of the ghost of the actual brother and the impossibility of its incarnation in this "nobody." Before Daniel discovers the truth about Henry, his brother is a substitute for H.W. who he believes actually has some of

Daniel in him, unlike his adopted son. Henry tells Daniel he will leave him and pleads for mercy, "Daniel, I'm your friend. I'm not trying to hurt you. Never. Just survive." At this invocation of friendship, Daniel shoots Henry without a word: he cannot comprehend or incorporate a "friend," as he can an intimate blood tie. He cannot allow Henry to leave because the false brother would become a spectre and haunt him—he must be destroyed, exorcised. When Daniel reads the real Henry Plainview's diary, he weeps and mourns the brother he never knew, attempting to incorporate him textually as he consumes the pages, while also highlighting the impossibility for Daniel of unmediated or incalculable human connection. This sequence is striking because it demonstrates the impossibility of being a total capitalist as Daniel is haunted by the original dead brother after the banishing or exorcism of his repetition in the false brother.

Daniel adopts H.W., the son of the worker killed in the opening sequence, in order to have a "sweet face to buy land" and to demonstrate to landowners that he has "a real family business." He grooms H.W. to be his successor and the dynamic is one in which Daniel has complete control. Yet the spectre of H.W.'s dead father—the original sacrifice at the first gush of oil—haunts the relationship; Daniel is always aware that H.W. is not his biological son. The film jumps to 1927 for their final scene: the first shot is of H.W. and Mary Sunday's wedding, and Daniel is notably absent. H.W. comes with his interpreter to Daniel's office to tell him that he is leaving to drill in Mexico with his wife. At first H.W. tries to be reconciliatory, telling his father, "I love you very much," and that he prefers having him as a father rather than a business partner, an impossible distinction to Daniel. Daniel responds, "that makes you my competitor," pointing to how "the influence of capital dissolves any difference between Mexico and the United States" (Vredenburg 265). Daniel seizes the moment to exorcise himself of the spectre of H.W.'s biological father and the lack of blood tie between him and H.W.: "You're killing us with what

you're doing. You're killing my image of you as my son. [. . .]. You're not my son. [. . .]. You're an orphan. You operated here today like one." The scene echoes Daniel's earlier conversation with Henry. In language similar to Daniel's description of his own feelings, he tells H.W., "you've been building your hate for me, piece by piece. I don't even know who you are because you have none of me in you. You're someone else's. This anger, your maliciousness, backwards dealings with me." The personality traits he ascribes to H.W. are his own, despite his claim that they do not come from him. As H.W. leaves, he repeats, "You're not my son, just a little piece of competition." This final rupture is one that allows Daniel to exorcise the spectre of not having a biological son or anyone with biological ties; naming him as competition allows Daniel to comprehend him in a way that he never could as his fabricated son—the complexities and contradictions that came from raising him to be his successor and then taking care of him after his accident have been reduced to a relationship of competition. Daniel's claims, "I should have seen this coming," and indeed it is a calculable rupture. After H.W. leaves, the film cuts to scenes of them together when he was a child. The music is soft and could accompany a nostalgic remembrance of happier times. Yet the scenes depicted are not ones of tenderness but rather aggression: the teasing and playful slaps are manifestations of underlying tension. The flashback ends with the camera following Daniel who walks alone toward the derrick, H.W. and Mary receding from the screen. These scenes confirm how the film has affectively allied the spectator with H.W. all along, the spectral son, and the total alienation of Daniel from everyone else. The image captures his capitalist imperative while others form interpersonal relationships by acknowledging heterogeneity and the subjectivity of others; Daniel desires only to possess and totalize.

For the final confrontation between Daniel and Eli, the film skips forward to 1927—we can travel in time but cannot escape the spectre, and Eli enters Daniel's house as a *revenant*. The inebriated Daniel is at his seemingly weakest at the beginning of the final sequence, but he is actually on the verge of his capitalist apotheosis, fulfilling the promise to exorcise the final spectre—a discrepancy between the actual and the apparent. Daniel signs his name, as he did earlier in the film, but the sense is that his business now is signing papers and checks; he no longer acts or works in order to acquire capital. His capital is so firmly in the surplus category that he does not know what to do with himself: he engages in target practice indoors, destroying his possessions. When Eli enters the bowling room, he is physically dominant and Daniel is passed out in the lanes. His body is permeable, grotesque: he drinks, sweats, drools, eats, and removes food from his mouth. Eli is dressed smartly and comes with a business proposal. Daniel allows Eli to believe he has leverage, that Bandy's tract still contains oil, but will do business with him on the condition that he expose once and for all the falsity of his religion. Furthermore, Daniel requires Eli to do so using the form and theatricality of one of his church performances: "I'd like you to tell me that you are, and have been, a false prophet, and that god is a superstition. [. . .]. Say it like you mean it. Say it like it's your sermon." When he has Eli say the lines with the same abandon that Daniel himself shouted, "I've abandoned my boy!" during his conversion, he reveals to Eli that his sovereign dominion has already exploited Bandy's tract by surrounding it: "It's called drainage, Eli. See, I own everything that's around it, so, of course, I get what's underneath it." Daniel continues eating and sweating, but his inviolable ipseity is evident—he is dominant over Eli and the younger man was never any real competition for Daniel. His triumph over Eli is calculable and inevitable, even over a decade into the future. Daniel tells Eli, "I drink the blood of lamb from Bandy's tract," echoing his repetition of the line "give me the blood"

during his conversion—as Eli's followers were chanting, there is indeed "power in the blood." Daniel needs to assert his power over Eli before he destroys him; otherwise his triumph is not an exorcism, a "breaking" and a "beating," but a mere killing. Eli tells Daniel he needs "a friend," but Daniel has already demonstrated with Henry that he does not tolerate friendship. Each of Eli's confessions of sin fuels Daniel as he grows more dominant. He invokes Paul Sunday, telling Eli that Paul is "the chosen brother" who found Daniel to take the oil out of the ground—making Daniel the chosen of the chosen one. Daniel is absolutely sovereign and inviolable—"I am the Third Revelation. I am who the Lord has chosen"—the centre around which others must organize themselves. He is the figure who cannot be ignored; Daniel as the embodiment of capitalism subsumes the external world to his will and requires others to recognize him even as he does not acknowledge their subjectivities.

The hyperbolic and excessive final scene between Daniel and Eli is an explicitly calculable incident that fulfills the promise of the title; the bowling lane echoes earlier images of railroads and landscapes leading to the horizon, and the form of the game itself parallels Daniel's unimpeded trajectory. Indeed, he fulfills the promise of his name, Plainview, which points to teleological calculability: the view is plain, the end anticipated, the *revenant* spectres exorcised. The physical excess of this scene parallels the scene in the church when Eli forces Daniel's confession: Eli "waves his hand as if to indicate that *this* is Hollywood, a self-reflexive moment that is carried forward when Daniel coerces him into giving a performance of apostasy that is reminiscent of his stage acting in church. This is the first time the film deliberately alludes to its own medium, but Hollywood remains at the backdrop of the entire narrative" (Phipps 38, original emphasis). Indeed, the pervasiveness of Hollywood, only made explicit in this final scene, occurs not only on the level of its own medium but the historical relationship between oil

and cinema, or as Hitchcock puts it, “Hollywood was oil’s industrial ‘brother’” (Hitchcock 96). Its convergence here gestures to the various collapsing of substances: body and earth, oil and blood, narrative and medium. Daniel requires every one and thing to follow the logic of oil, no disavowal or fetishism, but rather the demystification and making-visible: oil from the ground and blood from the body. Eli’s clean suit and slick hair are the same formal mediations that cover what he is really after—the same as Plainview without his power to acquire. If, following LeMenager, there is something diabolic about Plainview, this confession to the devil leads to death rather than expiation.

In his insatiable voraciousness, Daniel tells Eli, “I told you I would eat you! I told you I would eat you up!” which echoes his line to Tilford, “I told you what I was going to do.” Murphet criticizes the ending of the film, citing “a formal incoherence and a fatal contradiction between a cinematic and histrionic mastery at the level of technique, and a rigidly bathetic banality at the level of narrative destiny” (85). However, Murphet’s reading appears to miss the point exactly: the inviolable sovereignty of capitalism requires the ending to be calculated, indeed part of the structure of capitalist hegemony. Daniel explains the capitalist mechanism to Eli: “If you have a milkshake, and I have a milkshake, and I have a straw, there it is. That’s the straw, you see? Watch it. Now my straw reaches across the room and starts to drink your milkshake. I drink your milkshake! I drink it up!” Eli was never a legitimate rival because the very nature of capitalism is to expand and appropriate; Eli can be in possession of his glass, just as Bandy is of his tract, but Daniel’s (phallic, penetrative) straw will suck all the exploitable material out of it, no consent or negotiation required. With his destruction of Eli, Daniel proclaims, “I’m finished,” and the film cuts to the end credits with the same Brahms concerto that accompanied the primal scene of drilling in Little Boston—the music here emphasizes the

teleological form of the narrative. Daniel has rid himself of spectres; the net result of the exorcism of ghosts is the triumph of capitalism. The most histrionic, hyperbolic, and excessive is also the most calculable, because calculation is the essence of an exchange economy that accumulates surplus value. On Derrida's spectres, Jameson argues that that Marx's "error" is that he wants to get rid of ghosts, "that it is desirable to do so" ("Marx's Purloined Letter" 58): "Derrida [. . .] diagnos[es] and demounc[es] the opposite excess: that of a present that has already triumphantly exorcised all of its ghosts and believes itself to be without a past and without spectrality, late capitalism itself as ontology" (59)—there is no room for justice there, which requires welcoming the *arrivant* not exorcising it.

Going back to Derrida's claim that when hegemony is strongest it is also the most haunted reveals how the film critiques the very thing it foregrounds as unstoppable. Daniel is a not an aspirational figure but rather a grotesque and miserable one. Szeman writes, "The success of capital is dependent on continuous expansion, which enables not only profit taking but investment in the reproduction of capital that is a necessary condition for its continuation on into the future" ("System Failure" 807). Plainview is "finished"—for all he possesses, none of it will continue into the future; contrast with Ross, who has real human paternal connection with Bunny but also leaves him at least part of his fortune. The couple at the end, H.W. and Mary, remains in the oil business. Szeman writes of the futurity of petro-capitalism: "Whiter capital? Will the end of oil capital bring an end to capital as such (and thus, potentially, in its wake, bring new political possibilities)? The expectation that haunts the future is not the end of capital, but that, despite everything, oil capital will not end until every last drop of oil (or atom of fossil fuels) is burned and released into the atmosphere" (820). Capitalism seems inexhaustible, but oil is a finite resource and climate change could bring about not just the end of accumulation but

apocalypse. Daniel Plainview's body in this final scene, to use a capitalist metaphor, is spent: he breathes heavily and can hardly hold himself up. In other words, he embodies exhaustion. The film does not imagine a future—it is not a post-apocalyptic text—but it does make visible that what appears total actually has permeability and temporality, haunted by the past of the novel and its filmic fathers and the impossibility of an indefinitely accumulating future.

On the one hand, the narrative trajectory makes the case for the inviolable ipseity and unstoppable expansion of capitalism. On the other hand, for all the weak or deceased fathers and denial of paternity within the film, the film as a text welcomes Sinclair and its cinematic fathers as *arrivants*, in formal references and thematic allusions. In presenting its origin myth of American civilization, Anderson's film explicitly acknowledges and embraces its debt to what came before, gesturing to the possibility of hospitality and justice in the narrative that refuses them. On welcoming Marx's ghost, Werner Hamacher writes, "The spirit of Marxism [. . .] is thus first and foremost the absolutely abstract formality of the promise: the opening of a future which would not be the continuation of pasts but for the first time exposes the claim of these pasts, the opening of another time—a time other than the time of labor and capital—the opening of a history which in fact gives all previous history its room for maneuver" (201). In embodying the grotesque figure of capitalism in Daniel Plainview, the film also offers a strong indictment of the tyranny of capitalism and the misery, blood, and warfare that are byproducts of capitalism. Plainview is a triumphant figure within the narrative, but in the formal, intertextual terms of the film he embodies the failure to thrive. If the goal of the capitalist is to expand infinitely, Plainview is contracted, isolated—contrasted to Ross, who dies but seems happiest in the last days. This film is anti-capitalist in a way the novel is not because it shows the grotesqueness of triumph, or at LeMenager argues, "The film is 'about' obsolescence as an excess of feeling,

extravagant feeling that is the wake of spent stories and modes of production" (81). Yet *There Will Be Blood* welcomes the stories and art-house cinema in which it is part of a chain; what is spent here is the figure of capitalism. The horror of the muckraking novel is what happens to Paul and the other workers, but in its ideological adaptation the horror of *There Will Be Blood* is what Plainview is, always-already, as the sheer presence and apotheosis of capitalism. The conflict on the level of narrative of capitalism vs. religion is a fabrication and deflection of the real tension in the film: the unresolvable différance of artwork as critique and cultural product as reproducing hegemony that belies the totalizing logic of subsumption and opens up the sheer present of capitalism to an incalculable future-to-come. *Oil!* and *There Will Be Blood*, inversions that both foreground their objects of critique, dismantle the naturalized mythology that America, a nation constructed through resource extraction and capitalism subsumption, could ever make possible the conditions of freedom and justice.

Transcendent Desire: Zora Neale Hurston, Oprah Winfrey, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is one of the most widely studied novels by a Black woman writer of early-20th-century American literature, with contested interpretations ranging from denunciation to glorification. Richard Wright famously indicted the novel for reproducing white supremacist views of Black people and culture: "Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh. Her characters [. . .] swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears" (76, original emphasis). In another contemporaneous review, Otis Ferguson similarly pointed to the anthropological distance between the narration and dialogue: "To let the really important words stand as in Webster and then consistently misspell no more than an aspiration in any tongue, is to set up a mood of Eddie Cantor in blackface" (78). Yet after Alice Walker's rediscovery of Zora Neale Hurston in the 1970s, *Their Eyes* has been taken up in liberatory ways, particularly by Black women. Apart from Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and other writers, popular figures such as trans activist and writer Janet Mock[40] and rapper Cardi B[41] have also named Hurston's novel as an influence and inspiration. Indeed, the broad circulation of the novel attests to its complexities beyond the reductive indictment of mere minstrelsy.

[40] "Zora Neale Hurston wrote that Janie's 'soul crawled out from its hiding place' when she met Tea Cake. I wanted to come out of my hiding place. I wanted a love that would open me up to the world and to myself. I wanted my own Tea Cake who wanted all of me" (Mock 4-5).

[41] "She lists her favorite books: *To Kill a Mockingbird, Their Eyes Were Watching God,* and *The Coldest Winter Ever,* by Sister Souljah" (Weaver).

At contention are both Zora Neale Hurston herself as a prominent figure of Black conservatism and the manifestation of her politics in protagonist Janie's narrative of self-actualization. Out of the four texts under consideration in this dissertation, Hurston's character occupies the most marginalized structural position. Yet unlike Lily, Gatsby, and Ross/Plainview, Janie's narrative does not foreground the structural limits on individuals but rather the possibility of individual transcendence of those limits, the fulfillment of the promise of exceptionality. If what is at stake in my reading is the tension between a liberal view of society as an aggregate of individuals and a perspective that puts forth a systemic totality, then Hurston's narrative posits that, on the scale of the individual, it is possible to thrive beyond the circumscription determined by patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism. It is no coincidence, then, that the novel would be adapted by Oprah Winfrey, the first Black female billionaire, in a film branded as *Oprah Winfrey Presents Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005). Moreover, following Adorno's contention that culture reproduces hegemony, it is similarly unsurprising, given the kinds of narratives that circulate in culture industry, that Hurston appealed to white audiences and her novel is a rare film adaptation of a Black woman author. Hurston's work foregrounds individual self-actualization as a resistance to the social death of formerly enslaved people in America. Janie's trajectory in both novel and film ends with her blossoming as a woman alone; self-actualization here is deliberately vague, only articulated through metaphors, and futurity is located not in the couple-form but rather in the fecundity of her environment itself.

The methodology of this chapter involves an analysis of Zora Neale Hurston as represented through her memoir and essays along with the brand of producer Oprah Winfrey in order to examine the discourses of individual agency and transcendence that these historical

figures put forth. Hurston used her lover Percival Punter as an inspiration for Tea Cake[42] and, as the personal attacks on the author in reviews of the novel suggest, the relationship between the figure of Hurston and her fictional protagonist Janie is muddled at least on the level of the politics of self-actualization. Oprah, for her part, reads the novel as an epic love story: "I got the book and remember reading it straight through and was bawlin' like a baby when Tea Cake was telling Janie she was like the roses. It's my favorite love story of all time. Because ultimately it's about learning to love what's real about yourself, so that you're free to love as you choose" (qtd. in Plant 198). Seeing herself as part of a genealogy of Black women, Oprah bought the rights to many Black women's writing with the intent to bring them to a wider audience: "As the most successful daytime television talk-show host the networks have ever seen, and as the first black female ever to own a prosperous TV and film production company, Oprah Winfrey is buying up TV and film rights to all the 'black feminist' literature she can lay her hands on" (Wallace 245). Yet as Michelle Wallace points out, placing "black feminist" in quotation marks, that "in an attempt to mainstream 'black feminism'" the Oprahfication of these texts produce "sentimental tale(s) having little to do with 'black feminism'—that is, little to do with changing the status and condition of black women as a group" (245). Inspirational narratives may contribute to individual thriving on a personal level—and, in this case, also provide an alternative to prevalent and repeated representations of Black death—while reinforcing patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy on a systemic level. Holding these critiques, this chapter examines the ways that Oprah's investment in narratives of self-actualization, the empowerment of the individual rather than the collective, dovetails with Hurston's individualism and contingent refutation of the persistence of historical systems of oppression: Oprah's ideological adaptation of *Their Eyes*

[42] Hurston received a Guggenheim fellowship and took the opportunity to leave Punter and go to the Caribbean: "I tried to embalm all the tenderness of my passion for him in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (*Dust Tracks* 211).

manifests these politics by taking the articulation of metaphors that obliquely define self-actualization in the novel and materializing them visually through dehistoricized images of bodily integration with the environment. The film follows a Deleuzian model of desire that takes the individual out of history and the structures of subjectivization into a radical assemblage with nature; yet without a concept of subjectivity or interpellation by systems, this transcendent desire cannot abolish the material systems of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism, and thus can only exist as metaphorical fantasy. Nevertheless, the fantasy of a subjectless body deterritorializing to form connections is a seductive one, particularly for those who occupy marginalized subject positions. The film plays to this appeal to resist social death and imagine new configurations in order to craft an Oprahfied inspirational narrative for its viewers. The novel acknowledges systemic oppression to reject its imposition; the film takes this rejection further by effacing those structures in favour of a conception of desire that produces connections, ultimately breaking down the distinction between body and world, materializing the fantasy of transcendent desire that in the novel's imagination can only exist in metaphor.

History, the Afterlives of Slavery, and the Contradictions of Zora

As "Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*" investigates, the thickening of mediation in the move from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration demonstrates the persistence of history in the present as its transmutation into increasingly masked forms—the adaptation of ideology. Contemporary work on the persistence of anti-Blackness provides some context into how social death can be resisted while also attending to history. In particular, Christina Sharpe illuminates:

> the condition of post-Civil War United States of the formerly enslaved and their

> descendants; still on the plantation, still surrounded by those who claimed ownership over them and who fought, and fight still, to extend that state of capture and subjection in as many legal and extralegal ways as possible, into the present. The means and modes of Black subjection have changes, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain. (12)

Sharpe uses the metaphor of the "wake," the effect and trace of the ship in the water, to describe the form of this repetition of subjugation: "individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery" (8). Yet the key for Sharpe is that it is a not totalizing, and resistance is possible: "while the wake produces Black death and trauma [. . .] we, Black people everywhere and anywhere we are, still produce in, into, and through the wake an insistence on existing: we insist Black being into the wake" (11). Sharpe emphasizes the importance of history in "wake work": "our knowledge, of slavery and Black being in slavery, is gained from our studies, yes, but also in excess of those studies; it is gained through the kinds of knowledge from and of the everyday, from what Dionne Brand calls 'sitting in the room with history'" (12).

Like Hurston, whose anthropological work documents the quotidian lives of Black folks, Sharpe is interested in the question: "how does one memorialize the everyday?" (20); yet for Sharpe persistence and survival does not depend upon a disavowal of the past or a focus on individual thriving but rather an attention to history and collectivity:

> At stake is not recognizing antiblackness as total climate. At stake, too, is not recognizing an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being. How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unliveable? These

> are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold time of the wake. At stake, then is to stay in this wake time toward inhabiting a blackened consciousness that would rupture the structural silences produced and facilitated by, and that produce and facilitate, Black social and physical death. (22)

Thus Sharpe's model of the wake holds both anti-Blackness as a structure—"the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack (104)—and the possibility of navigating a consciousness that resists social death. Following her metaphor of shipping and her engagement with Dionne Brand's work, she evokes the concept of the "ruttier," a chart to make this climate legible and survival or even thriving possible. Sharpe concludes *In the Wake* with a crucial exhortation to this possibility of resistance to social death that simultaneously acknowledges the enormity of the structures of anti-Blackness:

> Brand's 'Ruttier' writes and contains Black being as it has developed in the wake; Black being that continually exceeds all of the violence directed at Black life; Black being that exceeds that force. For Brand, all of this is knowledge and wealth. And she offers us a song, a map to anywhere, to everywhere, in all of the places in which we find ourselves. The Ruttier: a map to be held; to behold. So here we are in the weather, here in the singularity. Here there is disaster and possibility. And while '*we are constituted through and through and by continued vulnerability to this overwhelming force, we are not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force*.' (134, original emphasis)

Sharpe argues here that Blackness does not have to be defined by the negation that structures anti-Blackness. The invocation of "we" and "us" points to the necessity of collectivity in navigating the wake of anti-Blackness and finding the space for Black being that resists the

overwhelming force of social death.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, often read as overly focused on social death,[43] also writes about Black joy as a way to carve out a space resisting anti-Blackness. While he defines Blackness within the framework of white supremacy, that negation (not-white) is not the totality of Blackness:

> We have taken the one-drop rules of Dreamers and flipped them. *They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people.* [. . .] [W]e have made a home. As do black people on summer clocks marked with needles, vials, and hopscotch squares. As do black people dancing it out at rent parties, as do black people at their family reunions where we are regarded like the survivors of a catastrophe. As do black people toasting their cognac and German beers, passing their blunts and debating MCs. *As do all of us who have voyaged through death, to life upon these shores.* (*Between the World and Me* 149, emphasis added)

Acknowledging the violence of anti-Blackness (needles, vials, catastrophe) along with the policing of race (one-drop rule), Coates identifies a space of liberation in the collective, not individual exceptionalism but through connections with others in the everyday. Like Sharpe, the invocation of "we" and "us" is essential to the crafting of collective Black survival: that is, despite being racializ*ed*, making "ourselves in a people."

Hurston's extensive and thorny body of work tackles many of the same issues of quotidian joy and resisting social death, yet in much of her work she dismisses the importance that thinkers such as Sharpe and Coates place on history and collectivity. In "How It Feels to be Colored Me" (1928), Hurston writes, "Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the grand-daughter of slaves" (1041). This "someone" appears to be an aggregate of individuals

[43] See R.L. Stevens, "Between the Black Body and Me," in *Jacobin Magazine*: "What we find all too often in Coates's narrative universe are bodies without life and a racism without people."

exhorting her to recognize the afterlives of slavery, rather than the persistence and interpellation of structural white supremacy. Anticipating passages from her memoir, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she writes, "Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. [. . .]. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization" (1041). As in the end of *Dust Tracks*, she views the present moment as full of potential, with expectations for her as a Black woman set lower than for white people: "No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame" (1041). If the legacy of slavery persists, it does so in a negative way for white people: "The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed. The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting" (1041). The apparent claim here is that white guilt over slavery and the loss of privilege is worse than the aftermath and continuation of oppression. Hurston constructs a subject position here that, while racialized through difference—"I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (1041)—also has the potential to transcend that racialization: "I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville [. . .]. The *cosmic Zora* emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads. I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries"[44] (1042, emphasis added). The ideal of resisting racialization and social death by communing with the universe may sound poetic and have strong appeal, but individuals cannot choose their way out of oppression. Hurston sees herself raced as "a brown bag of miscellany" (1042), a container of

[44] The connection to some eternal or cosmic nature is foregrounded in *Their Eyes* and, as I later argue, intensifies both visually and with the narrative in the film adaptation.

melanin with contents “a jumble of small things priceless and worthless” (1042). She calls for a common humanity over the divisiveness of racial categories, as if individuals can, on their own, decide that historically grounded white supremacy no longer applies to them.

In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston denounces the Black intelligentsia for focusing on the “Race Problem”: “I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. [. . .]. Different idioms, yes. Circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no” (171). Certainly, race, as a social construct, is not an inherent difference, but the ways that it is constructed have material consequences across time, from colonization and slavery onward, and across scale, from the individual to the group. In her memoir, Hurston is explicit about the resistance to systemic oppression being located in the individual: “I had no need of either class or race prejudice, those scourges of humanity. The solace of easy generalization was taken from me, but I received the richer gift of individualism. When I have been made to suffer or when I have been made happy by others, I have known that individuals were responsible for that, and not races. All clumps of people turn out to be individuals on close inspection” (248). Here, Hurston views American society as an aggregate of discrete individuals, conflating critiques of white supremacy with critiques of individual white people, just as the previous statement collapses the difference between the social construction of race and its material effects. The white man who delivered her when her mother was in labour became the “one person who pleased me always” (30) and taught her about the world: “‘Snidlits [his pet name for her], don’t be a nigger,’ he would say to me over and over. ‘Niggers lie and lie!’” (30). An explanatory footnote states, “The word Nigger used in this sense does not mean race. It means a weak, contemptible person of any race” (30). She further explains in the body of the text, “I knew without being told that he was not talking

about my race when he advised me not to be a nigger. He was talking about class rather than race" (32). Here, Hurston evacuates the systemic and historical operation and specificities of race and class to put forth a view of hierarchies as individuals with personal character merits or flaws. Hurston uses a deliberately provocative word—consider Irene's reaction in *Passing* to Jack Bellew's use of the term, even when not directed towards her—to reinforce her argument for a model of society as an aggregate of individuals who exercise agency and can choose whether to be honest, hard-working, and successful despite whatever the historical or systemic conditions.

Arguing against the Black intelligentsia's calls for race consciousness and pride as impossibly divisive, she asks, "how can Race Solidarity be possible in a nation made up of as many elements as these United States? [. . .]. During the Civil War Negroes fought in the Confederate Army because many Negroes were themselves slave-owners [. . .]. And why should Negroes be united? Nobody else in America is" (251). Indeed, class and other intersections across race make solidarities difficult: "What that educated Negro knows further is that he can very little towards imposing his own viewpoint on the lowlier members of his race. Class and culture stand between. The humbled Negro has a built-up antagonism to the 'Big Nigger'" (178). Hurston reasonably points out the differences within groups of individuals but extends it to say that the individual is the only social unit and any attempt at forming solidarities across those differences is not only futile but anathema: "Racial Solidarity is a fiction and always will be. Therefore, I have lifted the word out of my mouth. [. . .]. Being an American, I am just like the rest of the Yankees, the Westerners, the Southerners, the Negroes, the Irish, the Indians, and the Jews" (252). Yet whiteness protects itself even as it polices class; consider in *Gatsby* Nick protecting Daisy rather than confronting Tom about the "unutterable fact that it wasn't true" (Fitzgerald 175) that Gatsby killed Myrtle. What is "unutterable" there is the solidarity and

protection that whiteness affords despite the fantasy of American equality—the utterance would cut through that illusion. Despite cleavages within systemic categories, groups can and do protect, police, and reproduce themselves, from old money and whiteness to the Black intelligentsia by which Hurston felt policed and the residents of Eatonville's harsh talk about unconventional Janie.

Contrary to Sharpe's exhortation to "sit in the room with history," Hurston's view of historical legacy is that it is a burden the individual can choose to transcend. Responding to Black activists who focus on race and the afterlives of slavery, Hurston writes:

> I see nothing but futility in looking back over my shoulder in rebuke at the grave of some white man who has been dead too long to talk about. That is just what I would be doing in trying to fix the black for the dark days of slavery and the Reconstruction. From what I can learn, it was sad. Certainly. But my ancestors who lived and died in it are dead. The white men who profited by their labor and lives are dead also. I have no personal memory of those times, nor no responsibility for them. Neither has the grandson of the man who held my folks. (*Dust Tracks* 229)

Like Gatsby claiming the agency to rewrite the past, Hurston addresses the limits of individual agency within historically grounded systems by claiming that a focus on history slows down individual self-actualization. As a "mixed-blood" person, she "neither consider[s] it an honor or a shame" (191) how this genealogy came out, or the trauma of the historical rape of Black women:

> It does not matter in the first place, and then in the next place, I do not know how it came about. Since nobody ever told me, I give my ancestress the benefit of the

> doubt. She probably ran away from him just as fast as she could. But if that white man could run faster than my grandma, that was no fault of hers. Anyway, you must remember, he didn't have a thing to do but to keep on running forward. She, being the pursued, had to look back over her shoulder every now and then to see how she was doing. And you know your ownself, how looking backward slows people up. (191)

Here, the white man acts without the burden of looking backwards, which slows down individual progress. Thus the disavowal of historical legacy here is a model for agency: "The present is upon me and that white man's grand-children as well. [. . .]. Since I cannot pry loose the clutching hand of time, I will settle for some influence on the present" (254). Hurston calls for both individual and a common humanity; that is, the common humanity of individuals connected by this essential humanness—a resistance to social death. She concludes the published version of *Dust Tracks*:

> I have no race prejudice of any kind. My kinfolks, and my 'skinfolks' are dearly loved. But I see the same virtues and vices everywhere I look. So I give you all my right hand of fellowship and love, and hope for the same from you. [. . .]. Let us all be kissing-friends. Consider that with tolerance and patience, we godly demons maybe breed a noble world in a few hundred generations or so. Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbeque. (232)

In this estimation, the past may have been bad, but the present is different, and we have the ability to transcend whatever historical legacy of trauma threatens to circumscribe our individual progress and rupture our shared humanity; the barbeque as a tradition of the enslaved and

colonized is here opened to the human race. It is a common refrain: that was slavery, that was Jim Crow; post-Emancipation, post-Civil Rights, post-Obama's election were all presents put forth as the when the American promise had finally arrived. Only in hindsight, when those presents are past, does this model consider how unequal those times were. A liberal democratic view of the American nation places times of systemic oppression always in the past, while the present is the culmination of progress and full of possibility for the individual agent.

Alice Walker called *Dust Tracks* "the most unfortunate thing Zora ever wrote" (xvii); certainly, the text puts forth a model of exceptional individualism that ultimately reinforces systemic oppression, while denouncing all systemic critique as reproducing the social death her individualism resists. Critics have recuperated the text by foregrounding the heterogeneity of the language and contradictory claims, [45] some arguing for postmodern or deconstructive readings.[46] Susan Meisenhelder writes, "*Dust Tracks on a Road* seems fundamentally contradictory, alternately an affirmation of racist stereotypes and a testament to black pride" (145), the latter of which arguably can only be true if one reads the text against its explicit statements against racial pride. Like many other critics,[47] Meisenhelder points to the conditions of publication: "Recognizing the ways Hurston is forced to speak in *Dust Tracks on a Road* is crucial to

---

[45] Consider this harsh denunciation of Black (un)originality subsequently contradicted: on the one hand, "We love to imitate. We would rather do a good imitation than any amount of something original. [. . .]. What did Haiti ever do to make the world glad it happened? Well, they held a black revolution right behind the white one in France" (*Dust Tracks* 242); on the other, in relation to bringing West Indian dancing and work songs to the public, "I am satisfied in knowing that I established a trend and pointed Negro expression back towards the saner ground of our own unbelievable originality" (*Dust Tracks* 285).

[46] For example, see Pierre A. Walker's "Zora Neale Hurston and the Post-Modern Self in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "it seems to be Hurston's admission that she was incapable of representing her 'real' inner self. But it is not that Hurston had neither the will nor the ability to reveal the 'real Zora,' but rather that there is no one, single, hidden, inner, real self to reveal. What she did reveal was a literary representation of a complex and varied human being. [. . .]. To perceive the juggling acts in *Dust Tracks* makes it possible to appreciate what a remarkable literary achievement this book is, but that requires abandoning traditional expectations both of autobiographical unity and of the homogeneity of the self" (394-5).

[47] For example, in his influential biography of Hurston, Robert Hemenway recounts a letter Hurston wrote after the publication of *Dust Tracks* expressing her frustration with her publisher Bertram Lippincott asking her to write an autobiography (275-8).

understanding its complexity. The mutilation of her views—and her persona—that results in the published version remains a statement to a black woman's lack of power as traffic as Hurston's childhood failure to find a voice for her mother" (174). Yet I would argue that *Dust Tracks* is not wholly an anomaly in Hurston's body of work, nor an "unfortunate" misrepresentation of the views espoused in many of Hurston's writing; while the later-published appendices discuss global colonialism and other topics left out of the initial autobiography, much of it reinforces the racial politics of the originally published version.

Genevieve West indicts Hurston's white publisher, J.B. Lippincott, for overly influencing her work to pander to the market: "At best the publisher was ignorant of black life and the broad range of concerns held by Hurston's African American contemporaries. At worst, the publisher deliberately manipulated racist stereotypes of black life in order to attract white readers" (9). Hurston's later essay "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1950) expounds on the problems of voice, audience, and genre, illuminating the complexities of representing the inner life of marginalized people. She positions her work as rehumanizing in the face of the dehumanization of white supremacy, working against the "the lack of literature about the higher emotions and love life of upper-class Negroes and the minorities in general" (118). Just as she denounced the Black intelligentsia for focusing overly on racial oppression, she argues that publishing houses "shy away from romantic stories about Negroes and Jews because they feel that they know the public indifference to such works, unless the story or play involves racial tension. It can then be offered as a study in Sociology, with the romantic side subdued" (118). *Their Eyes* shifts away from this cultural and literary emphasis on the overtly political to depict a Black woman's narrative within a common humanity: "Argue all you will or may about injustice, but as long as the majority cannot conceive of a Negro or Jew feeling and reacting inside just as they do, the

majority will keep right on believing that people who do not look like them cannot possibly feel as they do" (119). This perspective frames the romance of *Their Eyes*, with its focus on individual self-actualization and the inner lives of characters and Black sociality. In relation to Hurston's controversial opinions denouncing racial solidarity and her opposition to *Brown v. Board of Education*, West writes, "She was not opposed to desegregation, but opposed to *court-ordered* desegregation. The distinction may seem minute, but for Hurston it was vital. [. . .][S]he does not find any value in forced associations" (227).[48] Yet this model of resisting dehumanization through making visible the inner lives of the marginalized requires faith in a common humanity and a view that ignorance, rather than the maintenance and reproduction of power, is the cause of racial oppression.[49]

West argues that criticism that Hurston was writing for a white audience "impugns Hurston's character by implying that she has in *Their Eyes* made dishonest use of her folk materials and that she has been using those materials to advance herself without regard for the social implications of writing for a racist white readership" (113). She points to the conditions of production and reception to explain Hurston's changing reputation and circulation through culture: "Just as racial and artistic ideologies marginalized Hurston in the first half the century, the dynamic ideologies of black cultural nationalism and black feminism converged with changing university curricula, changing student and professor populations, and key publications to make her recovery and canonization possible" (231). As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains, the

[48] Other critics have also argued that her opposition to *Brown* reflects an investment in Black culture: "She held that the survival of African American culture and its traditions was central to the struggle against white dominance and racism. To force black students to attend white educational institutions that excluded and devalued black culture robbed black children of those traditions that contribute to their individual and culture identities and self-esteem" (Moylan 216).

[49] The sociological horror film *Get Out* (2017) illustrates this point brilliantly: the white characters parrot liberal talking points praising Obama and form intimate, knowing relationships with the Black characters whom they then condemn to conscious bodily enslavement in the social death of the Sunken Place.

desire for Black foremothers in the emergence of Black feminism in the latter half of the century that new readings of Hurston's work:

> The deeply satisfying aspect of the rediscovery of Zora Neale Hurston is that black women generated it primarily to establish a maternal literary ancestry. [. . .]. Hurston became a metaphor for the black woman writer's search for tradition. [. . .]. [T]hey read Hurston not only for the spiritual kinship inherent in such relations but because she used black vernacular speech and rituals, in ways subtle and various, to chart the coming to consciousness of black women. ("Afterword" 288)

These recuperative readings focus less on her politics and more on how she foregrounds the folk tradition, rejecting attempts to discredit it as minstrelsy from Richard Wright onwards. West also argues that, with the passage of time, "Hurston's persona had faded, eliminating significant personal bias for readers of *Their Eyes* and *Mules and Men* who knew nothing of the author, and the political lens created by black nationalist[50] and feminist thought illuminated new aspects of Hurston's work, elements lost in the earlier horizon" (237). The kind of textual poaching that occurred through these news lenses that were then incorporated into the literary and academic communities de-centered the white audience in favour of the importance of Hurston's representations of Black culture, cultural artifacts that are scarce from that time: "Hurston's use of vernacular narration and dialect, folktakes, signifying, and sermons coincided with the new artistic agenda that made white readers and their needs peripheral to black readers and their needs [. . .]. Critics were less concerned about whether Hurston was supporting stereotypes"

[50] Hurston's racial politics, as manifested in *Dust Tracks* and her essays, were markedly different than Black nationalism, as they emphasized individualism along with a common humanity: "[I]t is impossible to form a nation within a nation" (*Dust Tracks* 252). West emphasizes that although Hurston benefitted from this movement in some ways, unlike their adherents she "fractures the whole by arguing that "*The Negro*" does not exist. [. . .]. Hurston remained a staunch individualist, artistically and personally" (239, original emphasis).

(239). Hurston's writing opens itself to various readings, and even keeping her politics in mind we cannot dismiss the significant work of *Their Eyes* in representing the inner life of a Black woman and how that also resonates in our contemporary moment.

Hurston's most recent circulation in culture is through the 2018 publication of *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* the result of her anthropological field work and interviews with Cudjo Lewis in the late 1920s. The release of this previously unpublished work was much anticipated along with indictments as to the conditions of publication that left this text dormant for so long.[51] In the Foreword, Alice Walker calls the texts a "Maestrapiece," "the feminine perspective or part of the structure, whether in stone or fancy, without which the entire edifice is a lie. And we have suffered so much from this one: that Africans were only victims of the slave trade, not participants" (x). Cudjo Lewis' perspective on the slave trade is singularly valuable: "The only man on earth who has in his heart the memory of his African home; the horrors of a slave raid; the barracoon; the Lenten tones of slavery; and who has sixty-seven years of freedom in a foreign land behind him" (*Barracoon* 15). His story, told in his own words,[52] recounts African complicity in the Transatlantic Slave Trade; the epigraph of *Barracoon* comes from *Dust Tracks*: "But the inescapable fact that stuck in my craw, was: my people had *sold* me and the white people had bought me. . . . It impressed upon me the universal nature of greed and glory" (165). The passage in *Dust Tracks* includes: "if the African princes had been as pure and as innocent as I would like to think, it could not have happened. No, my own people had butchered and killed, exterminated whole nations and torn families apart, for a

[51] Apart from market conditions, Plant also identifies unfavourable trends within the Black arts community: "There was a decided movement to do away with the image of 'the Old Negro' and usher in 'the New Negro,' whose authentic culture and ethos were rooted in African origins How did the butchering and killing of African 'others' and the extirpation of whole societies fit within the profile of this modern, authentic 'New Negro'?" ("Afterword" 125).

[52] From Deborah Plant's Introduction: "The dialect was a vital and authenticating feature of the narrative. [. . .]. Hurston found a way to produce a written text that maintains the orality of the spoken word" (xxii).

profit before the strangers got their chance at a cut. It was a sobering thought" (165). Hurston's project in *Barracoon* is iconoclastic as ever, to dismantle "the folklore I had been brought up on" (*Dust Tracks* 165). *Barracoon* is indeed a harrowing read and a crucial contribution to the necessary remembrance of the horrors of the slave trade; it is impossible upon reading it not to consider what is unsaid in *Dust Tracks* when Hurston describes enslavement with the simple adjective "sad" (*Dust Tracks* 229). *Barracoon* does what Sharpe terms wake work, yet focuses on the trauma and ship not to map global anti-Blackness but rather to highlight a common humanity, that we are "kissing-friends" not just in our ability to experience the collective joy of a barbeque but also in an equal ability to dehumanize each other.

Hurston's body of work is contentious and contradictory to the extent that its circulation has produced vastly different readings and interpretations depending on the perspectives of discourses and history. Yet what remains constant, and relevant to a reading of *Their Eyes* and its ideological adaptation in the 21st century,[53] is a firm investment in individual agency and potential rather than a focus on collectivity or systems that would place limits on the individual, including what she saw as a monolithic view of Blackness. As Gates notes, she especially resisted what she saw as "the idea that racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to being who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression" ("Afterword" 291). Attending to the nuances of Hurston's individualism as a rejection of dehumanization, Gates further cautions, "We cannot oversimplify the relation between Hurston's art and her life; nor can we reduce the complexity of her postwar politics, which, rooted in her distaste for the pathological image of

[53] From Edwidge Danticat's Foreword to the 75th Anniversary edition of *Their Eyes*: "Like all individual thinkers, Janie Crawford pays the price of exclusion for nonconformity, much like Hurston herself, who was accused of stereotyping people she loved when she perhaps simply listened to them much more closely than others, and sought to reclaim and reclassify their voices" (xv); of course, much of this chapter interrogates the "perhaps" and "simply" in this statement.

blacks, were markedly conservative and Republican" (296). The term conservative requires further interrogation: what is being conserved with these politics? Arguably, a fantasy of the American republic where the individual agent at the least has the potential to transcend historical trauma. Lovalerie King asks readers to consider how "a closer examination [. . .] [of *Dust Tracks*] shows that Hurston delighted in and celebrated black culture and black consciousness on both personal and professional levels" (86); indeed, this claim does not even require a closer reading, as her anecdotes of folk culture are delightfully exuberant. Yet these individuals are only favourably portrayed at their most idiosyncratic; as *Their Eyes* demonstrates in Eatonville, when the collective does come together it is to participate in often absurd conventions and the stifle the individual.[54] Navigating the apparent contradictions in Hurston's work, King:

> wonders [. . .] whether there were times when Hurston stopped wearing her mask and it started wearing *her*. When does one become lost in her own duplicity? What were the paradoxes she faced and how does her autobiography reveal the different aspects of her personality? The mythic self that emerges from Hurston's work is gifted and hardworking, a staunch individualist and intellectual who desires the best that her country can offer its artists in bloom and its citizen in general. (87, original italics)

Indeed, this passage describes Hurston's investment in the fulfillment of the American promise

[54] Certainly, the manifestation of the collective in the institutionalization of racial consciousness, which Hurston thoroughly rejects, risks reproducing structures of oppression, such as class distinctions and respectability politics: "It is a curious thing that he does not resent a white man looking down on him. But he resents any lines between himself and the wealthy and educated of his own race. "He's a nigger just like us," is the sullen rejoinder. The only answer to this is 'My people! My people!' So the quiet-spoken Negro man or woman who finds himself in the midst of one of these 'broadcasts' as on the train, cannot go over and say 'Don't act like that, brother. You're giving us all a black eye.' He or she would know better than to try that. The performance would not only go on, it would get better with the 'dickty' Negro as the butt of all the quips. The educated Negro may know all about the differential calculus and the theory of evolution, but he is fighting entirely out of his class when he tries to quip with the underprivileged" (*Dust Tracks* 178).

for all its citizens. King gestures to Hurston's project as generalized within the singular, noting Hurston's strong belief that "one arrives at the universal only through an experience of the specific" (86). The specificity under consideration here is the particular narrative of Janie's self-actualization in *Their Eyes*. Given its interpretive multiplicities, examining the novel and how it has been taken up through Oprah's ideological adaptation reveals the imperatives of cultural production in foregrounding models of individual agency in the American republic.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) and Janie's Self-Actualization

Hurston's most celebrated work is a compelling coming-to-consciousness narrative organized by Janie's trajectory through various spaces associated with particular relationships.[55] The frame of the narrative demonstrates the power of a specifically feminine kind of storytelling; as Amy Sickels argues, "Unlike the men on the porch who try to outdo each other's 'lies,' constantly interrupting and arguing with each other, Janie and Pheoby have a dialogue based on truth-telling and listening. By the end of the Janie's tale and tale-within-tales, Pheoby has been changed" (64). Janie's mode of recounting reflects Hurston's investment in anecdotes—in *Dust Tracks*, *Of Mules and Men*, and beyond—and the importance of telling one's story in one's own voice. Yet Janie's recounting to Pheoby is not solely her story, and the novel often shifts focalization from Janie to her grandmother, Jody, Tea Cake, and minor characters. In his detailed examination of the language of the novel, Gates notes "Hurston's use of free indirect discourse as the rhetorical analogue to the text's metaphors of inside and outside, so fundamental to the depiction of Janie's quest for consciousness, her very quest to become a speaking black subject"

[55] *Their Eyes* is often read as a corrective to her memoir and other works that are more explicitly against racial consciousness. It merits an extended analysis here to expand on my claim that the novel is in many ways a continuation of these individualistic politics and to buttress my reading of the film as a Deleuzian ahistorical assemblage.

(*The Signifying Monkey* 181). Rather than detract from Janie's self-actualization, the multiplicity of voices highlights the double consciousness of the text, on the level of disparity between the standard English of the narrator and dialect of the characters as well as among the characters themselves and their view of Janie and ultimately her view of herself. Meisenhelder connects this multiplicity of stories and interpretation to Hurston herself: "That Janie's story should be subject to so many divergent interpretations among critics should not be surprising, for (as Hurston is careful to illustrate) the same is true for reactions to her story within the novel itself" (80). Indeed, the heterogeneity of the language coupled with the complex narrative of consciousness and liberation, often represented obliquely—as Meisenhelder points out, using Hurston's phrase, "such a narrator can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick" (86)—resists any kind of reading that would impose a master narrative. Thus, my reading here focuses on those aspects of history and individualism in Janie's journey that Oprah takes up in her adaptation.

Biographer Robert Hemenway asserts, "Janie's poetic self-realization is inseparable from Zora's concomitant awareness of her cultural situation. The novel also celebrates the black woman's liberation from a legacy of degradation" ("Crayon Enlargements" 90). Like Hurston herself, Janie becomes conscious of being racialized at a specific moment of difference. In "How it Feels to be Colored Me," Hurston writes, "I remember the very day that I became colored" (1040). Growing up in all-Black Eatonville, so she recounts, racial difference did not exist in the community, and white people would only occasionally pass through benevolently. Emphasizing the contextuality of race, Hurston writes, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (1041). Janie grows up around the white children whose family employs her grandmother:

> Ah was wid dem white chillun so much Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old. Wouldn't have found it out then, but a man come long takin' pictures [. . .]. So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair [. . .]. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, "where is me? Ah don't see me." (8-9)

Race is something that happens to an individual, imposed externally and encountered through mediation, here, the photograph. Starting off her story with this anecdote, Janie emphasizes an essential self that is not what others recognize—that is, other people's views of her are an imposition on her own sense of self: "before I seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest" (9). The trajectory of the novel is to realize this self, from the first moment of racialization and empty signification—"Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names" (9)—to an autonomous rather than externally constructed Janie.

A formal similarity with Bunny's coming-to-age in *Oil!* is Janie's rejection of alternative paths, what others want her to be, and received notions of history and futurity. Janie's grandmother, called Nanny, was formerly enslaved, a remnant of another time imposing her perspective upon young Janie. Nanny's description points to her deep grounding in history and the weathering away of this time and perspective: "Nanny's head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered" (12). She tells Janie, "Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will" (16). Janie kisses Johnny Taylor and "the first tiny bloom had opened"

(10), associating her erotic awakening with nature itself, as she longs "to be a pear tree—*any* tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life" (11, original emphasis). Nanny forces Janie to marry Logan not to help Janie blossom in her own way, as "[t]he vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree" (14), but rather as "protection. [. . .]. Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life" (15). Nanny sees Janie's life as an opportunity to revise her own, a recuperation or remedying of the horrors of rape she and her daughter, Janie's mother, experienced. Of this maternal genealogy, Sharpe writes, "Living in/the wake of slavery is living 'the afterlife of property' and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother" (15). Nanny's investment in Janie is the possibility of resisting the transmission of being-property by giving Janie over to a man with property who can eventually pass it on to her and their future descendents.

Janie views this violation of her self-determination in the name of protection as rooted in victimization and ultimately a reproduction of that victimization, reflecting the politics of *Dust Tracks* that a systemic view reproduces the system. She rejects the burden of history and lineage that her grandmother too keenly feels:

> Digging around inside of herself like that she found that she had no interest in that seldom-seen mother at all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. But she had been whipped like a cur

> dog, and run off down a back road after *things*. (89, original emphasis)

Janie looks to herself and realizes that what she desires is to recognize and to be recognized, to reconcile the double consciousness that began when she was Alphabet and forge her own independent path. Janie locates the key to this within the self, within one's own perspective:

> It was all according to the way you see things. Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon—for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. (89)

The conditions of Nanny's life—enslavement, rape, poverty—square with a worldview that security is more important than freedom, let alone some abstract sense of self-actualization or recognition. Nanny tells Janie, "Have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate" (20). Yet for Janie, to realize the promise of the horizon requires looking forward to a future untethered to the past—thus, her outright rejection of Nanny, indeed, hatred, rather than sympathy for the mothers who brought her to a position to consider her own desires.

Nanny's aspirations to have her own voice are cut short by the material exigencies of being a Black woman living the transition from enslavement to emancipation. She tells Janie, "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah's take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what I felt" (16). Nanny's experience with sex has been rape, not the fulfillment of

desire; the consequences of that rape was the terror of passing on that legacy through her child: "Ah don't see how come mah milk didn't kill mah chile, wid me so skeered and worried all de time" (18). Considering the institutionalization of rape during slavery, particularly to produce more labour after the end of the Transatlantic trade, and the horrifying possibility of one's child being taken away and sold, Nanny does not conceive of sex as a kind of blossoming. By contrast, Janie's erotic encounter in the garden crystallizes her individualist and ahistorical desire: "She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid" (11). As Hemenway argues, this moment sets the terms for Janie's pursuit of self-fulfillment beyond physical desire but to a cosmic, even transcendent, sense of self: "This organic imagery permeates the novel and suggests a resolution of time and space, man and nature, subject and object, life and death" ("Crayon Enlargements" 88). Contrast Janie's description to Nanny's stark objectification: "Ah couldn't see nothin' cause yo' mama wasn't but a week old, and Ah was flat uh mah back. But pretty soon he let on he forgot somethin' and run into mah cabin and *made me* let down mah hair for de last time. He sorta wropped his hand in it, pulled mah big toe, *lak he always done*, and was gone after de rest lak lightin'" (16-17, emphasis added). While Janie's sexuality is related to the fecundity of her environment, not necessarily a man or the couple-form, the experience of sex itself for Nanny is unutterable and the consequences of it prevent any possibility of her own thriving.

King roots Nanny's fear of sexuality in a broader respectability politics that denigrate Black women: "Nanny's desire to raise Janie to be a 'respectable' back woman also suggests an

engagement with Cult of True Womanhood ideology, a nineteenth-century ideology of womanhood that placed black women on the licentious end of a spectrum against its opposite: bourgeois white women who exhibited the qualities of domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness—true women" (59). Meisenhelder frames Nanny's choice of Logan in relation to her belief that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (14), carrying what the Black man picks up from the white man: "the options facing Janie are clear early in the novel: to live as the mule or initiation white woman implied in Nanny's vision or as the vigorous black on imagined in her own" (64). White bourgeois futurity is located in the heteronormative couple-form—as texts such as *The Great Gatsby* aptly illustrate—and reproduction from rape serves the needs of labour in slavery. Having children for Nanny, her daughter Leafy, and their foremothers as a result of rape divorces sexual reproduction from desire, and Janie's narrative is a way to reclaim a desire that does not depend on the reproductive couple-form. While the narrative is structured around successive partners, as Meisenhelder explains, "Hurston uses elements of traditional romance ultimately to subvert the genre. Buried beneath the romantic surface is the story of a woman tempted to succumb to the passive female role assigned her in the prototypical white woman's story but who does not, a woman who does finally love herself more" (88). Dressed up in romantic tropes, *Their Eyes* does not track the heteronormative structures that reproduce the white nation, but rather the fruition of Black female desire in a singular individual.

The narrative is structured around Janie's successive partners to present and reject alternatives to her own self-actualization and autonomous desire. Gates reads this succession as external expansion accompanied by internal retreat: "Janie comes to occupy progressively larger physical spaces [. . .]. With each successive move to a larger physical space, however, her housemate seeks to confine Janie's consciousness inversely, seemingly, by just as much" (The

Signifying Monkey 185). The security Logan afford is merely material; Nanny points out that he has "de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks [. . .] a house bought and paid for and sixty acres [. . .]. Dat's de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love!" (23). Of course, Janie "wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (24), her desire connected to nature more so that the vision of a particular man. Logan reproduces the mule condition that Nanny fears for Janie by having her work on the farm and treating her as property: he tells Janie, "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh" (31). Yet when Nanny asks what Janie does not like about Logan, she points to his appearance: "Some folks never was meant to be loved and he's one of 'em. [. . .]. 'Cause Ah hates de way his head is so long one way and so flat on de sides and dat pone uh fat back uh his neck. [. . .]. His belly is too big too, now, and his toe-nails look lak mule foots" (24). According to Janie, Logan is not worthy of love because he is not beautiful. Janie associates love with desire and sexuality, which are in turn associated with the harmonious beauty of nature; Logan's appearance is disharmonious and thus he is irrevocably apart from the blossoming pear tree that Janie so desires.

She marks the time through natural metaphors that correspond to her yearnings: "She waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things. What things? She didn't know exactly. Her breath was gusty and short. She knew things that nobody had ever told her" (25). Janie's desire does not have an object—she does not want an organ or sixty acres—but rather a self-actualization that can only be articulated through metaphor. The temporality of nature lacks history: "She knew the world was a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether. She knew that God tore down the old world every evening and built up a new one by

sun-up" (25). Nature is ongoing, erasing the past, like her disavowal of the burden of her maternal genealogy: "The familiar people and things had failed her so she hung over the fate and looked up the road towards way off" (25), waiting for this present to be over so a new one can emerge.

Change comes in the form of Jody Starks, who provides a different model of imposition on Janie. While she notes that "he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for the horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (29), that is, an escape from Logan. Logan strives merely for subsistence, whereas Jody, like Janie, looks to the horizon. King identifies this similarity, that "[l]ike Janie, he was a dreamer" (55), but his dream of is domination: "she understood that his plans for her would preclude her from expressing herself naturally in the world. Like Nanny, he wanted Janie to sit on a pedestal, to assume the status typically assigned to the wives of affluent white men" (55). Rather than making Janie in a mule as Logan does, Starks tries to make her into the white woman complement for his imitation of a white man, subservient, silent, and decorative; he tells her, "Ah aimed tuh be a big voice. You oughta be glad, 'cause dat makes uh big woman outa you" (46). He mobilizes the inhabitants of the nascent town to come together to build the infrastructure, and commands authority: "They had murmured hotly about slavery being over, but every man filled his assignment" (47). Jody has capital, which gives him legitimacy but not a sense of communality; indeed, the form the town takes under his organization resembles a plantation: "Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with bannisters and such things. The rest of the town looked like servants' quarters surrounding the 'big house.' And different from everybody else in the town he put off moving in until it had been painted, in and out. And look at the way he painted it—a gloaty, sparkly white" (47). Jody's imitation of whiteness extends to how people perceive

Janie, setting her apart from the others; they fetishize her long hair, signifying proximity to whiteness, and according to him, "She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang. [. . .]. Her silken ruffles rustled and muttered about her. The other women had on percale and calico with here and there a headrag among the older ones" (41). Janie tells Jody that what he considers progress "keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother. You'se always off talkin' and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ah'm jus' markin' time" (46). Janie wants recognition as herself, not as someone else's vision of her, as well as integration into her surroundings, but Jody's domination isolates her: "She felt far away from things and lonely" (46).

Jody's domination over the community stems in part from his ability to think beyond his own racialization, to have the entitlement of a white man and bring his vision to fruition. This perspective sets him apart from the others in the community. As Jody arranges to have a post office in Eatonville, Hicks, for one, is unsettled: 'He was the average mortal. It troubled him to get used to the world one way and then suddenly have it turn different. He wasn't ready to think of colored people in post offices yet" (39). Hicks tells Coker, "Yo' common sense oughta tell yuh de white folks ain't goin' tuh 'low him tuh run no post office" (39). Coker counters, "Us talks about de white man keepin' us down! Shucks! He don't have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down" (39). The dialogue between Hicks and Coker as Jody pushes forth with developing the town encapsulates Hurston's politics of self-victimization, that if one thinks of oneself as a victim of oppressive structures then it will be impossible to transcend them; as Jody thinks of himself as equal to white men, he is able to achieve greatness within that realm. Specifically, Jody succeeds as a capitalist, establishing his store as a communal gathering place: "everything is got tuh have us center and uh heart tuh it, and uh town ain't no different from nowhere else. It

would be natural fuh de store tuh be meetin' place fuh de town" (40). Of course, what counts as natural for Jody is ultimately about making profit for himself rather than integrating the community in a non-hierarchical way, and following capitalist principles proves successful. Indeed, "Janie was astonished to see the money Jody had spent for the land come back to him so fast" (41). More so than Logan Killicks' sixty acres and mule-work, Jody best exemplifies Nanny's wish for her child to have material comforts. Indeed, rather than work a mule to death, he frees it, much to the delight of the town. Janie tells him, "Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something" (58). Indeed, Jody's development of Eatonville reproduces social, political, and economic forms with himself as ruler rather than envisioning any kind of radically liberating or egalitarian sense of community.

Jody makes a spectacle of acquiring a lamp for the town—"with money out of his own pocket he sent off to Sears, Roebuck and Company for the street lamp" (44)—holding a ceremony to celebrate the illumination and inviting people from the surrounding neighbourhoods. It becomes a site of convergence and the townspeople have a barbeque. The scene is an example of the kind of sociality that Hurston celebrates in her work: "In between times they told stories, laughed and told more stories and sun songs. They cut all sorts of capers and whiffed the meat as it slowly came to perfection with the seasoning penetrating to the bone" (45). Yet what they are celebrating is the reinforcement of Jody's dominance over the town, his separation from the others, and by extension Janie's. He associates the lamp with the divine: "Folkses, de sun is going' down. De Sun-maker brings it up in de mornin', and de Sun-maker

sends it tuh bed at night. Us poor weak humans can't do nothin' tuh hurry it up nor to slow it down. All we can do, if we want any light after de settin' or befo' de risin', is tuh make some light ourselves" (45). Jody's self-elevation has its effect on the community; while "the whole town got vain over" (44) the lamp, Jody's wealth—what provides the means for the lamp—alienates them and reproduces capitalistic exploitation: "It sort of made the rest of them feel that they had been taken advantage of. Like things had been kept from them. [. . .]. It was bad enough for white people, but when one of your own color could be so different it put you on a wonder. It was like seeing your sister turn into a 'gator. A familiar strangeness" (48). A Black man imitating whiteness is uncanny; they recognize separation and difference but cannot account for it through received notions of racial subjugation. Through Jody the text demonstrates the possibility of overcoming individual subjugation through the reproduction of whiteness and capitalist relations—that is, subjugating others for his own freedom rather than liberating all.

The porch of Jody's store becomes indeed becomes a meeting-place, in part a celebration of Black sociality but, as a store, also firmly located in market relations. Janie spends most of her time in the store, nothing that "[t]he store itself was a pleasant place if only she didn't have to sell things. When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The face that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to" (51). Gates argues that the porch—of the store and the Stark house, where Janie tells her story—is a "crucial place of storytelling both in this text and in the black community. Each of these playful narratives is, by definition, a tale-within-the-bracketed tale, and most exist as Significations of rhetorical play rather than events that develop the text's plot" (*The Signifying Monkey* 196). Indeed, the form of storytelling is not teleological but rather dialogical and unending: "Sam Watson and Life Moss

forced a belly laugh out of Joe himself with their eternal arguments. It never ended because there was no end to reach. It was a contest in hyperbole and carried on for no other reason" (63). This form of community resists capitalist temporalities of progress and instead represents engagement with others. Gates further notes:

> Against this sort of communal narration [of the porch] the text pits Jody Starks, Janie's second husband, who repeatedly states that he wishes to become 'a big voice.' This voice, however, is the individual voice of domination. The figure of Jody's big voice comes to stand as a synecdoche of oppression, in opposition to the speech community of which Janie longs to become an integral part. (*The Signifying Monkey* 200)

Yet the community of Eatonville is only possible in its current form through Jody's wealth and facility with that which was hitherto largely only accessible to white people—including land ownership, lamps, capital investment, and a plantation-style house.

Ultimately, Janie's asserting her voice diffuses Jody's power and effectively kills him. Gates reads this assertion in terms of writing: "Janie, in effect, has rewritten Joe's text of himself, and liberated herself in the process. Janie writes herself into being by naming, by speaking herself free" (*The Signifying Monkey* 207). Evoking Nanny's desire to be a preacher, the power of voice here speaks to Janie's eventual ability to rewrite her own story, not as Alphabet but as an autonomous desiring subject. With sexual desire and natural eroticism are essential to Janie's self-conception, she wounds Jody maximally by referring specifically to his lack of masculine sexuality and desirability: "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (79). His forward progress inextricably tied to his masculinity, but not sexual desire or natural eroticism with Janie, "There was nothing to do in life anymore. Ambition was

useless" (80). On Jody's deathbed, Janie centres her desire to be recognized: "You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't half know me atall. And you could have but you was so busy worshippin' de works of yo' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their minds till you didn't see uh whole heap uh things yuh could have" (86), namely, Janie herself. She tells him, "you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (86). Just as she has no sympathy for Nanny, who tries to curtail her blossoming, Janie's "pity" for Jody—"Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mishandled him too" (87)—quickly gives way to her own possibility to thrive now that Jody is not taking up space or dominating her: "She thought back and forth about what had happened in the making of a voice out of a man. Then thought about herself. Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. [. . .]. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there" (87). In life, Jody makes possible the material comforts that allow her to thrive after her death, financially independent without needing the protection of the couple-form Nanny envisions. Even though Janie's voice ultimately defeats him, Jody achieves what he does because he also has a sense of himself as transcending the limits other place on him, and in doing so his accumulated wealth facilitates Janie's thriving after his death.

The interim period between Jody and Tea Cake sees Janie blossom into a position where she can choose love when it comes upon her: "Ah jus' loves dis freedom. [. . .]. To my thinkin' mourning oughn't tuh last no longer'n grief" (93). Janie no longer requires a man for money or security, as she has inherited Jody's wealth, and thus she is open to the arrival of someone like Tea Cake who has nothing to offer her but the kind of love grounded in desire that she has been

seeking. Gates notes Tea Cake's divergence from the relationships that precede him: "the text opposes bourgeois notions of progress (Killicks owns the only organ 'amongst colored folks'; Joe Starks is a man of 'positions and possessions') and of the Protestant worth ethic, to more creative and lyrical notions of unity. Tea Cake's only possession is a guitar" (*The Signifying Monkey* 186). While Logan represents looking backwards to the aftermath of slavery—forty acres and a mule—and Jody forward development through the imitation of whiteness through capitalist acquisition, the temporality of Tea Cake is a perpetual present that seeks only pleasure and integration with his environment as Janie does. Gates points to his name as a clear association with the integration nature that Janie sees as her telos: "Tea Cake not only embodies Janie's tree, he is the woods themselves, the delectable veritable woods, as his name connotes ("Verigible" being a vernacular term for 'veritable'). Verigible Tea Cake Woods is a sign of verity, one who speaks the truth, one genuine and real, one not counterfeit or spurious, one not false or imaginary but the thing that in face has been named" (*The Signifying Monkey* 191). When she first meets him, she notes, "Tea Cake wasn't strange. Seemed as if she had known him all her life" (99). Unlike the disharmonious Logan or dominating Jody, Tea Cake is the materialization of the natural desire she first experiences under the pear tree: "He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God" (106). Tea Cake represents the integration with nature that for Janie allows a transcendence of humanmade structures, recalling Hurston's invocation of the cosmic Zora that has neither feelings of race victimization nor pride. Cheryl Wall argues that Tea Cakes facilitates Janie's self-actualization outside of the configurations that others attempt to place her in:

> [Tea Cake] is so thoroughly immune to the influence of white American society that he does not even desire them. Tea Cake is at ease being who and what he is. Consequently, he fosters the growth of Janie's self-acceptance. Together they achieve the ideal sought by most characters in Hurston's fiction. They trust emotion over intellect, value the spiritual over the material, preserve a sense of humor and are comfortable with their sensuality. Tea Cake confirms Janie's right to self-expression and invites her to share equally in their adventures. (122)

Tea Cake's autonomy from external exigencies such as money and security mirrors Janie's; together they are the bee and the blossom. Rather than investing like Jody, he gambles, further confirming his present temporality, going with the flow rather than looking backwards or preparing for the future.

Janie and Tea Cake go to the Muck, in the Everglades, where they work on the land together and he teaches her how to shoot. As even the name implies, the Muck is outside structures of hegemony and respectability: "Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too" (129). Of this sociality, Wall notes that Hurston "asserted that black people, while living in a racist society that denied their humanity, had created an alternative culture that validated their worth as human beings. Although that culture was in some respects sexist, black women, like black men, attained personal identity not by transcending the culture but by embracing it" (103). The Muck as alternative space is intensely embodied, material, and freeing for Janie: "All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants" (131). In this place, Janie

gains her voice: on the Muck, "The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (134). As Nanny conceived of Logan as a rewriting of her own story in Janie, Janie actually realizes the rewriting of her story with Jody on the Muck with Tea Cake.

Janie and Tea Cake's romance has violence embedded in it from the beginning, foreshadowing the inevitable violence to come. As they part after their first meeting, he tells her "Could yuh lemme have uh pound uh knuckle puddin' till Saturday?" (98), a footnote explaining that a knuckle puddin' is "A beating with the fist" (98n). Janie jokes, "You need ten pounds, Mr. Tea Cake" (98). What is here a joke reveals the violence that is embedded in this kind of love, one so intense that they lose each other in intersubjectivity. For all Janie's financial dominance—Pheoby warns her that Tea Cake may be after her money[56]—she allows herself to be caught up in Tea Cake, immersed in his vision of her: "He done taught me de maiden language all over. Wait til you see de new blue satin Tea Cake done picked out for me tuh stand up wid him in. High heel slippers, necklace, earrings, *everything* he wants tuh see me in" (115, original emphasis). The difference here between being remade for Tea Cake's desire versus Jody forcing her to wear a fancy dress to set her apart from the other women is Janie's free acceptance of Tea Cake's domination because she associates him with nature and desire rather than capitalist accumulation or an imitation of whiteness. Sex and violence are entwined in their passion for each other; when

[56] Pheoby is not without reason: "He spied the money while he was tying his tie. [. . .]. When he found out how much it was, he was excited and felt like letting folks know who he was. [. . .]. He had never had his hand on so much money before in his life, so he made up his mind to see how it felt to be a millionaire" (122). Of course, Janie forgives him, as he is just following his natural instincts and abilities: "You done married one uh de best gamblers God ever made" (125). Janie "was not shocked at Tea Cake's gambling. It was part of him, so it was all right" (125).

Janie catches him cheating with Nunkie[57] she pounces on them. Nunkie runs away but Janie and Tea Cake grapple with each other until it becomes sexual: "They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; till he hurled her to the glow and held her there melting her resistance with the hear of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible; kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion" (137-8). The model of love in this novel involves losing oneself in another, like the symbiosis of the bee and the blossom. Meisenhelder argues that "the honest expression of feelings among equal—even when acted out violently—poses no threat to the balance of their relationship" (72). King further justifies Tea Cake's violence: "That Janie devoted herself to Tea Cake and considered him the love of her life in spite of his flaws suggests that she was aware of her own flawed humanity" (56). This analysis is missing a conception of gendered power, that they can be equally violent to one another and equally flawed belies Janie's subordinate gendered position, which becomes clearer in the incident with Mrs. Turner's brother.

The Muck is ultimately not a utopic non-hierarchical place, and in the figure of Mrs. Turner the novel makes its strongest critique of investing in systems that are oppressive by design. Mrs. Turner is a light-skinned woman who buys into white supremacist ideas of racial hierarchies:

> Mrs. Turner, like all other believers had built an altar to the unattainable—Caucasian features for all. [. . .]. Behind her crude words was a belief that someonhow she and others through worship could attain her paradise—a heaven

[57] Early in their relationship Tea warns her, "If Ah ever gits tuh messin' round another woman it won't be on account of her age. It'll be because she got me in de same way you got me—so Ah can't help mahself" (121). He is, of course, actually messing around with Nunkie because Janie sees it with her own eyes, but Tea Cake reassures her, "Whut would Ah do wid dat lil chunk of a woman wid you around? [. . .]. You'se something tuh make uh man forgit tuh git old and forgit to die" (138), the compliments appealing to Janie's vanity and desire to be recognized and thus placating her. Indeed, he does not grow old and Janie eventually kills him.

> of straighthaired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs. The physical impossibilities in no way injured faith. [. . .]. [S]he didn't cling to Janie Woods the woman. She paid homage to Janie's Caucasian characteristics as such. And when she was with Janie she had a feeling of transmutation, as if she herself had become whiter and with straighter hair and she hated Tea Cake first for his defiled of divinity and next for his telling mocker of her. (145)

Though Janie tells her that she enjoys the company of Black people—"they tickles me wid they talk" (140)—Mrs. Turner responds in explicitly racist terms:

> Ah can't stand black niggers. Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' 'em 'cause Ah can't stand 'em mahself. 'Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid 'em. Us oughta class off. [. . .]. Dey laughs too much and dey laughs too loud. Always singin' ol' nigger songs! Always cuttin' de monkey for white folks. If it wuzn't for so many black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin' us back. (141)

Mrs. Turner rejects the kind of Black sociality that Janie values on the Muck, and represents the view that hierarchies are all right if you have proximity to the dominant category. She considers Booker T. Washington "uh white folks' nigger" (142) for doing "nothin' but hold us back—talkin' 'bout work when de race ain't never done nothin' else. He wuz uh enemy tuh us, dat's whut" (142), a critique of Washington's liberal capitalist politics from the side of white supremacy rather than radical politics.[58] Mrs. Turner considers Black futurity through the lens of

[58] It is no accident that the deplorable Mrs. Turner contrasts herself to Booker T. Washington. Noteworthy here are the parallels between Washington and Hurston's own politics: that hard work, familiarity, and achievement will bring about acceptance in a white supremacist society, a liberal model that has faith in incremental change rather

white supremacy: “She didn’t forgive [Janie] for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake, but she felt she could remedy that. That was what her brother was born for” (140)—a brother with “dead straight hair” (142). She tells Janie, “Ah jus’ couldn’t see mahself married to no black man. It’s too many black folks already. We oughta lighten up de race” (140). Yet Mrs. Turner is withered, her paleness a literal form of etiolation contrasted with the vibrancy of the others on the Muck. Meisenhelder argues, “Just as Starks’s definition of maleness finally makes him impotent, Mrs. Turner is sexually insipid and symbolically uncreative” (71). The function of Mrs. Turner in the novel is to show the no-future of investing in systems that by definition exclude you, and that proximity to whiteness is a trap that detracts from participating in the flourishing of Black culture.

After Mrs. Turner’s brother comes to the Muck, Tea Cake beats Janie—not because she was cheating, as Tea Cake did with Nunkie, that is, “Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (147). Jealousy here, like violence, is part of the intensity of their love. Meseinhelder argues that this beating is “Fundamentally manipulative and coercive [. . .] calculated to assert his domination of Janie” (72). The Muck is enthralled by Tea Cake’s flagrant display: “Equating light skin with passive female victimization and blackness with defiance, the men on the Muck express admiration not only for Tea Cake’s assertion of dominance but also for what they fantasize as Janie’s acquiescence” (Meidenhelder 73). Tea Cake is explicit about his motivations: “Ah didn’t whup Janie ‘cause *she* done nothin’. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss” (148, original emphasis). Rather than providing access to Janie’s interiority or voice, between his

---

than overhauling an oppressive system. Of course, as history played out, wealthy Black families moving into white neighborhoods were no less terrorized by the KKK.

beating and the arrival of the hurricane the novel narrates the Turners' ejection from the town. Framed as a resistance to the white supremacist Turners, an act of patriarchal violence becomes an assertion of Black sociality.

The hurricane is not an incalculable event, but rather foreshadowed as an act of God, as God inhabits nature. Tea Cake, is no longer purely associated with nature after his beating of Janie: as Emily Hinnov points out, "Tea Cake, the once warm and loving bohemian who awakened the pear tree inside of her, has become just as harshly abusive and possessive as all the other men with whom Janie has aligned herself. (69). He dismisses warnings in favour of making money: "You couldn't have a hurricane when you're making seven and eight dollars a day picking beans" (155). Contrasting Tea Cake's mercenary imperative, the novel associates Indians with natural knowledge, as they anticipate the coming storm; Tea Cake retorts, "Indians don't know much uh nothin', tuh tell de truth. Else dey'd own dis country still. De white folks ain't gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous" (156). Whiteness here is farthest from nature, but Tea Cake buys into this hierarchy after being "infected with Mrs. Turner's poison" (Meisenhelder 74) and the consequences on his relationship with Janie. The storm is divine judgment:

> They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. As soon as Tea Cake went out pushing wine in front of him, he saw that the wind and water had given life to lots of things that folks think of as dead and given death to so much that had been living things. (160)

Meisenhelder reads the storm as a consequences of Tea Cake's changed values: "Beneath the surface of what seems simply dramatic action and vivid language, she carefully develops the storm as a symbolic ritual of purification, a rejection of those characters who have betrayed the sexually egalitarian and culturally autonomous values of black life on the Muck" (74). Reading the storm as a divine ritual of purification, it has similarities with Victor Turner's concept of the liminal: "the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states" (57). The description of the storm gives the novel its title and foregrounds the social construction of structures that the divine power of nature has the ability to wipe away: capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy are ephemeral human fabrications, but the pear tree and horizon, and the water and wind, are eternal.

The rabid dog bite eventually defeats Tea Cake; nature, what brings Tea Cake and Janie together, also rends them apart. Meisenhelder argues, "Given the changes that have occurred in Tea Cake's sense of racial and gender identity, it is not surprising that he, too is killed as a result of the storm" (76). Yet Janie's devotion is as strong as ever, reaffirmed after the storm: "Once upon uh time, Ah never 'spected nothing', Tea Cake, but bein' dead from standin' still and tryin' tuh laugh. But you come 'long and made somethin' outa me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anything we come through together" (167). She shoots Tea Cake when he tries to kill her in a rabid fit: "It was the meanest moment of eternity. A minute before she was just a scared human being fighting for its life. Now she was her sacrificing self with Tea Cake's head in her lap. She had wanted him to live so much and he was dead" (184). Meisenhelder identifies this moment as subverting the traditional romance genre: "Buried beneath the romantic surface is the story of a woman tempted to succumb to the passive female role assigned her in the prototypical white woman's

story but who does not, a woman who does finally love herself more, who neither dies at her lover's hands nor withers away after his death" (88). The novel thus resists white futurity in order to present an alternative that shifts the focus to the agency of a desiring Black woman.

The shooting is not without consequences: "that same day of Janie's great sorrow she was in jail" (184). The court scene depicts good white people in a sympathetic justice system. In Janie's childhood, Mrs. Washburn, Nanny's benevolent white employer, would dress Janie, and the Black children would make fun of her: "Dere wuz a knotty head gal name Mayrella dat useter git mad every time she look at me. Mis' Washburn useter dress me up in all de clothes her gran'chillun didn't need no mo' which still wuz better'n whut de rest uh colored chilllun had. [. . .]. Dat useter rile Mayrella uh lot. So she would pick at me all de time and put some others up tuh do de same" (9). The court scene at the end of the novel reproduces this relation, with sympathetic white women contrasted with the Black community against her: "They were all against her, she could see. So many were there against her that a light slap from each one of them would have beat her to death. She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts" (185). The white women, on the other hand, "worse good clothes and had the pinky color that comes of good food. They were nobody's poor white folks. [. . .]. [T]hey didn't seem too mad, Janie thought. It would be nice if she could make *them* know how it was instead of those menfolks" (185, original emphasis). Justice is putatively objective, impersonal, official—without knowledge of Black life on the Muck—and before the court Janie narrates her tale: "Twelve strange men strange men who didn't know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her were going to sit on the thing" (185). Janie is loyal to Tea Cake and her desire to be recognized until the end—"It was not death she feared. It was misunderstanding" (188)—and ultimately the court rules the shooting as self-defense: "she was free and the judge and everybody up there smiled with her and shook her

hand. And the white women cried and stood around her like a protecting wall and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away. [. . .]. Nothing to do with the little that was left of the day but to visit the kind white friends who had realized her feelings and thank them" (188). Hemenway argues that white sympathy at the trial demonstrates Janie's trajectory of self-actualization independent from systemic oppression: "Janie's growth is Hurston's subject. Although that growth is affected by the racism surrounding her, white oppression is not the dominant factor in Janie's development. Zora is saying once again that it is arrogant for whites to think that black lives are only defensive reactions to white actions" ("Crayon Enlargements" 94). Of course, the narrative frame of Janie telling her story to Pheoby makes clear from the start that Janie does not end up in prison, but more than that, the teleology of the story—starting with Alphabet claiming her name as Janie and then tasting communion with nature under the pear tree—necessitates individual self-actualization rather than an indictment of oppressive structures, such as a white-supremacist justice system.

Back in her room in the big house Jody built, "the place tasted fresh again. The wind through the open windows had broomed out all the fetid feelings of absence and nothingness" (192). The permeability here contrasts with structures such as patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy that cut people off from each other and from nature. Tea Cake's memory permeates the room as well, posthumously integrated fully with nature: "Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was [. . .]. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl" (193). The teleology of pear tree to horizon is fulfilled in the final lines, with the protection and comfort of a permeable cover: "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (193). This is not a story of victimization intended to rouse readers to political

activism, such as *Oil!*, nor a cautionary tale of decline such as *The House of Mirth*, but rather an individual tale that evacuates the systemic forces that doom Gatsby to demonstrate the transcendent possibilities of individual agency.

Indeed, in both scholarship and popular culture the novel has been celebrated as the narrative of a subject achieving harmonious coherence after being pulled in different directions by the dominance of others to reclaim an authentic self. Gates reads the ending as Janie's reconciliation of the internal and external: "She has internalized her metaphors, and brought them home, across a threshold heretofore impenetrable. This self-will, active, subjective synthesis is a remarkable trope of self-knowledge. [. . .]. Her invitation to her soul to come see the horizon that had already before been a figure for external desire, the desire of the other, is the novel's sign of Janie's synthesis" (214). Gurleen Grewal reads it as the recuperation of a maternal legacy of rape:

> As Janie Woods, she has integrated the blossoming pear tree with the dark woods, which is the site of both the fatal hurricane at the Everglades and the rape and disappearance of her barely known mother Leafy. The equation of dawn and doom implies equanimity before the vicissitudes of life. Further, the things done and undone were but the leafings, for the whole is vaster than these. (110)

Hinnov extends this integration to the readers themselves:

> Janie has found a new mode of being, which was always her most genuine self. Drawing it inward from the outer web of interconnection, releasing its grasps around the world, and placing it over the mantle of her shoulder in a gesture of self-acceptance, Janie appears as a newly reigning queen of her own best self. As readers, we finally witness her fully integrated body, mind, and soul,

> encompassing all of the promise of the horizon; we too are absorbed into Janie's total vision of self within a shared community of which we become a part. (71)

Brenda Smith reads the novel as a dialectic of romance and quest narratives in the female *Bildungsromane*, arguing that Hurston's innovation is "writing her black female protagonist *into* the paradigm of the romance or femininity text and be then writing her protagonist *beyond* the conventional fate of the heroine (marriage or death) into 'heroic' selfhood. However, Hurston's protagonist ends her quest with the *actualization* of the horizon (successful *Bildungs*) and the *memory* of the pear tree (romance), which she reifies in her text of self" (134, original emphasis). These kinds of interpretations explain how the narrative has been taken up in liberatory ways, as the trajectory of someone born from rape in the aftermath of enslavement to a big house and independence, not only without an overt systemic critique but seemingly in rejection of one.

Through a broader analysis, however, this actualization narrative disguised as romance reveals the limits of individualism. Janie's autonomy is only possible because of Jody's capitalist accumulation. After the hurricane, Janie fulfills the teleological promise of integration with nature in the house she shared with Jody and the community she left behind. Though arguably her inherited wealth is compensation for living under his dominance, this ending is not possible without Jody, that is, not possible without the romance narrative of the couple-form. Although the novel appears to reject Nanny's view that security is in the couple-form, Janie can only transcend the need for safety and security in a man because she has Jody's wealth—what Nanny wanted for her through inheriting elderly Logan's wealth. The novel ultimately cannot imagine a self-actualization that does not depend on the economic capital. Even as the horizon imagery imagines a kind of coherent subject in communion with nature, self-actualization in the abstract can only be articulated through metaphor, and its limits are the material exigencies of white

supremacy and capitalism that the text denigrates Jody for buying into. The narrative presents itself as liberatory—for Janie and for readers—but cannot imagine liberation or self-actualization outside the material exigencies of capitalism—the importance of these structures on the individual can be downplayed, deflected, or disavowed, but not erased.

Oprah, Adaptation, and Colourblind Individualism

While film is, of course, a collaborative medium, the styling of this adaptation as "Oprah Winfrey Presents" and the distribution through Harpo Films reflect a continuity with the politics of the Oprah brand. The film text opens not with the narrative but rather Oprah's introduction:

> I remember when I first read this book, I fell in love with the story. It was one of the most beautiful, poignant love stories I'd ever read. This is a story about a woman allowing herself to be a full woman and not subjected to the definition or identity others have carved out for her. The first time Janie and Tea Cake kiss reinvents the whole idea and notion of kissing. I would have to say that if you can get a kiss like that, you can die a happy woman. When this movie airs, Zora Neale Hurston, wherever she is, is gonna give a shout.

This adaptation makes Hurston's narrative legible through the genre of romance; viewers broadly know what to expect and how to read the characters and plot. Oprah Winfrey and Zora Neale Hurston's individualist politics have much in common, and Oprah's adaptation of *Their Eyes* reflects this investment. The novel foregrounds Janie's individualist trajectory while also gesturing to broader structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism—if only to dismiss them; the Oprahfication of this narrative takes this individualism a step further, stripping away complications within Janie and her surroundings to present a likeable and relatable heroine

with whom the audience can identify in the genre of romance.

Oprah, like Hurston, is a complex figure that reconciles particular social contradictions; she foregrounds her position as a Black woman while also making herself immensely marketable to a predominantly white audience. Eva Illouz reads Oprah as the revision of a quintessentially American figure, "a female response to Horatio Alger, offering a feminine parody of the masculine myth of self-help" (33), the repetition of "a therapeutic biography: what is being exposed are not 'events' that occur in the 'real' world, as much as the plots and subplots of her psychological struggle with herself. The therapeutic biography in turn enables Oprah to capitalize on her failures by recycling them into a narrative of victory and self-overcoming" (34). Oprah's personal narrative makes marginalization hypervisible in her history of abuse and her embodiment in order to track a narrative of self-actualization and achievement. As Sherryl Wilson argues, "Winfrey's blackness and womanhood both signal her marginality while, as a celebrity sign, Oprah represents success and achievement" (172). Oprah's ethos of self-determination reflects Hurston denouncing those who blame racism for their problems:

> Winfrey vented her frustration with "young people who are impoverished" but "don't understand there's a process to success." She was equally annoyed with people who "blame society or they blame whoever is president at the time" and take the stance "I am the victim and the system ought to be doing better for me." Such attitudes violated what Winfrey described as "one of the things I believe in the very fiber of my being…that you can become whatever you wish to do in life." (Peck 143)

Consider Hurston's invocation of the "cosmic Zora," or her claim that "I am not tragically colored" ("How It Feels to be Colored Me" 1041) in relation to Oprah's appeal to her

predominantly white audience: "As Winfrey explains [. . .] 'I transcend race, really. I believe I have a higher calling. What I do goes beyond the realm of everyday parameters. I am profoundly effective. I know people, really, really really *love* me, *love* me, *love* me. A bonding of the human spirit takes place. Being able to life a whole consciousness—that's what I do" (Peck 152, original emphasis). Winfrey's brand humanizes a singular Black woman—herself—without dismantling the structures of dehumanization and social death and while reinforcing consumer capitalism. Similar to Hurston's condemnation of the Black intelligentsia as overly focused on race:

> Winfrey revealed that she "hated" her time at all-black Tennessee State University, where she "did not relate well to the racially militant mood" of fellow students,' [. . .]. Winfrey contrasted herself to other TSU students who were "into black power and anger," whereas she was "just struggling to be a human being." [. . .]. [S]he explained, "Race is not an issue. It has never been an issue with me. … Trust is, I've never felt prevented from doing anything because I was either black or a woman." (Peck 159)

Following Hurston scholars who argue that the exigencies of the white publishing industry explains her colourblind racial politics, one could reasonably argue that a similarly capitalist imperative is at play here; yet this interpretation does not excuse these politics but rather reveals the co-implication of the systems that are being disavowed.[59] As Peck argues, Oprah's "enterprise can be understood as an ensemble of ideological practices that help legitimize a

[59] While Oprah-as-brand may put forth a colourblind politics, this is not to say that Oprah the person is colourblind. In a BBC interview with Will Gompertz, Winfrey notoriously stated "As long as there are people who still—and there's a whole generation, I … said this for apartheid South Africa, I said this for my own community in the south—there are still generations of people, older people, who were born, and bred, and marinated in it, in that prejudice and racism, and they just have to die." While people criticized her for saying that old white people have to die, this perspective buys into a narrative of liberal progression rather than a systemic politics of abolition.

world of growing inequality and shrinking possibilities by promoting and embodying a configuration of self compatible with that world" (217). These similarities bear out in Oprah's adaptation as the systemic impinging on individual freedom are even more obfuscated than in the novel, while Janie is dehistoricized and universalized to facilitate viewers' identification with her inspirational journey.

Oprah's role as interpreter of literature has an established history in Oprah's Book Club, and the adaptation reproduces the reading strategies developed there. In their examination of reading practices of the Book Club,[60] Roberta F. Hammett and Audrey Dentith identify close readings as the primary interpretive framework: such strategies argue that the predominance of narratives of self-actualization efface structures limits on the individual: the "recognition of one's own abilities, talents, or resourcefulness is usually not contingent on or influenced by social politics or cultural identities. Gender, race, and social class are not significant indicators of oppression or privilege but, rather, benign descriptors that are not related to or determined by the dynamics of social power relations inherent in the everyday lives of the characters" (214). The neutralization of structural oppression facilitates the identification of bourgeois white women, the majority of Oprah's audience, with the Black women in Oprah's book selections. In a response to critiques that Oprah is merely effacing systems to depoliticize texts, Kimberly Chabot Davis argues for the political potential of white empathy: "While the possibility of appropriation is an important concern, critics also have a responsibility to bring to light moments of empathy or compassion with progressive political significance, lest we lose hope in the

[60] They identify "three areas of limitation that served to reify popular but injurious social beliefs and values, as well as detract from readers' abilities to deconstruct existing power relationship and challenge existing structures. They are (1) the practice of gendered readings of the selections and Winfrey's approaches to interpretation; (2) the overreliance on morality and individual self-improvement; and (3) the glaring absence of a discourse of critical literacy regarding the nature of power relations with respect to race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation" (213).

potential for change in the racial order" (148). However, like Hurston's perspective on *Brown*, this model lacks an understanding of power: that is, it misses that white supremacy does not stem from ignorance or a lack of empathy but rather the maintenance and reproduction of power across history. Tarshia Stanley describes *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and by extension the Oprah empire as "a guilt-free space where history and current manifestation of capitalism, racism, and sexism rooted [. . .] history do not matter" (42), overlooking "[i]n her passion to push rugged individualism [. . .] that marginalized individuals have always had to marshal themselves in groups to subvert a system designed to keep them marginalized" (47). Peck similarly emphasizes that "there is a vital difference between conceiving empowerment at the level of individual well-being versus understanding it as a sociopolitical, hence collective, undertaking" (38). These analyses of Oprah-as-brand echo Hurston's politics in *Dust Tracks* and essays: collectives are organized around ideologies that impose themselves on individuals, restricting freedom and thriving. That is, living one's best life—to use Oprah's slogan—is an endeavour of one, not many.

The narratives that Oprah's brand puts forth repeatedly traces a known trauma while simultaneously assuring the audience through the temporality of the narratives that this suffering has been overcome through self-actualization. Illouz notes that the texts from Oprah's Book Club have in common that "the awful end is always at the beginning, which suggests that what draws the reader in is the question of how a character will cope with something already known to be awful" (108). Moreover, "in these novels suffering is closely intertwined with a discourse about the search for the authentic self" (Illouz 109). The adaptation of *Their Eyes* begins with Oprah assuring the viewer that this is a beautiful love story, and the narrative from the novel begins with Janie's voiceover, outlining the journey of self-discovery she has already made by the

beginning of the film: “There’s two things everybody got to find out for theyselves. They got to find out about love, and they got to find out about livin.’” Every limit to her thriving—specifically, her marriages, the hurricane, and Tea Cake’s tragic illness—are steps on the path to self-actualization, and viewers are invited to identify with Janie’s journey, as loving and living are for “everyone” to figure out. In the novel, Janie is often selfish and unsympathetic, particularly in her relationships to others whose worldviews impinge on her, but the film removes those complications in her character in order to smooth out a legible and inspirational story of love and loss eventually leading to thriving and integration with the spiritual, cosmic plane of the natural environment.

The film effaces the historical specificities of the afterlives of slavery by excising Nanny’s backstory and the matrilineage of enslavement and rape. While Nanny’s tale in the novel associates sex with rape, desire with danger, and children as a burden rather than futurity, the grandmother of the film is concerned for Janie due to the exigencies of patriarchy and capitalism but not white supremacy. The line from novel that encapsulates Nanny’s worldview—“De nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (14)—in the film is “The woman is the mule of the world.” Performed by the recognizable Ruby Dee, and thus sympathetic to viewers, Nanny here could be anyone’s grandmother. Janie’s renunciation of—indeed, declaration of hatred for—her grandmother does not appear in the film, as it is an unsympathetic moment that is also directly related to Janie’s recuperation of the narrative of slavery and rape that is excised here in favour of universalization and viewer identification. The film also elides the strongest manifestation of white supremacy in the novel, when white men with guns conscript Tea Cake into grave-digging after the hurricane. In the novel, Janie and Tea Cake note that if only the white men knew them it would be different: “‘De ones de white man know is nice colored folks. De ones he don’t know

is bad niggers.' Janie said this and laughed and Tea Cake laughed with her" (172). While the novel demonstrates a faith in knowledge as solving racism and a definition of white supremacy that is rooted in ignorance rather than power, the film excises even this individualist definition in favour of colourblind politics: mutual understanding is already here, facilitated, of course, by Oprah herself.

The film also renders Janie's relationships with her first two husbands to portray her character in a more positive light, highlighting their unsuitability for Janie without providing their perspective: in the novel, for example, Logan's "half a sob and half a cry" (32) and Jody's lamenting her "cruel deceit" (80). The film thus flattens the complications of varying perspectives. Rather than have Janie tell Nanny that Logan does not deserve love because he is not beautiful, the film instead fetishizes Janie's beauty and places her in incongruous positions, such as working Logan's farm; it is not his beauty that is lacking—as expressing that view demonstrates Janie's lack of empathy—but that Janie herself is so beautiful she deserves more beauty—with others and with nature—not labour. When Janie asks what Logan would do if she leaves, his response, "Do what you got to do, I'm going to sleep," permits and legitimizes Janie's decision to leave as his perspective is excised. The film further emphasizes Janie's compassion through shorthand when she sets the pigs free rather than slaughtering them for dinner.

Eatonville is a site of Black sociality much more so than in the novel, where the residents have often contentious relationships with each other and Jody and Janie. A montage shows the people coming together and joyfully building the town. The film excludes the town's fixation with the mule and their elaborate funeral, which signifies in the novel the absurdity of rituals and the primitiveness of the Eatonville residents,[61] and is further emphasized in the courtroom

[61] "Out in the swamp they made great ceremony over the mule. They mocked everything human in death" (60).

scene.[62] Instead, the townspeople in the film include familiar characters played by Terrence Howard and Lorraine Toussaint, who comically and lustily gazes upon Tea Cake. Furthermore, Janie's friendships with the other women are important in the film, as an analogue for the viewers' friendships: Janie and her friends get ready for the lamp lighting and say, "we're in the big house now," implying a togetherness in this elevated status. Jody asserting his position and controlling Janie is thus not about cutting Janie off from a natural expression of desire—indeed, the film eroticizes their early relationship in a way the novel does not, showing close-ups of their naked bodies together—but rather emphasizes his wish to separate her from friendship and sociality. Moreover, the film demonstrates Jody's control in a physical way: when he takes off the expensive corset he buys for her to show her status, the camera lingers on stripes on her back, here the marks from the stays alluding to whipping. Jody kisses her back and tells her he's going to be a big man and make a big woman out of her, and the combination of possessiveness and violence here makes Jody unsuitable for Janie, whereas in the novel violence is part of the passion of Janie and Tea Cake's relationship.[63]

Smoothing out the complications of Janie's relationships and the limits the characters encounter keeps the focus of the film narrative on Janie's journey to self-discovery, and thus provides a way for viewers to consume the film as aspirational and inspirational. *Their Eyes* is part of the repetition of narratives in the Oprah brand that focus on the individual to sell self-actualization without the need for self-reflection about systemic complicity; Peck outlines the effects of this mechanism:

---

[62] "The white part of the room got calmer the more serious it got, but a tongue storm struck the Negroes lke wind among palm trees. They talked all of a sudden and all together like a choir and the top parts of their bodies moved on the rhythm of it. [. . .]. The palm tree dance began again among the Negroes" (186).

[63] In his review for *New York Magazine*, John Leonard writes, "while I can understand leaving out the courtroom scenes, a modern version of *Their Eyes* should have felt itself obliged to reconsider Hurston's odd complacency about male violence."

> Winfrey's viewers, readers, and seminar attendees are meant to feel enlightened, uplifted, and empowered. They are encouraged to esteem themselves, to "live their best life," to treat their suffering as an opportunity for personal growth, because, as Winfrey never tires of reminding us, we are "responsible for our own lives." What Winfrey's followers are not asked to do it to consider how they might be implicated in (and even benefit from) the suffering of others, or to take responsibility for this possibility. They are not, in other words, ever made to feel *uncomfortable*. (166, original emphasis)

Janie cannot be unsympathetic and other perspectives—accounting for systems and history—that the novel presents to dismiss must be excluded altogether in other for the narrative to fit the continuity of Oprah's project, in its narratives repeated across forms and genres. The film does not ask viewers to be uncomfortable—to interrogate discomfort and perhaps convert it to political action—but rather to buy into a safe and temporary misery that always resolves itself into triumph.

Indeed, the film does not merely avoid discomfort, but importantly also provides pleasure to the viewer, through sensual closeups and a camera that lingers on bodies and flora. Post-Oscar win, Halle Berry embodies Janie in lingering shots of her luminous beauty—the fragmentations into parts, such as her long hair, light skin, and the fluid movements of her limbs. While the film invites scopophilia and identification, what is at play here is not the classic Mulveyan male gaze, but rather an emphasis on Janie's burgeoning connections extending out from her body. The partial objects of her body, bees, blooms, etc. are not fetishes; they do not compensate for lack but are rather additive or connective, reflecting a Deleuzian model of becoming that further dehistoricizes the individual in an asubjective assemblage with nature. Deleuze and Guattari

write, “the partial objects do not refer in the least to an organism that would function phantasmatically as a lost unity or a totality to come. Their dispersion has nothing to do with a lack, and constitutes their mode of presence in the multiplicity they form without unification or totalization” (*Anti-Oedipus* 324). Tea Cake, too, first appears on screen in close-up fragments, as the camera pans over his sweaty skin as he wipes it down; the image of his muscular chest precedes the image of his face. Both Janie and Tea Cake are exceptionally beautiful—in a way that corresponds to the beauty of nature through images of their bodies with caterpillars, bees, fruit, flowers, plants, and the landscape. Thus the film naturalizes the relationship of this couple not through a gesture to futurity but rather through their extension into the environment. The trope of inside and outside, significant in the novel, is literalized in the film through frames contrasting light and dark inside and outside windows and doors. When Tea Cake and Janie are together, the frames are more colourful and sensual during their flirting and intensely erotic with close-ups on skin during sex. The film invites the spectators to be caught up in the pleasure, beauty, and romance of two beautiful people and aspire to their beauty and their desire for its own sake.

Desire in this film is an affective force that connects the desiring body to its surroundings, and tracks closely with Deleuze and Guattari’s model, as productive and generative: “Desire is the set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production. [. . .]. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject unless there is repression” (*Anti-Oedipus* 26, original emphasis). The film materializes this model of desire in Janie’s body connecting with its surrounding and the trope of the fecundity of nature. In a voiceover paraphrased from the novel, Janie muses, “I was born sorta knowing things, like how

the trees and the wind talk. I told the seeds when they was fallin', 'I sure hope y'all fall on soft ground.'"[64] In the novel this passage occurs when Janie resigns herself to marriage with Logan, knowing that the world is bigger than what Nanny or Logan want to impose on her. The film is explicit about Janie's knowledge of nature connected to her desire, with a rack focus of a bee burrowing into a flower and then Johnny Taylor in the background; Janie runs to Johnny in a flowing white dress. Her body, hair, and clothing flow sensually, an extension of the swaying foliage. Another close-up shows a caterpillar walking on her face. These images demonstrate the assemblages of desire, the force of desire that generates connections. Desire is ultimately not for another person, not grounded in the couple-form, but, following Deleuze, an extension into the world that produces flows inside and outside a permeable body.

The specific tropes of the film are repeated in images that gesture to a conception of desire in and of itself. The sex scenes of the film show desires, to be sure, but the close-ups parallel those of nature. The image of the bee and the blossom, plucked from the novel, points to a model of becoming rather than being: on Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-orchid of the wasp" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 11), Hannah Stark explains, "the wasp and the orchid form an assemblage in which their bodies find new functions [. . .]. This becoming is literally reproductive, but it also produces new ways of relating to things and new embodied sensations. It is this novelty, rather than the identities of the actors involved, that is important in becoming" (25). As the novel expounds and the film excises, white bourgeois reproductive futurity in the couple-form is overshadowed by Nanny and Leafy's rapes; Nanny's wish for Janie in marrying Logan is rewrite her own narrative. With this aspect of the story absent in the film, desire is

[64] From the novel: "She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, 'Ah hope you fall on soft ground,' because she heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed" (25).

valued in and of itself, not as a corrective or revision. Janie is the embodiment of this model of desire: "Desire is not about the attainment of what is lacking, for Deleuze and Guattari, because it is an active, anarchic and unpredictable force that brings disparate things together. Desire is evident whenever ruptures appear in organized systems. [. . .]. Desire produces proliferating connections that create constant flux rather than stability" (Stark 51). The film takes the threads of this form of desire from the novel—the connection to nature—but by effacing historically grounded systems—to use Deleuze's term, molar institutions—it focuses solely on the actualization of a connective desire through Janie's body, rather than grounding that narrative trajectory as a rewriting of specific aspects of her maternal lineage, such as her radical desire as resisting the institutionalization of rape in slavery. Indeed, the excision of the court scene in the film is not merely for narrative flow, but rather because being saved by a "molar" institution would interrupt the flow of desire that the film puts forth.

The film lacks historical specificity, a conception of power, or racial politics in favour of foregrounding the flows of affect. The Muck of the film is a utopia following the colourblind politics of Oprah's brand. The denizens of the Muck are diverse and multi-racial, embodying a connection with nature as people eat what they harvest, dance, braid each other's hair, and generally live in harmony with each other and the land. While the novel presents Mrs. Turner's colourist politics to reject it, and as Meisenhelder argues, punishes the denizens of the Muck, such as Tea Cake, who are infected with Mrs. Turner's poison, here the hurricane is an extension of the power of nature, an intensification of the deterritorializing force of desire and assemblage. The film also excises Tea Cake's violence towards Janie, which Hinnov argues "warns her readers and the perils of misinterpreting intersubjectivity as too easy and utopian" (69); the film embraces intersubjectivity to the point of the annihilation of subjectivity—bodies, water, and

plants are all permeable and connected as desiring-machines. As Hannah Stark elucidates, "Desiring-machines do not respect categories such as the 'human.' Instead they bring into shifting aggregates a random assortment of parts and pieces" (52). The flow of the water and the jumble of wood and bodies and plants during the storm is a visual manifestation of the flows of affects.

A repeated trope of the film is Janie plunging into water. The first occurrence is her flight from Nanny when confronted with being corralled into the patriarchal configuration of marrying Logan; the final image of the film also involves water, with Janie plunging yet again and gasping for breath, floating on the surface with a reverse shot of the sky. The allusion to baptism, here not in organized religion but in the flowing spirituality of affects materialized in nature, is reflected in the voiceover line, "I'm watching God." In Deleuzian terms, this immersion, the entanglement of embodiment and environment, is an unconscious thriving:

> The body is no longer that obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. (Deleuze *Cinema 2*, 189)

Janie's vitality bursts through repressive distinctions; the imagery here contrasts the numerous shots of doors and windows that clearly delineate spaces. Starks explains the function of Deleuzian desiring-machines: they "break down the usual distinctions between inside/outside, self-other, mechanism/vitalism, human/nature. These dichotomies are no longer sustainable because both sides are involved in the same process of production. Desiring-machines do not respect categories such as the 'human.' Instead they bring into shifting aggregates a random

assortment of parts and pieces" (52). Desire here is not about security in Nanny's model or the white bourgeois reproductive couple-form. Stark further clarifies that Deleuze's model of desire "offers scope for desire to be emancipated from established patterns. The erotic is full of lines of flight: the compulsions, attachments and practices that escape prescriptive and normative ideas about sex. Desire is excessive and disorganizes things. It is precisely for this reason that it cannot be about identity or coherence" (58). The film is sexual but sex is not about the reproductive couple-form; fecundity is instead located in the environment and the assemblages of bodies and nature. The film is not about Janie overcoming double-consciousness to reconcile a coherent subject position, as the novel tracks; rather, the film effaces the interpelleting systems that subjectivize in favour of the transcendent annihilation of subjectivity.

After Pheoby leaves, the tale told, Janie's voiceover speaks: "Love is like the sea. It's a movin' thing, and it's different on every shore," affirming a model of flow. She walks outside her house, throws off her jacket, and bursts into a run—"the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 508). She runs through a field of tall grass and then plunges into the water, her body floating and splashing as light permeates from above. A reverse shot of her looking up at the sky accompanies Tea Cake's voiceover: "Whatchu doin', Janie?" She replies, "I'm watching God." The fantasy of ending is the full integration with nature; life and death are no longer separate as Tea Cake is present as well. The flow of water and flow of time and memory abolishes the subject: there is no position, only flows. Nevertheless, I contend here that it is impossible to have any kind of structural politics without a subject. In "Breaking Up With Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable," Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck explains the appeal of Deleuze for colonized and enslaved peoples in the beyond-structure of the rhizome: "No roots, no starting

place, no sequence, no ending place; only multiple sources, interruptions, interceptions, foldings, mergings, partings, multiple entry ways, exponential sequences, always, always the seeking out and out" (638). This conception parallels the erasure of Janie's matrilineage in the film and her permeable connectedness, culminating in this final image of body/nature, inside/outside, solid/flow, absence/presence assemblages.

Janie rejection of convention, her lines of flight—plunging in to the water at key moments where she asserts her freedom—"undo that which is thought to be static, not by returning to earlier freezes, but by exploding what is possible and practical through the processes of desire" (Tuck 645). Yet deterritorialization is not abolition. The shifting of metaphors that occurs in the Deleuzian model, and the metaphors of *Their Eyes*, necessarily remain in the realm of representation and mediation, even as Deleuze insists that his work is not metaphorical. The fantasy of Janie is one of an Icarus who does not die, a line of flight that leads to the assemblages of desiring-machines rather than annihilation, and a model of desire that is not reproducible outside the fantasy of representation, as these texts are of course implicated in the systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy—produced and circulated in the market. Despite the appeal of these metaphorical freedoms, Tuck writes:

> I am ready for a politics of desire that observes desire as enjoying *some/a lot of* self-determination, even as its lines of flight "flee in every direction." Desire, for my part, accumulates wisdom, picking up flashes of self-understanding and world-understanding along the way of a life. This wisdom is assembled not just across a lifetime, but across generations, so that my desire is linked, rhizomatically, to my past and my future. It is in the way I can tell my

> grandmother's stories with as much fullness as I tell my own, a practice among many first peoples. (645-6, original emphasis)

The temporality of Tuck's model of desire brings us back to history, an attention to the rhizomatic links not as unconscious assemblages but deliberate bonds along the lines of Sharpe's exhortation that we sit in the room with history. The ahistorical fantasy in of a subjectless desiring-machine in the film *Their Eyes* takes the radical freedom of the individual to the extreme—the freedom not to be a subject. Yet molar structures cannot be made molecular through the force of affect and desire. This fantasy is a trap, as here it comes in the form of an ideological adaptation that is part of a capitalist machine that espouses a colourblind conception of self-actualization that is personally therapeutic—but not structurally abolitionist—in the age of inequality and systemic oppression. A film may imagine the undifferentiated flow of desires and bodies and nature but its function is to shore up subjectivization in capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

I'm not Black, I'm Janie

A conception of white supremacy as rooted in ignorance rather than the policing of power, and able to be transcended by particularly exceptional individuals—due to hard work or sheer talent—is nothing new, and Zora Neale Hurston is part of a long tradition that resists social death not through abolition but rejection, and holds that acknowledging and fighting white supremacy is racial essentialism and making oneself into a victim. In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston proclaims her personal ambition:

> [I]f I must be connected with the flock, let *me* be the shepherd my ownself. This is just the way I am made. You cannot arouse any enthusiasm in me to join in a

> protest for the boss to provide me with a better how to chop his cotton with. Why must I chop cotton at all? Why fix a class of cotton-choppers? I will join in no protests for the boss to put a little more stuffing in my bunk. I don't even want the bunk. I want the boss' bed. (263, original emphasis)

Missing here are any abolitionist politics; instead, she espouses an ambition to be the boss. Of course, not everyone can be a boss, but this kind of aspirational politics is widespread, as a way to shore up capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy while touting individual achievement.[65]

Colourblind politics goes hand-in-hand with individualism. O.J. Simpson notoriously declared, "I'm not Black, I'm O.J." and Kanye West, whose body of work contains many lyrics attentive to structural racism and patriarchy and the trap of consumer capitalism, implied in 2018 that slavery was a choice. Among his tweets was a declaration of himself as a Trump supporter because he loves everyone; he is the cosmic Kanye: "We are both dragon energy. He is my brother. I love everyone. I don't agree with everything anyone does. That's what makes us individuals. And we have the right to independent thought" (@kanyewest). In "I'm Not Black, I'm Kanye," Ta-Nehisi Coates parses out West's individualism, contextualizing him in relation to other Black artists such as Michael Jackson:

> What Kanye West seeks is what Michael Jackson sought—liberation from the dictates of that *we*. [. . .]. West calls his struggle the right to be a "free thinker," and he is, indeed, championing a kind of freedom—a white freedom, freedom without consequence, freedom without criticism, freedom to be proud and ignorant; freedom to profit off a people in one moment and abandon them in the next; a Stand Your Ground freedom, freedom without responsibility, without hard

[65] Consider the discussion of the hip-hop mogul and Gatsby in Chapter Three, "Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*."

> memory; a Monticello without slavery, a Confederate freedom, the freedom of John C. Calhoun, not the freedom of Harriet Tubman, which calls you to risk your own; not the freedom of Nat Turner, which calls you to give even more, but a conqueror's freedom, freedom of the strong built on antipathy or indifference to the weak, the freedom of rape buttons, pussy grabbers, and *fuck you anyway, bitch*; freedom of oil and invisible wars, the freedom of suburbs drawn with red lines, the white freedom of Calabasas. (original emphasis)

This is the freedom to be the boss, to be on top of the American hierarchy, not the freedom from hierarchies. Significantly, Coates invokes Hurston in this article as an expression of that "we," quoting from *Of Mules and Men*.[66] Hurston, in this instantiation, signifies a celebration of Black culture that attends to the historical legacy, contrasted with the individualism of Kanye. In the passaged Coates quotes from Hurston:

> There is no separating the laughter from the groans, the drum from the slave ships, the tearing away of clothes, the being borne away, from the cunning need to hide all that made you human. And this is why the gift of black music, of black art, is unlike any other in America, because it is not simply a matter of singular talent, or even of tradition, or lineage, but of something more grand and monstrous. When Jackson sang and danced, when West samples or rhymes, they are tapping into a power formed under all the killing, all the beatings, all the rape and plunder that made America. The gift can never wholly belong to a singular

[66] "It was said, 'He will serve us better if we bring him from Africa naked and thing-less.' So the bukra reasoned. They tore away his clothes so that Cuffy might bring nothing away, but Cuffy seized his drum and hid it in his skin under the skull bones. The shin-bones he bore openly, for he thought, 'Who shall rob me of shin-bones when they see no drum?' So he laughed with cunning and said, 'I, who am borne away, to become an orphan, carry my parents with me. For rhythm is she not my mother, and Drama is her man?' So he groaned aloud in the ships and hid his drum and laughed" (Hurston qtd. in Coates, "I'm Not Black I'm Kanye").

> artist, free of expectation and scrutiny, because the gift is no more solely theirs than the suffering that produced it.

The complications of Hurston's work, representing a kind of "authentic" Black culture while also espousing individualist politics, account for the multiplicities of interpretations. It does not matter in an analysis of Hurston's texts and their circulation whether she herself believes she transcends race or not, despite her explicitly stating so. Surely, much in her work suggests she does not; it is also reductive to take Oprah's comment that she has never faced discrimination for being Black or a woman at face value. The textual poaching in interpretation is a matter of scale: Hurston and Oprah can be inspirational on an individual level—to pop stars and activists, moguls and scholars—while also participating in the shoring up of oppression on a systemic level. Hurston, Oprah, and even Kanye have multiple phases in their personas and brands, reinventing themselves or being taken up in new ways, and the culture and market rewards them for that modulation—the ultimate ideological adaptation of capitalism and the imperative to reproduce the American nation. That a narrative tracking the self-actualization of Janie, the proximate descendent of rape under enslavement, puts forth this kind of dismissal and disavowal of structural oppression demonstrates that there is always a market for racialized people doing the work of white supremacy.

Conclusion

"Make America Great Again!" – Donald J. Trump

This dissertation has argued through the examination of adaptations that the ideology of American liberal democracy is itself adaptable, and shifts or costumes itself for new historical and formal contexts while also adapting itself to critiques to strengthen its hegemony. Our current moment is seeing a crisis in American liberalism with the election of Donald J. Trump, whose slogan posits the future as a repetition of the past. While the general trend in recent decades has been the increasing thickening of liberal discourses and an expansion of the rhetoric of civil rights, the Trump era has been a jarring transparency in the exercising of sovereign power, without the conventional corresponding liberal cover. This increased transparency is occuring as the thickening of mediation reaches its limit to cloak the real material conditions, with the structures of power reasserting themselves firmly on the material side of their original vision in a revanchist backlash to the assertion of marginalized to the rights originally intended only for a few. In other words, the liberal discourses of old appear to no longer suffice as mythology, and cultural production is becoming increasingly polarized. In Jackie Wang's words, "The crisis of Donald Trump is more than a crisis of governance; it is a crisis of uncertainty" (47)—master narratives no longer suture together the nation, and the inequality at its root is laid bare. The inclusion and exclusion that founded the nation has thus led to an epistemological chasm: those who support the exploitation of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy (the material conditions of the nation) holding an incommensurable worldview with those who are fighting for justice for all (the discursive ideals of the nation). On the one hand, in some ways

American popular culture in particular has never been more willing to represent systemic critique;[67] on the other, systemic inequality is increasing rapidly and on a global scale.

Our current historical moment is seeing an intensification of adaptations, in the conventional sense as well as a plethora of memes, franchises, and sequels. Each iteration of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and the like tells the same stories with ever more aestheticized and fetishized images and spectacular special effects, copies of increasing scale and intensity. However, it is crucial to note that the current lamentation that culture lacks original narratives is not a new one, and in fact one that also undergoes repetition and adaptation. In "The 18th Brumaire," Karl Marx identifies this fixation on the past as a hindrance to true revolution:

> The tradition of countless dead generations is an incubus to the mind of the living. At the very times when they seem to be engaged in revolutionizing themselves and their circumstances, in creation something previously non-existent, at just such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously summon up the spirits of the past to their aid, borrowing from them names, rallying-cries, costumes, in order to stage the new world-historical drama in this time-honoured disguise and borrowed speech. (288)

More recently, Frederic Jameson sees this re-costuming of the past as a condition of what he identifies as postmodern culture:

> [T]he writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds—they've already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the unique ones have been thought of already. So the weight of the whole

[67] For example, consider the adaptation *Moonlight*'s depiction of individual lateral agency through the coming-of-age of a gay Black child, while firming invoking the systemic impact of the war-on-drugs and the school-to-prison pipeline.

> modernist aesthetic tradition—now dead—also "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," as Marx said in another context. Hence, once again, pastiche: in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involves the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past. ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 7)

Indeed, adaptation and the adaptation of ideology is not unique to narrative objects of the American century. This project conceives of ideological adaptation as the adaptation of ideology; on the precipice of the disintegration of liberalism and other crises, how will ideology adapt and what does this mean for narratives in the cultural imaginary? While America looks quite different on its surface from the literary to cinematic objects of this dissertation—in terms of image regimes, discourses of rights, media landscapes, temporalities, political economics, etc.—the ideologies of those narratives have adapted. The gesture in this conclusion is to pose a possibly unanswerable question: what, then, will be the adaptation of the future, as we are faced with the end of resource accumulation and the crisis of liberalism?

Case Study: The Post-Apocalypse of *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

This dissertation has focused on the narrative trajectories of the American sovereign subject through figures of exceptionality, but here I would like to put forth an example of how this methodology of viewing adaptation as ideological should not be restrained to that particular kind of narrative by briefly examining a science-fiction post-apocalyptic genre text: Denis

Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), a sequel to an adaptation (Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*) of a novel (*Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep?*, by Philip K. Dick, 1968), and thus a serial adaptation. A post-apocalyptic film such as *Blade Runner 2049* is paradigmatic of how culture imagines the end of accumulation through the adaptations of existing narrative; indeed, it is no accident that climate crisis and income inequality has heralded this disintegration of liberal consensus. The Cold-War-era novel was written in a time when the apocalyptic threat was nuclear annihilation, while the first *Blade Runner* emerged against the backdrop of anxieties about waning American technological hegemony and its role and dominance in the global order. *Blade Runner 2049* comes at a time when the threat is likely inevitable: climate crisis.

If climate crisis ends cycles of accumulation, what happens when there is nothing left to accumulate? The opening of *Blade Runner 2049* offers an answer: an eye opens and it cuts to repeated patterns, fascinating, enrapturing terraces and lattices. It's a feast for the eyes, to be sure, but here the agricultural terrain cultivates worms like a corpse. Other images in the film overwhelm with their stark beauty and cinematographic technique—recall Jameson's claim that art that reproduces the past also draws attention to its own aesthetic. There is nothing new, only the surface, the fetish that effaces history—here literalized by references to a technological blackout.

Post-apocalyptic fiction necessarily grapples with futurity. America is founded on the theft of land and people—an apocalypse for Indigenous people and the enslavement of Black people—and perpetuating accumulation into the future. Moreover, speculative fiction in general has long dealt with the fear of the colonizer to be colonized themselves—see Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996), for example—and the precarious policing and reproduction of the white nation. The first adaptation, *Blade Runner*, provides an imaginary displacement of

American slavery through the Aryan-looking Roy Batty and his coterie of white slaves as well as the implication that our all-American hero is himself part of that abject category. In *2049*, climate apocalypse has already happened, its anxieties contained through the fetishization of the image on the level of form and a nostalgic retrenchment into heteronormative white reproductive futurity on the level of content.

If what is at stake in this film, and in American mythology more generally, is the policing and reproduction of the white nation when threatened with demographic and climate crises, then the film must transcribe slavery onto white bodies and marginalize racialized people. The fantasy of *Blade Runner* is slaves who have to prove their humanity in an ontological sense—if you stab a replicant, do they not bleed?—because they're quite literally non-human. This parallel effaces the very real humanity of actual enslaved people and reduces them to their energy and capital. The imperative to have to prove one's humanity is legitimized here since the difference is in the body itself and by extension their reproductive capacity. Racialized characters are contained outside the project of reproductive futurity. If the American project since its genesis involves reproducing the white nation, racialized people and the wrong kind of white people (due to varying intersections of subject positionalities: class, gender, ability, etc.) are threats that must be expelled or contained.

Imagined (no-)futures proliferate in contemporary narrative, containing or sublimating our collective fears and desires. In *Blade Runner 2049*, there is no reproduction, only recycling. The figure of futurity, Ana, is a memory-maker—she fabricates and copies the past—and lives in a sterile glass cage; the only future implied in her final scene is more repetitions of *Blade Runners*. If *Blade Runner 2049* wrestles with climate catastrophe and the end of accumulation, it can only look back: in the limits of its imaginary, there are neither new lands nor new narratives,

with the future a machine that looks backward to the past because it lacks the resources to construct a future.

Whither Adaptation? Whither Ideology?

This case study implies that the cultural imaginary cannot represent an outside to our existing structures, even when grappling with the end of accumulation; this is, of course, a common trope in this genre, examined in depth by Mark Fisher and others. Indeed, this seems to fit a genealogy (or repetition or adaptation) that includes Marx in the 19th century and Jameson in the 20th. While this model seems accurate in terms of the representations of the future in our present, could our current moment of climate crisis, automation and dead labour, and the potential collapse of liberalism form not an inflection point but rather a rupture that prevents the adapting ideologies of the past from snaking their way into our future narratives?

Jackie Wang argues that rather than Marxist revolution—stemming from the possible autoimmunity of capitalism—or a techno-utopia, the future will see the incarceration of surplus populations, a brute material intensification of the foundation inclusion/exclusion, and an economy dominated by debt:

> While some post-Marxist tech critics hypothesize that automation will inevitably lead to guaranteed basic income, the monetization of the social value of our participation as *users*, and the creation of a post-work society, it seems just as plausible—given recent trends—that the social and economic crisis of unemployment caused by automation will lead to the creation of new debt regimes. [. . .]. Far from inaugurating the communist utopia many of us wish for, technological innovations that reduce the need for human labor may just become

> an opportunity for financial institutions to have broader ownership of our futures through the creating of new credit instruments. (66-67, original emphasis)

Presumably, the kinds of narratives that would emerge out of these conditions would continue the emphasis on individual agency to justify unequal structural conditions. In this case, the trend I have tracked through the American century would continue.

Stephen Dillion examines *Born in Flames* (1983)—a film that images the aftermath of a false revolution, one dressed, as Marx writes, in the costumes of the past—and argues that the future will always be an image of the past without a true revolution; that is, ideology will always adapt itself to new conditions without a fundamental change. Dillon writes of this temporality: "the amplification, modification, and protraction of the past in the present, where the past is not an isolated aberration of what is here, but, rather, is an anticipation of the present and future. The past is an image of the future because the future will be a repetition of the past" (41). He cautions, "If there is no progress, but instead repetition, modification, intensification, reversals, and suspensions, then we know what the future will be. The future will be what was before" (43); of course, as Trump's slogan implies, some may welcome this replication if they were originally included in its structural foundations. In terms of adaptation, this view posits the reproduction of existing forms through their adaptation to new contexts and a reproduction of the past in the future. The only way to break this temporality would be revolution, that is, a radical restructuring of both ideological and material conditions.

This dissertation has examined four case studies of ideological adaptation across the American century, arguing that American mythology-as-ideology adapts itself to contexts that appear quite different—in terms of image regime, cultural production, political economy, etc. These analyses treat the individual trajectories of characters as illuminating structural conditions

through the adaptation of narrative. Yet would we even see the adaptation of past narratives if we make a rupture with the past? If the ideologies of the moment are no longer the transmogrification of past ideologies, what would the adaptations of past narratives look like? Would revolution negate the repetition of narratives in the cultural imaginary altogether? Or, on the other hand, could repetition be mobilized to precipitate a rupture?[68] The answers to these questions are complex and uncertain, but the imperative to study ideological adaptation to understand the repetition of the past in the present and its projection into the future remains necessary.

[68] On gender, Judith Butler asks, "can this repetition, this rearticulation, also constitute the occasion for a critical reworking of apparently constitutive gender norms?" (ix)—which I would adapt to ask, can the repetition of narrative be, in her words, "an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them toward a more enabling future" (95)?

Bibliography

@kanyewest. "You don't have to agree with trump but the mob can't make me not love him. We are both dragon energy. He is my brother. I love everyone. I don't agree with everything anyone does. That's what makes us individuals. And we have the right to independent thought." *Twitter*, 25 April 2018, 10:30 a.m., https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/989179757651574784?lang=en.

2001: A Space Odyssey. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood. 1968. DVD. Warner Brothers, 2007.

Adorno, Theodor. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture.* Routledge, 2003, pp. 98-106.

---. "The Schema of Mass Culture." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture.* Routledge, 2003, pp. 61-97.

Adorno, Theodor and Marx Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford UP, 2002.

The Age of Innocence. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perfs. Daniel Day-Lewis, Michelle Pfeiffer, Winona Ryder. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1993.

Albrecht-Crane, Christa and Dennis Cutchins. "Introduction: New Beginnings for Adaptation Studies." *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*. Edited by Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2010, pp. 11-22.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2010. Revised Edition. The New Press, 2012.

Althusser, Louis. From "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." 1969. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: WW Norton &

Co., 2001. 1483-1508.

Andrew, Dudley. "The Economics of Adaptation." *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*. Edited by Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner. Oxford UP, 2011, pp. 27-39.

Arrighi, Giovanni. "Hegemony Unravelling." *New Left Review*, vol. 32, 2005, pp. 23-80.

---. *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. London: Verso, 2010.

Axelrod, Mark. *I Read It at the Movies: The Follies and Foibles of Screen Adaptation*. Heinemann, 2007.

Baker, W. Oliver. "Democracy, Class, and White Settler Colonialism." *Public Journal*, vol. 55, Spring 2017, pp. 144-153.

Barnhart, Bruce. *Jazz in the Time of the Novel: The Temporal Politics of American Race and Culture*. U of Alabama Press, 2013.

Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. 1977. Ed. and Trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1978.

---. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. Hill and Wang, 1972.

"Baz Luhrmann: 'Jay-Z Totally Nailed *The Great Gatsby*.'" *NME.com*. 11 May 2013. <http://www.nme.com/news/music/jay-z-52-1261771>. January 19, 2019.

Bazin, André. "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest." *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties.* Trans. Alan Piette and Bert Cardullo. Ed. Bert Cardullo. Routledge, 2014. pp. 41-52.

Beller, Jonathan. *The Cinematic Mode of Production.* Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.

Blade Runner 2049. Dir. Denis Villeneuve. Perfs. Ryan Gosling and Harrison Ford. Alcon Entertainment, 2017.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Ed. John Richardson. Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-258.

Bozak, Nadia. *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources*. Rutgers UP, 2011.

Brouillette, Sarah. "On Art and 'Real Subsumption.'" *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 29.2 (Lukács 2016). < http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/on-art-and-real-subsumption>. January 19, 2019.

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books, 2015.

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke UP, 2015.

Bubeníček, Petr. "Politics and Adaptation: The Case of Jan Hus." *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Edited by Thomas Leitch. Oxford UP, 2017, pp. 559-75.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter*. Routledge, 1993.

Cahir, Linda Costanzo. "*The House of Mirth*: An Interview with Director Terence Davies and Producer Olivia Stewart." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2001, pp. 166-171.

Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. Second Edition. Routledge, 2006.

Carroll, Michael Thomas. *Popular Modernity in American: Experience, Technology, Mythohistory*. SUNY Press, 2000.

Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan. *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Charley, Hélène. "*Shaft*'s Political Shifts." *Screening Text: Critical Perspectives on Film Adaptation*. Ed. Shannon Wells-Lassagne and Ariane Hudelet. McFarland & Company,

Inc., Publishers, 2013, pp. 114-128.

Chinball, Steve. "If You Build It, She Will Come: An Appreciation of Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013)." *Adaptation*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2014, pp. 94-7.

Citizen Kane. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles. 1941. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2001.

Clover, Joshua. "Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital." *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 41, no. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 34-52.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

---. "I'm Not Black, I'm Kanye." *The Atlantic.* 7 May 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/05/im-not-black-im-kanye/559763/>. January 19, 2019.

Compton, Wayde. *After Canaan*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010.

Cook, James W. "The Return of the Culture Industry." *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley. U of Chicago P, 2008, pp. 291-317.

Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin, White Masks*. U of Minnesota P, 2014.

Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford UP, 2003.

Cumings, Bruce. "Still the American Century." *British Journal of International Studies*, Winter 1999, pp. 271–299.

Danticat, Edwidge. "Forward." 2000. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Zora Neale Hurston. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013.

Davis, Kimberly Chabot. "Oprah's Book Club and the Politics of Cross-Racial Empathy." in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club*. Edited by Cecilia Konchar Farr and

Jaime Harker. SUNY Press, 2008. 141-162.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Zone Books, 1995.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, U Minnesota P, 1986.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. U Minnesota P, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1987.*

---. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1983.*

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Translated by Rachel Bowlby, Stanford UP, 2000.

Dillon, Stephen. ""It's here, it's that time:" Race, Queer Futurity, and the Temporality of Violence in *Born in Flames*." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2013, pp. 38-51.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." *Edith Wharton's* The House of Mirth*: A Casebook*. Ed. Carol J. Singley, Oxford UP, 2003, pp. 63-84.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator." *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Edited by Sue Thornham, NYU Press, 1999, pp. 131-145.

Dorson, James. "Intimate Exchanges: Work, Affect, and Exploitation in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." *American Studies in Scandinavia*, vol. 46, no. 1. 2014, pp. 55-68.

Douglass, Frederick. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?. Extract from an Oration, at Rochester, July 5, 1852.” *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Lit2Go Edition. 1855. <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/45/my-bondage-and-my-freedom/1517/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july-extract-from-an-oration-at-rochester-july-5-1852/>. January 15, 2019.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.

Elliott, Kamilla. “Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories.” *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions.* Eds. Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 19-46.

Ellis, Jim. “Temporality and Queer Consciousness in *The House of Mirth*.” *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 163-178.

Endnotes. “The History of Subsumption.” *Endnotes 2*, April 2010, <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption>. January 19, 2019.

Ferguson, Otis. “You Can’t Hear Their Voices [Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*].” in *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. GK Hall & Co., 1998.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Broadview Press, 2007.

Froelich, Maggie Gordon. “Gatsby’s Mentors: Queer Relations Between Love and Money in *The Great Gatsby*. *The Journal of Men’s Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 2011, pp. 209-226.

G. Dir. Christopher Scott Cherot. Perfs. Richard T. Jones, Chenoa Maxwell, and Blair Underwood. Sony Pictures, 2002.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. “Afterword: Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying.’” 1990. *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Zora Neale Hurston. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

---. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford UP, 1989.

Get Out. Dir. Jordan Peele. Perfs. Daniel Kaluuya and Allison Williams. Universal Pictures, 2017.

Goldsmith, Meredith. "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2003, pp. 443-468.

Gompertz, Will. "Oprah Winfrey: The Butler, Racism and Obama." 13 November 2013. Interview. *BBC News*. Video. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-24934979/oprah-winfrey-the-butler-racism-and-obama>. January 19, 2019.

The Great Gatsby. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Perfs. Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire, and Carey Mulligan. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

Grewal, Gurleen. "'Beholding "A Great Tree in Leaf"': Eros, Nature, and the Visionary in Their Eyes Were Watching God." in *"The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Deborah G. Plant, editor. Praeger, 2010. 103-112.

Griggs, Yvonne. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Hammett, Roberta F. and Audrey Dentith. "Some Lessons before Dying: Gender, Morality, and the Missing Critical Discourse in Oprah's Book Club." In *The Oprah Phenomenon*. Updated Edition. Eds. Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson. UP of Kentucky, 2009. 207-226.

Hanssen, Eirik Frisvold. "Imaginary Museums, Material Refractions: André Bazin on Adaptation." *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions.* Eds. Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 33-54.

Harol, Corrine and Mark Simpson, "Introduction: Toward a Literary History for the Twenty-First Century." *Literary/Liberal Entanglements: Toward a Literary History for the Twenty-*

First Century. U of T Press, 2017.

Harrison-Kahan, Lori. "'Queer myself for good and all': *The House of Mirth* and the Fictions of Lily's Whiteness." *Legacy*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2004, pp. 34-49.

Hemenway, Robert. "Crayon Enlargements of Life." in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. 73-100.

---. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. U Illinois P, 1977.

Hinnov, Emily M. "Modernist Visions of 'Self' within Community: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and James Van Der Zee's Home in Harlem Photographs." In *"The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Deborah G. Plant, editor. Praeger, 2010. 65-78.

Hitchcock, Peter. "Oil in an American Imaginary." *New Formations*, vol. 69, 2010, pp. 81-97.

The House of Mirth. Dir. Terence Davies. Perf. Gillian Anderson and Dan Ackroyd. FilmFour, 2000.

Hughes, Clair. "Consuming Clothes: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." *Fashion Theory*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2005, pp. 383-406.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* Ed. Deborah Plant. Amistad, 2018.

---. *Dust Tracks on a Road*. 1942. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

---. "How It Feels to be Colored Me." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Vol 1, Third Edition, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Valerie Smith, W.W. Norton, 2014, pp. 1040-1042.

---. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013.

---. "What White Publishers Won't Print." *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American*

Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present, edited by Angelyn Mitchell, Duke UP, 1994, pp. 117-121.

Hutcheon, Linda with Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd Edition. Routledge, 2013.

I Am Not Your Negro. Dir. Raoul Peck. Narrated by Samuel L. Jackson. Velvet Film, 2016.

Illouz, Eva. *Oprah Winfrey and The Glamor of Misery*. Columbia UP, 2003.

Jackson, Bruce. "Nick's 'I'/Nick's Eye: Why They Couldn't Film *Gatsby*." *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 52, Summer 2009.

Jameson, Frederic. "Marx's Purloined Letter." *Ghostly Demarcations*. Edited by Michael Sprinkler, Verso, 1999, pp. 26-67.

---. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell UP, 1981.

---. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. Verso, 2009, pp. 1-20.

---. "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?" in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005, pp. 281-295.

Jay-Z. "99 Problems." *The Black Album*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004.

---. "Public Service Announcement." *The Black Album*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004.

Jefferson, Thomas. "The Declaration of Independence." *Historic American Documents*. Lit2Go Edition. 1776. <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/133/historic-american-documents/4957/the-declaration-of-independence/>. January 15, 2019.

Jehlen, Myra. *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent*. Harvard UP, 1986.

Kaplan, Amy. "Crowded Spaces in *The House of Mirth*." *Edith Wharton's* The House of Mirth*: A Casebook*. Edited by Carol J. Singley, Oxford UP, 2003, pp. 85-105.

Kassanoff, Jennie A. “Extinction, Taxidermy, Tableaux Vivants: Staging Race and Class in *The House of Mirth*.” *PLMA*, vol. 115, no. 1, Jan. 2000, pp. 60-74.

King, Lovalerie. *The Cambridge Introduction to Zora Neale Hurston*. Cambridge UP, 2008.

Kirby, Lynne. *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*. Duke UP, 1997.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. The Modern Library, 2002.

Lavoie, Mark. “Transforming Huck Finn into Paul Watkins: Upton Sinclair’s ‘Red’ Re-Imagining in *Oil!*” *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 2009, pp. 18-29.

Leitch, Thomas. “Introduction.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Edited by Thomas Leitch. Oxford UP, 2017, pp. 1-22.

LeMenager, Stephanie. “The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after Oil!” *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 59-86.

Lena, Alberto. “The Colors of New York: Racism, Historicism and Site in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.” *Public Space, Private Lives: Race, Gender, Class and Citizenship in New York, 1890-1929.* Edited by William Boelhower and Anna Scacchi, VU University Press, 2004. 209-222.

Leonard, John. “*Oprah Winfrey Presents: Their Eyes Were Watching God* [Review].” *New York Magazine*. <http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/tv/reviews/11237/>. January 19, 2019.

Lewis, Charles. “Babbled Slander Where the Paler Shades Dwell: Reading Race in *The Great Gatsby* and *Passing*.” *Critical Insights:* The Great Gatsby *by F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Morris Dickstein, Salem Press, 2009, pp. 72-92.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A New Abridgement.* Edited by David McLellan, Oxford UP, 2008.

---. “From ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.’” *The Portable Karl Marx*. Edited by Eugene Kamenka. Viking Penguin, 1983, pp. 287-323.

---. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. *The Portable Karl Marx.* Edited by Eugene Kamenka, Viking Penguin, Inc., 1983, pp. 203-241.

---. "On the Jewish Question." *The Portable Karl Marx.* Ed. Eugene Kamenka. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1983, pp. 96-114.

McCabe and Mrs. *Miller*. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Warren Beatty and Julie Christie. 1971. DVD. Warner Brothers, 2002.

Meehan, Adam. "Repetition, Race, and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 37, no. 2, Winter 2014, pp. 76-91.

Meisenhelder, Susan Edwards. *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*. U Alabama P, 1999.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Shorter 8th Edition, Vol. 1, eds. Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, W.W. Norton & Company, 2013, pp. 1102–1128.

Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Mock, Janet. *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*. Atria Books, 2014.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. Verso, 1987.

Moylan, Lynn. "'A Child Cannot Be Taught by Anyone Who Despises Him': Hurston versus Court-Ordered School Integration." in *"The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*, edited by Deborah G. Plant. Praeger, 2010. 215-224.

Moynihan, Sinéad. "Beautiful White Girlhood?: Daisy Buchanan in Nella Larsen's *Passing*." *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 37-49.

Mullen, Patrick. “The Aesthetics of Self-Management: Intelligence, Capital, and *The House of Mirth.*” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2009, pp. 40-61.

Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema.” *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

Murphet, Julian. “P.T. Anderson’s Dilemma: The Limits of Surrogate Paternity.” *Sydney Studies in English*, vol. 34, 2008, pp. 63-85.

Oprah Winfrey Presents: Their Eyes Were Watching God. Dir. Darnell Martin. Perfs. Halle Berry and Michael Ealy. Harpo Productions, 2005.

Pease, Donald. “America.” *Fuelling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment*. Edited by Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger, Fordham UP, 2017.

Peck, Janice. *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*. Paradigm Publishers, 2008.

Pennington, Adrian and Carolyn Giardina. *Exploring 3D: The New Grammar of Stereoscopic Cinema*. Focal Press, 2012.

Phipps, Gregory. “Making the Milk into a Milkshake: Adapting Upton Sinclair’s Oil! into P.T. Anderson’s There Will Be Blood.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 34-45.

Plant, Deborah G. “Afterword.” *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo.”* Zora Neale Hurston. Amistad, 2018.

---. “Introduction.” *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo.”* Zora Neale Hurston. Amistad, 2018. xiii-xxv.

---. “*Their Eyes Were Watching God*: The Novel, the Film—An Interview with Valerie Boyd.” in *“The Inside Light”: New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Deborah G. Plant, editor. Praeger, 2010. 197-202.

Polan, Dana. “The ‘Great American Novel’ as Pop-up Book: Baz Luhrmann’s *The Great Gatsby*.” *Adaptation*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2013, pp. 397-399.

Quinn, Eithne. “Occupy Wall Street, Racial Neoliberalism, and New York’s Hip-Hop Moguls.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2016, pp. 75-99.

Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Polity, 2009.

Roediger, David. *Class, Race, and Marxism*. Verso, 2017.

Rohrbach, Augusta. “Sexing the Lily: Shadows and Darkness in Terence Davies’ *House of Mirth*.” *Edith Wharton Review*, vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 19-25.

Saltz, Laura. “‘The Vision-Building Faculty’: Naturalistic Vision in *The House of Mirth*.” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 17-46.

Scholz, Anne-Marie. *From Fidelity to History: Film Adaptations as Cultural Events in the Twentieth Century*. Berghahn Books, 2013.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016.

Shinbrot, Victoria. “Risk and Subversion in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*.” *Orbit Litterarum*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2012, pp. 39-60.

Sickels, Amy. “The Prose of Zora Neale Hurston.” in *Bloom’s BioCritiques: Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. 49-72.

Sinclair, Upton. *Oil!* Penguin Books, 2007.

Smith, Brenda R. “Reaping What She Sows: The Evolution of African American Female Bildung and the Journey to Self from Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*.” In *New Essays on the African American Novel: From Hurston and Ellison to Morrison and Whitehead*. Ed. by Lovalerie King and Linda F. Selzer. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. pp. 123-139.

Smith, Christopher Holmes. "'I Don't Like to Dream about Getting Paid': Representations of Social Mobility and the Emergence of the Hip-Hop Mogul." *Social Text*, vol. 21, no. 4, Winter 2003, pp. 69-97.

Söderlind, Sylvia. "Introduction: The Shining of America." *American Exceptionalisms: From Winthrop to Winfrey.* Ed. by Sylvia Söderlind and James Taylor Carson. SUNY Press, 2011, pp. 1-14.

Somers, Renée. *Edith Wharton as Spatial Activist and Analyst*. Routledge, 2005.

Stanley, Tarshia L. "The Specter of Oprah Winfrey: Critical Black Female Spectatorship." in *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club*. Edited by Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker. SUNY Press, 2008. 35-49.

Stark, Hannah. *Feminist Theory After Deleuze*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Stevens, R.L. "Between the Black Body and Me." *Jacobin Magazine*. 31 May 2017. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/05/ta-nehisi-coates-racism-afro-pessimism-reparations-class-struggle>. January 19, 2019.

Szeman, Imre. "Afterword." *Fuelling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment*. Edited by Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger, Fordham UP, 2017.

---. "Intro to Focus: Petrofictions." *American Book Review*, March-April 2012, p. 3.

---. "System Failure: Oil, Futurity and the Anticipation of Disaster." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 4, 2007, pp. 805-823.

Taylor, Christopher. "'Inescapably Propaganda': Re-Classifying Upton Sinclair outside the Naturalist Tradition. *Studies in American Naturalism*, vol. 2, no. 2, Winter 2007, pp. 166-178.

There Will Be Blood. Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson. Perf. Daniel Day Lewis. 2007. DVD.

Paramount Vantage and Miramax, 2007.

Tuck, Eve. "Breaking Up With Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable*." International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 635-650.

Turner, Victor. "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology." *Rice University Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, Summer 1974, pp. 53-92.

Totten, Gary. "The Art and Architecture of the Self: Designing the 'I'-Witness in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 71-87.

Vidal Villasur, Belén. "Classic Adaptations, Modern Reinventions: Reading the Image in the Contemporary Literary Film." *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 5-18.

Vogel, Joseph. "'Civilization's Going to Pieces': The Great Gatsby, Identity, and Race, from the Jazz Age to the Obama Era." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, vol. 13, 2015, pp. 29-54.

Vredenburg, Jason. "The Californian Problem: Upton Sinclair's Oil! and the Mexican Revolution." *American Literary Realism*, vol. 48, no. 3, Spring 2016, pp. 251-269.

Walker, Alice. "Foreword." *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* Zora Neale Hurston. Amistad, 2018. ix-xii.

---. "Forward." *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Robert Hemenway. U of Illinois P, 1977.

Walker, Pierre. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Post-Modern Self." *African-American Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1998, pp. 387–399.

Wall, Cheryl A. "Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words." in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. 101-128.

Wallace, Michelle. *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. 1990. Verso, 2016.

Wamacher, Werner. "Lingua Amissa: The Messaianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida's

Specters of Marx. *Ghostly Demarcations*. Edited by Michael Sprinkler, Verso, 1999, pp. 168-212.

Weaver, Caity. "Cardi B's Money Moves." *GQ Magazine*. 9 April 2018. <https://www.gq.com/story/cardi-b-invasion-of-privacy-profile>. January 19, 2019.

Wells-Lassange, Shannon. "Sexual Politics: *The Last September,* Novel and Film." *Screening Text: Critical Perspectives on Film Adaptation*. Ed. Shannon Wells-Lassagne and Ariane Hudelet. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013, pp. 129-139.

West, Kanye. "All Falls Down." *The College Dropout*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004.

---. "Gold Digger." *Late Registration*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2005.

---. "You Can't Tell Me Nothing." *Graduation*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2007.

West, M. Genevieve. *Zora Neale Hurston & American Culture*. UP of Florida, 2005.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. Edited by Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, Broadview Press, 2005.

Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Culture and Materialism*. Verso, 2005, pp. 35-55.

Wilson, Sherryl. *Oprah, Celebrity and Formations of the Self*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Wright, Richard. "Between Laughter and Tears [Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*]." in *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. GK Hall & Co., 1998.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan thought Popular Culture*. MIT Press, 1992.