

"crawling through these cracks:" THE APOCALYPTIC BODY IN CONTEMPORARY
LITERATURES OF TRANSGRESSION

by

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Abstract

Apocalypse narratives and their categorical perversions provide a symptomatology of Western cultural subject-formation, and chart out the subject's anxious response to his own desire for transcendence. Through close readings of four contemporary American authors: Kathy Acker, Bret Easton Ellis, Chuck Palahniuk, and Hubert Selby Jr., the generic matrices of apocalypse as a formal literary and cultural structure (or set of structures) are examined. These contemporary apocalypses, contextualized with and against their historical antecedents, the Book of Daniel and Revelation, disclose what I theorize as a logic of the terminal subject – the transgressive confrontation of the subject with his own condition of disappearance. Mobilizing psychoanalytic and poststructuralist critical legacies I seek, here, to open up the field of apocalypse studies to a renewed investigatory practice, which would engage both the theological as well as secular representational content of end-time practices and discourse.

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*Chapter One – “crawling through these cracks:” The Apocalyptic Body in
Contemporary Literatures of Transgression*

Introduction: The Apocalyptic Drift

The whole rotten world
come down and break
and I'm crawling
through these cracks
I've never had a lover
not in the world that exists
I've never wanted one
piss on my teeth, shit and piss.
I wanted to die . . .
I'm a girl,
night is my eyes,
die for a while.
While the world cracks open
and all the rich men die,
and all the fucks who've sat on my face,
those sniveling shites.
We come crawling through these cracks, orphans, lobotomies;
if you ask me what I want I'll tell you
I want everything.

Whole rotten world come down and break.

Let me spread my legs.

rats coming out

of broken egg half

(Acker, Pussy, King of the Pirates 211-212)

Apocalypse as Genre: The Structuration of Crisis

It seems an almost ironic preparatory maneuver to commence a discussion of terminal narratives by tracing out their generic matrices – the apocalypse’s propensity, as it were, towards recurrence, structure, and recognizability. To make such a gesture, however, is also to open up its conditions to interrogation and de-formation. The study of apocalypse as genre, itself, is a contentious arena, fraught with complex internal divisions and intersections between literariness, eschatology and ideology.

The topology of the apocalypse and its narratives are to be distinguished from other modes of religious discourse by the apocalypse’s philosophical foregrounding of a specifically deterministic world order, as well as its fundamental reliance upon highly encoded metaphor and, hence, “initiate” knowledge as textual strategy. Apocalypse engages with and intervenes in the tradition of prophetic language and prophecy’s preoccupation with an emblematic production of both knowledge and reality through the fundamental, and radical, pronouncement: “In the beginning was the word and the word was God” (Taithe and Thornton 4), as “origin” anticipates the formal content of its discursive culmination. Whereas, however, prophecy engages “possibility,” and contingency, in opposition, apocalyptic language “reveals” a historically immutable

“end-time” (Bergoffen 11-35). In other words, prophecy can be understood as conditionally enacted and as that which relies upon a series of variable and indeterminate human actions for realization (Ezekiel, Isaiah, and First Enoch exemplify the gradual literary movement from prophecy to the apocalyptic tradition from about 592 BCE to approximately 250 BCE – a generic shift to the eschatological form that is seen to definitively commence with the production of the Book of Daniel circa 167 BCE). Prophecy, as a discursive formulation, is generally read as hortatory in nature (Clendenen 385), that is, its function is to compel the reader to engage a particular form of action through which the prophecy can be realized, whereas apocalypse constructs for us a “determined” unveiling of the condition of an intrinsically corrupted material presence at its “certain” conclusion – here, exhortation cannot change or redirect the outcome of the prophecy in its eschatological dimension. Human action, in apocalyptic revelation, is always already embedded within the parameters of its own undoing, as is the very notion of “the human” itself in its apocalyptic disassemblage and reconfiguration within the collective subjectivity of the godhead that formulates the New Jerusalem within Revelation.

Concomitantly, apocalypse’s narratological ties to the complicated history of theistic mysticism deserves a more sensitive treatment than I can, here, provide. I wish, however, to raise the interesting etymological functions of each strand, and the significance of a few of their hermeneutic deviations to my overall thesis. The term “mysticism” is derived from the Greek *mueo*, which means to “conceal,” whereas apocalypse comes from the Greek term *apokalyptein*, that is, to “uncover.” The opposition of these roots

points to the fundamental self-reflexivity of mystical experience, which is countered by apocalypse's uneasy relation to the self in terms of its own distinct discursive priorities.

In contradistinction to apocalypse, mysticism can be understood, following St. Thomas Aquinas, as an unmediated, experiential knowledge of God, what Aquinas termed "*cognitio dei experimentalis*." Apocalypse, generally, containing mystical, otherworldly elements, is a heavily mediated, discourse, whose interpretation is governed, not by the prophet receiving the vision, as occurs within the mystical tradition, but, rather, through the engagement of the Other(s) that guide the prophet through his experience. Apocalypse can be thought of as a kind of process whereby the mystical experience is dispossessed of its singularly subjective experience. The apocalyptic experience, in other words, is "global," whereas the mystical experience is "personal." The possibility of linguistic and psychological collapse into the mystical is foreclosed by the apocalypse's insistence upon schemes of institutionally regulated notions of self and knowledge. As Calin Mihailescu notes in his discussion of the construction of the body in Christian mystical literature:

...Christian eschatology, a way of thinking already historicized by the end of the New Testament, provides a powerful framework that may include and disposes [sic] mystical thought of its irreducible particularities. The "immortality of the body" in eschatological thought amounts to mortification, with the difference that one does not find an Egyptian mummy in a "post-apocalyptic pyramid": here the body is mortified by omission. In Christian terms, an "eschatological body" is utter nonsense. As the Christian apocalyptic thought focuses on the moral aspects of the Last Judgment, the body is relegated to a space that is absent from Christian

discourseThe real urgency imposed by Christ's presence *and* absence is

traded for a "delayed urgency," a feeling common to all members of the race.

The concept of Christian history emerges as the way toward the second coming and the Last Judgment, and in this historicization the experience of the individual, of his body, of utter urgency, is marginalized or lost. (6-7)

I am interested, here, in Mihailescu's subtextual gestures towards the apocalypse as both the disenfranchisement of the prophetic body from its singularity, as well as in his supposition of a cultural imperative towards "delayed urgency" that characterizes the eschatological imagination; however, as I will elaborate in terms of my taking up of the "transapocalyptic," such maneuvers towards apocalypse as discourses of undifferentiation do not account for the complex and subtle generic play that the literatures, themselves, instantiate. Apocalypse, indeed, reorganizes mystical experience, as well as the mystical body, but not necessarily in order to deprive the mystic narrative and subject of its "authenticity" and ideological "values" through a historicizing process. Apocalypse, contrary to Mihailescu's evaluation, is only partially concerned with the historicization of "the end" – "history," in other words, is only one facet of the genre. The generic oppositions that we may call up between prophecy, mysticism, and apocalyptic discourse are merely operational – they serve only to indicate general tendencies from which we may chart the narratives' subsequent "perversions" and undoings – their inability to obey "themselves."

The secularization of apocalypse discourse within, particularly, the late-twentieth century, begins the process whereby the interpretive Other is deconstructed and dissolved into the agency of the "prophet," not as a desire to re-engage or emphasize, necessarily,

the mystical components of apocalypse per se, but, conversely, to destroy the agenda of the mediation as both meaning- and subject-production, itself. Contemporary apocalypses psychologize the revelatory experience; they understand God and the Word as “trauma,” to appropriate the terminology of Greg Mogenson in his text God Is A Trauma: Vicarious Religion and Soul-Making. The import of the subjectivisation of apocalypse and the anxiety of interpretive agency will be taken up in my close readings of the contemporary apocalypses of Acker, Ellis, Palahniuk, and Selby.

Contemporary apocalypse exegesis has traditionally maintained a distinction between the “apocalyptic” as an ideology and “apocalypse” as genre. Four central distinctions have been drawn up by The Society of Biblical Literature Genres, which effectually sub-categorize the interpretive use of the notion of the apocalypse: 1) apocalypse as literary genre; 2) the apocalyptic as historical movement; 3) apocalypticism as social ideology; and 4) apocalyptic eschatology as a set of ideas and motifs. The desire of biblical critics to maintain the distinctiveness of apocalyptic components¹ stems from a wariness of collapsibility and the effacement of differential nuance that the application of generic frameworks has the potential to elicit. More recently, the concern has revolved around the elision of discursive *intention* in the production of a “master-paradigm” for apocalypse narratives (Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John” 13-64). It is, however, precisely this categorical dissension that provides for the richness and instability of apocalypse relation and expressions more

¹ The cumulative and still debated outcome of this critical discussion can be found in the collected papers of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, which was held in Sweden in 1979.

generally, and, which my investigation will take up in greater detail in terms of contemporary adoptions of “end time.”

The collation of “ends,” which comprises the genre of apocalypse, draws its definitional structure from the seminal work of John J. Collins in conjunction with David Hellholm’s provisional adjunct of the objective of the category. The conditional prescripts of apocalypse literature read thus:

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial as it involves another, supernatural world.

(Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre” 9)

Hellholm adds to this overview, the provision that apocalypse is, as well, “intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of a divine authority” (27). Hellholm’s *supplement* provides the integral element of cultural panic – a symptom of sorts, which, in turn, necessitates or calls into being the apocalypse as, interestingly, assuagement through what is, fundamentally, a process of “group” re-making. What this condition of crisis instantiates is a foregrounding of the essential constructedness of apocalyptic discourse *as* traumatic response to the reading and writing of cultural history itself. The functions of disclosure and prophecy that apocalypse emphasizes as narrative concerns become produced or manufactured therapeutically against, or, as a covering over of, socio-cultural disruption. Thus, the generic formulation of apocalypse creates what can be viewed as an ideational aporia. The crisis is subsumed by the treatment – indeed, the crisis, in popular consciousness, is read *through* the sign of

apocalypse and, in this way, apocalypse is *properly* invented as a critical paradigm. The word (or sign), quite appropriately, absorbs and/or consumes its own mode of effectuation as the particular revelation demands, which creates, in its wake, a kind of gap of knowledge – *something* in this translation is lost, and it is this “residuum” of apocalypse that I am concerned with pursuing.

The resurfacing of this erased content in apocalypse’s contemporary formations is, at least in part, a conceptual dismantling of the transcendent or noumenal that apocalyptic discourse privileges as a condition of the “working-through” of the precipitating crisis. Here, I am suggesting that there is not so much an effacement of the transcendent in twentieth-century apocalypses, but that, rather, this space is configured as always already profane as opposed to immaculate. Apocalypse is read on the abject bodies of the individual and bracketed “subjects” of the texts in which they are situated. In a sense, contemporary apocalypse narratives effectually re-map apocalypse as an inherent condition of subjectivisation – the point at which the symbolic is accessed as a condition of fulsome misrecognition.

For Collins, in his original tracing of apocalypse as genre, the primary narrative requirement for taxonomic inclusion is that of “transcendence.” Collins states, and it is valuable, here, to quote him at length, that

[t]he manner of revelation requires the mediation of an otherworldly being: i.e., it is not given directly to the human recipient and does not fall within the compass of human knowledge. The manner of revelation then already asserts the reality of another world, superior to our own in knowledge, even in the knowledge of human affairs and destiny. The reality of this other world is further affirmed by

reference to angelic and demonic beings, and by the descriptions of heavenly geography. Human life is set in a context which is shaped by this otherworldly, supernatural dimension. Finally, the transcendent nature of apocalyptic eschatology looks beyond this world to another. The forms of salvation are diverse, exaltation to the heavens or renewal of the earth, but in all cases they involve a radically different type of human existence, in which all the constraints of the human condition, including death, are transcended. Both the manner of revelation and the eschatological content point beyond this world to another which is at once the source of revealed knowledge and of future salvation.

(“Introduction” 10-11)

The mediated nature of this “delivery” of revelation is essential in order to maintain the already compromised boundaries of the human subject that, in Hellholm’s mode of crisis, cannot sustain itself. This re-regulating function of revelation, which will be examined more fully in my discussion of the elements of transgression within apocalypse, is notable, as well, in its taking up of the dissemination of both knowledge and enlightenment from a particularly pronounced alterior space. The transmission of the voice of the Other, in this manner, becomes fundamentally relevant for any consideration of twentieth-century apocalyptic narratives, which posit this kind of communicative strategy as perverse, abject, and pathological – the elided, or, more accurately, redirected subtext, certainly, of the conventional apocalypse scenes from which they draw.

A conservative apocalypse, as Elana Gomel intuitively observes, posits a “utopian transformation of the body (and the body politic) through suffering” (2), whereas contemporary apocalyptic drifts centralize, not the purification of the distressed body, but

its very containment of dis-ease. Theorists such as James Berger and Gomel have termed this trend as “postapocalyptic,” and the “remainder” as apocalyptic “aftermath” or “sequel,” which belies the fundamental impossibility of apocalypse to be, effectually, consummated. An “aftermath” would suggest the failure of either the apocalypse or of the constitution of the successful “utopia” that “replaces” the “end.” To “post” apocalypse is to mis-route its narrative and political strategies and to neutralize the interesting purgatorial aspects of the “trans,” or the *apocalypse in waiting*, as it were. The margin that I wish to emphasize, with an insistence upon a sub-narrative of transapocalypticism, in contradistinction to a postapocalypticism, is precisely that notion of “interminability” that Gomel locates as a substantive feature of her postapocalyptic. The critical impatience to exceed the “end,” and/r to semantically align it with both postmodern and apocalyptic discourse is as inadequate a paradigm as the attending conflation of apocalypse with millenarianism. The theoretical impoverishment of apocalypse, and its own discursive protocols that ensue, substantively undermines any grounding for a postapocalyptic that may be available for examination, in turn.

Twentieth-century assumptions of the tropes of apocalypse concern themselves with a self-reflexion, and with an agenda to obfuscate the dialectical nature of the relationship between revelation and redemption that the type contains as its ostensive and, importantly, *divine* moment. Although this essential collapse can be traced through conventional apocalypses, it is, in fact, an interpretive inversion of sorts that resides outside of the narrative’s generic demands, inasmuch as *apocalypse* is, by its very etymological nature, the act of uncovering or of disclosure. Contemporary discursive resistances to sustaining the origin of apocalypse as “revelation” can be seen as a kind of

outing of the subtext of the traditional apocalypse – a signal that there is a breakdown being charted in regard to the process of revelation itself, or, a disavowal of the terminal “One,” the simultaneous presence of the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, that eschatological representations convey as an axiomatic necessity. The ironic multiplication of the “disclosing” processes of apocalypse, here, are not reductive, however, but work, instead, to create an almost infinite network of narratological folds, which deconstruct not only the central tenets of “revelation” that apocalypse attends to, but, as well, the notion of the “unsealing” or “unfolding” of knowledge that revelation discursively announces.

Prevailing apocalypse forms, in tension against the conventional understanding of revelation as the process of unveiling, refold the schema by ironizing their own generic historiography. Thus, as we will see in Selby, the “exit,” as well as the “dream,” are both prefaced and foreclosed by their imbrication with various terminal institutions and practices (for example, the law, gender, class, and geography). Unfoldings, here, signal the fatal breakdown and circumvolution of the subject as opposed to its emancipation and transparency. Similarly, Acker’s apocalypses are referentially bound to the suspect spaces of the “senseless,” and the “vision,” through which the required revelation is simultaneously sought and lost in a series of deprived end-games. Maps, in Acker, for example, are always already encrypted; locations float, and quests deconstruct their own demands through their reflexive awareness of their own fictional nature. In Ellis and Palahniuk, in turn, masculinity is configured as an apocalyptic economy generated by the anxious dynamic between the self and his social, which is manufactured as a fractured descent into “madness” and hyper-realized forms of violence indicated in the narrative

preoccupations with torture, murder, and, perhaps more complexly, in Palahniuk's "fight club." In each of the contemporary apocalypse narratives examined in this dissertation, we can trace out the re-emergence of the prophet as the pathological invention of a subject who has come face to face, as it were, with the abject core of his or her own being. The "otherworldly journey" of the twentieth-century prophet is a nightmare devoid of redemption in which the "promise" of the New Jerusalem is exposed as mere simulation and surface effect of a discourse always already without meaning.

The terminal, or end-point, bodies, which comprise the fluctuating and intermediary field of the transapocalyptic, are decidedly textual ones – hermeneutic fractures, which are simultaneously self-narrativizing and self-undoing – and, hence, unpredictable. It is within this implausible non-space, a kind of *khora*², that the movement towards the "absolute" deterritorialization of the self occurs. The transapocalypse is the "revelation," the process of the Other's confession, which, at least in contemporary terms, is unrealizable because inarticulable. In a sense one can understand the transmission of apocalyptic discourse as "aphasic." Prophetic language is always already a mediation, a

² I would follow, here, Derrida's reading of Plato's *khora* as "alien to the order of the 'paradigm,' that intelligible and immutable model" (On the Name 90). As Timaeus articulates, in terms of a kind of "bind:"

Out of the indivisible and unchangeable, and also out of that which is divisible and has to do with material bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of essence, partaking of the nature of the same and of the other, and this compound he placed accordingly in a mean between the indivisible, and the divisible and material. (Plato, *Timaeus* <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html>)

I is this "un-nameable" negotiator that Plato struggles to articulate that the transapocalypse compels us to read not only as an interceded "Other," (the process of communicating the revelation between this Other and prophet) but, as well, as in a parallel or simultaneity with apocalypse discourse itself (its generic traits). As in layers of transparency sheets, there is a "bleeding-through" of meaning made possible through this bind, or "third" territory of the transapocalypse.

speaking through *another's* tongue, as it were. Language and communication become, here, radically severed from the enunciating subject. In this excommunication of meaning and utterance there is that integral, however illegitimate movement towards “nonsense” – a discourse that lies outside the normative sphere of knowledge and comprehension. The transcendent territory that the “revelation” calls forth is an explicitly semiotic space – an unveiling of the “signs” and “codes” of the condition of crisis that it, concurrently writes and is written by. The very inaccessibility of these signs (in particular, towards the group in crisis), their requirement of both an interpretive framework and framer through which to functionally enter into relationship with the *socius* (through the translative presence of the prophet or “relater” of the revelatory discourse who “administers” the “unsealing” of the narrative), and their equivocal logics all work towards the rendering of apocalypse as an always already foundering exposure. Revelation is a discourse of what can be understood as the “brink.” Apocalypse is, itself, a representational sequencing that, quite literally, exhausts itself in its own making.³

Dangerous Liaisons: Apocalypse and Transgression

The contestatory terrain of transgression, and its involved associations with apocalypse narratives, more generally, finds an intriguing nexus in critical anatomies of gothic texts, with their own generic emphases on labyrinthine representation and logics of excess that are similarly charged and unstable. Fred Botting, in his study of gothic

³ Interestingly, D.H. Lawrence, in his own analysis of the structure of apocalypse reaches a consonant determination in his almost “aside” remark in *Apocalypse* that apocalyptic configurations only ever “reveal” an institutional weakness such that the discourse, like “civilization” admits itself as “one long evasion” (46).

inscriptions of transgression, points to that fundamental uncertainty that underlies its articulation:

Transgression, provoking fears of social disintegration, thus enabled the reconstitution of limits and boundaries. Good was affirmed in the contrast with evil; light and reason won out over darkness and superstition. Antitheses made visible in Gothic transgressions, allowed proper limits and values to be asserted at the closure of narratives in which mysteries were explained or moral resolutions advanced. (8)

What Botting recognizes, here, as a pronounced *reversal* of the transgressive moment, in the very instance of its pronouncement, replicates the narrative working-out of apocalypse in its confirmation of that transcendent utopia, which follows the monstrous (and paradoxical) *inception* of itself. The recuperation and normalizing of transgressive impulse *by* its imprisoning discourse (be it apocalyptic, gothic, or both) provides a narrative and cultural sense of closure, which is enacted, metonymically, through the text's ostensible "conclusion" – apocalyptic versions, for example Revelation, perform this function through the institution of the New Jerusalem and its attendant promises of transparency and resolution. The constitution, here, of a syllogism of "compensation," what Marcel Hénaff has termed a narrative repetition of "the strategem of the sacrifice" (6) is, however, subject, itself, to a kind of internal or categorical subversion. In Palahniuk's Fight Club, the unnamed narrator's fetishization of the dying body, manifested in his addiction to attending support groups for victims of terminal illnesses, mirrors and elaborates, however pathologically, this act of "giving over" as an Adamic gesture of control over subjective context, in this case, the narrator's chronic insomnia

and resultant disconnections from phenomenal reality. The ritual of the sacrifice that is engaged, here, is linked, as in traditional apocalypse narratives, with a *certain* and “end” time. The narrator adopts the role of prophet, reading through the coded trajectories of the diseased body, the advance of the end that is incorporated, subsequently, into the always deferred and fragmented body of his doppelganger, Tyler Durden.

The “reassertion” of social order as a generic imperative or trope is available to its own deconstruction by its grounding in “desire,” and I use this term in the Lacanian sense of being an effect of symbolic articulation: “Desire, in fact is interpretation itself” (Four 176) and hence “essentially excentric and insatiable” (278) – a mechanics that helps to put into question the assimilation and disciplining of transgression in accordance with a kind of primal and abiding Law. The assertion of this primal Logos achieves its telos in the institution of the divine finality of the Alpha and Omega as one and the “completion” of the mystery of God: “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (*Rev.* 21:6). Knowledge, as *originary* transgression⁴, is remobilized here in the service of perfect enlightenment, and importantly, as “restitution” for the group in crisis who desire salvation from their modality of hubristic suffering. It is not coincidental that

⁴ Note the “forcing,” in *Revelation*, of the prophet John’s consumption of apocalyptic knowledge:

‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.’ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” (10:9-11)

This paradox, of the nauseating pleasure of incorporating the text into the body, of making the body a receptacle for the Logos, constructs the subject as a kind of recording-machine for the infinite playback of the desire of the Other. The auto eroticism of this regurgitation, and its implications for the function of knowledge within apocalypse narratives will be more closely engaged with in Chapter One of this dissertation.

the exemplar of gothic fiction, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, both emulates this structure and punctuates its underlying erotics in the figure of the "daemon," that "transgression" that is "made visible," and hence controllable or recuperable in "the end."

Radicalizing Genre: Monads and Memes in Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic monadology: of eschatological différance and negative theology

It is at the intersection between transgression and apocalypse that the body, thus, plots itself as the monadic subject of this inflection. The *apokalypsis* of this monad, in other words, is the entelechy or desire, which arises out of its predication upon transgression – transgression is the channel through which the body becomes "unfolded" or disclosed as monad – as the Alpha and the Omega, which as a "final" body contains the "all." The monad⁵ is, to paraphrase Leibniz, both "pregnant" with the future as well as a receptacle for the traces of the past; it is *choric* and self-contradictory. As the body involves itself in this "becoming," it simultaneously empties itself of its immanent relations to the phenomenal or symbolic and becomes an aphanistic site – in a perpetual mode of disappearance. Here, in terms of the entelechy of the monad the apocalyptic body moves, in the "becoming" towards a kind of "full" realization, or self-actualization, which gestures towards that unification implicit in the Alpha and the Omega as the One with apocalypse discourse. This desire, towards the completed self, functions not as an emancipator or salvational technology, but, rather, is a process which turns against itself, which eats itself as John's consumption of the Logos signals in Revelation.

⁵ As Leibniz states, in terms of the monad, "...since every present state of a simple substance is a natural consequence of its preceding state, the present is pregnant with the future" (The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology s.22, 71).

The complication of this contingent morphosis occurs in its resubjectification within the discourse itself. The disappearing subject of apocalypse is placed in a stasis, a literary purgatory of sorts, inasmuch as the writing-out of revelation perpetually reinscribes precisely what it seeks to undo. The “failure,” here, of the apocalyptic body’s “unfolding” into the promised “One,” its process of “becoming” both beginning and end, interestingly, invokes, through Leibniz, the metaphor of the “mirror,”⁶ but, one of such infinite abstraction, or reflection, that it can only ever promise a kind of eternal collapse as it negotiates through the folds that the One ostensibly encompasses.⁷ We are reminded, here, of Valéry’s *La Jeune Parque* and the danger, to the self, embedded in this mechanics of unfolding, and in the consumption of both self and other: “Ô dangereusement de son regard la proie!” The “danger” of the gaze and the apperception of the self as “prey,” paradoxically, to the self, is preceded by the moment that Lacan points to in *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, in which the Young Fate laments, “Je me voyais me voir, sinueuse, et dorais.” The self-reflexivity of “seeing oneself seeing the self,” and its tropic transformation or unfolding into the universal category of knowledge as a transgressive process, in conjunction with the illusion of complexity that such a mirroring institutes, invokes its moment as a profound reversal. The apocalypse of

⁶ Leibniz asserts that “...since every monad is a mirror of the universe in its way, and since the universe is regulated in a perfect order, there must also be an order in the representing being, that is, in the perceptions of the soul, and consequently, in the body in accordance with which the universe is represented therein” (s.63, 77).

⁷ In Lacanian terms, I would suggest that the union between the Alpha and the Omega, within the framework of apocalypse, instantiates an unfolding of the arenas of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic into a kind of disarticulation. Apocalypse threatens (promises?) the collapse of subjective symbolic experience as the realization of the covenant embodied in the New Jerusalem. The reflective monad, in Leibniz, like the subject entered into the social within Lacan, is *subject* to the Symbolic, and hence always in the process of misorganizing the One through perspectival circumscription.

the gaze, the revelation implicit in its mechanics, becomes a function at least for Valéry, of desire – a desire, which aligns itself with a mode of deception, and a self-undoing, as opposed to an actualization: “De regards en regards, mes profondes forêts./ J’y suivais un serpent qui venait de me mordre./ Quel repli de désirs, sa traîne! ... Quel désordre.” The self-dissassemblage of la jeune parque is the abject condition of Ellis’ Clay in Less Than Zero, who is cannibalized and subsequently hyperbolized by the character of Patrick Bateman in American Psycho, and echoed in variation, as well, in Palahniuk and Selby’s nihilistic subjects. While Acker’s work interests itself, also, in these “breached” subject-formations, she foregrounds not the disintegration of the symbolic self so much as its “potential” ability to respond, out of its deconstructive catastrophe, to the performative gesture of re-making that such an undoing solicits as its counter- or companion logic. As opposed to ambivalent acts of disappearance, that mark out Ellis, Palahniuk and Selby’s characters, Acker’s “protagonists” quest for new self-models within the conventionally prohibited spaces of dreams, sex, and death.

This “communicative” process, as Leibniz outlines, is, however, always already foreclosed by the very act of “being;” the mirror, as it were, is limitative, or, rather, its potential is universal, but its borders remain contained to the human “machine,” which can never access the apocalypse as a “full” site – that is, the self can never reach the One, inasmuch as the One, the convergence of the Alpha and the Omega, is the infinity of unfolding, an always “beyond” of the human as mirroring monad. Leibniz discusses the limited nature of the monad as a function of their ever only partial knowledge of the objects of the universe:

. . . a soul can read in itself only what is distinctly represented there; it cannot unfold all its folds at once, because they go to infinity. Thus, although each created monad represents the whole universe, it more distinctly represents the body which is particularly affected by it, and whose entelechy it constitutes. (s. 61-62, 77)

It would seem, thus, that the discursive use of apocalypse as a healing gesture towards the group in crisis is always one of impotence in its “final” working-out. Apocalypse becomes a narratological *pharmakon*, particularly in its “treatment” of the subject within and of the revelation, as well as in terms of the importance of “reading” and “writing” within the apocalypse framework as a translative process of revelatory “speech.” To mobilize Foucault’s requisitioning of the *pharmakon* in Discipline and Punish, in which the punishment is simultaneously the desire for the cure (22), apocalypse, thus, re-writes itself, not as a discourse of redemption, but, rather, as one of destruction.

The process of “salvation” is further complicated by its labyrinthine relations to the notion of “saving,” more generally, and the inferences of concealment that are embedded there, as well. To save is not only to “deliver,” but it is, as well, to cache, or to conceal, which, in turn, involves the volte-face of exhibition and display – creating an ideational morass in the attempt to “unfold” apocalypse and its networks of meaning, more generally. Apocalypse involves a profound series of hermeneutic contradictions that eternally returns its “reader” to its cryptographic genealogy. I posit these meaning reversals not as an inconsequential semantic exercise, but as a point of “real” diagnostic “trauma” that is affixed, comprehensively, to the relation of apocalypse. Apocalypse emerges as an ungraspable narrative, a discourse of perpetual evasion. This suggestive

reinvention of itself, from a language of salvation to one of annihilation, is most available within the contemporary popular consciousness in which the etymological, as well as narrative, history of apocalypse is elided in favour of its positioning as a “critical” or “nuclear” discourse. This “mis-taking” of *apokalypsis* and its revelatory function, as terminal, produces a counter-apocalypse in terms of signifying regimes that is a markedly pronounced element of twentieth and twenty-first century ingressions into the territory of end-time.

The End-Meme: TEOTWAWKI

The other night I dreamt of knives continental drift divide,
Mountains sit in a line, Leonard Bernstein, Leonid Brezhnev,
Lenny Bruce and Lester Bangs, Birthday party, cheesecake, jelly
bean, boom! You symbiotic, patriotic, slam book neck, right?
Right.

It's the end of the world as we know it.

It's the end of the world as we know it.

It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine... fine...

(It's time I had some time alone)

(R.E.M. *It's the end of the world as we know it*, Document 1987)

The study of memetics, or, the concern with an analysis of the units of cultural transfer, designated by Richard Dawkins as *memes* in his 1976 text on biological and social evolution, The Selfish Gene, has been provocatively modified by cognitive philosopher Daniel Dennett. Dennett proposes we resolve the concept of the meme as a

parasitic or viral information-packet, which “proliferates” with the brains of “culture members,” thus, “making phenotypic alterations thereupon” (“The Evolution of Culture” n.pg.). The human, within this prototype, functions as a “vector,” or vehicle, for the transmission of successful memes and their attendant, mutually assisting, and symbiotic complexes.

My interest in memetics, as an apocalyptic strategy, lies in its rudimentary characterisation by Dawkins as an element of culture that is transmitted through an imitative process (The Selfish Gene 192). This preliminary introduction to the concept of the meme and its potential as an explanatory cultural paradigm has been subsequently complexified by theorists such as Dennett, Susan Blackmore, and Douglas Hofstadter to reflect the recombinant nature of meme transmission, more generally, and the insertion of the memetic element into elaborated schemes referred to as meme-complexes or m-plexes. As John S. Wilkins elaborates: “Dawkins’ “memes” . . . are cultural replicators, which, if they are to function in cultural evolution analogously to genes, must be transmitted with fidelity, and must cause some interactive traits that in turn will cause a differential replication of the memes” (“What’s in a Meme?” n.pg.). The application of this model to a discussion of apocalyptic tropes, however contestatory, both plays with and accommodates the imbrication of apocalyptic discourse within genre studies. Indeed, in their theological, as well as in their secular dimension, considerations of apocalypse . forms are always already a kind of re-route back into and through the notion of apocalypse as a series of repeating cultural gestures, whether or not explicitly articulated as such. It is interesting to note, as well, that within the popular memetic lexicon, the apocalypse construct, and its corollaries, the millennium and TEOTWAWKI (the end of

the world as we know it), have been accorded special definitional status as integral memes: the end-meme, the apocalypse-meme, and the millennial-meme.⁸ The linkages, within memetic theory, between end-memes and electronic viral constructs provides for a particularly generative arena of investigation, particularly as this relation manufactures a communicative correspondence between traditional apocalypse narratives and digital electronic systems failure discourse.⁹ This connection is important for understanding the conceptual slippage into secular millenarianism that contemporary end-time texts often instantiate.

William Gibson's "Agrippa (A book of the Dead)" is a material study of such secular apocalyptic disappearances – an electronic text programmed to self-destruct in the very moment of its reading. As Gibson outlines in his introduction to the poem, the design included a "self-devouring floppy-disk intended to display the text only once, then eat itself" (n.pg.). Extant text files of the poem circulate and reproduce memetically on the Internet, surviving only as a series of unstable "local copies" on individual hard drives, subject, themselves, always, to deletion, removal, and corruption.

Susan Blackmore, in "The Evolution of Meme Machines" takes both Dawkins' and Dennett's work to an ironically apocalyptic telos in her suggestion that the human functions, within the memetic paradigm, as a reductive copying-machine, and that, further, the "self is just a word around which memes can gather . . . a complicated memplex, created by and for the memes themselves for their own protection and

⁸ See: the Principia Cybernetica web project
<<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/DEFAULT.html>> for definitional elaborations on the significance of the apocalypse to memetic transmission theory.

⁹ An example of this affiliation would be the Y2K bug panic, initialised by software engineer Ed Yourdon's 1998 "risk-assessment" book Time Bomb 2000.

replication” (n.pg.). It is here that we can return to the preoccupying image in *Revelation* of John’s consumption of the Word and the concomitant exhortation to expel, *ad nauseum*, his recorded information throughout a kind of global cultural network. The role of the apocalypse prophet *is* that of a vector for the transmission of divine knowledge. His body, as we saw of John’s, and, as Blackmore conjectures of the self, is a kind of symbolic construct around which the end-meme coheres and disseminates itself outward.

End-time narratives present themselves, both diachronically and synchronically, as “selfish” texts, as “active replicators,” channeling information that acts on the subject and his or her environment in such a way as to induce the copying of the text or meme within and across the cultural field. I would further complicate this understanding of meme transmission’s homology with apocalypse discourse by incorporating into its consideration the notion of memetic drift, which is the accumulation of mis-replication, or, what is also understood as “memetic mutation” – a kind of socio-cultural *méconnaissance*. We can see the processes of this drift at work in the contemporary elision between theological and secular understandings of apocalypse, which orient apocalypse not as “creative” narratives of revelation, but, rather, as a site of catastrophe and annihilation. This conceptual lacuna becomes important for discerning the incursions of apocalypse into nuclear narratives and the ideational slippage that occurs when any discussion of a post-apocalypse is raised as a point of theoretical inquiry. The brokerage, here, of a kind of *apocalyptic drift* into the suppositional spaces both of the end-meme, as well as of traditional eschatology, helps to annotate the generic modifications that apocalypse undergoes in its translation into a secular ideosphere. These categorical *per-*

versions are instanced in the “cracking” of “Agrippa’s” text code, which enacts a reversal scene against Gibson’s desire to effect a virtual disappearance of history, both personal and public.¹⁰ This replication of “Agrippa,” interestingly, has been countered by Gibson himself, who, concerned over the degree of textual corruption that such copies may institute, released an online, “authentic” version of the text of the poem, “with the correct line-breaks, etc.”¹¹ continuing, thus, the successful extension of this particular end-meme, even as it seeks to destroy it through the implementation of its own “legitimate” One.

To Have Done with the Judgment of God: Contemporary Apocalyptic Ressentiment

Man is sick because he is badly constructed.

We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that
animalcule that itches him mortally,

god,

and with god

his organs.

¹⁰ “Agrippa” recounts Gibson’s memories of his father, and implicates the reader in their processes of disappearance. The very act of the reading instantiates the progressive erasure of these interconnected histories through the “infected” body of the text itself. The pages of the disk container display a DNA stream, which is an encoding of the text itself – his medium is, indeed, his message, a project, which is further elaborated through Dennis Ashbaugh’s accompanying chemically treated etchings that disappear and appear subject to their exposure to light – functioning as a kind of formal introduction preceding the playing of the text.

¹¹ This “sanctioned” copy of Agrippa can be located on Gibson’s personal website at <http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/source/agrippa.asp>. Hacked versions, comparatively, exist extensively on the Internet, such as at <http://project.cyberpunk.ru/lib/agrippa/> and <http://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/archive/courses/liu/english165HL/materials/gibson-agrippa.html>, Alan Liu’s study version, which contains the addition of line numbers to “facilitate referencing.”

For you can tie me up if you wish,
 but there is nothing more useless than an organ.
 When you will have made him a body without organs,
 then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions
 and restored him to his true freedom.
 Then you will teach him again to dance wrong side out
 as in the frenzy of dance halls
 and this wrong side out will be his real place.

(Artaud, "To Have Done With the Judgment of God")

My investigation, in this dissertation seeks to complexify, and, in a sense, to reconceive of that body of literature that Scott Bukatman categorizes as "terminal identity fictions." For Bukatman, the notion of terminal identity is linked, strategically, to the "coupling of both stylistic *and* thematic approaches to the problem of the subject in the electronic era" (9). While Bukatman's study contains itself to cyberpunk fictions in conjunction with a consideration of their theoretical linkages to the cultural and media analyses of such writers as McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Haraway, I am interested in tracing out terminal texts' infixed relations to apocalypse conditions as the, albeit ironic, however necessary, logics for their narrative progressions.

This dissertation takes up the relations that exist between contemporary narratives of transgression and the genre of apocalyptic literatures, both theological and secular, in order to contest the production of *disclosure* and *prophecy* that the apocalyptic text foregrounds. My analysis will take up, here, the historical configuration of apocalyptic literatures in order to show their progressive involvement in self-deconstructive narrative

practices towards the turn of our current millennial cycle. I include below a definition of the literary genre of the apocalyptic in order to elucidate, by contrast, the ways in which my own analysis will focus in upon the “resistances” played out in contemporary literatures of transgression that engage the notion of the “apocalyptic” in various contestatory ways. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory discusses the genre of apocalyptic writing as follows:

The term ‘apocalyptic’ derives from Greek *apocalypse* ‘to disclose’, and Apocalypse is the name given to the last book of the New Testament, *The Revelation of St John*. Such literature comprises prophetic or quasi-prophetic writings which tend to present doom-laden visions of the world and sombre and minatory predictions of mankind’s destiny. (52)

I would suggest, here, that contemporary millennial transgressive productions do not represent “the world” as *revealable*. There is in these texts a move not towards but, rather, away from “disclosure.” What is of primary importance here is not the idea of “revelation” itself but of the *desire for* revelation and knowing that is bound to the social subject. As a point of access into the notions of transgression and millenarianism, the political *use* of prophetic language is examined in my readings of historical and contemporary apocalypse narratives.

The “grammar” of prophecy mirrors the ambivalences and paradoxes that are bound to transgressive aesthetics. Prophecy, or revelation, contains within itself the simultaneous and hence contradictory potential for both subversion and for the rearticulation of forms of authority, which are features, as well, of narratives of transgression. Following the work of Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton, I address the dynamics of resistance that the

apocalyptic body/text practices in late twentieth-century western culture. As Taithe and Thornton suggest, in terms of a genealogy of prophecy:

As a political language prophecy moved from being at the heart of western politics to being a subversive force which, because it did not participate in the common political culture, could offer unique opportunities for a complete reconstruction of the body politic. Within that political alternative the position of the prophet is never assured and leadership structures are constantly shifting out of the centre to the margins where they originated. Any political language based on prophecy implies a constant chartering of the past to understand the future. Although this historical perspective might appear to offer the ground for stability it is always a matter of conflicting interpretation and it remains forever unstable and dynamic. (11)

Similarly, I inquire into the built-in potential that transgression contains for the production of alternative identities and subjectivities. In Acker's work, for example, I raise the spectre of the mutinous "subject-object" architecture as an agency, which seeks to "produce" itself from the very conditions its own apocalyptic undoing. Elsewhere, I examine the dynamics and promotion of "seduction"¹² in the construction of transgression as an end-moment for the social subject as it enters into and dispenses its own particularised apocalyptic logic. The literatures of transgression, which are here reconnoitered, mirror the movement that Taithe and Thornton trace out in terms of prophetic discourse to the margins of language, writing, and politics.

¹² As Baudrillard reminds us: "Seduction, however, never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice – never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals" (2).

The intrinsic “instability” of the transgressive text works, thus, to emphasize its potential for the subversion of normative categories of “being.” That is to say, prophetic and transgressive discourses map out, through their intersections, the margins of thought and existence, and, consequently, engage with peripheral modes of representation. Adopting Stephen Lyng’s conceptualization of “edgework,” as the micro-navigation of social and philosophical dichotomies, Chris Jenks elaborates:

What is central to the activity [of edgework] is a sense of self-realisation or determination. It is critical that the ego becomes realised in an almost histrionic context. It is not the case, either, that edgeworkers are fearless. Precisely part of the frisson of the activity is the experience of fear, its control and the perverse pleasure that this combination can provide. The capacity that such sensation has for pressing the individual beyond the experience of the normal and the everyday, on a dramatic scale, enables us to suggest that edgework has an elitist orientation; it always elevates the individual above the mundane. (179)

Edgework is “transgressive” because of its *intention* towards transcendence from within the fold of the margin. This notion of “boundary production” is of particular interest with regard to my study of contemporary apocalypse texts within which this desire to “exceed” is manifested in terms of a series of perpetually failing and increasingly pathological gestures. In Selby’s Last Exit to Brooklyn, for example, the abject diaspora of the urban working-class are caught in a kind of representational loop within which they are only capable of “re-presenting,” ad infinitum, their primal subjective deaths back to themselves in the repeating mantra: “Another night. Another drag of a night . . .” (11). The perverse acts of violence which Selby’s subjects enact upon themselves and others

are transformative, however, as in the metaphor of the “last exit,” itself, always already liable to their own foreclosure and blockage. In Selby, the transformative process is always engaged, and yet always “missed,” or thwarted in the “end.”

The apocalyptic body, which links the two narrative traditions of prophecy and transgression, becomes, thus, a body of contestation, “always a matter of conflicting interpretation,” as Taithe and Thornton suggest and, hence, the fascination in transgressive productions with the fragmentary and pathological aspects of the body. A genealogy of the “apocalyptic” body, as it is represented and “used” within millennial discourse, would thus trace out the shifting orientation of the “human” within the socius, more generally. Here, my discussion is situated alongside Marcel Hénaff’s consideration of the “invention of the libertine body.” Hénaff suggests that the “body,” itself, “its workings, and its fate, apart from its production as a boldly original trope – will be the major sign through which all other signs and their relationships are read” (10). My work strongly interests itself in the similar ways in which the “apocalyptic” body functions as a “model” of the transgressive body that structures, in turn, its own narrative performances.

This dissertation, as well, elaborates upon the problematics of “apocalypticism” as it is theorized in terms of the literary genre of the “apocalypse,” and its often unstable relationship to millennial discourse, and traditional apocalypse exegesis. Although my own work, primarily, takes up secular writings, their preoccupation with the “apocalyptic” and its various textual permutations requires a consideration of the history and complexity of the “apocalypse” as it is rooted in religious discourse. I address, thus, the hermeneutic fractures, which surround discussions of the apocalypse both popularly as well as theologically. For literary critics such as David Ketterer, Frank Kermode, and

Leslie Fiedler, for example, notions of the apocalypse, or, more generally, of “the end,” stand as the symbolic articulations of a particularly modern sense of crisis and anxiety. The traditional eschatological interpretation of apocalypse as bound to the emergence of a kind of utopic renewal (St. John of Patmos’ *Revelation*, *The Book of Daniel*, Augustine’s *The City of God*, and, more recently, Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s “Two Notes on the End of the World”) is, in a sense, lost or disavowed within the modern consciousness, what Krishan Kumar has termed a period of “debased millenarianism.” In “Hystericizing the Millennium,” Baudrillard, in a critical line of argumentation analogous to Kumar’s, asserts:

Messianic hope was founded on the *reality* of the Apocalypse. Today, this has no more substantive reality than the original Big Bang. We will no longer have a right to this dramatic illumination. Even the idea of putting an end to our planet via an atomic clash has become barren and superfluous – if this no longer holds any meaning for anybody, not even for God, what good is it for? Our Apocalypse is not real, it is *virtual*. Neither does it belong to the future, its incident is *in the here and now*. With respect to our orbiting bombs, even though they do not comprise a natural ending, at least we were the creators of them, with the potential, seemingly, to better finish them off. But no, in fact, *to better shake off the end*. This is the end we have henceforth managed to satellize in the image of all finalities which had once been transcendental but have now become orbital, pure and simple. (n.pg.)

Baudrillard points, here, to the central frustration of the contemporary apocalypse, and its turn towards the transapocalyptic as its response to its autopsies of the social subject as

pinioned by failure and deferral. The contemporary apocalyptic text, in the absence of any kind of divinely accorded covenant, becomes obsessed with, as Baudrillard emphasizes, its own “impossible situation of being” properly able to access not only our own “end,” but, our own “origin,” as well.

Inasmuch as my project considers the construction of the apocalyptic body, I am interested in analyzing the modes through which this body is subject to display, as well as, concomitantly, the tactics employed by this threatened and threatening body to subvert its ostensibly revelatory function. Writers such as Kathy Acker and Bret Easton Ellis, for example, configure the millennial body in terms of the violence of representation that circulates around medical and legal discourse, and their attendant positionings of the subjectivised body, more generally. Within the texts of these authors, the body of the human subject is always already a contested surface, which is, importantly, *estranged* or *alienated* from itself. Consequently, the body is only ever able to “reveal” its very *fictionality* or constructedness. The suggestion, here, of the *impossibility* of obtaining recourse to any kind of phenomenally *essential* body or subject, functions as a central concern of the transgressive text. The deconstruction, or de-essentialization, of the “object-body” within transgressive literatures opens up a space (or spaces) of resistance within which the abject performs itself only apparently against the normative socialized body.

Thus, although the “whores’ revolution” that opens Acker’s Pussy, King of the Pirates functions, in part, as a liberation of, and re-formation of, identity and subjectivity outside of a kind of patriarchal economy of signification and representation, it is, also, a de-articulation of identity – hence the progression in the text into various modes of

becoming-animal (the “rat” girls, the “wolf hound” girls). This relocation of self, which underwrites the narrative of Pussy, more generally engages the notion of transgression as a revolt against hegemonic categories of *being in the world* and their reduction of identity to surface material signs. The placement of the self on the borders of representation, and, indeed, of possibility, here, elucidate what Deleuze and Guattari would term a strategic “line of flight” from the social, within which the transgressive body only ever functions relatively. Once the social (or the essentialized) body is rendered representationally impotent within the transgressive space, the social loses, as well, its relational status. There is, thus, no “other” against which the “self” can be oppositionally placed, inasmuch as, within the transgressive narrative, the “social” is the “other” of the perverse (and vice versa). The idea, here, that begins to emerge, is that of the social, or the socialized body, as itself a kind of fantasy, or idealization, which the transgressive text rejects as any kind of viable option for self-identity.

What is, perhaps, most interesting in the textualization of the body that occurs in the writings discussed in my study is in fact this very retreat from any kind of “real” body that “suffers,” or, alternatively, experiences itself as a material condition. Contemporary end-time narratives elucidate a pronounced dissociation of the apocalyptic body from any notion of *being in the world*. The victims, for instance, of Patrick Bateman in Ellis’ American Psycho, are categorically dehumanized – reduced to tropes: the whore, the mother, and the anonymous. The suffering and the torture of the victims’ bodies, of *their* bodies, become an abstraction because the reader only ever experiences *them* through Patrick, and, for himself, his victims are profoundly unreal. Similar disjunctions appear

in the works of Acker who, by positioning her characters in equivalently inaccessible and fantastic worlds, reproduce and sustain the notion of the body as a textual construct.

Operating as a theoretical supplement to these considerations is that of the role of “fantasy” in transgressive literatures and its engagement with psychoanalytic formulations of desire and the unconscious, especially as these ideas are mobilized by Lacan, Kristeva, and Žižek. My analysis focuses on the staging of fantasy, and its working through as an examination of a “cult of artificiality” that informs late twentieth-century readings and writings of transgression, more generally. The critical placement of writers like Acker within a paradigm of “theoretical fiction,” that is, fiction which exploits theory as a narrative strategy, and not, simply, as a kind of informing discourse, necessitates this consideration of the ways in which *artifice* is employed as an integrated feature of both transgression as well as of apocalypticism. I adapt, in this analysis, Žižek’s notion of fantasy’s “transcendental schematism.” For Žižek, fantasy “provides a ‘schema’ according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure” (The Plague of Fantasies 7). The idea of fantasy mediating the production of objects of desire works with my suggestion, in Chapter One, that the *object of horror* constructed by the transgressive text the apocalyptic body, is similarly desubjectivised (objectified) within the narrative of transgression itself – as our “awareness” of the object of desire correlatively “‘depossesses’ the subject, reducing her or him to a puppet-like level ‘beyond dignity and freedom’” (8).

In conjunction with the motif of the *made* subject, is the construction of a *terminal* aesthetic, which is derived from Jean Baudrillard’s theory of the postmodern subject as a

“terminal of multiple networks.” Baudrillard’s concept is elaborated upon by Scott Bukatman, who proposes the emergence of a “terminal identity,” which “is a transitional state produced at the intersection of technology and narration” (Terminal Identity 22). For both Baudrillard and Bukatman, the competing interests of the “machine” and its discourses subsume the human. Although I engage, as well, with the transgressive potential of the terminal subject, I am, more particularly, interested in the broader implications of the subject’s encounters with *machineries* and *technologies* as they indicate, more generally, institutions and structures of power, which organize apocalyptic subject or identity formation. For example, in Hubert Selby’s Requiem for a Dream, Sara Goldfarb’s desire for immersion into the imagistic surface of televisual reality instantiates a process of desubjectivisation, which in turn, becomes the agent for Sara’s subsequent collapse into madness and the spaces of fantasy as the narrative “progresses.” The interfaces that occur between the body and the machine in Requiem comment upon, in a more diffuse sense, the subject’s perilous and imperiled position within a disarmingly indifferent late-capitalistic context – the requiem for the “dream,” is, at least in part, Selby’s ironic lament upon the illusory productions of the “American dream,” against which much of the modern self founders. For many of the transgressive or terminal writers, which I examine in this dissertation, contemporary western culture is an inherently “viral” system – our representations of our selves, our bodies, our subjectivities, and our identities are simultaneously self-replicating, deconstructive and invasive – apocalyptic memes, of a sort. Arthur Kroker has defined this locating of a kind of cultural *dehabilitation* within metaphors of the transgressive body as a social imperative towards “panic.” It is, consequently, this notion that normative society, faced

with the doubled trauma of both the turn of the century, as well as the closure of a millennial cycle, is *dis-comforted* by the human itself, which I take up in my consideration of contemporary apocalyptic literatures.

The texts that are considered within this study operate within a Sadean discursive tradition of revolution, which engages the function of violence, and the violated body, both politically and deconstructively. As Gilles Deleuze points out in “Coldness and Cruelty,” to the libertine, reason itself is a form of violence” (18). That is, the apparent linkage between violence and the “irrational” or the “anti-social” is a functional fallacy, an illusory differentiation and thus “[t]he acts of violence inflicted on the victims are a mere reflection of a higher form of violence to which the demonstration testifies” (19). The human body is, ultimately, the site upon which this demonstration is played out because it represents a kind of externalized, material signifier of the larger social body that is implicated in the libertine’s deconstruction.

It is through the figuration of the body, as Alphonso Lingis theorizes, “as a sensitive substance, a substance that produces pain and pleasures in itself, that a body is subject of and subjected to power and discourse” (*Foreign Bodies* 54). It is in this way, as *inciting* and *incited*, that the bodies of transgressive literatures articulate a politics of resistance, which seeks to evade and dissolve the textural, generic, and socio-cultural constraints that, in their operations, reproduce and sustain hegemonic structures of power and order. The transgressive body is, thus, self-deconstructive. That is, through its self-reflexivity, the transgressive body narrative foregrounds its *constructedness* and, relationally, the constructedness of the originary, or normative body or text to which it refers.

The contemporary transgressive text, in its rewriting and repositioning of the conventional eschatological bodies and texts that serve as its points of reference, inflict, thus a *representational* violence, which is always subversive of the idea of the *integrity* of the primary text – its characterizations and plot lines, for example. The perversity of this re-creative process of detachment, and recontextualization aligns the contemporary apocalypse, as well as its referents, with the “obscene.” Throughout my readings, I provide a framework for reconceptualizing the function of the “obscene” as an imperative operation of the apocalyptic text. Here, I engage the “obscene,” in part, in terms of Sandor Ferenczi’s notion of the “ideational complex,” which is, for Ferenczi, a neurotic response, by the social body, to any perceived threats to its norms and boundaries. The transgressive narrative, in this respect, constitutes a dangerous incursion into the territory of the dominant social ideology. The discourse of transgression is thus formulated, in terms of the socius, as “pathological.”

This consideration of the contemporary apocalypse’s transgressive use of the obscene as a narrative strategy will take up, as well, Jean Baudrillard’s understanding of how obscenity functions within a posthuman context. For Baudrillard,

[o]bscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusions, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication. (Ecstasy of Communication 21-22)

The obscene, here, as Baudrillard notes, is no longer the exclusive property of the sexual, but is, rather, bound to “a pornography of information and communication, a

pornography of circuits and networks” (22), within which the subject has ceased to exist as a functional “agent.” The technologized human, here, no longer participates in the construction of his or her own identity. That is, we are no longer performative, and thus complex, but operational, or “terminal;” our sense of *being* is thus tied to a kind of essential functionality – we, and our “object-universe,” are subject to a process of demythologization within Baudrillard’s paradigm. The construction of the obscene as a space of diffusion figures importantly into my own theorization of transgression, as the texts, which I have chosen to consider engage themselves with a flattening of the mythic and its signs.

Baudrillard’s presupposition that there is a manifest transparency to the technologization of culture is, perhaps, undercut by his own language, which adapts, or links, the subject to the metaphor of the terminal. The human subject, here, is instantiated within a kind of apocalyptic discourse that is anything but transparent and unspectacular. Baudrillard “prophecies,” in a sense, the “end” of the subject as a symbolizing construct, and inserts, in its place, a model of the subject as a kind of nodal point, which functions as a conduit through which information passes – note that, here, there is *no* interpretive exchange, only a kind of seamless passage of desemanticized signs (that is, an absence of deep meaning, or multivalent meaning; here, there is only data, or the meme). What Baudrillard’s theory effectually does, then, is to decenter the human. Here, the human does not occupy a unique or differentiated position within his or her world. Within a technologized context, the human is *apparently* only functional. The human subject, in other words, becomes a space of alterity, or “other-ness.” So, for Baudrillard, we *have*, or *will* become the alienating discourse of the machine as opposed

to *being* alienated *by* the machine as other. There is, no longer (?), any monstrous “other” against which to situate ourselves as subjects because we have come to occupy both positions simultaneously.

My dissertation investigates, as a counter-position to Baudrillard, the sense that the new spaces that technology creates for the human are always already notional or metaphorical. That is, they tend towards the constitution of a new kind of “theatre,” not its disappearance *per se*. In Palahniuk’s Fight Club, for example, the production of apocalyptic subjectivity is constructed imagistically:

What Tyler had created was the shadow of a giant hand. Only now the fingers were Nosferatu-long and the thumb was too short, but he said how at exactly four-thirty the hand was perfect. The giant shadow hand was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute Tyler had sat in the palm of a perfection he’d created himself.

You wake up, and you’re nowhere. (23)

In Palahniuk’s narrative, the aestheticization of the moment wherein the subject is split from itself, is attributed a magical, or spiritual quality – it is transcendent of the body, which the text invariably understands as disposable, as a literal means to a higher, albeit nihilistic end, but it is also, paradoxically, the telos, or apex of physical experience itself. To transgress the body’s limits, and, thus, to access the sublime, in Palahniuk, is to give the body over to the infinite idea of the “fight club,” and thus, essentially, to become subjectivised, locatable, even if only as one body on the collectivist matrix of that particular experience. Similarly, for Selby, it is in the violent space of the real that there occurs a kind of terminal loop – the apocalypse becomes “re-played” *ad infinitum* within

the scenes of the ostensive everyday and the bodies that simultaneously engage and defamiliarize this transapocalyptic site of investigation – within Selby’s texts, as in Palahniuk, existence is purgatorial and always already a condition of unresolvability.

The breakdown of structural relations that is initiated through the transgressive project is realized in a resultant disruption of the human’s ability to adequately represent, and thus to both know and recognize itself in any kind of definitive way. Hence, the transgressive text emphasizes the “minor” body. For Kathy Acker this body is “childlike,” “pornographic” – it is in the process, always, of “becoming-other” than itself. In the texts of Bret Easton Ellis, the human is interrogated in terms of its complicity with the inhuman – the commodity, the “serial,” and the fetish – that is never more than momentarily concealed by the shifting surfaces of an already unstable reality. Palahniuk and Selby, similarly, play with the construction of the “body-in-pieces” in order to emphasize the logics of violence that are historically embedded in the maintenance of the human, more generally.

In Chapter One, I take up the historiography of apocalypse through close examinations of *The Book of Daniel* and *Revelation to John*. With recourse to traditional apocalypse and biblical exegesis, as well as to current theoretical considerations of end-time narratology, I formulate a provisional outline of the generic characteristics of apocalypse and draw out their recurring memetic tendencies. This chapter interests itself in advancing a usable comparative framework for my successive considerations of contemporary terminal discourse. As both popular and foundational apocalypses, *The Book of Daniel* and *Revelation* provide critical entry points into my ongoing discussion of the function of both the logics of obscenity within eschatology, proper, as well as into the

formation of the prophetic subject as he is determined by the revelatory structures that charter him.

In this first chapter, I was interested in initialising a preliminary examination of the condition of the prophetic subject as “he” engages with revelatory institutions and their discursive demands. To this end, I take up the Lacanian registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real¹³, as they address the meaningful order of the subject, and play their constituted and constitutive effects through the end-visions and their landscapes in order to point to an interim theory of apocalyptic subjectivity for extension into my core chapters.

Chapter Two elaborates a construct of the prophetic subject’s relation to, particularly, the levels of discursive mediation that “he” encounters within the apocalyptic visionary experience. I understand this interaction to instantiate a per-version, or, abjection of the subject, and utilise this “turn” to map out the proximate subjective detours that contemporary end-time narratives superscribe.

My analysis then focuses on a reading of Bret Easton Ellis’ text American Psycho and the constructs of the self-apocalypse that the work inaugurates in consonance with the “end” of transgression. Here, I address the potential relations that exist between *apokalypsis* and the “sacrifice,” through the play of rupture and suture within the narrative. The serial formations that this “play” commences are theorized as a kind of apocalyptic pathology, which is formalized, or, made visible, through a scarring or

¹³ In my analysis I follow Lacan in understanding the Imaginary as the internalised image of an ideal, coherent self, the Symbolic as the “determining order of the subject,” which involves the formation of language and signifying systems, and thus organizes the subject, and the Real as that which resists interpretation, what cannot be “symbolized.”

marking of the body. These physical “traces” suggest an alterior narrative strategy that occurs outside of language, instituting a crisis of representation, and a forcing of the apocalyptic event. The privileging of this crisis in the overlap between transgressive and apocalyptic discourse is evidenced, by way of illustration, in the representational oscillation between the “perfection” of Patrick’s body, within his own interior narrative, against the progressively hyperbolic destructuring and partitivity of the bodies of his victims as he engages them as direct models of resistance against the catastrophe of his self.

A summary reading of Ellis’ Less Than Zero is engaged, in this chapter, as both a supplementary and irruptive narrative for my consideration of American Psycho. Less Than Zero, in terms of Ellis’ oeuvre, creates the initial conditions of subjective indifference in the production of Clay as a kind of apocalyptic voyeur, which then finds its telic resonance in the character of Patrick Bateman who is simultaneously “witness” and terminal agent. The notion of the “indifferent agent” that American Psycho engages, evokes a Sadean discursive register in his reduction of the Other to a kind of “object-end.”

The interesting categorical dissolution between subject and object that Ellis’ works investigate are amplified in the works of Kathy Acker, which occupy my analysis in Chapter Three, and which constitute the core of my discussion of the formation of contemporary apocalyptic subjectivity. Through a consideration of the intersections between abjection, false autobiography, and the poststructural “witness” in Acker’s Blood and Guts in High School, Empire of the Senseless and Pussy, King of the Pirates, I address the problematic of the apocalyptic body as recording-machine and its relation to

technologies of gender that inflect the twentieth-century terminal subject. Here, I commence my examination by relating the trope of the body/text that eats itself, as a strategy of self-archiving, to the production of aphanisis and memetic drift. Through Acker's texts, the function of self-consumption, and its "perverse" corollary, the absorption of the Other, is investigated both as a transgressive process of communication, as well as one of memory. Integral to this discussion is the relation of this impetus towards self-consumption to the desire for access to a kind of transcendent and originary knowledge, and towards what Kristeva would term "one's own clean self." I examine both the failure of this desire, as well as the resistance to its satisfaction as the built-in requirements of the transgressive subject within the space of the transapocalyptic.

In my fourth chapter, I concern my examination with the production of masculinity as an apocalyptic site, and read its concomitantly entropic signs of identity through Chuck Palahniuk's novel Fight Club. The terminal body, here, as in Ellis' American Psycho, and in Acker, although she engages this thematic circumspectly, and in a more overtly contestatory manner, is subject to an almost hyperbolic Oedipal paradigm. For the purposefully anonymous narrator of Fight Club, his social landscape is inflected by a conceptual hierarchy of successive dead "fathers," and absent or pathological "m(others)." This "no one" is self-configured as a perverse "tourist" of both life and death, and in relation to this formation, I trace out the catastrophic implications for subjectivity that his split into the agent of Tyler Durden institutes.

The structure of the "Fight Club," itself, self-consciously exhibits and elaborates the narrative preconditions of apocalyptic discourse in its exaggerated regulatory mechanisms and ideational recourse to the figure of Tyler, who, within this dynamic,

becomes substituted in for the Logos, which guides and provides the constitutive kernel for the terminal event. Here, I explore the ambiguous investment of the discourse in transgressive and alternative “Name(s) of the Father” as, themselves, specific instances of an apocalyptically directed memetic drift.

In Chapter Five, my analysis considers Hubert Selby, Jr.’s seminal text, Last Exit to Brooklyn, with reference to his later work Requiem for a Dream, in order to map out an operational theory of the contemporary apocalyptic moment as it engages its spatial, subjective, and material conditions of performance. Within Selby’s work, the play on borders, on entrances and exits, particularly, be they ideational or phenomenal ones, invoke a particularly unique apocalyptic sentiment. Selby’s apocalypses are differentiated, perhaps more radically than the other contemporary literatures that my dissertation examines, in their production of an almost undetectable, logistic, big Other that, as in the historic apocalypses of *Daniel* and *Revelation*, determine the fundamental progression of the apocalyptic field from both without as well as from within the narrative.

Thus, for example, in Requiem for a Dream, we can locate the apocalyptic agent of the text not so much in the progressive abjections of its characters, themselves, as in the allegorically configured “presence” of “Addiction,” which guides the narrative towards its catastrophic “conclusion.” The compromised subjects of Selby’s texts “ex-ist” in the *punctiform* margin of the apocalypse, between the Symbolic and the Real – between the Word and its inarticulable, thanatic “other.” Whereas the prophet, historically, has mediated this span through the complex of the dream-vision, the anti-heroes of Last Exit to Brooklyn and Requiem for a Dream encounter the aporia of terminality through the

dejected miasma of violence, drugs, and the pathological apparatuses of a culture of simultaneous consumption and deprivation. Here, we come up against the possibility of the apocalypse without redemption, what Derrida understands in terms of a kind of compulsion to repeat that solicits, in a sense, an “apocalypse without apocalypse,” the “inescapable catastrophe, the undeviating precipitation toward a remainderless cataclysm” (“No Apocalypse, Not Now” 21).

The concluding chapter of my dissertation ties my discussion of transgressive narrative strategies back to the underlying signifier of the apocalyptic body. I show that the logics of *disclosure*, which have conventionally underwritten apocalyptic texts, are subverted in millennial transgressive literatures that point, not towards revelation, but, rather, to its absence. The apocalyptic body, here, is not Baudrillard’s notion of *transparency*, but is, rather, his *hidden play of seduction*. The play of seduction, for Baudrillard, constructs an agonistics of the sign – a process not of de-signification, but, rather, of anti-signification, or meaning that “consumes” itself. Baudrillard’s linkage of “seduction” to the “charm” of the “apparent” involves a consideration of the “kept secret,” the invisible or occluded, which is a strategy of the apocalyptic body within the transgressive text. The apocalyptic body positions itself as a kind of secret that “challenges the order of truth and knowledge” (Ecstasy of Communication 64), because its own form of seduction operates to contest its “revelation,” or, the “disclosure” of its secrets – it reveals nothing. As Baudrillard suggests, “[s]eduction is not desire. It is that which plays with desire, which scoffs at desire” (67). The apocalyptic body is thus determined as a resistance to interpretation; it is a body that, in a sense, is irretrievable – a thematic that is traced out through the contemporary terminal narratives in my work.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, I suggest that the apocalyptic “subjects” of contemporary transgressive texts *are* those unfixed nomadic events that are simultaneously inside and outside conventional, static organizations of power and representation. My work constructs an operational theory of the production of transgression as it engages with current millennial discourse. As such, I mobilize the examined texts as “limit” cases for the articulation of the apocalyptic subject and body, as well as for the representation of an aesthetic of transgression – inasmuch as this aesthetic is produced on and through the body of this transitional subject.

My end chapter engages Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject and, in particular, the role of the *deject* within the state of abjection itself. As Kristeva outlines: “The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (Powers of Horror 8). For Kristeva, the *deject* is embedded in the “divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” (8) space of abjection, a space which, moreover, is *symptomatic* of the collapse between body and text. This collapse thus inaugurates a kind of perversion, or perverse act. Apocalypse writing, here, as we have seen and will further examine, becomes an abject strategy, which works towards the production of a kind of *interspace* for the questioning of integrity and structure as general principles, be it in terms of subjectivity, body, text, or the social.

Twentieth-century transgressive narratives function in my analysis as reworkings of conventional apocalypse rhetorical strategies. The transgressive text, and the apocalyptic bodies that it generates, operate within the context of what Slavoj Žižek has called “our era of the ‘decline of Oedipus’”, when the paradigmatic mode of subjectivity is no longer

the subject integrated into the paternal law through symbolic castration, but the 'polymorphously perverse' subject following the superego injunction to enjoy" (The Ticklish Subject 248). In my concluding analysis, I am concerned, in part, with adapting Zizek's formula as, for Zizek the perverse subject is "the 'inherent transgressor' *par excellence*" (248), precisely because the "pervert" does not doubt; as Zizek phrases it, but because he rather "*knows* the answer (to what brings *jouissance* to the Other)" (248). There is no desire, here, for revelation, and it is this conceptual territory of *non-disclosure* implied in Zizek's formulation that I extend into a consideration of contemporary transgressive apocalypse writings.

Notions of apocalypse underwrite our contemporary cultural milieu in critical ways. Whether we locate current apocalypse-fever in the resurgence of millenarian rhetoric to describe national identity and context (for example, political locutions of mass destruction), or, within the broader scope of cultural and historical repetitions of analogous *fin-de-siècle* discourses that the turn into the millennium encourages, particularly subsequent to World War II, the apocalypse and its attendant representations *remain* as integral cultural imperatives. The apocalypse "exists" as, perhaps, the ultimate form of seduction, which, as Baudrillard suggests, describes a very particular social anxiety: "Every discourse is threatened with this sudden reversibility, absorbed into its own signs without a trace of meaning. This is why all disciplines, which have as an axiom the coherence and finality of their discourse, must try to exorcize it" (Seduction 2). To interrogate the arena of apocalypse is to question both the constructs of the human and its desires: "What sometimes renders the real fascinating – and the truth as well – is the imaginary catastrophe which lies behind it" (46).

Chapter Two – The Apocalyptic Image and the Cracks of History

It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication. (Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication 22)

Thou has made all things, and power over all things hast Thou; and all things are naked and open in Thy sight, and Thou seest all things, and nothing can hide itself from Thee. Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, which men were striving to learn. (*First Enoch* 9:5-7)

The investiture of the obscene, which Baudrillard locates within a logic of exposure, or, more accurately, within that of an overexposure, is always already a discursively explicit component of the apocalypse. The revelation, situated as it is at the core of the apocalypse narrative, *is* that hardcore gesture of exaggerated lucidity, that “more-visible-than-visible” instancing of Baudrillard’s “*ecstasy of communication*” (22). The act of unveiling, within the apocalypse dynamic, is an excess of image and transmission – a hypertropic scene fraught with a proliferation of competing desires, which is governed only by the scheme of the vision itself, and then, only provisionally. In the “end,” the prophetic vision, indeed, the very *idea* of vision, is the compelling organizational (disorganizational?) metaphor, which guides the interplay between true and false, the inviolate and the contaminated, and, of course, is that which instantiates the seam between the chaos of the apocalyptic wasteland and the rapture of the new covenant.

The scopic regime of the apocalypse is, thus, a chiasmic negotiation between the supraphenomenal delivery of the vision and the seer, which is complicated, often, by the prophet's virtual removal from an agency of the gaze. The prophet is "compelled" to see, and this "line of sight" is often effected in independence from the subject's own will to look, a particular aspect of the *Book of Daniel*, in which Daniel narrates himself as located within a perpetual state of "watching," in the passive, transfixed posture of the reluctant spectator. Watching, for Daniel, is replete with anxiety and non-comprehension: "So I Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days.... I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it" (8:27). The ostensive "object" of Daniel's gaze, the revelation, is, fundamentally, outside of the realm of human comprehension – it fosters, thus, an "uncanny" relationship between the prophet and his scene – one that is distressed and excessive, and which borders on the Real, as we can conceive of the revelation, itself, as an eruption of that inarticulate register into the symbolic order normatively inhabited by the seer. The revelation becomes a kind of apeiron, a "that-which-cannot-be-handled," it "ex-ists," in tension with Daniel's anxious reiteration of his own clearly traumatized social subjectivity, which is encapsulated in his redundant self-address, "I Daniel." In the face of the unknowable, Daniel pathologically names and renames himself as a singular point of reference and certainty within the obfuscating revelatory scene.

In the apocalypse, it is not so much that there is the horror of "nothing" to see, but, rather, that of "everything" to see. In the *apokalypsis*, the process of unveiling assumes the quality of a panoramic display – the end becomes, fundamentally, an epic discourse of viewing. The look, as it is engaged by the revelatory structure, is determined,

importantly, within apocalypse, by issues of critical textuality. To “read,” to “interpret,” to “write,” to “see meaning” are, within the eschatological narrative, inseparable, and highly rule-bound reflexive economies. The prophet, himself, is unable to access the meaningful content of the vision, without the addition of a divinely ordered Other into the revelatory equation. The necessary interchange between the angelic interpreter and the prophet constructs an important relationality that is mirrored in the prophet’s role as the relay between the social and the divine that the notion of “testimony” gestures towards in its interesting supplemental capacity as, complexly, “support,” “evidence,” as well as “public declaration.”

The apocalypse, thusly, directs a *re-vision* of phenomenal reality as its hermeneutic apotheosis. The testimony of the seer, in its engagement with the regulatory mechanisms of the revelation, is impelled to enact this transformational, or, re-visioning, imperative within a contradictory and always already entropic socius. The divine Text that the prophet reads back to “us,” is, for all intents and purposes, a containing grammar, which is designed to bind the ostensibly objective real to a strict future progressive compossibility of language and vision. Revelation *is* spatio-visual within the framework of apocalypse. The reader of the signs of the apocalypse is obligated to “see” the Word as representationally manifest. The ocularity of the Word institutes the convergence of the phenomenal and the divine, and thus enters the “world” into the speaking of its own end-game. The apocalypse becomes incarnate in its transmission from the supersensible to the sensible, through the body of the prophet and its contradictory injunction towards action: “There will be no more delay” (*Rev.* 10:6), that operates in tension with the

strictures of deferral that comprise the formal waiting game of the apocalypse, more generally.

The complex of mediations, which, in turn, administers the revelatory institutional centre of the apocalypse and its effects, transposes the disclosure from sublime, private mystery to public knowledge, and back again, in a kind of visual information feedback loop. In *Daniel*, as in *Revelation to John*, there is an important moment of reversal wherein the revelation (or a part of the revelation) is re-encrypted until the coming of the end-time – the prophecy is thus re-sealed against its dissemination, and incorporated back into the Real. Here, the always already absent presence of the Word within the phenomenal world becomes metonymically linked to the transmission of revelatory discourse, more generally, as a retributive act, which, in its mode of concealment operates to “reveal” an “essential” end-truth: “Daniel keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase” (12:4). The culminating prophecy is deferred in a maneuver designed to discern and identify the legitimately righteous and faithful from those whose pretense to faith will be borne out in the “end.” The re-mystification of the contents of the revelation underscores the pre-eminence of the sublimity of the Word against the vagaries of the material to which it is terminally conjoined through the testifying body of the prophet.¹⁴

¹⁴ In Alenka Zupancic’s analysis of the myth of Oedipus, she employs the wonderful phrase, “the hostage of the word,” to discuss the relation of the Sphinx’s riddle to psychical negotiations between, Truth, knowledge, and desire. I wish to hijack Zupancic’s terminology, here, to elaborate the ways in which apocalypse discourse constructs, for itself, such a relational politics. Whereas, for Oedipus, “truth,” becomes a function of a self-reflexivity, in his “answer,” in his “act, his utterance of a word, [it] is not simply an outrage, a word of defiance launched at the Other, it is also an act of creation of the Other (a different Other). Oedipus is not so much a ‘transgressor’ as the

The discursive conveyance of the *apokalypsis* is, thus, effected through a series of profanations – both in terms of the revelation’s reproduction of the human subject as prophetic filter, as well as in the abject formulation of the communication itself. The revelation is, at once, the announcement of dissolution and its attendant horrors; while, concurrently, signaling the latent promise of renewal that the apocalypse engenders both noumenally as well as generically. The new covenant, as it functions in both *The Book of Daniel* and *The Revelation to John*, is that of a particular juridical consummation – it is the final act of arbitration, wherein punishments and rewards are distributed, and, in an important sense, the promise, itself, becomes the terminal revelation, and the final, transformational, image of the apocalypse.

The Book of Daniel: *Writing the Apocalypse-Meme*

Considered by exegetes to be the first “authentic” example of an apocalypse literature, *The Book of Daniel* is believed to have been produced around 164 B.C.E. during the period marked as the Antiochan persecution of the Jewish population in Syria, following the invasion of the Near East by Greece and the assumption of power by Antiochus IV, Epiphanes. Written sometime during the Maccabean revolt, *Daniel* templates the generic concerns of succeeding apocalypses with its motif of global effect, and charts the

‘founder’ of a new order” (204). Effectually, Oedipus “restructure[s] the field of given knowledge (of knowledge that ‘knows itself’) and to replace it with another knowledge” (204). As the apocalypse genre moves into its contemporary manifestations in the works of Acker, Ellis, et al., we begin to see the role of the prophet engage this inauguration of the self as the repository for Truth and knowledge in opposition to the narratives of Daniel and John, which, although do not unproblematically submit to “the knowledge that knows itself” (202), are; however, bound to and guaranteed by the Other’s ostensibly “objective” and universal Truth. Daniel and John, in other words, are credentialized through their relationship to the Other and its meaning, while Oedipus, and the “post-modern” prophet are, themselves, “constitutive” Acts.

insistence upon a holistic reinvention of the world that those following apocalypses, in particular *The Revelation to John* (circa 96 C.E. subsequent to the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the “Second Temple” period), have adopted as foundational to their own narrative structures.¹⁵

In *Daniel*, revelation is manifested according to two distinct schemes. In Chapter 2 of *The Book of Daniel*, the dream vision is possessed by King Nebuchadnezzar whose desire for interpretative intercession commences the important subtext of “right reading” that is foundational to the apocalypse narrative, more generally. The political import, here, of authentic reading, and indeed, of author-ity, positions Daniel and, by extension, his God, as “certain” and “trustworthy” (2:45), against the failures of the Chaldean magicians and their gods who “speak lying and misleading words” (2:9). Chapters 7 to 11, alternatively, detail Daniel’s direct visionary experiences of the end-time with his subjective struggles, and concomitant pleas, for comprehension.

Daniel’s alienation from the sublime categories of knowledge that underlie the revelatory visions produce themselves as distressed somatic symptoms, which, in even the intercession of divine translators of the experience, are never ameliorated. The process of the apocalypse, of the “disclosure,” itself, imperils the prophet’s already uneasy symbolic subjectivity:

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man and I heard a

¹⁵ See P.M. Casey and John J. Collins for more elaborated discussions of the historical context surrounding the production of *The Book of Daniel* and *Revelation to John*, as well as for overviews of the generic mandates of apocalyptic literature, more generally. These concerns are briefly outlined in the introductory chapter of my analysis.

human voice by the Ulai, calling, “Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.” So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, “Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end.” As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet. (8.15-18)

In the moment of revelation, the prophet’s body fails himself in a kind of concord with the gap in comprehension that the sublime instantiates. Within the apocalyptic dynamic, the chain of signification falters. The prophet’s virtual impotence within revelatory structures of meaning create breakage points, which we “read” through the failure of the prophet’s body to *withstand* terminal discourse outside of the supporting mediation of the Logos and its attendants.

A further consequential shift that occurs between the two discursive registers in Daniel is the substitution in narrative voice from third person (Chapter 2) to first person (Chapters 7-11), as the visions are reoriented to Daniel’s own dream space. The relocation of revelatory perspective is accompanied by the cannibalization of Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream in Chapter 2 by Daniel’s parallel vision, which initiates Chapter 7. Both revelations detail the rise and fall of the final four earthly kingdoms and the manifestation, of “what is to be,” the erection of a supreme, heavenly kingdom on earth: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (2:44). Concordantly, Chapter 7 reiterates that:

...the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and totally destroyed. The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (7:26-27)

The appropriation of Nebuchadnezzar's revelation by Daniel, and the concomitant turn in narrative voice to the first person, which marks the formal visionary replacement, suggests that *Daniel* is no longer interested in pursuing a politics of neutrality that would be embodied by the third person, nor is the text, itself, willing to advance the ownership of the prophecy by a foreign and theologically suspect voice. Daniel and his "Book" become, conversely, the sole loci for authority and revelation, while the secular rulers are reduced to a series of narrative tropes both inside and outside of the prophecies themselves.

The movement to the ostensibly egocentric "I" in *Daniel* suggests, as well, that the revelations have assumed a certain subjective immediacy, which is echoed in Daniel's increasing sense of apprehension and psychical debilitation in the face of his dreams as they progress through the final chapters of the book. The fractured "I" of the prophet, that we can understand the voice shift to, at least in part, indicate, is always already subsumed by the Word, and its various otherworldly interpreters (usually Gabriel or Michael). Daniel's narrative "I" is oftentimes unstable, and mute, in the face of the "unspeakable" revelatory machine:

While he was speaking these words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and was speechless. Then one in human form touched my lips, and I opened my

mouth to speak, and said to the one who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision such pains have come upon me that I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For I am shaking, no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me." (10:15-17)

Daniel's experiences with the divine Word construct a form of linguistic caesura, as the revelation irrupts and comes into tension with his compromised symbolic materiality. The apocalyptic Word is "impossible," in the sense that it cannot be "declared" by man, even by the prophet, in its revelatory moment.¹⁶ Gabriel or Michael must provide the necessary discursive intercession for both the transmission of the vision, as well as for comprehension of its meaningful content. Daniel's aporetic relationship to his apocalyptic visions forces meaning to emerge from the "Other," that certain "beyond" in which resides a kind of constitutive space of Truth that is not a function of phenomenal or "Symbolic" existence nor of subjectivity. It is integral, to mantic discourse, that "meaning," itself, becomes a kind of impasse that can only be acceded through the

¹⁶ "I know a man in Christ who ... was caught up to the third heaven....And I know that this man ... was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 *Corinthians* 12:2-4).

'God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (*Exodus* 3:14). Note, also, that the phrase, "I am who I am" can also be understood to mean "I will be what I will be" in an interesting tautology, "ehyeh asher ehyeh," the intent of which is to emphasise the presence of God, but, which, in effect, deconstructs itself through its redundancy of the verb "to be," making God, once again, as we have noted, an absent presence, both symbolically as well as materially. The "unspeakable" name of God provokes a series of substitutive epithets, within biblical texts, which traditional Rabbinic exegesis holds to denote the context-specific manifestations of God or God's Word. For example, the Tetragrammaton, "Adonai," or Y-H-V-H appears to indicate the merciful God, while "Elohim" coincides with the instantiation of God as judge and retributive agency.

prophet's unique relationship to the divine – meaning-making, in other words, is the process whereby the seer is both legitimized, and, ironically, “dis-appeared.”

In *Revelation to John*, we will see these mediatory elements of interpretation and subject-positioning reach their discursive telos in John's euphoric and rapturous engagement with the Word, as well as in the technologies through which the Word's erosion of the prophet- as- Subject become sources of pleasure and desire for John. The masochistic relationship between prophet and Word that *Daniel* and *Revelation* map, indeed, is an erotics of deferral that the future possible conditional of the apocalypse always already contains as its narrative and psychical foundation. Where; however, John is eager for his symbolic “undoing,” Daniel engages his “contract” more circumspectly, particularly as his testimony enters into its first person modality. As Gilles Deleuze reminds us in “Coldness and Cruelty,” the art of “suspension,” the “profound state of waiting” is “closer to the sources of life and death” (70). What else may apocalypse then be, if not “an indefinite awaiting of pleasure and an intense expectation of pain” (71)?

The Revelation to John: *Against interpretation and the Word made manifest*

The constitution of the new covenant is, formally, the cathartic moment of the revelatory process, and the beginning and end of human history, inasmuch as the apocalypse creates, through the New Jerusalem, an imaginary geography that positions itself outside of the human constructs of space and time in an exemplary synchronicity with its “Maker,” the Alpha and the Omega. The New Jerusalem represents a “perfect order,” the completion of God's wrath (*Rev* 15:1), and the “making [of] everything new” (21:5). The New World Order, embodied in the descent of the New Jerusalem from the

heavens, is the material instantiation of the apocalyptic act of consummation, just as the Abyss becomes the space of the incomplete, of the interminable, and the outcast. When the Abyss is opened, “men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die but death will elude them” (9:6) in a kind of serial spiral of desire, “wo Es war, soll Ich werden”.¹⁷

The Abyss holds, for its inhabitants, perpetual torture, it is a space of pure abjection, while the New Jerusalem provides for the cessation of all suffering, and is instantiated as the new locus for “one’s own and clean self,” that proper, contained body that is “the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies” (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 65):

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (22:14-15)

The Abyss internalizes all resistance; it becomes the repository, within apocalyptic discourse, for the fractious, for all partitivity, in one grand and self-reflexive metaphorical gesture. Within the logistical scope of the revelation, the New Jerusalem is bounded by the Abyss, and both spaces figure as equally monumental citational endpoints within the narrative of the Rapture. These two “impossibles,” the “crack” and the “irruption,” compete in a kind of dialogic ecstasy for the ultimate expression of “the limit of the subject’s historical function” (Lacan, Écrits 100).

¹⁷ “Where It was, shall I be,” within a Freudian economy, which privileges the production of self-identity over the unconscious, that is, the transferral of the contents of the unconscious into consciousness.

Conclusively, the Holy City announces an immaculate presence, a *parousia* – a spiritual and historical completion that, narratively; however, is thwarted through the perpetual suspension of its own end moment:

Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.

Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. (22:10-11)

The apocalypse, here, is always future historical, which finds its echo in Derrida's notion of the apocalypse without apocalypse that defines the late-twentieth-century eschatological imagination. The apocalypse of John is to "come," it is projected (as we can understand the term "projection" to refer both to the act of forecasting as well as to an elaborated extension); this is the promise, while contemporary apocalypse literatures internalize the "end" as a chronic, purgatorial, present-ness. As Peter Freese elaborates, the *eschaton* becomes, now, "no longer historical but spiritual and psychological" (26), an "individual" and "allegorical" end. What is consistent, throughout apocalyptic discourse; despite these hermeneutical inversions, is the motif of postponement, the moratorium on the end as a rhetorical conceit.

The recuperation of the traces of the obscene, that is to occur through the collapse of the perverse social that the archival apocalypse imagines, although subject to the same logic of deferral that informs the narrative, more generally, comprises, however, the central imagistic sequence of the text. *The Revelation to John* elaborates this redemptive process in the rapture of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a "walled" and "gated" city, which recontains, and re-*secrets*, the profane through a process of

doctrinally guided exclusion: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:27). While the catalogued faithful inhabit God’s promised city, the unrepentant exist on the boundaries of the new civilization, in the Abyss that surrounds the walls of the New Jerusalem.

The subtraction of the idolatrous from the sanctuary is complicated by the New Jerusalem’s correlative participation in the “all-too-visible” that, in its preparatory addresses to the seven churches, is associated with the obscene knowledge of a secularized and “forgetful” socius. Within the New Jerusalem, there is a stunning excess of visibility: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light” (22:4-5). Vision, as it is here moderated in terms of the territorial body of the City, is constructed as a byzantine negotiation between an agentic exteriority, and a compromised; however redeemed, human subject who is rendered, in turn, as a kind of recording-machine for inscription by the Logos.

There is a kind of cunning circumvention, here, of “knowledge” in its rerouting through the New Jerusalem. Critical knowledge, always already metaphorized as clandestine, and illicitly brokered through the Fall, is ejected from the paradisiacal city. The “light” of knowing, within the boundaries of this new territory, is explicitly regulated through “the Lord God,” who removes all modes of alternative, and hence inauthentic, knowledge: “They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun.” In exchange for the renewal of obedience, and entry into the New Jerusalem, the “First and the Last” offers a concessionary and partial knowing: “To him who overcomes, I will give some of

the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it" (2:17). This compensatory "some," that is offered, gestures towards the narrative thread of the "just" redistribution of power that is God's promise to his oppressed churches, as it also seeks to redefine itself against the "excessive" and obscene "teaching" of "Satan's so-called deep secrets" (2:24) imparted by "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (2:20). Vulgar knowledge is positioned in stark contrast to an exclusive and private knowledge that is conferred directly from God to his faithful through the mediatory and ostensibly transparent body of the prophet.

In contradistinction to the harlot city, Babylon, the New Jerusalem is "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9), who, in *her* "legitimacy," reappropriates the prurient "myster[ies]" and "abominations" of the "mother of whores." The reader is allowed to witness, in advance of itself, the dismemberment and cannibalization of Babylon, and the relocation of the redeemed social body to the holy city, which is "coming soon" (22:7) for those who bear the "proper" mark. The violent erasure of Babylon and "her" *remainders*, which is foregrounded in *The Revelation to John*, makes way for the emergence of the New Jerusalem, which re-writes and re-iterates Babylon's pathological narratives and histories in a tautology of substitution. The New Jerusalem becomes, indeed, the normalized repetition of Babylon – that moment that Lacan suggests wherein "subjectivity simultaneously masters its dereliction and gives birth to the symbol" (*Écrits* 100).

The dialogue, in apocalypse, between antitheses invokes a complicated metaphysics of presence that is ultimately articulated by and through a grammar of retribution. *The*

Revelation to John proceeds, substantively, from chapters two and three, which catalogue the offences of the seven churches to which the revelation is addressed through John who is, ostensibly, in righteous exile in Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). The churches are exhorted to “overcome,” in order for the new covenant to be realized. The promise, here, is both of judgment as well as redemption, and is represented in the “marking” of the subject’s body – a signage that, in its recollection of the inscribing of Cain, encompasses both the registers of condemnation as well as that of protection, which we find in the very idea of the covenant itself:

Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. (3:12)

Marking, in *Revelation*, indicates a formal interpellative “alliance,” to either the sacred or to the abomination. In opposition to the divine mark accorded to the saved is the brand of reprehension: “The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image” (16:2). Humanity, here, is the object of its symbolic affiliation and subject, thus, to a celestial system of exchange, which is founded on the interpretation and recognition of the body’s identificatory texts.

Indeed, the ways in which text, itself, more extensively, is approached within *Revelation* is laden with significance, particularly, with the threat of signification. *The Revelation to John* commences with an articulation of the notion of “testimony,” of declaring and, thus, interpreting the “truth” of the Logos properly: “Blessed is the one

who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (1:3). This concern with the ways in which testimony is consumed is a preoccupation that the text returns to again and again in its narrative progression. The insistence on right reading that opens the revelation also closes the text, with an injunction to a kind of exegetical hermeticism:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." (22:18-20)

"Meaning," here, is not up for grabs; it is, in fact, objectively determined outside of the reader. One, therefore, cannot engage the content of the revelation except as a literality, that is, of course, unless one desires to withdraw oneself from the protective and redemptive "seal" that the New Jerusalem will instantiate. *Revelation*, it seems, is attuned to the treacherous possibility of the supplement.

We return, here, to the transfiguration of the human subject into recording-machine, and "witness." Throughout *Revelation*, all representational strategies are collapsed into the Logos, which is outside of phenomenal categorization. John, thus, "sees" the voice that speaks to him, and he is charged with "testif[ying] to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2). The Logos makes visible that which otherwise can only be heard, or mis-heard, as in the detailed instancing of false teachings. The Word makes palpable, and "real" that which is, under other conditions, only an imaginative inference and, thus, liable to misinterpretation and self-interested

manipulation. The encompassing complexity of the revelation's media and delivery anticipates the rigorous control over the production of knowledge, and its post-apocalyptic modes that is encountered, particularly, towards the conclusion of the text and its injunction of literality.

The danger of words, specifically, of the Word, is a consistent meme that works its way through the genre of apocalypse literature, and, most singularly, through *Revelation*, in which bodies, notably the body of the prophet, become debilitated effects of their contact with the *apokalypsis*. Bodies, here, are highly immersed in the tactics of competing texts as, for instance, John, positioned as authentic prophet, is played off of Jezebel, his counterfeit, in much the same way that Babylon becomes the rhetorical counterpoint to New Jerusalem in *Revelation*. In all cases; however, regardless of whether the "word" is described as true or false, or administered as an act of love or as one of treachery, it is a repository of compelling power.

The reader is introduced to the gravity of the association between the Word and the body in the first chapter, which recounts John's incapacitation upon "see[ing] the voice": "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last' (1:17). John is thus enjoined, out of his state of desubjectivisation, to "[w]rite, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later" (1:19). The obligation to record, accurately and in accord with the intention of the "Living One", follows, structurally, from the representational exercise of John's paralysis in contrast to the Word's display of sublime potency. John, as prophet, is the "servant" (1:1) of both Christ and the revelation. The vision, moreover, that John experiences, and is enjoined to testify, requires his mimetic

obedience – John records the “Truth,” the “Word” of the revelation, and, in this, he is absorbed into the desire of the Logos. John, in order to fulfill his prophetic role, must abandon the freedom of authorship, and renounce, as an effect of this abandonment, his social subjectivity. Within *Revelation* John is “reduced” to the level of a signifier, he *is* the testimony.¹⁸ The prophet, in the end, is a filter, absorbed into a kind of master Subject in anticipation of the apocalyptic promise.

The catastrophe of the human subject is bound, not ironically, but rather, as the genre would advocate, intuitively, to its literal pronouncement within the revelatory form. The intimate linkage between the Word and death is recapitulated in the opening of the fifth seal, which is the repository for the martyrs, whose diligence in the transmission of the Word is specifically located in the context of self-sacrifice:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (6:9)

¹⁸ In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan, in his discussion of the relation of the subject to the Other, elaborates:

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. (207)

In *Revelation*, John’s assumption of the machinic function of prophet implicates him in this process of disappearance into the narrative itself – what Lacan identifies as “the fading of the subject,” wherein the subject disappears *under* the signifier.

The Word demands death, in fact, martyrdom, here, is articulated as a prerequisite for the completion of God's mandate on earth. In his commentary on *Revelation*, Ben Witherington suggests, importantly, for my purposes, that the term "souls," which occurs in dominant translations of the fifth seal episode, should, more correctly, be understood as "the living person or personality, without a body" (135). The body, which is so rigorously marked and classified according to a salvational schema throughout *Revelation*, is, explicitly, made an absent presence in the process of martyrdom in direct analogy with the Logos itself. The imperative distinction to understand here is that any "body" can die; however, the martyr is liberated from "his" body as a point of privilege, in that the martyred body, itself, is the locus for the social, and hence profane, punishment acquired in maintaining, as opposed to subverting, the Word. To be, thus, perpetuated as a living person without a body" signals the subject's material removal from both his suffering, as well as his attachment to a corrupt and disintegrating material conditionality. The white-robed martyrs are included in the procession of the "redeemed," and "[n]ever again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat" (7:16).

The subject, thus, that works in alliance with the Word achieves a kind of hyper-presence that insulates him from the abject condition of a world plunged into plague and crisis. The martyrs are figured in terms of a divine transcendence that the *Revelation*, through John's unique perspective looking down from the "door standing open in heaven" (4:1), structurally emulates. As Stephen Cook notes, the visions that John records are transcendent "irrupt[ions] into the world ... demanding ... accord" (The Apocalyptic Literature 195). Self-immolation, as Cook continues, is central to effecting a

“reorientation” of social “experience” (195), and, I would suggest, additionally, of the constitution of subjectivity, itself. Within the apocalyptic landscape there is no situating or reflective context within which to devise an identification or relation outside of God or the Logos. The subject(s) of the apocalypse are, hence, locked into always already assuming the alien image of the Other¹⁹, with no pretence as to their own imagined symbolic coherence. This incorporation of subjectivity into the overarching One of the Alpha and the Omega should not, however, be supposed to indicate a liquid subject, rather, it constructs a particularly rigid formation that, in its subjective liberation from the *corps / corpse* and merger with the Logos, removes it from all desire. This secession from desire is what the Word names, through John, as the new order, which is counter-balanced, appropriately, in the formulation of the “second death” (21:8) – the culmination of God’s judgment, and the abject antithesis of “the spring of the water of life” (21:6) that is the reward of those who have been recorded in the book of life: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (21:8).

It is the pronouncement of this “second death,” a “permanent separation from God” (Cook 200), that subtextually motivates the apocalyptic cycle, and, importantly, is that

¹⁹ In this chapter, I have used the term “Logos” as a correlate to “God,” or the “Name-of-the-Father. Here; however, I am deliberately choosing to add the term “Other,” into my discussion in order to foreground the imbrication of the subject into the symbolic complex that is generated between the New Jerusalem, the “bride,” and God, her informing “Word.” In *Revelation*, the Word, is the Legislator of both the Other and the subject, but, in the end, it is interesting to note that the subject finds his dissolution (and, ostensibly, his own “completion”) precisely in the Other, the New Jerusalem, in which the Logos functions as symbolic kernel.

which will complete it when the necessity of the deferment has been relinquished, when the “proper” eschatological conditions have been met. The unrepentant damned, the residuum of the judgment, testify, themselves, to a fissure in the “perfect” and “complete” order that the apocalypse ostensibly enacts as its telic articulation. Those “unnamed,” who are thrown into the lake of fire instantiate a subversive complement to the redeemed, whose status, whose “proper” marking within this apocalyptic movement is aphanistic²⁰. The unelect, the unfaithful – whose “second death,” in their expulsion into the Abyss – articulate an almost incomprehensible subjective rebellion in their suicidal commitment to Babylon. In the rejection of the New Jerusalem, and in the giving over of the self to the “Beast,” a kind of counter-sacrifice is instituted in which

[t]he subject says “No!” to this darting game of intersubjectivity in which desire gains recognition for a moment only to lose itself in a will that is the other’s will.

The subject patiently withdraws his precarious life from the churning aggregations of the symbol’s Eros in order to finally affirm life in a speechless curse. (Lacan, Écrits 102)

Here, the Abyss is the death instinct, made manifest, or, more correctly, the Abyss actualizes itself as the agent of death. In Lacanian terms, the “second death” evinces the loss of the ideal image, the Abyss, by correlation, comprises the lack of the informing Logos, the master-image, as it were, and thus becomes the terminal space of the Real in

²⁰ I, here, follow Lacan’s understanding of aphanisis as
 ...the subject appears first in the Other, in so far as the first signifier, the unary signifier, emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for another signifier, which other signifier has as its effect the *aphanisis* of the subject. Hence the division of the subject – when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as ‘fading’, as disappearance. (Four 218)

its apocalyptic breakdown of the sinthome and the sinthome's ostensive organisation of radical *jouissance* within a now impossible symbolic subjectivity. The "second death," within the text of *Revelation*, excludes redemption.

In contradistinction to the ravaging Beast, the "once was, now is not" (17:8) that is called up from the Abyss, the appearance of the sacrificial Lamb, the "Root of David" in chapter five operates as a metonym for the disappearance of the redeemed subject into the Logos:

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. (5:6-7)

Authentic self-sacrifice is positioned, here, as the key not only to divine knowledge, but, as well, to the realization of the revelatory promise. The Lamb is the "representative of the representation" (Lacan, *Four* 218), he, literally, embodies the "number" of God, and, indeed, has come to stand in for the Logos as his primary, or "radical" substitution on earth. Similarly, all of humankind is exhorted, through the example of the Lamb, the unsealer, to release themselves into the register of the Other that is, in *Revelation*, understood as the New Jerusalem within which God is manifest: "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (22:3-4).

The image of the Lamb, as it repeats itself throughout the revelation, becomes both recourse and repository for symbolic salvation. Against the Abyss, which constitutes the

important, second death, the Lamb facilitates the subject's entry into the "first death," that is the desired, and indeed "promised" absorption into the Other. The martyrs', therefore, "overcome" Satan "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (12:11), because "they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:11). The "first death," thus, adheres the martyr to the Logos, and assures the recording of their names "in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (13:8).

One of the most interesting, and troubling, moments in *Revelation* occurs in Chapter 10, with the appearance of the seventh "mighty angel" who holds the "little scroll ... open in his hand" (10:2), which inaugurates the revelation of the "voices of the seven thunders" (10:3). These voices speak the only words that John is forbidden to record of all of the unveilings: "And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down'" (10:4). The hidden text of the barred scroll is the terminal revelation, the accomplishment of the new covenant, which is fixed in a permanent state of deferment until "the days" when "[t]here will be no more delay" (10:6).

John, consequently, is enjoined by the Logos to receive the scroll that is both open and closed from the seventh angel. Cook describes this section as a parenthetical interlude (203), while Witherington interprets the scene as a "divine commentary" (155). Both exegetes point towards the nature of the interlude as a narrative supplement, or, textual gloss, however, and emphasize, as I would like, the differential resistance to be found in the open scroll that is to be sealed – an inversion of the prior closed scrolls, which John witnessed as "unsealings." John, here, is also an active participant in the episode and is,

moreover, invited to engage, directly and viscerally, with the substance of the revelation, though the contents of the scroll, themselves, are never explicitly communicated to the reader:

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings." (10:9-11)

As Julia Kristeva notes in Powers of Horror, "...orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body" (75). John's incorporation of the sealed Word becomes a rite of purification, a *kathamos*, which signals the fundamental and metaphysical distinction between the profane and suspect body, and the sacred and secret language of revelation. The act of testimony, the ostensible interface between the profane and sacred, is instantiated, metaphorically, in the act of vomiting – John's injunction to "prophesy again," involves the disincorporation of the Word from the containing field of the subject's own body into the world. The revelation, the communication, becomes, importantly, the author of John in contradistinction to John's titular ownership of the apocalypse. Through this abject symbolic reversal that the function of prophesying inaugurates, John becomes prophet.

The visceral natures of the competing subjectivities, which *Revelation* invokes, are configured, most acutely, through the process of differential signage that the apocalypse demands as a condition of its fulfillment. The "mark" of the "beast," is outlined as the

coerced inscription of a social subject who is alienated from the redemptive Logos.

This “mark,” in other words, regulates and extends social interaction, particularly the engagement of the social subject within the modes of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange:

He [the second beast] also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.

(13:16-18)

The imbrication, here, between humanity and the beast, in the shared designator of the “6,” highlights the subtext of the social subject as inherently fractured, not only in his divisive affiliation with the beast, but, in the “essence” of the imperfection and chaos that the “6,” itself, within prophetic language denotes. The “failure” of the social subject, here, to be “properly” named, to enter into the Logos, that “domain without domain,” effects a terrifying consignment to God’s tormenting “wrath” and “fury.” Within the scheme of apocalyptic judgment, the indifferent, and the fearful under compulsion from the beast, become coterminous with the rebels, who “[curse] the name of God,” (16:9), and “[refuse] to repent of what they had done” (16:11). All are subject, thus, to the same exacting punishments for their ostensibly allied complicity in the rejection of God’s commandments.

The inability of the secular subject, within *Revelation*, to transform himself, to enter into what Derrida so compellingly terms the “ellipsis of sacrifice,” culminates in their

expulsion to the “lake of fire” (20:15), which establishes the “second death.” As Derrida elaborates: “the indemnification of the unscathed” resolves itself as “the price of immunity” (Religion s.40). The rigid architecture of the eschaton demands sacrifice, specifically, self-sacrifice, as its salvational exigency, and as the performative key to the New Jerusalem.

The apocalypse, in its terminal formation, evidences that especial and, indeed, radical, movement towards its own displacement. The institution of the New Jerusalem effectively forecloses the revelatory process; for in its manifestation at the “end” all is explicit, and, thus, nothing “remains” to be disclosed: “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (22.3-4). The inscription of the Logos onto the bodies of the redeemed, in the resolving stages of the apocalypse, and their promised immersion into the Alpha and the Omega, produce thus, and finally, the apocalyptic subject as language itself.²¹

²¹ As 2 Corinthians reminds us, the human subject cannot claim epistemological, nor ontological competence, “...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 *Cor.* 3.6).

Chapter Three – Declaring the End

I spoke my word, I break of my word: thus my eternal lot wants it; as a proclaimer I perish. (Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 333)

prophet, n.

- a. One who speaks for God or for any deity, as the inspired revealer or interpreter of his will; one who is held or (more loosely) who claims to have this function; an inspired or quasi-inspired teacher.
- b. *fig.* (In non-religious sense.) The ‘inspired’ or accredited spokesman, proclaimer, or preacher of some principle, cause, or movement.

(OED SE 1989)

The body of the prophet, as Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton elaborate in Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History 1300-2000, has historically been marked by its “absolute liminality” (5), a representational status mandated by “its role as a bridge between the earthly world and the divine” (5). Prophetic language, the grammars of *apokalypsis*, or, of “disclosure,” thus issues from the margins of subjectivity – from the fraught position of an enunciative split, which is recorded on this culturally equivocal body through its relational engagement with the catalytic spaces of death, dream-vision, madness, and disease. The construction, here, of a “split” subject is necessary according to the demands of the prophetic narrative, which posits, in terms of the chain of signification, an independent and a priori subject, that is, God. God, as a unified and fixed existence (regardless of the philosophically contestatory nature of this claim) is demanded by the discourse – God, not the prophet, is the critical agent. The prophet

becomes divided in his engagement with both the world (linguistic space) and the otherworld (extralinguistic space). The prophet avoids, in part, a fall into a critique of the Cartesian subject because he is not the cause of signification, nor does he exist independent of language. His split originates out of the need for the chain of signification, in fact, to proceed – for the prophecy to enter into the arena of the social subject from alterity. Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture, articulates the notion of the enunciative split as a kind of “Third Space,” an ambiguous space from which cultural and political critique can emerge (35), just as Taithe and Thornton elaborate that “[p]rophecy is a political grammar into which highly subversive ideas can be inserted . . .” (3). The discourse of prophecy can be understood to allow for the occupation of that radical, khoric space, in the communication of the “vision,” and its concordant deconstruction of the “I” that is the domain of the linguistic subject.

The body of the subject, thus, similarly compromised, assures its categorical “receptivity” to the transcendent occupation of relay of the prophecy. It is only when a state of abjection (in terms of both body and self) is achieved that the prophet can enter into the impossibility of the apocalyptic “dialogue.” As Kristeva notes:

Abjection – dietary, sanguine, and moral – is pushed back within the chosen people, not because they are worse than others, but because in the light of the contract that they alone have entered into, abjection appears as such. The existence and degree of abjection are thus predicated on the very position of the logic of separation. Such at least is the conclusion one can draw from the prophets' insistence upon abjection. As far as the concept of a subjective

interiorization of abjection is concerned, that will be the accomplishment of the New Testament. (Powers of Horror107)

Here, abjection becomes a marker of consecration and legitimacy in terms of both the prophet as well as his discourse. The prophet's entry into the abject, his collapse into that *something other than himself* imbues his narrative, his testimony, with authority. We find this selfsame consecration of the mortified subject within mystical traditions, which, as de Certeau notes, cultivated a "language of the body," ("Mysticism" 15) which signaled "the place in which they [mystics] found themselves and the illumination they received" (15). Here, as in the apocalyptic experience, abjection, whether manifested on the surfaces or in the interiors of prophetic subjects "thus became the clearest indicators of the movement produced before or after the stability of intellectual formulations" (15). In other words, the fraught body here operates as a sign of accreditation when confronted by, or in the attempt to express, the inarticulable.

The transmission of the prophecy, both in contemporary, as well as in traditional forms, instantiates a displacement of the proclaimer – his concomitant ex-communication from the arena of social subjectivity and reconfiguration as object-instrument. Processes of identification are re-routed from the subject to the "divine" text, which constructs the "Word" as the preeminent locus of agency and change. The subject, here, is effectively exchanged for the "Word," a substitution which is reinforced and which achieves generic distinction through the operative dissemination and repetition of the narrative. The revelation, itself, circumscribes and *re-makes* the prophet into a supplementary function of its discourse. The speaker becomes a generic attribute, a convention, which is buttressed by the prophetic narrative's essential "pseudonymity" and deferral of authorial

“attribution” from the suspect now to the past historical:²² “In this way, the impression of the inadequacy of the present world and the need to derive revelation from elsewhere is confirmed” (Collins, “Morphology” 12).

Within conventional apocalypse narratives, the structural trope of the “elsewhere,” which is enfolded into the prophecy, institutes both the modality by which the discourse is transmitted – the doctrinal appearance of an “otherworldly” being who “communicates the revelation” (6) to the recipient – as well as constituting the symbolic space of reception and promise in the journey of the prophet “beyond the normally accessible world” (6) from which the revelation is delivered. The revelatory structure demands, moreover, the production of specifically “other” temporal and spatial axes through which a transformative salvation is instituted, as in, for example, the promise of the New Jerusalem²³ found in *Revelation*.

The generic preoccupation with the “elsewhere,” with the Other, undergoes a series of re-evaluative modifications within the framework of contemporary apocalyptic figuration, within which this Other becomes synonymous with the prophetic subject-object whose delivery of the “divine” text or Word is related as a pathological symptom both of a collapsed self and society. The key variation, here, pivots upon the internalisation of the Other, which disrupts the lines of mediation and thwarts the therapeutic legitimacy of the revelation by rendering its salvational “conclusion” non-extensible beyond the boundaries of the body to which it was delivered, and/or produced

²² John J. Collins elaborates: “. . . the attribution of a work to an ancient author such as Enoch or Shem effectively removes it from the time and place of the present” (“Morphology” 11-12), and, thus, extends an oracular tone to the narrative.

²³ “And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev.* 21:2, NRSV).

by. The chain of agency²⁴ which underwrites classical eschatology is suspended and literally deconstructed through the narcissistic self-reflexivity of the prophet who initiates a kind of anti-revelatory narrative strategy that foregrounds the unrealizability of disclosure and the essential absence of redemption. Some of the tension occurs, here, in the resistance-response of the prophet to his necessary desubjectivisation and reduction to “remainder” within the discourse. The desire to assert the pronominal “I,” even from the abyss of radical exclusion, destabilises the implicit generic contract, which privileges, traditionally, the Logos as the generative force of knowledge, being, and importantly, futurity, above the social subject within the network of signification that the revelation instantiates. The “I” within conventional apocalypse narratives is always the position of a passive recipient, it is the khora, or receptacle. Contemporary apocalypses, oppositionally, assert the “I” as “Maker/Other.” This transposition is not produced unproblematically, nor in an unmediated fashion, to be sure, however, its revaluation of the subject position of the prophet is an important intervention into the discursive format of prophecy and apocalypse, more generally.

Late twentieth-century apocalyptic figurations are not merely variations on the mythographic elements of their historical predecessors, but, rather, substantive unorderings of the chain of agency, which underwrites classical eschatology. The new modes of apocalyptic notation that are instituted erect the prophetic body as the theatre of

²⁴ As Collins’ stresses in his study of the formal development of apocalypse narrative: “The manner of revelation requires the mediation of an otherworldly being: i.e., it is not given directly to the human recipient and does not fall within the compass of human knowledge” (10). This generic insistence upon mediation is contested by contemporary apocalypses, particularly in their impulse towards exploring the apocalypse as a psychic terrain, a discursive facet, which I read through Ellis, Selby, Palahniuk and Acker.

the apocalyptic process – the prophet's body, in other words, becomes the stage upon which the cultural crisis is enacted. There is no "elsewhere" through which the narrative is mediated, no allusive past through which the pedagogy can be safely codified and distanced; rather, what is foregrounded is the immanent present in all of its pathological flatness. The "elsewhere," thus subtracted from the apocalyptic scene, is replaced by the body itself, at once estranged and perverse in its function as catastrophic remainder.

The rupture of the generic codes of the apocalypse constructs new schemes of prophetic notation, which do not so much contest the ambiguated subject of the prophecy, as they do bifurcate the subject within the narrative itself in order to foreground the communicative disjunctions of the revelatory structure. Paramount to the operations of prophetic discourse are the interplays of encryption/decryption as the revelation is transmitted from God, to intermediary being, to prophet, who is then responsible for declaring the vision to the social, thus rendering it available to interpretive possibility. This circuit is broken in the contemporary apocalypse narrative as the prophetic subject comes to occupy the positions of both sign-maker as well as interpreter, which disrupts the explanatory diffusion of the prophecy, and, effectively, performs the revelation, solely, as a process of self-circumscription. The apocalypse, thus relocated, becomes, in a sense, cannibalistic – it is, in the "end," the Word that eats itself.

The Anti-Metaphysics of American Psycho

Held back by his aloofness, modern man is a narcissist – a narcissist who may suffer, but who feels no remorse. He manifests his suffering in his body and he is afflicted with somatic symptoms. His problems serve to justify his refuge in the

very problems that his own desire paradoxically solicits. When he is not depressed, he becomes swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure but no satisfaction. Living in a piecemeal and accelerated space and time, he often has trouble acknowledging his own physiognomy, left without a sexual, subjective, or moral identity, this amphibian is a being of boundaries, or a “false self” – a body that acts, often without even the joys of such performative drunkenness. Modern man is losing his soul, but he does not know it . . . (Kristeva, New Maladies 7-8)

Patrick is *not* a cynic . . . He’s the boy next door, aren’t you honey?

“No, I’m not,” I whisper to myself. “I’m a fucking evil psychopath.” (Ellis, American Psycho 20)

Ellis’ American Psycho offers, superficially, a highly ambiguated mapping of its main character, and narrator, Patrick Bateman, a young and tautologically beautiful Manhattan banker, at the ironically branded firm of “Pierce & Pierce,” a blackly humorous inside play on Patrick’s abject sociopathy. Set in the late 1980’s, in the midst of a profoundly dissonant Reaganite economic ethos of the “me,” the text, in a fashion, traces the recession of the “self” within a culture of excessive materialism and an imperative towards the production and continuation of a spectacle of panic.²⁵ The reader,

²⁵ For an interesting examination of the apocalyptic rhetoric of Reagan’s public discourses, and their production of a culture of panic within the American consciousness, see Lloyd deMause’s Reagan’s America <<http://www.psychohistory.com/reagan/rcontent.htm>>. Ronald’s Reagan’s two inauguration speeches (1981 and 1985), as well, explicitly describe an imminent condition of crisis that informed/informs the American cultural landscape. The

maintained in a similarly pinioned and compulsive mode of interminable disquiet, can only ever participate alongside and through Patrick's mediation of his discontinuous self and events. Here, we are explicitly foreclosed from penetrating the narrative from any avenue "other" than Patrick – he pronounces and authorizes our interpretive routes, which are only ever partially revealed and always already deeply situated within the obfuscating logics of the perverse.

Ellis' monologically structured text is, ostensibly, a critique of the cult of artifice that our popular historicization of the 1980's, retrospectively configured as a decade of unbridled materialism, understands. It is, however, a reviewal that withdraws from itself in that any critical hermeneutic is one that is deployed by the reader herself against Ellis' stark denotation of Patrick Bateman's "world," both materially as well as psychically. Indeed, there is no "stain" of authorial "intention" present in the text of American Psycho. Patrick's relatively amoral and unidimensional context issues solely from his personal void of identity and his literal disappearance into the signs of material culture that preoccupy him throughout the narrative. In an interesting turn, thus, the "responsibility" for Patrick resides in the reader and his or her level of "comfort" with the abject as an existential possibility. Patrick's visceral and exhaustive descriptions of his torturings and murders thus slide vexatiously from "our" authorization of them as "realities" to our overburdened insistence that they are, alternatively, phantasmic products of the unconscious in its occupation of "safely" producing and harboring antisociality. "Clearly," we may say, Patrick's "success" guarantees our interpretation of

transcripts of these addresses can be found at the following urls: First Inaugural Address, 1981: <<http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres61.html>>, and the Second Inaugural Address, 1985: <<http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres62.html>>.

the acts as interior, imaginary plays, he is, after all, an “unreliable” narrator, and we, therefore, scan the text obsessively for slippages and inconsistencies, which will legitimize our reading. We are left, however, with the residue of doubt that such ambivalent discourse always manufactures. In a contemporary culture that has come to be defined by its loss of affect and alienation from itself, it is not so “unbelievable” to presume the authenticity of Patrick’s “confession,” and thus our own complicity with the propitious and, in fact, exonerated presence of “evil” within “civilized” society.

American Psycho prefaces itself with a series of popular quotations, which, in turn, create a fractalized interpretive lens through which the reader is invited to negotiate both the figure of Patrick Bateman as well as the narrative contours of the self-apocalypse that he relates. While, in the commencing epigraphs, Dostoevsky sets up the device of the fictional autobiography and highlights the parable of generational representationality to be found in the “voice from the underground,” Miss Manners discourses on the necessity of maintaining the appearance of “civilization” against the social imperative towards savagery and deviance, and, in the background, the Talking Heads lament the inaugural cacaphony: “And as things fell apart / Nobody paid much attention.” The discursive channels, here, construct a citational “ethical” framework through which the various texts of the *American Psycho* are to be read. To maintain the surface is to, simultaneously, participate gesturally in sociality, to “represent” it, as well as to be psychically disengaged from it. Thus is the socio-cultural topography through which Patrick moves as apocalyptic trace, the *representative* of an “ontology for the dislocated” (Grimshaw n.pg.).

This proposition of dislocation that American Psycho aestheticizes in the character of Patrick, elaborates upon the refrain “people are afraid to merge” that philosophically founds Ellis’ earlier work, Less Than Zero. In this text, Clay prefigures Patrick in his almost sterile narration of the monotony of being that delineates his privileged cultural milieu. Both novels interest themselves with the bankruptcy of affect that is posited as an explicit component of contemporary material social reality. Whereas, however, Clay’s subjective numbness to the empty and transitory signs of excess and spectacle that inform his personal context is translated into his compulsive desire to “move,” even directionlessly, Patrick’s response, although similarly kinetic, is pathologized in his ostensive acts of serial violence. The logics of disaffection that circulate around and through these two modes of terminality point to a similar preoccupation with the “real” as a category that can only ever function as a kind of marginal gloss of itself. Existence is always already, here, a precession of (dis)simulation, “the transgression that makes desolate” (*Dan*. 8.13).

Patrick, in his serial violences, performs that form of apocalypse, which “does not worship power. It wants to murder the powerful, to seize the power itself, the weakling” (Lawrence 27). Indeed, in the text of American Psycho, Patrick, by installments, translates himself as a progressive effect of this kind of castrated desire that “strips” him of his “emotional and imaginative reactions” (15), and which, in the end, results in a void of affect. Violence, for Patrick, becomes another product of conspicuous consumption, of a kind of bored and ironically depleted consumer nihilism – apocalypse without revelation:

While waiting on the couch in the living room, the Wurlitzer jukebox playing “Cherish” by the Lovin’ Spoonful, I come to the conclusion that Patricia *is* safe tonight, that I am not going to unexpectedly pull a knife out and use it on her just for the sake of doing so, that I am not going to get any pleasure watching her bleed from slits I’ve made by cutting her throat or slicing her neck open or gouging her eyes out. She’s lucky, even though there is no real reasoning behind the luck. It could be that she’s safe because her wealth, her *family’s* wealth, protects her tonight, or it could be that it’s simply *my* choice. Maybe the glass of Scharffenberger has deadened my impulse or maybe it’s simply that I don’t want to ruin this particular Alexander Julian suit by having the bitch spray her blood all over it. Whatever happens, the useless fact remains: Patricia will stay alive, and this victory requires no skill, no leaps of the imagination, no ingenuity on anyone’s part. This is simply how the world, *my* world moves. (76-77)

The surreal randomness of Patrick’s desire effects a kind of blank parody of late modern aesthetic philosophy, which privileges the “freeing . . . [of] instincts from their victimization by the intellect” (Hoffman 154). Indeed, what separates Patrick from any kind of recourse to a Sadean or other revolutionary ethic is the very absence of radical intention in the founding of his acts. Patrick *is* an empty signifier, as much “object,” in practice, as any of his victims – an awkward precipitate of an always already vacuous discourse.

As, himself, a kind of inchoate product of a narcissistic social thesis, Patrick can only ever *dis-articulate* his self. *He*, in unanimity with his socius, is “out of joint,” and the

collateral fracturing of his “thinking” *I* can constitute nothing more than a wasteland of false interiority and subjectivity:

J&B I am thinking. Glass of J&B in my right hand I am thinking. Hand I am thinking. Charivari. Shirt from Charivari. Fusilli I am thinking. Jami Gertz I am thinking. I would like to fuck Jami Gertz. Porsche 911. A sharpei I am thinking. I would like to own a sharpei. I am twenty-six years old I am thinking. I will be twenty-seven next year. A Valium. I would like a Valium. No, *two* Valium I am thinking. Cellular phone I am thinking. (80-81)

Patrick’s disentranced exercise in self-situation can only ever avail itself of partiality and discontinuity. He is an absurd sum, here, of his own play with the Cartesian equation “I think, therefore I am.” For Patrick, there is no “psychic life,” there are only machinic assemblages of part-objects and their associative social emblematic fetishes. His hand and his cock become the exclusive loci for his identity, and the “instruments,” throughout the text, for the performance of his psychopathology. The discursive correspondence of the body with random signs of acquisitive social premiums, and their incumbent technologies and ethos of designer weariness and inconsonance, “reveal,” in fact, and ironically, the fundamental failure of subjectivity to *cohere*, even if only symbolically, for Patrick.

In a particularly self-reflexive maneuver, the text of American Psycho opens itself with the section “April Fools,” and the apocalyptic warning: “ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE,” (3) in “blood red” graffiti “on the side of the Chemical Bank,” (3) which Patrick absorbs as a kind of accelerated moment of deprived potency through the window of his taxi. In this commencing paragraph there is an overlaid

influx of competing cultural signs, all functioning, in the end, to simultaneously explode and exhaust themselves with their potential hyper-referentiality. The bankruptcy of signification that contextualizes the urban scrawl against its blockage, a bus with an “advertisement for *Les Misérables* on its side,” (3) which obscures the portent from view, becomes an exaggerated exemplar of the strategies of the surface that the text foregrounds, more generally. The juxtaposition of spiritual warning against the signs of cultural emptiness which comprise the city’s own terminal text becomes a testimony of and to American (post)modernity as, itself, a register of abjection.

The recurrent incursions of “debased” popular cultural forms, the musical, “Top 40” pop songs, and the “talk show,” intervene in the narrative as mediatized extensions of Patrick’s increasing psychosis. Whereas, traditionally, popular cultural products can be read as ironically subversive moments of agency and voice²⁶ against the late modern tendency towards “massification,” within American Psycho, these popular forms are deprived of their oppositional status, and like the emptied subjects that populate Patrick’s universe, these sign systems function as perverse symptoms of a, specifically, class

²⁶ As John Fiske elaborates:

It is capital that provides the access to the means of production and distribution in the two parallel financial economies. But it is the meanings and pleasures of the cultural economy that determine the extent of the economic return on that capital. In this sense the cultural economy drives the financial in a dialectic force that counters the power of capital. Mass mediated popular art must contain within it the opposing but linked forces of capital and the people if it is to circulate effectively in both financial and cultural economies. Far from being the agent of the dominant classes, it is the prime site where the dominant have to recognise the insecurity of their power, where they have to encourage the cultural difference with all the threat to their own position that this implies. (“TV” n.pg.)

Indeed, in line with Fiske’s evaluation, we may read Patrick’s vapid encounters with his contemporary popular culture as a manifestation of that positional “insecurity” to which Fiske points.

indifference. As Patrick's horror towards the bathroom graffiti, "Kill all Yuppies," that he encounters in a nightclub displays, the late capitalist tendency towards hyper-consumption is neither self-conscious nor critically attuned. Patrick's absorption into the trivial denominators of the "upwardly mobile" is a process of paradoxical stasis and disappearance.

Patrick, in his limited engagement with structures of meaning becomes an exercise in redundancy, which is manifested in his obsessive-compulsive propensity to list and describe, a motif that works its way through the narrative in successive and deconstructive pulsations. The self, here, becomes reduced to its most minimal, sartorial descriptors:

Once inside Harry's we spot David Van Patten and Craig McDermott at a table up front. Van Patten is wearing a double-breasted wool and silk sport coat, button-fly wool and silk trousers with inverted pleats by Mario Valentino, a cotton shirt by Gitman Brothers, a polka-dot silk tie by Bill Blass and leather shoes from Brooks Brothers. McDermott is wearing a woven-linen suit with pleated trousers, a button-down cotton and linen shirt by Basile, a silk tie by Joseph Abboud and ostrich loafers from Susan Bennis Warren Edwards. (31)

Identity, here, is a matter of quantifiable inventories, which are dissociated from any sense of intimacy. Existence, within the socius, is subject to its ability to be "abstracted," to be summarized. This contraction of self is seen in terms of the language of the product, or commodity, the denotative assessment of which is ultimately rendered as a series of meaningless verbal gestures that never connect with their point of reference.

Meaning, in a sense, here, remains, always, *unredeemed*, a distantiation effect without recourse to any kind of salvational proximity.

Throughout the text, the disjunction between the transcendent primacy of the commodity fetish and the abject “reality” of contemporary American urban existence executes a malignant leitmotif that empties itself of both affect and relevance. In the discontinuity of experience that the representational oppositions provide, the violence of “being” is manufactured as an empty trope, heavily mediatized, and thus reduced and depersonalized. Timothy Price, a kind of pseudo-existential foil to Patrick’s subjective indifference, comes to embody, within the narrative, this perverse dialogic exchange:

He takes off the expensive-looking Walkman from around his neck, still complaining. “I hate to complain – I really do – about the trash, the garbage, the disease, about how filthy this city really is and *you* know and I know that it is a *sty*. . . .” He continues talking as he opens his new Tumi calfskin attaché case he bought at D.F. Sanders. He places the Walkman in the case alongside a Panasonic wallet-size cordless portable folding Easa-phone (he used to own the NEC 9000 Porta portable) and pulls out today’s newspaper. “In one issue – in *one* issue – let’s see here . . . strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis” – he flips through the pages excitedly – “baseball players with AIDS, more Mafia shit, gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, faggots dropping like flies in the streets, surrogate mothers, the cancellation of a soap opera, kids who broke into a zoo and tortured and burned various animals alive, more Nazis . . . (4)

The unmitigated excess of Timothy's enumeration of the monstrosity of the everyday produces *neither* a sense of horror *nor* a cognizance of their reality, but works, rather, to generate a collapse of their expressive content. Here, barbarisms exist in categorical affinity with topical "public interest" stories, and middling entertainment sidebars. Timothy's personal incongruity, additionally, in the face of the signifiers of cultural distress that he orates, manifests a kind of privileged condition of urban fatigue, and its concomitant abstraction of material suffering that Patrick incorporates into his own stream-of-consciousness self-analyses.

Within the inimical terrain of American Psycho the provocative fields of sex and death are reduced to anorexic gestures without any kind of substantive resonance for the subjects, which engage them. For Patrick and the literal "figures" that occupy his narrow field of existence, the abject elicits only a kind of disinterested, and ineffectual discursive participation:

I place the tumbler on the nightstand and roll over on top of her. While I kiss and lick her neck she stares passionlessly at the wide-screen Panasonic remote-control television set and lowers the volume. I pull my Armani shirt up and place her hand on my torso, wanting her to feel how rock-hard, how *halved* my stomach is, and I flex the muscles, grateful it's light in the room so she can see how bronzed and defined my abdomen has become.

"You know," she says clearly, "Stash tested positive for the AIDS virus. And . . ." She pauses, something on the screen catching her interest; the volume goes slightly up and then is lowered. "And . . . I think he will probably sleep with Vanden tonight." (23)

The impassive movements, here, between ego, body, object, and other disclose what Kristeva has termed an “amputated subjectivity,” (New Maladies 7) which has come to define the essential “poverty” of contemporary psychic life. The loss of affect that the text examines, more generally, through Patrick, is precisely located in this instance of perverse denotation in which death becomes, not a scene of radical separation and inarticulation, but, rather, one that is telescoped into a kind of anecdotal prosaicism. Death, here, is subject to the same processes of disenchantment that mark both the “Home Shopping Club” that backgrounds Evelyn’s “aside,” as well as in her displaced response to Patrick’s body.

In Less Than Zero, the disturbing iterative transpositions of scenes, which find their aberrant echoes in American Psycho, locate their substantive condensation in the meta-text of the “Cliff Notes to *As I Lay Dying*,” (Less 22) which becomes, itself, a suggestive apocalyptic testimony. The complex preoccupation with existence and identity that Faulkner’s work takes up, is, within the functional purpose of the Cliff Notes, necessarily reduced to its basest signifiers in a kind of gestural concert with the minimal expository aesthetic of Ellis’ texts. The abstraction of life to its most banal, that the Notes signal, is a micro-instancing, as well, of the self-plagiarisms that Ellis practices between his two texts, proper.

The platitudinous advancement of the narrative of American Psycho is consolidated and echoed in the continuous mis-taking of identities throughout the text. The misrecognitions, here, emphasize both the apathetic response to individuality as a quality of the social subject, as well as the fundamental detachment from “proper” subjectivity that occupies Ellis’ elaboration of (post)modern culture. These blockages of

identification operate simultaneously for Patrick as protective, anonymizing formations (in terms of his criminality) and as alienating denials of the interpellative process: "I am a ghost to this man, I'm thinking. I am something unreal, something not quite tangible, yet still and obstacle of sorts . . ." (71). If, in the moment of naming, as well as of being named, one becomes oneself, the conceit of misidentification that informs American Psycho prepares and supplements the conditions for Patrick's pathological relation to the social.

This Is Not An Exit

When we think the truth of Being, metaphysics is overcome. We can no longer accept the claim of metaphysics to preside over our fundamental relation to "being" or to decisively determine every relation to beings as such. But this "overcoming of metaphysics" does not abolish metaphysics. As long as man remains the *animal rationale*, he is the *animal metaphysicum*. (Heidegger 279)

The tensions and contradictions inherent within the project of metaphysics itself are further complexified in Ellis' erection of Patrick Bateman as the ultimate *animal irrationale* of his cultural wasteland, within which there exists no ontological interest, only a series of pathological tracings across apathetic exteriorities, which are marked as ironies by their essential ambiguity and relative undifferentiation. Characters merge into each other as social identificatory mechanisms, such as the "hail," become emptied indicators, both of the failure of the subject to be "properly" instituted within symbolic space, and, as well, of the futility of individual recognition, not to mention constitution,

within a culture of massification. The collapse of the individual within Ellis' narrative suggests a kind of anti-heroism in which nothing is "singular:"

The "anyone" or "everyone" is a common place, a philosophical *topos*. The role of this general character (everyman and nobody) is to formulate a universal connection between illusory and frivolous scriptural productions and death, the law of the other. He plays out on the stage the very definition of literature as a world and of the world as literature. (de Certeau 2)

The banality of the social self is effected, within American Psycho, rhetorically – in the non-languages of advertising that define the ostensible enunciative acts of the text, in the exhaustive cataloging of acquisitions, and the disenchanted genealogical project that it announces. As Lacan notes of the compulsion to repeat, the subject's integration into the chain of signification sets out for him, in advance, his positions through the circuit in which he is linked (Seminar II 89). Similarly, Patrick becomes a pathological effect of the socius, and his discourse, a perverse "rerun" of the empty, mediatized signs to which he is subject.

The acts of "naming," that occur become litanies of dissolution and articulate a breakdown of affect – apocalyptic warnings of their own kind exhibited on the surfaces of popular cultural discourse. Entire chapters dedicated to Patrick's capsule evaluation of Genesis (pre- and post- Peter Gabriel), Whitney Houston, and Huey Lewis and News become symptomatic of an integral disintegration of the self as "being-in-the-world," and the turn to "object-in-the-world." The always contested subject, here, becomes merely an iteration, an accumulation of representation with no substantive content. The self, like the impoverished aesthetics that it "reviews" through Patrick, is reduced to mimesis and

stuttering cliché: “Well, I think his work . . . it has a kind of . . . wonderfully proportioned, purposefully mock-superficial quality.’ I pause, then, trying to remember a line from a review I saw in *New York* magazine: ‘Purposefully mock . . .’” (Ellis 99).

The function of the “trace,” as a sign of a kind of frustrated ontology, mirrors the prophetic discourse embedded within the apocalypse narrative as a generic precept. The trace, like the prophecy, and, in turn, the ostensibly “visionary” subject, evades interpretation – it is a movement, as much as it is a language, of allusion – both the trace and the prophecy synchronously invite and defer interpretation. Patrick comes to embody, as the confession proceeds, these “plays” – he is both present and absent, he is a contradiction in terms – an “always already gone” within the terms of his own discourse:

The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace . . . In this way the metaphysical text is *understood*; it is still readable, and remains to be read.

(Derrida, “Differance” 156)

Confronted by Patrick’s illogic, by his Nietzschean “dissonance,” we may read him as *successful* because he *faces the consequences*²⁷ of his own existence as trace, and which, thus, in turn, dictates the failure of his “victims,” who *collapse*, if only upon the stage of

²⁷ As Nietzsche remarks:

It is certainly the sign of the ‘breach’ which all are wont to speak of as the fundamental tragedy of modern culture that the theoretical man, alarmed and dissatisfied at his own conclusions, no longer dares entrust himself to the terrible ice-stream of existence: he runs timidly up and down the bank. So thoroughly has he been spoiled by his optimistic views that he no longer wants to have anything whole, with all of nature’s cruelty attaching to it. Besides, he feels that a culture based on the principles of science must be destroyed when it begins to grow *illogical*, that is, to retreat before its own conclusions. (*Birth of Tragedy* 67)

his fantasy, because they, fundamentally, *misread* Patrick. Patrick's legitimacy, within the socius, is the product of this comprehensive error and articulates the interpretive rupture that indicates what Nietzsche terms theoretical culture's "fear of its own conclusions" (*Birth of Tragedy* 67): "He's the boy next door. That's Patrick" (Ellis 11).

This focalization of subjectivity as contingent upon textual practices (modes of reading and writing the self and other) is suggested, or, perhaps more appropriately, solicited, by the structural tokens which open and close the novel itself. As noted at the beginning of my examination, the inaugural section of *American Psycho*, whose cardinal line reads: "ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERÈ" (3), is companioned by the concluding episode "At Harry's" and the unanswered admonishment, "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT" (399). The reader is thus enticed to understand Patrick's narrative as a process of conspicuous and foreclosed referentiality, and, more so, as a bracketed pedagogical exercise. Inasmuch as Ellis' text becomes, in part, an emulation of Dante's taxonomy of evil in *The Inferno*, as we read Patrick's world as it is captured through its initial textual moment, we are also directed to mediate the allusion through a series of ironic contextual correspondences. The chapter title underlines a particularly strategic motif that inflects the novel as a whole. That is, the reader, from her first narrative encounter, is invited to explain both Patrick and his experiences as suspect – as an elaborate "April Fools" hoax being perpetrated at the expense of the reader by an author whose intentions can be seen to mirror, in turn, Dostoevsky's generational representative, "this personage [who] describes himself and his views and attempts, as it were, to clarify the reasons why he appeared and was bound to appear in our midst" that prefaces *American Psycho*.

The interpretive discomfiture, rendered by the multiple and conflicting readings made available through Patrick's increasing psychosis, further confounds our location of the prophetic subject within the structural body of the text. The narrative, certainly, maneuvers for some kind of comment on *author-ity* in all of its guises – it posits only to undercut, it declares only to deny:

On my way into the Chinese cleaners I brush past a crying bum, an old man, forty or fifty, fat and grizzled, and just as I'm opening the door I notice, to top it off, that he's also *blind* and I step on his foot, which is actually a stump, causing him to drop his cup, scattering change all over the sidewalk. Did I do this on purpose? What do you think? Or did I do this accidentally? (82)

The reader is not only addressed in a moment of acute textual self-reflexivity, but asked, as well, to participate in the construction, or, rather, misconstruction of Patrick's already fraught identity. In this sense, we being to *choose* to constitute both Patrick and his narrative according to "our" level of ethical comfort with his narration – his abjection can now, thus, be either classified as "authentic" relation, in the mode of the confessional, or, as the brokerage of an apocalyptic fantasy. The reader is consequently incorporated into a dynamic of judgment – we are either complicit with the production of atrocity, by taking pleasure in the assumption of its reality, or, we register ourselves as "civilized" by psychologizing Patrick's text, by attributing a doubly fictional status upon it. We read ourselves reading ourselves in this moment.

The possibility opened up for the imbrication of Ellis, himself, into the exegesis – of developing a simultaneous position of both author and literary device²⁸ then functions, itself, as an apocalyptic variant. Patrick *relates*, but what remains ambiguous is the question of whether or not there may very well be an inarticulable presence or omniscience guiding that relation. Conventional apocalyptic discourse maintains that presence in the ur-sign of the Word, however mediated, and the suggestiveness of Ellis' play throughout the text on tropes of uncertainty and provisionality point, correlatively, to this kind of circumstantial subject aggregation.

The potential to read Patrick as a composite or schizophrenically divided subject is determinate, as well, on how the reader proceeds with Ellis' allusion to Dante's *Inferno*, his starting referential gambit. Patrick's journey through "hell," after all, achieves no resolution – there is no "exit to the world of the living, no aperture through which to experience (re-experience?) those "beauteous things that Heaven doth bear" (Dante XXXIV), only a closed-off perpetuity of the damned in all of its inescapable and pathological triviality: "The conversation follows its own rolling accord – no real structure or topic or internal logic or feeling; except, of course, for its own hidden, conspiratorial one. Just words, and like in a movie, but one that has been transcribed improperly, most of it overlaps" (Ellis 395). It is as if Patrick and his universe repeat, ad infinitum, its own aphasic, purgatorial existence – never allowed to move beyond the bounds of the ante-inferno, in futile pursuit of the blank sign.

²⁸ This is a narrative strategy that we will see taken up complexly by Kathy Acker, in her examinations of the potential for constructing the "false" autobiography, and in the figure of the plagiarized self.

Patrick, indeed, has no recognizable Virgil to guide him through his hell, nor to disclose and explicate the prophetic content of his passage. The archetype of the quest, that Dante's epic elaborates, is subjected to a process of de-mythologization within American Psycho. Revelation, within Patrick's speculative lexicon is an emptied parody itself:

. . . where there was nature and earth, life and water, I saw a desert landscape that was unending, resembling some sort of crater, so devoid of reason and light and spirit that the mind could not grasp it on any sort of conscious level and if you cam close the mind would reel backward, unable t take it in. It was a vision so clear and real and vital to me that in its purity it was almost abstract. This was what I could understand, this was how I lived my life, what I constructed my movement around, how I dealt with the tangible. This was the geography around which my reality revolved: it did not occur to me, *ever*, that people were good or that a man was capable of change or that the world could be a better place through one's taking pleasure in a feeling or a look or a gesture, of receiving another person's love or kindness. Nothing was affirmative, the term "generosity of spirit" applied to nothing, was a cliché, was some kind of bad joke. Sex is mathematics. Individuality no longer an issue. What does intelligence signify? Define reason. Desire – meaningless. Intellect is not a cure. Justice is dead. Fear, recrimination, innocence, sympathy, guilt, waste, failure, grief, were things, emotions, that no one really felt anymore. Reflection is useless, the world is senseless. Evil is its only permanence. God is not alive. Love cannot be trusted.

Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in . . . this was civilization as I saw it, colossal and jagged . . . (375)

Modern man taken to his extreme, or, rather, posthumanist prophet, becomes a kind of nihilistic flâneur of the apocalypse. The cityscape is translated, here, into a philosophy of radical pessimism; the prophecy, a discourse of political barrenness and annihilated symbolization. What marks Patrick's anti-meditation is its subtext of nostalgia, embedded in the intimation of the "anymore," which suggest a form of millennial or, at least *fin-de-siècle* anxiety concerning what David Robson has formulated as a logic of "disconfirmation (or the failure of the attainment of apocalyptic closure)" (62). Patrick's apocalypse, most decidedly, is a kind of hysterical fracture, defined by its absences, and, ultimately, its transparency in its rendering into a pure surface made available for perpetual reinscription, and, as Robson would offer, an "opportunity for the recasting of the typological net" (62) in order to "recontain" the "intransigent otherness of history" (62).

For Patrick, the phenomenal assumes an aesthetic of disappearance – his "real," his "tangible," is an abstraction that is experienced as a pure interiority, without either extension or substance. The social, reduced to a series of fragmented slogans, instances a kind of depraved ethos, which eschews depth and engagement for "[s]urface, surface, surface," and dissolution. It is ironic, thus, that Patrick locates institutional and philosophical stability solely in the concept of "Evil," which requires, for its own logical "presence," and definition, some kind of "balancing" antithesis, without which it can only exist as a kind of free-floating signifier without gravity, without content. Within the apocalyptic construct that Patrick exploits, the necessary corollary of "retribution," to the

production of evil is absent. Here, there is no redemption, because there is no judgment, “[j]ustice is dead.” All that remains is a kind of parody of transgression in the absence of any Law against which to infringe.

Patrick and “his” text, here, advance a doctrine of the trace²⁹ in the apocalyptic subject’s virtual repetition of his own discourse. Subjectivity, identity, and communication are *necessary* failures in anticipation of an always already state of endless meta-historical reconstitution: “Form (presence, evidence) . . . [is] already in and of itself . . . the *trace* (*ichnos*) of a certain non-presence, the vestige of the formless, announcing and recalling its other to the whole of metaphysics” (Derrida, Speech and Phenomena 127). Patrick as his own kind of self-deconstructive text is, like the trace, a kind of “irreducible excess:”

. . . there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even

²⁹ Derrida’s elaboration of the function of the trace as a kind of eternal return is of particular significance here:

. . . the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense – is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of differance it introduces. Such a trace is – if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed – more “primordial” than what is phenomenologically primordial. For the ideality of the form (*Form*) of presence itself implies that it be infinitely re-peatable, that its re-turn of the same is necessary *ad infinitum* and is inscribed in presence itself. It implies that the re-turn is the return of a present which will be retained in a *finite* movement or retention and that primordial truth, in the phenomenological sense of the term, is only to be found rooted in the finitude of this retention. It is furthermore implied that the relation with infinity can be instituted only in the opening of the form of presence upon ideality, as the possibility of a re-turn *ad infinitum*. (Speech and Phenomena 67)

sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent. My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist. There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. I still, though, hold on to one single bleak truth: no one is safe, nothing is redeemed. Yet I am blameless. Each model of human behavior must be assumed to have some validity. Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do? My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this – and I have, countless times, in just about every act I’ve committed – and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing* . . .

(Ellis 377)

The eschatological version that Patrick announces describes a catastrophe of the self as social subject. Subjectivity, in fact, itself, is a kind of monstrous nothingness that rewrites itself in his interior monologue as an act of divested existential absurdity. The antifoundationalism and hyperbolic relativism of Patrick’s self-analysis figures apocalypse as an internal field – a non-generative exhibition of a kind of resentment

that socially manifests itself in the competing productions of his “hardbody,” his ostensibly successful public image, as well as in his “privately” abject responses to the very context that he endeavors to distinguish himself in.

Patrick’s reinvocation of the recondite self, of the primacy of the abstraction over the material, instantiates not only a process of subjective mystification, but, elaborates a self-construct that mimics, even if only partitively, in a “sketchy and unformed” manner, the Logos, however perversely. In Patrick’s assertion of a radical discontinuity with the socius, he proposes himself as the object-instrument of the abject, now Abject, that he raises as a pathological variant of the Other. In the absence of God, Patrick still desires; despite his assertion of the essential “nothingness,” which informs his testimony, he *still* “declares,” in a kind of depraved aping of sociality. In the end, Patrick constructs for himself a fiction in which the frustration of social anonymity, of his subjective effacement, is mediated through the pleasure (*jouissance*) gained in its imagined transcendence.

The apocalyptic scene, for Patrick, postures itself as a grand rejection of ethics, but, in its “essence” can only ever insert itself as an impotent and reductivist will-to-power as it locates itself in narrative juxtaposition to his pedestrian “epiphany” concerning his human potential to accept and return the love of his secretary, Jean. Jean, in her “hopeful, characterless” (379) *reality*, in her “ignorance of evil,” becomes the instantiation of Patrick’s “possibility,” however banal: “. . . it strikes me how useless, boring, physically beautiful she really is, and the question *Why not end up with her?* floats into my line of vision” (379). In her very prosaicness, Jean completes Patrick’s social fiction.

Patrick is always already a masquerade. As Lacan theorizes, the masquerade functions, not at the level of the Imaginary, but, rather, at that of the Symbolic – the masquerade is enfolded into the register of symbolic naming and, hence, instantiates a fundamental *méconnaissance* (Four 93). He functions only as a kind of half-articulated presence, or virtuality, from within these always regressing and multiplying apocryphal boundaries, both of his own construction, as well as that of the “literal” narrative that *describes* him:

Well though I know I should have done *that* instead of not doing it, I’m twenty-seven for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the end of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave, and this is what being *Patrick* means to me, I guess, so, well, yup, uh . . . (399)

The attempt to self-locate, to provide for a kind of end-game cultural and personal commentary through which “Patrick” can both grasp at reflexive meaning and be grasped as a meaningful subject, significantly, fails. Ironically, Patrick’s intention to force out of his depleted narrative some form of emergent context, to “appear” within a signifying register announces its very negation. The stutter of the subject disposes of itself from within the frame of its own enunciative gamble. Here, neither the “Word,” nor the prophetic “I” prevails. The language of the revelation exhausts itself in its own making.

Chapter Four – The Apocalypse Confessed

I sometimes think I see that civilizations originate in the disclosure of some mystery, some secret; and expand with the progressive publication of their secret; and end in exhaustion when there is no longer any secret, when mystery has been divulged, that is to say, profaned. (Brown 4)

Let the trumpet of the Day of Judgement sound when it will, I will present myself before the Sovereign Judge with this book in my hand. I will say boldly: 'This is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was. I have told the good and the bad with equal frankness. I have neither omitted anything bad, nor interpolated anything good. If I have occasionally made use of some immaterial embellishments, this has only been in order to fill a gap caused by lack of memory. I may have assumed the truth of that which I knew might have been true, never of that which I knew to be false. I have shown myself as I was: mean and contemptible, good, high-minded and sublime, according as I was one or the other. I have unveiled my inmost self even as thou hast seen it, O Eternal Being. Gather round me the countless host of my fellow-men; let them hear my confessions, lament for my unworthiness, and blush for my imperfections. Then let each of them in turn reveal, with the same frankness, the secrets of his heart at the foot of the Throne, and say, if he dare, "*I was better than that man!*"'

(Rousseau 3)

Accept the books of my “Confessions” which you have asked for. Behold me therein, that you may not praise me above what I am. Believe there not others about me, but me myself, and see by means of myself what I was in myself; and if there is anything in me that pleases you, praise with me there Him whom I wish to be praised for me – for that One is not myself. Because it is He that made us and not we ourselves; nay, we have destroyed ourselves, but He that made us has remade us. And when you find me there, pray for me that I be not defective but perfected. (Augustine, Letters 584)

In the generic mode of the confession, as in apocalyptic narratives, in toto, we are confronted, not only by the hystericized voice³⁰ of the “witness,” in the process of symptomatically generating his or her own terminal self, but, as well, with the semantic disjunction between understanding the “I” as, simultaneously, subject and object of its own discourse. The sacrament of penance, as it engages this complicated revisioning of the self, can be understood according to its attendant framing characteristics:

The whole procedure is usually called, from one of its parts, “confession”, and it is said to take place in the “tribunal of penance”, because it is a judicial process in which the penitent is at once the accuser, the person accused, and the witness, while the priest pronounces judgment and sentence. The grace conferred is deliverance from the guilt of sin and, in the case of mortal sin, from its eternal punishment; hence also reconciliation with God, justification. Finally, the confession is made not in the secrecy of the penitent’s heart nor to a layman as

³⁰ As Lacan notes: “[h]ysteria is a question centered on a signifier that remains enigmatic as to its meaning” (Psychoses 190).

friend and advocate, nor to a representative of human authority, but to a duly ordained priest with requisite jurisdiction and with the “power of the keys”, i.e., the power to forgive sins which Christ granted to His Church. (The Catholic Encyclopedia n.p.)

The confession’s structural relevance to apocalypse can be seen as a metonymic slide from the private to the public in terms of the discourses of testimony and arbitration. The confessional self, within the apocalypse, becomes, in effect, a global one as the prophet “stands in for” the transgressive social body in his function as auditor and relay of the divine judgment. Note, as well, here, the importance of discursive mediation, which is a prominent marker of apocalyptic textuality within the confessional tribune. The priest, who “holds the keys,” mimics the function of both God who holds “the keys of death and Hades” (*Rev.* 1:18), as well as of the angelic guardian of the Abyss in *Revelation* (9:1 and 20:1). Central to these images, and to their phenomenal translation onto the office of the priest, is the power to pronounce sentence, and its corollary acts of containing or releasing. The mediator, here, controls the interpretation of the confessional “text,” conferring, upon both experience and discourse, not only doctrinal meaning, but the mark of the guarantee of its “truth” value as well.

Redemption, within the confessional form, is, as in the apocalypse, established as a liberation from the prison-house of desire through the satisfaction of the Other in a chain of signification, which runs through the legitimized mediator of the revelation: “And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven” (*Matt.* 16:19). The “binding” and “loosing” of desire will

be mirrored and recognized by God in the authorization of both the Abyss and the New Jerusalem, at the Last Judgment, as terminal sites for the “in-the-world” performance of remission and retention. Forgiveness, within the dynamics of the tribunal of penance and apocalypse, are discriminatory processes based on the evaluation of the prodigal’s “purpose of amendment,” that is, his “genuine sorrow” in regard to his transgressions. The fascinating conundrum that emerges is that the requirement that the subject abandon his “symbolicity” for immersion in the Real, through the act of confession itself, does not guarantee him a position in the sublimity of the “New Jerusalem,” inasmuch as the Abyss, within *Revelation*, functions as a twinned, however antithetical, component of that-which-ex-ists subsequent to “the end” of the material world. The subject, within the psychic parameters of divine judgment, becomes an almost arbitrary effect of the apocalypse’s unremitting and deterministic progress towards “the end” itself.

Confessions, as we have detailed of apocalypses, fundamentally, force a witnessing of the self in relation to the social, whether that social be secular or spiritual in constitution. Apocalyptic testimony is always already hysterical in that its “identity” issues forth, never from itself, but, rather, from the pervading structural possibility of the Other to produce a perverse form of knowledge. The juridical Other of the confessional mode is the *eschaton* of the apocalyptic revelation “ . . . I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds” (*Rev.* 2:23). Within what we can come to suggest is the apocalyptic *substance* of the confession, articulations of *truth* as, ostensibly, naturalized effects of the confession, proper, as they are directed to and through the desire of the Other, become bracketed, and pathologized, in alignment with

the impotent body of the seer, itself, as with the discourse of the hysteric, figured as a kind of linguistic “question” within the revelatory text. Apocalypse, like the hysterical witness, desires privation. What else is apocalypse if not the imposturing articulation of both a personal, as well as public, *lack*?

The “confession” seeks to fill in the aporia in knowledge that the personal apocalypse generates by constructing a “willing” subject employed to the task of self-narration, and thus, of self-actualization. The confessed self, effectually, *presents* himself as part of a divinely inspired conduit for the transmission of truth and enlightenment. The irony of the confession, however, resides in its inability to either fully access “truth” as well as to adequately ex-press truth, itself, inasmuch as discourse becomes infiltrated by desire. Analogous to Derrida’s “*circumfession*,” we must understand the *truth* of the *confession* as always already mediated through the desire of the Other: “What we have said about writing and the trace shows that no *autos* is possible without an inscription of alterity, no inside without a relation to an outside which cannot be simply outside but must remark itself on the inside” (Derrida, “Circumfession” 47-48).

John J. Collins, in his introduction to the morphology of the apocalypse as genre, insists upon the importance of “knowledge” as both a structural as well as a subtextual component of the discursive category of end-time narration. Inasmuch as the hysteric may question in order to “know,” however intransitively, so too does the apocalypse work in this ironical mode. Both confession and apocalypse, along with their “subjects,” seek to transcend themselves through the barred enunciative act – their own linguistic failures to realise themselves, paradoxically, catalyze the production of transcendent knowledge:

. . . the transcendent nature of apocalyptic eschatology looks beyond this world to another. The forms of salvation are diverse, exaltation to the heavens or renewal of the earth, but in all cases they involve a radically different type of human existence, in which all the constraints of the human condition, including death, are transcended. Both the manner of revelation and the eschatological content point beyond this world to another, which is at once the source of revealed knowledge and of future salvation. (Collins, "Introduction" 10-11)

We can see here that the "knowledge" solicited from the revelation is laden with the overtures of the hysteric as it commissions the dynamics of the masochistic pact, in the form of the "covenant," as well in the process of co-initiation, in which the Alpha and Omega absorbs the redeemed into his "body of knowledge," which is figured in the descent of the New Jerusalem in the concluding chapters of *Revelation*. The bonds between these overlapping formations of the confession, the apocalypse, and the masochist, results in a kind of shattering of the subject as it comes up against the desire for this "impossible" knowing, which is the remainder of its competing discursive strands. The drive towards "coherence," and its concomitant frustration, becomes the apocalyptic signature of the strained confessional subject.

Against elaborating an impossibly fractured self-position, which is incapable of any form of agency, I wish to advance, here, the productive elements which begin to emerge, however, from this *fatiguing* of the subject of revelation. Within late-twentieth century apocalyptic narratives there exists a conscious effort to rework the subject, perhaps paradoxically, through a mechanics of disestablishment. The social subject, here, engages the apocalyptic mode as a revolutionary act of enfranchisement – producing a

“new” positionality as the logical, and demiurgic possibility of its necessary deconstruction. Acker’s work, as we shall detail, advances this mode as a condition of hybridity, within which a newly instantiated “subject-object,” what Deleuze might understand as the “superject,”³¹ is realised. Here, as worked through Ellis’ texts, the transgressive self is preoccupied with apocalypse as, simultaneously, a material as well as psychic landscape through which the social subject must orchestrate its existence, precisely, against itself annihilatively.

When we enter into a discussion of what Ian Edwards terms the “deconstructive witness,” or, what Donna Haraway and Dominic Pettman theorize as the libidinal economy of the “modest witness,” that “constitutive subject who witnesses (and perhaps consequently authorizes) millennial moments” (Pettman 2), we can then begin to trace out the ways in which the contemporary apocalyptic “subject” seeks to reevaluate her traditional position as a mobilized, however immobile, effect of a “meaningfully” deterministic eschatological discourse. This revised apocalyptic posture, in retaliation against the conventionally foreclosed structures of revelatory being and meaning, performs itself as a kind of obscenity in its radical movement towards the non-thetic from within the linguistic confines of the thetic:

Thus, with deconstructive witnessing, the tension that is witnessed uncoils in the vast expanse of the indeconstructable space, the *khora*. There is nothing to look

³¹ Following Whitehead’s formulation of the doctrine of the subject-superject in Process and Reality, Deleuze advances the notion of the transformed “sub-ject” as an anamorphic “super-ject,” which is contingent upon the remainder of “point of view”: “Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pregiven or defined subject; to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view” (The Fold 19).

at because you are blind. There is nothing to hear because you are deaf.

There is nothing to speak of because you are mute. You are simply everything and no-thing dispersing to no-end. This is pure freedom, radical liberation. With constant (deconstructive) witnessing, there is release, release-from-the-world because you are no longer its victim but its witness; therefore, there is no need to witness to anybody. The witness is not victim to the world because she is not empowered by its truth.” (Edwards 152)

The confessed self, here, emancipates its social “subjectivity,” as it were, unequivocally, through a reflexive process of undoing. Both the subject and the various ways in which it necessitates legitimating reciprocal structures of recognition and meaning within its context of signification are brought up against a terminal logic of disavowal. In terms of apocalyptic anatomies of the end-time subject, we can locate this transgressive figuration within the supplemental spaces of the Abyss and the New Jerusalem. The crucial difference between the two schemes lies in the division between the Abyss as a site of abject partitivity, while the New Jerusalem supports the production of undifferentiated “completeness” as the telos of the “realised” Subject. The existential sympathy of these two mutually required “Reals” in the effectuation of the “end,” and, indeed, in the quixotic manifestation of the raptured “Subject,” accedes to Acker’s insistence upon the “presence” of a hybridic, alterior position which negotiates the brink between the nothing and the everything of the apocalypse.

The Architectonics of Confession in Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School

The secret of sex confessed has to be interpreted by another. Sexual practices will be interpreted no longer in the register of fault and sin, excess or transgression, but according to the axes of the normal and the pathological. The hermeneutics of sexual data will delineate a pathology of instinct behind unhealthy tendencies, images, pleasures, and practices – abnormal and pathogenic, in turn, of physical and psychic maladies. (Lingis, Foreign Bodies 69)

Within the confessional complex of Blood and Guts in High School, the enunciative act of “testimony” marks, specifically, Janey’s experience of her “self” as a conflicted terminal for the engendering of revelation, itself, as masochistic contract. Here, “Janey Smith,” simultaneously the deferred everywoman and no-woman, fragments, and consequently renders perverse, the confession’s integral claim to truth as an expiative effect of the process of “telling.” The “I” of Blood and Guts is perpetually adjourned – the speaking subject always already a position of dislocation: “Janey was . . . very pretty, but she was kind of weird-looking because one of her eyes was lopsided” (Acker 7). Janey’s unstable “eye/I,” which introduces her biographical “history” to the reader, her lack of symbolic *consistency* and *symmetry*, motivates Acker’s concern, here, with the fundamental impossibility of the desire to “fix” the apocalyptic subject within the socius.

Acker’s interrogation into the social self as an unreconcilable site of subjective catastrophe is located, specifically, within (and against) popular cultural and literary discourses of gender and sexuality. As we will see in Palahniuk and Selby, as well, the social production of fictions of gender becomes central to the working-out of contemporary apocalyptic structures and the bodies that occupy them. For Acker’s

Janey, selfhood is predicated upon her ability to navigate successfully through the series of interpositional “male” texts that establish her “essential” social identity and being. The apocalypse of the subject occurs, here, in Janey’s *mis-use* of the constitutive narratives as a revolutionary act of self-deconstruction. The betrayal of interpellative signification that occurs through her cannibalization of the discourses of, specifically, sexual identity, record themselves as abject signs upon her socialized body, for instance, in the increasingly debilitating effects of Janey’s *dis-eases* (her pelvic inflammatory infection, her abortions, her cancer), culminating in her “death” and concomitant rebirth as a kind of transfinite coda to Acker’s work. The pathologized signs of transgressive excess that are charted *upon* Janey become, oftentimes, parodic, hysterical symptoms of the textual legacies that she commissions in her movement towards radical *apokalypsis*.

In her re-creation of highly elaborated scenes of desire and anxiety, Janey “writes” the confessional as a series of masochistic interchanges between shifting and disarticulating representational strategies. Janey’s “staged” encounter with her father, Johnny, concerning the dissolution of their primal relationship, enacts Deleuze’s suggestion of the masochistic dialectic in which “[i]t is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself” (“Coldness and Cruelty” 22). Acker’s narrative interrupts itself generically, here, in its modulation from prose exposition to the verbal divisions of drama, which emphasizes those “reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse” (22) that the masochist solicits, as well as his fundamental condition of performativity:

Janey: You’re going to leave me. (*She doesn’t know why she’s saying this.*)

Father (*dumbfounded, but not denying it*): Sally and I just slept together for the first time. How can I know anything?

Janey (*in amazement. She didn't believe what she had been saying was true. It was only out of petulance*): You ARE going to leave me. Oh no. No. That can't be.

Father (*also stunned*): I never thought I was going to leave you. I was just fucking.

Janey (*not at all calming herself down by listening to what he's saying. He knows her energy rises sharply and crazy when she's scared so he's probably provoking this scene*): You can't leave me. You can't. (*Now in full hysteria.*) I'll . . . (*Realizes she might be flying off the handle and creating the situation. Wants to hear his creation for a minute. Shivers with fear when she asks this*). Are you madly in love with her? (Acker 7)

The confrontation between Janey and Johnny self-consciously emphasizes its inherent constructedness, its *theatricality*, in order to undermine itself – the confession's claims to authenticity, to an imminent subjectivity, and to a readily identifiable “real.” Janey's position within the text as a “false” *I* is, here, an effect of her renegotiation of the masochistic contract, which is evidenced in her sexualization of the masochistic elements of suspension and disavowal. The “I” is always deferred and hidden behind the questions that never receive definitive or comprehensive answers. Within Janey and Johnny's “literary” exchange, lies a gender politics, which teases the roles established through and by the ideal masochistic contract – although a necessary slippage of roles within the

masochistic relationship is accepted, the functional categories, nonetheless, remain gendered and de-eroticized, a strategy that is subverted and reworked by Acker's text.

Specifically, Blood and Guts reinvests the masochistic body with the powers of the obscene and the erotic that it has been, conventionally, deprived, in its historical theorization as a kind of structural residue of oedipal relations, more generally.³² The female gendered body within Blood and Guts, in particular, is figured as the locus for a hyper-eroticized sensibility that operates as a parodic counter-point to Masoch's barren aesthetic. The disintegration of Janey's socially coded body is implicated in the performances of the "pain" of heterosexual love that motivates her confession. The diseased body is simultaneously figured as a sexual object and as a disruption of the economies of sexuality and desire that construct her use-value. Janey's abduction and subsequent rejection by the slave trader broadly outlines the imperiled position of the gendered body within the social. The tension here operates to articulate the masochistic dynamic that exists, for Janey, as a condition of her embodied instantiation into the normalizing paradigm of heterosexuality. Janey's abjected body is thus both her imprisonment and liberation from those societal structures that inscribe and locate her "self" within gendered discursive formations. The elements of suspense and disavowal, which mark the masochistic fantasy become actualized upon Janey's dissipating body, blurring, in the process, the boundaries that have been traditionally held to separate the "real" from the "fantastic."

³² See Freud's The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924) for an elaboration on the desexualization of masochism implicit in his construction of "moral masochism," which puts under erasure masochism's links to sexuality in its foregrounding of the guilt-punishment dynamic.

Blood and Guts in High School, within the context of the confession as a masochistic contract, is an examination of *enclosures*, and of the power of the obscene, the abject, to transform and redefine the various systems of imprisonment to which the body is subjected. Within the text, relational identificatory concepts such as “father” and “daughter” become free floating signifiers which trace the trajectories of desire without being regulated by the laws that govern the relationship between signifier and signified. This undermining of the “word” of the “law” is a challenge to the masochistic contract in its nascent state, with its limits, and its specificity, pointing at once to that end-point contract that sets no limits in its flow towards self-dissolution, that in its indeterminacy becomes its own antithesis, an anti-contract that transcends and deconstructs itself: “The plants in her room cast strange, beautiful shadows over the other shadows. It was a clean, dreamlike room. He fucked her in her asshole cause the infection made her cunt hurt too much to fuck there, though she didn’t tell him it hurt badly there, too, cause she wanted to fuck love more than she felt pain” (Acker 21). The ritualization of the “love act” by Janey evokes the themes of “coldness and cruelty” that Deleuze traces in Masoch’s works. Here, however, Janey does not merely set the terms and conditions of the act *as* masochistic *victim* but, as well, she performs with the *distance* and *calculation* of Masoch’s mythologized “torturess.” The frozen details of the room’s topography, the removal to third person narration all suggest that abstraction and suspension of the “real” that comprises the masochistic experience: “What characterizes masochism and its theatricality is a peculiar form of cruelty in the woman torturer: the cruelty of the Ideal, the specific freezing point, the point at which idealism is realized” (Deleuze, “Coldness

and Cruelty” 55). For Janey the realization of the Ideal is contained in that “love” which is always already deferred, rerouted, and circumvented.

The deconstruction of the gendered body that is enacted by Blood and Guts plays with the discursivity of the body, itself, as it is performed through conceptualizations of law and transgression. As Sade’s libertine Delbène remarks, “. . . laws alone create the crime, and the crime is gone as soon as the law ceases to exist” (Juliette 66-67). In the textual universe of Blood and Guts, both law and transgression are radically reconfigured and recontextualized in order to reveal the history, memory, and politics of gender and sexuality, and the ways in which these identities are actualized within and upon the posited “female” body. Janey’s “story” charts the laws and transgressions of “femininity” within the machineries of power and desire that regulate bodies within the socius. Thus, the degeneration of Janey’s body throughout the text is a comment upon the construction of her body from without by patriarchalized social forces as much as it is an exploration of the potentials of “becoming-woman” which, as Camilla Griggers suggests, “is to enter the micropolitics of becoming-molecular, to pragmatically enter the flows of matter and signs that have made up the turbulent and proliferating histories of the feminine . . . and to understand the delimited yet real possibilities for transformation that those histories afford” (xi). For Janey, it is the histories of heterosexual “love” that are marked upon her body, that are the “blood and guts” of her experiences as she negotiates through the gendered mythologies of Western culture. The transformative potentials that Griggers points to are, within the context of Janey’s story, the potentials of the abject to implode those systems, which domesticate and normalize the body.

Institutionalized structures such as the “family” are thus “perverse,” as are the bodies that inhabit those institutions.

In the spaces of alterity (the incestuous family, the sex trade, the pornographic) that Acker’s Blood and Guts in High School examines, the body as a locus for and indicator of the human subject emerges fractured, disabled, and finally, irretrievably dissolved. The gendered body as a site of violence and abjection interrogates, through its integral monstrosity and fragmentation, the discourses of the social that proscribe the relationships between the bodies that are collected within the socius. The identification of socialized bodies involves a process of heterosexualization that limits the performativity of gender signs and directs the flows of desire that have the potential to destabilize the various structures that regulate bodies within the social order. The bodies in Blood and Guts operate according to deauthorized flows of desire that refuse to, that *cannot*, sustain the illusions of coherence and homogeneity that the socialized subject erects. Thus, Janey’s body is figured as “diseased” in a specifically gendered manifestation of the *anxiety* of the masochistic body.

Janey’s pelvic inflammatory disease becomes an externalization of the pain of heterosexual love that informs Janey’s experience – a love that marks itself upon the female gendered body in the form of Janey’s PID, and her abortions: “Having an abortion was obviously just like getting fucked. If we closed our eyes and spread our legs, we’d be taken care of. They stripped us of clothes. Gave us white sheets to cover our nakedness. Led us back to the pale green room. I love it when men take care of me” (Acker 33). Janey’s sexuality is mediated by the technologies that control and produce the gendered body. For Janey, the effects of heterosexual love that are inscribed upon

and within her body become ironic signs of her own complicity with, and paradoxically, control over, the flows of power and desire that govern the gendered body. As Maurice Charney points out in Sexual Fiction, “[o]pen and enslaved make for a difficult paradox, but to be completely accessible and available is also to remove all barriers between oneself and the world. This kind of enslavement is also the only true freedom” (69). For, within the masochistic dynamic, the “real” is displaced by the performance of its own simulacrum. In effect, as Charney’s paradoxical equation suggests, it is fundamentally the very inability of language and codes of meaning to reveal, express, or understand that constructs marginal spaces and bodies. Boundary positions, once placed as deviant or incomprehensible, are pathologized “fantasies,” always already on the periphery of some singular reality. Thus it seems for both Charney and Janey (it is also important that Charney’s paradox is articulated within his analysis of Pauline Réage’s Story of O) that the masochist controls precisely by relinquishing control, by desiring and willing their own enslavement. Janey’s abortions, her PID, and later, her cancer all signal this contradictory engagement with, and usurpation of, the “real” as it is charted upon the body.

The fragmentation of the self that is marked through the body’s various dissolutions articulates a critique of the identified and naturalized “I.” Janey’s account which constructs an affinity between the state of abjection and the performance of sexuality is also, in itself, an exploration of a denatured love, no less “ideal” for all its monstrosity and abjection:

My bedroom is the huge white hexagon in the front left corner of the hotel. It has no clear outside or inside or any architectural regularity. Long white pipes

form part of its ceiling. Two of its sides, which two is always changing, are open.

My bedroom's function is also unclear. Its only furniture is two barber's chairs and a toilet. It's a gathering place for men.

Hotel men dressed in white and black come in and want to hurt me. They cut away parts of me. I call for the hotel head. He explains that my bedroom used to be the men's toilet. I understand.

My cunt used to be a men's toilet. (Acker 36)

Janey makes explicit the politics of gendered desire and the histories that inform gendered desire – a strategy that allies itself with Grigger's exploration of the processes of "becoming-woman." Janey's body operates as a critique of the unified subject by problematizing the regime of signs that invest the subject with its various powers and authorities. Thus, Janey's body, as a production of the discourses of gender and sexuality, is that abject site of the historicized "Woman" – a vessel for the waste and the superfluous, the excesses, of normative society.

Janey's relation to the world is through that of the obscene. As Janey points out, it is the obscene, the perverse, that carries within it the power to communicate the world as sensate, as "blood and guts," both displaced from and entrenched within language. This is the struggle of the thetic to transcend itself, and to transform itself into the non-thetic: "I'm not trying to tell you about the rotgut weird parts of my life. Abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortions is the only real way I can tell you about pain and fear. . .my unstoppable drive for sexual love made me know" (Acker 34). Men's toilets and abortions signify, in the context of

Janey's sexual confession, the inversion of the purity of a Platonic ideal love. Love, and the construction of gender roles within the paradigm of love, is for Janey an underworld whose desires are excremental and violent, a carnal obscenity within which Plato's spiritual ideal is subjected to the politics of the eroticized body.

The men's toilet becomes the geography of Janey's masochistic desire as it is played out through the text. The space itself is as indeterminate as it is specific. Its form, constantly shifting and irregular, is both inside and outside the patriarchal structures of power and subjectivity that it appears to suggest. For, within this "gathering place for men" that marks Janey's "unstoppable drive for sexual love," exists "her" bedroom, a parodic "room of one's own" that functions on a metonymic level, as does Woolf's "room," as an ironic comment upon Janey's textual status as the author of her own experiences. Janey's room, immersed as it is within the discourses of masculine authority is its own kind of freedom, that "open and enslaved" freedom that Charney announces. It is not a permanent enclosure, as the transitory and artificial context of the "hotel" in which it is situated suggests. Janey's room mediates between the marginal "imaginary" and the phallic "symbolic" in ways that do violence to both constructions.

Janey's room and sexual confession operate as incursions into male-identified sites of power and discourse, what Michel de Certeau would term strategic "raids," critiquing, as it pillages and burns, gender and sexuality as effects of linguistic structures. For Janey, gender and desire are political structures that are shifting, not only effects of other relations and spaces of meaning, although they are this too. This question of the gendered nature of linguistic representation, of writing as a gendered experience, has an

interesting relationship to an almost “aside” remark that Cora Kaplan makes in her essay “Wild nights: pleasure/sexuality/feminism:”

The walls and doors of the women’s lavatories at the University of Sussex library were, and are, covered with women’s writing. From this lowest seat of high learning a polylogic testimony to women’s entry into discourse can be read in the round. . . .if young women can shit *and* write, not for some patriarchal pedant, but for each other’s eyes only, what vestiges of Victorian constraints remain? (182-183)

Leaving aside some of the problematics of Kaplan’s analysis, what is striking is the locus of the toilet, not only as a space for women’s writing but also for the slippage between the public and the private that Janey’s description of her room examines. Kaplan’s anecdote, additionally, begs the question, “What of women’s writing in men’s lavatories?” The space of the lavatory, however gender specific it may be, is hardly inviolate. The openness of Janey’s room, enclosed as it is within the men’s toilet, expresses this very violation of both discourse and gender. The private communications of “men” are exposed through Janey, signaled by the violence that is inscribed upon her body – in her reduction to part-object as it comes into contact with patriarchal opposition and the institution of gendered identity: “They cut away parts of me. . . .I understand. My cunt used to be a men’s toilet” (Acker 36).

The illusion of the “whole Woman” cannot be sustained here, indeed Janey refuses its essentializing claims and romanticism by exposing it to the violent images of “Woman” as part-object, as “Cunt.” No utopian possibility exists in between the two, as evidenced in Janey’s self-fragmentation. The dissolutions of body and self that Janey experiences

charts the futility of conceiving of gendered absolutes. The boundary space of the obscene within which Janey locates herself involves a process of self-fetishization that subverts the patriarchal culture of the men's toilet that Janey has been inserted into. The moments of excess and the excremental, which are the "histories" of Janey's gendered experience, are signaled by Janey's evocation of her "Cunt" as an image which is both embedded within a masculinist economy of desire, as well as within signifying systems in which the encoding of desire is opened up to various contradictions, reappropriations and slippages. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur argues that "[t]he obscene word exposes not only the erotic body of the woman, but also that of the man. This raises two questions: that of exhibitionism and that of gendered desire. Exhibitionism is a corollary of the wish to expose the other's body. . . . If the narrator is female, such descriptions take on an additional significance, that of inscribing the woman's desire" (218). Taken in the context of Janey's self-revelations we see a desire to expose the body in a language, which mimics, and parodies, the language of masculine desire. Janey's self-reference to the function of her "cunt" as a container for male excess and waste underlines through its self-reflexivity the distinction that Frappier-Mazur outlines between the subject and object positions of the obscene articulation. In Janey's case, she is both subject and object operating through the agentic mechanisms of the obscene. Her desire is registered upon her body, rendering her both as voyeur and exhibitionist simultaneously.

This blurred positionality of the subject-object that informs Janey's sense of self is marked by a momentariness and indeterminacy that is countered by states of "freezing," an immobility that is characteristic of the masochistic aesthetic:

You, the thing you called 'you', was a ball turning and turning in the blackness

only the blackness wasn't something – like 'black' – and it wasn't 'nothingness' cause nothingness was somethingness. The whole thing turns up into a ball, the ball's ephemeral, and where are you? Your self is a ball turning and turning as its being thrown from one hand to the other hand and every time the ball turns over you feel all your characteristics, your identities, slip around so you go crazy. When the ball doesn't turn you feel stable.

You exist in this darkness. Rebels. Creeps. Outcasts. Loners. (Acker 55)

Alienation is constructed, here, as an alienation from self. What is important, however, is the underlying sense of the self as an illusion that is constructed from a set of shifting and variable identities and characteristics. The self becomes a virtualized effect of the negotiation from the margins to the center of the socius – a reductive process whereby the integral fluidity of identities is stopped up and channeled to produce the illusion of motionlessness, of stability of being.

The operative discourses at work here concern the dialogue that exists between senses of control and the mythologized body. The "real" and the "ideal," as they are played out anarchically in the text of Blood and Guts, reveal the artifice of the essential self that is actualized through the subversion of its very possibility. The self, in constant motion, can only be understood, grasped, and concretized by imagining itself as a frozen constant. The very "reality" of the self is thus always already problematized, aestheticized, and bracketed. Gilles Deleuze aptly states the discomfiture that the "real" presents when he argues:

The idea of nonbeing appears when, instead of grasping the different realities that are indefinitely substituted for one another, we muddle them together in

the homogeneity of a Being in general, which can only be opposed to nothingness. The idea of the possible appears when, instead of grasping each existent in its novelty, the whole of existence is related to a preformed element, from which everything is supposed to emerge by simple “realization.” (Bergsonism 20)

Deleuze argues for a kind of quantum theorization of the self against its reduction into the stultifying edifice of the One. Janey explicates the potentials of the multiple (in contradistinction to the “possibilities” of the One) through the fable of the Monster, the Beaver, and the Bear. It is the Bear who occupies the sphere of the Other to the homogenizing unit that the Monster and the Beaver form. It is the Bear who gives “voice” to the darkness of the “Rebels. Creeps. Outcasts. Loners” (Acker 55), thus displacing the narrative from Janey’s confession at the same time that it refers back to it because of its enclosure within both the text and Janey’s ongoing discourse concerning the dissolution of her “self.” The intertextual play evokes Deleuze’s multiplicity of reality in its fragmentation and plurality of voice.

The *incompleteness* of the position of the self is always conflictual, as the fable illustrates through the Bear’s meditations and madresses, and through Janey’s struggle to “understand” and thus contain the flux of the “real”: “I get hysterical when I don’t understand. Now everything’s OK. I understand” (Acker 12). Consequently, in the scene involving Janey’s uncertainty concerning the function of her bedroom, her desire again to “understand” the violence to which her body is subjected signals the limitations and boundaries of a unitary “real” that seeks to oppress and control Janey’s performance of self. Janey’s evasions of and submissions to the “real” are necessary paradoxes within

the masochistic dialectic, which is predicated upon “reversal, disguise and reduplication” (Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty” 22).

The question of the signifying systems within which Janey locates her self, and within which gendered spaces of writing are constructed, is reduplicated with Janey’s imprisonment by the Persian slave trader. Janey’s confession becomes a complex response to the slave trader’s “philosophy of psychology” and his idealization of “Culture”:

‘Where does culture come from? I will tell you. It comes from disease. All the great artists, Goethe, Schiller, and Jean-Paul Sartre – you must read *Nausea* in the French, in English it is nothing – have said this. They are aware how evil they are. They are aware this life is truly evil; due to this awareness, they are able to go beyond. You know that medically, I am a doctor, a body cannot live without disease. (Acker 64-65)

As Janey points out prior in the text, Mr. Linker, the slave trader, is a “materialist” who has turned *himself* into his own simulacrum: “He had become a real image, a fake” (64). Mr. Linker’s constructivism underlies his desire to reinvent the human: “And so Mr. Linker became a lobotomist” (64). Janey’s imprisonment and instruction in the art of being a “whore” by Mr. Linker is the realization of Linker’s theory that in order to transcend the body, and to actualize the possibilities of the body’s plasticity, the body must first be grasped as truly abject. The abject, as the essential nature of the human, must be imposed upon the body as an epistemological practice.

Janey acts from an almost persistent interpretive position, which becomes the impetus for her confession and her interrogation of the construction of “Woman” within

patriarchal discourse: "Janey lived in the locked room. Twice a day the Persian slave trader came in and taught her to be a whore. Otherwise there was nothing. One day she found a pencil stub and scrap paper in a forgotten corner of the room. She began to write down her life. . ." (65). Janey plays with pornographic conventions, specifically the genre of the "whore's confession" which was popularized in the eighteenth-century, to reveal the inherent constructedness and simulacral nature of voice and subjectivity as indicators of an authentic and "present" reality. In "The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette," Kathryn Norberg suggests that the whore's confession is fraught with the tensions of an undermined or absent sense of agency. Norberg, moreover, maintains that "[t]he first person narrative. . . is not a device that empowers the prostitute or conveys female subjectivity" (230). Norberg continues to state that "[t]he libertine whore is a reflection of male sexuality and a mirror of man's lust. . ." (230). Certainly there is an ambiguity surrounding Janey's self-representations in which she acknowledges her own complicity with the actualization of male desire, but at the same time she refuses the passivity that this position seems to suggest. As Janey states, "We all live in prison. Most of us don't know we live in prison" (Acker 65).

Janey's fundamental critique of the problem of voice and agency parallels Norberg's argument concerning the status of the "I" of the confession. Janey's "book report" on Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter deconstructs Hawthorne's representation of the "feminine" by recovering the characters of both Hester and Pearl within the narrative, and by re-writing them as ideals of the chaotic and the uncontrolled that always already exist beyond the canonical "meaning" of the text. In her analysis Janey contradicts Linker's positioning of "Literature" as outside the sensual and the carnal:

Hawthorne gives us a description of motherhood in the fucked-up society: All the people around Hester hate her and despise her and think she's a total freak.

The kid's beyond human law and human consideration. How do you feel about yourself when every human being you hear and see and smell every day of your being thinks you're worse than garbage. . . . You sense the people around you aren't right: what you did, your need, you weren't defying them to defy them, it was your need, was OK. You don't know. How can you know anything?

How can you know anything? You begin to go crazy. (Acker 67-68)

Janey explicates, through the character of Hester, the conflicted status of "woman" as she is constructed as an effect of cultural discourse. As part of the mechanics of the confession, Janey is charged with the injunction to "reveal," to "SEE," as Linker enjoins. Janey subversively employs these charges in order to construct a kind of *ars erotica* drawing upon the concepts of pleasure and intensity of experience to deconstruct conventional representations of "truth." Janey's Hester bears a paraxial relationship to Hawthorne's Hester, threatening both the canonical positionality of Hawthorne's text as well as its historiographical premises. Janey's "report" inflicts the same violence upon Hawthorne's text as she finds within the regulation of sexuality and gender in Western culture.

Janey focuses on and revels in her production of simulacral texts which expose the always already contingent and discursive nature of the "real." Janey's appropriation of Hawthorne's text enacts Baudrillard's theorization of "object practices" which refuse systemizations of meaning: ". . . it is equivalent to returning to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting meaning, like a mirror, without absorbing it" (Simulacra and

Simulation 85-86). By uncovering an alternative Hester within Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Janey finds a celebration of the state of abjection that is that form of subject-refusal to which Baudrillard's theorization points:

Pearl's four years old. She's as wild as they come. *Wild* in the Puritan New England society Hawthorne writes about means *evil anti-society criminal*.

Wild. Wild. Wild. Going wherever you want to go and doing whatever you want to do and not even thinking about it. 'Why did you get stoned?' the Persian slave trader asked me this morning. In 'primitive' 'wild' societies like Haiti the word 'why' doesn't exist. Pearl, according to Mr Hawthorne, wears hippy clothes and runs around in the forest and makes no distinction between what's outside her and her dreams. On the whole she doesn't make many distinctions. (Acker 93)

Pearl's immersion of her self within the world is similar to that loss of self that Janey verges on, and at points experiences, throughout Blood and Guts. This dissolution of self merges with Janey's exploration of and desire to "know" love as a kind of mystical submission. Janey's self-constructed exile from Mexico and Johnny is rewritten through her evaluation of The Scarlet Letter. As Rod Phillips suggests in "Purloined Letters: *The Scarlet Letter* in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*," Hester and Janey "both are 'prisoners' of their own desire to be loved" (175). What is implicit in Janey's reappropriation of canonical texts and language is a critique of claims to "authenticity" and "authority" that such master narratives purport. As Hawthorne's text becomes a way for Janey to interrogate her own "autobiography" and the mechanisms of captivity that inform her experiences with the world, so too are the Persian grammar book and Janey's

encounter with Genet implicated in the gendered structures of “love” and “self” that Janey’s “story” seeks to transform, or, to “see” differently.

Pearl occupies, explicitly, the site of the abject. “Anti-social,” within the discourses of power and knowledge that construct domesticated identities, is equivalent to the “pre-social.” Pearl is thus always already perverse and monstrous because she is outside of the institutions that encode and regulate gender difference and sexual behaviour. As Janey points out, Pearl is mythologized as the essential predator because she has been produced as a “visible” sign of the abject, eroticized, and hence “obscene” body. Pearl is a violent rejection of the ethics of Puritanism, which found American cultural values and iconography. “Woman” as a discursive construction, in this sense, is part of the iconic regime of signs that function as homogenizing forces within the socius.

Janey proposes the constitution of new languages and meanings that are marked by multiplicity, indeterminacy, and the potentiality of infinite substitutions. As Janey’s grammar lessons reveal, all is a process of translation, and to succumb to uncritical reproduction is perhaps the greatest capitulation of all. In a section entitled “translate into English,” Janey writes:

The streets are black. You haven’t fucked for a long time. You forget how incredibly sensitive you are. You hurt. Hurt hurt hurt hurt hurt. You meet the nicest guy in the world and you fall in love with him you do and you manage to get into his house and you stand before him. A girl who puts herself out on a line. A girl who asks for trouble and forgets that she has feelings and doesn’t even remember what fucking’s about or how she’s supposed to go about it cause she wasn’t fucked in so long and now she’s naive and stupid. So like a

dope she sticks herself in front of the guy: here I am; understood: do you want me? No, thank you. She did it. There she is. What does she do now? Where does she go? She was a stupid girl: she went and offered herself, awkwardly, to someone who didn't want her. That's not stupid. The biggest pain in the world is feeling but sharper is the pain of the self. (Acker 86-87)

The nature of desire becomes a problem of translation, as the text shows. Janey's passage indicates the variability and instability of communication and meaning.

Positioned as it is within her report on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Janey's Persian grammar lesson becomes a sign of the futility of language to express the inarticulate pain of her being, thus the requirement of ceaseless transformation and translation. Culture becomes the site of contestation upon which Janey's desire is encoded. For Linker, "Literature" is the abstract realization of "Culture" – of a body that is purified of its bestiality, its diseases of the flesh. Janey deconstructs Linker's theorizations, not only through her re-writing of The Scarlet Letter, but by calling into question the idealization of language and its ability to "authentically" represent any kind of "real" – as the incursion of the grammar lesson reveals, the process of interpretation is itself a translatative process.

In the counter-epistemology that her confession details, Janey seeks to distinguish between the socio-cultural naturalization of female masochism and her own desire to control pain and to understand it in terms of intensity of experience. Masochism, as a politics of the sensate, *aware* body underlies Janey's quest to "know" the myths of sexual love:

Everything takes place at night.

In the centres of nightmares and dreams,

I know I'm being torn apart by my needs,

I don't know how to see anymore.

I'm too bruised and I'm scared. At this point. . .in my life politics don't
disappear but take place inside my body. (Acker 97)

The translation of desire into discourse constructs simulacral bodies and technologies, which articulate Janey's politics of the masochistic body. Making the body a political entity, for Janey, involves the reinvention of pain, submission, and fragmentation as subversive practices. The sexual body placed within discourse is always already suspect and fantastic, as the confession finally *makes* apparent. Thus, Janey's deferral of the "real," of the public, is a condition of her rejection of the space of subjectivity as the site for "authentic" modes of agency and politics. Janey's play with the "false I" of the confession enacts a displacement and revaluation of the systems of power that subordinate fantasy and the private to the "real," and the real's focus on the public as a site of the legitimation of experience. The politics that Janey advances is a politics of bodies that exist on the borders of the social, in the margins of discursive formulations – bodies that are fetishized as objects of fantasy, and that are immobilized by their entry into the real.

As Janey's confession constructs slippages between the fantastic and the real, inside and outside, and the private and the public, there is a fundamental ritualization of the production of desire. The uncertainty of the "real" within Janey's confession points to the very epistemological and ontological instability of the social and its constituent discourses. Desire for Janey, within this context of fluidity, subverts the very discourses

(legal, medical, historical, etc.) that seek to define and control the production of desire as an effect of the social:

‘EVERY POSITION OF DESIRE, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, IS CAPABLE OF PUTTING TO QUESTION THE ESTABLISHED ORDER OF A SOCIETY; NOT THAT DESIRE IS ASOCIAL; ON THE CONTRARY. BUT IT IS EXPLOSIVE; THERE IS NO DESIRING-MACHINE CAPABLE OF BEING ASSEMBLED WITHOUT DEMOLISHING ENTIRE SOCIAL SECTIONS.

(Acker 125)

Janey's encounter with the figure of Jean Genet becomes enmeshed with her sexual fantasy of Jimmy Carter and her critique of American novelist Erica Jong. The politics of desire, and Janey's deconstruction of desire's instantiation into linguistic structures of representation, are central to the alternative, sexualized historiography, which, under Janey's direction, brings all three figures together as powerful projections of the repression of sexuality and erotic desire in Western culture. As indicators, variously, of the "deviant" (Genet), the "Christian" (Carter), and the "commodified" (Jong), Janey exposes their hypocrisies by actualizing their hidden desires through parodic repetition and recontextualization. Thus, Janey articulates the lust that lies in President Carter's heart, and reveals the inherent banality of Jong's "zipless fuck" as a metaphor for "women's liberation." For, as Janey's fantasies indicate, it is through the non-language of the obscene, the pornographic, that the full potential of desire to subvert social institutions and power relations is realized.

Janey uncovers the masochistic dynamic that underlies gendered constructions of love, but as her interlude with Genet shows, the very institution of gender *difference* renders

the masochistic experience itself as variable. Janey's fantasies are inextricably tied to the various dissolutions of body and self that she undergoes. Janey's body is positioned as an oppositional practice to what she sees as Genet's re-entrenchment of gender difference. It is not surprising that Johnny, Linker, and Genet are joined by a common Sadean philosophy in Janey's "telling." For Janey, the pains of love and self are inseparable from her gendered constitution within a patriarchalized "real" that is actualized through Johnny, Linker, and Genet, and their own practices and constructions of sexual love:

Janey to herself: Genet doesn't know how to be a woman. He thinks all he has to do to be a woman is slobber. He has to do more. He has to get down on his knees and crawl mentally every minute of the day. If he wants a lover, if he doesn't want to be alone every single goddamn minute of the day and horny so bad he feels the tip of his clit stuck in a porcupine's quill, he has to perfectly read his lover's mind, silently, unobtrusively like a corpse, and figure out at every changing second what his lover wants. He can't be a slave. Women aren't just slaves. They are whatever their men want them to be. They are made, created by men. They are nothing without men. (Acker 130)

The production of "woman" as a "real" identity is undermined by its relational status to, and dependence upon "Man" as the dominant referent within the economy of meaning and power. As Judith Butler argues, the relational condition upon which the *idea* of "Woman" depends is an effect of the "political construction and regulation of identity itself" (Gender Trouble ix). Janey's understanding of "Woman," in terms of her critique of Genet, takes Butler's assertion to its logical conclusion. Genet can only "become-

woman” by immersing himself within the signs of “femininity” that construct the “history” of “Woman,” as Griggers has pointed out. As Janey indicates through her confession, in the absence of any kind of legitimate or “authentic” real, identity is always already a fictionality, constructed according to the desires and requirements of the socius.

Genet cannot “become-woman” because, ultimately, for Genet, “Woman” is an aesthetic ideal, which does not exist except in the realm of the imaginary or the fantastic. For Genet, every “woman” is the deferred and absent image of his mother who is his abject Other, at once the object of both his tenderness and his cruelty: “I’d be glad to slobber over her,’ I thought overflowing with loveTo slobber over her hair or vomit into her hands. But I would adore that thief who is my mother” (Genet, The Thief’s Journal 14-15). Genet articulates what Deleuze terms “a masochistic art of fantasy” (“Coldness and Cruelty” 72). The mother as the suspended ideal can never be fully realized, as Janey’s critique of Genet points out. Deleuze notes similarly of Masoch’s aestheticization of the “feminine” that: “Reality . . . is affected not by negation but by a disavowal that transposes it into fantasy. Suspense performs the same function in relation to the Ideal, which is also relegated to fantasy” (72). Like Masoch, Genet does not desire to become his displaced Ideal, but to possess it.

Genet is understood as a cultural text that can be inscribed upon bodies – gender is an issue of performativity that radically distinguishes itself from the biologically sexed body. Janey, however, undermines Genet’s construction of himself as “Woman,” in turn, by exposing Genet’s own implication within a decidedly masculinist and heterosexist structure of power and “being.” For Janey, Genet’s fundamental error lies in his encoding of gender difference as a function of the real. Genet’s own marginality is

overridden by his adherence to a phallic ordering system in which both “woman” and Janey, whose own status within the socius is ambiguated even further by Genet’s systemization, are subordinate:

The hierarchy is (Genet has to explain the nature of the social world to her because she’s American).

Rich men

Poor men

Mothers

Beautiful women

Whores

Poor female and neo-female slut scum

Janey.

Then he kicks Janey around and tells her to be worse than she is, to get down, there, down in the shit, to learn. Go to the extreme. To make the decision.

Janey girl still has pretensions. She has to be drained of everything. She has to be disembowelled. (Acker 130-131)

Genet reproduces a conventional, gendered structure of being that locates Janey on the perimeters of the “human.” Janey is that “body without organs” that exists always at the limits of the socius, within the “decoded flows of desire” that Deleuze and Guattari theorize. Janey’s confession details the condition of being brought into the structural order of a domesticated, socialized desire that can only be understood in terms of “absence” – as Genet’s chain of being diagrams. As the text indicates, in order to be

fully incorporated into Genet's universe, Janey must literally become that ideal of absence, or pure desire – she must be emptied, “disembowelled.”

Janey's transformation into Genet's “object of desire,” ironically, involves her idealization of Genet as a transcendental possibility. Janey's “loss of self” is prefigured by her re-construction of “self” as this ideal Genet, an ideal that is for Janey beyond the material problematics of body and gender that have marked her relationship with Genet thus far: “Little by little Janey begins to understand how beautiful Genet is. She's so enamoured with him she's creating him. Truth and falsehood, memory, perception, and fantasy: all are toys in this swirling that is him-her. She's predicting her future” (Acker 131). Janey constructs a space of self-alterity that replaces and recontextualizes her body outside of the social. Janey sees in Genet a mirror to her own increasing fragmentation and dislocation. Unlike Janey, however, Genet can always *be*, precisely because he is part of that “real,” which Janey can only know *through* him. The masochistic relationship that is fostered between Janey and Genet becomes an externalization of Janey's desire to uncover the point at which the “I” slips into the “not-I” – the point at which the human subject is made abject.

Janey's reformulation of self confronts Genet's hierarchy with its own structural instability. As Janey points out, to disavow the integrity of the body and the self is to reveal the fundamental illusion of stability that such ordering systems posit. As Deleuze argues in “Coldness and Cruelty”: “Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in

place of it" (31). The disavowal of the unitary self and Janey's subsequent *doubling* of self into "him-her" parodies Genet's own thematic obsession with the double as well as absorbing Genet's own confession in The Thief's Journal into her own Blood and Guts. The emphasis placed on abjection and imprisonment as eroticized conditions runs through both texts constructing a lineage of the outlawed body. Society, as it appears in the alternate histories of both Janey's and Genet's texts, is perpetually deferred and replaced by a fantasy of solitariness that itself is always already constructed under the threat of an imminent dispersal. The text, here, operates to uphold the principle of suspension that the masochistic dynamic demands.

It is through the text that the politics of "self unmaking" is made explicit. The future that Janey predicts for herself is intimately bound up with the act of writing as a deconstructive practice. Janey's self-dissolutions become manipulated by Genet as a mode of production in terms of the abject text:

Her future: Genet spits on her and kicks her. The more she tries to be whatever he wants, the more he despises her. Finally she decides her black wool hood and dress aren't enough. If Genet thinks she's shit, she should be invisible.

When she follows him around, she hides in the walls like a shadow. She secretly washes his dirty underpants. She takes on his moodiness and his hating. (Acker 131)

Janey "takes on" the characteristics of Genet in the same way that her confession becomes a mirror to Genet's texts The Thief's Journal and The Screens. Genet is subject to the same processes of inversion and decontextualization as Hawthorne because ultimately, for Janey, they both belong to the same universe of male texts. Janey

becomes a shadow of Genet because, as Ihab Hassan suggests of the mythology of Genet: “The outcast rebuffs not only society but also the very order of things. He works against nature, invents his sex and self, in order to sever all ties with creation. No memory of a mother or of woman’s flesh connects him to the earth” (Dismemberment 180). Janey exists for Genet, as with Johnny and the slave trader, as an image of a kind of theoretical woman, a sign of an order that is purely imaginary and intangible – outside of the real that is all Alice, rags and filth” (Genet, The Thief’s Journal 49). It is not that “women” are not part of the general state of abjection which Genet describes, but rather that they are spectres who indicate the transcendent quality of the abject through their very ephemerality and absence within the text.

Janey’s movement toward death signals both the culmination of her sexual quest as well as the logical telos of her masochistic politics. Janey’s desire, which impels her toward death, actualizes the ritual of regeneration, which completes the process of the mythologization of sexuality that the masochistic cycle enacts.³³ As the epilogue to Blood and Guts announces: “Soon many other Janey’s were born and these Janey’s covered the earth” (Acker 165). The radical transformation of self that Janey seeks is constituted in her death. Janey’s death results in both an endless multiplication and splitting of self that transgresses the limits of a unitary “real,” and that reaches toward an undifferentiated and fluid realization of desire as a politics of the confessed body. This deconstruction of both self and body enacts what Rosemary Jackson terms the “subject in process” which

³³ In “Coldness and Cruelty” Deleuze argues that “[t]he masochistic contract generates a type of law which leads straight into ritual. The masochist is obsessed; ritualistic activity is essential to him, since it epitomizes the world of fantasy. Three main types of rite occur in Masoch’s novels: hunting rites, agricultural rites and rites of regeneration and rebirth” (94).

“denounce[s] the theses and categories of the thetic, [and attempts] to dissolve the symbolic order at its very base, where it is established in and through the subject, where the dominant signifying system is re-produced” (*Fantasy* 178). Janey’s rebirth is produced within the context of a mythologized “dreamscape” which refuses the real in order to reinvent itself as pure sensation. Consequently it is through the politicization and revaluation of the masochistic body that Janey is able to reveal the essential artifice that underlies all socialized identities and relations. As *Blood and Guts* makes apparent, “we create this world in our own image” (Acker 14), and as Janey’s translations and transformations reveal, “the world” is many and infinite.

Speaking through the Other: Empire of the Senseless

In the opening section of *Empire of the Senseless*, the protagonist Abhor “speaks through” her lover Thivai in order to recount her personal “history.” Thivai operates as the mediator – translating Abhor’s posthuman experiences into a “human” language. However, not until the text shifts to the counter, fantastical, worlds of apocalyptic dissonance and alterity, does Abhor begin to utilize her own voice to construct the narrative. The transition from “speaking through” to “speaking,” however, is problematized by the metafictional status of Abhor and Thivai’s “quest.” As Abhor relates to Thivai:

‘All I know is that we have to reach this construct. And her name’s Kathy.’

‘That’s a nice name. Who is she?’

‘It doesn’t mean anything.’

‘If it doesn’t mean anything, it’s dead. The cunt must be dead.’ My puns were dead.

‘Look. All I know is we have to reach this construct. I don’t know anything else.’

‘We have the capacities for understanding and, at the same time, we understand nothing,’ I replied. I understood we had to find some construct.

(Acker 34)

Abhor and Thivai can only “know” what the author, Kathy Acker, allows them to know. Abhor and Thivai are always already speaking through both the construct “Kathy” as well as through the citational presence of the texts through which Empire of the Senseless parodies and cannibalizes.³⁴ Not only is the posited “reader” prevented entrance into an idealized fictional realm, but Acker’s status as “author-ity” is questioned as well. If “Kathy” is a construct then there is no definitive ordering “presence” behind the text. “Who,” or “what” is *Kathy Acker* speaking through?

In terms of the breakdown of Enlightenment conceptualizations of human reason that punctuate Abhor and Thivai’s narratives, Empire of the Senseless launches a raid upon those “bastions” of modern society that seek to organize the “human” into docile and obedient “subjects.” Significantly, Abhor cites literature as containing the potential to subvert the cultural institutions of “[I]logocentrism, idealism, theology” (Acker 12). This literature has a decidedly posthumanist agenda that operates in contradistinction to what Acker posits as the hegemony of male textuality. As Shari Benstock points out:

³⁴ Empire of the Senseless utilizes William Gibson’s cyberpunk novel Neuromancer as a conceptual foundation from which to advance its own investigation into the ways in which theorizations and practices of virtuality “effect” the gendered body.

Modernist writing focused on the “agency of language” as a vehicle of meaning.

To whatever degree other defining characteristics of Modernism operated in juxtaposition, contradiction, or uneasy alignment with each other, the determined emphasis on the Word or Logos overshadowed all other divergences among Modernist writers. The one sacred, common belief seemed to be the indestructibility of the bond between the word and its meanings, between symbol and substance, between signifier and signified. (Textualizing the Feminine xxii-xxiii)

It is precisely this “sacred” identity between the word and what it seeks to represent, to *know*, that is placed under suspicion in Acker’s text(s). As both Benstock and Acker (*through* Abhor and Thivai) reveal, logocentrism and idealism construct a theology that is guided by the Enlightenment sacraments of a naturalized notion of “progress,” and the universalized capacity of *man*, the human subject, to reason.

Reason, as a homogenizing force, which organizes the human subject, which inserts the subject into a normalizing socius, is disrupted (or, is capable of being disrupted) by a literature, which plays with conventional structures of meaning and representation:

Here language was degraded. As daddy plumbed and plummeted away from the institute of marriage more and more downward deeply into the demimonde of public fake sex, his speech turned from the usual neutral and acceptable journalese most normal humans use as a stylus mediocris into...His language went through an indoctrination of nothingness, for sexuality had no more value in his world, until his language no longer had sense. Lack of meaning appeared as linguistic degradation. (Acker 17)

The language of transgressive sexuality (and thus the literature of transgressive sexuality) separates itself from the codings of normative society. The language of “perversion,” of “obscenity,” is both inside and outside the “human.” The “lack of meaning” that Abhor locates *in* her father is the language of the virtual subject. “Nonsense,” as Benstock asserts “must be ‘lost’ so that sense can properly function” (6). Abhor’s “father” then is disabled by his separation from reason, from his overcoding, because he is incapable of becoming-virtual, of becoming-molecular. His partiality, his degradation, is Sadean in nature, immersed in that simulacral “fake sex” which aspires to the virtual but is always already subsumed by the actual. The linguistic degradation that Abhor’s father *experiences* is the degradation of his awareness of “himself,” a material self that is deferred by his desire to be virtual, to attain the virtual. As Gilles Deleuze notes in “Coldness and Cruelty”: “In *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* the libertine states that he finds excitement not in ‘what is here,’ but in ‘what is not here,’ the absent Object, ‘the idea of evil.’ The idea of that which is not, the idea of the No or of negation which is not given . . . in experience . . .” (28). In this sense, Abhor’s father negates himself through his “language,” at least in terms of the maintenance of a normative “humanity.”

Abhor’s father is thus “monstrous” in the Sadean sense through his refusal (or inability to manipulate the mechanisms) of “reason,” to communicate and thus legitimize himself through normative language. In Sade My Neighbor, Pierre Klossowski outlines Sade’s alternative conceptualizations of the project of reason and its links to language and to the categorization of “humanity.” Klossowski points out that

[t]he medium of generality in Sade’s time is the logically structured language of

the classical tradition; in its structure this language reproduces and reconstitutes in the field of communicative gestures the normative structure of the human race in individualsTo this need to reproduce and perpetuate oneself. . .there corresponds the need to reproduce and perpetuate oneself by language. . . .With this principle of the normative generality of the human race in mind, Sade sets out to establish a counter generality that would obtain for the specificity of perversions These, in the existing normative generality, are defined by the absence of logical structure. Thus is conceived Sade's notion of integral monstrosity. (14)

In turn, the first part of Acker's Empire of the Senseless entitled "Elegy for the world of the Fathers" invokes this Sadean interrogation of Enlightenment reason. In its elucidation of an "anti-Oedipal" discourse, Acker's text exposes the virtualized subject that always already exists in and through the illusory, "actualized," Enlightenment subject: "Most humans felt totally disgusted by and repudiated both what they saw, what they felt, and the whole system of values behind the sex show and the pornographicnovels sold outside the 'theatre.' In other words, the primal urge of sex had become a revolting phenomena" (Acker 17). Thus, just as Sade's countergenerality works to expose the "perversity" of reason and to construct the ethics of "*outrage* – which Sade understands to be the transgression of norms" (Klossowski 17), so too does Acker's text locate and articulate the positionality of "monstrosity," of "posthumanity," as a gap within the discourse of a classicist dialectic of "human" rationality.

It is important to note that this reconceptualization of language and desire in terms of a discourse of monstrosity is constructed by and through Abhor's narrative as filtered through Thivai. As Thivai, the "pirate" tells "us" in "Thivai's Story," "I shall now by means of my profound rational processes find the explanation for my madness, and human socially unacceptable behaviour" (Acker 30). Thivai's interrogation into the nature of his own "perversity" fundamentally connects him to Abhor's displaced "father." The space of subjectivity, here the "property" of the "human" and its corresponding characteristics, markers, and representations, becomes a matter of "interpretation," and thus "knowledge," as filtered through the body. Like Abhor's "father," Thivai's fragmented identity is intimately connected to his inability to reconcile the notions of desire and subjectivity in any "meaningful" way: "I thought all I could know about was human separation; all I couldn't know, naturally, was death. Moreover, since the I who desired and the eye who perceived had nothing to do with each other and at the same time existed in the same body – mine: I was not possible. I, in fact was more than diseased" (Acker 33). The "I" to which Thivai refers is the "I" that is predicated upon an illusory wholeness, unity, and stability. Thivai's perception, or understanding, of "himself" is always in terms of an inherent partiality or fragmentariness that is placed outside of normative conceptions of the "human."

The "cyborgized," reorganized, body that circulates within and around Abhor's and Thivai's apocalyptic narratives is a body that is suspicious of the subject that speaks *through* the object, of the actual that speaks *through* the virtual. The privileged space of the actualized subject appropriates and domesticates the performative and shifting identities of the virtualized subject-object. It is necessary, within socialized spaces, for

the language of the virtual subject-object to be translated, and thus reterritorialized, in order to bolster the position of the normative human subject. As Brian Massumi suggests, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of virtuality, "[t]he virtual is the *unsaid* of the statement, the unthought of thought. It is real and subsists in them, but must be forgotten at least momentarily for a clear statement to be produced as evaporative surface effect" (46). The virtual, in this sense, does not "speak to," but rather speaks and is spoken "through" the various signifying structures that control and delimit its potentials and performances always within the socius.

Both Abhor and Thivai are constructed as "nomads" in the process of "becoming-virtual." This process of virtualization involves itself in Acker's critique of normalizing language systems. The search for the construct "Kathy" is the search for the transient body, a body that continuously subverts and evades social codings by parodying their strategies of control: "The code said: GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT YOUR MIND" (Acker 38). "Kathy's" code, or perhaps more accurately her decoding, deconstructs the posited supremacy of a transcendent consciousness by re-embodying the mind. The body ingests the mind, consumes it and absorbs it into its physical properties. The construct's "code" plays with the limits of language and language's ability to represent and thus control "reality" or "realities." As Deleuze suggests: "Words are at their most powerful when they compel the body to repeat the movements they suggest . . ." ("Coldness and Cruelty" 18).

The unstable language of the "construct" is dangerous because it threatens the power structures of meaning from within. The territory of cyberspace from which the "codes"

are pulled is a site that reveals the flux between word and meaning, subject and object, the body and the mind. It is a space of terrorism because the body within the machine is simultaneously reterritorialized and deterritorialized. Thivai's description of Abhor's cybernetic body discloses the contradictory space of the fragmented, apocalyptic body:

Asleep. Naked. I saw her. A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimetres below her crotch, the skin mottled by blue purple and green patches which looked like bruises but weren't. Black spots on the nails, finger and toe, shaded into gold. Eight derms, each a different colour size and form, ran in a neat line down her right wrist and down the vein of the right upper thigh. A transdermal unit, separated from her body, connected to the input trodes under the cast by means of thin red leads. A construct. (Acker 33-34)

The electronics, to Thivai's organizing eye, invade Abhor's body – the electronics effectively dismantle the “human.” This deferral of the “human” is marked by the violence of the machine upon the “meat” body. Bukatman analyzes the images of the cybernetic “organism” as “spectacle” in a language that effectively theorizes Thivai's appraising gaze: “The body is dissolved: malleable as data and more ephemeral than its own stored image. Even sexuality is distilled to the meaninglessness of transparency and surface...and as with all special effects, the viewer's fascination is precisely with the spectacle of a surface” (Terminal Identity 245). Abhor's marginal, “perverse” body is objectified by Thivai's empirical organization of its “apparent” characteristics. Thivai's “conclusion” is a dismissal of both Abhor's humanity (in Thivai's reading of Abhor's

body she is presented as “monstrous”) and the assumed subjectivity that is contingent upon the “human” (Abhor is a “construct”).

Abhor becomes interchangeable with that “other” construct, “Kathy,” whose “code” effectively maps out the shifting terrain of body knowledges. The partitioning of, and allocation of, “spaces” of knowledge as “discriminatory” activities are evident in the fortification of Abhor’s gendered and racialized, de-humanized, identification *through* Thivai’s representational practices. Within the text Thivai is the revolutionary subject who is simultaneously repelled by and obsessed with Abhor’s fluidity, with her “inhumanity”: “I asked Abhor what she wanted with me. Did she also want to destroy my identity?” (Acker 31). The threat to the masculinist human subject, not surprisingly, is located in the “feminine,” in the suspect body.

Thivai’s subjectivity, however, is not stable. He may take momentary comfort in his “humanity” but he is always already threatened by his own partialities, his status as “outlaw,” his sexual “polymorphism,” his amorality: “I who would have and would be a pirate: I cannot. I who live in my mind which is my imagination as everything – wanderer adventurer fighter Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces – I am nothing in these times” (Acker 26). Thivai’s fragmented identity is contextualized in terms of an ironic nostalgia for a “lost” individualism, an individualism, which, moreover, is predicated upon the ideal of personal autonomy and a specifically patriarchal economy of desire. Humanity becomes, for Thivai, equated with the “history” of war, a history which marks the human subject and constructs for the subject its desires: “If becoming adult equals the process of acquiring self-consciousness, my first recognition of my adult self was my perception of my desire to torture and kill. I hated” (Acker 29). For Thivai

violence is an archetypal memory that alternately forms his identity – provides *his self* with “meaning” – and also denies his integral self. Thivai can only *be* through his “mind” (the philosophical “history” of Western consciousness), through his “dreams,” but he is *actually* (virtually) “nothing” within the terminal textual universe of Empire of the Senseless.

When Thivai speaks of his inherent evil, his desire to salvage and reinscribe the human against its simulacra, he speaks of his fear of the “Other”: “For forceless humans are dead. We should use force to fight representations which are idols, idolized images . . .” (Acker 94). He is, as Baudrillard observes in Simulacra and Simulation, that traumatized subject which both fears and desires his iconic double:

Of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is doubtless the oldest. But the double is precisely not a prosthesis: it is an imaginary figure, which, just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like his other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death. This is not always the case, however: when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death. (95)

The power of *actualized* representations to thwart the “real” is not coincidentally taken up by both Baudrillard and Acker in terms of the complex positionality of the cyborg. For Thivai, Abhor is that monstrous “Other,” part idol, part flesh – the representation of his own subjective death that he seeks to simultaneously eradicate and embrace. Throughout the text of Empire of the Senseless Thivai’s quest for the construct “Kathy”

becomes intertwined with his various quests to re-locate Abhor and to contain her erratic lines of flight, evasions, and exiles from the community of the human.

Within the narrative of Empire of the Senseless Abhor attempts to construct for herself an increasingly “rhizomatic” space that becomes more diffuse and fractured as she negotiates the localized terrains of a decidedly apocalyptic revolutionary universe: “Exile was a permanent condition. A permanent community, in terms of relationships and language. In terms of identity. But from what was identity exiled?” (Acker 63). Abhor’s examination of her positionality as a space of exile necessarily calls into question normative orderings of “community,” of what constitutes and thereby determines socialities. In the revolutionary context of an Algerian “take-over” of Paris a “new” anti-Oedipal order comes to surface. It is within this context that Abhor’s question, “But from what was identity exiled?” takes on particular significance. “Identity” as a means to categorize and thus to “fix” or essentialize bodies is a representational practice whose aim is to control those bodies through “relationships,” and through “language.” The “perverse” body gives meaning to the normalized, socialized body. The relational status of all dichotomous, identificatory terms (subject/object, man/woman, normal/deviant) as they pertain to organizing bodies within and around the socius is disrupted by the lines of flight that the revolutionary bodies draw away from the homogenizing center. Thus, in an apocalyptic sense, identity becomes exiled from the systems of meaning that attempt to exert a stabilizing “presence” from without; identity is no longer an interpretation of a “real” condition of “being,” it is fluid, performative, perverse, and criminal.

Abhor’s interrogation into the identity of criminality and the exiled body is initiated by her encounter with the Cuban sailor Agone. For Abhor, Agone “exists” outside of the

socio-cultural institutions which constitute “reality” because he is shifting, nomadic, “imaginative.” In this sense, Agone catalyzes a series of “becomings” for Abhor; in terms of the process of Abhor’s deferred, mis-placed, and tangential quest, Agone is her “epiphany,” her transformative experience:

I used to think I was a lost being. That I didn’t fantasize. That I had no sexual desire. Real sexuality or identity. Lost in a maze that, perhaps, was politically controlled. Just Agone’s physical presence somehow mirrored, presented to me a sexuality which was mine and which I had never known. Due to Agone, I was no longer nothing. I was now on my way to being somebody. A criminal. (Acker 120)

Abhor’s *realization* of her own state of abjection, her “becoming-bject,” is marked by the breakdown of her body as a “recognizable,” gendered “sign.” She encounters Agone only after she has “visibly” altered her constitutive “I” – she “appears” in the drag of a male lieutenant with her head shaved. The significance, then, of Agone representing “her” mirrored “other” seems to repudiate both the necessity of “subjecthood” and “alienation” in terms of the construction of the “real,” and in terms of the formation of stable selves (that is, the development of the ego, or the discernible, fixed “I”).

For Abhor, becoming-bject is the refusal of the divided subject in favour of an absorption into the double, that fluid subject-object that, significantly, is outside of the Oedipal regime. Agone is not her mirrored, split “other” but her fantasy double. Rosemary Jackson in “Narcissism and Beyond” provides a psychoanalytic analysis of this construction of self outside of the Oedipal paradigm:

What seems to happen in fantasies of dualism is a reversal of the Oedipal drama

and a reversal of the mirror stage – a repudiation of the dominance both of the Father and of the Ideal ego, the I, formed with the subject. It is an unlearning of the distinction between body and what lies outside it, a non-identification with the reflection in the mirror, and its ego outline, a desire for that state *preceding* the fall into alienation. It is an attempt to loosen, or to lose, the ego and its dominance by uncovering something less fixed, less formed, less nameable, and, inevitable, less social. (46)

This “doubled” identification that Abhor “realizes” through Agone (with the accompanying signification of “violence” that operating “through” suggests) is an identification that critiques the psychoanalytic organization of the subject and the subject’s subsequent insertion into the socius. The locus of the subject, the space that Abhor refuses, is seductive because it is a position that promises those ideals of stability and unity that buttress social formations. Abhor and Agone, however, occupy the position of the displaced subject-object, a nomadic positionality that, significantly, lies outside the socius, raiding socialities in order to critique and parody their techniques of control. The subject-object makes no promises; it only, through its “lines of flight,” reveals the “objective illusion” of the subject’s inner coherence.

The subject-object is extra-functional in the sense that it operates both beyond and within socio-cultural systems. The subject-object is about “movement” within the flows of desire that are suppressed by the normalizing socius: “Since the world has disappeared: rather than objects, there exists that smouldering within time where and when subject meets object. The voluptuousness of your thighs. Odours seeping out of cunt juice and semen. Since the only mirrors are distorted; all is secret” (Acker 38-39).

The subject-object abandons itself to the margins of the body. It is virtualized, allowing itself only to be traced through the body's orifices, in its odours and "secret" secretions. Here, the body is not a space that is territorialized, or "conquered" by the subject-object. Alternately, the subject-object places itself conspicuously outside of the production of historically contingent, sexually differentiated subjectivities. The apocalyptic body that is articulated through the discourses of Empire of the Senseless' "outlaws" is a body that is wrenched from the technologies of control that seek to socialize and contain its flows through language and other codification strategies.

The virtualized bodies of Empire of the Senseless are "fetishistic," are "embodied" fetishes in the sense that Ira Livingston outlines in "Indiscretions: of body, gender, technology." As Livingston suggests, "[a] fetish embodies a contradiction, never simply to resolve or neutralize or transcend it but to animate and activate it, to prolong it" (99). Livingston's conceptualization of the posthuman body as fetish is important to an analysis of Acker's construction of the subject-object as the outlawed body because like Acker's transthuman bodies, Livingston's fetish is situated outside of "Freudian or Marxist pathologizations of the fetish whereby proper sexual investment eroticizes the genitalia (not a detachable part or a certain vignette) or whereby value property inheres in human activity and relations (not in their alienable products)" (Livingston 98-99). Abhor's body, as the fusion of flesh and machine – the "hard" and the "soft" – is this "embodied fetish." In turn, *Thivai as pirate* and *Agone as nomad sailor* are themselves fetishes in the de-organized economies of desire that construct Acker's narrative. It is thus the "imperative" of the terminal body (and its various incarnations "as" virtual, criminal, fetish, transhuman cyborg) to challenge the socio-cultural boundaries of the

normalized body by *becoming-abject* – Abhor’s cyborgism and blurring of naturalized “humanisms” such as race, gender and sexuality; Thivai’s Sadean manifestations; and Agone’s nomadism and body “violence” (Agone’s encounter with redefining his “surfaces” through tattooing) are all technologies of the abject.

The language of this abjected body that is performed through Abhor, Thivai, and Agone is the language of the tattoo. The tattoo becomes a re-marking of the body, a way to deterritorialize the socialized body from its moorings in an Enlightenment discourse, which conceives of the body in terms of the organization of, and conquest of, space. Tattooing, within the apocalyptic context of Empire of the Senseless operates as a prosthesis. The tattoo extends, and in a fundamental sense, exteriorizes the virtual body’s abject subject-object positionality:

Cruel Romans had used tattoos to mark and identify mercenaries, slaves, criminals and heretics.

For the first time, the sailor felt he had sailed home.

Among the early Christians, tattoos, stigmata indicating exile, which at first had been forced on their flesh, finally actually served to enforce their group solidarity.

The Christians began voluntarily to acquire these indications of tribal identity. Tattooing continued to have ambiguous social value; today a tattoo is considered both a defamatory brand and a symbol of a tribe or of a dream.

In 1769, when Captain James Cook ‘discovered’ Tahiti, he thought he had sailed to paradise. In Tahitian, writing is ‘ta-tau’; the Tahitians write directly on human flesh. (Acker 130)

Acker's historiography of the tattooed body is also the story of the categorization and colonization of the body as a discursive product. The body is always already "marked," and thus, in this sense, the tattoo functions as a contradictory "sign," as that unresolved "embodied fetish" that Livingston invokes that simultaneously constructs and displaces identificatory techniques. The tattooed body, ultimately, *is* apocalyptic in its play with the body as a space of representation that is never absolute nor prior to the discourse that constructs it.

The tattoo, for Agone, becomes a sign of the dismantling of the colonizing subject precisely because it is first and foremost an inherently *ambiguous* signification. The tattooed body performs what can be *seen* as a destabilizing force by recontextualizing, and reappropriating, for its own uses, the systems of meaning and identification that revolve in and around the policed body. When Acker inserts the "Ata-tau" into her genealogy of the marked/marking body, she suggests the multiplicity integral to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "Abody without organs":

The body without organs is produced as a whole but in its own particular place within the process of production, alongside the parts that it neither unifies nor totalizes. And when it operates on them, when it turns back upon them. . .it brings about transverse communications, transfinite summarizations, polyvocal and transcursive inscriptions on its own surface, on which the functional breaks of partial objects are continually intersected by breaks in the signifying chains, and by breaks effected by a subject that uses them as reference points in order to locate itself. The whole not only co-exists with all the parts; it is contiguous to

them, it exists as a product that is produced apart from them and yet at the same time is related to them. (Anti-Oedipus 43-44)

The Ata-tau," the language "made" flesh/the flesh "making" language, becomes associated not just with the spatialization of desire (Cook's "paradise") but, as well, with the body language that is associated, in turn, with the "mercenaries, slaves, criminals, and heretics" (Acker 130). The tattooed body as marked "other" is *both* this space of desire and marginalization that the body without organs represents to the socius. The tattoo, like the body without organs, "is the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialized socius" (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 33).

The tattoo as the marker of the identity in exile is celebrated through the discourse, which encircles Agone. This *fleshly* writing is the medium through which hegemonic systems of meaning can be critiqued. Tattooing functions here as the language of supplementarity, a making *visible* of the unconscious articulations of desire as a state of the virtual self:

Its primary language must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes.

This new way of tattooing consisted of raising defined parts of the flesh up with a knife. The tattooer then draws a string through the raised points of flesh. Various coloration methods can be used on the living points. (Acker 134)

The language of the unconscious that is “materialized” in the tattoo redefines the body’s relationship to normative constructions of self and subjectivity. This “new” language reconfigures the body outside of the discourses of control that govern the socialized body: Acker alludes to the “institutions of prison” which necessarily include those discourses of medicalization, criminality, “madness,” and perversion that delimit the classical boundaries of the body within the socius. The tattoo, as a visual and spatial redefinition of the body’s surfaces, of its ostensible “outer” boundaries, is *polyscopic* in its performative functioning, a “visual sign” of the *becoming-body without organs*. Here, the distinction between the subject and object of the gaze is deconstructed. The tattooed body is the space that controls the movement of the reifying gaze, defining the “limits” of the gaze and its constitutive eye/I.

The deconstruction of subjectivity through a re-making of the flesh responds to the conception of the embodied, gendered, subject. The body, as reconceived through Acker’s critique of the coded spaces of representation that “figure” the body within institutionalized discourses of meaning, is the locus for the dismantling of the “prisons” that close the body off to its performative possibilities. The tattooed body is simultaneously the seen and the unseen, it is a “virtual” body that moves alongside subjectivized and historicized/actualized bodies:

In decadent phases, the tattoo became associated with the criminal C literally the outlaw – and the power of the tattoo became intertwined with the power of those who chose to live beyond the norms of society.

In the same manner, normal society had ruled that he shouldn’t love another man, but he was, that he shouldn’t come simultaneously with another man . . .

The realm of the outlaw has become redefined: today, the wild places
which

excite the most profound thinkers are conceptual. Flesh unto flesh. (Acker 140)

The history of the criminalized body, in the tracing of its physicalized surfaces – in the *visual* markers of the body's *psychic* monstrosities – occupies relative socio-cultural positionings to the queer body, and to othered, outlawed, marginalized bodies. The outlawed body becomes an effect of institutionalized regimes of meaning, as the normative body becomes hyperactualized in an effort to reinforce its foundational premises – its inherent claims to subject-hood, inner coherence, purity, linearity/"straightness." When Judith Butler speaks of "the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality" (Gender Trouble viii), she is speaking of the *effacement* of those identities that are constructed on the periphery of socialities. Similarly, when Agone invokes the power of the outlawed body he is detailing the power relations of representation and "meaning" within which the "normative" becomes a function of the "perverse."

Abhor is the mediator of Agone's experience with the tattooist, with his experience of *becoming-abject*. As the narrative slips between Agone's sensual apprehension of *being* marked and Abhor's position as voyeur, Abhor positions herself as Agone's anti-Oedipal double, inside Agone's experience. Abhor's positionality marks that state of deferred being that, as Kroker points out, articulates a virtualized subjectivity: "Not simply the old tensions of 'paranoic investments' and 'schizoid breaks,' but something new, a romance of the doubling as the essential feature of the virtual self" (The Possessed 116). Abhor does not control the scene. The "I" in the "telling" is ambiguous and perhaps ultimately

irrelevant. As the tattooist remarks: "I make fortunes here. I don't need to tell or be told anything. For me the only telling's making" (Acker 130).

The deferred subject position of abject discourse is important to the "terms" of Abhor's relationship to Agone, which complicates traditional conceptions of fantasies of the double as self and projection. Abhor and Agone are embodiments of the chaotic partiality of posthumanity:

Male hand on male hand. Stomach on stomach. Male feet on male feet. Mouth on mouth. Cock on cock. Agone pulled away from the tattooer before either of them came because he didn't want to reach any port.

No roses grow on a sailor's grave.

As the two men moved away from each other, I went outside into the morning's beginning. (Acker 140)

As such partialities, Abhor and Agone circulate in and through each other. The focus, in the above passage, is cinematic in its "cuttings" to/of the body's various surfaces and extremities, in the narrative's fragmented, constructed perspective. It is, above all, an abject scene "[proceeding] by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles, and cuts" (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 141). Agone, like Abhor, is *estranged*; identity, or the fixing of "himself," is always already displaced, deferred – "he didn't want to reach any port" (Acker 140). Agone refuses the constitution of self that the orgasm would indicate – he cannot be "specified" through an assertion of "presence." Agone retreats before the specter of his own actualization for, as Baudrillard suggests, "when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death" (Simulacra 95).

Interestingly, Agone's discourse on the criminalized body is filtered through Thivai in the section on, "The Violence of Those Who Are Alone In Jail/The Violence of Roses." The genealogy of the written body is pathologized, albeit ironically, in Thivai's invocation of the "signs" of criminality:

Between one-third and two-thirds of all prison inmates wear tattoos. Being tattooed shows a tendency for violence, property crime, and self-destruction or self-mutilation. There is a 'strong relationship between tattooing and the commission of violent, assaultive acts. This propensity toward violence in general may well be signalled by the violence these men have done to themselves in the form of tattooing.' – some doctor. (Acker 148)

The irony, here, is not just in the abstract generality of authority implicit in the parodic legitimating addendum "some doctor," but as well in the revolutionary context in which it appears. Violence and criminality have been redefined *outside* the CIA jail in which Thivai finds himself. The liberation of the minoritarian body through the Algerian revolution in Paris has *fractalized* the orders of meaning that would attribute signification to such notions as the "criminal." The virtuality of the criminal in post-revolutionary Paris suspends the sociological discourse of "some doctor," which, in itself, acts as an already redundant mode of cultural translation. The virtual "subject" can only be inserted into an economy of power relations through this process of translation – through its "actualization" in normative discourses. Thus, the prison is an invented space which, like the delegitimated sovereignty of "some doctor," has no authority over Thivai's virtualized body: "One day I decided it was time to leave prison. I simply walked out" (Acker 170).

The space of the prison is a discursive one within which “deviance” is contained. In Empire of the Senseless, the age of the panopticon has been surpassed by the *self*-policing body; as Thivai realizes, he could have left the prison at any time. The self-ordered body is what Foucault would term a “technical mutation” from a modernist system of punishment to a postmodernist diffusion of the principles of institutionalized discipline that manifests itself through the actualized subject. Thivai leaves the prison as a self-policing agent. This is evidenced in his reunion with Abhor and his subsequent betrayal of her in a series of scenes, which parody Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:

Dear CIA,

The runaway nigger who engineered the bust-in to your Washington computer library a year ago is now floating down the Seine in an old rowboat. I know where she is and am willing to lead you to her for lots of money.

Yours sincerely,

Captain Blood

(X) (Acker 192)

Thivai continues, “I mailed this note. Now I was cleaned of all sin and pure. The truth was that I had never known sin before I had met Abhor” (192).³⁵ The interrogation into the socio-cultural production of “freedom” and “humanity” that Twain’s text launches against his contemporary society is taken up by Acker as part of the apocalyptic project.

³⁵ The text of Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn that is parodied by Acker reads: “Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send./ HUCK FINN./ I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time” (Clemens 169).

Thivai's desire for a "clean" and "pure" body is the desire for what Kristeva theorizes as "the integrity of one's 'own and clean self'" (Powers of Horror 53). This is, however, not so clearly a case of Thivai's integration into a normalizing socius. Thivai operates according to the logic of cruelty, which is perhaps a hyperrepresentation of the purified, disciplined body.

Thivai uses the Oedipal ordering of "the law" to punish and control Abhor's "deviant" body. It is not so much that he operates as a passive functionary of patriarchal law. Instead, it appears that Thivai exploits the organizational structures of the socius in order to enact his own claim of ownership over Abhor's body. Patriarchy operates as one structure among many that Thivai selectively appropriates in order to best manipulate his surroundings. In Thivai's narrative he himself operates as the individual mediator of all experience, informing and interpreting textual events by playing with the limits of power and meaning. Thivai takes patriarchy, as it were, to its "logical" telos. This logic of cruelty is a logic that is denaturalized, and deterritorialized, from the social institutions that regulate "human" behaviour. Thivai's "cruelty" is the stratagem of the inhuman. As Deleuze and Guattari note:

Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural violence that might be commissioned to explain the history of mankind; cruelty is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belaboring them. That is what cruelty means. (Anti-Oedipus 145)

Thivai's "marking" of Abhor's body in racialized and gendered terms is, in effect, *itself* an effect of the recuperation of the *becoming-virtual* by the socius whose movement, as noted by Deleuze and Guattari, is the movement of cruelty. Thivai's apocalyptic "voice"

is mediated by its filtration through the mechanisms of the appropriative socius and the various cultural texts that themselves are implicated in the maintenance of the human, and the human's various identificatory systems. Thivai *uses* the language of the socius *because* there is no other language at his "immediate" disposal with which he is able to articulate his relationship to Abhor. Thivai's state of *becoming* is a conflicted positionality that moves between institutionalized structures of representation and the subversion of those structures through his "play" with their very limits. By employing the language and systems of the normative socius, Thivai exposes its dominant representational technologies.

Thivai's ambivalence, as it is written *into* the text, *stresses* (emphasizes and endangers) the construction of the "subject" within the socio-cultural institutions that require the subject for their own coherence and "meaning." Through the parodic revisioning of the narrative sequencing of Twain's text, Acker's Empire of the Senseless foregrounds the contingent nature of conceptualizations of "freedom" and "humanity," notions that are simultaneously, and paradoxically, contested and *perceived* of as "givens." As Twain's text brilliantly asserts, "freedom" and "humanity," or "subject-hood," are indeed political prerogatives of "those" who are "inside" the normative boundaries of the social. As Mark, Thivai's lover, asserts of Abhor: "Abhor's not a slave, even if she is a runaway nigger. She's as free as any cretur who walks this earth" (Acker 212).³⁶ What Acker inserts into Twain's text is the *actualized* ontology of the outlawed body within the socius. Abhor, like Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, is

³⁶ Twain's text here reads: "They hain't no *right* to shut him up! *Shove!* -- and don't you lose a minute. Turn him loose! He ain't no slave; he's as free as any cretur that walks this earth!" (Clemens 226).

always already a “fixed” body, identified – “a runaway nigger.” The rhetorical circularity then of attributing “freedom” and “humanity” to Abhor’s abjected body is already itself a deconstruction of the “subject” as a socio-cultural production.

Abhor’s “liberation” through Mark and Thivai requires her transformation into “a great woman writer” (Acker 203). Writing, as a process, is as Thivai shows, not an intrinsically revolutionary action – Mark and Thivai teach Abhor how to “write properly”: “Mark didn’t listen to her palaver, but held her right thumb down, and I sliced into it. We held her right thumb down cause Abhor wrote with her right hand. Writers need disability or madness they can overcome in order to write” (203). Abhor’s construction as “writer” becomes implicated in the discourses of cruelty that Mark and Thivai *imagine by*. At this point in the narrative, Abhor is *subject to* the desires of the matrices of power from both inside and outside the bounds of the social. Her imprisonment becomes less literally the isolation and punishment of her body by agents of the hegemonic socio-cultural order and more an issue of the possibilities for disruption within dominant sites of “meaning.”

Abhor’s “education” as masculine ritual (her blood as ink) is subverted by her refusal to uproblematically reproduce her lessons. The intertexts of “writing and drawing” that Thivai imposes upon Abhor are reappropriated by her in the questioning of both Thivai’s authority and the systems of “meaning” that his writing demands. The struggle between Abhor and Thivai for control over the process of writing is, as well, the struggle to realize Acker’s project of that transgressive language of the unconscious, that non-thetic language that, within the realm of the “human,” can never be articulated:

I explained that these hearts were applicable because they were senseless. To write is to reveal a heart's identity. Abhor heard me, squeezed some more blood out, and traced, rather than drew, her own, the lonely heart. Cause she wasn't able to write by herself yet. Then like a baby falling flat on her or his face, she printed the words FUCKFACES ALL MEN then THE SHIP IS SINKING right over the bloody heart. (Acker 204)

Thivai is literally teaching Abhor to tattoo. The figuration of "hearts and banners" written in Abhor's blood is a transposition of the tattoo from the skin onto another surface. The tattoo thus resituated becomes a tracing of its own potentiality as virtualized effect. The tattoo in this sense is latent but it still entails the marking of Abhor's body – the slicing of her body to produce blood for ink. Abhor's body is the contested terrain upon which the battle for control of identity and language is waged.

Abhor at this point refuses to be passively constructed from without. She rejects not only the systems of meaning that are imposed on her, but as well the historiographies of gender and humanity that circulate around her body. As Abhor suggests in a letter to Mark and Thivai: "Everytime I talk to one of you, I feel like I'm taking layers of my own epidermis, which are layers of still freshly bloody scar tissue, black brown and red, and tearing each one of them off so more and more of my blood shoots into your face. This is what writing is to me a woman" (210). Abhor speaks here of the state of abjection that discards the illusive coherence of the socialized body in order to reveal the inherent fragility of self and identity. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Julia Kristeva theorizes the dissolution of the surfaces of identity in the same terms that Abhor charts the breakdown of the gendered body's boundaries. Kristeva notes:

The body's inside . . . shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. (53)

Abhor's discourse on "writing" indicates this process of "self unmaking," as Ihab Hassan calls it in The Dismemberment of Orpheus, that accompanies the body's radical separation from its moorings in gendered socio-cultural systems. The gendered body, as it is actualized in conventional phallogentric semiotic structures, is, at best, as Kristeva points out, "a fragile container" that is always already in danger, always a site of potential dissolution. This, shown through both Acker and Kristeva, is the process of virtualization.

The sacrifice of the body implicated in the act of writing *through* gendered paradigms is seen not only in Abhor's discourse on the experience of writing *as* a "woman," but as well in her rejection of occupying a marginal position within Thivai and Mark's community. Abhor's desire for a kind of sublime freedom of the body, for the nomad existence, is recuperated and commodified by the systemizations of the pirate and the motorcycle gang in the respective logics of both Thivai and Mark. For Abhor, the pirates and the biker gangs are complex socializations of her nomadic ideals, the sailor and the wanderer. The workings of "transgression" as a ritualized, or socially relational act reinforce normative codings of identity, society, and representation in the same way that Acker's critique of language play reveals:

Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy

language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning.

But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions. (Acker 134)

In terms of the narrative events of Empire of the Senseless, the slippages between the normative and the outlawed reveal not only the reciprocal nature of the law and its transgression but as well the theoretical Catch-22 that their very articulation presents. Susan Rubin Suleiman in Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde points out, similarly, that the politics of excess that the transgression examines is always already mediated by its sacralized effect. The subversive possibilities of the transgression are recuperated by the socius insofar as they are incorporated/legalized in ritual practices: "The experience of transgression is indissociable from the consciousness of the constraint or prohibition it violates; indeed, it is precisely by and through its transgression that the force of a prohibition becomes fully realized" (75).

Acker's text operates to reveal the possibilities of the virtual body whose code, "DISCIPLINE AND ANARCHY" (Acker 229) elucidates the paradoxical situation of the apocalyptic self. In response to recent feminist celebrations of a politics of location, the apocalyptic self exposes the body as a site of conflicting forces that is never neat, orderly or so easily contained within one epistemological project or another. The apocalyptic body slides between and through discourses of the body pointing, finally, to the inability to know the body as a totality:

. . . I thought about how a sword pierces a cunt. Only my cunt is also me.

The sword pierces me and my blood comes out.

It doesn't matter who has handled and shoved in this sword. Once this sword is in me, it's me. I'm the piercer and the pierced. Then I thought about all that had happened to me, my life, and all that was going to happen to me, the future: chance and my endurance. Discipline creates endurance. All is blood. (Acker 224)

The gendered, embodied subject is as unstable as the subject that is rooted in consciousness. The subject-object state that Acker theorizes in Empire of the Senseless is a condition that answers to the limitations of various conceptions of subjectivity. The boundaries of the gendered body are violated by their reorganization under the virtualized subject-object. Abhor expresses the terms of the gendered body as it is essentialized from without – her body, her actualized subjectivity within the socius – is marked by the closed equation *identity=genitals*. This identity, however, for Abhor is fluid and permeable – a disciplined anarchy that is always already the condition of the hybrid body, “All is blood” (224). In the abject spaces that Abhor inhabits the body's organs are exteriorized and displace the traditional surface boundaries of the gendered body. The body becomes a site of violence upon which Abhor reclaims a *sense* of agency that distinctly rejects her place within the community that Mark and Thivai offer.

The subject-object that Acker outlines is a function of those transgressive bodily excesses that displace gender and that deconstruct the socialized surfaces of the body. Abhor's declaration that her identity as a “woman,” indeed, that “[a]ll is blood,” disorganizes the tenuous distinction between inside and outside, and between subject and

object. Kristeva points to the borders of the body, its orifices, as the loci for the consolidation *and* contestation of power: “Menstrual blood . . . stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference” (Powers of Horror 71). Abhor rejects her position as “cunt” as it is understood within masculinist social structures. In this sense, Abhor’s reappropriation of not only the language of misogyny but, as well, her reclamation of the power that her body has been denied, constructs an alternate space from which both the body and gender can be theorized. Abhor, in the end/beginning, rejects absolutism and celebrates indeterminacy as the site of multiplicity from which the body’s potentials can be played out: AI stood there, there in the sunlight, and thought that I didn’t as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn’t want and what and whom I hated. That was something” (Acker 227).

Into the Abyss: Pussy, King of the Pirates

I’m not a NORMAL GIRL

I’m an angry sweaty girl

so bite me

and suck my not normal flesh. (Estep *I’m Not a Normal Girl*)

Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of the decentered subject, the “nomad,” is written into Acker’s texts in terms of the their inner logics of resistance to the same organizing Oedipal structures that Deleuze and Guattari critique. It is the nomad’s struggle against normalization and territorialization that manifests itself in Acker’s characters with their

fluid, shifting, identities. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, “. . . there does not exist a pure nomad who can be afforded the satisfaction of drifting with the flows and singing direct filiation, but always a socius waiting to bear down, already deducting and detaching” (149).

Douglas Shields Dix utilizes Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the nomad by tracing the moments of excess and escape that Acker’s texts create. Her narratives construct a terminal politics of the personal that puts notions of subjectivity and fixed identity into question:

The history of women that Acker explores (HISTORY AND WOMEN) is the segmented entrapment of women in a hierarchical power relation to men; however, there is a possibility of moving beyond these segmentations. . . Death is history’s opposite because it represents the outside, the void, the absence of the values that have created history to begin with. In the war between the genders that makes up this history, the alternatives seem to be to join the social order or to be annihilated by daring to step outside it. . . . (“Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote*” 57)

Ideas of annihilation, the suicided self, the gendered body’s “death instinct,” problematize traditional feminist claims that locate the essence of “woman” in her body, specifically, her gendered body. It is precisely this socially regulated body that Acker’s protagonists seek to escape; hence, their indeterminacy, their posthumanity.

As Acker’s texts reveal, the gendered body is not simply a spatial location; it is inscribed, as well, by “History,” and defined in terms of its construction within a linear, diachronically framed temporality. The body within the socius bears the marks of the “past.” It is not that the assertion of a materialist politics of identity is not relevant; it is

essential to reevaluate the foundations of subjectivity in Western culture. What is at issue, however, is the re-centering of the subject, albeit in a different form. The subject rooted in the body is no less problematic than the subject that is rooted in consciousness. It is of the very *fixity*, the constructed stability and primacy of the “subject” as a center for and ordering of identity, that Acker’s texts make inquiry. Acker’s invocation of the darting “subject-object” as the strategic manifestation of the apocalyptic self is a politics of the margin, a rewriting that issues from the lacuna of the terminal Abyss.

The abyssal gaps which are “performed” in Acker’s works question the production of the “real” by making it an effect of discourse – by constructing identities that are traumatized and abject *through* their contact with a unifying, and universalizing, “Symbolic.” The “fantastic,” shifting, identities in Acker’s fictions are entropic. In the desire for the dissolution of identities, in the “[move] towards an imaginary zero condition, without time or space, a condition of entropy, the fantastic produces an ‘other’ region . . . the result of pure transgression” (Jackson 79).

In Pussy, King of the Pirates, Acker dissolves the boundary that separates the self and the other, the human and the nonhuman. In the transgression of these normative, culturally constructed limits, the gendered body becomes the space of fantasy. The gendered body is produced (that is, concretized) through its insertion into a masculinized and heterosexualized sociality: “Inside the brothel, the women, however they actually look, are always beautiful to men. Because they fulfill their fantasies. In this way, what was known as the *male regime*, in the territory named *women’s bodies*, separated its reason from its fantasy” (8). The “fantasy” represents an alternate way of “knowing” and thereby of locating the gendered body in terms of the institutions and apparatuses that

organize and regulate identity. The gendered “female” body in Pussy is contained within the socially marginalized space of the brothel, a space which celebrates the play of sexual excess and spectacle. The body of the prostitute/woman is amorphous, and thus eternal/infinite. The body of the prostitute/woman is the idealization of space and time – a mythologized “fantasy” that disrupts the limitative social.

For O, in Pussy the geography that surrounds the brothel is itself an encryption, a language that she is unable to manipulate. It is only within the space of the brothel that O is *actualized*. The streets that lie outside are the indicators of her *virtual* potentiality, where, in their fantastic indeterminacy, and deferred signification, O can *mean* anything:

It didn't matter, the name of this unknown city to which I came. All the unknown cities, in China, held slums that looked exactly like each other: each one a labyrinth, a dream, in which streets wound into streets which disappeared in more streets and every street went nowhere. For every sign had disappeared. (Acker 7)

Thus the landscape of O's fantasy articulates an aesthetic that suspends both space and time and the orders of meaning that organize bodies historically and socio-culturally. The intense dissolution of self that is initiated by O's apprehension of the infinite possibilities of her body within the dreamscape of endless streets is, however, mediated and limited by her containment within the structure of heterosexuality that has “placed” her within the brothel. When O's boyfriend W brings her to the brothel, it is only to abandon her – another non-“sign,” or meaningless gesture that points to the same kind of aesthetic of disappearance that the streets speak to for O.

The virtualization of the material body within the text of Pussy is an effect of the body's historicization. Pussy does not announce “the end of history,” but instead asserts

a disassemblage of the organizing mechanisms of history – “pure” *apokalypsis*.

Memory, within the narrative of Acker’s text, is necessarily selective and always random.

Space and time are fluctuating and unstable boundaries through which the terminal self “performs” important acts of “forgetting” in order to transform and reconstitute itself as a dynamic process:

Hegel, or the panopticon, sees all, except for the beginning of the world. In that beginning, which is still beginning, there is a young girl.

Her name’s not important. She’s been called King Pussy, Pussycat,

Ostracism, O, Ange. Once she was called Antigone . . . (Acker 163)

History and thus identity, are “untimely:” “Spread out over a topographical field, the imploded self is energized creating the movement over a power grid where *all* ontologies are merely the sites of local ‘catastrophes’” (Kroker and Cook 26). The displacement of the masterful eye (Hegel), which surveys and *marks* all of “history” and “being,” articulates Kroker and Cook’s critique of technologies of power. The construction of a parallel, subjugated realm of chaotic identities and interchangeable, permeable, histories in Acker’s texts reflect what Kroker and Cook theorize as a “discourse on the disembodied eye of the dead power at the centre of Western experience . . .” (28). To “be,” in terms of Acker’s text, is to be contained by and within the masculinist gaze that seeks self-authentication through the construction of the “other.” Knowing oneself, for the “others” of Acker’s text, *is* that site of “catastrophe” that Kroker and Cook posit. The “young girl” of Pussy’s ruptured time line is promiscuous in her very multiplicity and indeterminacy – in her textualization.

The stable, idealized orders of “meaning” which direct Hegel’s construction of “history” are fragmented/ “fractalized” by the exiled pirate bodies of Pussy. The conceptualization of a “fractal” history has important implications for socio-culturally entrenched figurations of gender and identity. The deferral of identity in the flow of “names” that represent the “fictional” lineage of the “Other” charts the discontinuities of history that are otherwise subordinated to hegemonic orderings of knowledge. The bodies that Pussy re-calls parody those categories of identity that are legitimated and *made* “real” through the discourse(s) of history. As Paula Rabinowitz notes:

Eliminating the distinction between action and articulation, deed and word, the posthuman body is still saturated with the stories of humanity that circulate around it; it speaks through a language straddling the borders between health/ sickness, male/female, real/imaginary. It tells its stories, however, through those already told; it rips off the past to refuse the future. (“Soft Fictions” 98)

The categories that regulate meaning are displaced by Pussy’s pirate bodies which move fluidly across time and space to carve out alternative “truths” which are explicitly “fictional”: “*She’s been called King Pussy, Pussycat, Ostracism, O, Ange. Once she was called Antigone . . .*” (Acker 163). The very constructedness of “reality,” of what is designated as “real,” is the positional concern of Pussy. The critique of “authenticity” that Acker’s text launches against the orthodoxy of culturally produced institutions which function to control discourses of knowledge performs itself as a text of an apocalyptic posthumanity. The text of Pussy is thus aligned with Rabinowitz’s suggestion that “[p]erhaps a posthuman feminism develops from the evasion of truth – from fantasy, exaggeration and lies” (98). The elements of “fantasy, exaggeration and lies” operate to

reveal the *performativity* of identity, **not** as a category or categories which are positioned in opposition to “reality” and “truth,” for these “absolutes” are revealed *through* fantasy to be always already illusory.

Identity, as shown through posthuman critiques, is contingent. Identity *becomes* “an imaginative reconstruction, a symbolic performance . . . of desire” (102), always deferred, always constructed, and, in the end, always unseen. For Acker’s “protagonists” there is no absolute recourse back to that imaginary, “originary” primal scene because history is conceived of as a dynamic process. History is conceptualized as a constantly shifting present that, in itself, is nonlinear but is always in danger of recuperation, always coded from without by the ordering systems of history, gender, race, and class: “. . .the punk boys told us what it is to be a pirate. We joined up with them. It was only now that we were able to make up the rules of piracy” (Acker 204). The “punk boys,” who in Pussy are worshipers of Antonin Artaud, impose, ironically, meaning and order upon the anarchy of the pirate girls. Here, even the margins of sociality (represented in “punk” as a subcultural organization) invoke notions of value and structure – the principles of reason – to homogenize and contain the excesses of the pirate girls. Within the socius, as Pussy points out, there is no privileged site of transgression to which to escape. The only “lines of flight” that can be usefully drawn are those that suspend all categories of the “Symbolic,” those that question all strategies of identification and representation.

The abjected, virtualized body of the posthuman disposes of the human’s “categorical imperative” towards social normativity in order to reflexively question “itself” as a gendered, racialized, sexualized – identified – body. The apocalyptic subject that consequently circulates itself is violent and taboo *because* of its performativity and its

heterogeneity – its construction and deconstruction of itself in terms of multiplicities.

The *revealed* posthuman body *becomes* a site of increasing indeterminacy. As Scott

Bukatman asserts:

So far, the body has remained largely protected, a boundary that might be transgressed, but a boundary and limit point nevertheless. Yet, within these discourses, the body is hardly inviolate – it is instead a site of almost endless dissolution. From here the language of terminal identity becomes increasingly de-forming of the human, as the subject is simulated, morphed, modified, re-tooled, genetically engineered, and even dissolved. (244)

The subject/object position of the apocalyptic posthuman subverts the establishment of fixed identities upon the body; it is, itself, a contested proposition. This body is, above all, a meta-body that comments upon itself, that theorizes itself, and, in the “end,” perhaps refuses itself. The posthuman is not a position that offers solace, but rather induces discomfort within the narratives which seek to gain mastery over, to define, and to “know,” bodies and minds, and to position them in a kind of philosophical or rhetorical combat against each other. What is the processural terminal subject then in terms of the posthuman? In the words of Maggie Estep, “she’s” “an angry sweaty girl.”

Chapter Five – The Terminal name(s) of the father

All a gun does is focus an explosion in one direction. (Palahniuk 141)

‘It’s a book,’ I said. ‘It’s a book what you are writing.’ I made the old goloss very coarse. ‘I have always had the strongest admiration for them as can write books.’ Then I looked at its top sheet, and there was the name – A

CLOCKWORK ORANGE – and I said: ‘That’s a fair gloopy title. Who ever heard of a clockwork orange?’ Then I read a malenky bit out loud in a sort of very high type preaching goloss: ‘ – The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to attempt to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my sword-pen – ’ . . . (Burgess 21)

Within the discursive structures of the primary apocalypses, the Name-of-the-Father, the Alpha and the Omega, functions as the central resolving agency of the eschatological narrative, as well as of cosmic history. With *apokalypsis*, desire is suspended and the subject neurotically enfolded into the totality of the Law with *his* entry into the New Jerusalem, which becomes the organizational center of the apocalypse, proper. Outside of the Name, on the perimeter of relation and meaning, resides the Abyss of the Real:

Truth, unveiling, illumination are no longer decided in the appropriation of the truth of being, but are cast into its bottomless abyss as non-truth, veiling and dissimulation. The history of Being becomes a history in which no being, nothing, happens except *Ereignis*’ unfathomable process. The proper-ty of the

abyss (*das Eigentum des Ab-grundes*) is necessarily the abyss of proper-ty, the violence of an event which befalls without Being. (Derrida, *Spurs* 119)

Apocalypse, and its dominant textual landscape, indeed, articulates the Aristotelian suggestion, taken up by Heidegger, of time “as nothing but event” (Fry 46) – “*ereignis*.” The motion of revelatory unfoldings, within the terminal contours of the Last Judgment, occurs as acute, inscriptive attachments to, and upon, the bodies, which establish the “first” earth. Subjects, within the apocalyptic movement, are both literally “marked,” as well as recorded, ideationally, into the register of “the book of life” (*Rev.* 20:12), the “proper” of apocalypse. Apocalyptic time is figured as the pre-determined unsealing of events, which initiate, to the subjects of the compromised “earth,” the extension of the famously forced choice: *jouissance or life*. The apocalyptic irony of this particular “no choice” lies in the “reality” that both “options” result in a form of “death.” The “choice” of *jouissance*, here, marks the subject for the abyssal “second death,” while the “life” chosen is that of the martyr, redeemed through his death in the service of Life. It is significant, here, that the “choice” made results, as well, in the consignment of the subject to the competing feminine bodies that demarcate the arenas upon which the apocalypse is played out: the defiled Babylon, and the virginal promise of the New Jerusalem that “will be” instituted in the wake of the Whore.

Within Revelation, the territorial “proper-ties” of the “end,” are entered into a gendered discourse, which, specifically, identifies the New Jerusalem, the Bride, as a kind of hysterical container for the Name-of-the-Father, upon whose body is impressed the male genealogies that buttress the Proper in a kind of overcoding of regulatory

signification: “I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (*Rev.* 21:2):

It had a great high wall, with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.

On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west.

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (*Rev.* 21:12-14)

The pacified Bride, subject, here, to the desire of the Father, is laid open, herself “revealed,” as the functional entry point and habitus for the redeemed. The New Jerusalem is *made* transparent and *knowable* as a product of the Name-of-the-Father as John is enjoined to witness and record the measuring of her perimeter and structures, and the contents and promise of what lies between her walls.³⁷

By contrast, the Abyss, the terminal site for the Whore, the Beasts, the “unclean” and the “shameful,” is never fully “realised” nor communicated in the text of *Revelation*. It stands as an axiological gap, an inarticulable, symbolic incompleteness from within the space of the symbolic. As Tina Pippin notes of the abject character of the Abyss:

The interior of the abyss is not described; it is too horrible to imagine. So the text stops at the mouth, and the opening is perhaps the scariest part of all . . . The boundaries of the New Jerusalem seem impenetrable, but they are not a stable entity in the text, for this future city is always not yet. The abyss is always already. (*Apocalyptic Bodies* 77)

³⁷ See *Revelation* 21:10-27 and 22:1-5 for John’s detail of the New Jerusalem.

Here, the Abyss becomes Woman, one of the names-of-the-father, herself an apocalyptic moment of rupture within rupture in a kind of *mise-en-abîme* of terminality. The Abyss is that “exception *constitutive* of the phallic function, which thus represents the masculine fantasy *par excellence*. It is the position of the ‘capricious monster’ who is not limited by the law and who ‘wants it all’ . . .” (Zupancic 189-90) in her function as one of the extensions of the primal father.

Between the two constitutive spaces of the end-time, the Abyss and the New Jerusalem, however, lies the wasteland of the symbolic, the supra-purgatorial residuum of both Whore and Bride that is neither submissively absorbed into the Name-of-the-Father, nor a “psychotic” failure of the Law, but is, rather that form of *père-version* produced through the splitting of the Name-of-the-Father – neither neurotic nor psychotic, the “first earth” is, rather, perverse: “he doesn’t bow his head before the being of God” (Lacan, *Ethics* 199). In the institution of “the end,” before God, “[e]arth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them” (*Rev.* 20:11). Here, the first earth is substituted by the second heaven and earth, which maintains, ambiguously, that, with their constitution, “the old order of things has passed away” (*Rev.* 21:4). The aporia of this tertiary space, the khoric mystery of the disobedient “first,” is never adequately described in *Revelation*; it remains in a kind of perpetual flight *from*. Inasmuch as the end, itself, is placed in a condition of enduring interruption, the first earth looms as the subtextual threat of the return of the repressed within the apocalyptic “knot.” The generation of the “second heaven and earth” in *Revelation* is always already future continuous: “Behold, I am coming soon” (*Rev.* 22:12), and thus subject to simple future interruption and/or the deconstructive effect of parallel action, which allows for the

interesting possibility of the “return” of the “first earth” as an oppositional disavowal of the promise of the apocalypse.

The self-exiled first earth, thus, prevails between the “two deaths” catalyzed by the apocalypse and the concomitant establishment of the “new” heaven and earth. The anamorphic space that exists, here, in retreat, concurrent with the threat of its return, can be understood as the potential formation of a counter-apocalypse. This lurking “double” warns of the capacity for a revolutionary making “new”³⁸ of the world and the subject from the paradox of *jouissance* that Lacan locates in the articulation of the death of God: “If there is nothing more than a lack, the Other is wanting, and the signifier is that of his death” (*Ethics* 193).

The Father-of-Enjoyment, or, père-version in Palahniuk's Fight Club

The apocalyptic scene of *Fight Club* is distinguished by its strategy of the “impossible” refrain. The (re)iteration of “the rules” of fight club, throughout the narrative, both separate and signal what Palahniuk designates as the “core moment[s]” (xv) of the text. The “impossibility” of this maneuver resides in the refrain’s injunction to *remain* silent, to *not tell* or bear witness to the apocalyptic moment: “The first rule about fight club is you don’t talk about fight club” (39). Silence, within the parameters of the fight club, marks out the deliberate removal of the self from the space of the symbolic that it theorizes as always already a false coherence, an illusory state of consciousness.

³⁸ This “revolting” making “new” functions as a parallel action to God’s proclamation in *Revelation* in regard to the instantiation of the New Jerusalem: “I am making everything new!” (*Rev.* 21:5).

The removal of the Word from the machinery of the “end” is, however, necessarily subverted by the narrator who begins his transgressive account with the moment of his own presumed death. The narrator’s confrontation with Tyler atop the explosively wired Parker-Morris building, which opens and substantively concludes the text, discloses the functional tension between the neurotic desire to submit to the Law and the psychotic foreclosure of Law and its institutions: “‘This isn’t really death,’ Tyler says, ‘We’ll be legend. We won’t grow old’” (1). The apocalyptic agenda of fight club reaches its telic realisation in the planned destruction of the National Museum through a kind of violent indirection: the blowing up of the museum’s neighbouring corporate complex becomes the mediating and catalyzing structure for the collapse of history and its artifacts: “‘This is our world, now, our world,’ Tyler says, ‘and these ancient people are dead’” (4). The museum, in its function as both archive and objectal tomb for historical, symbolic memory, represents, to Tyler, the limitative nature of the social as it acts upon its subjects. The prison-house of meaning and being is located in the institutionalization of “Culture,” and, thus, cultural identity, in both the material and abstract “presence” of the museum, itself, which contains and “freezes” *man’s* dynamic progress into artificial and isolated presentational moments.

For Tyler, what is the kernel of his resistance to the “Symbolic” is proper-ty, and the Name-of-the-Father’s terminal ownership of both history and futurity as they inflect both the material and psychic conditions of self-realisation. Tyler *is*, in the moment of his emergence, a product of an always already transitional “present” – that “one perfect minute” (23) that is represented in the perverse time-piece of subjectivisation that “he” effects on the beach when first “encountered” by the narrator: “The giant shadow hand

was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute Tyler had sat in the palm of a perfection he'd created himself" (23). Tyler, for the narrator, constitutes a kind of ideal "overman" who asserts and produces himself as an effect of his own creative agency. Tyler "overcomes" both the limitations of the self and becomes, in terms of the narrator's own personal and apocalyptic psychic scheme, transcendent.

The fight club, itself, and the character of Tyler Durden, in their drive towards a kind of autonomous agency of the subject outside of the social, proper, seek to evade the conundrum of the forced choice that the apocalyptic dynamic demands by instituting a counter-end, in which what Tyler posits as the purgatory of existence is evaded through the radical exclusion of both the Law and the laws which govern the subject:

We are God's middle children, according to Tyler Durden, with no special place in history and no special attention.

Unless we get God's attention, we have no hope of damnation or redemption.

Which is worse, hell or nothing?

Only if we're caught and punished can we be saved. (183)

The Name-of-the-Father, through the various agencies that "fight club" develops, works perversely, here, not in order to precipitate the death of God, but, rather, to disinvest the Other of its status as the possessor of the desire of the subject. Tyler demands, rather, that the Other recognize that He "lacks," and, further, that He must desire, Himself, the creative potential of His "children." Tyler requires that the Other find "His" desire, and subsequent lack, in and through the "new" and fulsome subjective agents that fight club produces.

Within Tyler's radical philosophy, the aesthetics of disappearance that characterise the late-modern relationship to God is mimetically prefigured in the dissipation of the nuclear family, and, specifically, in the absence of the father as an ideational elaboration of the primordial Father within the symbolic: "If you're male and you're Christian and living in America your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God?" (133). Fight club becomes, thus, not only a means of resuscitating a viable system of subjectivisation out of a symbolically exhausted social, but, and perhaps more importantly, a means through which "masculinity," as such, can forward itself in all its potent urgency. What is lamented is the diminishment of any kind of recourse to male paradigms in an apparent context of the feminization of subjectivity.

Palahniuk's text, perhaps intentionally, leaves ambiguated how the substitutive system of belief would constitute itself in the absence of the father. We can, however, fabricate the unspoken typology of Tyler's *ex nihilo* male subject through the narrator's erection of Marla Singer, in the narrative, as the accidental *quilting point* whereby both Tyler and the narrator are attributed "real" signification:

We have a sort of a triangle thing going here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me.

I don't want Marla, and Tyler doesn't want me around, not anymore. This isn't about *love* as in *caring*. This is about *property* as in *ownership*.

Without Marla, Tyler would have nothing. (4)

The narrator constructs a kind of program of erasure, in which all desire and processes of subjectivisation are confronted by their own essential impossibility and lack.

This already compromised interpellative process is further complicated and detoured by the progressive revelation that Tyler is, "himself," a pathological product of the narrator's psychotic break from reality. Tyler, thus, as the shadow double of the narrator is given subjective substance only through the narrator's own increasing dislocation from the anchors of the social that ostensibly define him: his job, his possessions, his structural relations with others. Marla, only ever having come to know the narrator as his ego-ideal, unconsciously recognizes and thus legitimates the condensation of Tyler as subject against the nameless narrator and his own subjective fading: "[there is] no subject, without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established" (Lacan, Four 221).

The centrality of Marla to the economy of desire that, in fact, constitutes and sustains Tyler is problematised by the narrator's own foundational and synchronous relation to and desire for her presence. Marla provides both the narrator and his double, Tyler, with a strategy of legitimation, enacted through her proximal, and thus, destabilising connections to their overlapping narratives. Tyler, as counterfeit self, is only recognised as such through the narrator's terminal reconstruction of *himself* through his history with Marla.

It is not incidental to this process of substitution that the narrator first encounters Marla in the context of his desire to reinvent himself through vicarious contact with the Real. The narrator's inability to adequately treat his chronic insomnia prefaces his removal from social subjectivity and his concomitant collapse into a kind of foreclosure of self: "This is how it is with insomnia. Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can't touch anything and nothing can

touch you” (Palahniuk 11). The simulacral existence of the narrator, and his “turn” to the ideal of Tyler hinges, in fact, upon the *occurrence* of Marla as an interruption of the fantasy of his coherence that he locates in his support group addiction – the ostensive “remedy” to the subjective debilitation effected by his insomnia.

Both the narrator and Marla construct a “fake” integrity of the self through their surrogate experience of the abjection of others in an obscene process of intersubjectivity. Freedom, here, subsists in the *idea* of the Real, in the imagined possibility of annihilation as it confronts the social and the subjects that, to the narrator, circulate uselessly within it:

This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn’t say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder. Look up into the stars and you’re gone.

Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I’d ever felt. I wasn’t host to cancer or blood parasites; I was the little warm center that the life of the world crowded around.

And I slept. Babies don’t sleep this well. (12)

Through the pretense of becoming-death, the narrator seeks to reinscribe himself into some form of sociality, however perverse. He, in turn, justifies his masquerade by asserting that his “silence” engenders a reciprocal subjective benefit to the authentic members of the groups by positioning himself as supremely terminal, and, thus, distributing a kind of residual invigoration of the groups through their belief that they are, relatively, more “alive” than he. Marla, consequently, disrupts the narrator’s strategy by reflecting back to him his essential fictionality: “With her watching, I’m a liar. She’s a fake. She’s the liar” (13).

Marla's gaze *disturbs*, and in her revealing of her own misrepresentation the narrator is forced to recognise himself: "Marla smokes and rolls her eyes now. In this one moment, Marla's lie reflects my lie, and all I can see are lies. In the middle of all their truth" (13). The inarticulable "truth" of the Real that is situated in the group, repudiates the narrator's identification with their abjection. Both he and Marla are forced to acknowledge their own provisional status as mere "tourists" of suffering and dying, their inability to "authentically" know or come up against, so intimately, the tissue of the Real that fascinates them: "'Funerals are nothing compared to this,' Marla says, 'Funerals are all abstract ceremony. Here, you have a real experience of death'" (28-29). The desire to participate, not in the distanced, formal plays of death but, rather, in its visceral instances necessitates the splitting of the groups and the removal of each other from their "knowing" looks. Marla and the narrator cannot exist "together" because it disrupts their construction of a false solidarity with the groups by foregrounding, and, indeed, making visible, the illusory nature of the connection.

This notion of "connection," and its associative production of immanences, provides a kind of route back into the social for the narrator, whose existence is defined, precisely, by its relevant lacks and momentariness. The narrator is a functional citizen of the "terminal," in his ironic occupation as risk-assessment officer. His life is composed in the contracted domain of the "business class" and in the ambiguous displacement of the body/self in perpetual transit:

The charm of traveling is everywhere I go, tiny life. I go to the hotel, tiny soap, tiny shampoos, single-serving butter, tiny mouthwash and a single-use toothbrush.

Fold into the standard airplane seat. You're a giant. The problem is your

shoulders are too big. Your Alice in Wonderland legs are all of a sudden miles so long they touch the feet of the person in front. Dinner arrives, a miniature do-it-yourself Chicken Cordon Bleu hobby-kit, sort of a put-it-together project to keep you busy. (18)

In the absence of any kind of contextual field of consistency within which to situate himself, the narrator explicates the dilemma of the body/self that *does not fit*. Here, there is a radical discontinuity between the subject and his existential horizon. The desire, thus, to carve out not only a space of individual enunciation, but, as well, to be integrated into a “community” of “proper,” and *fitting* subjects that is no longer sustained by an irrevocably *dis-eased* social results in the production of both Tyler and fight club from the narrator’s fatigued psyche: “If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?” (23).

Tyler, consequently, emerges as a primal saviour for the narrator – he is, simultaneously, the creator and destroyer of the self, gesturing toward a kind of mythic circuit of history, and Lacan’s “perfect torus” of the unconscious:

May I never be complete.

May I never be content.

May I never be perfect.

Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete. (36)

In the coming to recognition of his own essential “lack,” the narrator composes Tyler as the representative of a “lost” plenitude that can only ever be simulacrally gestured towards and superficially manufactured within the symbolic. Out of the defeat of the symbolic, for the narrator, both the organization of fight club, and its emblematic figure-

head of Tyler Durden, operate as transgressive reconstructions of the social and God as, here, fundamentally perverse, however necessary, constituting agencies.

The narrator, stultified by his domesticity and *pained* by the realization of the incompleteness, not only of his self, but of his desire, as well, solicits the register of the Real as an ironic means of self-actualization. Contemporary Western culture, within the narrative working-through of Fight Club, is insensate, it is always already a kind of subjective life in death:

The first fight club was just Tyler and I pounding on each other.

It used to be enough that when I came home angry and knowing that my life wasn't toeing my five-year plan, I could clean my condominium or detail my car. Someday I'd be dead without a scar and there would be a really nice condo and car. Really, really nice, until the dust settled or the next owner. Nothing is static. Even the *Mona Lisa* is falling apart. Since fight club, I can wiggle half the teeth in my jaw.

Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer.

Tyler never knew his father.

Maybe self-destruction is the answer. (40-41)

The banality of everyday existence is, for the narrator, conversely, a slow process of subjective extinction. The relevancy and ostensive import of the social fictions of "success" that are subscribed to become increasingly traumatic and failed markers of a social and of a subjectivity deprived both *of* and having access *to* any kind of "sincere" meaning. As a condition of his own *fleeting improvisation*, the narrator seeks reconfirmation of the self in the spaces of the abject, and in the primality of tropes of

masculinity that fight club provides. Man, here, may be reduced to the clichéd binarisms of dramatic conflict – man against himself, man against society, man against nature – but, in terms of the narrator's desire, the simplicity of the mode of self-production that fight club facilitates is a fundamental inconsequence given the ability to engage affectively with life that the organization extends as the reward of membership.

Fight club^d offers an oppositional form of (homo)sociality that evokes the privileged signifier of the Phallus for its *denatured* participants who are otherwise only ever “subject” to the gap of intuiting that what they are “supposed” to be is unresolvable with their “reality:” “What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women” (41). Fight club, through the reinstitution of the Phallus into the identificatory chain of meaning, and, specifically, through the positing of Tyler as its ritual representative, conducts the organization of a “new” theology of the male self as a resistance *to* the castrated and abbreviated subject of contemporary Western culture: “There’s hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved” (43). The members of fight club turn against what they imagine is the aporia of the domestication of the self, and, like Whitman’s untamed and untranslatable “self,” seek to produce a kind of “barbaric yawp” from the silences that register the normalized self within the social: “Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world” (40).

Tyler, thus, collates and leads an apocalyptic army of disenfranchised “rebels” against what he understands as an absent and thus impotent Law, and a symbolic social concurrently deprived of its constitutive ability to impart even the most basic fiction of subjectivity for its citizens. In the inadequacy of the symbolic to provide regulatory and

legitimizing structures for the production of self-hood, fight club articulates itself as a kind of fulfillment of the gap:

“You have a class of young strong men and women, and they want to give their lives to something. Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need.

“We don’t have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression.

“We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them. (141)

Fight club, as a counter to the deprived Name-of-the-Father, becomes its perverse and obscene supplement, the Father-of-Enjoyment, who says, “Yes!” to *jouissance* and enacts, in its injunctive wake, a new totalitarianism of the subject. The complicated relation of forces that the fight club’s mandate advances, inaugurates that *speaking between* law and transgression that produces, not prohibition, but rather, its own malfunctioning exception designed to make visible both the impossibility of the Law/law as well as of the structural totality of its symbolic correlate. Within Tyler’s “new world order,” the self is subjected to the apocalyptic conditions of its own paradoxical desire as a means to knowledge and psychic emancipation: “Only after disaster can we be resurrected” (61).

The eschatological telos of fight club is realized in the institution of “Project Mayhem,” the urban guerrilla arm of the organization. Project Mayhem apocalyptically

reproduces, on a macro scale, the transformative effect of fight club for the subject:

“Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world” (86). The terminal agency of the Other, within *Revelation*, to “make (a)new” out of the corrupted ruins of the social is metonymically replaced by Tyler’s compulsion towards what he sees as the productive core that lies at the heart of entropic cultural processes:

When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, Tyler said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn’t care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world. (113)

Fight club, in its ostensive cosmic capacity for revolution, remains a closed and initiate system of participation. The assertion, here, of a specifically phallogentric, hyper-individualized ordering regime evokes the frontier sensibility of prototypical American settlement narratives, which privileged and advanced a kind of Adamic cultural paradigm of the “New World” self. The ideological underpinnings of Fight Club, thus, deconstructively turn in against themselves, in the end, as they become not a discourse of the “new,” but, rather, refold themselves as nostalgic echoes of a “lost” subjective ideal.

As Robert Bly’s *Iron John: A Book About Men* suggests, the process of “remasculinization” is closely bound up with the need for ritual practices, which can function as cathartic loopholes for the expression of men’s “hidden nurturing side as well as their anger and grief about inadequate fathering, without feeling feminized or weak” (Leverenz 23). In contrast to the aggressivity of the therapeutic mechanics of fight club, the “support group” is figured as a passive response to the imperiled subject. Here, “No

one will ever say *parasite*. They'll say, *agent*. They don't say *cure*. They'll say, *treatment*" (Palahniuk 25). The support groups operate according to a language of deferral as opposed to one of action, and thus function as metonyms for the "feminine" that Tyler sees as the endemic cultural determinant of the late-twentieth century.

The motif of "stasis" that subtexts Fight Club's narrative becomes a supplement to this anxiety over the production, or non-production, as it were, of masculinity in the text. What *makes a man* is, precisely, what is under critical evaluation, here. What Tyler deplores is the stagnation, ironically, of male discourse and experience against a dynamically evolved and progressive reformulation of "female-ness" in the late-modern consciousness. The representational crisis of middle-class, white male, heterosexual identity becomes conrescent in the increasing nihilism of fight club as it advances towards its own logical and apocalyptic conclusion: "'We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact,'" Tyler said. 'So don't fuck with us'" (157). Against their production, always already of fantasy, and "fakeness," the reconstituted, virile, subjects of fight club are hostile selves, the residuum of a discarded and paralyzed desire. The subjects of fight club no longer "recognize" themselves within the symbolic and are thus, are radically alienated from self-meaning – entering, by default, into a kind of aggressive and narcissistic contact with the Real: "aggressivity gnaws away, undermines, disintegrates; it castrates; it leads to death" (Lacan Écrits 10).

Thus, when at the commencement of the text, the unnamed narrator, the "everyman," confronts his Other, Tyler Durden, with the compossibility of their mutually sustaining

existences: “I tongue the gun barrel into my cheek and say, you want to be a legend, Tyler, man, I’ll make you a legend. I’ve been here from the beginning. I remember everything” (5), he re-initializes the originary dyad of the signifying articulation. Self-annihilation, here, intends to produce not only a fulfillment of the desire of the Other/Tyler, but, as well, seeks to re-establish the normalization of subjectivization within the social.

The narrator’s attempted suicide and consequent institutionalization that finalizes the text in a kind of anti-climax of agency and desire, is, in the end, the appropriate failure of the experience of the human subject within symbolization, proper. Desire, in terms of the narrator’s collapsed undoing, at the closure of the narrative is, indeed, that of the “vanquished idiot” (Lacan, Encore 56), within which “everything succeeds” in “fail[ing] in a male manner” (56):

In my father’s house are many mansions.

Of course, when I pulled the trigger, I died.

Liar.

And Tyler died.

With the police helicopters thundering toward us, and Marla and all the support group people who couldn’t save themselves, with all of them trying to save me, I had to pull the trigger.

This was better than real life.

And your one perfect moment won’t last forever.

Everything in heaven is white on white.

Faker.

Everything in heaven is quiet, rubber-soled shoes.

I can sleep in heaven.

People write to me in heaven and tell me I'm remembered. That I'm their hero. I'll get better. (197)

The narrator's false gesture towards sacrifice redoubles Tyler's ritual performances within the arena of fight club – there is no “authentic” nobility attached to the act, instead, the attempted suicide plays out the primary mobilization of the fraught self towards death as a means of recapturing affect that the narrative's opening suggests. Instead of resulting in a return to a kind of ethical life, that sacrifice presupposes in its acting-out, however, the text suggests that Tyler and the narrator have, in fact, not separated but, rather, have merged in a perverse resubjectivising process – the self, here, *becomes* Other, and re-makes history, even if only on the level of the personal.

At the conclusion, the analytic confrontation between the narrator and his therapist mirrors the antagonism between the discourse of fight club and the social to which it responds. Here, the social Other, and the symbolic structures that it governs are assimilated into the infirm and feminized representation of the support groups that the narrator had engaged as restitutive possibility at the start of the text:

I've met God across his long walnut desk with his diplomas hanging on the wall behind him, and God asks me, “Why?”

Why did I cause so much pain?

Didn't I realize that each of us is a sacred, unique snowflake of special unique specialness?

Can't I see how we're all manifestations of love?

I look at God behind his desk, taking notes on a pad, but God's got this all wrong.

We are not special.

We are not crap or trash, either.

We just are.

We just are, and what happens just happens.

And God says, "No, that's not right."

Yeah. Well. Whatever. You can't teach God anything. (198)

The dialectic of analysis, as it is here configured, is no uni-dimensional exchange between the master and his slave. Rather, the narrator hijacks the discourse from the authority of the analyst, not out of a sense of rivalry – a desire to usurp the ostensive power of the analyst³⁹ – but in order to expose the essential meaninglessness of the review. The analyst is ironically figured in terms of the debilitated "God" of the narrative – that bored absence that Tyler desired to replace. The narrator, thus, plays with the dialogue, and, in the end, argues for a "nothing" – not a "nothing" in the sense of a cataclysmic disappearance, but, instead a return to the specter of stasis, "what happens just happens," that provoked his initial psychotic rupture. If the subject is, in turn, "nothing" but his speech then the narrator reveals his own self-stoppage in the discourse of apathy that he relates to the analyst.

The text thus opens itself up to the possibility of Tyler's return with the failure of the narrator's symbolic restructuring through analysis. The ideal subject of the therapist, that

³⁹ For Lacan, "the analyst intervenes concretely in the dialectic of analysis by pretending he is dead" (*Écrits* 140). This intervention is accomplished "either by his silence when he is the Other with a capital 'O', or by annulling his own resistance when he is the other with a small 'o'. In either case, and under the respective effects of the symbolic and the imaginary, he makes death present" (140).

“sacred, unique snowflake of special, unique, specialness” exists in radical discontinuity with the narrator’s *laissez-faire* articulation of self and agency. Knowledge and reality, and the subjective identities that cohere within these categories, are exposed as mere contingencies, as variable effects of particular forms of training and experience. The analyst, here, cannot claim any “authority” to these registers over the patient, both discourses, in their fundamental disjunction with each other, exhibit their own “special” and “unique” pathologies. There is no reconciliation with the Other that the dialogue between the analysand and the analyst substantiates, there is only ever a series of missed connections.

Chapter Six – The Apocalyptic “End(s)” of Transgression

Instead of sounding himself as to his “being,” he does so concerning his place:

“Where am I?” instead of “Who am I? For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh.

(Kristeva, Powers 8)

The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency. (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 7-8)

The doorway is a particularly ambiguous spatial phenomenon – that confusion of both direction and boundary that, if only momentarily, disorients the body as it passes through the margins of the frame. The “opening” that effects an ephemeral blurring of inside/outside, towards/away, entering/exiting constitutes, as its by-product, an almost undetectable state of nothingness – of transparency – in the subject. The “opening” of the doorway is an aphanistic site – here is where the subject fades, over there, past the opening, is where it may, once again reappear.

I wish to turn, here, to the notion of apocalyptic “openings,” and how they function to both structure the terminal landscape, as well as to identify the subjects that occupy its shifting corridors. As Pippin notes in Apocalyptic Bodies, “the opening is perhaps the scariest part of all” (77). “Openings,” within the apocalyptic scheme “speak,” and, in a sense, what issues from these “mouths” are monstrous, whether the opening is sacred or profane. “Revelation” is an occurrence of the “opening,” and as such, manifests itself as its own end – the entrance is always already its own exit.

The symbolic doubling back upon itself that the “dis-closure” gestures toward, can be seen in the perverse effects of the unsealing of the scrolls that instantiates the apocalypse of *Revelation*. To “open,” here, is aligned both with death, proper, as well as with the stratagem of the sacrifice: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (*Rev.* 5:9). Here, the “Root of David,” the bloodied Lamb, is enabled, through his sacrificial erasure from the symbolic, the power to “unseal,” to open up the symbolic, thus, to the very conditions of its own annihilation.

The language of the apocalyptic opening, the terminal “content” of the scrolls, is a language of abjection whereby what is announced is “[n]ot a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges” (Kristeva, *Powers* 38). Indicatively, apocalyptic reality is produced through the language of the scrolls in the moment that they speak. End discourse is that, thus, of the inhuman.

Every opening, in *Revelation*, is catastrophic – every broken seal facilitates the interpenetration of the Real into the Symbolic in order to “return” symbolic space to the terminal origin of its own non-being. The “seal,” in place, is the scar of the Real that marks the symbolic network – epitomised in the “scroll,” which literally writes the Real into existence and thus breaks the chain of signification with the opening of the scar/seal. Here, within the scheme of the apocalypse, the inarticulable is made manifest. Thus, every breach contains the condition of a correlative disappearance, as with the opening of the sixth scroll, from which rupture “[t]he sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (6:14). The human subject becomes, within the divine act of unsealing, inextricably trapped

within the death drive as he is produced, through the mechanics of the apocalypse, the object cause of the Other's desire.

One of the "ends" of apocalypse, thus, is the emergence of the Real into the space of its own posited semiotic foreclosure. This irruptive "deconstruction" is what *Revelation* understands as the first "death," that is, the erasure of the Symbolic from the constitutive registers of subjectivity. In the New Jerusalem, the subject is absorbed into the Logos, and there is, therefore, no need to symbolize, supplementarily, outside of the Symbolic itself. Thus, the articulation of *disclosure* produces its own lack at the level of the Real – a pathological play, which Selby abjectly narrates in his work.

The double bind of the apocalypse – its representational insistence upon the closure as an opening – articulates the paradox of the sacrifice that underwrites *Revelation's* apocalyptic scene more generally. As Derrida notes in *Glas*: "...the sacrifice recaptures with one hand what it gives with the other, and its account must be kept on a double register" (259). The telic realisation of desire that is implicit, correlatively, in the fulfillment of the apocalyptic narrative – in the human subject's absorption into the collectivity of the New Jerusalem – is countered by the loss of the very subjectivity, which he has just perfectly effectuated. Self-actualisation, within the apocalyptic complex, is the mechanics of its own dissipation, as Selby's Tralala and Georgette come to emblemize through the narrativisation of their own personal critical subjectivities.

The imaginary cartography of the apocalypse is a traumatic and monstrous territory, with its seas of blood (8:8) and abyssal shafts from which plagues and agonies emerge as representational excesses against the *parousia* of the New Jerusalem and its attendant collapse of those representational practices. Within the fulsome perfection of the end of historical, material reality that is instantiated by the New Jerusalem there is no desire, no representation. On the

periphery of the New Jerusalem, however, we are confronted with the exit wound of its full presence in the Abyss. Like Selby's Brooklyn waterfront, the Abyss of *Revelation* "contains" an anarchic proliferation of terminal abjection caught in a persistently recycled condition of self-unmaking. The conundrum, thus, of the entrance as exit, is the apocalyptic condition of the metastasizing of representation, itself as the Real penetrates the space of the Symbolic. The Abyss functions, in this instance, as a reciprocal extimacy to the New Jerusalem, as we can understand, according to Lacan, the structural relationship of the Real to the Symbolic, more generally.⁴⁰ The opening and the closure become, in the apocalyptic moment, indistinguishable from each other. This occasion of structural mimesis between the sacred and the profane (an effect of the deferral of the post-apocalyptic *parousia* of a consummated New Jerusalem, which we can only ever enduringly anticipate) is, in Selby's own "last exit," reproduced as the violent pornography of the formal symptom in its engagement with desire, and the escapes and incompletions, which desire inaugurates in the fraught subject.

A meditation on exiting "to" in Hubert Selby Jr.'s Last Exit to Brooklyn

The "exit," for those within the geographical and psychological space of Selby's Brooklyn, is a fallacy. It is, moreover, the essential aporia that underlies and defines the desire of the subjects of the novel. There is no compossibility here, no coherence or meaning, only the ironically overdetermined condition of the "dead end." The metaphor of "the exit," here, becomes a sealing up of the potentiality of signification – "the exit" is, after all, definitionally bound up with the notion of death and annihilation. Selby's Brooklyn is a scar on the symbolic field, a kind of localized trauma within which its subjects are incapable of fully constituting themselves.

⁴⁰ In Jacques Alain Miller's seminar "Extimacy," he elaborates upon Lacan's concept of the "extimate," and notes, further, that "the exterior is present in the interior. The most interior--this is how the dictionary defines 'intimate' (l'intime)--has, in the analytic experience, a quality of exteriority. This is why Lacan invented the term 'extimate'" (76).

These deadlocked bodies, within the text, take on the aspect of a monstrous repetition:

“Another night. Another drag of a night” (11). The “exit” and those liminal forms, which are, themselves, kinds of vacated personal thoroughfares, function as traces – they are seductive, dissipative, and ultimately thwarted, as well as thwarting. As the narrative “progresses,” both bodies and text unravel – the artifice of interaction with the social ultimately collapses until there is, paradoxically, “nothing” but the Real, in all its retrospective, non-immediate, “full” presence.

Selby’s text, is divided into five structural parts and a concluding “coda,” each section is prefaced by an informing quotation from the Old Testament, and are integrated, primarily, through their commonality of scene, as well as in their microscopic detailing of the dejects who function at the literal margins of the city-scape – Brooklyn’s waterfront. Selby’s concern with the boundaries of the social and, indeed, with the limits of subjective experience are charted through the tragic progression of his characters in their almost unbearable pushing up against the Real. Selby’s world, in *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, is abjectly configured – it dislocates, it unstructures, as much as it assumes those perverse and mysterious qualities of the “disappeared” first earth from *Revelation*. The “first” that turned from the apocalyptic face of God, finds its mimetic resonance in Selby’s Brooklyn.⁴¹

⁴¹ As Julia Kristeva remarks of the abject:

If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject. The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. (5)

The first earth, similarly, experiences the horror of its own essential fragmentation in the very conferral of the apocalyptic moment upon its body. In response, it flees the sight of its imaginary fullness (the face of God), and retreats into the abjection of its own partitivity. Self-exile, within the parameters of apocalypse, is a pathological, as well as a revolutionary response to the recognition of the self as “not-whole,” it emulates Oedipus’ removal to Colonnus to think the origin of oneself into essential “non-being,” and thus escape the signifying and judging gaze of the Other.

In Part One, “Another Day, Another Dollar,” Ecclesiastes 3:19 warns us of the essential synchronicity of man and beast – our objective affinity condensed in the moment of our deaths, which elides all claims to difference.⁴² Here, we are confronted with the monstrously repetitive and instinctually barren condition of existence: “. . . they talked and walked, talked and walked . . .” (12). This continuum of stasis and apathy that inflects Vinnie’s gang is interrupted only by the moments of unmediated violence that the group initiates:

He tried to roll over on his stomach and cover his face with his arms, but as soon as he got to his side he was kicked in the groin and stomped on the ear and he screamed, cried, started pleading then just cried as a foot cracked his mouth . . . he tried to raise himself on one knee and someone took a short step forward and kicked him in the solar plexus and he fell on his side . . . gasping for air and blood in his mouth gurgled as he tried to scream, rolled down his chin then spumed forth as he vomited violently and someone stomped his face into the pool of vomit and the blood whirled slightly in arcs . . . (Selby 17)

The beating of the soldier by Vinnie’s gang, recorded as 29 lines of unpunctuated narrative, broken only by the entry of the police into the scene, effectuates an exhausting self-referentiality between text and event – a hyper-coding of unbounded “barbarity” that accedes the subject, and the language that underpins him, to his own abjection. The “law” in this scene, and as it will continue to “malfunction” throughout Selby, is perverse, and in its perversity is symmetrized not with a particularly recognizable order, but rather, to the anarchy of subjectivity to which it is attached. The police do not punish, in Selby, but enforce, in place, a return to the stultifying stasis of existence that the text preoccupies itself with: “The cops drove away and Freddy and

⁴² The epigram to Part One reads:

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 3:19)

the guys went back into the Greeks and the street was quiet, just the sound of a tug and an occasional car; and even the blood couldn't be seen from a few feet away" (19-20).

In Selby, as in Palahniuk, we are confronted with the dissipated signs of the subject that has wearied of himself. It is not incidental, as well, that both writers interest themselves not only with the criminal or abject potential of the subject, but with the gendered nature of the crisis that is precipitated in the slide into abjection. Selby's men are "beasts" in the apprehension of the apocalypticism of their own being:

My death advances toward me as the brink of the abyss, of utter impossibility. It outlines, in the outlying field of all that is possible in general, for anyone, an expanse of what is yet possible for me. It also reveals, under my feet, resources available to me. The acute sense of my mortality thus illuminates for me an expanse of possibilities possible for me. At the same time the anxiety that throws me back upon myself makes me feel what is unrealized in me, the potentialities and powers that are in me and have remained in suspense. Hence the sense of my vulnerability, contingency, mortality is also the sense of my being, my powers, my singularity. (Lingis, "To Die With Others" 108)

Lingis' theorization of the appropriation of the Real by the perverse subject is, in Selby, transformed into the manifesto of a kind of cult of abject masculinity that circulates throughout Last Exit to Brooklyn. Whereas in Lingis, via Heidegger, it is through the coming to the limits of existence that "life" is brought into being, within Selby, existence and subjectivity, particularly male subjectivity, is always already terminally compromised. The power that is attained through the encounter with death, through the abject, forms, for the male psyche, an undeliverable rupture. Masculinity, here, seeps. Possibility, through contact with the Real, is not the possibility of coming to being, but rather the securing of some glimmer of affect to which

the subject is closed off from within the context of the narrative. Pain becomes the operative mode of the deject in Selby, as it also manifested itself in Palahniuk. To “know” the Real, here, is not to “know” the self, but to *feel* it – an unbounded *jouissance*.

The Apocalypse of (Wo)man

The potential to mobilize the apocalyptic “opening” for one’s own purposes, for the constitution of a “singularity” within a culture of effacement, is ironically, engaged only by the posited “women” of the text: Georgette and Tralala. The engagement of the “women” with the debased Phallic order of Selby’s universe, operates in marked contrast to the ritualized aping of “Masculinity” that is effected by the male figures in the text. Georgette’s part-history that is recounted in the second section, “The Queen is Dead,” centers itself around her terminal desire for the gangster Vinnie, who, in his hyper-masculinity is as explicitly threatening to the coherence of the symbolic register as Georgette is in her trasvestistic queerness:

Georgette was a hip queer. She (he) didn’t try to disguise or conceal it with marriage and mans talk . . . but, took a pride in being a homosexual by feeling intellectually and esthetically superior to those (especially women) who weren’t gay (look at all the great artist who were fairies!); and with the wearing of womens panties, lipstick, eye make-up . . . and the occasional wearing of a menstrual napkin. (23)

Georgette’s masquerade *as* woman, is, here, formulated as an integral component of her performance of queerness. For Georgette, the *travesty* of identity lies in its submission to the heterosexual imperatives of the symbolic, not in the play of gender and representation, more generally, that her adoption of the signs of “femaleness” may suggest. The antinomies of identity to itself, are always already *confirmed* within the abject spaces of drug addiction and prostitution which inflect both Georgette and Tralala within Selby’s narrative. *To be*, within the textual horizon of Last Exit, is an ambiguated state as the subject is operative, here, only in the

context of the experience of the perpetual irruption of the Real into the Symbolic, proper.

The self is, consequently, inherently annihilative, always on the fringes of being. As Joan Copjec notes: *“male and female, like being, are not predicates, which means that rather than increasing our knowledge of the subject, they qualify the mode of the failure of our knowledge”* (212).

Georgette’s misogyny, in fact, in terms of her engagement with the masquerade, creates a secondary point of sexual slippage in the field of representation as it mirrors both the tropes of a “masculine” consciousness, which figures “woman” within the category of a voided subjectivity, as well as entering Georgette into the clichéd “company of women” who, in their violent competition for recognition by the (male) subject *turn* against each other in the desire to gain the point of privilege within the social compositing of sexual relations. In the language of the deject, Georgette’s, and for that matter, the text’s, concern is not so much with “who” she is, but, rather, “where” she is. For Georgette, her spatial location either secures or threatens her within the text.

Georgette *as* this “unknowable” and ambivalently situated boundary subject is elaborated by the non-linear, hyper-reality of her existential experience, more generally:

Her life didn’t revolve, but spun centrifugally, around stimulants, opiates, johns (who paid her to dance for them in womens panties then ripped them off her; bisexuals who told their wives they were going out with the boys and spent the night with Georgette (she trying to imagine they were Vinnie)), the freakish precipitate coming to the top.

(24)

As with the articulation of her sexual identity, Georgette exists as a counter-formation – the precipitate or condensation of a persistently violent social horizon. Georgette’s is subjectivised, here, only ever through a kind of process of the dissimulation of the other: through the artificial realities produced through the drugs, through the mis-identities of johns, and, finally, in

Georgette's fantasy of Vinnie, which she maintains as so intricately developed and repeated that it could "almost [be] carr[ied] over to consciousness" (24).

In her fundamental alienation from both the self and the social, Georgette can, perversely, come close to bringing desire into the "real," and thus actualize the fantasy that founds the core of her marginal being. In the spaces of masculine or of the social, Georgette's "dream," as well as her identity, however, is exposed as sites of dangerous incompleteness and subject to erasure by phallic order:

It wasn't fear of being rebuked or hit by him (that could e developed in her mind into a lovers quarrel ending in a beautiful reconciliation) that restrained her, but she knew if done in the presence of his friends (who tolerated more than accepted her, or used her as a means to get high when broke or for amusement when bored) his pride would force him to abjure her completely and then there would not only be no hope, but, perhaps no dream. (24-25)

Georgette's fear resolves itself not in the condition of Vinnie's physical rejection of her desire, but, rather, in the abstract possibility of the recognition that her desire is, in fact, *not* the desire of the Other, but, rather that which is produced always within the scheme of mis-identification and thus, always a failed desire. In the "presence" of Vinnie's friends, at the Greeks, or in the space of her *home*, which is violently divided between mother and brother, Georgette's series of masquerades are made the malfunctioning conditions of the failure of her desire to achieve itself – her "essential" maleness, here, is always exposed. It is only in the protected and affirming space of Goldie's apartment, in the company of her *own women*, that the potential for the actualization of her love for Vinnie is allowed to proceed with any kind of genuine intent, and with any kind of possibility of consummation.

Georgette's desire, as she points out, is not one that produces itself as purely sexual, it is, rather, the desire for connection, for the ideals of "beauty" and "romance," "where love was born of affection, not sex" (50) and *where* she and Vinnie might "just stand complete with and for each other not as man and woman or two men, not as friends or lovers, but as two who love" (50). Desire, here, is for a perfect sublimity of experience "in a world of beauty, a world where there wasn't even a memory of johns or punks, butch queens or Arthurs, just the now of love" (50). As Lacan states " . . . love demands love. It never stops demanding it. It demands it . . . *encore*" (Encore 4).

Georgette's death, at the conclusion of Part Two, proceeds from a series of apperceptions that she makes not only in regard to the impossibility of her desire to fully "have" Vinnie, but, as well, in her recognition of the annihilative content of sexual difference that is focalized through the figure of Goldie's female companion Rosie:

. . . Georgette looked up and her eyes cleared as she saw the sick look in Harry's eyes as he looked at Rosie's snatch. Her legs were raised and she rested her head on her knees staring at a spot on the rug waiting, as always, for Goldie to speak and she would jump. Georgette turned her head and tried to think the Bird back into her mind, but she slowly turned her head back, unable to ignore Rosie, or avoid thinking about her. Rosie had always been more than taken for granted – she had never been thought of. Not even as a demented human, but as a scooper: someone to scoop up the empties; to buy the bennie; to meet the connection . . . Georgette looked at the spot on the rug, then back at Rosie's face. Who was Rosie? What? Did she think? What did she feel? She must feel something or why would she stay with Goldie? Had she ever loved? Was she ever loved? Could she love? (50-51)

Rosie's external "sign" of her sexual difference, her "snatch," draws and records the perversely analytical gaze of the male subject who marks her "authenticity" as sexual object out through the revelation of her genitals. Georgette's supplementary gaze, here, is queered, as she perceives Rosie's "difference" through the mediation of Harry's look. The production of identity, here, through a process of multiplied indirection creates, for Georgette, a point of subjective affinity with Rosie who, in her "essential" femaleness is posited as a body and self under threat from the regime of primal masculinity, the "rough trade" that Georgette and her friends desire. Georgette's point of captivation, here, moves from the "snatch" that is so integral to the phallic gaze to that indeterminate and mysteriously signifying "spot" outside of the gendered and sexualized body that Rosie affixes to.

The triangulation of the gaze that is constructed in this scene, in which Georgette "knows" Rosie through the marking of Harry's line of sight, is complicated by that invisible "spot," which lies, significantly, outside of the primary scopic figuration. It is here, in this "third" space, which evades signification that Georgette locates a moment of affinity with Rosie:

Did she ever long for love??? An analogy started to form and Georgette had to fight it, she had to fight before it defined itself or she would not be able to ignore or deny it. She popped more bennie and gulped gin. She almost puked from the gin and in panic lit a cigarette and sat still, smoking, until the nausea passed (the analogy becoming fainter) . . .
.. (51)

If Rosie is, indeed, a kind of mathematical sum zero within the heterosexual economy of desire, "whereas in fact *woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole* – woman's sexual organ is of no interest except via the body's *jouissance*" (Lacan, Encore 7), then Georgette's identity, as she conceives, by "analogy," is concurrently suspect. It is appropriate that Georgette's only recourse, in this moment of identification, is to attempt to close the representational chain

through the bennies and the gin, which make her want to *vomit* until “the analogy” fades.

The abject process of recognizing oneself as that “lack,” that “not whole,” demands the detour of the supplement, which obfuscates the gap in Georgette’s own self-construction and knowledge.

The dissimulation of the lack, that Georgette practices, is, however, always already compromised by its hysterical production. The questions that Georgette asks *of* Rosie are essential questions of *herself*—in an interrogative of panic that reaches its axiomatic realization in Georgette’s death at the finale of the section. Vinnie’s repudiation of Georgette’s desire for his “love,” that precipitates her self-undoing, pierces the veil of her fantasy and reveals her self to be a site of abjected discontinuity in relation to her ideational manufacture of their intimacy.

When Vinnie and Harry “fuck” Lee, and thus authorize, against Georgette, the content” of her desire, Georgette becomes overwhelmed by the annihilative “momentum of the centrifuge” (73), within which she apperceives that Vinnie will only ever be the representative of her aporia of being. Georgette is utilized, here, by Vinnie, as a secondary sexual object – she fucks him by proxy, through her fellatio, tasting, feeling, and smelling Lee’s “shit” on him, as she desperately attempts to recoup the integrity of her fantasy from within the ruins of her abjection:

Why didnt he kiss me? If he would only let me kiss him. She looked at her slacks and the small hole in one leg, running her finger tips over the scab on her calf. Dance Ballerina Dance. Dreams? Now? When? When? I had him. I *did* have him. He didnt fuck her. Smell, feel, taste . . . It was n the bed. From Harry. It was right. It is beautiful. It was what I wanted. It is . . . is . . . I had him. Vinnie. Again. She tried to scrape the scab off the wound, sticking her fingernail under the edge, but only a tiny piece broke loose; she felt the slime of puss and tried to tear the scab loose with one quick rip . . . her hand wouldnt move. It hurt. Pained . . . She covered the wound with her hand and took a syrette from the drawer, found a vein in her arm then put her hand back on her leg. And

it was now. Now. It wasn't yesterday and it isn't tomorrow . . . but there will be a tomorrow and there will be dreams . . . fulfilled . . . fulfilled . . . no it wasn't . . . It was Harry. Vinnie has me. Anytime . . . yes anytime . . . But Rosie is different . . . it's not the same . . . (76)

The failure of the consummation of Georgette's desire, here metaphorized in her worrying of the scab covering the wound that Vinnie had inflicted on her at the beginning of the narrative, catalyzes Georgette's terminal breakdown of self. Georgette's collapse into the enigmatic question of Rosie, and her own erasure of subjectivity, becomes the apocalyptic moment, the "now" of Georgette's aphanisis. Inasmuch as the scar is reopened to reveal the "hole" at the core of her being, there is produced the concomitant impossibility of Georgette to signify herself as anything other than an equivocity within the perverse field managed by and through her idealization of Vinnie, as, in fact, the correlatively ideal horizon of her self.

In the process of attempting to reformulate her desire, in the wake of her terminal revelation, Georgette discards the masquerade and seeks to construct, in its stead, a "now" of subjective authenticity within the entropic remains of her fantasy: "Vinnie? It was Harry . . . No. No, I won't have to go in drag. We will defy them all, and love . . . Love. And we will be loved. And I will be loved" (77). The final articulation of her self is the removal of the sartorial mask that Georgette understands *makes* her desire conformable to the desire of her Other. In the absence of *womanliness as masquerade*, for Georgette, there is, consequently, neither being nor meaning:

Love Vinnie . . . blowing love . . . no NO! O God no!!! Vinnie loves me. He loves me.
It.

Wasn't.

Shit (79)

In the cataclysm of self, even Georgette's narrative is deprived of terminal signification.

Selby's refusal to punctuate her final articulation extends the fantasy into the Real from the ostensible symbolic within which Georgette was only ever marginally participatory. As with Tralala, the peripheral subject, marked by its material as well as linguistic or psychic ambivalences and traumas, is always already implicated in the chiasma of the "exit" that subtexts their histories, more generally.

In Part IV, Tralala operates as a symptomatic counterpoint to Georgette. Whereas, however, Georgette seeks self-actualization through love, Tralala becomes "love's" perverse corollary in her submission to her own object status within the economy of the heterosexual relation that Selby's text establishes:

Tralala was 15 the first time she was laid. There was no real passion. Just diversion. She hungout in the Greeks with the other neighborhood kids. Nothin to do. Sit and talk. Listen to the jukebox. Drink coffee. Bum cigarettes. Everything a drag. She said yes. In the park. 3 or 4 couples finding their own tree and grass. Actually she didnt say yes. She said nothing. Tony or Vinnie or whoever it was just continued. They all met later at the exit. (93)

In the abject monotony of being that defines her context, Tralala secures the illusion of power and agency through her own abnegation; through her own particularized instantiation of the masquerade that Georgette engages. Tralala's adoption of the tropes of femininity in her sexual apathy and in her silences – in her "nothingness" – becomes the ironic practices of her own self-knowledge. There is a kind of armouring effect at work in Tralala's studied disinterest in the engendering processes which bind her to the social of Brooklyn's waterfront that is absent in Georgette's profound vulnerability to the precariousness of her own symbolic position: "Tralala didn't fuckaround. Nobody likes a cockteaser" (93).

Tralala's utilization of her body, of her "tits," for her economic and psychic survival is implicated in the same logics of violence that inform the "masculine" subject in Last Exit to Brooklyn. The bodies of the Brooklyn dejects, and their performances, are self-parodic in their hyperbolic enactments of the primal conceits of gender. To fuck and fight are the instinctual propulsions of Selby's apocalyptic subjects:

Theyd make the rounds of the bars and spot some guy with a roll. When he left theyd lush him. Sometimes Tralala would set him up. Walk him to a doorway. Sometimes through the lot. It worked beautifully. They all had new clothes. Tralala dressed well. She wore a clean sweater every few days. They had no trouble. Just stick to the seamen. They come and go and who knows the difference. Who gives a shit. They have more than they need anyway. And whats a few lumps. They might get killed so whats the difference. (94)

Tralala instantiates a subjective inertia without any gesture towards context or meaning. In Last Exit to Brooklyn the structural relations, which may be seen as ways to mark out the positions of subjects within the text, are highly ambivalent – they are arbitrary and incomplete affiliations without appeal to any real kind of generative or stabilizing conditions. Victim and tormentor exchange their representational sites, here, with a kind of destituted oscillation of power without knowledge: "Who gives a shit . . . whats the difference."

The graduation from indifferent sex with the boy gangs for "sociality" and status to the grifting of sailors as a means to material "self-sufficiency" institutes, in turn, Tralala's trajectory towards self-annihilation. Tralala, in the end, "fails," despite her armouring, for precisely the same reason as Georgette – her inability to translate her desire beyond the "now:"

Time passed – months, maybe years, who knows, and the dress was gone and just a beatup skirt and sweater and the Broadway bars were 8th avenue bars, but soon even

these joints with their hustlers, pushers, pimps, queens and wouldbe thugs kicked her out and the inlaid linoleum turned to wood and then was covered with sawdust and she hung over a beer in a dump on the waterfront, snarling and cursing every sonafabitch who fucked her up and left with anyone who looked at her or had a place to flop. The honeymoon was over and still she pulled the sweater tight but there was no one there to look . . . and she flopped from one joint to another growing dirtier and scabbier. (108)

Tralala's degeneracy becomes marked through the acceleration of her removal from even the margins of social recognition. Outside of a determining and signifying gaze, even a perverse one, Tralala is incapable of maintaining the fiction of her self. In the abject economy of desire that circulates, here, Tralala is pure remainder. As she advances towards her end, not only is she disarticulated by the social, but, as well, she is incapable of producing herself as anything other than an exaggerated and abject moment of loss.

As the terminal body-in-pieces, the staging of Tralala's gang rape and abandonment in "the lot," which figures as one of the loci of her directed violences throughout the text, asserts, here, a kind of final desubjectivizing moment – the ironic "fulfillment" of her drive towards abjection. In its grotesque pantomime of Tralala's loss of virginity that opens the section, the gang rape invokes both the atrocity of the subject as it comes up against the Real, as well as reminds us of the metonymic affiliation between man and beast that Selby's text commences with. Tralala's own section opens with an excerpt from the Song of Solomon:

I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

Song of Solomon 3:2,3

The burlesque intertexts of the songs of erotic love with Tralala's essential alienation from affect, also charts a genealogy between Part One's epigram from Ecclesiastes, also believed to have been written by Solomon, but expressing, not the lust of youth, but, rather, the cynical disaffectation of age. In their self-reflexivity, Tralala's "story" partakes of a microcosmic rewriting of a Fall within a Fall within an always already debased "nature." For Tralala, there is no originary point of innocence from which to construct an ethics of subjectivity – all is a product of a pathological discourse that can only write itself as a series of conditions of its own absences.

As Tralala's history suggests, the abject self is a gaping "exit" wound in the field of the symbolic. Her "singularity" is, thus, derived from the perverse estrangement of her *self* from the violent machineries of power that seek to objectify her from *outside* of herself. Tralala, *strangely*, subverts the desire of the Phallic order by always already partaking of her self as the sublimated object-agent of its hystericized social as the Symbolic comes up against the Real:

. . . 10 or 15 drunks dragged Tralala to a wrecked car in the lot on the corner . . . and yanked her clothes off and pushed her inside . . . and Tralala drank beer while being laid and someone asked if anyone was keeping score and someone yelled who can count that far and Tralalas back was streaked with dirt and sweat and her ankles stung from the sweat and dirt in the scrapes from the steps and sweat and beer dripped from the faces onto hers but she kept yelling she had the biggest goddamn pair of tits in the world . . .

(113)

Within the terms of the drunks' chain of signification, Tralala only ever "exists" in a kind of substitutive analogy with the ruined and wrecked objects that compose their primal scene, more generally. Her "use-value" is abjectly determined, in turn, by the violence implicit in the *stopping up* of those inarticulable gaps of being that her very presence disruptively reveals.

Inasmuch as she traumatically voices her own reduction to part-object, Tralala uncovers the fundamental “reality” of loss that underpins, clearly, not only her “self,” but, as well, mirrors and answers to that of her rapists, as well. Tralala’s ostensive participation in her own apocalyptic “end,” delineates a broader terminality of being within Selby’s text.

Tralala, as simultaneously terminal subject and its object, discloses herself as the catastrophic symptom *par excellence* of drive in the absence of desire.⁴³ Here, in the rape, there is no interpretive process, but only, and always already, base construction in all its discursive exhaustion:

. . . more came 40 maybe 50 and they screwed her and went back on line and had a beer and yelled and laughed and someone yelled that the car stunk of cunt so Tralala and the seat were taken out of the car and laid in the lot and she lay there naked on the seat and their shadows hid her pimples and scabs and she drank flipping her tits with the other hand and somebody shoved the beer can against her mouth and they all laughed and Tralala cursed and spit out a piece of tooth and someone shoved it again and they laughed and yelled and the next one mounted her and her lips were split this time and the blood trickled to her chin and someone moped her brow with a beer soaked handkerchief and another can of beer was handed to her and she drank and yelled about her tits and another tooth was chipped and the split in her lips was widened and everyone laughed and she laughed and she drank more and more and soon she passed out and they slapped her a few times and she mumbled and turned her head but they couldnt revive her so they

⁴³ Žižek’s elaboration of drive as a form of “acephalic” knowledge, through Lacan, is relevant to my situation of Tralala within her own constructing narrative. Žižek notes: “This knowledge involves no inherent relation to truth, no subjective position of enunciation – not because it dissimulates the subjective position of enunciation, but because it is in itself, nonsubjectivized, or ontologically prior to the very dimension of truth” (“Desire” n.pg.).

continued to fuck her as she lay unconscious on the seat in the lot and soon they tired
of the dead piece and the daisy chain brokeup . . . (113)

The obscene oscillation between the reinvocation of Tralala's youthful "beauty," through her masking by the shadows of the seat to which her self is objectively bound in its metonymic functioning, and her progressive dismemberment creates a profound rupture in the symbolic as it comes face to face with the apocalyptic crisis of its abjection. In this landscape, however, in contradistinction to the paradigm outlined in *Revelation*, there is only wasteland and abyss, without promise of either redemption or paradise. Beauty is essentially *diseased*, misrecognized and, thus, outside of the possibility of sublimity, as it is, fundamentally, here, a categorical impossibility.

The self, deprived of any "substance," and objectified out of any metaphysics, assumes the debilitated status of the "things" that surround it. For the rapists, Tralala is merely one available object to fill the "void," and, as such, she is marked as exchangeable, secondary, and inseparable from the wreckage to which she is consigned. Thus, Tralala becomes the "dead piece," another vandalized "mass" on the surface of the lot upon which

. . . the kids who were watching and waiting to take a turn took out their disappointment on Tralala and tore her clothes to small scraps put out a few cigarettes on her nipples pissed on her jerkedoff on her jammed a broomstick up her snatch then bored they left her lying amongst the broken bottles rusty cans and rubble of the lot. (114)

In her incontrovertible, effacing "silence," which perversely echoes her sexual initiation scene, Tralala becomes, finally, and paradoxically, the "ideal" of signification in her very erasure from its field. Inasmuch as her body, throughout the text, functions as a stage for the playing out of male fantasies, Tralala is, as well, the internalized resistance to these symbolizing operations. The thanatic character of Tralala's *erotisme*, and, indeed, of her existence, in general, compels

the dissolution of the symbolic enterprise, mimetically gestured towards in the very “failure” of her body to preserve itself in the face of its abjection.⁴⁴

Unlike the Sadean victim who remains “intact” throughout the fantasy, Tralala epitomizes Selby’s deconstructive agenda in her mirroring both of the dis-ease of a social absented from the regulatory prescriptions of the Law, as well as in her interior monologic frustrations with the desire of *her* victims to speak, thus disrupting what is for Tralala the logical relational equation between the two pathological positions – in their sexual exploitation of Tralala, the “victims” must accede to their victimhood: “. . . Tralala stomped on his face until both eyes were bleeding and his nose was split and broken then kicked him a few times in the balls. Ya rotten scumbag . . . Just another fuckin doggie. And anyway he deserved it” (97). We are reminded, throughout, that, in Selby’s universe, there are no moral subjects. In the unavailability of Law, here, no transgression, proper, occurs, just as there is, as well, no transcendence in the apocalypse of

⁴⁴ Within this “topology of catastrophe” that Kristeva outlines in Powers of Horror, she proposes that:

. . . having provided itself with an *alter ego*, the Other no longer has a grip on the three apices of the triangle where subjective homogeneity resides; and so, it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through jouissance. . . . there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that “I” does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. (. . .). One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones.

(9)

In my reformation of Kristeva’s understanding of the abject, my own insistence on the overlap between object and abject, in this chapter, evolves from my consideration, in turn, of the lack of the “alter ego” of the Other within Selby’s universe. Selby, unlike Palahniuk, does not erect an identifiable *père-version* in place of the absent Father, but rather, investigates a “Culture,” in sympathy with Acker’s dreamscapes, that has rejected both the “Other,” as well as its variations, however shadowy. We receive, thus, a “deject” that is perhaps, thus, doubly perverse in its posited unreferentiality. My conjoining of object and abject, here, at least in part, also speaks to Lacan’s notion of the abject as a “reminder” of its pre-Oedipal fulsomeness. The abject, thus, mobilizes and exploits the potential of the object in order to deliver its expression, as a string on a finger may “objectively” operate. This conceptual *vel* or space of the overlap that I hypothesize between the object and the abject is, of course, not so much consistent with the material presence of the “string,” but, rather, as it is of the dissipative effect of the “stain,” as the imbrication of the two registers might convey as the issue of their mutual ideational parasitism.

subjects and their bodies that is effected. There is, in its place an interminable existential “wavering” “for want of the ability to name an object of desire” (Kristeva, Powers 20). As Bataille suggests, the loss of the sacred precipitates the unrestrained expression of what is, otherwise, the necessary expression of “limited” transgression, as a buttressing of Law (Erotism 67-68).

The horror, which we “read through” Tralala is, itself, a way to maneuver ourselves, as readers, as “analysts,” of and through our own desire. Tralala’s humiliation, after all, must *mean* something. And if, in the end, Selby’s dejects creep back into the tedious circuit of their own existences, without guilt, without interpreting, themselves, the relation of the atrocity of their acts to their own being, the responsibility for the imposition of the “Last Judgment” is remitted to “us.” And when we *approach* justice, here, Selby reminds us, through his prefatory use of the Old Testament, that we must demand, thus, “an eye for an eye.”

Chapter Seven – Approaching Apocalypse: The Mobilization of the Terminal Subject

Finally, the anticipation of ending makes possible the fixing of ends. The sense of my death is the sense of ending, definitively and irrevocably. It gives me an inward understanding of termination, which combines every sense of goal and every sense of destination. The sense of one's life as a trajectory that casts itself with all its own forces unto its end makes action possible, where life casts some or all of its forces toward some term. (Lingis, "To Die" 107)

Thus we see that the critical question to be posed to Lacanian metapsychology, given its withering attack on the ego and its famous delusions, mystifications, and forms of false consciousness, is whether it can conceive of any authentic human agency that might resist and transform the Symbolic order. (Zeitlin 35)

The apocalyptic subject's relation to the terminal conditions of its body is not one of abstraction; it is, rather, an intimate and mutually informing association. The logics of disclosure that eschatologies narrate are explicitly performed on the bodies of the subjects that populate their textual universes – bodies, here, are plagued, transcendent, imperiled, rapturous and defiled in answer to the Other's evaluation (interpretation) of the content of their psychic lives. Far from collapsing into their own alienated condensations, the apocalyptic self *is* praxis, and if (s)he mystifies, or deludes, like Jezebel, the "false" prophet, it is precisely to produce that radical intervention into the strictures of the Symbolic that Zeitlin points to as a "political urgency."

Apocalypse's play with the psychoanalytic registers of the subject, indeed, moves distinctly away from what would be for itself a totalizing desire – the Real of the "end" is hardly an inviolate and fulsome "nature," it is, rather, partitive and compromised; the ideality of the New Jerusalem bounded and threatened by the seething remains of the Abyss. The subjects which

operate within the apocalyptic scene, to be sure, are sensitive to the despotism of the Other, the Logos that ostensibly catalyzes disclosure (knowledge/apocalypse), but, they are, importantly, as well, capable of functioning as “ethical” political agents outside of the desire of the Other. How each narrative under examination *realizes* these terms (ethics, politics) within its own counter-paradigm is, however, highly diversified and oftentimes problematically conceived if we understand, for example, ethics to proceed from a Kantian base of unconditionality and universality buttressed by a categorical imperative of “pure reason,” which, for instance, Acker would suggest is always already the structural fallacy of a disabling and disabled socius.

The logics of *disclosure*, which, as we have seen, conventionally underwrite apocalyptic texts, are subjected to a process of subversion in late twentieth-century transgressive literatures that point, not towards revelation, but, rather, to its absence. This rewriting of apocalypse as its own practice of deconstruction investigates, as the essential subtext of terminality, representations of truth and knowledge as they are produced through the Other/Logos, which ostensibly authorizes the movement of the apocalypse as a discursive as well as a material form. For all of the contemporary authors whose work was taken up in this dissertation, the categories of “truth and knowledge” are suspect constructions of a “Culture” bound to and by a compulsion towards homogeneity, and therefore, become the ideological “instruments” through which the alienation of the subject is effected. For Acker, thus, the State, and its phallogocentric institutional apparatuses work to “fix” the subject within an immobilizing symbolic. For Palahniuk and Ellis, analogously, the structures that Acker disassembles “fascinate” and imprison the “male” subject within a false consciousness that deprives him of his revolutionary potential. In turn, Selby’s texts occur within the abject “moment” of apocalyptic immanence that is instantiated when the Other removes himself from governance of the symbolic in the process of reinvesting His “chosen,” and enraptured, subjects within the sealed territory of the New

Jerusalem. For Selby, as with Acker, the radical possibility of the “abandoned” subjects becomes the point of critical departure for their apocalyptic considerations. Whereas, for Selby, terminal “existence” is implicated in the production of an unbridled and anarchic *jouissance*, Acker’s dejects seek to “reconstructivize” social experience and subjectivity outside of the Symbolic as the logical telos of deconstructive or apocalyptic practice.

The reformulation of the subject in his or her “becoming-apocalypse,” is charted out, interestingly, upon their bodies. The apocalyptic body, as it interprets the terminal condition of its subjectivity as somatic symptoms, performs what Baudrillard has termed the *hidden play of seduction*. The play of seduction, for Baudrillard, constructs an agonistics of the sign – a process not of de-signification, but, rather, of anti-signification, or meaning that “consumes” itself. Baudrillard’s linkage of “seduction” to the “charm” of the “apparent” involves a consideration of the “kept secret,” the invisible or occluded, which is a strategy of the apocalyptic body within the transgressive text. The apocalyptic body positions itself as a kind of secret that “challenges the order of truth and knowledge” (*Ecstasy of Communication* 64), because its own form of seduction operates to contest its “revelation,” or, the “disclosure” of its secrets – it reveals nothing. As Baudrillard suggests, “[s]eduction is not desire. It is that which plays with desire, which scoffs at desire” (67). The apocalyptic body is thus determined as a resistance to any form of interpretation that runs through the desire of the Other; it is a body that, in a sense, is irretrievable – except to itself.

This revalued apocalyptic subject, within Acker, Ellis, Palahniuk, and Selby, is formulated as “nomadic,” and hence evasive of the entrapments of normalizing (territorializing) representational practices. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, nomadic subjectivity is processural:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.).

But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence.

To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay.

A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*. (A Thousand Plateaus 380).

The nomad is little concerned with “origins,” and is, hence, “anti-Oedipal.” In this dislocation of the primacy of the Oedipal complex to the structuration of subjectivity, more generally, the nomadic subject of the apocalypse is able to formulate new categories of subjective being, that, however “perversely” manufactured, distribute to the terminal self this delirium of autonomy. For the nomad as he is becoming-apocalypse, creativity (the positivity of apocalypse) is found always already within the mode of crisis that conventional apocalyptic discourse seeks to limit and contain (within the prison house of the Abyss).

The nomad, here, encounters, in the process of its deterritorializing impulse, the conditions of the abject and its own counter-identity practices. As Kristeva outlines: “The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (Powers of Horror 8). For Kristeva, the *deject* is embedded in the “divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” (8) space of abjection, a space which, moreover, is *symptomatic* of the collapse between body and text. This collapse thus inaugurates a kind of perversion, or perverse act. The apocalyptic production of abject *interspaces* operates as planes of consummation between nomad and *deject* in their creative manipulations of the cultural memes of terminality and its subjects.

The eschatological text, and the apocalyptic bodies that it discursively generates, operate within the context of what Slavoj Žižek has called “our era of the ‘decline of Oedipus’, when the paradigmatic mode of subjectivity is no longer the subject integrated into the paternal law through symbolic castration, but the ‘polymorphously perverse’ subject following the superego injunction to enjoy” (*The Ticklish Subject* 248). As Žižek notes, the perverse subject is “the ‘inherent transgressor’ *par excellence*” (248), precisely because the “pervert” does not doubt; as Žižek phrases it, but because he rather “*knows* the answer (to what brings *jouissance* to the Other)” (248). There is no desire, here, for revelation, and it is this conceptual territory of *non-disclosure* that we may read as the alternatively *creative* agency of the contemporary apocalyptic subject.

I love the smell of napalm in the morning

Our “end” gesture, thus, and to appropriate Deleuze’s literary critical method, is to offer up the apocalypse as a kind of “symptomatology” of the human subject, proper, in all its terminal acquiescences and resistances to its symbolic and material fields of engagement. Inasmuch as eschatological narratives investigate (or diagnose), for example, the pathological processes of “misrecognition” in the coming to subjectivity, and its correlatively anxious production of desire through lack, they also isolate the “symptoms” of the production of the apocalyptic subject (his perversity, his hysteria), construct a prognosis (abjection, narcissism), and effect a treatment (the integration of the subject with, finally, the desire of the Other), we can begin the process of reevaluating apocalypse, as well as its multiplicitous subjects and narratives, as “positivities” or “becomings” against its historically reproduced “negative” symptomizations.

Coda

The apocalypse is, above all, a specular, as well as a transformative discourse, which reproduces itself as both a synchronic and diachronic effect even as it proclaims its very moment of consummation – what memetics understands as apocalypse’s propensity to culturally repeat, however differentially. This ostensive generic “end of history” is not, in this case, unproblematic, nor is it either absolute or realised. Apocalypse memes “drift,” that is, they initialise what I term, in my introduction, a “categorical perversion” of their discursive legacy.

The opportunity thus elicited by these “misdirections” in the communication of apocalypse over time affords readers of the “end” the ability to charter and thus mobilize terminal narratives as one mode by which the human subject’s phenomenological relation to being-in-the-world might be traced over time. Far from positing an abstract consideration, apocalyptic *dasein*, is a reflection of the situated body and its ability to produce structures of meaning through which it seeks to understand itself as a constitutive reciprocity, however anxious. An apocalyptic hermeneutics would thus seek to concern itself with the politics of the subject in its ethical encounters with the other (Other), inasmuch as the apocalypse is both an ontological as well as epistemological process of inquiry and representation.

What my project requests of both itself and its other(s) at its own conclusion is, thus, to effect what Glyn Daly has termed “possibiliz[ing] the impossible.” This ethico-political imperative is transformative, as opposed to stagnant, it is progressive and attuned to the potential for radical cultural critique that apocalypse, as a series of dynamic social narratives, affords. The anxiety embedded in narratives of terminality – of the panic-stricken body, of the aphanistic subject – simultaneously engage both the symbolic and material conditions of the self in its confrontation with the oftentimes traumatic relations of intersubjective experience. Apocalypse, perhaps,

requires us to gaze long into our own proverbial abyss, and to not, thus, retreat from the abject return of our own look, as well as the gaze of the Other, however monstrous.

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