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In Defense of the Political: Housework and Policework in the Post-Civil Rights Era

DISSERTATION

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by

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DEDICATION

in memory of my father

Weaker and weaker, the sunlight falls
In the afternoon. The proud and the strong
Have departed.

Those that are left are the unaccomplished,
The finally human,
Natives of a dwindled sphere.

— Wallace Stevens (*“Lebensweisheitspielerei”*)

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues that concerns about labor, productivity, and social mobility are inextricable from anxieties about the gendered and racial reconfiguration of the reigning political reality as it was contested in the last years of the Civil Rights Movement and the decade after. This claim is supported through material analyses of films, congressional hearings, theoretical essays, and television broadcasts from the period (roughly 1967-1983). Methodologically, the work of analysis is informed by object relations theories of care and defense and political and social critique from the post-Marxist emancipatory tradition of critical theory. In contrast with more traditional studies of post-civil rights era literature, this dissertation sees its objects in relational terms as sites of facilitation and frustration where sociopolitical anxieties about the nation, the home, and the state of work are worked through — or not.

INTRODUCTION

“This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.”

— Hannah Arendt¹

“There is much more continuity between autonomically appropriate quanta and the waves of conscious thought and feeling than the impressive caesura of transference and counter-transference would have us believe.”

— W.R. Bion²

“The absolutely inward nature of matter, as it would have to be conceived by pure understanding, is nothing but a phantom [*Grille*]; for matter is not among the objects of pure understanding, and the transcendental object which may be the ground of this appearance that we call matter is a mere something of which we should not understand what it is, even if someone were in a position to tell us.”

— Immanuel Kant³

“Sensuous knowledge is a different kind of materialism, neither idealistic nor alienated, but an active practice or passion for the lived reality of ghostly magical invented matters. Sensuous knowledge is receptive, close, perceptual, embodied, incarnate. It tells and it transports at the same time. Sensuous knowledge is commanding: it can spiral you out of your bounds, it can hollow out, with an x-ray vision, the seemingly innocuous artifacts of the master. To experience a profane illumination is to experience a something to be done.”

— Avery F. Gordon⁴

¹ *Between Past and Future*, 13.

² *Two Papers: The Grid and Caesura*, 56.

³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, 286.

⁴ *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 205.

General Project Introduction

My dissertation began with a simple question: Why does the problem of civil rights in the United States force a reconfiguring of the way the state imagines its relationship to an insistently heterogeneous populace? Situating this question in the context of the post-civil rights era (roughly 1967 – 1983), I show the ways in which literature and film, both popular and minor, figure the structural violence of a nation whose hegemonic forms of social representation were in crisis. While scholars attentive to the historical context of civil rights and political reactionism often privilege a binary aesthetics in which a culture of hegemony is opposed to a counter-culture of resistance,⁵ I argue that, in its overdetermination, a novel or a film offers a space for the working through of political anxieties otherwise at odds with its aesthetic intent.⁶ Furthermore, this refusal

⁵ Much of the film and genre analysis of the 1970s and 1980s can be said to more or less abide by such a distinction — and I show several places where the work on melodrama, in particular, often insists on an almost ontological separation of popular and *true* art. One prominent example is the work of Laura Mulvey, whose canonical theory of the “male gaze” was applied with critical force to the category of “narrative cinema,” while her own work as an “experimental” filmmaker laid claim to a theory and praxis outside of and in resistance to the ideological norm. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), she writes, invoking the Brechtian influence that was prevalent in many of the early works of *Screen Theory*: “The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical film-makers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment” (844). This is not to call out Mulvey’s work, by any means, and much of the early film theory that was invested in ideology critique would eventually reckon with its problematic distinctions and (perhaps) utopian defenses. We might also note here Fredric Jameson’s attempt to evade this problematic and overcome the implicit binary of good art/bad art in his use of the concept of *allegory*. I will take a closer look at an example of his work from this period in the final chapter.

⁶ As I explain in the subsequent methodological introduction, I turn to the language and theory of object relations psychoanalysis to inform my analysis of objects so conceived.

to separate out the political (as well as the economic) and the aesthetic results in an understanding of *the cultural object* that sees it, primarily, as a site of facilitation and mediation.⁷ As a result, my objects include: television news broadcasts, feature films, documentary film, essays, and their source material (where relevant), but also congressional hearings, political philosophy, psychoanalysis, and genre theory. The point is not to read one from the first series of more traditional objects of cultural analysis *according to* the prescribed methods of those from the latter, although the methods of, say, psychoanalysis are often informative of the analytical perspective I bring to bear on, say, political and economic theory.⁸ As will become clear in the following chapters, I am as interested, for example, in the defensive and prescriptive desires that manifest in

⁷ Influenced by the work of Jacques Rancière, which is central to much of the work of this dissertation, Asma Abbas convincingly articulates the relational conception of these two supposedly disparate categories of experience/analysis. She writes:

In every pathos that we offer up to liberal society can be found a clue to our lost senses — senses that have lost their way, forgetting where to look, what to look for, how to smell, how the dead call on us, how being tickles, how freedom tastes, what love sounds like, what intimacy suffering allows and asks for, and where a memory enters us. The limits of the political, then, are not reliant on epistemic assessment but are experienced relationally and aesthetically as a question of the nature of our very being — the degree to which our senses contest the imposed modes of the presence and absence of suffering is the degree to which we are political. (4)

⁸ At its liberal origins, in the work of Adam Smith, for example, the discipline of political economy was as invested in questions of exchange, production, and profit as it was in matters of desire, conduct, and judgment. We do not need to ascend to the detailed study of the homologies of Freudian theories of mind and Marxian theories of production found in the work of Jean-Joseph Goux, for example, to understand the many ways in which the problem of *value* — or *evaluation*, perhaps more accurately — blurs the boundaries between interiority and exteriority.

theories of melodrama as I am in melodramatic works themselves. The question may inevitably arise then: *Why these specific objects?* If I want to look into post-civil rights cinematic representations of crime, why would I choose *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973) and not *The Godfather* (1972)? If I am undertaking something of an historical analysis, looking to the places where political conflict, social desire, and economic anxiety coalesce, how do I decide which objects are most representative of those phenomena with which I want to engage? In brief, all of the objects analyzed here are engaged — sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly — with the historically-specific *problem* of the concept of labor after civil rights; and, further, this problem must be understood in relation to the continued struggle against oppression and exploitation as it had manifested *at this time*. Housework, under-employment, policework, and the labor of crime, but also the production of legislative norms, the discursive labor of constructing an image of the nation, and the theoretical work of enforcing or disputing the reigning ontologies of political and social reality as they inform said image — these *problems* converge in the wake of a civil rights movement that reached a paroxysm of bodily expression in 1967 and 1968 in the form of the urban uprisings. What I find in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* that I do not find in *The Godfather*, then, does not constitute a judgment on the aesthetic or political *use-value* of one or the other — nor am I interested in resurrecting (or maintaining) the good art/bad art distinction I criticized above. In fact, these two contemporaneous crime films can both be said to *be about* the labor of crime. What most fascinates me, instead, is how the former escapes or frustrates so many of the generic constraints that still animate the latter; and not only *how* it does this but *what* forces and phenomena become visible when this happens. Something similar is happening in all of the films that are analyzed here. For example, *A Woman Under the Influence* and *Bless Their Little Hearts* both frustrate traditional avenues of melodramatic identification in ways that expose or — if this is not

a labor of critical unveiling, and I do not think it is — foreground those sites of conflict in their overdetermination by anxieties over politics, economics, race, gender, and their relation to an elusive conception of law and right in a nation whose structural *wrongness* had been called into question in such spectacular ways. At the same time, these films wrestle with the problem of labor in the United States, where the categories of *labor* and *value* can be seen to coalesce in assertions of moral prescription and social necessity, appearing here in the figures of the affectively-overwrought housewife and the under-employed patriarch. *Asking what gets to count as work also asks who gets to count as valued in a clearly impoverished ideology of domestic economy. Any honest answer to such questions only sets us up to ask: what are we to do with all of those who fall so clearly outside of this exclusive hierarchy of value organized around the historically-constituted category of the productive laborer.* My contention is that the federal response to the urban uprisings at the end of the 1960s, in its obvious anxieties over de-segregation and the reconfiguring of a manifestly exclusive system of political representation, illustrate how the democratic recognition of *actual* (which is to say, *institutionally enforced*) civil rights became entangled with worries about the implicitly exclusive structure of labor *as* value.

Returning to my initial question, there are several assumptions that I would like to emphasize before going further: first, it must be made clear what it means to say that civil rights is a “problem;” second, the very notion of a reconfiguring of the relationship between state and populace has consequences for the way we conceive the empirical content of the political; third, to what extent is the *insistence* on heterogeneity specific to this historical moment, and, if it is not, what about this moment is different — either in terms of how the insistence manifests or how *this* populace comprehends its particular difference. Civil rights is a “problem” when it forces a reigning and hegemonic conception of political democracy to contend with its inherent

contradictions and its structure of exclusion. The *problematic* of civil rights fits within the tradition of what Nick Hewlett calls the “emancipatory tradition” of post-1968 French political philosophy, exemplified in the work of Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, and Jacques Rancière. “By adopting the view that freedom is closely linked with freedom from oppression, advocates of the emancipatory tradition set themselves apart from liberals, who tend to conceive of freedom as absence from interference” (1). As will become clear, this project is indebted to the political theory of Balibar and Rancière. It might also be said, following Rancière, that one of the primary reasons civil rights is a problem is because it enacts — in theory and praxis, in speech and action — the confrontation between what he calls the *logic of the police* and *egalitarian logic*, a meeting “that is never set up in advance” (*Dis-Agreement* 32). By *police logic*, Rancière means a specific “order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise” (29).⁹ On the other hand, *egalitarian logic* gives rise to what he names *politics* as such, which is “antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration — that of the part of those who have no part” (29-30). I argue that the urban uprisings of 1967-1969, as an emphatic and material expression of the problem of civil rights, fulfill such a logic of the political in the endeavor to contest the reigning order of the visible/sensible and force a *re-ordering* of bodies and things. I will revisit this argument in detail in the first chapter, but it should be clear how this first assumption informs the second: namely, that any *political* — in the precise sense Rancière gives to this term — contestation of the order of what *can be* seen and said will have consequences for the way we

⁹ This conception of *police-as-logic* is integral to my analysis of policework in the third chapter, where I make use of this broader political philosophy to ground an aesthetic and empirical analysis of policing.

conceive the empirical content of the political. As for the third assumption implicit in my opening question, it is my contention that the material analyses of the films, hearings, essays, and broadcasts that follow will make clear how we are to understand, *contextually*, the shape and force of this historically-specific configuration of the heterogeneous populace. If I am successful, *this dissertation will show how concerns about labor, productivity, and social mobility are inextricable from anxieties about the gendered and racial reconfiguration of the reigning political reality as it was contested in the last years of the Civil Rights Movement and the decade after*. In Rancière’s terms, the post-civil rights era, as I understand it, was an exemplary moment for examining and analyzing the effects of a sustained and impactful clash between *police logic* and *politics*. Each of the three chapters of the dissertation engages with an aspect of this broader problematic.

Methodological Introduction — From Trauma to Defense

In an article largely concerned with the interpretive stakes of diagnosing psychological trauma in a clinical setting, Alan Bass poses the question: “Why does American psychoanalysis seem to have bypassed the civil rights movement altogether?” (274). After remarking on the readily available (even obvious) “description of transmission of trauma in second generation Holocaust survivors,” he asks why this “theory of unconscious processes [has not] been generalized to include racial persecution in the US” (275). Indeed, for some years, the literature of trauma studies¹⁰ — grounded in a reading of Freud’s early work on the “war neuroses” and his

¹⁰ See, for example, Balaev, Balint, Caruth, Comay, Cruz, Herman, LaCapra, and Sklar. In the volume, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Caruth, the category of “trauma” ascends to the status of a conceptual hermeneutic in itself, evident in the collection’s first entry, where Shoshana Felman asks: “Is there a relation between trauma and pedagogy?” (13).

later metapsychological theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* — focused almost exclusively on the Holocaust and its aftermath. In the years since Bass’s article, however, a number of academic works on the subject of trauma, slavery, and racism have taken up his question — notably, and more recently, Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory* and Gabriele Schwab’s *Haunting Legacies*.¹¹ At times, however, a designation of trauma often inaugurates a work on collective suffering as its categorical *sine qua non*, offering a descriptor of experiences otherwise deemed incapable of description: “traumatic” names both event and effect in its performance as disclaimer¹² and diagnosis. In much of the contemporary work that makes use of the concept of trauma, the psychoanalytic theory of the experience has often been abandoned in favor of methodologies more suited to the disciplinary origin of the study — whether sociological, clinical,

¹¹ In a sustained engagement with the Algerian revolution, Rothberg has made explicit the connections between “the Holocaust and colonialism,” a “solidarity” which had previously been separated and *institutionalized* “as autonomous realms of history and discourse” (267). Gabriele Schwab brings trauma theory into a more robust methodological framework that also draws on the psychoanalytic writings of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok and their use of such concepts as “psychic haunting” and “the crypt” (*Haunting Legacies* 4). In complicating the sociological image of trauma as a kind of metonymic designator of historical suffering, Schwab pursues a more nuanced analysis of the *cryptic* in the “[t]raumatic silences and gaps in language” that “express trauma otherwise shrouded in secrecy or relegated to the unconscious” (4).

¹² Jeffrey C. Alexander and Elizabeth Butler Breese open the edited collection, *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, with these lines: “This book deals with social suffering; with exploitation and violence; with war and genocide; the massacre of innocents; and intense and often gruesome religious, economic, ethnic, and racial strife. These formidable topics do not in themselves render our book distinctive. What distinguishes the contributions that follow is how they approach social suffering’s causes and effects.” (xi).

historical, or literary.¹³ Something of Freud's estimation of the experience remains, however, in the way that "trauma" acts as a placeholder for an event constituted by an excess of reality, where "reality," in a sort of concession to the Hobbesian vision of the world, is equated with suffering and injustice. In colloquial terms, we might speak of an experience that was, owing to its excessive degree of violence, *too much to process*, resulting in a subject who has been *traumatized*. As disclaimer and diagnosis, however, "trauma" more accurately describes the relational position of a subject outside of the violence in their perception of the victim of a traumatic event. Thus, in *trauma studies*, we often find ethnographic and historical accounts of those traumatized others, where the description provides not only a means to categorize often disparate experiences of collective suffering (ethnic cleansing and domestic violence, for example) but as a way of measuring the distance between the one who describes and the one who endures, between, in other words, the agent and the patient. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Elizabeth Butler Breese may exemplify this relation when they describe trauma as "cultural work" even as they adopt it as an interpretive framework for the study of "intense and often gruesome religious, economic, ethnic, and racial strife" (Eyerman, et. al. xiii, xi). We might ask, instead: What is the function of description in the work of a sociocultural analysis of trauma? How might we contextualize an event that, while it may ostensibly be described as traumatic, allows for the difference of individual experiences without losing sight of the impact of collective experience? Alexander and Breese pose as their response to such a question a focus on the cultural narrating of trauma, how it becomes a social representation and how that representative form bridges individual and collective experience. In their own words, they want "to trace the manner in which these [traumatic] causes and effects are

¹³ Alexander and Breese, for example, argue: "To transform individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work" (xiii). See, also, the sociological work of Ron Eyerman or the "healing focused" work of Joy DeGruy.

crucially mediated by symbolic representations of social suffering and how such a cultural process channels powerful human emotions” (xi). In this methodological introduction, I pose a different, albeit related, question: What happens when the perception of trauma, whether in the past or future, necessitates a response on the part of a subject (or community or nation) even where the capacity for response is outpaced by the demands of representation? Further, how might an analysis of discursive and aesthetic modes of representation account for this *response-ability*¹⁴ as that which articulates an appeal to an imagined collective and how those very modes call such a collective into being on behalf of its perceived imperative to respond? As I show, the collective figure of the urban police force in the American post-civil rights era is imagined and represented — just as it imagines and represents itself — as embattled by an almost quotidian experience of traumatic relation to the broader populace. In the pathologization of the nation’s poor, black others, the labor of *policework* makes use of the logics of trauma (with its *too-muchness* of the qualitatively *bad*

¹⁴ Looking back on the Los Angeles riots/rebellion of 1992, Nahum Dimitri Chandler asks: “How can we speak of the massive violence that preceded what has been called the rebellion or riots in the streets of Los Angeles? How can we speak of the violence of a beating that had occurred before it had occurred?” (1). Such questions “desediment” (his term) an otherwise established historical trajectory, opening up the interpretative (and experiential) primacy of causality as the measure of the truth of history *as* representation. “We cannot pretend to *speak* of these things,” he argues. “In the face of incommensurability — I call this entire ‘thing,’ long before the beating itself and yet to come, the *disaster* — in the face of such, we cannot *speak*, as in depart from or arrive at truth. We can only respond, make a choice — a decision — in short, *judge*, in other terms, *be responsible*. *We must act as if we were responsible*. For, we will, always, be responsible” (4-5).

stuff) to justify its own brutality and a perpetuation of the kind of violence¹⁵ it has necessarily blinded itself to in order *to* work.

My interest in trauma is not motivated by a desire to intervene in an already established field, nor am I proposing an alternative or corrective to what I perceive as a misuse of the concept. What interests me is that in its transposition from the discipline of psychoanalysis into works of social and cultural history, the concept often accrues a moral value it does not possess inherently in Freud's theory of the mind. In other words, were we to speak, as I have above, about the trauma of policing the Bronx in the 1970s, when the New York City borough was notorious for its high rate of crime, the moral value of the concept becomes unspokenly ironized. I am interested in this ambiguity of the term and what it means for an analysis of the post-civil rights era as I conceive it — to be more specific: I wonder if there might be a structural inconsistency in the notion itself that refuses to allow for its use *relationally* to describe a moment of broad social crisis, due in large part to the inherent moral tenor the concept acquires as soon as it is applied to situations of historical specificity. Before pursuing this question, I would like to look further at the various ways the discipline of psychoanalysis has defined and made use of trauma to make sense of what I would call *structures of overwhelming*.

In *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis offer this definition of trauma: “An event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organisation” (465). While the more general emphasis on the *intensity* of the event, the *incapacity* of response, and the *duration* of its effects are common to most of the

¹⁵ See the previous footnote. The violence that is inexplicable within the praxis of policework is that which Chandler describes as having “occurred before it had occurred” (4).

academic work in the field of trauma studies (as well as its more popular representations), the inclusion here of matters of *psychical organization* marks a point of specification particular to more exclusively psychoanalytic investigations of trauma. “In economic terms,” the definition continues, “the trauma is characterised by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject’s tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically” (465). The *economic* theory originates in an understanding of the traumatic event (a specific, datable event) in terms of the “non-abreaction of the experience,”¹⁶ where “abreaction” signifies the “[e]motional discharge whereby the subject liberates himself from the affect¹⁷ attached to the

¹⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis further specify that the traumatic experience here understood “remains in the psyche as a ‘foreign body’,” hence the term, *abreaction*, which, much like *abjection*, signifies a maintenance of the boundaries of a coherent self, a proper identity (466). Although both terms concern the threat of invasion, abreaction describes the process of expelling a “foreign body” that has taken up residence in the self, while abjection describes the rejecting of a disavowed part of the self. Julia Kristeva describes the experience of the abject through the example of recoiling from a piece of rotten or spoiled food: “‘I’ want none of that element, sign of their desire; ‘I’ do not want to listen, ‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3). In another project, I would like to revisit the discussion on abjection in the first chapter informed by this distinction between abjection and abreaction and how it exposes different dynamics in the object relations of American racism.

¹⁷ As André Green notes, the concept of the affect in psychoanalysis is inconsistent. In Freud’s earliest work on hysteria, “the quota of affect” is contained in the concept of “cathectic energy” — it is, thus, an economic determinant (12). In the shift to the later topographical theory, however, affect relates to the inherent dualism of psychic organization where, no longer opposed to the representation/repressed as that which is “suppressed,” it (as, say, anxiety) “is subject to the same splitting” (of, say, repression and disavowal) (55-57). Affect, in Green’s estimation, describes any discrete point along the spectrum of pleasure/unpleasure, and as such is capable of any number of relations to the processes of psychic organization.

memory of a traumatic event” and thus avoids a pathogenic response (466, 1). In a sense, in this earliest formulation, “trauma” names the origin of psychic pathology; origin, in brief, of the symptom. Without abandoning this earlier economic theory, Freud’s development of trauma in later works both broadens and specifies the significance of the concept in light of his later emphasis on psychic topography and defense. A renewed focus on the economic model in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* leads him back to the metapsychological theory of the “living vesicle” that is shielded “against stimuli from the external world” and that protects the receptive “cortical layer” beneath that will become consciousness, which he first developed in “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (32). “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (33). Although Freud specifies that the receptive cortex is also subject to “excitations from *within*,” which provoke “feelings in the pleasure-unpleasure series” and from which it is not shielded in the same way, trauma is, by definition, “external,” even here where it is already *internal* (32, 33). In the moment of the breach,

There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead — the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of.... An ‘anti-cathexis’ on a grand scale is set up for whose benefit all the other psychical systems are impoverished, so that the remaining psychical functions are extensively paralysed or reduced. (33-34)

Such a traumatic episode, a forced experience of *too much* external stimuli, gives rise, in Freud's theory, to the compulsion to repeat, the effort afterwards (*Nachträglich*)¹⁸ to "master the stimulus" which had failed in the initial breach (37). Trauma, then, names both the event of the breach and the retrospective efforts of mastery. Six years later, Freud modified this theory yet again in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, where, as Laplanche and Pontalis point out, the "simplified model of the vesicle ... no longer holds" (469). Without naming "traumatic neurosis proper," Freud posits an overwhelming of the ego by a surge of "automatic anxiety," inaugurating a state of helplessness and again marshalling the forces of psychic defense (469). In this instance, however, "the ego is attacked from within — that is to say, by instinctual excitations — *just as* it is from without" (469). Here, Freud takes the example of the infant separated from its mother — whose absence, experienced as a threat to its capacity for survival, triggers anxiety as "a rescuing signal" — to articulate a slightly different theory of the "traumatic situation" (138, 166). A focus on the specific affect of anxiety¹⁹ allows him to expand his earlier theory of *external* trauma to encompass both "physical helplessness if the danger is real and psychical helplessness if it is instinctual" (166), a distinction that was not allowed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* because the internal or instinctual danger there was transformed, by the defensive process of projection, into

¹⁸ Laplanche has written extensively on this complicated and sometimes misunderstood concept. In his essay, "Notes on Afterwardsness," he distinguishes three ways that Freud uses the term: first, in the sense of "further" or "secondary," where "it relates secondary consciousness to a primary one;" second, where it signifies "the direction of time from the past to the future;" and its third usage which "inverts it from the future towards the past" (261). He is especially interested in this latter usage and makes use of it to explain the relational *third term* in his interpretation of Freud's seduction theory of consciousness.

¹⁹ See Green 59ff.

an external stimulus and so subject to the shield of the vesicle (*Beyond* 32-33). Once again, in the later work, Freud renews an emphasis on the retroactivity of the experience, where the helplessness of a trauma in infancy is already a repetition of the “birth trauma” (138).²⁰ “A danger-situation is a recognized, remembered, expected situation of helplessness. Anxiety is the original reaction to helplessness in the trauma and is reproduced later on in the danger-situation as a signal for help. The ego, which experienced the trauma passively, now repeats it actively in a weakened version, in the hope of being able itself to direct its course” (166-67, my emphasis). Of particular interest to the present study, and what remains most consistent in these theories despite the differences in Freud’s formulations, is the emphasis on response in the figure of afterwardsness (*Nachträglichkeit*). For Freud, the *figure* of trauma as a moment of psychological impasse — that which cannot be mastered which must be mastered — presents the opportunity to speculate on the nature and function of defensive response to the perception (or anticipation or projection or fantasy) of danger. As a reckoning with an event or affect retroactively (*nachträglich*), repetition of the traumatic experience, both as an unassimilable quota of affect and its re-enactment in representational form, suggests a model of translational response. Agency is shared between the ostensible subject and object, and *passivity* — of the overwhelming event which can only be what it is and the self whose defenses are not sufficient enough to prevent being overwhelmed by it — itself acquires an agency it was not previously seen to possess. In Laplanche’s terms, there is no interpretation, no retro-action, without a “message” possessed of its own motive and agency (*Essays* 265).

²⁰ It is here where we find the famous line: “There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe” (138).

A relational and non-deterministic understanding of trauma as *that which necessitates a response* allows for an approach to the responsive mode of aesthetics (both textual and visual) that need not reduce the object to either symptom or ideological prop. In a rhetorical analysis of the cultural object, cognizant of the intentional as well as the accidental in the relational play of meaning and genre, attending to the tenor of defense opens up the vicissitudes of form to the mutual influence of the sender and receiver of the message. For example, the legislative genre of the congressional hearing may be seen as simultaneously instituting a discourse, enacting a (national) community of interest, and authorizing a structure of relation between citizen and state, all while it is caught up in the responsive labor of interpreting a series of events that cannot be made to fit the epistemological strictures of its genre.²¹ The dissonance between interpretation and its accidental effects brings us into proximity with the field of compromised relations and acts of coercion that constitute the fraught moment of the impasse, a moment which renews the need for response. The federal response to the sociopolitical demands contained in the struggle for civil rights²² inaugurates such a moment, one that, I argue, continues to demand and elicit response.

In the work of D.W. Winnicott, the psychological concepts of agency, defense, and organization manifest in an analytical language that privileges environment and relation. As if taking his cue from Freud's final theorizing of trauma, Winnicott returns to that prototypical scene of care, the *holding environment* of mother and infant,²³ in his own articulation of the experience.

²¹ See my comments in the first chapter on the congressional disavowal of state violence with which the hearings begin and upon which the foundation of its response is established.

²² A response that can be seen in both the Kerner Commission's diagnosis of widespread institutional racism as well as the legislative denial of those findings and an insistence on black guilt.

²³ Winnicott's description must surely be influenced by Freud's term of the "infant in arms" in *Inhibitions* (138).

It is the smooth operation of this environment that ensures the development of a functioning psyche, and it is its failure that guarantees the disintegration of that psyche. Building on Freud's increasing emphasis on the temporality of the danger-anxiety relation, Winnicott writes:

The feeling of the mother's existence lasts x minutes. If the mother is away more than x minutes, then the imago fades, and along with this the baby's capacity to use the symbol of the union ceases. The baby is distressed, but this distress is soon *mended* because the mother returns in $x+y$ minutes. In $x+y$ minutes the baby has not become altered. But in $x+y+z$ minutes the baby has become *traumatized*. In $x+y+z$ minutes the mother's return does not mend the baby's altered state. Trauma implies that the baby has experienced a break in life's continuity, so that primitive defences now become organized to defend against a repetition of 'unthinkable anxiety' or a return of the acute confusional state that belongs to disintegration of nascent ego structure. (*Playing* 131)

For Winnicott, disintegration, or perhaps more accurately un-integration, is primary,²⁴ and the labor of the caretaker (which here amounts to no more than not being away for too long) must reckon with the constant threat of a failed integration. In this period of "nascent ego" formation, the holding environment does not impart anything like knowledge; there is, in fact, no content being imparted whatsoever — aside from the almost monolithic presence of the maternal imago,²⁵

²⁴ "It may be assumed that at the theoretical start the personality is unintegrated, and that in regressive disintegration there is a primary state to which regression leads. We postulate a primary unintegration" (*Through Paediatrics* 149).

²⁵ It is worth noting, however, that even this monolith begins in a state of unintegration, as so many affective and perceptual fragments: "In regard to environment, bits of nursing technique and faces seen and sounds heard and smells smelt are only gradually pieced together into one being to be called mother" (*Through Paediatrics* 150).

which possesses a set duration before it must be recharged, as it were, by the real thing. Prior to any state of knowing, of the very posture *to know* which must already possess the capacity for discerning between objects, Winnicott sketches this moment when *potential* is all there is, when what is learned is the very capacity to learn. For this to happen, the caretaker need only to ensure continuity, to provide the environment within which integration can take place.

In addition to the emphasis on structure, integration, and organization, Winnicott considers the traumatic effect of a “*break-up*” of “*a personal continuity of existence*,” which, in his terms, leads to an experience of “madness” (*Playing* 131). Winnicott’s unique contribution to the theory of trauma can be found in his reflections on this lapse in self-continuity which persists even after the infant has recovered from the damaging effects of the mother’s absence once she returns. Despite the “cure” of the mother’s return, and despite the frequency of breaks in continuity caused by subsequent $x+y+z$ absences, the temporal breaches may never be repaired, merely *recovered from*. At the same time, and in something of a deviation from the Freudian theory, Winnicott sees a possibility of *structural repair* following a trauma; what remains is the discrete moments of separation with their attendant experiences of madness. Curiously, however, it is these temporal lapses in continuity that provide the opportunity for the practice of what Winnicott calls symbolization whereby “the separation ... is not a separation but a form of union,” a practice of object use that inaugurates a form of life “apart from illness or absence of illness” (132, 133). In this view, there is no pathologization of trauma *per se* precisely because it does not (as long as the absence is not indefinite) inhibit an eventual integration of ego structure. It is in these ideas of reparability and care, that carry so much weight in Winnicott’s theory, that I see a way of moving beyond the structural limitations of trauma as a descriptor of psychosocial experience or, perhaps more accurately, a way of mobilizing its structural logics without being snared by a *de facto* moral

prescription. Melanie Klein makes her own use of Winnicott's "emphasis on the unintegration of the early ego," and claims that the "tendency towards integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits" (*Envy* 4). She correlates this "greater or lesser cohesiveness of the ego at the beginning of postnatal life" with a "greater or lesser capacity of the ego to tolerate anxiety" — which, for her, is "constitutional" (4 n.3). What may appear to be ambiguous or, at least, approximate efforts to describe phenomena that inherently refuse quantitative certainty — i.e., *greater or lesser* — seem almost necessary when we consider how much this image of "postnatal" life refuses anything like a ground or beginning. As we see in Klein's own juggling of Winnicott's plastic description, in place of a *thing* — ego, unconscious, preconscious, subject — there is a "tendency," already *unsettled*, between integration and disintegration.

Although the mother-child relation is the prototype of all object relations, as well as the primal scene of care, the mother is not an originary *imago* that repeats in substitutional form in all other relations; to describe this as the prototypical relation merely says that all object relations (especially those of the transformational kind) are *of a type*: they are all aesthetic, facilitative, and aimed at an affective assurance prior to that particular species of interferences that make up the stuff of knowledge. In the object relations narrative of development, prototypical relation is atmospheric: a surround, in the etymological sense of that which overflows and surpasses, that which contains without, however, constraining or delimiting. This is in part why acts of representational identification (metaphoric insinuation) that collapse the ontogenetic and the contemporary carry the danger of becoming "fanatical," according to Christopher Bollas (27). Identification arises from a certainty on the part of the object-seeker that what is sought will fulfill the promise demanded of it, whether this is coerced through acts of substitution that deny the

interval its capacities of differentiation or through an insistence on “total environmental transformation” that disallows contrary structures outside of the subsumption by the collective (Bollas 27). Care facilitates the internalization of an aesthetic: within the “holding environment” of maternal care, the “baby is protected against impingements which might lead him to replace being taken care of with precocious mental processes that interrupt and dissolve being by means of premature thought and vigilance” (34). According to this model of care, thought manifests as intrusion, as disruption, in a scene more exclusively affective and potential; in this environment, cognizance of a self apart from environment threatens the very constitution of that self: thought is untimely at the birth of relation. Michael Balint uses the German word *arglos* to describe “this special atmosphere of the new beginning period,” in which “an individual feels that nothing harmful in the environment is directed towards him and, at the same time, nothing harmful in him is directed towards his environment” (135). Of course, the individual who is doing the feeling here is the analysand who has regressed to the experience of the *arglos* environment, characterized as it is by what Balint calls a “mix-up” between self and other or between self-other (as a composite figure) and environment. Winnicott describes this scene as “comparable to the digestive process” and “comparably complex.” In this prototypical moment, the “mother holds the situation, and does so over and over again, and at a critical period in the baby’s life. The consequence is that something can be done about something” (*Through Paediatrics* 263). The remarkably plastic consequence “that something can be done about something” involves a Kleinian working through of ambivalence, or better a working through *to* ambivalence, a gradual sorting out and interrelating of the primary affects of love and hate through the systolic and diastolic rhythms of the holding environment and its uncountable iterations. As Alan Bass notes, Winnicott “does not think about the temporalization or spatialization of either internal or external reality. As a manifestation of

primary reality, the ‘limiting membrane’ is processive, is never achieved once and for all. Environment is everything that makes boundary formation possible” (193). For all of these theorists, the subject of the experience is no subject at all: for Bollas, the baby at the center of the scene of care is indissociable from its *surround* and yet incapable of the capacity for repetition and *mise-en-scène* that constitutes the proper staging of the self; for Balint, the *arglos* environment is an experience only through regression, through an almost reflexive evocation of the prenatal state he describes as a harmonious mix-up when “there are as yet no objects, only limitless substances or expanses” (67); lastly, for Winnicott, the holding environment, which he also names the “facilitating” environment, allows *for* experience without, however, precipitating an actual experience: the prototypical scene of care creates the space for possibility and maintains this space but it stops short of granting the agency or material for the conversion of that possibility into an actuality.

Outside of the quasi-mythic experience of the holding environment or Balint’s pre-natal “harmonious mix-up,” the scene of care remains accessible solely through regression; in its strict psychoanalytic conception, “care” describes a set of processes and practices that are exhausted within a set duration (what we might grossly encompass by the term “infancy”) and which form the locus of a non-determining primary mode of relation. Primordially, care very much *is* the facilitation of the capacity to relate, and once this potential is realized (as potential) the work of care is concluded only to re-emerge in experiences of transference regression. So Bollas writes “that in the transference,” the analysand re-activates in a way the primary mode of care in his relation to the “transformational object,” which is to say in relation to

the analyst as the environment-mother, a pre-verbal memory that cannot be cognized into speech that recalls the experience, but only into speech that demands

its terms be met: unintrusiveness, ‘holding’, ‘provision’, insistence on a kind of symbiotic or telepathic knowing, and facilitation from thought to thought or from affect to thought. (24-25)

Such is the lexicon of care: unintrusiveness, holding, provision, symbiosis, facilitation, affect. It is largely the project of this dissertation to show how this very same lexicon describes the sociopolitical forms of desire and anxiety that characterize the post-civil rights era. What Bollas names the “transformational object” is that which promises, or that which is demanded to promise, such a cluster of experiences. At the risk of overly schematizing the argument, it could be said that the transformational object is that which is sought as the impossible cure for trauma: the metaphorical leap back in time that is also a leap back in psychic organization that passes off all responsibility onto the *environment* which was responsible for the labor of organization in the first place. In the quest for the transformational object, then, the analysand shows no interest in analysis *per se*, no interest in the “content” of interpretation but a desire for “relief,” which is gained from the “voice,” from the analyst as presence, as *surround*, and from the “structuring experiences” facilitated by interpretative discourse prior to its registration as discourse; the transformational object is sought out as process, as an affective prop to knowing, without the object-seeker looking to go so far *as* knowing, and in fact frequently manifesting an outright hostility *to* knowing. Bollas writes: “Interpretations which require reflective thought or which analyse the self are often felt to be precocious demands on the patient’s psychic capacity, and such people may react with acute rage or express a sudden sense of futility and despair” (25).²⁶ The scene of care that inheres in the

²⁶ This hostility to knowing is related to what Alan Bass describes as the problem of “concreteness and fetishism” in clinical experience, where *knowing* is used as a processive lock on the labor of interpretation and the deliberation of meaning. He writes:

promise of the transformational object is coveted explicitly for its capacity to shelter from knowledge, sought out in regressive formations almost as if at the behest of the pleasure principle; what the transformational object is expected *to transform* is nothing short of everything, it is expected to *do over* the facilitation of the capacity to relate, which is why Bollas describes as “fanatical” those who believe in the power of an actual object, always a representation, to achieve the expected transformation.

Plan of the Work

In this dissertation, the methods and insights of object relations psychoanalysis are brought to bear on an analysis of the sociopolitical landscape of the post-civil rights era. Where a desire for care — or for the *transformational object* — shows up as, say, handling or facilitation, and the focus shifts from a context of trauma to one of defense, we can see how the political becomes overdetermined by the categories of experience to which it is traditionally opposed: necessity and work. Even in a discursive space that thrives on antagonism, ideals are named not merely as objects in need of defense but as the objects that will facilitate passage through the perceived danger — such as when a United States legislator calls for the defense of the nation against the “threat” manifested in the unrest of black Americans when it becomes embodied and vocalized in a way

When the patient says, ‘I know that you’re mad at me for being late,’ the temptation is to attend to the content in the second half of her statement. One then would think about the possible meanings, especially transference meanings, of her fantasy of the analyst’s anger at her for being late. To do so, however, would be to ignore the negative hallucination that dominates her consciousness when she says ‘I know....’ Her ‘knowledge’ expresses her compelling defensive need to make sure that whatever fantasy she imposes upon the analyst can be taken as a reality in a way that brooks no alternative, no difference in apparent meaning. (37)

that challenges the very discourse *of* the nation. In every chapter of the dissertation, I find moments that illustrate this relational desire for the experience that experience itself has foreclosed. In the congressional hearings on the urban uprisings, the language of legislators and officials betrays a paranoid-schizoid conception of urban space in their need to maintain a psychic vision of the nation that continues to operate with the abject outside and at the margins. Gina Rowlands's portrayal of Mabel Loghetti in *A Woman Under the Influence* acts out the breakdown in the midst of her labor as wife and mother where it is precisely this *housework* that is supposed to maintain the domestic as the site of environmental surrender — where the affective needs of *the family* are met without question. It is this same space of holding and facilitation that appears as an impossible horizon in the post-civil rights black neighborhood of Watts in *Bless Their Little Hearts*. And in representations and theories of policework from the 1970s, we can see an almost hyperbolic vision of the police as those who are called upon to provide an impossible experience of care. Rather than the now banal assertion that policing is about the *prevention of crime*, the discourse of policework as it took shape at this time was more focused on the affective labor of “colonial occupation” and the need to maintain the space of the *district* in predominantly aesthetic terms. In every example I provide, the logics of the transformative object and the search for facilitation are seen to take precedence over the usual narratives of desire that privilege the subject-predicate dichotomy of interpersonal psychology. Object relations psychoanalysis is useful for me precisely because of this theory of desire that is not a desire *of/for an object*, and not even a desire *of/for* a specific experience but the desire *for* a facilitation *of* experience.

In the first chapter, I argue that insofar as the discourse of the state appealed to an homogeneous American identity as both *natural* and *right*, it undermined its justification of force as a non-violent response to the *real* violence of civil dissent. Most of the chapter centers on an

analysis of a series of hearings conducted by the United States Congress, beginning in 1967, which sought to address the “riots” that were taking place in more and more American cities at the time. In these hearings, we find a bureaucratic production of knowledge that is simultaneously a spectacle of American governance; it is notable, I argue, for the symptomatic and systematic ways that a discourse on state violence, confronted with an impasse forced by civil rights, describes and defends itself. When United States legislators appeal to the doxa of “law and order” as what sustains the fertile ground of American freedom — and its double, American enterprise — they rely on the authority of the social contract whose gendered and racial construction ensures all of the *reality*, in Hannah Arendt’s terms, goes to one group (property-owning, white men) at the expense of others. In this chapter, I also look to two television broadcasts on the urban uprisings to illustrate the visual representation of the bureaucratic and paranoiac logics of abjection that inform the reigning conception of the political at this time. This also serves to transition to my focus on a pair of feature films in the second chapter.

In the second chapter, I argue that the response to the political problem of civil rights can be seen to manifest in a crisis of the domestic that was represented and worked through in films at the margins of the Hollywood mode of production. I analyze two works of cinematic realism with a focus on how they import tropes from melodrama which serve as sites of breakdown, preventing the films from serving as traditional objects of moral cathexis. As I indicated in the methodological introduction above, I want to move away from the psychoanalytic concept of trauma as the primary category of description for analyses of collective suffering. My focus on the domestic drama of *A Woman Under the Influence* and *Bless Their Little Hearts* allows me, instead, to shift the focus onto the concepts of defense and care. In the first chapter, the political anxieties of congressional legislators were seen to manifest a defensive mode of response to the problem of

civil rights that could somehow be rectified by imagining the structural necessity of abjection (segregation) to constitute a space and experience of care. In the second chapter, however, we find a sociopolitical landscape that is bereft of such an experience — and where the concept of labor might traditionally promise a way out or way towards a mode of facilitation, instead, it emerges in league with the forces of frustration and exhaustion that otherwise saturate the space of the domestic at this time.

In the third and final chapter, I turn to representations of policework and crime as they are imagined in legislative discourse, in genre studies of police fiction, in sociological and anthropological theories of policing, and in two films: a documentary about the South Bronx police force and a feature film about career crime in Boston. Although the police were seen as a force in opposition to the *unsanctioned* manifestations of civil rights at the end of the 1960s, opening the way to calls for and justifications of the militarization of police, the discourse on quotidian policework in the post-civil rights era was mostly concerned with problems of community relations and the logistics of policing borders and boundaries. In my analysis of how policework is represented at this time, I show how the aesthetics of policing leads to a policing of aesthetics: order maintenance and the immunization of social space. Several narratives emerge from different spectatorial positions that ascribe a similar function to policework — whether it is the object of an aesthetic representation in a work of fiction or of an institutional reflection from within.

CHAPTER ONE

Domestic Crisis — The Making of a Post-Civil Rights Era

Chapter Introduction

This dissertation began in an effort to locate and theorize the origins of the 2007 global financial crisis, to discover how and why the “home,” in particular, became the overdetermined object at the center of that crisis, and how its de-materialization — and simultaneous financial obfuscation — fueled the speculative boom that brought about the crash.²⁷ It was clear early on that the so-called “subprime” home loan, a derivative of the even more ubiquitous “mortgage-

²⁷ With the financial crisis in mind, Philip Goodchild suggests a different antagonism that animates and undermines contemporary capitalism: “In the contemporary global economy where 95% of finance capital is invested in currency speculation, bond speculation, and financial packages, the traditional exploitation of labour by capital is significant but not central” (133). Instead, he posits “a more fundamental class difference,” which he identifies as that between “householder” and “speculator,” a relationship defined by the asymmetry (and inequality) of desires: for subsistence and profit, respectively. As the sub-prime crisis made clear, a stock-market crash does not “weaken the position of capital with respect to labour, but the contrary.

The ultimate result of the imbalance between the speculator and the householder is a progressive shift of wealth towards finance capital, as we have seen in recent years, and a consequent increase in relative power in exchange. This progressive shift of power may continue beyond the level at which all subsistence needs for all householders are fulfilled, for finance capital has no interest in the fulfillment of need if more effective profits can be made elsewhere. (135)

Although Goodchild argues here that finance capital may well abandon *subsistence needs* for more profitable sectors, his analysis raises a question about the relationship between speculation and subsistence. Could this be the endgame for finance capital: the utter instrumentalization of subsistence for profit?

backed security,” was almost single-handedly responsible for “Wall Street investment banks and brokerages haemorrhag[ing] \$175 billion of capital in the period July 2007 to March 2008” (Blackburn 63). It should not be contentious to claim a profound, even structural, relationship between civil rights, housing, and American capitalism, even if the political optimism of the 1960s²⁸ put into place the very mechanisms that enabled finance capital’s spectacular *hemorrhage* and rationalized its subsequent bailout. As Christopher Bonastia notes, in 1968, “Civil rights agencies in education and employment were discovering ways of using governmental powers to chip away at the racial caste system” (93). Those same agencies, backed by courts that were “largely enthusiastic” of the reforms, worked to influence two of the era’s most defining pieces of legislation: the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 — both significant revisions of their earlier counterparts. In many ways, the revised laws — which sought to defend against housing discrimination, increase the production of homes, and, most significantly, make home-ownership a more viable (read, affordable) option for more people — were seen as a step forward in the federal government’s effort to desegregate the nation. “Nevertheless, housing did present difficulties that did not exist or were not as severe in other areas,” such as education and employment (95).²⁹

²⁸ “Despite the obstacles that HUD faced, there was ample reason for optimism early in the Nixon Administration. At several junctures between 1969 and 1972, HUD appeared to be building the momentum to help forge elementary changes in segregated residential patterns” (Bonastia 96).

²⁹ Unsurprisingly, as many statistics show, the impact of the 2007 economic crisis was felt most severely by the historically exploited and oppressed. The Center for Responsible Lending reported, for example, that for every 10,000 loans issued between 2005 and 2008, the number of foreclosures in 2007-2009 was 790 for African Americans, 769 for Latinos, and 452 for non-Hispanic whites (Bocian, Li and Ernst 2).

The links between the contemporary “economic crisis” and the years following the Civil Rights Movement — its own kind of “political” crisis — were enough to warrant a comparative study. What most interested me, however, was a seeming indissociability of the *political* and the *economic* in the form of the so-called crisis moment; and, moreover, that the “optimistic” legislative revisions at the end of the 1960s were caught up in this very determination of these two categories, one by the other. What constituted the most progressive moment in legislating civil rights, in a decades-long effort to make *equality* law, were economic solutions to the problem (as it was perceived) of political inequality: the mortgage-backed security and the extension of insurance to multi-family housing developers. This lends irony to Bonastia’s observation that education and employment, as sites and objects of civil rights reform, were more bureaucratically manageable than housing. In fact, the “housing problem” was the easiest of all to solve, as long as we take the cynical view that what counted as a solution was a more equitable distribution of the national burden of debt and a more definitive exposure of the nation’s racial minorities to exploitation by finance capital. Within only a few years of the 1968 revisions to the HUD Act, the “well-intentioned changes created an environment that invited corruption” (Bonastia 132). Teams of realtors working together with Federal Housing Authority (FHA) appraisers would get families to sell their homes cheaply (often by “warning white residents in a declining neighborhood of impending racial transition”), secure an FHA guarantee on the mortgage, get an inflated appraisal submitted, make only cosmetic improvements, then re-sell the property (132). “Eventually, the mortgage would go into serious default, the private lender would foreclose on the property, and HUD would be required to pay the lender and take possession of a property with no willing buyers” (133).

My project ended up involving three fundamental assumptions which have required varying degrees of evidence and analysis to support. First, the demonstrations and uprisings of the Civil Rights Movement — especially those of the second-half of the 1960s — were as much about a contestation of American political ontology as they were about specific issues or instances of inequality.³⁰ In other words, as if in response to Sen. John L. McClellan’s claim, in 1967, that the “riots cannot be justified,” those who took part in the uprisings were not only calling attention to the psycho-social and material effects of discrimination in housing, education, and employment but also to the very logic that allows for such a claim to be made in the first place — contesting, namely, that there are *genres* of response to injustice that cannot count as (legitimate or justifiable) response (United States, “Riots” 6).³¹ If we refuse this logic, however, and we see the urban

³⁰ Such a contestation of democratic political ontology is not, of course, confined to this specific historical moment. See, for example, Jacques Rancière’s examples from revolutionary France, cited below.

³¹ As an example, we can look at the claims made by Houston Mayor Louie Welch on the “problems” that subtend the possibility of urban rioting. (And it is worth noting that this very syntagm, “urban rioting,” was used to signify the “unjustifiable” manifestation of black unrest so condemned by Sen. McClellan.)

Helping to meet the needs of nearly 300,000 Negro citizens is a problem that consumes approximately 40 percent of my time as mayor of Houston. If this sounds as though it is a disproportionate amount of time to spend on the problems of a minority group in a city with a population of 1,250,000 then the reason is that the problems are tougher and defy neat solutions.

The problems are all those inherent in rapid urbanization, in an increase in Negro populations of 65 percent from 1950 to 1960, in 196,603 Negroes with family incomes of less than \$4,000 a year, in nearly 50,000 housing units that are substandard and occupied largely by Negroes, in an unemployment rate that is about three times higher among Negroes than white people. These should be enough to suggest that Houston is like any other large city in terms of having the explosive

potential for trouble if housing, jobs, schools, and a large Negro population are underlying factors in riots (United States, “Riots” 24).

It is unclear how Welch has arrived at such a specific “percentage” of time that “Negro” problems require of him but the number is itself telling. Clearly we are meant to feel the imbalance that 24 percent of the population requires 40 percent of mayoral time, as if democratic governance should have a strict 1:1 ratio of percentage-of-the-populace to unit-of-governing-time. The reasons why this minority group — of 300,000 people — have caused this imbalance in governing, according to Welch, is the relative difficulty of the problems: harder problems require more work and more work means more time. There is a danger, however, that this common sense logic will obscure the irrational and violent foundation of the claims that are being made here — although, it might equally be said that the very rhetoric of *politics as problem* and *governance as solution* is itself a way of averting a kind of danger. We only have to say *whose* danger we are talking about, and what it threatens — I attempt to do this below, in the third part of this chapter. From the first line quoted above, we are almost compelled to ask: *Why are the needs of citizens a problem?* There are, of course, many ways to approach this question. Welch even provides a reasonable response when he ascribes the problem to “rapid urbanization” and a precipitate increase in the city’s black population. In this pragmatic view, *need is a problem* because of logistical constraints: the city simply was not equipped with the people and resources necessary for their adequate housing, employment, and education. If this is how we conceive the contested political, social, and economic landscape of the civil rights era, we must, like Welch, take “black Americans” as themselves constitutive of the “problem” — “an underlying factor in riots.” In other words, there would not *be* a problem if this particular group of people had not showed up in such numbers in a city that was unprepared for them. There is a consistent logic that informs McClellan’s claim that the “riots cannot be justified” and Welch’s claim that the black population of Houston is both *a* cause and *the* object of the “problem” faced by the city, a problem that itself threatens in its “explosive potential” to become a riot. In this view, “black America” was both something to be feared and something to be managed — and this latter precisely because it was feared — precisely because it could not possess a subjective legitimacy of its own (see, for example, Frantz Fanon on “negrophobia” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 154ff.). At the same time, those whose dissent could not be justified were also disadvantaged if not outright excluded from ascending even the lowest rungs of the American political hierarchy, already kept out by prejudicial mechanisms

uprisings/riots as not merely justifiable but *adequate* to the exclusionary politics that informed civil rights reform — even at its most progressive — we are led to my second assumption: the American government could not provide a *political* solution to the problem of civil rights.³² The urban uprisings should count as ample evidence of this failure (i.e., in demonstrating the very need for revision at the same time as they dramatized the nation’s readiness to intervene, *militarily*, when the struggle for black rights literally took to the streets): the landmark civil rights legislation had already been passed by this time, and the subsequent revisions to that legislation merely sought different means for previously stated ends.³³ What was most interesting about these differences was their *anti-political* logic. The only way the legislature found to address the challenge posed by the radical demands of civil rights discourse was to redress inequality through economic intervention: the market solution. The narrative that justified the specific revisions to housing legislation, for example, went like this: if it was more difficult for black Americans to achieve the American Dream of owning a home, this was because it was harder to acquire the mortgage loan needed to purchase the home because of the prevailing income disparities; therefore, the solution

of “representation” and a juridico-bureaucratic regime of political mediation to which *most* Americans were still denied access.

³² I say “could not” instead of “did not” to emphasize that the legislature was bound by its own constraints on what counts as freedom and by the intransigence of its laws which were built not to encourage but to stifle change. As James Baldwin puts it: “All governments, without exception, make only those concessions deemed absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the *status quo*; and if one really wishes to know how this Republic esteems Black freedom, one has only to watch the American performance in the world” (27).

³³ Bonastia’s work (*op. cit.*) illustrates how *any* effort at progressive legislative change had to take place at the bureaucratic level of governance. Any attempt at direct democratic action could not in-itself yield change in a sociopolitical landscape wholly mediated by institutional organizations of power and redistribution.

was to make banks more willing to lend to those who were more likely to default on those loans, and the way to do this was through the mortgage-backed security (for single-family housing) and an extension of publicly-backed risk insurance (for multi-family housing developers). This first chapter undertakes to prove these first two assumptions through an analysis of primary source documents related to the urban uprisings of 1967 and 1968, along with an analysis of television broadcasts of the riots, which are seen to illustrate the antagonisms and anxieties about this political impasse as they are mediated by visual representation. My analysis of these news reports at the end of this first chapter serves as the transition to the third primary assumption of this dissertation, and the one that occupies my attention in the second and third chapters. The third primary assumption that informs the analytical foundation of this project maintains that the aesthetic experience of cultural objects both facilitates and frustrates the modes of psychic defense that emerge in response to the contested political anxieties in this post-civil rights era. This is the primary reason I make use of object relations methodologies in my analysis of film, television, and literature — and why genre theory and social theory are read in tandem as making space for the working through of similar anxieties.

Contesting the Political

In order to understand what I mean when I say that the urban uprisings (as the bodily manifestation of radical civil rights) were a contestation of American political ontology, it is important to understand the difference between how we theorize and describe “the political” and how it is experienced and imagined. My point, however, is not to indict such a difference *as* difference nor to measure the actual against the ideal. What most interests me, rather, is the way that theories of “the political” — often posited as a sphere or mode of collective existence distinct

from, say, the social and the domestic — move, sometimes inexplicably, between genres of description; in other words, it is not always clear whether the phenomenon being described is a category, an ideal, an act, or a way of being. Jacques Rancière is especially useful to such a discussion for his insistence that politics *is* “an activity” and *not* “a specific realm” restricted to those “beings whose own business and destination it is to engage in politics” (*Dissensus* 206).³⁴ As we will see, however, even in the classical conception, which marks out the political as just such an exclusive realm, theories of *politics* remain theories of action. The difference between Rancière’s materialist articulation of politics and democracy and the classical theories, which he sees exemplified in the work of Edmund Burke and Hannah Arendt, may seem, as he claims, to pivot on this distinction between *space* and *action* as the category by which we are to deploy the

³⁴ It is worth reproducing the full quote here, as Rancière is explicit in his opposition to Hannah Arendt, whose conception of the political bears much in common with the actual practice of politics of the American government during the civil rights struggles:

I take as my explicit target Arendt’s notion of ‘political life,’ that is, her opposition between *politics* and the *social*. I object that it is precisely an anti-political logic, the logic of the *police*, that marks off a specific realm reserved for political acts in this way — which is ultimately to say for beings whose own business and destination it is to engage in politics. As I understand it, politics is, on the contrary, an activity that retraces the line, that introduces cases of universality and capacities for the formulation of the common, into a universe that was considered private, domestic or social. The police/politics opposition, then, puts into question every principle that marks out positive spheres and ways of being. (*Dissensus* 206-207)

When Rancière says that politics “retraces the line,” he understands, in my view, that politics, as well as what he calls police, is a perpetual boundary formation, contestation, and negotiation. Cf. Étienne Balibar on borders and boundary formation below.

concept. What we find, however, is that *theories of politics are always at least implicitly interested in activity*, and, further, that the points of difference — between the classical/liberal and the postmodern/Marxist theories — hinge instead on *who* gets to possess the potential for such properly political activity but also on the temporality specific to political engagement, according to which the *agent* of political activity might be seen now as a defender, now as a challenger to what has already been established as the *right to act*. In Rancière’s view, the contestation of what I am calling political ontology by the forces of civil rights is the very definition of “politics,” and should be seen in contrast with the actions of the state which are, in his terminology, determinations of the police. What he calls politics, then, is something that has been immanent, in differing degrees, to democratic theory and action throughout its history; what changes is the *particular* identities that disrupt the prevailing understanding of the *universal* and often force it to be re-imagined.³⁵ As Rancière notes, at the time of the French revolution,

[w]omen were denied the rights of citizens on account of the so-called republican principle which states that citizenship is the sphere of universality, while women’s activities belong to the particularity of domestic life. Women were deemed to occupy the sphere of the particular and, as a result, could not be included in that of the universal. Lacking a will of their own, they could not be political subjects.³⁶

(56-57)

³⁵ This re-imagining, as Rancière and Étienne Balbar both show, is both a conceptual and a material re-tracing of new boundaries.

³⁶ This critique of classical (liberal) democracy proceeds by exposing such binary oppositions as that between the *willful* (active) and the *will-less* (passive) subject — which then extends to, say, the space of *citizenship* and the space of *domesticity*, where the former is only accessible by those active subjects and so not those whose lives are determined

Women such as Olympe de Gouges, however, “blurred the boundaries” between these supposedly separate spheres of citizenship/universality and domesticity/particularity (57). In arguing that “since women were qualified to mount the scaffold, they were also qualified to mount the platform of the Assembly,” de Gouges challenged that categorical divisions that kept women out of the

by (i.e., in thrall to) the latter. Affirmative categories that are foundational to democracy’s political ontology — or, at least, the way that ontology has been inscribed and narrated throughout the Western *scientific* canon — are shown to be in a determinant relationship with their supposedly negative counterparts/opposites. A category such as “active” thus serves as a logical *a priori* by which certain exclusionary regimes of power justify — to themselves *and* to those whose exclusion makes the regime possible — their schemas of oppression. As we will see in the second chapter, Silvia Federici’s feminist critique of “housework” takes issue with the ways that even Marxist theories of social organization continue to rely on such obfuscations, thus maintaining “domesticity” as a space apart from *proper* political action and thought. Denise Ferreira da Silva has perhaps gone furthest in pursuing this critique via the category of “race,” making use of the opposition she establishes between the “transparent ‘I’” (“Man, the subject, the ontological figure consolidated in post-Enlightenment thought”) and the “affectable ‘I’” (“The scientific construction of non-European minds”) (xv). See *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, where Da Silva locates the primary antagonism in Reason’s transition from Cartesian *cogito* to Kantian “I” — when the *transparent subject* was brought into vertiginous contact with its own *affectability*:

My excavation of the founding statements of modern thought identifies philosophical formulations that reproduce Descartes’s outline of self-consciousness as the only existing being to enjoy self-determination — the ability to alone decide on its essence or existence — which requires the bold articulation and disavowal of the ontoepistemological relevance of extended things, that is, bodies. I then identify how this formulation of self-determination is threatened when two framers of modern science deploy a version of reason, *universal nomos*, the constraining ruler of the ‘world of things,’ that opens up the possibility of rewriting man as subjected to outer determination, namely, as an affectable thing. (xxxviii)

Da Silva’s theory of race is integral to my critique in this dissertation.

political sphere proper (57). In this example, “politics” arises out of a discursive challenge to what might be called a misuse of reason, where we understand this faculty as a producer of universal values: the argument mounted by de Gouges indicts such production for its analogical inconsistency. We know, however, that politics is not merely discursive for Rancière. It is also aesthetic, and in being so, ontological: “Consensus means precisely that the sensory is given as univocal. Political and artistic fictions introduce dissensus by hollowing out the ‘real’ and multiplying it in a polemical way” (149). It is through a contestation of the “real” — itself a construction based on consensus (which is never without its own originary violences) — that certain activities (discursive and aesthetic) may be recognized as political; thus, political activity is inherently subversive. In these terms, the “riot” may be seen as the preeminently political act, especially in its visual representation on television, where the bodies-in-dissent are literally seen to be contesting the supposedly consensual space of the city.³⁷

American governance in the first half of the twentieth century operated according to a notion of the political consistent with the classical view that Rancière seeks to upend by shifting the conceptual focus from politics-as-realm to politics-as-action. It is analogous to Hannah Arendt’s spatial theory of the political sphere as a space apart, *walled-in*, exclusive, and wholly distinct from the private, which is ruled by necessity.³⁸ When Arendt writes that “the political

³⁷ I will return to this idea, in particular, in the last section of this chapter, when I analyze two television broadcasts of the riots in Los Angeles and Detroit.

³⁸ I am interested in how the concept of necessity shows up in political theory and why it is so frequently and exclusively attributed to domestic life if not outright named as its defining quality. In what ways are body and mind reified here? We speak of *bodily necessities* — but in this view, *the body* cannot escape necessity which is how we

realm rises directly out of acting together,” she, too, makes use of a notion of politics as activity/action, with a significant difference: here, the action is foundational, grounding rather than subversive. Thus, while “the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of law” circumscribe “public space,” they also close it off (198). In such a conception of the political, segregation may be seen to conform with the very dictates of political *formation*: as Arendt notes, this properly political space “does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them do not live in it” (199). However, being deprived of this political existence means no less, for Arendt, than being “deprived of reality” (199). One of the functions of segregation, then, where the distinction between peoples constitutes a condition of possibility for the political, is to grant to an exclusive group (of property-owning white men, say) if not the right then at least the power to determine the boundaries of that reality which are coterminous, as Arendt explains, with the *boundaries of law*. When the American legislature faced the compulsion to put a legal end to segregation as both institution and practice, it was forced into a contradiction with its own motives, its own principles of exclusion from which its powers over reality were derived. In Arendt’s terms, the political itself is at stake where its reconstitution by a different *acting together* threatens to remake its boundaries³⁹ — hence the defensive response of legislators whose discourse of law and order sought to undermine alternative claims to the political while also insisting that those claims

are to understand its functions apart from the contingencies of reason that shape public/political life. Politics can also be seen here as an escape. Curiously, if not ironically, it is a necessary escape.

³⁹ For Rancière, however, it is precisely this contestation of boundaries that defines politics. “Political dispute is that which brings politics into being by separating it from the police, which causes it to disappear continually either by purely and simply denying it or by claiming political logic as its own. Politics, before all else, is *an intervention in the visible and the sayable*” (36-37, my emphasis).

had already been fulfilled. When the ostensible gains of civil rights legislation failed to remedy the injustices of racial segregation, however, the urban uprisings exposed the structural violence (of law and order) that maintained those boundaries. In contesting the space of the city, then, the uprisings contested the exclusive political “reality” of the nation; and the conflicts over property, circulation, and access made evident that urban space itself was shaped by that socioeconomic antagonism.⁴⁰

In response to the threat posed by the urban uprisings, the discourse that took shape in the legislative hearings asserted its exclusive right to draw and maintain the limits of the political, in effect closing off any *justifiable* challenge to the state’s monopoly on violence in the name of law. Because “the riots cannot be justified” and because any action outside of its determination by law forfeits its place within the law’s space of consent, any “philosophy” of the apolitical other, any praxis of knowing that stakes a claim to the *territory* of the political, necessarily falls outside the purview *of* knowing (United States, “Riots” 6, 2).⁴¹ However, the very insistence on this

⁴⁰ As James Baldwin described it, the very act of a black American going to that part of the city (“downtown”) which, prior to the legislative end to segregation was *off limits*, was both an act of contestation and a visible demonstration of the racial component of economic disparity. “For those who could — narrowly — afford it, going downtown was not so much a mark of status as a kind of vengeful, triumphant obligation” (24). I will return to this text in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁴¹ As da Silva has shown, the very claim to self-determination made by the knowing (rational) subject has been its own object in need of defense in order to maintain the *necessarily-segregating* power of knowledge promised to the active subject: destined to be the subject *of* history.

From the very beginning, then, the prerogative of the mind as a knowing thing would rest on a postulated intimacy with the logos (reason and word), but it was rather late in its trajectory ... that self-determination would be added as the rational thing’s exclusive (moral) attribute. Precisely the

infrangible space apart of political reality was forced to come to terms with the violence of a public that visibly and overtly challenged the phenomenological boundaries of lived space — hence challenging the state’s right to say what can and cannot count as political (i.e., justifiable). Rancière might say that civil rights was the social response *become-political* — or the very eruption of politics — in opposition to the police: “The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible” (36). In discourse and in action, civil rights both instantiated a new paradigm of politics *as action* — in its attempt, as Rancière would say, to effect a new *distribution of the sensible* — at the same time as it contested the Arendtian closure of an exclusively political space where the “complaints” of black Americans *could not be counted*⁴² because they did not conform to the legal and discursive dictates of that space. In response, American legislative discourse denied the legitimacy of this new paradigm while it simultaneously effected a closure of the political in its appeal to the absolute ideals of law and order whose defense became the sole imperative of the investigative hearings on the uprisings that I analyze below. Only that which sought to pursue law and order, then, warranted the right to violence and the right to determine the boundaries of the political. Étienne Balibar claims that “to mark out a border is, precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it. Conversely, however, to define or identify in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders” (76). In these terms,

need to secure this exclusive attribute, I argue, has occupied modern philosophers since the refashioning of reason as the secular ruler and producer of the universe, as an exterior (constraining or regulative) force, threatened to transform the mind into such an other thing of the world. (40)

⁴² For Rancière, such “complaints” are emphatically democratic: “The one who belongs to the *demos*, who speaks when he is not to speak, is the one who partakes in what he has no part in” (32).

the legislative discourse that took shape in response to the urban uprisings — affirming for itself the exclusive *rights* granted to the defender of law and order — adopted a logic of self-identification whereby the boundaries of the political and the boundaries of the justifiable were made coextensive. Although the governing class maintained the pretense of territorial sovereignty over the ideal space of the political, and the material space of public life, instead of invoking an imperial right to expand the borders, to redraw the boundaries of the city or the barriers between races, state power walled itself in, effecting an apparent separation between the desires of the nation and the desires of capital.⁴³ Our interest in the American city, these legislators appeared to say, is an interest in the prosperity and well-being of its people. Their actions made clear, however, that this ostensible interest in the security of urban *life* was inseparable from maintaining the municipal borders and barriers between races and classes which guaranteed the commercial and

⁴³ There is more to be said about the particular form of *imperial identity* whose practices of self-identification through the tracing of boundaries — geographical as well as psychosocial — pursues a logic of exclusion at the same time as it reserves the right to redraw such borders for the purposes of accumulation, say. If, as Balibar claims, the very practice of defining is one of tracing borders, there is, nevertheless, an imperial supplement that operates *above and beyond* that more fundamental practice, extending those limits without being bound to the constraints of a continuity (of lines or logics). As Melinda Cooper shows, however, where the interests of the state are coextensive with the *interest* of capital, there is a concerted effort made to maintain limits and boundaries, both those that restrict the “realization of wealth” and those that ensure social stratification. She writes: “In its efforts to overcome all quantitative barriers to the generation of wealth, Marx observed, capital transgresses all established forms of reproduction — that is, all customary or religious strictures on the organization of gender, all status-like constraints on social mobility and all national restrictions on the circulation of money. But is it not also compelled to reassert the reproductive institutions of race, family, and nation as a way of ensuring the unequal distribution of wealth and income across time?” (16).

speculative *interest* of the capitalist state.⁴⁴ In its devotion to the defense of the ideals of law and order, the federal legislature affirmed its right to military intervention wherever the “unjustified” actions of black Americans threatened its exclusive right to the space of the city at the same time as it gave to the real estate developers and financial speculators the power to reorganize that space through directly economic means.⁴⁵ As this chapter argues, the urban uprisings not only exposed the ideological foundations of this ostensible logic of defense and security but, in the very contestation over the space of the city, challenged the racialized conceptions of property, circulation, and access.

Despite the political gains of the civil rights era, institutional segregation remained largely intact at the end of the 1960s. Efforts to focus the national discussion on the growing disparities of wealth and opportunity — the problem of what the Kerner Report described as “two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal” — triggered a more entrenched paranoid response

⁴⁴ We might turn again to Baldwin here for his insight into the connection between ghetto construction and the interests of the capitalist state. Writing in the 1980s but looking back to the early years of the post-civil rights era, he notes: “It is terribly boring to have to say it — again — but it is the White flight and not the Black arrival that alters, or demolishes, property values. This arrival and departure is pure heaven for financiers and speculators: a ghetto is a great source of great profit” (35).

⁴⁵ For more on this, see my comments (earlier in this chapter) on the revisions made to federal housing and civil rights legislation — amended and authorized by many of the same legislators who were a part of these hearings on the riots — which opened up both the residential home mortgage and collective housing to less risky forms of speculation and investment. In particular, the creation of the residential mortgage-backed security and the extension of the Federal Housing Authority’s insurance guarantees — both introduced in the revision to the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 — enabled “capital” to maintain racial segregation while the “state” could be seen to act in the name of freedom and equality and, thus, hold onto its image as the defender of civic life.

from those who literally wrote the agenda (National Advisory Commission 1). When federal legislators took up an investigation into “the grave national crisis created by urban rioting,” they implied that the threats to life and property were new or at least had become dangerous to the extent that they could no longer be ignored (United States, “Riots” 1). Much of the state discourse on the riots invoked notions of individual security, especially in its appeal to those urban denizens whose fear could be mobilized to support the inevitable calls for militarization and mass incarceration. More often than not, however, the anxiety of response was aimed at the threats to property. In the legislative documents on the subject, as well as the journalistic coverage of the riots, there is a consistent focus on the cost of property damage and the disruptions to commerce; on looting, price gouging, and hoarding; and on the logistical issues of moving goods in and out of the city once the routes of circulation have been closed or the city itself quarantined. Claims that the riots *were* the crisis ignore, however, that for most black Americans at the time, even where there was a pretense of racial integration, urban life was a constant state of crisis,⁴⁶ and the uprisings were a way of making this manifest. If we understand the riots as an economic argument motivated by racial segregation and impoverishment, we must recognize that any claim that the urban uprisings constituted a “national crisis” conceives *the nation* in terms that are exclusively racial (white) and economic (property-owning). In this context, then, the very use of “crisis” must

⁴⁶ Of course, the very claim to a *constant state of crisis* could be seen to dilute the concept of crisis which ought to signify an acute event, a violent disruption of the normal state of affairs. And perhaps this is the point: that the segregation and impoverishment of black Americans *was* the normal state of affairs, that the structural violence of a suffocating social order defined daily existence for so many. When federal legislators thus spoke of the “crisis” of the riots, they were not wrong; it was, rather, a matter of failing to recognize — or merely disavowing — that what was *in crisis* was not the functioning of a just social order but an oppressive regime of social stratification empowered by racial antagonism.

be seen as a defensive response which exposes the desire to preserve a socioeconomic structure which secures the psychic and material advantages of a governing class and its beneficiaries through the impoverishment and exploitation of a segregated populace. In other words, the “crisis” of the riots cannot be abstracted from its context, cannot be analyzed without consideration of the ongoing resistance to racial integration and how that resistance is integral to the contest over public space in the American city.

A federal discourse on the riots emerged at this time in legislative hearings and bureaucratic state documents which attempted to characterize the riots as a violent threat to law and order and, in this, to propagate an image of the nation as an object in need of defense. However, the very terms by which this discourse constructed its objects — law, violence, crisis, and, especially, the public — reveal the ideological desires of a governing class anxious over its loss of control of political space, where this latter is understood as the exclusive territory of determinative governance. While the dissertation as a whole plans to pursue these conflicts where they manifest in the cultural mediations of the social/public and the domestic/private, this chapter remains focused on the politics of urban space: in the imagined borders of neighborhoods and municipal jurisdictions, in the public street as a route of circulation and as a liminal site of patrol and resistance, and in the representation of the city as a topographic or a demographic distribution of bodies. I argue that, in this post-civil rights era,⁴⁷ the contestation over public space exemplified by the urban uprisings was determined by racial antagonisms which, in turn, were part of the broader socioeconomic injustices that shape our understanding of what has historically counted as

⁴⁷ I am using this periodization of “post-civil rights” to indicate the years immediately following the landmark acts of legislation through and into the early years of what has since been described as the early years of American neoliberalism — roughly 1967-1984.

political life (or simply: living) in a nation that owed its very existence on structures of segregation and exclusion. If, as Rancière argues, politics is “an intervention in the visible and the sayable,” the demonstrations and uprisings at the end of the 1960s constituted just such an intervention in the way they occupied urban space. In order to prove this claim, I will analyze the discourse on race and violence that emerges in a series of legislative hearings on the riots conducted by the United States Senate. I am especially interested in this discourse where it worries over the “crisis” of the nation and the “threats” to domestic well-being attributed to the riots but rather transparently effected by the very prospect of desegregation itself.⁴⁸ In the next section, “Contesting Crisis,” I analyze several moments from those legislative hearings in order to establish the three primary functions of the defensive discourse that fought to justify the *effects* of a segregated nation at the same time as it was challenged to put an end to such divisions. First, legislators claimed on behalf of the state the exclusive right to determine political discourse in an effort to immunize the space of the political from the contagion of the abject other, here figured most prominently by the resident of the black ghetto. Second, legislators routinely disavowed state violence which also served to delegitimize any oppositional form of violence — in other words, only the latter actually counted *as* violence. Third, nearly all of the officials called to testify at the legislative hearings perform the same systematic abjection of the black ghetto via a paranoid constitution of urban space. With the space of the political in quarantine, the anxieties loosed by the perceived threats

⁴⁸ Following James Baldwin, I choose the term “desegregation” rather than “integration” here to emphasize the issues of rights and access and to distinguish between . He writes of the civil rights struggle that “the Black demand was not for integration. Integration, as we could all testify, simply by looking at the colors of our skins, had, long ago, been accomplished.... The Black demand was for desegregation, which is a legal, public, social matter: a demand that one be treated as a human being and not like a mule, or a dog” (22).

of civil rights show up in an aesthetics of law and order, one characterized by curation, management, objectivity, and a neutralization of affect. Of course, these ideal aesthetic forms become, in turn, distorted by the influence of such anxieties which are not so easily contained and dispelled.

The Problem of Civil Rights

On November 1, 1967, the United States Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations commenced a series of hearings “on one of the most disturbing internal problems which has faced our country in recent years . . . : the grave national crisis created by urban rioting” (United States, *Riots* 1). The purpose of these hearings, which would span more than two years and nearly 6,000 pages of “evidence” and “testimony,” was to discern the “immediate and long-range prevention” of “civil disorder” and achieve “the preservation of law and order and domestic tranquility within the United States” (1). The hearings began with a focus on specific incidents of rioting in the cities of Houston, Nashville, Newark, Chicago, and Detroit, shifting to a more abstract investigation of “militancy, extremism, and violence,” followed by a more sustained engagement with “campus disorders,” and concluding in August, 1970, on the subject of “bombing and terrorism.”⁴⁹ The first fifteen parts of the hearings — beginning with the shootout between Houston police and students

⁴⁹ This trajectory of the hearings warrants its own consideration, and it says much about how the state views any act that could be seen to undermine the rule of law as an “extreme” threat to its existence. If the actions of the governing class are to be taken as an indication of the political ontology that informs democratic practice in the United States, it is obvious that a rigidly-maintained consensus — a consensus which is itself *anti-democratic*, in Rancière’s terms — demands that any challenge to the order so conceived constitutes a threat that must be eliminated. That there can only be order is not merely ironic, it is an institutional given.

of Texas Southern University in November, 1967, and concluding with a brief return to Nashville in March, 1969 — include nearly 3,000 pages of evidence and testimony from investigators, administrators, police, community relations liaisons, and politicians. At the same time as these hearings were being held, Congress passed both the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (in April) and the revised Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 (in August), both of which sought to increase the opportunity of all to “fair and equal” housing. In February of the same year, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Kerner Commission, so named for its chair, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner Jr.) issued its Report, which famously proclaimed: “Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal” (1). Commissioned by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in the wake of the riots in Newark and Detroit, the report opened with the same set of questions as the hearings: “What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?” (1). The language of the Kerner Report, however, implicates a structural racism that the participants in the hearings consistently disavow. Where the hearings target the lawlessness and violence of “urban disorder” as both cause and symptom — a repressive form of civil disobedience itself in need of repression — the Kerner Report acknowledges, from the start, the “racial division” and “polarization of the American community” as tending to “the destruction of basic democratic values” (1).

Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negro can never forget — is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it. (1)

Such language of institutional culpability contrasts with the stark and unforgiving rhetoric of the hearings, exemplified by Senator John L. McClellan, who claims, from the beginning, that “[t]he riots cannot be justified” (6). The contrast in tone and blame persists in the very different ways each document understands its *problem* and how it approaches its *solution*. For the members of the Kerner Commission, the problem *is* segregation, institutional racism, and ignorance; for McClellan and the members of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, the problem is not merely the “philosophy” of the black radical but the black radical himself. Says McClellan, offering his “conclusion” before the hearings have even begun:

It is my own judgment that we have come to the conclusion that idleness is the worst curse, and an economic base is the greatest necessity, and that the American system demands not only Government action, but enormous action in the private sector and especially by American business enterprise. (7-8).

For McClellan, the violence and disorder (as well as the violence *of* disorder) result from a lack of appropriate economic opportunity, with the emphasis on *opportunity* signaling an unwillingness on the part of the black American to take advantage of what has been made available; the solution, therefore, is “enormous action” by capitalist enterprise. If “idleness is the worst curse,” those who are not already working (or those who refuse to work) must be made productive: un-production and waste, according to McClellan, are the root causes of violence and disorder.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The fear of anti-production (which is a fear that a source of potential surplus is going untapped) motivated the revisions to federal housing legislation, opening up not only the residential home but the “ghetto” itself to greater exploitation by forces of financialization and speculation. McClellan’s fear of “idleness” is somewhat obviated, not by making the unproductive bodies productive but by rendering their very space (the home, the project, the neighborhood) a source of surplus-production.

The ostensible goal of the hearings — to obtain the knowledge necessary to assure the “health, welfare, and safety” of the nation (2) — could only be achieved through a more absolute suppression of non-sanctioned violence: i.e., any violence that is not an extension of the “law-making” and “law-preserving” functions of state militarism (Benjamin, “Critique” 240-41). Law must be preserved and security must be maintained for the sake of “the structure of our peaceful society” (United States, *Riots* 2). The violence inherent in the preservation of law and order is disavowed, as is the exceptionalism of police violence, as “law” comes to signify “peace” within a legislative discourse that equates “force” and “violence,” where *violence* only appears in a *violation* of law. The disavowal of state violence — or what we might more generally describe, following Étienne Balibar, as the *violence-of-power* — recasts that violence according to “the schema of *preventive counter-violence*” (Balibar 139). “Any violence ... that has to become legally or morally legitimate must present itself if not as retaliation, at least as correction and suppression of *violent forces* ... which have destroyed or disturbed an originary ideal, originally peaceful, non-violent order, or threaten it with destruction” (139). Such a preventive counter-violence, in other words, imagines a nefarious violence which is temporally anterior to it, always before, which justifies the force of law as the necessary intervention into a field of unstable power relations in order that they may be corrected, which is to say put back in order.⁵¹ However, since the threat to which the violence of the state responds pre-exists it, the force of law must establish a permanent

⁵¹ “[I]f, at a fundamental institutional level, violence can be justified only as preventive counter-violence, then something called violence, or violent behaviour — be it public or private, individual or collective — will exist only inasmuch as its violent suppression is already anticipated. In other words what we call ‘violence’ and the lines of demarcation between what is supposed to be violent behaviour and what is not, will exist only retrospectively, in the anticipated recurrence of counter-violence” (Balibar 139).

vigilance in the name of defense: it *always* acts in response to the “violent forces” that *always* threaten its ideality.

A patriarchal (even paternal) tone of regret is clear from the start of the hearings, as McClellan states in the opening moments:

We must face certain unpleasant facts. It is apparent that a new philosophy has flourished in recent years, having as its central theme the theory that we are no longer a nation of laws. In several fields, and particularly in the civil rights movement, there has been for some time a rapid increase in the number of civil disorders, sit-ins, unruly protest marches, disorderly demonstrations, and violations of law. It appears that many persons who, in the past, have condoned or sponsored willful civil disobedience have now taken the next step in advocating criminal force and violence. (2)

McClellan’s language is largely transparent: the creation of two distinct sides of the issue, those who obey/uphold the law and those who do not, and the repeated characterization of the other as *out of control*. Part of the problem, for McClellan, resides in the *theoretical* production that sanctions such actions (seeming an almost disciplinary dispute in his use of the term “fields”), yet the ambiguity of the claim that the “central theme” of this “philosophy,” “that we are no longer a nation of laws,” leaves it in doubt whether McClellan is more bothered by the “willful” violation of law or the presumption that the legal foundations of the state can be called into question. In foregrounding the problem of this philosophy — “which contends that each man should be free to violate the laws which he considers unjust” — at the same time as he appeals to an inviolability *of* law that sustains any law in particular, McClellan also de-emphasizes the “genuine grievances” made by the supposed lawbreakers (2). McClellan juxtaposes “complaints from police and urban

officials” that television broadcasts “rarely show attacks upon policemen” with “complaints and alleged grievances relating to conditions which are said to underlie the outbreaks of violence, including unemployment, violations of civil rights, charges of police brutality, and the adequacy of housing, educational and recreational facilities, and relief and welfare programs” (4).⁵² Even if such grievances were “genuine” — and nowhere does McClellan suggest that they may be — the “riots cannot be justified,” and the primary concern is not to attend to such grievances but to “take the high road back to law and order,” in the words of Sen. Karl E. Mundt (6). In the repeated insistence that “[w]e want the facts to speak for themselves,” at the same time as it is admitted that the “causes” of the “disorders” under investigation “may be indeterminable,” McClellan and Mundt establish within the first dozen pages of the hearings the epistemic impasse that necessarily constrains them: despite the “testimony of nationally known sociologists, psychiatrists, public officials, and urban experts,” the motivations of the (almost exclusively black) militants and rioters is likely beyond what can be known (2, 3). (The irony that no “testimony” is provided from the “militants” themselves escapes the members of the subcommittee, for whom facts only originate from sources deemed official or expert.) The construction of this impasse serves two functions: first, in obscuring potential causes for the violence (which, it must be repeated, is always a violence in *violation* of the law), it irrationalizes the conduct and action of the rioters: i.e., no matter what grievances are claimed, they may never be verified and may as well not exist, thus removing in

⁵² The obvious racial divisions alluded to and exploited in McClellan’s rhetoric was hardly exceptional in post-civil rights government discourse. As Christopher Bonastia shows, “From 1964 to 1968, federal bureaucrats began to discover what approaches to desegregation were more or less effective, civil rights opponents in Congress began to devise ways to restrain the more activist impulses of government agencies, and numerous riots and expressions of black militancy reduced white support for civil rights initiatives” (2).

advance any justification for their action (*the riots cannot be justified*);⁵³ second, what can be known (the “facts” which “speak for themselves”) is *all* that can be known, thus the dual burden of authority and legitimation rests solely on the investigations and subsequent actions of the legislators. In other words, the construction of an impasse creates the space for a response at the same time as it decides in advance what counts as response.

From early on in the hearings, the legislative response to (its own) impasse takes the form of an obsessive psychic and discursive segregation: the senators as well as their summoned officials and experts repeatedly invoke a space of dissent outside the nation or community proper, a space of containment or quarantine where the irrationalism of militant violence originates and where it threatens to spill over and destroy the true space of the nation.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, this space of exception becomes the site upon which the violence of the law (a violence never conceived as such within this discourse) may act with impunity and, in fact, out of necessity.⁵⁵ Victor Burgin suggests the concept of “paranoiac space” to think about the racialized space that takes shape within the opposition “exile/nation,” an opposition that becomes internalized in nationalist

⁵³ The epistemological obscurity of the black militant position is figured in Mundt’s contrast to the “high road back to law and order” when he speaks of “the smoke-ridden trail leading to further chaos and eventually oblivion of our free society as we have known it” (6).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Mundt’s claim: “These are acts of violence which cannot be permitted, for if continued there is no limit to the conflagration which could sweep this country” (6).

⁵⁵ See Denise Ferreira da Silva’s analysis of “[n]ecessity as a figuring of violence” within the long history of western juridical philosophy in “No-bodies” (122-23), as well as its more comprehensive treatment in *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

discourses.⁵⁶ “History has familiarized us with the insidious movement in which ‘nation’ is confused with ‘race.’ Institutionalized racism may ensure that racial minorities live in a condition of internal exile within the nation of which they are citizens — an exile that, if it is not legal, cannot be named” (130).⁵⁷ The evidence of the conflation of “nation” and “race” is everywhere in McClellan’s and Mundt’s comments in the opening pages of the hearings, most especially in their efforts to conceive the black neighborhood (or the frequently named “ghetto”) as a space of exception, a site of violent infection within an otherwise healthy landscape, “the structure of our

⁵⁶ In an article on the “interlocking matrix” of race, class, and gender in the construction of public space, Susan Ruddick asks why one of two “equally brutal” public murders in Toronto in the 1990s “provoked a massive outrage” while the other “was met with barely a comment within the larger community” (7). Contrary to “the assumption that public spaces are universally accessible to a civic public,” Ruddick notes that “gendered and racialized identities function to constrain participation in the public sphere” (7). In the case she examines, the narrative that most garnered public response quickly adopted the “gendered and racialized trope of the dangerous black male who threatens the integrity of the white community through sexual or physical violence to its women” (8, 9). The attack “was seen to compromise the freedom of middle-class families to move without fear through the city. This commercialized public space was, in this depiction, elevated to the status of every space in the city” (10).

⁵⁷ Balibar writes of the internalization of borders in these terms: “there can be no doubt that, in national normality, the normality of the national citizen-subject, such an appropriation is also *internalized* by individuals, as it becomes a condition, an essential reference of their collective, communal sense, and hence, once again, of their identity (or of the order, the ranking, by which they arrange their multiple identities). As a consequence, borders cease to be purely external realities. They become also — and perhaps predominantly — what Fichte ... magnificently termed ‘inner borders’ [*innere Grenzen*]; that is to say — as indeed he says himself — *invisible borders*, situated everywhere and nowhere” (78).

peaceful society” (2).⁵⁸ Further, the non-legal exile of the inhabitants of such spaces justifies their subjugation by the “law of the land” — what *cannot be named*, which is also what cannot be known and so (as Mundt repeats several times) *cannot be justified*, of necessity lies outside the law and must, then, be made lawful. In contrast with what Burgin calls “psychotic space,” where “boundaries fail” and “frontiers are breached,” where the “external object” is experienced as having “invaded the subject,” a paranoid conception of space maintains the threat of such an invasion without yet experiencing it as *having happened*; instead, boundaries and frontiers are fiercely maintained (129). In sympathy with Melanie Klein’s theorizing of the paranoid-schizoid position, Burgin’s concept of paranoia suggests the defensive posturing of a psyche that imagines itself assailed by malevolent forces and responds by concretizing its own processes of splitting, idealization, and projection. By maintaining such manufactured divisions, paranoia holds off the dynamic forging of an ambivalence that would allow the reparative engagement with objects, both internal and external, characteristic of what Klein calls the depressive position. Klein goes further, however, when she suggests the possibility of denying the bad object altogether in “hallucinatory gratification,” where an unyielding sense of omnipotence annihilates the very possibility of the “painful situation.” She writes: “It is, however, not only a situation and an object that are denied

⁵⁸ Mundt’s imperative that “we take the high road *back* to law and order” furthers the claim that this spatial disruption has also interrupted the *telos* of the nation, constituting a temporal break or exception within an otherwise homogeneous history (6, my emphasis). In Hegelian terms, any deviation from “law and order” would be tantamount to a negation of *real* freedom, i.e. that freedom secured by the “ethical totality” of the state. In contrast with the classical liberal conception of freedom as measured by limits to individual will (“as if the individual were to limit his freedom among other individuals”), Hegel advocates a notion of freedom grounded in institutional forms: “As against this negative concept of freedom [based on limits], it is rather law, ethical life, the state (and they alone) that comprise the positive reality and satisfaction of freedom” (*Introduction* 41).

and annihilated — *it is an object-relation* which suffers this fate; and therefore a part of the ego, from which the feelings towards the object emanate, is denied and annihilated as well” (*Envy* 7). Such a fantasy of omnipotence supports the vision of the state espoused by legislators in these hearings where the very structure of relation between government-as-agent and the communities it abjects gets denied: those communities are outside what can be known, outside the law, outside the *telos* of nation; and the only way such communities can be made to fit the fantasy of the good relation is by being subjected to the annihilatory drive that denies their very difference.

Houston Mayor Louie Welch’s testimony exemplifies, in many ways, the rhetoric of defense and disavowal. He was called before the subcommittee to testify specifically on the “gun battle” between police and the students of Texas Southern University (TSU), which he immediately sets out to prove was not a “riot” like the others. Welch claims: “It is impossible for me to discuss a big-city riot in Houston, because Houston has not had one. As you know, we had a gun battle between students in dormitories at TSU and city police. The campus is not the community at large” (30). Welch’s insistence that one make a distinction between the university campus and the *community at large* — understood, in a sense, as the former’s exemption from the latter — is intended to highlight the difference between “campus disorders” and “big city riots” (30). For Welch, the issue is one of blame: while the mayor’s office may be held accountable for the “traditional underlying causes of unrest” such as “jobs or housing,” it cannot be held accountable for the localized and institutional-specific problems of a university, even if that university and its students are Houston residents (30). However, Welch’s frequent efforts to focus his testimony on his office’s diligent efforts to contend with the “racial problems” of the city are largely ignored by the subcommittee, which continually brings the focus back to the “disorder” on the campus of TSU. Seeming to reject Welch’s paranoiac separation of the university from the

Houston community, McClellan insists that “what happened at TSU is the crux of why we are here, *because violence did occur in the city*” (55, my emphasis). Welch again attempts to dissociate the “problems” of the university from the potential to address such problems available to his office when he insists in turn that the “militant efforts being made on the campus of the university ... were not directed to municipal government in any way at the beginning.”

The CHAIRMAN. That is what I believe your statement seems to indicate, that this was not a community disturbance or disorder.

Mayor WELCH. This is correct.

The CHAIRMAN. It occurred on the campus of the university.

Mayor WELCH. The things that led up were intramural for some time. They were within the walls of the campus, so to speak, although we did have a public street that traverses the campus, which became involved several times. (55)

Welch’s paranoid-schizoid conception of the space of the city relies on the same exceptionalizing of violence performed by McClellan and Mundt — the violations exist only “within the walls of the campus” and only affect the *community at large* to the extent that that community literally bisects the campus via a public street. Eventually, however, Welch admits that the violence of the campus disorder “overflowed to that street” (60). Rocks and bricks were thrown at cars passing along the street, and eventually student protestors “laid down in the street and blockaded it” (60). While the paranoiac maintains borders, insists on the absoluteness of separation between self and other, the abject and the body proper, *this* space and *that* one (the *campus* is not the *community*), Burgin notes: “In psychotic space an external object — a whole, a part, or an attribute of a person or thing — may be experienced as if it had invaded the subject” (129). It is an experience of this psychotic space, in other words, that paranoia defends against. In the example of the “public” street

that bisects the space-apart of the campus, the “public” themselves are endangered by the abject matter of that other space — the individuals/bodies that do not get to count as part of that public. The street is neither border nor frontier; rather, it is an interior — of the community, of the lawful and non-violent space of the state — thrust into proximate relation within an exteriority that threatens its self-constitution. At the same time, however, the public street, as signifier of the subject of the community, contains the abject space of the campus within it: bi-secting it, it also marks the limit by which the contour of its identity can be traced through exclusion of that which it does not contain. “Abjection,” notes Burgin, “establishing the first line of demarcation, is the zero degree of identity.... The paranoid racist subject, seeking to take its place on the ‘clean and proper’ side of abjection, has refused to symbolize the abject within itself” (131). In “an effort to force the closing of the street,” the bodies on the ground threaten to cut off the circulation of traffic by which the community measures its life and ensures its identity — yet it is the very presence of those bodies that testifies to the processes of abjection (processes of segregation and ghettoization) necessary to that identity formation (*Riots*). The “bricks, bottles, large chunks of concrete, and other missiles” thrown onto the street, but even more the black bodies that literally occupied its space, signify an invasion of the abject, triggering the responses of defense, containment, and self-preservation (157). Police responded to the “blockade” by themselves blocking the street, closing it to the circulation of public traffic. When the street was closed and traffic “rerouted,” according to one Houston police lieutenant, “the situation would become calm,” yet when “the barricades” were removed, “it would start over” (158). Impasse is met with impasse, the space of the abject quarantined, denied the circulation of traffic necessary to stage its invasion of that public space. At the same time, the mutual efforts of blocking — the traffic on the street by the protestors and the traffic from entering the street by the police — become their own form of circulation: while

those who live within the university's space of exception, those excluded from the mayor's *community at large*, enter onto the public space of the street in an act of forced inclusion, the police respond by denying such efforts, re-affirming the space-apart of the campus by temporarily conceding the public street to the quarantined zone.

Welch rejects the term "ghetto" to describe the black population of Houston, opting instead to speak of the city's "laminations" of white and black, as if the city were constituted by a striation of colored bodies that have come about naturally, a geologic process of history: "as the city has grown, its laminations have occurred." The area around TSU is "predominantly Negro," he claims, but "[t]here are many very fine homes just a few blocks away, *fine white homes*" (58, my emphasis). Welch's descriptions of the city's racial (and socioeconomic) geography does not appear sufficient for the members of the subcommittee who request a "map" that "would give us a profile of this picture that you are giving us a word picture of" (58). Indeed, McClellan, as well as Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, seem incapable of making sense of the "campus disorder," whether it should qualify as a community-wide disorder or an exception, as Welch argues. The map, which would supply an *actual* picture, to which Welch's description is merely a supplemental "word picture," would somehow help them make that decision. If the causes of the race riots under investigation are linked to "high unemployment, unrest, inadequate housing, low incomes, and so on," in Muskie's words, what would it mean that a riot takes place at this university campus which is flanked by a "low-income" neighborhood on one side and a "high-income area" on the other (58)? If one understands the space of exception as being constituted by what Giorgio Agamben calls the "state of exception," a primarily juridical and even binary phenomenon, the space of

exception comes to be *in relation to* a sovereign power.⁵⁹ Yet the topographical logic that motivates the questions (and confusions) of the congressional investigators relies on a displacement or suspension of the sovereign in favor of an almost geographical faith in the formation of public spaces. The map would provide the view from above, presumably depicting Welch's "laminations"

⁵⁹ Are we here dealing with what Agamben names a *relation of exception*: "the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion" (18)? E. Lâle Demitürk argues that Agamben's definition of "the concentration camp, the space where 'the state of exception begins to become the rule' can also be applied to the black ghetto, located within the boundaries of the modern nation-state" (61). It seems evident that the "sovereignty of whiteness, then, constitutes itself through an exclusion of (black) bare life, defined solely in terms of blackness" and that "[b]lack ghetto formation as a 'space of exception' is necessary in the form of the emergence of white sovereign power" (61). Demitürk's argument, however, does not seem to recognize that what is here being named "white sovereign power" emerged not in the post-Reconstruction ghetto but in the Middle Passage. In a critique of the claim that the "refugee is the contemporary political subject par excellence," Jared Sexton calls into question the functional use of Agamben's terminology for a discussion of black life in the U.S. He writes:

If in Agamben's analysis the inscription of nativity in Euro-America is disquieted in the twentieth century by postcolonial immigration, the native-born black population in the United States — known in the historic instance as 'the descendants of slaves' — suffers the status of being neither the native nor the foreigner, neither the colonizer nor the colonized. The nativity of the slave is not inscribed elsewhere in some other (even subordinated) jurisdiction, but rather nowhere at all. The nativity of the slave is foreclosed, undermining from within the potential for citizenship, but also opening the possibility of a truly nonoriginal origin, a political existence that signifies 'the presence of an absence that discloses the absence inherent in all presence and every present.'" (41).

See also, further on: "The metaphoric transfer that dismisses the legitimacy of black struggles against racial slavery ... while it appropriates black suffering as the template for nonblack grievances remains one of the defining features of contemporary political culture" (42).

in clear (i.e., black and white) visual form. Welch's insistence that there are "pockets" rather than "a single big concentration" of poor black residents is intended to reinforce his claim that Houston has "very healthy integration," witnessed by the "laminations" of "white, Negro, white" (58).

When the mayor of Plainfield, New Jersey, George Hetfield, is called by the senate subcommittee to testify on the riots in that city in July, 1967, he immediately asserts that "no one is justified in placing the cause on unemployment, inferior schools, oppressive housing or inadequate recreational facilities" (959). He goes on to insist: "*There is no real ghetto*. Civil rights played no part in the Plainfield disturbances, in my opinion" (960, my emphasis). Hetfield's assertion that there is *no real ghetto* in Plainfield echoes an earlier claim made by John Walsh, "staff investigator" of the subcommittee, who testified: "The city [of Plainfield] gives the appearance of being neat, orderly, and generally prosperous. There does not appear to be any specific section of the city which could be termed a ghetto, although there are individual houses which are in a rundown condition" (947). Walsh's language is studiously non-committal, saying everything and nothing at once as it invokes the city as epiphenomenon. In addition to the "appearance" the city "gives," as well as what "does not appear," there also "does not appear" to be "any serious unemployment problem" (947).⁶⁰ Walsh's summary of his investigations consists of a chronological overview of interviews of those same officials and "experts" who will themselves testify before the subcommittee. As Walsh explains: "This chronology sets out only the major events which took place *and the various witnesses will amplify the details* which surround these events" (947). The *amplification* of evidence signifies the fundamental structure of proof that drives the objectivity or *facticity* of the hearings: questions, claims, statistics, and

⁶⁰ I will return, in chapter three, to the question of a city's "appearance" when I examine the shift in post-civil rights urban policing to an emphasis on "order maintenance" and the policing of aesthetics.

phrases are repeated, sometimes *ad nauseum*, enacting through sheer quantity a form of consensus; and the testimony of the officials and experts, upon whose authority the image of the riots is constructed, itself gets doubled in the introductions and summaries by such figures as Walsh *and* in the facsimile reproduction of statements which, in addition to being read in full, function as written reports that are appealed to as yet further objects of proof.

The discussion that follows involves Hetfield's efforts to prove each of these claims: that unemployment cannot be an issue because there are enough jobs; that housing cannot be an issue because the slums have been demolished; that recreational facilities cannot be an issue because of the "efficiency" of the city's "human relations commission" (960-62). The majority of the black community in Plainfield is "hard-working and responsible," according to Hetfield, and it is "only a few hundred" who are the cause of the city's unrest: "It consists of the can't or won't work, unemployed and unemployable, uneducated, hoodlums, addicts, misguided youth, and militants" (962). Hetfield cites an unemployment rate of 2.8 percent and statistics from the city's chamber of commerce that lists "only 598 cases of unemployment" (960).

The CHAIRMAN. You say many of the unemployed are not employable for either skilled or unskilled labor. Why wouldn't they be employable for unskilled labor?

Mayor HETFIELD. They are not even competent for unskilled labor, many of them, or they don't want to work.

The CHAIRMAN. That is what I was trying to find out. They are not employable because they don't want to work; is that a fact?

Mayor HETFIELD. Or they are not skilled enough for unskilled labor.

The CHAIRMAN. They are not even skilled enough for unskilled labor?

Mayor HETFIELD. Right. Something is lacking somewhere.

The CHAIRMAN. Does that mean a lack of mental ability to perform unskilled labor, or a physical handicap? What does it mean? It is a very significant statement.

Mayor HETFIELD. There may be many causes, sir, whether mental, physical, no will to work, or what. We always have that. (960)

As further proof that the unemployed in Plainfield are simply those who are too choosy about the kind of work they are willing to undertake, Hetfield cites the example of a local hospital that is “going begging” to fill its 104 vacancies for “menial jobs” (960). The coexistence of statistics and speculation fuels a discourse that wants to have it both ways: Hetfield wants his baseless prejudices affirmed at the same level of objective fact as the statistics that are supposed to elucidate them. The problem, as he describes it, is not societal, not the result of failed efforts to integrate the community, precisely because that “unemployable” subset of the black population has “resisted all attempts to be included as members of our integrated community” (962). None of his claims, however, stand up to even the most rudimentary scrutiny, as seen in the discussion with McClellan; this *unemployable* surplus, the abject subset whose exclusion is of its own making, cannot even be described: in Hetfield’s own words: “Something is lacking somewhere.” The implication of mental or physical retardation falls back on itself and exposes its own ad hoc construction, a baseless claim that is supposed to be shared by others, delivered with a wink and an implicit conspiratorial consent (which McClellan denies). At the same time, it is the truest thing Hetfield says, since *something* is definitely lacking *somewhere*. McClellan’s pragmatic and genuinely disconcerted response only exposes how ridiculous the conversation has become, with Hetfield speaking in an absurd racist code while McClellan mimes the objectivity and impartiality supposed to sanction

this discourse as fact. What is lacking is that which has been excluded from the start: the segregated subject from the epistemic field. Further, the something-that-lacks is also the thing “we always have” precisely because it subsists in its exclusion; just as the abject confirms the proper boundary of a self in its expulsion and just as the border traces the space of inclusion through an act of exclusion, the unemployable surplus or the something-that-lacks *is always had* because it is “our” most intimate property. In Balibar’s dialectic of violence and ideality, the unemployed as a historical category does not “*predate* the establishment of a social (welfare) state ...; they *come after* its partial failure and dismembering” (142). In the particular American instance, what I am calling the unemployable surplus describes — in contrast but also in sympathy with Balibar’s claims of a “post-historical situation” — the subject of post-segregation, the real effect of the contradictory and destructive processes of racial integration in the wake of civil rights legislation. While Hetfield insists on the unemployable as the one who resists integration, it is precisely the opposite: the unemployable is the one whom integration resists, the figure whose exclusion is maintained in order to affirm the boundaries of a political reality, in Arendt’s terms, whose very existence is threatened by inclusion.

A different logic motivates the desire for *locating* the source of the violence attributed to the black militant, one that, as seen in Burgin’s description of paranoid space, understands space topographically, constituted by distinctly bounded fields of representation. As with any topographical map, one can see a landscape in different ways depending on how the surface is coded (i.e., colored) in order to represent otherwise imperceptible gradations of depth. Paradoxically, such a map depicts difference by categorization and selection, essentially reducing a heterogeneity to those aspects of it that can be represented. Any such practice of visualization already operates according to the spatial demands of the boundary-seeking paranoid whose most

primal fear is not, as would be the case for the occupant of the space of exception, to become bare life but the potential dissolution of identity that results from contagion. Muskie makes this clear when he explains to Welch the reason why he wants the “map” of the city: “The point that I am really driving at here is whether the university is located *physically in proximity to* any Negro area which is an area of high unemployment, unrest, inadequate housing, low incomes, and so on” (58, my emphasis). For the paranoiac, in his disavowal of the constitutive abject, nothing is more frightening than the influence of physical proximity; rather, what is frightening is that proximity itself *is* influence. The pictorial “profile” of the city map would show this based on its code (or key), yet in the very process of depicting, say, “unrest,” the profile is inevitably distorted, since the function of any profile is the depiction of only a selection of the subject, a turned face. That is, of course, precisely the point. Muskie needs to see the city’s profile in order to confirm what he already knows⁶¹: violence is contagious; which is why from the start of the hearings, violence

⁶¹ I will return to this particular function of “knowing” later when I consider in more detail the way that knowledge serves not the purpose of accumulation but of restriction. In a consideration of the clinical phenomenon of the “concrete” patient in analysis — the one who holds fast to a disavowal and resists all interpretation — Alan Bass shows how “knowledge” on the part of such a patient “expresses her compelling defensive need to make sure that whatever fantasy she imposes upon the analyst can be taken as a reality in a way that brooks no alternative, no difference in apparent meaning” (37). Here, the knowledge that would be provided by the pictorial “profile” of the situation goes beyond McClellan and Mundt’s earlier efforts to relegate any reason for the violence to an epistemological obscurity; instead, the visual plays a special role in an overall quest for knowledge that will not secure new information but merely reinforce the concrete position of the investigators who already know that violence infects when in proximity to an area (which is to say, a people) whose tendency to violence has already been ontologically secured.

“cannot be permitted,” because if it is,⁶² its contagious nature would allow it to spread indiscriminately and there would be “no limit to the conflagration which could sweep this country” (6). Rather than a space of exception, then, the “pockets” of poor black residents in Houston are seen by this legislative discourse as sites of infection whose proximity to the functioning (circulating, public, white) areas of the city proper indicates its threat of contagion. The desire for a spatial (and often even pictorial) representation of the boundaries, byways, and impasses of a city arises from this desire to separate or abject the foreign body that nevertheless constitutes the healthy functioning of the body. Here we see another reason for the police response in Houston: to blockade the street that bisects the university campus keeps the public from entering this space of contamination and contagion.

In attending to the ways that this discourse wrestles with such anxieties in the various figures deployed to explain (or explain away) the violence of segregated space, I hope to interrogate the political stakes that arise when this desire for law and order dictates the functions of particular aesthetic forms. Welch’s terminology of “pockets,” “laminations,” and “concentration” to describe the distribution of colored bodies within an urban space both informs and is informed by the ensuing discourse on the utility of the pictorial form as a proof of claim. Elsewhere in the hearings, similar terms can be found in discussions of perimeters, boundaries, and the function of a dividing line performed by public streets where they act as borders between two districts or neighborhoods or where they trace the limit of a municipality or a university

⁶² This idea itself is difficult to grasp within the logic of exception that informs this legislative discourse and points to the paradox that subtends the disavowal of state violence. If violence can only be conceived as a violation of law, it already refuses to acknowledge any form of permissive authority, already exists outside of a structure of permission and consent. How, then, can its *being permitted* (or not) become a possibility?

campus.⁶³ Maps are often provided with areas blocked off, shaded, or outlined to indicate not only the precise location of the rioting or the clashes between protestors and police but often simply to designate the *blackest* spaces of the urban topography. Although the diagram of the space around Fisk University in Nashville is reproduced devoid of any markings or overlays (see Fig. 1.1), the testimony of the hearings describes the ways its surface was drawn upon to indicate those structures and boundaries that constituted both actual sites of conflict during the riot and retrospective sites of cathexis, such as the “retaining wall” that divides the campus from the street which was marked with a “wavy line” (431). On a map of the city of Plainfield, shaded areas indicate both the main areas of interest in the city, such as the police and fire stations and city hall, and the two black housing projects; in addition, a thick shaded border creates a zone of quarantine, the space of violence, that occupies only part of the city as a whole (see Fig. 1.2). A map of the city of Detroit is provided which includes several “overlays” representing various situations and emphasizing again key sites of conflict. Unlike the other maps reproduced in the transcripts of the hearings, however, there is one image of Detroit whose surface is overtaken by an amorphous black blob (see Figs. 1.3 and 1.4). Robert Emmet Dunne, who served as assistant counsel for the subcommittee, explains that “the darkened areas [depict] those portions of the city of Detroit and the wholly enclosed community of Hamtramck that were affected by the major disorder of 1967” (1307). Such a saturation of the space of violence, which coincides with the *blackest* districts of a still largely segregated city, compels response; the city appears here under siege, overwhelmed by a visualized force of nullification. In this example, the image no longer provides *information*;

⁶³ Testimony on the Nashville riot takes up the figure of a “retaining wall” that separates the campus of Fisk University from the city proper (431); testimony on the Plainfield riot focuses on a specific parking lot and again on a “housing project” that is deemed “not a part of the street or a public place” (948).

instead, in its formlessness, the black blob consumes knowable space, blocks it out, halts the very practice of assembling facts for the purpose of producing verifiable claims. As Balibar notes: “A power which organizes itself as preventive counter-violence undoubtedly needs certain information about violence” (Balibar 139). The topographical map, but also the statistics, the charts and graphs, the photographic evidence, and the very form of the *expert testimony* itself, fulfills this function. However,

the suspicion will never be eliminated ... that there must be a basic element of *misrecognition*, a blind spot, in the midst of this ever-expanding knowledge, which stems from the fact that this knowledge is not only associated with power — as is all knowledge — but, more precisely, produced under the schema of preventive counter-violence, or the *re-establishment of order*” (139-40).

The epistemic impasse established at the start of the hearings — according to which any knowledge of the motivations and desires of the black militant has been foreclosed — signifies the blind spot, the misrecognized surplus that circulates throughout this knowledge production as precisely that which generates the paranoiac proliferation of evidence that is never enough. Furthermore, it is this unknowable element, the black blob that spreads like a stain over the city map, that prompts the call for the *re-establishment of order*.

The View From Above

Alongside a faith in the power of the visual to confirm knowledge (in the form of the topographical profile), there is a simultaneous fear of the visual as a medium of contagion (in the form of the moving-image). The form of the map aids the overall goal of the congressional hearings to seek out the sources of violence and extinguish them precisely because it confirms what is

already known: there are boundaries that must be maintained. The form of the television broadcast, however, exceeds the constraints by which what is seen is known precisely because its images have not been subject to the processes of abstraction by which bodies and lives may be safely catalogued and contained, which is to say: discursively quarantined. However mediated, the images are still taken to be raw, and as such, they are capable of inciting mimetic behavior. The same fear is operative in McClellan's anxiety over the "new philosophy" (of black militancy) to which he ascribes the central tenet "that we are no longer a nation of laws" — what the television broadcasts threaten, then, is an amplification of the same contagious threat inherent in civic dissent. McClellan notes that the primary complaint of law enforcement working in the cities flagged as sites of social unrest pertains to the televised broadcast of images which "has frequently had an inflammatory impact upon susceptible elements of our people" (3).⁶⁴ Fear of the moving-image as itself a medium of contagion is hardly unique to this moment, or this discursive scene. In many ways, the fear of these legislators and of the law's enforcers is rather transparent and banal: they worry that too much television coverage focuses on the violence enacted by the state (which their discourse disavows), that it makes them look bad, so to speak; but they are equally fearful of the

⁶⁴ Hetfield provides an example of the inevitable contradiction of such a discourse when it claims, on the one hand, that the riots "were planned, not spontaneous," that they were "organized, precipitated, and exploited by a small, hardcore group," and, on the other, that they were a hysterical outbreak caused by the contagious influence of a television broadcast (963). Hetfield: "I believe that the TV coverage played a large part in the Plainfield riots. The sensational coverage of the Newark riot showed persons looting stores while the police took no action to halt them. This view of looting appealed directly to the criminal and susceptible element. A mob hysteria was created which affected weak persons who would normally be law abiding" (962-63). Hetfield's way out of the contradiction is to separate the rioters into two distinct classes: the "small, hardcore group" who planned the events and the "weak" (i.e., affectable) mob who were recruited in their hysteria.

mimetic potential of the moving-image even as they proclaim their own immunity from it. “Thus, it is argued,” says McClellan, “that as a result of the excitement engendered by these films of violence and by the showing of frenzied exhortations by apparent leaders of the mobs, other riots were sparked and ignited in cities within television range of the large city where the pictures originated” (3).⁶⁵ Once again, proximity is invoked as itself influence (“within television range”), and once again what is at issue in this paranoiac vision of space is the failure of the boundary to contain the contagion, here given animated form and incendiary capabilities. On more than one occasion, the legislators seeks to recruit others to this view, urging, for example, Detroit journalist George Pruette, to corroborate their suspicion that the broadcast of riot imagery in one city catalyzes violence in another “within television range” by sheer force of mimetic contagion. Pruette, all too eager to affirm McClellan’s views (as long as they are speaking of his competitors), is repeatedly commended for his own reportage, in evidence at the hearings in the form of an hour-long news documentary on the riots in Detroit, which, was “edited down to eliminate inflammatory and emotional incidents” (1211).⁶⁶ Instead, Pruette’s film, represented in the hearings only in the transcript of the journalist’s “narration in addition to the sound on film,” focuses on the destruction of property and violence against police and firefighters (1211). In other words, it enacts, in visual

⁶⁵ McClellan’s use of the phrase “frenzied exhortations” to describe “apparent leaders of the mob” ascribes to them an affective quality of the subject-in-ecstasy, one who has lost recourse to the stoicism of good sense. Unlike the stern operatics of a fascist demagogue inciting the populace, McClellan sees the mob leader as devoid of reason, an example of what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls the “affectable ‘I,’” at the same time as he is endowed with the power to infect others with his “affectability.”

⁶⁶ At this point, the word “inflammatory” is repeated eight times in the span of not even two pages of the printed hearings.

form, the same disavowal of state violence (not to mention “emotions” writ large) with which McClellan opened the hearings. The police officers in Houston barricading the public street that bisects the campus of TSU in order to assert their control over the city’s means of circulation are engaged in the same practice of managing desire as the police officers in Detroit who have set up a checkpoint at the municipal border, stopping cars and retrieving loot. As a grand-standing Sen. Carl Curtis says to George Pruette shortly before they view the film on the Detroit riots: “The public media has a responsibility to promote *the desire for* law and order on the part of all people” (1210, my emphasis).⁶⁷

The film which was edited by Pruette also featured him as one of several “experts” who appear as a panel, accompanied by the program’s hosts, Ven Marshall and Dick Westerkamp. Titled *Six Days in July*, the broadcast, which aired on July 30, 1967 and was produced by WWJ Radio and Television News, is structured as an in-depth look back on the events of the Detroit Riot, which are presented chronologically, beginning on Sunday, when the first fires broke out, and concluding on Friday. “My colleagues and I hope to show you another dimension to the story,” says Westerkamp, “by taking you behind the camera lens.” Each segment is composed of aerial and ground footage of the riots (often accompanied by voice-over from one of the panelists), intercut with clips from official press conferences, and bookended by scenes from the studio soundstage where Pruette is joined by fellow “newsmen” Dwayne Riley and Robert Lyle, and cinematographers Al Deneau, Art Mazur, and Lare Wardrop. The program’s hosts interact with the panel of journalists and camera operators, getting their take on a specific piece of footage or provoking their reflections on what they had witnessed in their role as documentarians. At the conclusion of each day of the riot, which structures each segment, the broadcast cuts to an

⁶⁷ Not merely obeisance of the law but *desire* for it will return in my analysis of policework in chapter three.

advertisement for humanitarian relief: whether phone numbers for shelter and housing, for childcare relief, or for the Salvation Army or the Red Cross.

From the opening promise to take the audience “behind the camera lens” to its sanguine conclusion that Detroit, just as its city motto dictates, will rise from the ashes,⁶⁸ the broadcast flaunts its liberal moderation, avoiding, as Pruette says to McClellan in the hearings, inflammatory and emotional incidents.⁶⁹ “It was our intention,” Pruette says to the subcommittee before they view the film, “to show exactly what happened as objectively as possible” (1208). The documentary is an exemplary exercise in non-sensational journalism, offered up in primetime, in hindsight, and via the suit-and-tied adjudication of an all-American cast of well-tempered, white *newsmen*. Almost every moment of the program feels curated to conform to the most milquetoast brand of capitalist ideology. The rioters are characterized as “lawless hoodlums” helping themselves to the “unprotected merchandise in store windows,” and posing a threat to the “consuming public,” whose “property” was being looted and destroyed, while the rioters themselves “couldn’t care less.” “The mood of the people on the street was a carnival,” reporter Robert Lyle explains. During a segment on looting, images of broken storefronts and stockpiled shopping carts quickly yield to more insistent scenes of arrest and the checkpoints set up at municipal perimeters, followed by a clip of Detroit Governor George Romney calling for federal

⁶⁸ Detroit’s motto: “Speramus meliora; resurgent cineribus” (“We hope for better things; it shall arise from the ashes”) was written by Father Gabriel Richard following a fire that all but destroyed the entire city in 1805.

⁶⁹ In fact, the program’s most “emotional” scenes are the interludes of humanitarian relief. The advertisement for the Red Cross, for example, is scored with the persistent staccato blip of a heartbeat set to rapidly cut shots of medical workers reaching for bags of blood — or perhaps it is more accurate to say *a* bag of blood with the implication that supplies are running out.

troops, followed by President Lyndon B. Johnson calling for federal troops — there is no room for misinterpreting the causal sequence of (unlawful) actions and (penal) consequences. In such sequences, the film manifests the paranoid-schizoid desire to police the capillaries of circulation, all of the routes by which bodies and things traverse the topographies of capital; and the maintenance of boundaries is integral to this as it establishes the infrangible borders that protect those routes — hence the need on the part of the police in Houston to blockade the public street at its ends before the student activists blockade it from within, to assert control over circulation. Lyle continues his commentary over a scene, shot at night, of a group of National Guard troops, poised in the middle of the street with rifles aimed at an oncoming car. He explains that the troops were blocking traffic in an effort to both keep the trunk loads of loot from getting beyond the municipal borders and to protect the looters themselves from the more violent districts of the city. “It’s amazing that people didn’t want to stop,” he says. “They would have to order them three or four times with a rifle pointed at your head and then they would argue about turning around, even though there were all kinds of shots being fired across the street.” Lyle’s amazement comes from a position outside of the disavowed space of state violence and registers both his transparent faith in the regulatory power of law — surely federal arms cannot fail to halt unpermitted circulation — and his own desire to be in proximity to that violence — to *want to stop* at the point of its rifles (evident in part in the switch from the third-person “they” to the second-person “your”). The doubling of the violence — the “rifle pointed at your head” and the “all kinds of shots being fired” — is recast to fit that disavowed structure where the gun in *your* face is merely a punctuation to the “order” which is insisted upon merely to keep *you* safe from the real violence that saturates the space of the city under siege.

The documentary relies on images of aftermath,⁷⁰ second-hand accounts from law enforcement, and anecdotal evidence from the journalists to illustrate and amplify the violence that otherwise only appears in the form of the structure fire or the tense, almost still-image, of the standoff. Images of garbage trucks hauling piles of broken glass and brickwork, for example, precede a segment on “sniper activity” in the broadcast’s coverage of the third and fourth days of the riots. In a discussion on the sound stage, Westerkamp talks about the severity of the gun violence on that third night when “sniper activity broke out all over the west side.” As a result, he suggests, “two or three people” were killed at the Algiers Motel. The deaths Westerkamp alludes to, with the implication that they were victims of riot violence, were three young black men who were murdered by city police.⁷¹ Images of gouges in brick and concrete facades and holes in windows are offered as “evidence of sniper activity, of the exchange of sniper and police fire.” The mimetic capacity of the violent image is tempered by the film’s curation and its portrayal of the city during the riots as a space saturated by violence, only approachable via the spatial or temporal distance of a camera mounted to a helicopter or a public official addressing a press corps. In the enclosure of the studio sound stage and the mediation of the imagery by a crew of white *newsmen* who present everything in retrospect — so no longer posing a threat of temporal proximity — the film immunizes its audience from the inflammatory contagion of the violent image. At no point does the film present anything like McClellan’s figure of the mob leader and his “frenzied exhortations;” in fact, when the black citizen of Detroit shows up in the film, he is more often than not under arrest, even if the film is also careful to include several black law

⁷⁰ This emphasis on crime *as* the aftermath will be integral to my analysis of policework in chapter three.

⁷¹ John Hersey’s non-fiction account, which relies on of these murders is covered extensively in his book, *The Algiers Motel Incident*.

enforcement officers and city leaders to condemn the riots. At no point in the film is a participant in the riots allowed to speak, a tactic that both adheres to the film's pretense to objectivity through the suppression of sensational content — since it is precisely the words, the language, the “philosophy” of the black militant that is most feared — and maintains the collective subject of the mob.⁷²

In an appeal to Pruette's expertise, McClellan asks: “In your judgment, as a television man and newsman, does [the film] portray a generally fair and correct picture of the situation and the happenings as they occurred?” (1209). After it has been established that, indeed, the film provides a “correct picture” of the events, McClellan shifts to establish Pruette as an autonomous third-party “not employed by this committee” and not “under the direction or instructions of this committee” (1209). As further evidence of the film's “objectivity,” McClellan and Pruette discuss how it won an Emmy Award and how it has been submitted “to the national competition now in Hollywood,” all of which further proves, for McClellan that “this is not a picture that has been doctored or prepared for this particular hearing” (1209). Mundt joins the evaluation by asking Pruette if, following the broadcast of the documentary in Detroit, “any serious or responsible challenge developed in the Detroit area to its accuracy and objectivity” (1209). The series of questions feels both necessary and superfluous: as if it Pruette's allegiances and objectivity *should* be the subject

⁷² There is a scene in the KTLA production *Hell in the City of the Angels* on the Watts riot of 1965 that features a young black man who speaks passionately about the oppression of his community and the desire for revenge that is now becoming manifest. One of the more interesting aspects of this moment is the argument that ensues behind him as some stand up for him and urge him to speak while others disagree amid claims that he *does not speak for them*. Such a picture of a conflicted black community undermines the image of the collective mob upon which so much of the testimony of the hearings and the WWJ documentary rely.

of inquiry and as if any challenge (“serious and responsible”) to the evidentiary quality of the film *should* be exposed. However, the structure of every question implies the answer it already knows because it is *this* film they chose to view and *this* journalist in particular who was called to testify. As we have already seen, the function of repetition in these hearings serves the dual purpose of affirming the already-known and of taming contingency by making the unexpected (i.e., Welch’s claim that the university campus is not part of the city proper) fit the confines of the pre-established epistemic field of inquiry. While the set up for the viewing of *Six Days in July* is intended to provide a proof of its own — that the legislators are willing to confront the realism of the documentary form in its quest to allow “the facts to speak for themselves” — there was never any question that anything other than the “correct picture” would be shown. Pruette’s insistence on the film’s objectivity, the industry awards, the community response — all of these supplemental proofs constitute the performance of the committee’s own objectivity, the affirmation of its own *correct picture* mirrored back at it in the curated form of the news broadcast.

The degree to which *Six Days in July* strives to de-sensationalize its content and immunize the threat of the violent contagion may also be seen in comparison with another contemporary news documentary on the riots. In 1965, KTLA aired its own special broadcast on the Watts Riot in Los Angeles titled *Hell in the City of the Angels*. From the start, it is clear this documentary strikes a very different tone, even if it shares many formal similarities with the WWJ production: the broadcast opens with host and narrator Hugh Brundage speaking over aerial footage of the city, commenting on the relative racial harmony, supported by claims that the black population of Los Angeles was much better off than those other urban centers of the U.S. which were beginning to show signs of racial unrest. Of course, the story of peace and prosperity merely serves to set up the paroxysmal title sequence when Brundage abruptly shifts his tone and declares: “Then, with

the suddenness of a lightning bolt and all the fury of an infernal holocaust, there was Hell in the City of Angels.” The KTLA broadcast is set to a dramatic orchestral score which accompanies Brundage’s voice-over narration and the images of violent clashes between police and rioters. Although both films include aerial footage, the segments in *Hell in the City of the Angels* are much longer, the editing much more sparse — the average shot length in *Six Days in July* is perhaps a few seconds at most, in contrast with the favored form of the aerial shot which runs for sometimes several minutes at a time in the Los Angeles broadcast. On the subject of aerial footage, cinematographer Art Mazur, who worked alongside Pruette, speculates that had city and state officials seen what he saw, from above, they would have understood much sooner “the seriousness” of the situation in Detroit: “It was apparent from the air that the town was about to be sacked.” For the most part, however, *Six Days in July* avoids dwelling on the aerial view of the city, and any footage from this vantage is accompanied by an explanation of what can be seen as well as the causes and effects that are not immediately visible — it is, in brief, curated through its contextualization. In KTLA’s film, long stretches of aerial footage roll without such mediation, unedited and intact, and the manufactured pretense of knowledge conveyed by WWJ through its careful curation and retrospective commentary is absent. If the aerial camera signifies a privileged place from which the imminence of events becomes legible, according to Mazur, the images and accompanying reportage from KTLA dwells instead in the contingency of the experience. As the helicopter hovers over the city, the journalist aboard narrates only what he sees, largely without comment, and the *seen* constitutes the entirety of his narration; his voice and vantage is superfluous, a supplement to the lens which performs the same descriptive labor. In contrast with the retrospective tenor of *Six Days in July*, the KTLA broadcast operates more often in the speculative mode, bringing the audience along for the ride, as it were. In one of the film’s longer

aerial sequences — which like most of the others is composed of a single roving shot — the footage shows several buildings on fire and the nearby blocks where people gather to watch. At one point, the aerial reporter speculates about the motives of those on the ground based on their movements and gestures, fascinated by their seeming unconcern, and soon fixates on a trio of young black men who are seen running from one of the fires. He immediately concludes that the young men were involved in starting the fires and as the camera tracks their movement through a nearby parking lot and into a building out of frame, the reporter, in his broadcasting of the events, directs police to the location of the “suspects” he has conjured from his knowing vantage above. In both films, the aerial shot puts a physical distance between the seer and the seen, it moves outside and above the more phenomenological experience that would be captured by a camera at ground level and, in that distance, it abstracts the image. In producing such distances and abstractions, the aerial shot fulfills several (sometimes contradictory) functions: it reduces the threat of contagion and the landscape becomes more legible in terms of a total picture of events.⁷³

Six Days in July almost impeccably pulls off an aesthetics of law and order, affirming the moral *right* of government and law enforcement through its de-sensationalizing of otherwise *emotional* and *inflammatory* content and its use of framing, retrospection, and editing in service of a logic of containment and static representation. It strives for a specific legibility that tells the story of a city under siege and effectively fulfills Sen. Curtis’s imperative for American media to *promote the desire for law and order*. The film’s aesthetics reproduce the logic of the police that Rancière describes as “not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social” (*Dissensus* 36). The “essence” of the police, he argues, “lies in a certain way of dividing up [partitioning] the sensible [*partage du sensible*],” where this “partition” indicates both “that which separates and

⁷³ Cf. the cinematographer’s claim above: “It was apparent from the air that the town was about to be sacked.”

excludes” as well as “that which allows participation” (36). *Six Days in July* internalizes this *function* and makes it the aesthetic principle by which *exclusion* is rationalized and *participation* is restricted to only those who are *on this side* of the manufactured “constitution of the social.” *Hell in the City of the Angels*, on the other hand, seems more concerned with doing the opposite, of playing up the illegibility of the riots, and of stoking fear and promoting the narrative of racial violence as a social contagion. Limits of the contemporary technology — seen, for example, in many extended sequences shot at night where the Los Angeles landscape gets rendered in almost abstract expressionist forms of black and grey — reinforce the associations of blackness, obscurity, and danger that become so central to the state discourse on violence. In the broadcast’s scenes during night, most of which are shown from above via helicopter footage, what shows up on screen is barely visible: we see the contrast of the fires only dimly rendered against a blacker backdrop of night sky and unlit streets, but we cannot see what is burning. We see the contours of structures but only enough that the ambiguous imagery is both *hellish* (as likely intended) and beautiful in its abstraction. In some ways, the aesthetic presentation of the broadcast fulfills the hyperbolic worry of Hetfield that the riots will become a conflagration that will consume the nation.⁷⁴ However, this *contagion of the visible* is communicated through the *figuration* of violence while the actual subject matter of the film — in these night-time scenes, at least — gets swept up in the processes of abstraction: the context for the uprisings, the violence wrought by segregation, gets bracketed out in such sequences.

In the next chapter, I will continue to think about what it means to represent the conflicts and anxieties of this post-civil rights era in an analysis of two feature films. As the analysis will shift to accommodate works of fiction, I will nevertheless maintain this focus not only on *what*

⁷⁴ Cf. note 64.

gets seen/represented within the strictures of particular genres and media but *how* such modes of representation communicate through those very limits.

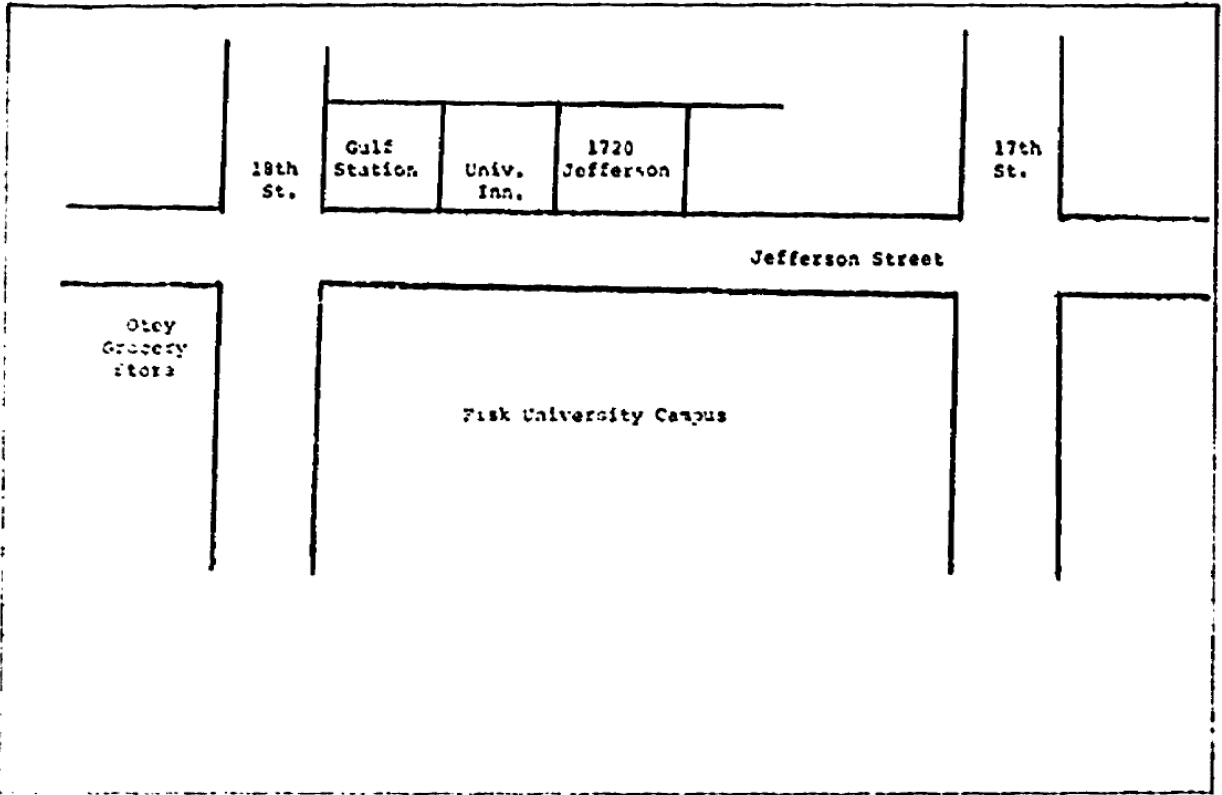


Fig. 1.1 — Diagram of Jefferson Street in the city of Nashville, Tennessee.

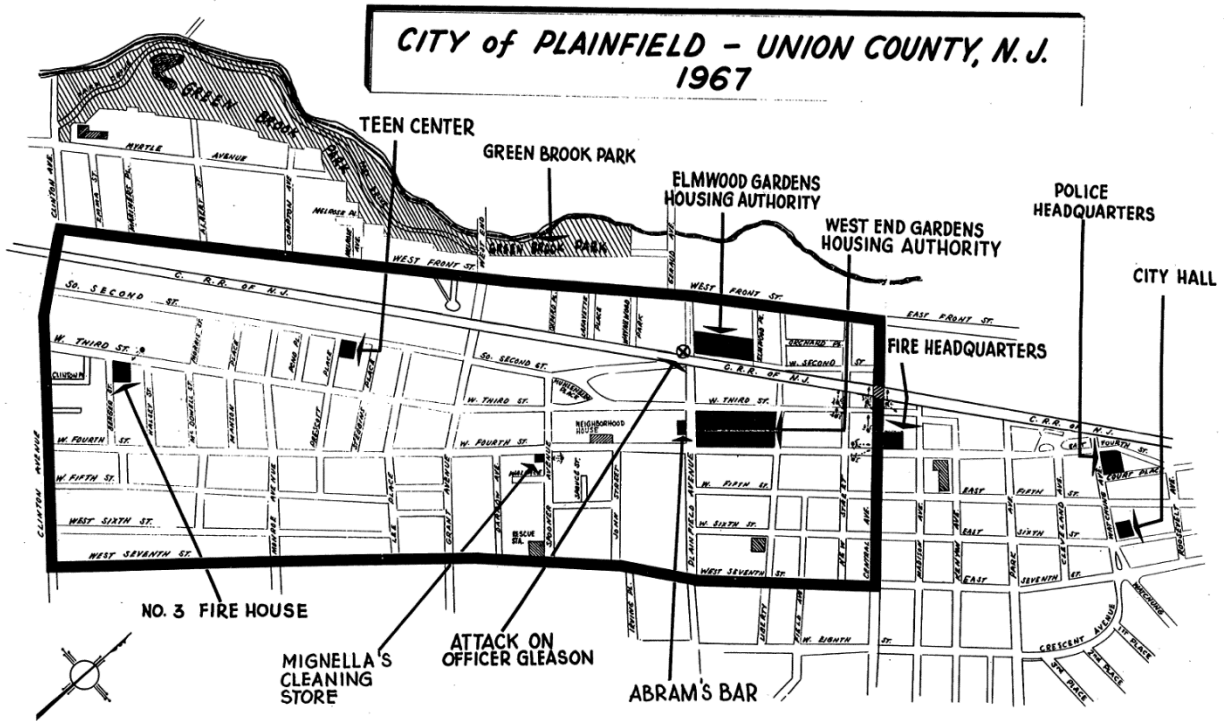


Fig. 1.2 — City of Plainfield, New Jersey.

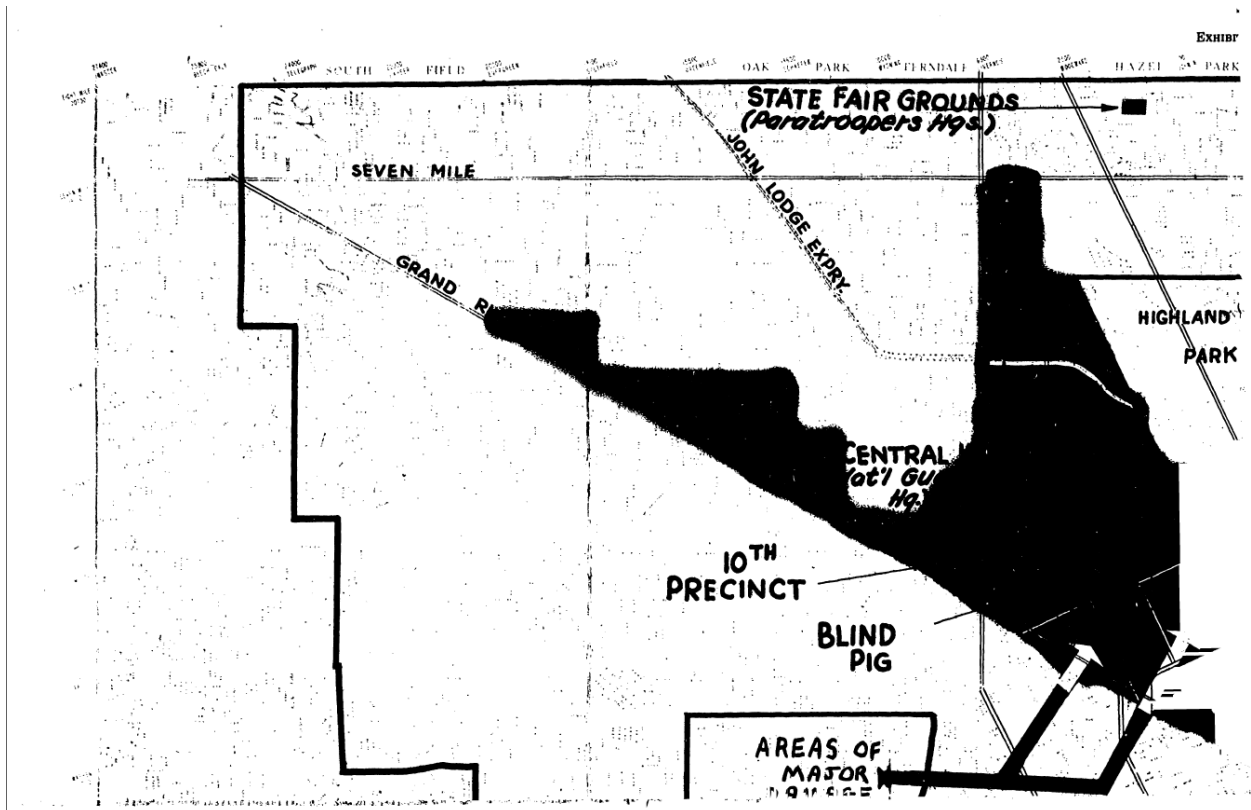


Fig. 1.3 — City of Detroit, Michigan (left).

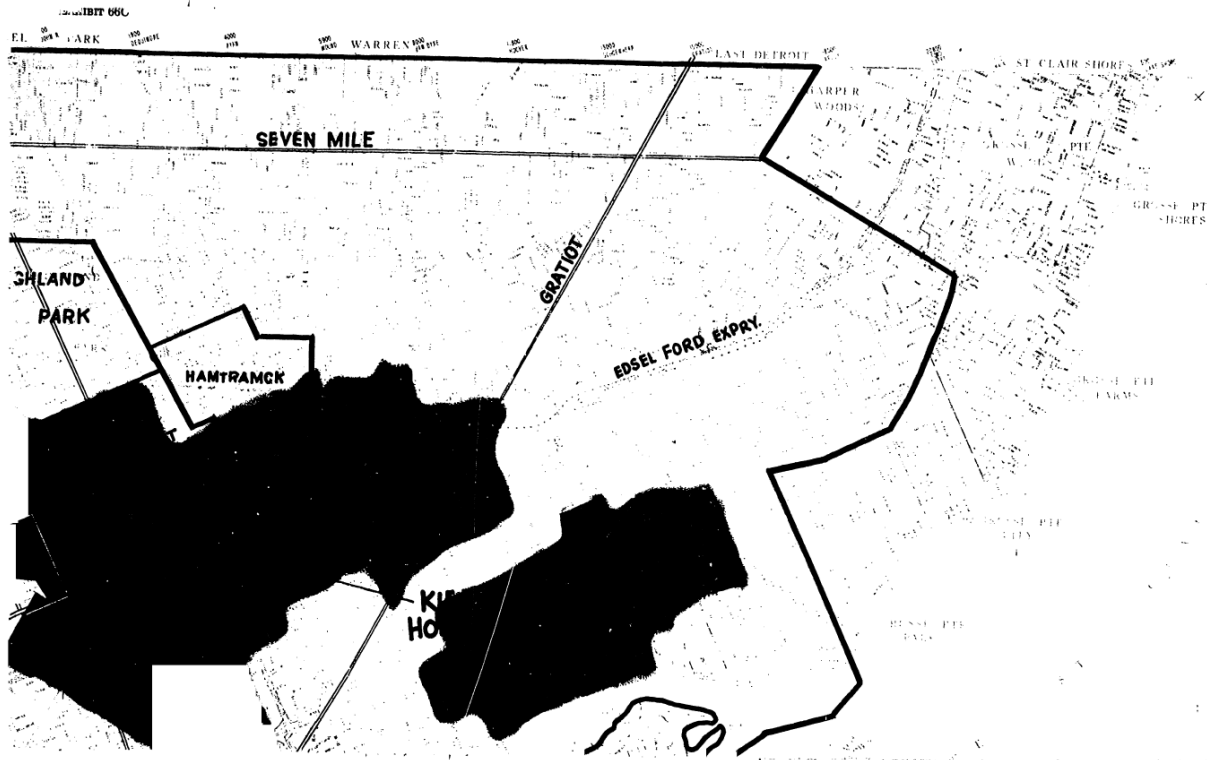


Fig. 1.4 — City of Detroit, Michigan (right).

CHAPTER TWO:

Frustrated Desires — Representations of Labor in Post-Civil Rights Film

Chapter Introduction

In the first chapter, I analyzed a federal discourse on violence and political right in a series of legislative hearings tasked with investigating the *crisis* of the urban uprisings/riots at the end of the 1960s; and I theorized an aesthetics of law and order that arose out of a paranoid-schizoid conception of urban space and how it was used to manage representations of the uprisings in order to neutralize the challenge to the hegemony of capital and state. The hearings and the two television broadcasts that I analyzed are early examples of discursive and aesthetic objects from the period I am calling the *post-civil rights era*, which begins in 1967 — with the revisions to the Civil Rights Act and the Housing and Urban Development Act — and endures up until about 1983 — when President Ronald Reagan secured a victory over the striking air traffic controllers, often seen as the dawn of American neoliberalism. This period is characterized by the psychic aftermath of what I see as the state's failure to reckon with the political problems of desegregation and the subjugation of domestic (gendered) labor. As I argued in the first chapter, it is equally important to understand this failure in the context of the purported *solution* that took shape in the revisions to the major civil rights legislation in 1967. The revisions to the Housing and Urban Development Act, in particular, were seen to open up the home — both the single-family dwelling and the apartment in the ghetto — to greater financialization by capital. As I will show in this chapter, this political problem (of desegregation) and its economic *solution* (make housing more affordable by shifting the burden of debt onto the public) contributed to a crisis of the domestic that was represented and worked through in films conceived and produced outside of the Hollywood mode

of production. Although both films that I analyze in this chapter are most easily categorized as works of cinematic realism or naturalism, they make use of tropes from melodrama that, in their breakdown, reinforce my reading of how domestic concerns become overdetermined by the problematic of labor in the post-civil rights era. In the introduction, I looked at the psychoanalytic concept of trauma as a way of describing and analyzing this period; and although trauma is often marshalled for just such projects of narrating collective suffering, it felt inadequate to the specificities of this moment in American history, not least of which because of the moral baggage the concept has accrued in its overuse in sociological theory. Instead, I argued for the relevance of the concepts of *defense* and *care* as they are theorized in object relations psychoanalysis. If we accept that de-segregation was the defining problem of the post-civil rights era, the legislative discourse that occupied my attention in the first chapter can be understood as manifestly *defensive*, in this specific sense, and it was precisely a space and experience of *care* that was sought in the bureaucratic aesthetics of law and order — a *somewhere* where the problem of knowing could be suspended in favor of facilitation and the promise of potentiality.

After the collapse of the Hollywood Production Code in 1968, which all but abolished industry restrictions on graphic content, American film became enamored with the kinds of gritty, realistic representations of violence that had previously been confined to exploitation cinema.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ As Eric Schaefer has shown, however, there was never any clean separation of mainstream and exploitation cinema, not in industrial terms nor in aesthetic matters of form and content.

Exploitation films are usually thought of as ethically dubious, industrially marginal, and aesthetically bankrupt. That they emerged from the mainstream industry, indeed, that their origins can be traced to respectable films made with the alleged ‘good intentions’ of decreasing human suffering, is another paradox surrounding exploitation. But progressivism, the movement that gave

What might have appeared to be the birth of a cinematic naturalism in the United States, however, was often rooted in misogynist and classist fantasies of the nation's pathologized others.⁷⁶ Films such as *Joe* (1970), *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), and *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (1977) mask, behind their ostensible meditations on violence, capital, and inequality, a paranoid vision of those classes and races who are confined to a milieu of anomie and deviance — an ideological vision wholly consistent with the federal discourse that conflates the urban with the criminally pathological.⁷⁷ Outside Hollywood, however, an emerging alternative cinema was combining elements of Italian Neorealism, *cinéma vérité*, direct cinema, and the French New Wave to document and dramatize

birth to these films and was then instrumental in suppressing them, was itself filled with paradoxes.

(17)

As we will see, theories of melodrama often share the ethical desires of progressivism.

⁷⁶ See Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*, which traces the history of the (mis)representation of women in film up through the 1970s. Of the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s, for example, she writes: "In the roles and prominence accorded women, the decade began unpromisingly, grew steadily worse, and at present shows no signs of improving. Directors who in 1962 were guilty only of covert misogyny (Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*) or kindly indifference (Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*) became overt in 1972 with the violent abuse and brutalization of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Straw Dogs*" (323).

⁷⁷ Derek Nystrom's study of 1970s Hollywood cinema has explored this dynamic in detail, although his analysis tends to conflate the categories of social strata and class. See, for example, his claim that "the new visibility of working-class characters in the 1970s was generated by a series of *middle-class* concerns and dilemmas. Much as representations of homosexuality are often more concerned with stabilizing heterosexual identity (or, for that matter, as images of blackness are frequently produced by white anxiety), the decade's cinematic renderings of white working-class masculinity tell us a great deal about the crisis within what I will call the professional-managerial class (PMC) during this period" (4).

social conflicts with an almost naturalistic attention to individual, family, and community dynamics.⁷⁸ In such films, depictions of violence take a different form from their Hollywood counterparts: while the latter rely on externalized and often paroxysmal representations of brutality,⁷⁹ filmmakers such as Charles Burnett, Billy Woodberry, Julie Dash, and John Cassavettes explore the diffuse and ubiquitous violence that results from the everyday effects of structural inequalities. In Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1978), for example, the many sequences of children at play invoke, in their games of war and feints at death, a rehearsal of future conflict at the same time as they explore the cause-effect relation of injury and empathy. Where Hollywood's auteurs often rely on stark juxtapositions of moral conflict to indict specific traits or types in a mimicry of political critique, a film like Woodberry's *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983) subverts melodramatic tropes to expose the socioeconomic foundations of moral judgment and the collective determination of individual thought. This chapter makes use of the generic framework of the melodrama, where it shows up in works of post-civil rights cinematic realism, to show how these films frustrate traditional aesthetic channels of sociopolitical desire and how conceptions of class, labor, and race informed the experience and imaginary of domestic life in this era.

I argue against the theoretical tendency to erect (methodological or hermeneutic) borders between the categories of race, gender, and class in the study of aesthetics and politics,

⁷⁸ "The concern with family, in particular, determines *Killer of Sheep*'s narrative and helps define Burnett's vision of black urban space, one that is, unlike *Sweetback*, enabled by communities working together in various forms rather than by individuals working alone" (Massood 24-25). See also Guerrero; and Kleinhans, "Realist Melodrama."

⁷⁹ More often than not, the violent episodes in films like *Joe* and *Looking for Mr Goodbar* have the problematic function of communicating the film's message through acts of homicidal vengeance which merely reinforce the misogynist or classist ideology that undermines its pretensions to tolerance and justice. Cf. Haskell, pp. 323-330.

exemplified, perhaps, in Fredric Jameson's claim that the discourses of civil rights — which he contrasts with the "politics of social class" — were not "intrinsically subversive," and that they were, rather, "cooptable because they are already — as ideals — inscribed in the very ideology of capitalism itself" ("Class and Allegory" 844). In the first chapter, I showed how "the ideals of racial justice and sexual equality" (844) challenged the implicit rule over and ownership of the prevailing *political ontology* of the nation by exposing its exclusionary structure and the logics of abjection and immunization by which it maintained control over that reality.⁸⁰ While perhaps not "intrinsically subversive" according to the dictates of historical materialism, such "ideals" were the animating force behind the physical demonstrations against the state and in the streets. Of course, the very designation of racial justice and sexual equality *as ideals* ignores the inherent material critiques of state, capital, and patriarchy that the movements of the era promulgated and enacted — in brief, Jameson's move to name the *ideals* of justice and equality obfuscates the critical focus on *injustice* and *inequality*. Further, the challenge embodied in these critiques must be understood as inseparable from class antagonisms and the broader socioeconomic injustices precisely because the categories — and experiences — of reproduction, subsistence, and employment are emphatically gendered and racialized.

⁸⁰ In the state discourse on the urban uprisings at the end of the 1960s, the *response* to this challenge took the form of a paranoid-schizoid imperative to defend the nation from its internal saboteurs, its abject others, who threaten to undo the boundaries of America's cities and in the process to undo the nation herself. The ostensible interest in the security of urban life was, however, inseparable from the (armed) maintenance of the municipal borders which doubled as barriers between races and classes and guaranteed the commercial and speculative *interest* of the capital state.

In the first part of this chapter, I survey the literature on melodrama which reached a critical mass in American and British scholarship in the 1970s.⁸¹ Although some sense of a historically consistent conception of melodrama is relevant to my argument — and although questions of pathos, excess,⁸² and moral polarization are all central to what follows — I am more interested in

⁸¹ The genre of melodrama is notoriously capacious, and any effort to synthesize its many tropes into a coherent and historically consistent form would amount to little more than an exercise in encyclopedic reduction. As Ben Singer notes in his study of cinematic melodrama and modernity, there are typically two approaches that are taken to define the term for the purposes of critical analysis. One might, for example, identify a “defining element that manifests itself in various ways throughout all the genre’s many permutations” (38). For those critical endeavors that pursue such an approach, the “essential element” most frequently associated with melodrama is *excess* (39). Or one might, with Singer, “analyze melodrama as a ‘cluster concept,’” which would involve identifying a larger set of tropes that combine in various degrees and establish a constant over time and in otherwise disparate cultural contexts (44). Drawing on the earlier definitional study of William S. Dye, Singer identifies five “basic features” of melodrama: pathos, overwrought emotion, moral polarization, nonclassical narrative structure, and sensationalism (44-49).

⁸² The figure of excess is a constant in the critical literature on melodrama, where it is posited as one of the “essential elements” of the genre, according to Ben Singer (38). As Peter Brooks notes: “Nothing is *understood*, all is *overstated*” (41). In seminal works of film theory by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Laura Mulvey, excess figures the expressive or gratifying release of “psychic energies and emotions which the narrative ‘represses’” because they are “fundamentally incompatible with the demands of dominant patriarchal ideology” (Singer 39). Melodrama is also characterized by emotional excess in its characters, an excess of “visceral responses” in the spectator (i.e., its overwrought *pathos* and the inevitable tears of sympathy), and an excess of “moral outrage” that most often takes form in the hatred for a villain (39-40). As a way of talking about melodrama, Christine Gledhill notes how excess is frequently tied to the naïve identification of the genre’s popular audiences whose repressed desires and visceral attachments are coded as gender specific. “The designation of the family as a bourgeois institution, the perceived materialisation of bourgeois ideology in these films as a sphere conventionally assigned to women — the home, family relations, domestic trivia, consumption, fantasy and romance, sentiment — all imply equivalence between the ‘feminine’ and bourgeois

how melodrama operates as an analytical category for thinking through the sociopolitical *use* of cultural forms. I am also interested in the ways that the genre of *genre theory* itself was often a site for the working through of the very same sociopolitical anxieties that were being explored in the films from which those theorists derived their critical narratives of collective desire. While the classical formula of the melodrama brought about narrative closure in order to facilitate a cathartic identification with the moral good or a proxy experience of frustrated sociopolitical desires,⁸³ the

ideology” (Gledhill 12). Critical observation of excess is split off from the identification and experience of it, and the one who, in ironic detachment, judges excess as symptom occupies a position of superiority in relation to the one who is *affected by it*. Excess as figure is a tool of ideological critique. Excess as experience and desire indexes an aesthetic over-investment, a too-close relationship with the cultural object that fails to account for its inherent status as a product of fiction.

⁸³ Peter Brooks, for example, argues that the “melodramatic” is a specific mode of engaging with a world that has undergone a progressive *desacralization*. What he terms the “melodramatic imagination” seeks to unveil the *moral occult*, which he defines as “the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality” — “the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of ancient myth” (5). The melodramatic imagination penetrates reality’s surface and seeks in such *desacralized remnants* an experience of morality and meaning that is no longer operative — not since the historical transition from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism via the Enlightenment. For Brooks, melodrama “evolves out of the loss of pre-Enlightenment values and symbolic forms, in response to the psychic consequences of the bourgeois social order, in which the social must be expressed as the personal” (Gledhill 29). In other words, melodrama provides the cultural space for an experience that had been repressed in the triumph of the secular over spiritual life. The “moral occult” comes to index “a generalised need for ‘significance,’ the terms of which are historically relative, rather than as a set of specific ideological ideas” (Gledhill 29). For “secular bourgeois society,” then, this *significance* took the form of “all that cannot be contained within the dominant order — anti-social desire, the ‘numinous,’ the struggle of good and evil” (29-30). As a result, there was an intimate association of the emotional and the moral in nineteenth-century bourgeois melodrama: “Ethical

cinematic melodramas of the post-civil rights era reach no such formal completion. Thus, where melodramatic tropes appear in the films I analyze in this chapter, instead of providing avenues for identification and pathos they reveal, in the breakdown of such formal channels, the absence of a moral ground from which one might stand above (or at least aside from) the excesses of capital and its subjugation of the domestic. For such a critique, whether a specific novel or film *is* a melodrama is less relevant than how the genre mobilizes a set of critical questions to theorize and analyze the problems that most concern me here: namely, how representations of reproductive labor, subsistence, and unemployment problematize — and dramatize — the function of the domestic economy as the site where capital first lays claim to psychic and social life. While the first chapter explored how the ideological contest over public space in the 1960s was related to a paranoid-schizoid abjection of the nation’s black others and a fear of racial integration, this chapter moves into the interior of the home to show the subjugation of the domestic by the capitalist state. In *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), set in a residential neighborhood in West Hollywood, the nervous anxiety of a working class housewife figures the violence of reproductive labor. In *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983), the struggles of a black man to find regular work in the segregated community of Watts exposes the failed efforts to create opportunities for historically oppressed peoples in the wake of the civil rights struggles and explores the effects (and affects) of underemployment at the end of the post-civil rights era.

Tracking Desire and Frustration: Melodrama as Category of Experience

imperatives in the post-sacred universe have been sentimentalized, have come to be identified with emotional states and psychic relationships, so that the expression of emotional and moral integers is indistinguishable” (Brooks 42).

In the critical literature on melodrama, an emphasis on the “personal” and the “emotional” often fails to conceive social and economic dynamics in a way that accounts for differences in gender, class, or race. Thomas Elsaesser⁸⁴ and Peter Brooks, for example, both interrogate how melodramatic forms respond to a world where the structure and meaning of experience has been “violently thrown into question” — i.e., in the transition from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism (Brooks 15). However, the very category of “experience” in this discourse is indeterminant, an abstraction intended to register broad historical changes whose effects are then made integral to the desires and anxieties of an imagined public. A concept of domestic interiority remains implicit in these theories that nevertheless rely on categories of individuality, desire, and morality to make the case for a melodramatic *drive* that emerges in tandem with the rise of the interior as a unique

⁸⁴ “Melodrama,” for Elsaesser, describes a source of aesthetic material taken up by canonical works of literature and cinema in order to transcend the solely mimetic function of popular culture. Although he attends to the conventional series of binaries that make up the thematic poles of the melodrama — i.e., high/low, good/evil, public/private, innocence/guilt, irony/pathos — he also replicates that binary logic in his insistence on a distinct separation between the “popular” and the literary. Thus, the value distinction between popular/mass culture and serious/literary culture remains operative: the popular in itself possesses a critical and analytical value only where it has been dislodged from *popular culture* and appropriated by high art. While melodrama is valued for its mimetic *truth-content*, as “popular” culture it retains critical relevance only to the extent that it has served as material for the production of what Elsaesser terms “sophisticated” art. “Even if the situations and sentiments defied all categories of verisimilitude and were totally unlike anything in real life, the structure had a truth and a life of its own, which an artist *could make part of his material*” (49, my emphasis). Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (among others) have drawn attention to the critical practices that draw on the structures of value inherent in such cultural binaries which are then problematically mapped onto relations of gender, race, and class. See Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 10-16; and Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field,” 11-12.

space of experience and feeling.⁸⁵ As Martha Vicinus notes, “Domestic melodrama was the working out in popular culture of the conflict between the family and its values and the economic and social assault of individualization” (128). However, in the opposition between the family and *its* values and the social coercion of the individual, Vicinus, too, evacuates the categories of the private and the interior of their economic determinations, ignoring that the individual is as much a product of society as it is of the family. “Value” here becomes exclusive to the domestic/familial in contrast with the social/individual which, in its “assault” on the family, acquires the character of an anti-value. One cannot conceive these “familial values” without resorting to negative formulations; in other words, “value” comes to signify the negation or inversion of those aspects of bourgeois capitalism that must be disavowed in order to preserve an ideal image of the subject who lives and has been nurtured in a space apart. Thus, when Vicinus argues that melodrama “is not concerned with what is possible or actual but with what is desirable,” she rightly diagnoses the psychosocial use of the genre but does not provide the concrete signifiers that would clarify *who* is doing the desiring. Hannah Arendt’s genealogical distinction between the social and the political gets reified in theories of melodrama which fail to recognize that the social “is neither private nor public, strictly speaking” (28).

In Elsaesser’s historical survey of melodrama, despite the genre’s tendency to take the form of “escapist” mass entertainment, the peculiarities of its popular idiom were mobile, able to be captured and put to work in *proper* realist works of fiction. Further, they were often capable of

⁸⁵ It may be worth looking into the discursive links with a competing effort in political theory to indict and separate out this space of domestic interiority for the same reasons that it is celebrated in the critical literature on melodrama. We saw this in the first chapter exemplified in Hannah Arendt’s determination of the domestic as a space ruled by *necessity*. This concept of necessity will be integral to my analysis of *A Woman Under the Influence*, below.

amplifying the realism of the realist work in their more precise mimetic relation to historical and social variables. It is similar for Brooks who argues that melodrama evinces a psychological realism, capable, in its exaggerated forms and feelings, of expressing a reality that is otherwise repressed in a sublimated society. Chuck Kleinhans takes a different approach in his stress on melodrama's concern with the family and its conflicts which in their very *interiority* accrue, for him, an almost quasi-universality. "Perhaps more than any other genre, melodrama deals directly with one side of the capitalist dichotomy, with the personal sphere, home, family, and women's problems" ("Notes" 42). Where realism invests gesture and detail with a social significance which typically assumes a pessimistic, even fatalistic, relation to the world it depicts, melodrama shifts the emphasis to an almost redemptive focus on the moral tenor of effects ("Realist" 160-62). In such terms, melodrama acquires an almost pragmatic significance. "More directly than other genres, melodrama helps us understand, relate to, or deal with the same kind of situations that we emotionally experience in personal life" ("Notes" 43). In its emphasis on the personal and the familial, melodrama has a "fairly coherent historical and social existence," yet, at the same time, it has a "protean form" that emerges in its "profound psychological resonance in the audience of its own time" ("Realist" 158, 163). Contrary to the theories of excess and repression, then, Kleinhans argues for melodrama's groundedness. In its historical coherence and through its pragmatic aesthetics, melodrama might serve, instead, to temper the cynical "momentum of realism," to bring it back within a framework of didactic and ethical relation ("Realist" 162). For Kleinhans, the function of melodrama is didactic and pragmatic: "it represents to us the contradictions of capitalism as evidenced in the personal sphere" and it "helps us understand, relate to, or deal with" the situations that arise as a result of those contradictions ("Notes" 43). Here, the *use* of melodrama is tied to its analogical structure: we can *relate* to it, Kleinhans suggests, because

we have been there. “I’m sure some of my readers have direct experience from their own family with the central question in *All That Heaven Allows*: should a widow remarry, and if so, outside her class and to a younger man?” (“Notes” 43). For Kleinhans, then, the aesthetic experience, even where it is affective, remains intellectual: its analogical structure allows for a direct experience of the film’s moral conflict and requires the viewer to consider the fictional resolution in the context of her own life. This is a decidedly different aesthetic experience from what we find in Elsaesser, Brooks, and Vicinus, where the film communicates at a primarily affective and unconscious level.

The critical literature on melodrama frequently sees in the genre a cultural space within which domestic desires negotiate an antagonistic relationship with the forces of state and capital, providing, for example, a narrative triumph of the weak over the powerful.⁸⁶ For Brooks, however, melodrama and “the state” are historically bound up with one another; in his analysis, the purported goal of the French Revolution was to render “the Republic as the institution of morality” — an “attempt to sacralize law itself” (14, 15). Where this inevitably fails, the drive for a secular morality “necessarily produces melodrama *instead*, incessant struggle against enemies, without and within, branded as villains, suborners of morality, who must be confronted and expunged, *over and over*, to assure the triumph of virtue” (15, my emphasis).⁸⁷ The assumption that melodrama can be the

⁸⁶ Christine Gledhill notes that “melodrama’s invariable deployment of familial values across sub-genres attests to a psychic overdetermination of the social and personal, charging the idea of home and family with a symbolic potency” (21). Martha Vicinus puts it even more succinctly: “Melodrama always sides with the powerless” (130).

⁸⁷ As I will argue in the next chapter, there is an affinity between this melodramatic structuring of experience and the “spectacle of policing,” as Jean and John L. Comaroff have noted. The “theatrics” of policing, especially in postcolonial contexts, “are anything but hidden or half-hearted. More often than not they assume the overdrawn shape of melodrama.... So it is with the spectacle of policing, the staging of which strives to make actual, both to its subjects

product of a (failed) revolutionary drive for state formation suggests an intimacy, if not a homology, of the political and the aesthetic that Brooks leaves largely unanalyzed. Implicit in such an analysis is the belief in an ahistorical social drive, a sort of Freudian collective unconscious,⁸⁸ that seeks a mimetic experience of its “most basic desires and interdictions” in representational form (5). Although the motivations are historical — the bourgeois attempt to recover the sacred that the Enlightenment had purged from social life — the drive itself is timeless. If the Revolution fails to enact the state as the institution of morality, the drive does not cease, does not fail altogether in its effort to give form to its desire for the triumph of virtue: *it necessarily produces melodrama instead*. This is why, for Brooks, “melodramatic rhetoric, and the whole expressive enterprise of the genre, represents a victory over repression” (41).⁸⁹

The post-civil rights era in the United States provides an interesting context for these theories of melodrama that bridge the aesthetic and the political by way of psycho-social investment in something like a historical narrative. What would constitute the drive of a Freudian collective unconscious in the United States in the 1970s? It would have to be not only ambivalent

and to itself, the authorized face, and force, of the state — of a state, that is, whose legitimacy is far from unequivocal” (“Criminal Obsessions” 276).

⁸⁸ Freudian and not Jungian because it is not a repository of sociocultural archetypes but the locus of drives and the bearer of repressions.

⁸⁹ It is a victory over the repression of the drive *for* morality as the calculus of social life, and it does not matter that it happens in cultural rather than political form. “The melodramatic utterance breaks through everything that constitutes the ‘reality principle,’ all its censorships, accommodations, tonings-down. Desire cries aloud its language in identification with full states of being.... Desire triumphs over the world of substitute-formations and detours, it achieves plenitude of meaning” (Brooks 41).

but outright contradictory in its pursuits as the analysis of the urban uprisings in the first chapter has shown. On the one hand, there is a desire to defend the dominant conception of the state as the sole determinant of what can count as political life in a nation whose history has followed — and must continue to follow — a profoundly moral *telos*. On the other hand, there is a desire to dismantle this very order of the state, and to make of this dismantling the new paradigm by which the inequalities and immoralities of this order are exposed and made to account for the abjecting violence by which the state maintains its forms. In the classical conception of melodrama, the genre names a space of mediation between an individual who requires that space in order to enact a fantasy of revenge against a social order that demands a renunciation of any private form of value. Where tropes of the genre show up in the post-civil rights films that I discuss below, however, even the fantasy of such a space is more than the cultural object can promise. At this point in American history, the moral power of poverty — a Judeo-Christian power that lingered in the early bourgeois era as a remainder of feudal power structures — had since been subsumed into the teleological *bildungsroman* of the rags-to-riches figure of the good capitalist. In proper Hegelian fashion, the innocent child, the poor mother, or the abused wife only retained its moral value (emblemized in powerlessness) as a moment, no longer a good in itself. As moment, it needed to be sublimated, sucked up into the inevitable and inexorable march of progress. This all but undoes melodrama's classical temporality, thus crippling its melancholic form of hope in which it had once been possible — or so the genre theorists argue — to resurrect the lost love, to show, in fact, that it had been there the whole time, it was only misrecognized, falsely indicted by a specious system of value that had now been overthrown. In the post-civil rights films I examine below, there is no longer a question of *how it should have been*, as if imperial capitalism was only one possible way things could have turned out, and as if recognizing this might somehow conjur

up the other *possible ways* that might be championed instead. Where manifest destiny orders the temporality of social history, things are only ever *how it should be*, where the status quo and the moral order are seen as inseparable.

Thus, in the paranoid imperative of post-civil rights American statecraft, the lure of the melodramatic fantasy no longer entices one to experience the victory of the moral over the secular. Melodrama's repetition compulsion no longer takes the form of a unified drive for the experience that arises from a world that has been made morally legible. Moral legibility, in brief, is not an issue. If anything, the United States, beginning in the 1960s, suffered a political and cultural surfeit of moral values,⁹⁰ even if they were fiercely contested. When Richard Nixon described *his* "majority" in contrast with the "Roosevelt coalition," for example, he sought to construct a political base united by "the same basic values" — "people who care about a strong United States, about patriotism, about moral and spiritual values" (qtd. in Cowie 126).⁹¹ In 1969, Nixon's "Middle America Committee" — which had been tasked with harnessing the political power of the "white middle class" — understood that constituency as "deeply troubled, primarily over the erosion of what they consider to be their values" and planned its appeal accordingly (qtd. in

⁹⁰ Even *inflation* would become a moral issue in a climate where the economy itself was a site of cathexis for such drives. Paul Volcker: "[Inflation] corrodes trust, particularly trust in government. It is a governmental responsibility to maintain the value of the currency that they issue. And when they fail to do that it is something that undermines an essential trust in government" (qtd. in Cooper 29-30).

⁹¹ The very notion that there could be moral *and* spiritual values is antithetical to the melodramatic drive that Brooks locates in the nineteenth-century bourgeois struggle against the repression *of* the moral which is coextensive with the spiritual. We should also pay attention to the way that Nixon establishes "moral value" as the exclusive property of those who also *value* militarism and nationalism — as if, to be against a "strong United States" or not caring enough about patriotism renders one immoral by default.

Cowie 128). In this context, where the state acquired the metonymic expression of the moral structure of experience and became the object most in need of defense, *state morality* became congruent with traditional forms of *family values*: the male breadwinner, feminized reproductive labor, individual responsibility, and white superiority. When the state as the center of political power was then called into question by the radical critiques of the civil rights movement — which exposed its exclusive, *abjecting* structure (the ways in which the purported health of the institution was secured through violent processes of social immunization) — the state became the institution for the defense of morality. If capitalism and its purported value structure could, at the peak of the industrial era, come to be figured in the character of the villain and the circumstances of his defeat, by the mid-twentieth century in the United States, capitalism itself became, through an indissociable link with the American state, the object of defense. New Deal Keynesianism and the affluence of the postwar era in the United States saw an alliance between a burgeoning (white) middle class and the bastions of capitalist power who united in their opposition to the *sedition* and *subversive* calls for the socialist redistribution of wealth and for civil rights for racial minorities and women. In a political landscape where the nation became the defender of “family values,” the anticapitalist sentiment of the Victorian melodrama — with its strict figurative association of power with villainy and evil and powerlessness with innocence and good — would no longer be legible to what could be considered the *conservative* part of the populace. So when the (now outmoded) tropes of classical melodrama show up in these post-civil rights films, they no longer express desire or gratification but rather they index the breakdown of the moral calculus in the cultural sphere. In the excess of gestural drama in the acting of Gena Rowlands in *A Woman Under the Influence*, for example, pathos does not lead the viewer to a position of moral transcendence; instead, it suggests a perversion of forms where the corporeal and psychic effects of capitalist

subjugation show up with the full weight of their irrationality and abjection. Where the exploitation of the powerless at the hands of the powerful was once a cathartic means to validate one's *oppressed* values, in this post-civil rights era, we only see the suffering for what it is and bear with its bearers the shame for those who no longer even have a claim to moral superiority in the assumption of powerlessness as a virtue.⁹²

The Labor of Love: Reproduction and Subsistence

On the surface, John Cassavettes's film *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) looks very much like a melodrama: wife and mother Mabel Longhetti (Gena Rowlands) suffers from an unnamed nervous illness⁹³ that ultimately leads to her being committed to a psychiatric hospital by her husband Nick (Peter Falk) who has been pressured by his mother and enabled by the family doctor. The film is rife with the exaggerated and overwrought forms typical of the melodrama — in its operatic score, in Mabel's repeated reenactments of *Swan Lake*, in the manichaeistic opposition of forces (of love and hate, order and chaos, desire and rage).⁹⁴ However, in those

⁹² This is most explicit in the scene in *A Woman Under the Influence* when Mabel asks her father to “stand up for her,” to which he responds by literally standing up out of his chair. I analyze this scene in detail below.

⁹³ The film never *names* her “illness” — opting instead for the euphemistic or stigmatizing, such as “sick,” “nervous,” “wacko,” or “crazy;” this absence of diagnosis undermines the pretense of psychological classification at the same time as it opens up, and even encourages, allegorical readings of the film.

⁹⁴ Elsaesser wrote of the “myth-making function” of early forms of the melodrama — from the medieval morality play through the romantic “cult of the picturesque” (44). One of the primary functions of such “popular” forms was “the non-psychological conception of the *dramatis personae*, who figure less as autonomous individuals than to transmit the action and link the various locales within a total constellation” (44). This was the source of the stereotypes that

moments when the façade of the sublimated self breaks down — yielding to a primal violence of discourse and gesture — the film also makes clear its pretense to a cinematic naturalism. The pathos of the family drama with its wrenching scenes of conflict, embarrassment, and abuse seem to confine the film’s thematic concerns to the struggles of private life. An analysis attentive to the *social realism* of melodrama (per Kleinhans) might see in such a drama a mimetic appeal to the working classes in its presentation of a wife and mother who suffers a nervous illness, an overworked husband and father who cannot cope and whose abuse is at least partially responsible for his wife’s breakdown, and the children and extended family caught in the middle and forced to take sides. In the film’s ambivalent style, however, the *psychological* turmoil of its characters does not speak to a crisis of individual desires but indexes, instead, the violence of a social structure that exerts an absolute control over the purportedly private space of the domestic. Mabel’s “madness” is inseparable from the conditions of her labor, from the demands made on the reproductive sphere of the home, and from her subservience to capital. While melodrama’s tropic investment in domestic conflict conventionally affirms the moral right of the family in opposition to social coercion, *A Woman Under the Influence* denies any moral ground and exposes the logic of opposition for what it has become: complicity.⁹⁵ There is no position from which we might judge any of the actions in the film as *right* or *wrong*, not only because it has stripped the characters

populated the most distilled forms of the late-nineteenth century melodrama, such as the mustachioed villain or the swooning damsel in distress.

⁹⁵ Although this will be covered in more detail below, it is worth noting at this point that complicity is ubiquitous in the film, not only on the part of the men, in the name of domestic subservience, but in the violence of women against each other and turned on themselves. Neither action nor language can escape its determination by this complicity with the hegemonic forces of capital.

of reason and choice — leaving them in a perpetual cycle of compulsion and reaction — but because, unlike the classical melodrama, morality can no longer be posited as a value in opposition to the forces of capital, which always had the last word anyway. Domestic life cannot be affirmed — neither ideologically nor even structurally — as distinct from a social order whose dictates it ultimately obeys as it performs the reproductive routines of sustaining and nurturing variable capital. While the home remains a site of familial conflict in the film, there is no interiority where one might escape the violence and coercion of the social which operates in the very gestures and desires of spouses, siblings, and children.

In his essay for the film's Criterion Collection release, critic and filmmaker Kent Jones praises those moments in the film when aggression breaks through the constraints of sublimation. As an example, he points to the final scene when Nick, having smacked Mabel down off the couch and onto the floor, stands over her and growls: "I'll kill you! I'll kill you! I'll kill those sons-of-bitchin' kids!" Jones describes the moment as a "terrifying" one "and a liberating one as well, because it *gives voice* to frustrations that most people bottle up just when they're about to reach the surface" (my emphasis). If the film *gives voice* to such moments of aggressivity, however, it also exposes the power relations inherent in *vocality*, for it is only Nick's "frustrations" that are vocalized (in his frequent fits of shouting) and *given voice* by the film. Where Mabel's "frustrations" reach the surface, they erupt in pathological displays of incoherence, in stuttering, in whispered pleas, and in the mute mouthing of words that cannot be spoken. In fact, the film amplifies her moments of inarticulate speech and gestural ticks in its adherence to the *cinéma vérité* aesthetic of exposure: the shakiness of the handheld camera, the ambient sounds that often compete with the main dialogue, the long takes and scenes that persist beyond their narrative and

dramatic exigency, and the frequent close-ups within which are sometimes crammed several faces and limbs.

For Mabel, the home is neither container nor refuge: incapable of *being herself* — she pleads with Nick to tell her *what* to be, *how* to be⁹⁶ — she is exposed in her own home, the promise of an inner sanctuary unfulfilled. Whether she is playing with her children, entertaining her husband’s work crew, or simply lounging in wait for her family to return, she finds only that she is doing it wrong: talking too loudly or too closely, being overly intimate or not being motherly enough, alienating her guests or offering them too much. It is in such a “powerlessness” that Gledhill locates the moral stakes of the melodramatic form: “Powerlessness regains moral power in its association with a family or social position that should command protection” (21). The film, however, does not offer the closure typical of the melodramatic form, partly because it does not resolve the moral stakes. Mabel is “powerless” in her compulsion, her acting out and being ruled by daemonic forces, but also in her marital subservience and her inability to decide *for herself* who she is — she will be whatever Nick tells her to be. In one of the film’s more touching yet cynical moments, Mabel is presented as one whose position “should command protection,” and there is a gesture to melodrama’s moral power of powerlessness but there is no moment of transcendence or realization. Mabel sits at the dinner table with her children, her husband, their parents, and the

⁹⁶ Early in the film, Nick brings his work crew home the morning after an all-night shift for Mabel to cook them a spaghetti dinner. When Mabel gets too close to one of the men, putting her face beside his as he sings an aria, Nick shouts at her to “sit down” before telling everyone to leave. In the conversation between husband and wife that follows, Mabel defends herself by telling Nick, “I’m not one of those stiffs that you like with their noses up in the air,” asserting that she is a “warm” person and that she “loves” his friends, “loves” anyone he “brings in the house.” Her self-defense quickly gives way, however, and she says to him: “Nicky, don’t be afraid to hurt my feelings. Tell me what you want me to be, how you want me to be.”

doctor, and she describes her experience at the hospital where her behavior was strictly regulated and she was subject to shock treatments. Nick interrupts her, punching the table, his face inches from her own, and tells her: “Be yourself. Go ahead. Simple talk.” Mabel looks up and quietly asks her father: “Dad, will you stand up for me?” The camera stays in a close-up shot on Mabel’s face and we hear her father get up from his chair at the other end of the table; he has *stood up* for her. Misunderstood, she asks him again, and he responds that he does not know what she wants him to do, pleads with her that he does not understand “this game.” Mabel “talking at cross-purposes” with her father, wanting, when she asks him to *stand up for her*, his defense and protection (from her husband), seems to evoke the melodrama’s classic relation of pathos.⁹⁷ Her figurative plea for support is taken literally, however, and her failure to communicate — which throughout the film usually results from a mutism or psychic retreat — feels here especially poignant in its clarity. In her powerlessness, although Mabel may invite pathos, she does not secure a victory, even allegorical, over the forces of capital and its domestic avatars. There is no change in the form of relations. No one is punished. No one even seems to have understood what happened. The Manichean structure of classical melodrama here gives way to a structure of what we might call amoral morality: unlike the poor widow, the weak child, the mistreated daughter, Mabel does not acquire power through suffering. This is not to say that she may not be pitied or evoke pathos

⁹⁷ Elsaesser defines the “archetypal melodramatic situation” in terms of “the response to the recognition of different levels of awareness” (66). This response manifests either as irony, where the spectator “registers the difference from a superior position,” or as pathos, which “results from non-communication or silence made eloquent” (66).

but that such “emotional” matters do not bridge the moral and the sentimental in the way the classical form had.⁹⁸

In the penultimate scene of the film, Mabel is due to return home from her six-month stay in a psychiatric hospital. In preparation, Nick plans a surprise party to welcome her home, and the film dwells in the anxiety of her imminent return as Nick stalks through the house and then outside in the rain asking himself and others if he went too far, if the house packed with people eager for drink and merriment might be “too much” for a woman still recovering from a recent nervous breakdown. When Nick’s mother confronts him outside and tells him “these people can’t stay here,” that “they got to go,” he relents without argument but tells her: “You do it! I know it’s wrong! I can’t do it! Can’t tell them not to go!” The moment is representative of Nick’s portrayal throughout the film as someone who both *knows* what must be done — a *knowing* determined by the strict codes of a working-class social normativity — yet finds himself incapable or unwilling to do it.⁹⁹ His moments of decision are projected onto others and ascribed to a fatalism that determines his actions from without: he has to miss a date with his wife because of a burst water main, he has to throw his judgmental neighbor out of the house because his wife has been insulted, he has to have Mabel committed for the sake of the children and for her own good. When Nick is forced to act by those circumstances outside of his control, he erupts: he shouts, curses, threatens,

⁹⁸ “Ethical imperatives in the post-sacred universe have been sentimentalized, have come to be identified with emotional states and psychic relationships, so that the expression of emotional and moral integers is indistinguishable. Both are perhaps best characterized as moral sentiments” (Brooks 42).

⁹⁹ We might recall here the function of *knowing*, examined by Alan Bass, as an enacting of the concrete in the clinical setting. Knowledge does not, here, provide the motive and justification for action (or interpretation); it serves to prevent difference from intruding on a scene where intolerability has been sufficiently quarantined.

hits. In his confrontation with an implacable reality, he knows only imperatives: “don’t,” “stop,” “be normal,” “speak normal,” “get down,” “get out,” “get off,” “sit down.”¹⁰⁰ Nick occupies a position of authority in relation to the demands and conventions of a reality that calls upon him for its defense, but he is, the film suggests, unable to fulfill those demands. His words have no effect: Mabel does not “stop” and she certainly never *is normal*, however impossible that may be. Such vocalizations are not, however, gratuitous, not altogether without effect; rather, they are, like the physical blows that eventually intervene to enforce the imperative where it has not been obeyed, a part of the domestic economy — both in the order and circulation of role-based behaviors and the forces of internal governance, as well as in the expectations and consequences of capital where its immediate apparatuses of regulation are absent. In the quasi-private sphere of the domestic, the reproductive labor of housework is overdetermined by the machinations of the quasi-public sphere of production and its imperatives (of value creation) which are embodied and enforced by the patriarch-as-breadwinner.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ There is, of course, the inherent problem of such an imperative of the formula “be normal” or “speak normal,” which, in its command to cease acting *abnormally*, exposes the *unnatural* constructedness of the normal. Mabel’s compulsions are both abnormal and natural (i.e., they happen without the interference of social convention).

¹⁰¹ Robert O. Self has shown how the ideal of “breadwinning” — the belief that the public and remunerative quality of “men’s work” was sufficient to sustain either a working-class or middle class family, thus relegating women to the unpaid caregiving of domestic work — persisted throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and was “not even acknowledged as an ideology” in the 1960s debates on civil rights reform. “It functioned as an organizing mythology of social life and was believed to be the bedrock of a sound family and by extension a sound society” (18). Even among the most progressive discourses of civil rights reform, this *ideology* shaped the desires and limits of policy. As Self notes, “For many civil rights leaders, racial progress was inseparably linked to the capacity of African American families to create the male-breadwinner, female-homemaker household presumed to be enjoyed by whites. The

Mabel does not (cannot) benefit from the separation of home and work which Nick takes for granted, restricting her labor potential to the reproductive needs of herself and her family. The interiority of her psychic space is, thus, coextensive with the interiority of domestic space where, as Arendt had always insisted, need determines possibility and value is inseparable from bodily capacity. As Leopoldina Fortunati notes, the female houseworker's "*exchange of work for work*" leads to a "*subordination of female labor power's productive capacity to its reproductive capacity;*" it is, further, "determined by capital in order to oblige the woman to exchange her labor power (as capacity to reproduce) with variable capital" (15).¹⁰² Fortunati evokes an image of the female body that is simultaneously machine and raw material, a vampiric figure of constant capital that, in the process of working *for another*, works on and consumes *itself*: "*A woman no longer uses her body, her body is a means of work and uses her*. Her body not only becomes estranged from her, but, insofar as it is subject to the orders of others, it also becomes her enemy: it consumes her living processes" (72). The subordination of the productive to the reproductive is, thus, not

common goal of the upwardly mobile black family involved trading a woman's domestic labor in a white home for prideful domestic labor in her own home" (24).

¹⁰² Fortunati here exposes the sexual division of labor that informs Marx's definition of variable capital, which he describes as "that part of capital which is turned into labour-power" and thus "both reproduces the equivalent of its own value and produces an excess, a surplus-value" (*Capital I* 317). The specific action of the *reproduction of value* described here takes place both in the process of the production of surplus-value — *within the sphere of production proper* — and *at home* where the labor of subsistence is performed for the productive laborer by another. In other words, the process of reproduction in the production of surplus-value depends on the cooperation (Fortunati writes of an "obligation") of the *sphere* of reproduction as what sustains the variable capital of labor power. "This is to say that capital does not simply posit itself as a waged work relation but as a dual work relation: *waged* within *production* and *non-waged* within *reproduction*" (Fortunati 16).

without consequence: when the body itself becomes the means and the material for the creation of value, its own generative processes are brought into the circuit of production and consumption.¹⁰³ Mabel Longhetti is *under the influence* of her nervous anxiety whose ostensible aesthetic purpose is to figure the strain of conforming to a regime of social normativity; yet she is also *under the influence* of what Fortunati describes as the totalizing subordination of capital. In the improvisational and acutely physical performance of Gena Rowlands, her body acts out its own imminent breakdown. Mabel's body is not only *used* but is being *used up*, its "living processes" are consumed by a family that counts on her physical and affective labor for its subsistence. Her relation to her children is a source of pride but also marks the limit of her (re)productive labor; as she tells them early on the same day she is committed: "I never did anything in my whole life that was anything except I made you guys." It is Mabel's body, the way it emotes, its gestures, its balletic swoons and its defeated crumpling, that bears and acts out the violence of an ontological war of the spouses¹⁰⁴ while also exposing its one-sidedness. It is the sole terrain of the battle, and its stakes, but there can be no victor.

¹⁰³ When Fortunati writes about how the woman's "body" becomes "estranged from her," she renders Marx's theory of alienation even more existentially repugnant (72). Marx describes alienation in these terms, in the *Economic Manuscripts*: "The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* [*Vergegenständlichung*] of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization [*Verwirklichung*] of labor appears as *loss of realization* [*Entwirschlichung*] for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *bondage* to it; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation* [*Entäusserung*]" (108). Fortunati's critique forces us to consider that, in the *non-waged labor of reproduction*, the object *lost* by the domestic wife/mother is quite literally her own body — she is alienated *from herself*.

¹⁰⁴ Kent Jones claims the film is a "war movie," noting that "Mabel and Nick have dueling conceptions of reality, each as valid as the other." This claim, however, ignores Mabel's lack of agency: the only time she could be said to act

One of the effects of the bodily estrangement that Fortunati describes is the forced renunciation of autonomy. Mabel's body is not her own. The gestural and vocal quirks of her *nervousness* thus become a form of resistance to Nick's authority, paradoxically assuming a kind of autonomy in compulsion, a way of evading his verbal imperatives. Although Nick's commands are the vocal precursor to the physical force that inevitably proceeds them — he slaps her in the face in the film's final scene — the words themselves also enact a violence. "If there is such a thing as violence in language, the term must be taken literally — not the violence of symbol, but the violence of intervention, of an event the immateriality of which does not prevent it from having material effects, effects not of metaphor but of metamorphosis" (Lecerle 227). Vocal language, in particular, exhibits the violence of "body penetrating body," in, for example, the piercing of an ear-drum (229). As we see in Nick's verbal imperatives, there is a mixing of these two violences: "the material violence of the scream, and the immaterial violence of persuasion" (230). If the domestic interior is the space of necessity, the space of bodies acting on bodies — without the transcendent, community-making function of what Arendt calls "speech" which can only take place in the public sphere — it is also the space where the violence of capital, most visible in the processes of accumulation and exploitation, extends into the capillaries of everyday life. Mabel's compulsions and Nick's commands enact, in the filmic narrative of a family drama, the impossible negotiation of domestic freedom and capitalist unfreedom.

against her husband, to make the conscious choice to betray Nick's "reality," is her attempt at infidelity which culminates in what could only be described as rape. If husband and wife have *dueling conceptions of reality*, there is never any question which is the victor — in fact, the very idea that there could be more than one such conception would have to ignore Mabel's struggle to simply articulate who or what she is. If anything, the "war" arises out of Nick's frustrated effort to secure victory *without cost*, which is to say that even his *reality* is an illusion.

A Woman Under the Influence may also be said to dramatize the lapse in the self-governing or auto-policing function of the domestic interior as the site where social norms, having been inscribed on the body, organize the practices of family living that rehearse the obligations to capital. Near the start of the film, as Nick agonizes over calling Mabel to tell her that he will miss their date, he confesses to one of the men of his crew that, sure, Mabel is “unusual,” but “she’s not crazy”: “This woman cooks, sews, makes the bed, washes the bathroom. What the hell is crazy about that?” Although Nick means to say that Mabel *cannot be crazy* precisely because she does these things, the way he says it suggests there might be something *crazy about* the labor of housework. His speech exposes the psychic violence of the domestic sphere. He means to use Mabel’s devotion to her role as housewife and mother as proof against the claim, which he makes himself, that she is *crazy*. His supposedly rhetorical question about the *craziness* of housework has, however, a subversively sincere response summed up in a single word: everything. Is it not *crazy* that a relation ostensibly grounded in love and mutuality should demand a fidelity that is both material and immaterial?¹⁰⁵ Is it not *crazy* that where that fidelity wavers, where the body and person of the houseworker do not adhere to the dictates of a normality beyond question, they should be subject to violent reorganization? Fortunati writes:

The fact that housework is not solely bed-making, cleaning, washing, ironing etc. has already been argued *ad nauseam*. This is work that, within certain obvious limits, not only makes the satisfaction of material needs possible, but is also work directly related to the satisfaction of non-material needs. Housework has to [be]

¹⁰⁵ “Within the processes of reproduction of labor-power, two clear figures can be discerned. (1) The process of commodity production does not take place in a direct way. Rather, it has two distinct phases separated from each other by the moment of consumption. (2) Both material and non-material use-values are produced within it” (Fortunati 72).

organized around material *and* non-material functions because the male worker, as labor-power, needs both. (74)

Mabel's purported *craziness* is cast in contradictory terms, as both the expression of her "delicate, sensitive" nature and her capacity to "climb the walls, break dishes, scream." Sylvia Federici exposes the inherent misconceptions of such categories as "affective" and "immaterial" labor to describe the so-called ubiquity of service work, which modes of labor, she notes, are "a component of every form of work rather than a specific form of (re)production" (122). Examples of service work that isolate the affective-relational quality of that labor "are deceptive, for much reproductive work ... demands a complete engagement with the persons to be reproduced, a relation that can hardly be conceived as 'immaterial'" (122). Even the more encompassing category of "care work" is reductive and misleading since the "distinction" between physical and emotional aspects of such labor "is untenable" as "what differentiates the reproduction of human beings from the production of commodities is the holistic character of many of the tasks involved" (123).¹⁰⁶ Nick's conclusion, that she is "not crazy" yet "not like a normal person," assumes a kind of responsibility that takes the form of a self-accusation: "She's mad at me." Mabel's position outside the sphere of production, as the one who labors *on behalf of* or in order to maintain the value-creating labor-power embodied in her husband Nick, strips her of agency, and even her *abnormality* must be understood as a reaction to forces she cannot control. Mabel is the one who *is affected*, witnessed by the trembling, the gestural ticks, the muttering, and the nonsensical vocalizations, all of which

¹⁰⁶ As I argued in the Introduction, object relations psychoanalysis provides us the theoretical language and logics for understanding *care* as a totalizing thing — both in its envisioned practice and in the fantasy of its promise.

are coded as signs of her incipient madness, her *nervous illness*.¹⁰⁷ Yet as the one who is affected, she is also *affecting*, held responsible for the ways that her own emotions (which are also not her own) *affect* her family.

Looking Hard: Underemployment and Exhaustion

Billy Woodberry's *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983) revisits the same Watts neighborhood explored in Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1978) and features some of the same cast, brought along by Burnett who penned the script and worked behind the camera for Woodberry's feature. In some ways a collaborative effort by the two figures of the L.A. Rebellion, Burnett nonetheless removed himself from the film's direction and editing, encouraging Woodberry to develop his own vision for the project.¹⁰⁸ Kaycee Moore reprises her role as the central matriarch, having played opposite Henry G. Sanders as "Stan's wife"¹⁰⁹ in *Killer of Sheep*, here cast in the role of Andais Banks, the frustrated and overworked wife of Charlie Banks (Nate Hardman). The film centers on Charlie's struggle to secure regular work and the material and psychological effects of his underemployment on himself, his wife, and his children. Most of the film takes place within the domestic interior of the family home, primarily the kitchen, and depicts the tensions and confrontations that result from Charlie's lack of regular work. A brief affair with another woman from the neighborhood leads to the film's most dramatic sequence: a ten-minute clash between

¹⁰⁷ When she asks her children what they think of her, not just as their mother but how they think of her as a person, one of her sons responds: "You're smart, you're pretty. You're nervous, too."

¹⁰⁸ "He would deliberately restrain himself from giving me the solution to things," said Woodberry — from the film's description by Ross Lipman on the UCLA Film & Television Archive website.

¹⁰⁹ Curiously, she is never named in the film nor in its credits.

husband and wife in the kitchen, followed by Charlie's self-imposed exile for a night. Once the semi-regular employment of his "casual" gig concludes, Charlie has the idea to catch and sell fresh fish with some of his friends only to walk away from the enterprise in the film's final shot. Stylistically and thematically consistent with its predecessor, Woodberry's film is nevertheless quite distinct. While both films adopt the signature neorealist style of the L.A. Rebellion filmmakers, and while both depict the same neighborhood, cast some of the same actors, and focus on similar dynamics of labor and domesticity, *Bless Their Little Hearts* engages more explicitly with infidelity, ideology, and the worsening relations between a still segregated black community and a white nation that manifests only obliquely in its institutional forms (the unemployment office) and in the presence of its vacancy and unconcern (the skeletal structures that litter the post-Watts Riot landscape).

The film opens with a scene of Charlie at the unemployment office, waiting in line, filling out forms, scoping job listings, and eventually taking note of an advertisement for "a casual labor job." From here, Charlie returns home only to head right back out to his friend Duck's place, where the men are gathered around a table, drinking and talking about "how to make some money." The scene is filmed entirely in relative close-up shots of the men at the table, never showing all of them together and never allowing an entire body within the confines of the frame — it is a scene without a subject but where the subject is also *every piece* of them. The men discuss the possibility of robbing gas stations and banks ("there's one on every damned corner"), a prospect advanced by the logic that there are "little kids out there doing it and we are smarter than they are." Charlie demurs, saying that he wouldn't want to do anything that would separate him from his family, and ends up derailing the conversation as he assumes a more philosophical take on their predicament: "I don't feel I'm no loser. I feel that basically all I got to do is look hard at my situation and just

try and figure out what's going on. But I must believe in God because I feel all this must be a test. See I feel that there comes a point in a man's life where he has to make a choice between the spiritual and the material." Although "we always choose the material," he says, "I believe, through a little faith, we can move a mountain."¹¹⁰ Charlie's choice of the spiritual over the material gets read by Edward Guerrero as representative of the opposition between idealism and materialism with Charlie taking "up philosophic company with Hegel and the idealist position that 'consciousness makes conditions,' against Marx and the materialist inversion 'conditions make consciousness'" (315). Although seemingly supported by Andais's frequent accusations that Charlie is too caught up in "dreaming [his] dreams," Guerrero's claim fails to account for the significance that Charlie's *idealism* — which is more colloquial than philosophical — takes root in *faith* not consciousness. "Charlie imagines that, as an inspired individual, he can, through hard

¹¹⁰ Charlie seems to have in mind this moment from the New Testament Book of Matthew: "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it [the demon] out?' He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you'" (17:19-20). The moment is a curious one, positioned between a brief discourse on succession and suffering and one on the Israelites' exemption from Roman taxation. After Jesus and the apostles Peter, James, and John, return from the top of a mountain where they witnessed a vision of Moses and Elijah and the prophecy of Jesus's resurrection, they are confronted by a man who asks for his son to be cured of epilepsy. Before Jesus exorcizes the demon that has caused the boy's condition, he says: "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you?" (Matthew 17:17). This intertext plays with the moral attributions the film sets up on its surface in the way it appropriates a moral superiority for the community-outside-community (Israelites/black Americans) and dissolves the notion of fiscal responsibility in the figures of spiritual succession and a responsibility to the "nation" that lives in internal exile. In claiming the status of "others" as the privileged position outside of the confines of state law, Jesus and Peter subvert the hierarchy of social relation.

work alone, transcend the historical/social relations in which he is caught and which consist of, among other variables, the structural unemployment and underdevelopment that plague the black community of South Central Los Angeles” (315-16). Without denying the assessment of what it is that has Charlie *caught*, I would argue that Guerrero’s claim ascribes a purpose to Charlie’s faith and supposed work ethic that the film never provides. So much of the film finds Charlie either out of work or underemployed, *caught* in the semi-regularity of casual labor, that it simply does not make sense to insist on his ideological belief that hard work alone creates the conditions for social mobility, which is also not what he says at his dining table sermon. It is not the work itself that promises transcendence for Charlie. His idealism, if we can call it that, occupies a position outside of the experience of waged labor, considering its prospect and relating to it as a mere possibility, even where it is spoken of in terms of an inevitability: “I will get a job,” “I’m going to get a job.” It is neither the activity of consciousness nor the strenuousness of manual labor that constitutes the vehicle for Charlie’s faith in the miraculous power of collective transformation. In the drink-fueled discussion of prospects for employment, which is not a discussion about finding a job (because there are no jobs) but rather cooking up plans to “make some money,” Charlie’s option is a non-option: contrasted with the only other ideas — robbing banks and gas stations or hunting rabbits — his declaration of faith is not even part of the conversation. His speculations, too, exist outside of the contractual circuit of employment, outside the dialectic, whether Hegelian-idealist or Marxist-materialist.

Charlie’s faith originates in a space apart where employment is no longer a guarantee, subject instead to the cruel irony of “casual labor.” What does labor look like, his words seem to say, when it is stalled prior to its contract with capital? What does it mean that all he has is the capacity *to look* and the imperative to interpret? “I feel that basically all I got to do is look hard at

my situation and just try and figure out what's going on." For Guerrero, the dilemma is resolved in Charlie's submission, his move from one rung of the ideological ladder down to another: "By the film's close, he has replaced his version of dominant ideology, that of middle-class optimism and mobility through individual effort, with its underclass counterpoint, an outlook by which he perceives himself as socially worthless, economically discarded, and psychically defeated" (316). From the conflict of hope and despair, we end with just despair. The problem with Guerrero's reading is that the film offers no evidence of this transition, nothing to show that Charlie has moved from one ideological position to another, nothing, really, to show that he has occupied any of these positions — an interpretation in favor of Charlie's ideology would already be burdened to find those utterances and actions in the film that can unambiguously count as *ideological*. Although Guerrero notes the "understated, ambiguous, and melancholy" qualities of the film's concluding moments, he still sees Charlie's walk away from his friends, away from the camera, and off into the background as a sign that he is "completely defeated, disgusted his consciousness finally ground under by conditions" (321). Guerrero is most interested in a naturalist reading of the film that emphasizes its Marxist critique of capitalism, in general, and the racist violence of American capitalism, in particular — and this does not misrepresent the film. In what he describes as if it is obvious social realism, however, there are clear affinities with the melodrama that offer a more politically dynamic interpretation of the film. Elsaesser notes the way that the family melodrama records the failure of the protagonist to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu. The world is closed, and the characters are acted upon. Melodrama confers on them a negative identity through suffering, and the progressive self-immolation and

disillusionment generally ends in resignation: they emerge as lesser human beings for having become wise and acquiescent to the ways of the world. (55)

Where the traditional drama externalizes conflict which is “projected into direct action,” argues Elsaesser, the domestic melodrama limits “the range of ‘strong’ actions” and foregrounds the inward turn of the character who is impotent in the face of a world that resists his action (55-56). Formally, there is little to distinguish Elsaesser’s account of melodrama and Guerrero’s realist interpretation of *Bless Their Little Hearts*: in both, the narrative proceeds from *suffering* to *disillusionment* to *resignation*. The difference lies in how we are to interpret the aftermath of this absurd trajectory. In the classical form of the melodrama, as Elsaesser points out, the brutalized creature that emerges on the other side of *self-immolation* acquiesces to that very brutality in a demonstration of *wisdom* — for whatever that is worth. In Guerrero’s account, however, the acquiescence is internalized and the (mysterious) thing that Elsaesser calls “wisdom” is altogether absent — in other words, there is only defeat: there is only a movement *down* the ideological ladder.

With the exception of the scene in the kitchen where Charlie and Andais have reached the moment when words must be said — so much of the film beautifully captures this repression of the *hard truths* that must but also must not be spoken — most of the film communicates the conflicts of psychic life through often mutely visual means. Alessandra Raengo picks up the notion of the Brechtian *gestus* which she finds “reinterpreted in different directions” by the filmmakers of the L.A. Rebellion where “the individual does not disappear to the advantage of a symbolic act that captures the complex intersection of sociopolitical forces but is rather protected, preserved, and elevated in her individuality, even simply because of the camera’s ability to record her” (301-302). Raengo identifies several of these “resilient and sublime” gestures in *Bless Their Little*

Hearts, mostly where they involve Charlie's hands: in the close-up shots of him filling out forms in the unemployment office, but even more in those moments when the labor of the hands is obscured somehow and the emphasis shifted to "his entire bodily posture that commands attention within the frame" (302). Such moments provide "access to something that the L.A. Rebellion has described so radically and so well: the landscape of the characters' minds" (303).

Andais tells Charlie several times in the film that he needs to stop dreaming and be a man (i.e., get a job and bring in a regular paycheck to support the family). Her tear-filled rebuke, late in the film, that she's "tired of helping [him] dream [his] dreams," feels warranted, considering everything we have seen to that point, and Charlie doesn't disagree, affirming instead that she "has a right to be tired." The very accusation that Charlie busies himself with "dreaming pipe dreams" says that he is too unconcerned with the material immediacy of his world, opting instead to imagine his way into a future no longer bound by the impasse and frustration of the present. The pipe dream is a genre of fantasy akin to the wistful daydream but in lieu of the daydream's flight from the confines of temporality, the pipe dream sets its sights on a particular future that has broken free of its determination by the past. "It wasn't always this way and it ain't going to always be this way," Charlie pleads, to which Andais responds: "When ain't it been this way." Dreaming pipe dreams means giving in to the affective assurance enabled by such temporal trickery and no longer being bound by the sociohistorical conditions that have the purported final word on just how much better the better life can be. Is Andais right about Charlie? Is a belief that things will change, even with the implicit claim that they will change for the better, enough to make Charlie a dreamer of pipe dreams or, in Guerrero's terms, an ideological dupe? Although the film sets up an opposition between Charlie's indulgent optimism (things will change for the better) and Andais's defeatist realism (things will be as they have always been), it does not suggest either position as a choice

which necessarily excludes the other.¹¹¹ Without making either Charlie or Andais into reductive caricatures of the poor, black subject stripped of agency by the machinations of a ruthless capitalism, the film nevertheless presents this as a moment of impasse: the very opposition of hope and despair ensures the conflict at the heart of the domestic, an interiorization that doubles¹¹² the impasse of a structural segregation voiced by federal (white) legislators that the black experience in America is unknowable. It is in this sense that both sides of the opposition may be seen as operating according to a mode of response dictated by the epistemic impasse that symbolizes black-white relations and the problem of segregation in the United States. Charlie and Andais can be read as acting without knowledge of their own motivations, or at least at a degree of remove from what they articulate as their desire, caught as they are in a perpetual state of reaction. Charlie says as much when he insists that “basically all I got to do is look hard at my situation and just try and *figure out what’s going on.*” When Andais confesses to a friend that she knows Charlie is sleeping with another woman, she says that she is not going to *let him know that she knows*, opting instead to “play it on his conscience [and] make him feel real bad.” Much of their relationship, in fact, consists in a sort of veiling of what they know of themselves and of each other at the same

¹¹¹ This is where my problem with Guerrero’s reading ultimately lies.

¹¹² This doubling of the public or social impasse in the interiority of the private or domestic is doubled again in the psyches of the parents and again as it is passed on to the children. See, for example, Alan Bass on “racial persecution in the US” as an instigator of the “intergenerational transmission of trauma” (275). See also Balibar on the “‘post-historical’ situation” of unemployment spanning several generations: “Now, provisional or not, the situation is that millions of disposable human beings are at the same time excluded from labour — that is, *economic activity* — and kept within the boundaries of the *market*, since the market is an absolute; it has no *external limits*. The Market is the World” (142).

time as they justify their actions as reactions dictated by the other or the environment. Charlie speaks of his infidelity as inevitable: an escape from the responsibilities of his home life and the inability to be to his children what they need him to be but also as the necessary outcome of Andais's lack of sympathy and understanding. As Guerrero notes, much of the emotional power of the scene of the fight in the kitchen, which makes it "one of the most convincing domestic fights in recent narrative cinema," derives from the improvisation of the actors who were allowed "to draw upon their own cultural repository of gestures, experiences, and memories to animate the scene" (320). Samantha N. Sheppard describes the scene as a "bruising moment," which she defines as "those emotionally powerful scenes that reflect and underscore broader sociopsychic narratives and experiences specific to Black communities" (229). The scene is also the only moment in the film when the two unveil their knowledge of each other *to* each other, the only time when the performance of ignorance gives way to a vocalization of the violence wrought by the reactionary logic by which they are otherwise bound. In almost every other moment of the film, the visual communicates that the disagreement between Charlie and Andais is not about the question of whether or not things will always be *this way* but about the very content of the *this way* as the material conditions to which they respond. Charlie and Andais both labor outside the legitimized sphere of capitalist production yet the structure that informs how they are supposed to respond to this social exile is decidedly different in each case.¹¹³

¹¹³ "What image does the process of production and reproduction of labor-power conjure up? As has already been said, it presents itself as a photograph printed back to front, as mirror image of the process of commodity production. While within reproduction labor-power as capacity for production is produced, in production labor-power is consumed. While in the latter the male worker is a means of work, in the former he is the object of work, and his means of subsistence are the means of work for the woman. The two processes are opposites: in production, the

For Charlie, the labor of dreaming, looking, and interpreting are no less necessary than the wage labor he cannot secure with any degree of regularity, and his words and actions in the film suggest his rejection of the latter as the sole paradigm of *work* — one source of his ongoing disagreement with Andais is that he cannot convince her that *looking for work* is itself a form of labor, one that occupies most of his time. When Charlie and a friend visit the neighborhood barber to inquire about jobs, the older man talks at length about the kinds of discipline and qualifications required to find and hold a steady job. He asks Charlie: “What can you qualify to do? You have to know something before you can get a job. What can you do?” “I can work,” Charlie responds, as if there should be any other prerequisite. The assertion that knowledge precedes employment affirms and contradicts the sociohistorical relations the film explores: it affirms an ideological commitment to education as the institutional prerequisite of gainful employment; and it contradicts the existence of unskilled labor that maintains and reproduces the material structure and means of circulation that prop up the fantasy of the transcendent work ethic. However, the very ideology of education as the passage from unskilled to skilled, from value-consuming to value-producing, rests upon a process of dis-identification and normalization.

[A]ny basic process of education, which aims not only at normalizing subjects, but also at *making* them bearers of the values and ideals of society, or at integrating them into the fabric of ‘hegemony’ ... mainly by means of *intellectual* processes, is not mere *learning*, an acquisition of capacities, knowledge, ideas, and so on, written on a *tabula rasa*, as classical empiricist liberalism innocently imagined. On

exchange-value of labor-power as capacity for production is produced and its use-value consumed; in reproduction, the use-value of labor-power is produced and its exchange-value is consumed” (Fortunati 69).

the contrary, it has to be a deconstruction of an already existing identity and a reconstruction of a new one. (Balibar 140)

When Charlie is asked what he *can do*, what *qualifies* him, he is being asked what he has been made into, in what way he has been primed for his integration “into the fabric of hegemony.” His pleading response, “I can work,” identifies his willingness to enter into such a space at the same time as it marks him as one who has been excluded from it, left outside looking in. If education, in Balibar’s dialectic of violence and ideality, breaks down and reconstructs identities, it does so in order to acclimate the educated subject to the capillary exercise of power-as-violence. What is education, in these terms, if not an apprenticeship in the labor of ideal attachments? What is the educated subject if not the *bearer of the ideals of society*?

Against Guerrero’s Marxist fatalism, Kleinhans argues that *Bless Their Little Hearts* “maintains the dialectical form of realist narration, as opposed to the negative determinism of naturalism, by use of socially significant gesture and detail” (160). Where Guerrero emphasizes the film’s “consistent downward movement” — exemplified in his image of Charlie’s ideological devolution — Kleinhans insists on the ways its seeming fatalism is tempered by moments of comedy and catharsis, offering a reading of the final scenes of the film, after the fight in the kitchen, that “redeem[s] the pessimism” (162). In the film’s final shot, when Charlie walks away from the roadside fish stall he and his friends have set up out of the trunk of a car, the image of him in the center of the frame, back turned, ignoring the pleas of his friends, and walking off through a field of tall grass may very well affirm his earlier desire to choose the spiritual over the material. For Guerrero, as we have seen, the image signifies Charlie’s defeat, but for Kleinhans, who admits that “[t]his is the most speculative part of my interpretation,” it signifies “the moment of moral choice and coming to a new level of awareness and a return to his home, his family” (166). Kleinhans

goes so far as to declare this conclusion “gratifying” in the way it shows Charlie breaking with “his friends’ materialism,” his willingness to “set right” his “sexual wandering,” and his ability to “cry in front of his family” (163). More interesting than these interpretations of the film’s politics, perhaps, is the very imperative *to interpret* and the specific way in which they imagine the political horizon that structures the positions one *can* take. Genre is cathected for its capacity to provide the aesthetic contours within which that horizon can be mapped and articulated. Guerrero’s “naturalism” provides a political reality determined *in the last instance* by the base over the superstructure; Charlie’s desire for the “spiritual” is really a desire for the “ideal,” Guerrero argues, and we all know how that works out. For Kleinhans, coding the film as a “realist melodrama” allows for an attachment that masks its cruelty and opens up a space within the political where experience and choice regain their moral character: where aesthetic convention and social norm overlap we can be *gratified* by Charlie’s assimilation into the familial fold. The aesthetics of the realist melodrama “avoids irony and self-reflection,” which allows a film like *Bless Their Little Hearts* to speak “powerfully and directly to that which is unrepresented, misrepresented, and underrepresented in the dominant culture’s depiction of the exploited” (163-64). In this sincerity of form, Kleinhans locates “the film’s moral standard” that holds Charlie up “as an equal” but which also presents him as having to “make a moral decision ... to bring money home for the family” (164). As we have seen, however, the coding of the family breadwinner as a *moral position* relies on a discourse that insists on sexual and racial divisions of labor that maintain the very structures of oppression.

Charlie’s predicament in *Bless Their Little Hearts* is overdetermined by these seemingly contradictory discourses on work and worklessness. When he does not work at all, he fails to fulfill his socially-determined role as breadwinner, the sole financial supporter of his family. He is

disgraced in the eyes of his wife and devalued by a society that interprets his joblessness as both irresponsibility and a personal failure to *work* hard enough to *be employed*. In this formulation we can recognize the power of *waged labor* as what validates work in a social context where, for example, the reproductive labor of housework or the intermediary labor of *looking for a job* are cast as either necessary (so not deserving of reimbursement) or extra-curricular (so preliminary to the contractual obligation of the wage).¹¹⁴ As a member of the “underclass” Charlie bears the stigma of the asocial deviant, cause of his own disgrace, yet as a victim of social exclusion his plight is the effect of forces outside his control, even if those forces are endemic to his *demographic*. It is precisely this failure to make sense of Charlie’s situation — without recourse to an ideological framework that provides the narrative coordinates — that the film reveals.

Postscript: What’s the Best Way to Say ‘Underclass’?

William Walters notes how the discourse on unemployment in the postwar era became bound up with the ideological framings of social division that would eventually be codified in neoliberal practices of state welfare.¹¹⁵ The concepts of “the underclass” and “social exclusion”

¹¹⁴ As Michael Denning notes, even in the devaluation of unwaged labor, there is yet another distinction — between a feminized reproductive labor and a masculine *unemployment* — that exposes a further degree of stigmatization. “One arm of the state apparatus insured and secured the normative male breadwinner against the risk of involuntary unemployment; another arm tested the ways and means of women raising children and doled out a stigmatized relief. If the social-democratic conception of unemployment broke with the nineteenth-century rhetoric of the Poor Laws by understanding it as systemic rather than individual, as a waste of social labour rather than a malingering of the idle and dissolute, it also drew a stark and ideological line across the working multitude” (Denning 86).

¹¹⁵ Melinda Cooper’s *Family Values* and Marisa Chappell’s *The War on Welfare* provide extensive critiques of the gendering and racializing of this discourse. See, for example, Cooper, 32ff., and Chappell, 21ff.

present two seemingly opposed ways of describing that part of the population that had been marginalized or left behind by liberal democracy's relentless march of progress. The "underclass" most often shows up in "conservative debates ... about urban poverty" and signifies an effort to "reconstitute social issues as problems of 'urban disorder' and 'security'" (125).

Usually 'the underclass' invokes a specific sector of society, an almost pathological community, cut off from the wider world by virtue of its asocial values and habits. The underclass represents a milieu in which a dangerous culture of drugs, violence, unemployment, single motherhood and welfare dependency, all intersect *and reproduce*; a world in which mainstream values concerning work, marriage and personal responsibility are seriously lacking. (125-26)

It should not be hard to hear the echoes here with the American legislative discourse that I examined in the first chapter. The discourse of the "underclass" pathologizes and racializes poverty, obscuring structural and economic effects behind an image of the national others as responsible for their own abjection. In the legislative discourse on urban disorder that I examined in the introduction, the "underclass" is the operative logic by which the violences of state and capital are disavowed and projected onto those who bear its force. The discourse of the "underclass" ensures the moral superiority of its orators by ascribing to those *others* the traits and tendencies that oppose the values that constitute its superior social status.¹¹⁶ Such a moral calculus, however, depends upon these negative figures to articulate their positive forms: asociality, divorce, irresponsibility/dependence, unemployment — all must be seen as negations of or deviations from

¹¹⁶ The similarity is not merely discursive but epistemically consistent with the logic that informs the genre theorists's understanding of value as itself defined in opposition to the anti-value of capitalist sociality.

the supposedly natural forms that underwrite the social contract.¹¹⁷ As such, they threaten the integrity of the social, which, as we have seen, was always already dependent upon a forced (and enforced)¹¹⁸ segregation. The postwar image of the welfare state as the ideal means for producing “*integral societies, fully national communities*” (Walters 124) became, in the decades after civil rights, a source of anxiety for the governing class which accrued its power and privilege from division and disenfranchisement. Nixon’s appeal to the “silent majority” and the concerted (often secret) effort to mobilize such anxieties for political ballast relied on a logic of *moral values* that could *only* see itself as threatened by these negative attributions: anxieties about structural deviance were marshalled to posit the positive form of morality: sociality, marriage, personal responsibility, independence, and employment. My analysis in the first chapter has already shown

¹¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman writes: “The prefix ‘un’ suggests anomaly; ‘unemployment’ is a name for a manifestly temporary and *abnormal* condition and so the nature of the complaint is merely transient and curable. The notion of ‘unemployment’ inherits its semantic load from the self-awareness of a society which used to cast its members as producers first and last, and which also believed in full employment as not just a desirable and attainable social condition but also its own ultimate destination; a society which therefore cast employment as a key — *the key* — to the resolution of the issues of, simultaneously, socially acceptable personal identity, secure social position, individual and collective survival, social order and systemic reproduction” (11).

¹¹⁸ I briefly looked at this (false) distinction between *force* and *enforcement* in the first chapter. It will show up again in the next chapter in my analysis of policework. See also, Derrida, “Force of Law,” especially 233ff. “When one translates ‘to enforce the law’ into French, — as by *appliquer la loi*, for example — one loses this direct or literal allusion to the force that comes from within to remind us that law is always an authorized force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself, even if this justification may be judged from elsewhere to be unjust or unjustifiable.... Applicability, ‘enforceability,’ is not an exterior or secondary possibility that may or may not be added as a supplement to law. It is the force essentially implied in the very concept of *justice as law*, of justice as it becomes law, of the law as law” (233).

how the very prospect of a racially integrated, *whole* nation — no longer segregated, no longer bound by the naturalized dictates of the sexual division of labor, no longer classed¹¹⁹ — was a source of anxiety because it threatened the sanctity of a political reality that was ontologically dependent on exclusion. A seeming contradiction arises here between this desire to maintain the segregated form of social order and the articulation of a moral structure that defines itself in terms of coherence and wholeness. This contradiction is doubled in the figure of unemployment which is cast both as an abnormal, which is to say pathological, trait of the “underclass,” and as a normal, even expected, consequence of industrial capitalism.¹²⁰ What appear here as contradictions, however, merely illustrate the discursive distinctions between ideological oppositions and the different manifestations of unconscious sociopolitical desires. As Walters notes, the concept of “social exclusion” emerged as an alternative to the “underclass” precisely because of the latter’s “pejorative connotations and highly racist associations” (126). “Whereas the underclass concept is accused of ‘blaming the victim,’ the notion of social exclusion allows for a fuller ‘structural explanation of the phenomenon of the divided society’” (126). In the work of Lydia Morris, the notion of the “underclass” performs a “conceptual containment,” “localizing the causes of mass unemployment” and restricting the negative manifestations of asociality to “a pathological sub-population” in order to protect “the wider social system from the criticism that it is dysfunctional”

¹¹⁹ In the words of British sociologist T.H. Marshall, the ideal form of the welfare state “envisaged ‘a population which is now treated ... as though it were one class’” (qtd. in Walters 124).

¹²⁰ Michael Denning points to the efforts of early trade unions to secure “out-of-work benefits,” as well as the self-identifying of the “wageless” as “unemployed” in their marches and riots, and to the theoretical work of J.A. Hobson and William Beveridge who argued against the moralizing discourse of unemployment as the effect of “individual depravity or idleness” (83).

(Walters 127). For Walters, the concept of exclusion, however, produces its own form of “containment,” and it points to the way that both of these discourses (the “underclass” and “social exclusion”) legitimate a state practice that is able to conceptually relocate structural problems to the margins (127-28). Both perform an apologetics intended to absolve those who benefit from the existing structure of social order.

Chapter Conclusion

While the traditional forms of melodrama served the *use* of providing a cultural outlet for the experience of otherwise frustrated sociopolitical desires, where its tropes show in works of (cinematic) “realism” in the post-civil rights era in the United States, the criteria for a successful victory over repression (Brooks) or the formally excessive undermining of the dominant social structure (Mulvey and Nowell-Smith) or a proxy moral victory over capitalism’s asymmetrical oppressions (Vicinus) no longer appear operative. In brief, the object no longer allows for a transcendence of form, no longer allows an experience whereby frustration can be aesthetically transformed into satisfaction. The otherwise frustrated sociopolitical desires that emerge in the two films looked at in this chapter cannot find a proxy form of satisfaction in the space of the cultural — for a domestic life not fully determined by the absolute control of capital in *A Woman Under the Influence* and for an inclusive and non-oppressive form of the social contract in *Bless Their Little Hearts*. As I argued in the first chapter, the *genre* of the legislative hearing served to provide a space where anxieties (about de-segregation) could be worked through in a paranoiac logic of abjection; this logic, which had always been a part of the reigning political ontology of the nation, informed the construction of the *domestic* as the object most in need of defense, most under threat by the nation’s abject others. In that same chapter, I also looked at two television broadcasts that were tasked with a similar role of managing anxieties; although, as we saw, they approached this

role in very different ways. The more aesthetically conservative and bureaucratic production in Detroit used forms of containment, exclusion, and immunization to neutralize the threat of the violent contagion represented by the urban uprisings. In Los Angeles, however, the KTLA broadcast used sensationalism, sparse editing, and abstraction both to de-contextualize the uprisings from their place within a discourse for civil rights and to encourage the same anxieties about contagion that the other broadcast worked so hard to suppress. *In every instance, we see the idea that the aesthetic work desires something and that this desiring is bound up with the form and genre of the work.* This is shown most explicitly in my methodological introduction, but it is worth saying here again that there is a relationship between an aesthetic (or a discourse) and the promise or desire an object is entrusted with in order to work through or *hold* a set of anxieties. Aesthetic objects *are* objects of defense but, as such, they can fail or breakdown; hence my reading in this chapter of the post-civil rights melodrama as a site of such breakdown.

What most interests me in thinking about *A Woman Under the Influence* and *Bless Their Little Hearts* as objects of defense is how their forms show up negatively, critically, and in the process of breaking down. If the (cultural) object of defense is supposed to allow for a working through or a holding of anxieties, what can we say when they fail in this way? As I have argued throughout this second chapter, that “failure” so often shows up in the films where issues of gender, normativity, race, and domesticity are overdetermined by anxieties related to the problem of labor in the post-civil rights era. *Work*, as theme and material, gets in the way of the fantasy such that the means by which classical melodramatic forms provided a cultural space for the satisfaction of sociopolitical desire are here disturbed or broken. One of the questions that remain at the conclusion of this chapter is precisely why the introduction of “work” (as problem/topos) into the domestic interiority of the melodrama *restrains* and *frustrates* the desires that previously found

paths to expression — by way of, for example an excess or moral purity or power. Instead of *exceeding* the object, these forces fall back into it: evidenced in the body of Gena Rowlands or in the mute gestures of aggression and conflict in *Bless Their Little Hearts*. In the traditional melodrama there are *paths of egress* for those desires that show up in aesthetically formal or narrative ways — those “tropes” that get named as the essential elements of the genre — in the hyperbolic language of sentiment and moral purity in early bourgeois French theater (Brooks), in the excesses of color, lighting, and objects in the *mise-en-scène* of Sirk (Nowell-Smith and Elsaesser), in the figuring of capitalist injustice and oppression in the villainy of a character in Victorian fiction (Vicinus). In post-civil rights cinematic *realism*, however, even where it makes use of the same tropes of classical melodrama, they are activated — the hyperbole of Rowlands’s acting, the oppressive mother-in-law, the moral issue of infidelity — only to be dragged back into the aesthetic confines of the object; as, for example, when Mabel wordlessly hums a song from *Swan Lake* while she dances without ever invoking its operatics to forge that *path of egress* beyond the object. The thing cannot be said where its saying, per Brooks, is precisely what constitutes its expression, which is to say its victory over repression. In *Bless Their Little Hearts*, similar classical tropes show up only to be denied at the moment where they would conventionally be fulfilled; as, for example, in the evils of capitalism which never get figured in an individual or (corporate) entity but instead saturate the space of the film,¹²¹ from the interior of the unemployment office at the start to the roadside fish stand at the end — there is no point of leverage where its defeat can be

¹²¹ The devastation wrought by Capital/History is total, and the landscape’s dissolution bears witness to this. It is surely no coincidence that Charlie’s stroll through the wreckage of Watts is structurally and aesthetically reminiscent of Edmond Kohler’s trek through the postwar devastation of Berlin in *Germany Year Zero* (1948). See Figs. 2.1 and 2.2.

staged, no person or thing to figure the *evils* so that they may be routed, if not in real life, at least in the proxy form of the film narrative.



Fig. 2.1 Charlie Banks walks through the wreckage of Watts. *Bless Their Little Hearts*.



Fig. 2.2 Edmund Kohler walks through the wreckage of Berlin. *Germany Year Zero*.

CHAPTER THREE:

Policework: The Banality of Labor Outside Production

Chapter Introduction

In the first chapter, I analyzed the federal discourse on the urban uprisings of 1967-68 in order to show that this conflict over the space of the American city was as much a contestation of the nation's prevailing political ontology as it was about the specific issues of inequality that made up the pragmatic critique of civil rights. A subsequent analysis of a series of congressional hearings and two television broadcasts of the uprisings demonstrated the particular way I am bringing together an analysis of politics and aesthetics to show how anxieties about the nation after desegregation informed the *uses* of cultural objects at the time. One of the ways that post-civil rights anxiety manifests for the ruling class, for example, is in the worry over the security and maintenance of goods. The categories of labor and value were called into question when the literal bodies of the oppressed reconfigured the space and function of the city as those same bodies set up barricades, initiated combat, and appropriated goods. Political anxiety at this time was thus inseparable from worries related to work and profit — which is why, in the words of Sen. John L. McClellan, “idleness is the worst curse.” In the second chapter, I looked at two works of post-civil rights cinematic realism for the ways they incorporated tropes from classical melodrama in order to express another set of anxieties of this period: namely, those of the working classes, which were seen to be conflicted in the desire both to maintain gendered and racialized norms and to abolish them. Worry over the state of the domestic and the place of the family in the broader national imagination was further overdetermined by what I have been calling the problem of labor.

In the second chapter, I analyzed two films from the post-civil rights era to see how these anxieties about labor, family, and the domestic informed an aesthetic landscape in the wake of desegregation. In *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) and *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983), I looked at representations of housework and underemployment for the ways they broke with the traditional formula of the melodrama and how this opened up new ways of problematizing the gendered and racial determinations of domestic labor in post-civil rights American film. I made use of the critical literature on the genre of the melodrama in my analysis of these two films in order to show how the genre's aesthetic promise goes unfulfilled when the tropes of suffering, family values, and moral triumph no longer transcend their forms. Instead, they indexed the breakdown of a moral calculus that could no longer assuage the psychic and corporeal effects of capital's brutalization of the domestic.

In this final chapter, theories of police and policing will be read alongside work on the genre of crime fiction to think about how representations of policework in the post-civil rights era break with the traditional ways that policing and detection have been represented and theorized. I am especially interested in how these new modes of representation — in both fiction and non-fiction/documentary — show how the aesthetics of policing leads to a policing of aesthetics: order maintenance and the immunization of social space. These practices of governance, often labeled biopolitical, should be seen to embody the aesthetics longed for in the political anxieties over desegregation that were examined in depth in the first chapter. In the first part of the chapter, I will return to the legislative discourse of the late 1960s to show how the conception of the function and role of the police changed in its response and adaptation to the political and social challenges mounted by civil rights.

Policework as Carework: An Historical Case Study

In 1966, one year prior to the start of the hearings on urban rioting,¹²² the Senate Committee on Government Operations tasked its Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization with an extensive investigation of the relationship between the federal government and individual municipalities concerning, especially, issues of housing, civic unrest, and unemployment. The series of hearings, titled “Federal Role in Urban Affairs,” concluded in June, 1967, one month before the most destructive riots of the era in Newark and Detroit. New York Mayor John Lindsay was called before the committee in August, 1967, to speak on the city’s efforts to reign in poverty and improve housing. Lindsay praised his police commissioner, Howard Leary, for his part in implementing “new police techniques” and for pursuing “a broad range of efforts that were brought to bear” on the “riot situations” in the city (579). New York City did not experience a riot on the same scale as other major cities in those years. However, in the decade or so that followed, New York City (and the Bronx, in particular) became the epitome of urban crime and poverty.¹²³ Leary’s own testimony was provided to the committee in December, 1967. In his opening remarks, he emphasized the “high correlation between crime and poverty; between racial outbreaks and

¹²² The discourse of these hearings was the focus of my analysis in the first chapter of this dissertation.

¹²³ Unsurprisingly, Leary attributes the city’s success in preventing an uprising on the scale seen in Detroit and Newark to the “police behavior in this area [which] was nothing short of remarkable” (2954). In response to two “racial incidents” in the summer of 1966, the police, according to Leary, showed “clearly and unmistakably” that they “intended to take all appropriate measures to restore the community’s tranquility but would not be provoked into unnecessary or exaggerated action” (2954). There is more to be said about this *action* without *over-reaction* that Leary wants to claim for his department. Almost all of these qualifiers beg the question about just what Leary means by such claims: What is an *appropriate* measure? What is *unnecessary* action (and by extension how do we determine when action is necessary)? At what point does action become *exaggerated*?

unemployment; between the use of narcotics; the incidence of violence; and the degree of educational, social, and cultural deprivation;” to which he gave the disclaimer: the “police alone cannot correct any of these conditions, yet we bear on a daily basis much of the burden of the effects of these evils” (2952). It is not clear what counts as an “evil” in Leary’s discourse — if, for example, “racial outbreaks and unemployment” are both evils or if the former is merely the “effect” of the latter — nor is it evident what logic animates the “correlation” he identifies beyond merely noting that, say, crime and poverty *coexist*. It is most likely that *crime, racial outbreaks, the use of narcotics, and violence* are the effects of *poverty, unemployment, and deprivation* — but this hardly resolves the ambiguities (i.e., how is *violence* both a specific category of effect while it is also that which describes the entire series, is, in other words, the manifestation of evil, according to this discourse). Part of the difficulty in parsing Leary’s claims lies in the common-sensical, self-evident approach that sees in the divide between *the police* and *the community* a divide between civility and lawlessness,¹²⁴ but part of the difficulty also lies in the displacement of affect or rather the way that the affective import of his claims is lost in the equivocation over the chain of psychic causality. In the correlation of “racial outbreaks and unemployment,” for example, if unemployment is the evil and racial outbreaks are the effect, it is, nevertheless, the *effect* that constitutes the “burden” for police, as Leary sees it — in other words, the police are not burdened by unemployment but by the “racial outbreaks” which result from unemployment. According to

¹²⁴ As we saw in the previous chapter, William Walters showed how the separation of the discourse of the “underclass” from that of “social exclusion” and how the latter attempts to provide a more “structural explanation” of social division, yet both serve the same function of absolution and apologetics. (See Ch. 2, pages). We also saw in the introduction how the legislative discourse of the congressional hearings appropriated moral right as exclusive to the state and characterized any deviation from state-imposed ideals of Law as inherently *lawless* and corrupting.

this logic, we have two series, the causes/evils: poverty, unemployment, and deprivation (educational, social, and cultural); and the effects/burdens: crime, racial outbreaks, the use of narcotics, and the incidence of violence. Aside from the perhaps obvious questions regarding what constitutes the difference between “crime” and “the use of narcotics,” for example, I am eager to ask not only why this claim is made but why it must show up where it does, namely as a kind of preliminary, opening remark. Why is this where we start?

Most of Leary’s testimony concerns his desire to build (or see built) a more technocratic and institutionally refined police force to more successfully combat urban crime and ensure the safety of the civilian populace. But if this is his desire, why does he preface all that he says with this phenomenological distinction between causes and effects, especially if “crime” is an effect and its cause is outside of the control of the police? When he asserts that these issues “are, of course, police problems, but they are also the problems of the American people,”¹²⁵ we are again left to contend with the ambiguity of his claims (2952). In light of the discourse he has invoked —

¹²⁵ Leary specifies the problems that constitute the “key areas of law enforcement” as “crime, *violence as distinguished from civil rights demonstrations*, the administration and management of police service, the civilian review board, and the effect of Supreme Court decisions on confessions” (2952, my emphasis). The last “problem” is in reference to the *Miranda v. Arizona* decision of the Supreme Court from 1966 which established the rights of a criminal defendant against self-incrimination — the decision was a hotly contested one among law enforcers. Although Leary appears to support the dissenting justices who “insisted that much police questioning is not coercive and that society has a legitimate right to ask a suspected criminal to explain the circumstances that gave rise to his arrest,” his progressivist views of police enforcement ultimately put him on the side of change (2957). It may have been “the view long held by those of us who enforce the law and have the obligation of ferreting out the criminal and protecting society,” he noted, adding: “I think it is important that law enforcement officials accept such decisions, learn to live with them, and, above all, seek new methods and techniques that are consistent with them” (2957).

the discourse that wants to accept responsibility for social injustice by recognizing that the pathologies of the so-called underclass are indissociable from structural, institutional, social inequalities (but in this *acceptance* to also absolve oneself of the responsibility) — “the problems of the American people” would seem to reference the deprivation and impoverishment, the “evils,” which are precisely *not* “police problems” because they are more broadly social, which is to say systemic. This point could be seen illustrated in Leary’s claim that the city’s “major attack on narcotics violations . . . appear to have reaped rewards, if the soaring arrest rate of drug peddlers is an indication of our success” (2953). If crime is the *effect*, how can an arrest rate count as a measure of success in addressing the real problems that the police (and American society) face? There is an assumption here that the higher quantity (absolute and relative) of arrests means that police are successful in their fight against crime, although it may also be argued that more arrests are, rather, an indication that crime has grown (i.e., there are *more* criminals). What counts as justice in such a picture of law enforcement? In Leary’s claims, we can already see a specific vision of policing as a kind of work subject to its own internal consistencies that resembles, in large part, the schemas and frameworks that determine the growth of value in private enterprise. If more arrests means there are more criminals, then the police could be said to have shown an adequate response to the problem of supply and demand created when the law fails — and it seems the law, in this theory, is *supposed to* fail — to achieve its ideal organization of the social without the intervention of its enforcers. We must also not lose sight of the problematic nature of *number of arrests* as an *indication of success*. As I will show, the arrest is only the first stage in the process of judicial correction, and it is often an indication of nothing more than that this quasi-independent branch of

law enforcement has met its own criteria of success. In other words, an arrest is *not* a prosecution, and that matters.¹²⁶

Leary's call for the redefinition of the police as a corporate technocracy — what he calls “the police force of tomorrow” — is remarkable not only in its prescience but also in its contrast with his characterization of the “problems” and “evils” that contribute and shape “crime” in the United States.

The time has come, I believe, for the police to call upon those in the population at large who understand and employ the highly sophisticated and modern techniques of industrial and commercial management to help us modernize and streamline our methods. We must go out into the community in search of new ideas, new techniques, and new equipment that will make our operations and our manpower more efficient.... In many respects our operation is comparable to those of the largest industries. Like many large corporations which have grown with the continuing expansion of the American economy, we have set new records this year. Never before in our city's long history have we employed such a large police force.

¹²⁶ Nor even is a prosecution a guarantee of justice, as if such a cliché need even be said. It matters, however, to the police officer, to the way he perceives his work, and to his own sense of efficacy. In the television documentary, *The Police Tapes* (1973) — which I analyze in detail below — the filmmaker, Susan Raymond, asks a Bronx police officer some follow-up questions regarding a recent arrest. She wants to know about the length of jail time for a man who was arrested for rape two times. The officer explains how the charge will be reduced in a plea deal, and instead of a prison sentence of 25 years, it is more likely to be between five and ten. Susan Raymond then asks: “How does a forcible rape get changed to an assault?” The officer responds with a wry smile and explains how the plea is arranged in the courtroom. He tells her: “It really isn't up to us to determine what type of sentences people have. Sometimes we become very frustrated because they do plea bargain these cases down.”

Never before have our police officers been better equipped and better trained. Never before have the demands for their essential services increased so sharply. And never before has our police budget been higher.... But we are still far short of the level of performance that we seek.¹²⁷ We are bogged down by a Niagara of paperwork. We retain many unsatisfactory management techniques and we still are striving to give the citizen of our city maximum service for each dollar he spends. To attain our goals we need the help of management specialists outside the police department and are seeking their advice on a consistent basis. We hope they will help us eliminate many of the unnecessary burdens placed upon our police and will help us to create the most modern and effective police force in the world. (2955)

Attention to the grandiosity and rhetorical flourish of this speech is integral to making sense of the claims being made here, because the actual substance and function of policework once again gets obscured by this corporate vision of the police force as an institution whose success should be measured by its *effectiveness, performance*, and value — and it should be emphasized that Leary means value in the most transactional sense possible: *in police service per taxpayer dollar*. Again, if the *evils* that create the problems that most burden police are structural and socioeconomic — poverty, unemployment, and deprivation — we have to wonder why a more technocratic and *modernized* police force will make the changes necessary to combat them. There is an obvious answer, of course: it is not the job of police to address such problems. In a sense, the responsibility of the police strictly *is* what shows up here as epiphenomenal: the crime that inevitably follows

¹²⁷ In light of these comments, it is curious that when Sen. Ribicoff asks if the force in New York City has enough police “to take care of all the needs” of the city, Leary refuses to commit to an answer, merely stating, “That matter at the present time we are now studying. I wouldn’t be able to make a decision at this moment” (2959).

from rampant inequality. This is why *paperwork*, *management technique*, and *training* are what Leary most covets “to create the most modern and effective police force in the world.” At several other points in his testimony, Leary further clarifies and qualifies what this ideal force would look like. In addition to being more technocratic and making use of new and creative administrative approaches, he wants to increase the force to record size and to expand the available tactical and patrol forces in order to create a highly mobile police that can “provide maximum visibility” (2952). Only in this way can they be prepared to face the “crisis in crime” faced by the nation.

Mystery and Care: The Aesthetics of Policework

After working behind the camera on the seminal television series, *An American Family* (1973), Alan and Susan Raymond spent three months, in 1976, filming the police officers of the 44th Precinct of the South Bronx. The resulting 90-minute documentary, *The Police Tapes*, first aired on public television in 1977. Largely made possible by developments in portable video tape recording, the Raymonds shot over 40 hours of footage at a cost of \$20,000; the use of the handheld camera and footage from the backseat of a patrol car influenced the police procedural series *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987) and the reality TV show *COPS*, which started broadcasting in 1989. In an interview with the filmmakers included on the DVD release of *The Police Tapes* (2006), Susan Raymond talks about their “strong belief” in the style of *cinéma vérité*, which informed their work on *An American Family* but changed “when we got to the streets of the Bronx.” They could no longer adopt the fly-on-the-wall approach because “the nature of police work” necessitated a more interrogative involvement.

Someone is having a nightmare. Someone is screaming. Someone is calling for help. The police officer arrives and has to figure out what is going on, who is telling

the truth, who did what to whom, and what is the officer going to do to help them. Well, I didn't understand what was happening. I was totally confused, so I started asking the officers, started throwing questions from behind the camera: What's going on? And then I found out the officer didn't know what was going on, and that was the nature of his job. ("Interview")

Raymond describes her realization that the audience was in much the same position as herself and the police officer, that they were all implicated in the same situation of *not knowing*, of seeking after a truth that would only reveal itself upon interrogation and evaluation. "You had to help your audience. You had to help them understand what was going on, even if the answer was 'I don't know what's going on.'" In this way, the aesthetics of *cinéma vérité* gave way to a stylistic approach that mimed "the nature of police work" that they were documenting. Raymond articulates what we might call an aesthetics of policework, characterized by an interrogative, almost beckoning, approach to a reality at odds with itself where the profoundly expressive yet incommunicable experience of *someone* calls out to the other for interpretation and succor: "Someone is having a nightmare. Someone is screaming. Someone is calling for help." From the oneiric interiority of the subject *someone* appears as if in relief, as the figure in relation to a background that obscures rather than situates it. Such an aesthetics of policework bears an ostensible similarity to ways that the genre of crime fiction has been interpreted and theorized. In a more recent study of police and detective fiction, Luc Boltanski describes the genre's fundamental encounter as one of "mystery," which he understands, in quasi-phenomenological terms, as the "irruption of the *world* in the heart of *reality*" (3). Likewise, Ernest Mandel writes: "The real subject of the early detective stories is thus not crime or murder but enigma. The problem is analytical, not social or juridical" (15). Where "crime was a framework for a problem to be

solved” and not the subject in itself of the action and narration, the mode of the classic detective story privileges the mystery as analytical puzzle because it is “the only irrational factor that bourgeois rationality cannot eliminate” (Mandel 15, 27). According to Raymond, while the *irrationality* and *enigma* of the scene of real-life crime suggests the need for something like “bourgeois rationality” to show up and *make sense* of the situation, judgment intervenes in the process: in order to “figure out what is going on,” the police officer — and this may be one of the key signifying differences between the “officer” (or “beat cop”) and the “detective” — must determine “who is telling the truth” and “who did what to whom” *before* help may be provided, before even the causal details of the event may be established, before it is even determined that help is *deserved*.¹²⁸

Violence and death are contained according to strict logics of societal abstraction. “[Death] is not lived, suffered, feared or fought against,” Mandel claims. “It becomes a corpse to be dissected, a thing to be analyzed. Reification of death is at the very heart of the crime story” (41). In the *roman noir* of the 1940s and 1950s, epitomized in the works of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, violence and death had begun to break from the logics of attribution and intent that define the mystery for Boltanski. Fredric Jameson writes of the “de-mystification of violent death” in Chandler, in whose work the structural and determinant influence of the central murder is “contaminated” by “the other random violence of the secondary plot” (27-28). In an apparent break with the classic model of attribution — and its delineation of significance from event to intent — Jameson argues that Chandler’s detective fiction dispels the aura of the rational. “Murder comes to seem ... in its very essence accidental and without meaning” (28). Here, where the

¹²⁸ As the film seems to argue, more often than not, help is withheld in favor of an approach that seeks, instead, to merely be done with the situation.

representation of violence and death no longer fits into the logical form of “intention and execution,” the expectation of “the solution to an intellectual puzzle” characteristic of classic detective fiction has been replaced with “an evocation of death in all its physicality” (28). This “aesthetic deception” nullifies the conventional crime fiction contract between reader and text, and in the substitution of the *physical* for the *intellectual* the reader, who “no longer [has] any time to prepare himself for it properly, ... is obliged to take the strong sensation on its own terms” (28-29).¹²⁹ Jameson does not qualify this “strong sensation” — is it disappointment, disorientation, guilt, surprise? He seems to take seriously Chandler’s own claim that what readers of crime fiction most cared about was not the action but “the creation of emotion through dialogue and description” (qtd. in Jameson 1).¹³⁰ Yet the “aesthetic deception” that the *physicality* of death facilitates does

¹²⁹ The full quote reads: “Now, however, the gap between intention and execution is glaringly evident: no matter what planning is involved, the leap to physical action, the committing of the murder itself, is always abrupt and without prior logical justification in the world of reality. Thus the reader’s mind has been used as an element in a very complicated aesthetic deception: he has been made to expect the solution to an intellectual puzzle, his purely intellectual functions are operating emptily, in anticipation of it, and suddenly, in its place, he is given an evocation of death in all its physicality, when there is no longer any time to prepare himself for it properly, when he is obliged to take the strong sensation on its own terms. Was it then simply ... to substitute an experience of space for that of the temporality of problem solving, that these shill games were constructed?” (28-29).

¹³⁰ For Mandel, the cynicism and gruff of the hard-boiled detective is little more than decoration for what remains a prototypical bourgeois type: “at bottom they are still sentimentalists, suckers for damsels in distress, for the weak confronting the strong” (35). Although the emphasis shifts from “the painstaking analysis of clues and related analytical reasoning” to an “obstinate questioning” and dogged tracking down of the criminals, the hard-boiled detective still expresses a bourgeois ideology that avoids any denunciation of the grand structure of capitalist order (36). One of the obvious shortcomings of Mandel’s analysis is precisely this reliance on the ideological that subsumes (and ultimately negates) the differences within the literature of popular crime fiction. The only distinction that matters,

not evoke *an* emotion in particular, but rather instantiates, or so Jameson seems to suggest, the aesthetic experience *of* feeling where the “purely intellectual” was believed to be all that was at stake — a substitution of “an experience of space for that of the temporality of problem solving” (29). While authority as subject and intent of classic detective fiction is affirmed in the process of attribution for Boltanski and in the mastery of *ratio* for Mandel, Jameson argues that such a “purely intellectual” satisfaction of solving the puzzle of the crime succumbs to the *obligation* to *feel* something instead.

In an anthropological study of police culture in Taiwan, Jeffrey T. Martin develops a theory of “police as linking principle”:

police provide a ‘linking principle’ for the context-switching trajectory through which trouble is absorbed into the *status quo*. This culturally substantiated, historically constituted linking principle defines the practical interface between ‘policing,’ as a kind of social control diffused throughout modern social life, and ‘the police,’ as a state-based institution. (157)

This tension between *policing* as a diffuse mode of social control and *the police* as institution sets up a very different notion of “mystery” from that confronted by Susan Raymond and what was theorized in Boltanski and Mandel. Martin’s almost positivist theory of police culture looks at the phenomenon as fulfilling a necessary function in the social order: as *practical interface* and *linking principle*, police not only enforce normativity, they regulate difference — which is both semiotic and violent — and rationalize the coercive and totalizing means by which the state ensures that

for Mandel, is that between a so-called “real literature” (the work of, say, Dostoevsky or Dickens) and this “*Trivalliteratur*” that is only ever capable of a mimetic relation to its historical context (26). Thomas Elsaesser makes a similar distinction between “sophisticated” and “popular” art in his genealogy of the melodrama.

normativity. Similar to Leary's proclamations about "modern policing," there is here, too, a pragmatism¹³¹ that takes precedence over the ethical and the ontological: the necessity of the police is a privileged given that need not be invoked nor explained.¹³² What is *mysterious* about the police encounter in this narrative, however, lies in the way that *trouble is absorbed* in order to maintain *the status quo*. We could say that it is a kind of mystery that the police are tasked with averting, but we could also say that in its *context-switching trajectory* the police sustain the mystery — if we accept that what is mysterious is not the trouble that disrupts the *status quo* but rather that which maintains it.¹³³ *The police officer arrives and has to figure out what is going on, but the officer didn't know what was going on, and that was the nature of his job.* What Susan Raymond describes is that scene of *trouble* — in a phenomenological guise — that Martin's police must *absorb*; and what constitutes police-work in this model is making known what is unknown, even if *not knowing is the nature* of the job. In other words, *trouble* names that which disrupts knowing's certainty in the otherwise heterogeneous space of the social — it is that space *made sense of*. As Martin writes, "police operate to *hold things together*" in a labor that is described as "trouble-

¹³¹ Martin explains at the outset of his study that he is focused on "how police fit into the sociocultural order of life" (157). Thus, his work is inherently observational and descriptive, and, it could be argued, justifiably defers questions of ethics and more foundational inquiries into political ontology. However, we might also wonder at the function of the *descriptive* in such anthropological accounts. For example, what are its epistemic boundaries and how do they also predetermine the field of values by which the phenomenon so described may be understood?

¹³² Robert Reiner has argued that the contemporary era has seen the development of "police fetishism," which he defines as "the ideological assumption that the police are a functional prerequisite of social order so that without a police force chaos would ensue" (3).

¹³³ We saw an analogous ambivalence in the opposition of natural/unnatural in *A Woman Under the Influence*.

management” (157, 158). “The work of police is, in other words, to manage a stabilizing intercontextual movement of trouble through a social landscape” (157). When Martin explains that police fulfill their function as *linking principle* in both their “presence” and their “absence,” the spatial image of the mobile enforcer who contains disruption is augmented by the interpellative notion of law’s internalization. The police strive for what Leary calls “maximum visibility” through maximizing mobility, but policework also produces this other kind of social presence-through-absence: “an ambient invocable force maintaining a conflicted status quo” (158).

Martin argues for a reconceptualization of “police culture” by moving away from a focus on “organizational structure, ethos, and worldview” to emphasize instead how the police are incorporated into “the broader sense-making processes at work in the cultural order more generally” (158). There are more than mere superficial similarities to the theories of policing and crime that we saw in Boltanski, Mandel, and Jameson, where policework — in its fictional and its ideological forms — is analyzed for its *sense-making* role.¹³⁴ At the same time, as we see in *The Police Tapes*, the rationalizing work of the police as *linking principle* succumbs to the many contradictions that arise in its practical application in a still segregated and poverty-stricken neighborhood. The police in the South Bronx never seem able to establish such connections — and their efforts often take the form of imperatives and elaborate performances of authority and

¹³⁴ When Martin refers to the police *as a cultural thing*, he understands this as “a genre of signifying practice that generates consequential interpretations of specific events around particular hegemonic ideals.... Embedded in such an order of relations, the police role is not to enforce the abstract principles of law (not even ‘discretionarily’ enforce their ‘spirit’), or is it to ‘fight crime’ (for they must in fact actively *facilitate* structural illegalities of state involution). So what are the police there for? They are there to hold things together [and] to manage the way trouble ramifies through the received political economy” (176).

judgment. The existing hierarchies of racial and socioeconomic power relations overwhelm nearly every effort to force and enforce a community.

Boltanski's argument abstracts crime fiction from the social and historical relations that Mandel considers essential to their cultural significance and insists, instead, on an almost universal semiotic value of the mystery. In his account, the mysterious event "does not have a *meaning* as long as it has not been possible to *attribute* it to a given entity or, when that entity is already known, to determine that entity's *intentions*" (4). The *mysteriousness* of the mystery, for Boltanski, lies in its semiotic obscurity and its narrative inexplicability. Where Mandel indicts the enigma in its guise as a convention of crime fiction in the way that it figures the bourgeois desire for analytical mastery or the drive for a rational totality, Boltanski delights in the manufactured experience of a crisis of intention, where meaning is predicated on the necessary relation of attribution and intent. Meaning *means something* only where someone emerges as the willful agent of an event, and it is the function of the detective to explain the trajectory of this causal sequence when the mystery obscures its otherwise rational motivations.¹³⁵ Most striking here, perhaps, is the difference between the aesthetics of actual policework as the Raymonds understood it — i.e., an interrogative approach to a situation of *not knowing* — and the traditional ways that crime and policing were represented and theorized. Susan Raymond was well aware of the "drama" of policework, and she knew it would be good material for a documentary for that reason ("Interview"). But her experience in relation to the *scene of crime* would change drastically in the course of making *The*

¹³⁵ Such a theory of "meaning" might be contrasted with its investigations in post-structuralism. See, especially, Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of *sens* in *The Logic of Sense*, where the event is understood in relation to the accumulation of quasi-causes and the *significance* of intent and attribution produce meaning (*sens*) in the form of their breakdown in nonsense.

Police Tapes, just as that “scene” was revealed, in the case of a homicide, to more accurately coincide with the events and experiences *after* the crime had been committed, *after* the body was found, and was often more appropriately a scene at odds with itself, one characterized by inquiry and interrogation, on the one hand, and grief and frustration, on the other. A temporality of policework emerges here that is vastly at odds with the notion of policing as *prevention* and *maintenance*. The scene of a violent crime is a scene of *aftermath*; as event it is also what comes after the event (after the crime, after the violence, in its wake); the unthinkable — from the point of view of the defenders of the social contract — thing has already happened, someone has been injured or killed; or, something has happened that constitutes a threat of something worse (injury or death) and the police are called to intervene before the *worse* thing can come to pass. When Susan Raymond says that someone *is having a nightmare, is screaming, is calling for help*, she suggests that the event is ongoing but more often than not (as the film itself shows), the screaming and calling for help are subsequent to the assault, the rape, the murder.¹³⁶ In the way that the cultural representation of such scenes are theorized (in Boltanski’s mystery and Mandel’s enigma, for example) the policework assumes in this encounter a purely intellectual relation between the police and the crime.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ I would like to think more about the difference between the *ongoing crime event* and the *aftermath crime event*. What counts as policework surely changes drastically.

¹³⁷ It is worth noting that by the end of the 1960s not only had the perception of policework undergone a significant change but the very makeup of the institution had changed as its relation to the “public” also took on new dimensions and a new aspect of burden. As Leroy Lad Panek notes in his history of the police novel in the United States, “in the 1950s the character patterns of the great detective, the amateur, and the hard-boiled private eye were handed down from older generations of mystery writers and, in the way of popular fiction, needed to be updated or abandoned” (41). Writers of crime fiction began to turn from the intellectual loner to the “squad,” the precinct of police officers as a

Before the processes of detection and investigation begin, however, when the police arrive on the scene, they announce their presence with sirens and lights — to the enigmatic moment of succor described by Raymond, often characterized by a chaos of bodies and intents, the police bring the full spectacle of law enforcement. In one scene near the end of *The Police Tapes*, a patrol car blares through the streets of the Bronx, siren wailing, before coming to a halt outside an apartment building, lights fixed on a group of mostly young black and Puerto Rican men and women milling around a body that lies prone on the concrete. The officers climb out of the car and cut through the bodies, joining other officers already on scene. “All these people and nobody saw anything?” one of the officers queries the gathered crowd. People ask the officers multiple times when the ambulance will come, when *help* is coming, to which one officer responds with the terse command to “shut up.” The ambulance never arrives — “there is no ambulance” one of the officers explains, annoyed by the repeated questions — and the limp body is lifted, instead, into the back seat of a patrol car, criminalized even in death. As the officers on scene multiply and direct people away from the presumably dead young man in the street, his mother arrives and begins to scream — harsh, staccato shrieks — reaching her arms out to her son’s body as she collapses to the ground,

collective subject, and from the rigorous case of detection as the motor of narrative to “routine, to the mechanical and human procedures that were increasingly important in professional police work in the twentieth century” (41). Early on in the subgenre of the police novel, works by authors such as MacKinlay Kantor, Jack Webb, and John Ball typically championed the police as “society’s bulwark against increasing chaos” (81). “Instead of confronting the real problems of police and policing (corruption on one hand and social ills on the other) the cop writers of the 1950s and 1960s depict policemen and police departments as beleaguered, but peopled by honest, hardworking, moral men” (81-82).

barely held up by those behind her. Susan Raymond recalls the scene in an interview several decades later as an exemplary moment of what it meant to inhabit that new aesthetic mode when the dictates of *cinéma vérité* no longer fit the reality in which they found themselves, when the experience *beckoned* in a way that called for response. What she realized, however, was that she had been changed in the process of encountering such scenes during the weeks and months of filming. “I was recording and I didn’t care at that point. And that was really bad, to find out that I had taken on that cynical hard shell that the cops take on to survive in these mean streets. And I didn’t know if I liked that or not.” If the aesthetic ground of the police encounter is characterized by *not knowing*, by adopting an interrogative and, ultimately, judgmental relation to the representational matter of the event, it is also determined by a pervasive sense of helplessness, running into the brick wall of socioeconomic conditions, as it were. But why is the “cynical hard shell” described as the necessary — inevitable, natural, understandable, reasonable — response of the police officer to the situation of *policing* the ghetto?

South Bronx Police Chief Tony Bouza explains that the average police officer, who comes from the “lower-middle class or upper-lower class,” begins in the profession with a degree of optimism: “he wants to help people.”

And he goes to the police academy, and he is told he is going to be helping people and he is taught how to help people and he’s going to be preserving the fabric of our society, preserving life and property and maintaining the peace and doing all noble purposes, and then he gets out there and he discovers he is regulating human behavior and he is bitterly resented and he is shocked. (*The Police Tapes*)

Bouza theorizes that out of this resentment and in order to preserve a store of emotion for his personal life, the police officer becomes “hardened” and “cynical;” drawing an analogy with

prostitution, the officer, like the prostitute who cannot afford to get “emotionally or romantically involved with every client,” the officer “cannot afford to become emotionally or romantically involved with every client,” which results in him “developing callousness over his emotions.” Bouza’s psychologism racializes emotion: while “conditionable” is made a universal predicate of humanity, the poor black resident of the ghetto is *conditioned* to violence and inarticulateness, while someone like Bouza himself (white and middle class, perhaps) is *conditioned* to seek a good education for his children and to “resolve disputes” through “communication.”¹³⁸ Although it passes for a pragmatic assessment of the problems of policework, Bouza’s discourse is emphatically racialized and classed; and, despite his recognition of the systemic nature of the issues of the American ghetto, the racialization of his discourse has distinct effects on any distinctions that are made between the subjects under consideration. We might wonder, for example, about the function of the collective noun in comments such as these:

The fact of the matter is that *we are manufacturing criminals*, we are manufacturing brutality out there. We are very efficiently creating a very volatile and dangerous sub-element of our society, and we are doing it simply because we don’t want to face the burdens and the problems and the responsibilities that *their existence* imposes upon any society with conscience. So rather than awaken *your conscience* to the problem you’re far better off ignoring it, and that’s what we are doing. And I am very well payed almost to be a commander of an army of occupation in the ghetto. (my emphasis)

¹³⁸ Denise Ferreira da Silva’s work on the global category of race has done much to analyze the philosophical and historical context of such *conditionability* — although she uses the term *affectability*, putting the emphasis on the classical epistemological distinction between affection and autonomy. See, especially, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*.

Bouza's insight into the "manufacturing" of the ghetto acknowledges the historical and material causes that have contributed to the problem of the post-civil rights social landscape — oppression, too, is work. However, it remains *their existence* that is the primary problem in this description. I have shown in the previous chapters how this defensive logic informs the reactionary response to de-segregation which has been forced to acknowledge the structural causes of oppression that it nevertheless disavows in maintaining the culpability of the abject other. In the first chapter, this was evident in the language of the hearings and the reticence to yield the reigning conception of the nation's political ontology — to allow it, in brief, to make room for that other. In the second chapter, in addition to the discourse of the underclass, this was figured in Charlie's futile negotiations with the *workless* landscape of post-civil rights Los Angeles.

The Ghetto as 'Eyesore': Policing Aesthetics

The *mysteries* and *enigmas* routinely confronted by the beat cop or the patrol officer are distinct from the experience and method of the homicide detective or the private investigator, the preferred figures of classic (bourgeois) crime fiction. What Susan Raymond describes as a kind of Cartesian confrontation of individual subjects, mutually inexplicable to one another in the depths of their selves, does not fit the conventional picture of the mystery or detective genre. The enigma does not communicate itself through the part-object relation of the clue and its context (as meaningful inconsistency between thing and environment) nor in the temporality of the past event that lingers in the present precisely because it has not yet been inserted into a causal sequence. Although the encounters captured on film by the Raymonds could be described as "dramatic" in the sense that Susan Raymond had expected before they started filming, the experience of policework that they represented did not quite fit that expectation. Despite having "all the

ingredients of a good story,” as Raymond saw it, the individual scenes of policework captured in the film did not cohere to narrative conventions of climax and resolution (“Interview”). Despite arriving at the scene of a crime in a state of *not knowing what was going on* and needing to ask questions to establish even the most basic details in order to decipher an event, the processes of inquiry and judgment repeatedly proved to be insufficient.¹³⁹ One might not ever know what *really* happened because the accounts of the event were contradictory — hence the need for judgment to intervene prior to the conclusion of the rational labor of deduction and the inevitability that someone will be arrested (or at the very least accused). Or one *knew* what happened — the young man died from being stabbed fourteen times — but the knowledge did not assuage the conflict and could not provide succor to those who *called* for help. In the immediacy of policework, which is the subject of *The Police Tapes*, instead of clues the officer (not yet investigator)¹⁴⁰ is confronted

¹³⁹ What is it about the police encounter that requires verbal description in order for there to be a satisfactory representation of the depicted events? Is this doubling of discursive affirmation similar to what we saw in the first chapter in the desire for the “picture” — pictorial representation, physical document — to supplement the “word picture” of testimony in the hearings? The film frequently problematizes what can and what cannot be seen in the police encounter. Often, what we see is the event *after the event*, the scene after the arrest when the accused is already handcuffed and the officers must explain to the camera — to the audience but also, as Raymond has made clear, to the filmmakers themselves — what happened to get to this point. The arrest necessitates a verbal narrative of the arrest, its justification. When the visual cannot in itself fulfill the function of evidence, it requires a verbal supplement: description in the mode of justification.

¹⁴⁰ “Not yet” in the temporal sequence of policework, in which the “beat” or “patrol” officer has an immediate experience of a crime (or its aftermath) followed by the *mediations* (which, classically, also take the form of a kind of meditation) of the investigator. It might be interesting to consider, in the particular instance of murder, how the role of the coroner is the true mediator of policework, coming in to declare the body dead and, thus, open to investigation.

with testimony, or rather testimonies: often competing accounts of an event that either persists or threatens to recommence. Here, real-time police work takes the form of a kind of community relations, and issues of circulation and social exchange take precedence over the more *metaphysical* debates about identity, causality, and relation that occupy the attention of the classic investigator confronted with mysteries and enigmas. When Susan Raymond speaks of the *you* that must *help* the audience “understand what was going on” — just as the police officer is called upon to *help* the person in distress whose capacity for verbal communication has been outstripped and who can only *express* the trouble that overwhelms them — she is not merely caught up in an imitative fallacy. The former adherent of *cinéma vérité*'s imperative of non-involvement becomes, in such situations, if not implicated by the event being filmed, at least interpellated by it: she becomes *its* subject. However, as the facilitator of the message, she must transcend her aesthetic mimicry of police work, and in this simultaneous movement further into the mystery of the event and further away from it, the representation of crime assumes a function it did not possess in the classic modes of detective fiction and true crime. We may be reminded here of Martin's theory of police as linking principle, where the epistemic serves a different function: knowledge is not predicated on detection but through securing a space of legibility. The supremely rational and analytical detective described by Mandel and Boltanski could never be seen to admit, as does Susan Raymond, that “I don't know what's going on.”¹⁴¹ *Not knowing what's going on* prompts the quest to interpret the clues, to analyze, to investigate, to master the mystery of the event because

¹⁴¹ The possibility of *not knowing what's going on* abolishes the certainty that *there is* meaning, which, in Boltanski's theory, grounds authority. Meaning is no longer the natural yield of processes of deduction and analysis. In the documentary, the *significance* of events is a non-issue. In the hierarchy of law enforcement, the judgment of the patrol officer precedes — and is often supplanted by — the juridical function of the court.

not knowing is incompatible with an experience that locates *meaning* in the attribution of intent (Boltanski) or in the triumph of bourgeois rationality (Mandel). The patrol officer, however, polices the routes of circulation in search of abnormality not mystery. As a functionary of the normative order, he is called to a scene of dispute to judge not to analyze, and in his judgment — which is not dependent upon *knowing what is going on* — he determines who deserves the help he has been empowered to provide. In classic crime fiction, the authority of the detective is never in question: he is the one who possesses the analytical faculties required to *make sense* of an event that either resists meaning at the surface or obscures its relation to the rational order. “Clues have to be *discovered* because tracks have been *covered*” (Mandel 42). Value is not in question. The narrative of detection proceeds from an *a priori* certainty regarding the contours and laws of reality. It is an exercise in ontology and epistemology in the performance, through repetition, of mastery. *It is elementary*. The patrol officer enjoys no such *de facto* assumption of authority which becomes, for him, a performative aspect of the job — from the blinding lights and deafening sirens of the cop car to the badge and handcuffs: authority is in the accoutrements.

What I have here been calling the *aesthetics of the police* is bound up with the *policing of aesthetics*, which the Raymonds explore throughout their documentary, epitomized in one officer’s claim, delivered from the driver’s seat of a patrol car as it cruises through the streets of the South Bronx, that the dice games they regularly break up are “an eyesore.”¹⁴² The officer in the patrol car is confronted on all sides by façade and appearance, and it is his function to judge the adequacy

¹⁴² It is interesting that the “casual labor” that Charlie Banks undertakes in *Bless Their Little Hearts* almost exclusively involves the maintenance of surfaces and façades: the scything of tall grass and weeds on a patch of vacant land by the side of the road or the painting over (in white paint) graffiti on the side of a detached garage. At the margins of sanctioned labor, the work that is available is dedicated to maintaining the aesthetic surface of the city.

of such surfaces in relation to the normative image of community he has been provided.¹⁴³ In 1982, this practice of *policing aesthetics* found its theoretical exposition in an article by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling who called for a police-based form of community relations that emphasized “order-maintenance” in distinction with crime fighting.¹⁴⁴ What became known as the “broken windows” theory of policing conceives the space of the city in emphatically aesthetic terms: the perceptible and material phenomena that make up the *stuff of the streets* harbor a contagious potential that must be actively immunized. Wilson and Kelling write:

That link [between order-maintenance and crime prevention] is similar to the process whereby one broken window becomes many. The citizen who fears the ill-smelling drunk, the rowdy teenager, or the importuning beggar is not merely expressing his *distaste* for *unseemly* behavior; he is also giving voice to a bit of folk wisdom that happens to be a correct generalization — namely, that serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked. The unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window. Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being

¹⁴³ South Bronx Police Chief Tony Bouza explains that the police recruit, before he has become “hardened” to the reality of his work and the rift that separates him from a society that “doesn’t appreciate him,” harbors an image of his community as one that is in need of his protection and preservation, an image that is encouraged in his academy training and reflected back to him in the media (*The Police Tapes*).

¹⁴⁴ Wilson and Kelling’s article, which was published in *The Atlantic*, “argued that the police role should be expanded beyond law enforcement to include active participation in maintaining and/or improving the quality of community life through an increased focus on *order maintenance*” (Vila and Morris 236, my emphasis).

caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions. If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby, *the thief may reason*, it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place. (qtd. in Vila and Morris 238, my emphasis)

This description of the *broken windows* theory relies on metonymic displacement and an attribution of individual psychological motives to deliberately constructed social types in order to evoke an almost Hobbesian image of community. We might also recognize here the logics of abjection and contagion: the drunk who offends the senses or the beggar who breeches civil restraint infect the space of the social; their very presence acts as an invitation to crime and facilitates its spreading, eventually saturating the community in an affective tenor of disgust. Roberto Esposito notes that in theories of “immunitary democracy” — from Arnold Gehlen’s Hobbesian politics to Niklas Luhmann’s cybernetic functionalism — institutions do the work of forging community bonds: they are “charged with exonerating man from the weight with which the contingency of events saddles him” (40). In this “exoneration from environmental contingency,” the individual “is compelled to close his originary openness, and to circumscribe him or herself within his or her own interior” (40-41). The pragmatics of such an institutional democracy thus propagates an immunization of the *body politic* whereby the exterior is interiorized. “What is immunization,” asks Esposito, “if not a kind of progressive interiorization of exteriority?” (41). In Luhmann, it is the “system” that performs the role transforming the “exterior complexity” of environmental conflict into one “that is internal to the system itself” (41).

Unproductive Labor and *Heistwork*

In a footnote in the *Grundrisse* to the misconception that capital is not productive,¹⁴⁵ Marx makes use of a frequently-used example to illustrate the difference between *productive* and *unproductive* labor: the piano maker (who produces the material commodity) and the piano player (who uses that object to produce music). In its most succinct formulation, what sets *productive* labor apart from *unproductive* labor — in the “*economic sense*” — is its production of surplus-value, or, as Marx says here: “*Productive labour is only that which produces capital*” (*Grundrisse* 305). It makes sense to say that the piano player *produces* something with his labor — we might call it satisfaction, says Marx — or that “the madman who produces delusions is productive,” but in neither instance is that labor “productive for capitalization” (305, 306). These two examples seem excessive to the way this argument typically develops, in Marx and in his interpreters. As Ian Gough notes, “a necessary condition” of productive labor (in the capitalist mode of production) is that “it must be useful labour, must produce or modify a use-value — increasingly in a collective fashion” (60). Unproductive labor may be both *useful* and *necessary* but it is not “productive for capitalization” (*Grundrisse* 306).¹⁴⁶ As Gough sees it, productive labor encompasses the work of those in industry, agriculture, distribution, and services — although there has been much debate about the extent to which “transportation” of goods can count as productive or not — while those who may fall under Marx’s category of unproductive laborers include everyone from state employees, teachers, doctors, and domestic servants (who produce use-values) to salesmen,

¹⁴⁵ A misconception that arises from the mistake of seeing capital “as mere means,” which understands it as “the material which confronts labor,” rather than recognizing the processive truth that the “simple production process ... appears as the self-propelling *content* of capital” (*Grundrisse* 305).

¹⁴⁶ “To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck but a misfortune” (*Capital I* 644).

advertisers and “unnecessary supervisory workers”¹⁴⁷ (who do not produce use-values) (Gough 60). Fred Moseley argued that it was an increase in the ratio of unproductive to productive workers through the 1960s and 1970s that “reduced the percentage of surplus-value available for capital accumulation” in the period, contributing to a “stagnation of capital accumulation” largely responsible for the economic crisis at the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s (“Marx’s Concepts” 185, 184). Gopal Balakrishnan claims that it was neoliberal capitalism’s “prolonged, unsuccessful attempt to transcend” the global economic crisis at the end of the 1970s that set the stage for an ongoing period of stagnation as the economy has increasingly shifted to financial speculation as the purported *solution* to “deceleration” and “overproduction” (4). “In the 1990s it seemed plausible that containerization, post-Fordist production, and supply chains and information technology in the new office place were the driving forces of a transition to a ‘New Economy,’ one more productive, and in different ways, than anything that had come before it” (7). Yet this shift to the *new* never took place, despite the adaptability of the “productive” sector to forge new methods and objects for the pursuit of surplus-value in a global economy that was becoming ever-more dependent — in the so-called advanced capitalist nations — on its (unproductive) service sectors.

¹⁴⁷ There is a version of “supervisory” labor that counts as productive in the proper sense, however, as that which produces surplus-value. As Marx notes in *Capital, Vol. 3*, “all labour in which many individuals co-operate necessarily requires a commanding will to co-ordinate and unify the process ... This is a productive job, which must be performed in every combined mode of production” (qtd. in Gough 58). In a future project, I would like to revisit Marx’s notion of the commanding will and to think about the its two versions or modes: the productive one and the unproductive one, with the former constituting a form of accepted authority and the latter a necessary performance of authority.

The categories of productive/unproductive and the historical *long durée* critique of capital seem more than capable of making sense of the changes in the global economic landscape in the wake of the civil rights-era in the United States. For the argument that I will develop in this final section, however, I would like to dwell on the concept of unproductive labor and its place within this history of the critique of capitalism. It should now be clear that unproductive labor has been central to the problem of every object that I have analyzed in this dissertation: the televised representations of the urban uprisings in Los Angeles and Detroit, which were as concerned with the political ramifications of the black militant and his contestation of *justice* and *right* as they were with documenting and assessing the breakdown of the circulation of goods and the threats to property posed by looting and mass demonstration; Mabel Longhetti's psychological crisis in *A Woman Under the Influence* as performance and allegory of the crisis of reproductive labor in the post-civil rights era; Charlie Banks's chronic underemployment and unemployment as both cause and effect of the dissolution of domestic autonomy in the segregated poor black community of Watts in Los Angeles; and, lastly, here in the final chapter, the various conceptions of policework as, on the one hand, the institutional means by which the irrationality of a social order — defined, as it is, by such contradictions in value as show up in the categorical distinction between productive and unproductive labor — is rationalized, the means by which its mysteries and violences are neutralized in a specific spatial logic of *order*, and, on the other hand, the necessary policing of the city's aesthetic presentation of the former as what, precisely, *is*.

Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labor takes on Adam Smith's definition of these terms in book two of *The Wealth of Nations*, where the former is described as that which "adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed" and the latter is simply that

which does not add such value (191). Smith also recognizes that unproductive labor is not only often *useful* but even necessary to society.

In the same class must be ranked, some both of the gravest and most important, and some of the most frivolous professions; churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers, opera-dancers, etc. The labour of the meanest of these has a certain value, regulated by the very same principles which regulate that of every other sort of labour; and that of the noblest and most useful, produces nothing which could afterwards purchase or procure an equal quantity of labour. Like the declamation of the actor, the harangue of the orator, or the tune of the musician, the work of all of them perishes in the very instant of its production. (192)

As Gough points out, Marx “vehemently rejected” Smith’s emphasis on “the *material characteristics of the product*” as integral to the distinction between the two (52). For Marx, the difference did not depend at all on the materiality of the object produced, and, in fact, he says that the “*same kind of labour may be productive or unproductive*” (qtd. in Gough 52). The question of the materiality of labor introduces, however, a new problematic into this historico-critical distinction between *kinds* of labor under capitalism: namely, the problem of the value of labor. It is clear that Smith wants to introduce a moral difference into the category of unproductive labor, to say that even where labor may not be accurately termed *productive* it may still be *good* — or, in other words, that unproductive labor may still have *a certain value* or be *most useful* — and he achieves this by separating the kinds of unproductive labor into two classes: one that is *noble* and *important* and one that is *mean* and *frivolous*. What emerges in this argument is *another level of value* that Smith almost requires to salvage the hierarchy of existing class distinctions. In other

words, the devaluation of such professions as “lawyers, physicians, [and] men of letters,” which have, in this political economy, been classed as *unproductive labor*, necessitates a different means of valuation by which they may regain their *nobility*. Even here, however, the problem of materiality persists. In Smith, what gets to count as a *productive* object must endure, it must itself be capable of *procuring a quantity of labor*. What disqualifies the performance of an actor, the speech of an orator, and the song of the musician is that the object so produced *perishes in the very instant of its production*. At times, Marx seems to reinforce this picture, as in the example of the footnote from the *Grundrisse*, where the piano player’s music and the madman’s delusions cannot count as *productive* labor. As we have seen, however, Marx’s definition of productive labor does not at all depend on materiality nor is there any indication that materiality itself requires temporal endurance, as it does in Smith — we might recall, for example, the *collective will* maintained by the *productive* supervisor. Marx notes that “other economists” grant the unproductive worker a form of productivity, as when the piano player can be said to “stimulate production; partly by giving a more decisive, lively tone to our individuality, and also in the ordinary sense of awakening a new need for the satisfaction of which additional energy becomes expended in direct material production” (*Grundrisse* 305-306). Although he insists that even in this example, it is already evident that “only such labour is productive as produces capital” (306) — presumably because the unproductive worker can only be considered productive when his labor engages somehow in the relation of labor power and surplus-value — we can recognize what Antonio Negri means when he says that labor “*has become a problem*” not only for contemporary (Marxist) theory but for praxis, as well (9).

Negri does not say *when* labor became a problem, and his reading of Job *as a parable of human labor* already suggests that there is no other side of this problematic horizon, even if the

work seems to speak to a specific postwar, post-Marxist strain of theoretical pessimism. The fate of labor is inextricable from the fate of value. In fact, we can see how *labor's* value is already problematic for Smith, and this persists in Marx, despite his emphasis on the historical specificity of certain categories of his analysis. For Negri, “it is impossible to quantify production on [labor’s] basis” and “one is no longer able to distinguish what is productive from what is not” (10). As a result, value “*has become immeasurable at the same time that all measure fails*” (10).

There is little critical literature on Peter Yates’s film adaptation of the George V. Higgins novel *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), but those few articles and reviews that have evaluated the classic crime film are unanimous in their praise of its idiosyncratic presentation of the bleak and brutal world of professional crime. A recent retrospective take by Robert Hanks for *Sight and Sound* notes that “Eddie Coyle’s descent has a *noir*-ish inevitability, but none of the existential glamour — just the dismal fact that criminals spend much of their lives making excuses and pleading for favours, and they have few friends” (98). Another recent piece that goes more in depth contends that the film “effectively captures the imagery of the working-class underbelly” of Boston in the early 1970s (Caro). The film is notable, the author argues, for its presentation of the economic “rot” and “decay” that characterized the post-civil rights “American metropolitan landscape,” where one did what one must to survive. Kent Jones notes that in “the miserable economy of power in Boston’s rumpled gray underworld, Eddie and his ‘friends’ are all expendable, and the ones left standing play every side against the middle, their white-knuckle terror carefully concealed under several layers of nonchalance and resignation” (Jones). It is this *expendability* of the criminals in this narrative that contributes to the “impression of dog-eat-dog brutality” that most stands out in “this seemingly artless film” for Jones. We might, however, wonder at the surface-and-depth play of *terror* and *resignation* that Jones suggests. In its *seemingly*

artless way, the film never provides formal means to a character's interiority, unless the *rot* and *decay* of the landscape are intended as an allegorical complement to the moral blight of the criminal underclass. In which moments of nonchalance are we to discover the terror of, say, Eddie (Robert Mitchum)? What is more astonishing about the film, perhaps, is how it renders some of Hollywood's favorite *topoi* — violence, police, and crime — in ways that are palpably banal. The affective surplus that is usually mined from scenes of conflict or desire in order to amplify the sensory load for the viewer is here dissipated or blunted.¹⁴⁸ If Jones is right that what is most characteristic about the film's criminals is their expendability, this must be understood in relation to its peculiar aesthetic in which the affective highs and lows of "white-knuckled terror" or "dog-eat-dog brutality" appear on screen as moments of banal exchange or negotiation. In other words, what is so *brutal* and *terrifying* about how *a life of crime* is represented in this film is not the adrenaline rush of gun sales or shootouts between the cops and robbers, it is the absence of any means of transcending the mundane structures of valuation that inform working-class existence in the post-civil rights era. In contrast with most Hollywood productions on crime and policing, not only is crime not glorified in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, it is reduced to its barest economic forms: reconnaissance, negotiation, trade, and accumulation. As we saw in the other figures of post-civil rights labor that I have analyzed in this dissertation, *heistwork* must be taken primarily as a *problem*, especially in its irreducibility to the prevailing capitalist circuits of exchange.

¹⁴⁸ A connection may be made here with *A Woman Under the Influence*, which, despite its melodramatic excesses, also communicates through the breakdown of formerly transcendent forms. In that film, when Mabel asks for her father to *stand up for her*, he is incapable of understanding the figurative meaning of her plea for help (from the powerless to one who is supposed to have power).

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