

"THE IDEA OF BEAUTY IN THEIR PERSONS:"  
DANDYISM AND THE HAUNTING OF CONTEMPORARY MASCULINITY

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## ABSTRACT

Jonathan Chambers, Advisor

In this dissertation, I argue for the dandy as a spectral force haunting contemporary masculinity. Using the framework of Derridean hauntology, I posit that certain contemporary performances of masculinity engage with discourses of dandyism, and that such performances open up a space for the potential expression of a masculine identity founded on an alterity to hegemonic gender norms. The basis for this alterity derives from the philosophical underpinnings of dandyism as articulated by its most prominent nineteenth century theorizers. As a result, I divide my study into two halves: the first focuses on a close reading of texts by Balzac, d'Aurevilly, and Baudelaire; the second centers on three case studies illustrating the spectral nature of dandiactal performance in relationship to contemporary masculinity.

Chapter One establishes the framework for my argument, articulating the way in which both nineteenth century French philosophical dandyism and Derrida's concept of hauntology, particularly his "three things of the thing" (mourning, language, and work), serves to structure the rest of the study. Chapters, Two, Three, and Four, which constitute Part I, provide close readings of texts by Balzac, d'Aurevilly, and Baudelaire, respectively. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven form Part II, and consist of individual case studies examining the spectral traces of dandyism in performances of masculinity by three contemporary celebrities. Chapter Five takes as its subject the self-proclaimed dandy Sebastian Horsley. I position him as the object of a performative act of mourning, one which identifies and locates the spectrality within the dandy's performance. In Chapter Six, I explore the commodification of the dandy's identity in the person of David Beckham, deploying Werner Hamacher's arguments about commodity-language as a

means of exploring the dandiacal performance's relationship to contemporary consumer culture. André Benjamin, more popularly known as André 3000 of the hip-hop duo OutKast, serves as subject for Chapter Seven's case study. I foreground Benjamin's performance as an expression of the dandiacal imagination serving as a kind of transformative "labor." Ultimately, I argue that such performances result in the potential for a masculinity less constrained by the conventions of hegemonic gender norms.

For my mother,  
Sandra Jean Botz Kerr

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In her introduction to *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture*, Susan Fillin-Yeh poses the same question I ponder as I pen this introduction: “Why study dandies?” Her answer (or part of it, at any rate): “Certainly because new ones continue to flourish” (3). I find this response reassuring, not least because it suggests she feels, as I do, that the dandy (or dandyism) stubbornly persists in some fashion,<sup>1</sup> even while some would (mis)construe him solely as an archaic figure, outmoded and thoroughly obsolete. Indeed, for many, the dandy likely conjures images of the Regency period, all starched neckcloths and Brummellian elegance. Or perhaps he brings to mind the philosophical individualism of the Baudelairean dandy, individualism neither anarchic nor limitless, but strictly bounded, circumscribed within and by culture. Mention of the dandy might also conceivably evoke the Wildean variety, trailing behind him the strikingly pungent green carnation whiff of *fin-de-siècle* ennui and decadence. Whatever the particular associations, however, the dandy as a representative masculine “type” (if such a thing can be claimed), largely retains an association with the past, an association often reinforced by the occasionally eccentric particularities of his style(s) of dress. This “pastness,” however, has hardly prevented critics and theorists from making use of this complex figure. Narratives of eighteenth and nineteenth century gender roles often make mention of the dandy, as he provides the historian an opportunity to address, in a manner either direct or glancing, a host of issues ranging from literary representation to social class to the ongoing (re)definition of modernism and postmodernism. Unsurprisingly, then, the dandy has engendered a wide range of critical responses. Some applaud his purported opposition to conventional morality through sartorial means, while others critique that same mode of presentation for what they see as his capitulation

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<sup>1</sup> Pun intended.

to the machinery of consumer capitalism. Less frequently, however, do historians and theorists look beyond the circumstances in which the dandy first made a name for himself. Dandyism remains, for many, a distinctly “historical” phenomenon. By this, I intend to suggest that, by situating dandyism as something decidedly *not* contemporary (or at least not *fully* contemporary) with the present moment, historians regrettably do much to stabilize and dematerialize the potency and efficacy of dandyism’s present-day exemplars and inheritors.

Though traditionally understood *in situ* as an embodied, performed identity, dandyism’s association with the past has rendered the dandy a being largely associated with what Diana Taylor would term the “archive.” From a contemporary standpoint, we understand him largely through historical documentation, given that we view him primarily as an artifact of the past. We thus make his seeming absence in contemporary culture manifest by regarding his presence only in the historical record. Such a limited understanding of how we might study the dandy, however, while acknowledging his presence as a trace in the archive, fails to fully account for him as typifying embodied, ongoing performances of philosophy, ideology, or epistemology. Indeed, Taylor argues for the validity of “embodied practice as a form of knowing as well as a system of storing and transmitting knowledge” (18).<sup>2</sup> In doing so, she also reveals the manner in which archival practices (those record-keeping impulses of historians and other academics) have overshadowed, if not entirely eclipsed, the practices of what she terms the “repertoire,” that which “enacts embodied memory” (20). The archive’s dominance has resulted in a seeming

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<sup>2</sup> Though Taylor refers to such practices in the specific context of examining the (de)valuation of indigenous behaviors, her argument nevertheless also serves as a valuable point of reference from which to approach other performative ways of knowing.

inability to fully wrest the dandy away from his traditional milieu. In a blog post on dandies, one commentator noted the following:

Dandies would probably prefer to hang out in Victorian-style conservatories, parks, libraries, tea shops, speakeasies, vintage clothing stores, and quaint or unique urban or rural areas not yet beset by Wal-Marts and Starbucks. They would probably not prefer sports bars, 7-11s, rodeos, subdivisions, or shopping malls. There seems to be something very Victorian-era about dandies. . . (Lly)

The very force of the dandy's idiosyncratic appearance(s) in the archive tends to efface his (re)turn on the catwalk as a revenant, the contemporary masculine's uncanny shade. With apologies to Marx and Engels, a specter is haunting masculinity, the specter of dandyism. The relationship of dandyism to spectrality in contemporary masculinity constitutes the emphasis of this study. The figure of the specter, dependent on corporeality while simultaneously flouting its claims of primacy, refuses to grant sole authority to either archive or repertoire. Therefore, without valorizing either archive or repertoire as the primary means through which knowledge might be produced and consequently understood, I argue that the spectralized dandy presents a valuable subject through which to examine the implications of how both serve to influence the contemporary fashioning of certain masculine identities.

In my research, then, I look first to primary sources in an attempt to more clearly define the philosophical parameters of dandyism. I then examine present-day manifestations of dandyism and dandified performance, particularly in the context of public displays of masculine celebrity. I suggest that such performances illustrate continuing unresolved tensions surrounding the representation(s) of masculine identities in contemporary consumer culture. Dandyism puts on public exhibition a particular brand of masculine self-fashioning marked by paradox and

ambivalence, characteristically exhibiting symptoms of both rupture and continuity in its performance.

The term “dandyism” most commonly refers to a style or mode of behavior and appearance affected by those subjects identified, either by themselves or by others, as dandies.<sup>3</sup> While this tautological definition reveals little about the potential characteristics of what might be (or has been) termed dandyism, it begins to suggest the somewhat elusive (and illusory) quality of attempts to pin down the subject. Ultimately, however, for the purposes of this study dandyism references a type of masculine performance relying primarily (at least in surface appearance) on certain particularities of sartorial presentation and verbal acuity.<sup>4</sup> In general, these characteristics have historically manifested themselves in relationship to expressions of capital; hence, the rise of the dandy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mirrors a near-simultaneous ascendance of consumer culture. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” the essay most fully articulating his thoughts on dandyism, Baudelaire refers to the “rich and idle,” those with “no other occupation than the perpetual pursuit of happiness” (27). Though he does not intend to

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<sup>3</sup> As with many such terms, dandyism’s definition often remains contingent on the particular needs and desires of the individual critic or researcher. As such, then, any attempt at comprehensive definition necessarily finds itself embedded within a larger framework of contested narratives. A full examination of the cultural history of dandyism is well beyond the scope of this particular project, so my attempts at definition here only selectively engage with the many discourses surrounding the subject. See Part I for a further examination of certain definition(s) of dandyism.

<sup>4</sup> Though some critics argue for dandyism as a style that transcends gender, my study concerns itself exclusively with biologically male performances of masculinity.

apply these remarks specifically to the dandy, they illustrate his consciousness of the “rich and idle” as a codified social class, one whose status derives from access to capital, as distinct from the titled aristocracy, who saw their traditional power wane with the rise of mercantilism and the middle class. In this context, then, the dandy emerges as nearly inseparable from such relationships to class and capital. The ready availability of capital (or at least credit) has thus historically marked dandyism as something available only to those of a certain caste or station.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, those critical of dandyism often characterize it as explicitly elitist in nature, the dandy’s fastidious attention to surface detail enabled only by wealth and existing in inverse relation to the shallowness of his soul. Such critics, however, typically fail to understand dandyism’s philosophical underpinnings as a highly personal expression of aesthetic mastery and individualism. Baudelaire positions the dandy as a kind of aesthetic paragon, articulating the role of such individuals without apology: “These beings have no other calling but to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think” (27). Any impression of “idleness” for the dandy is only a surface, a seeming, under which move the invisible currents of his emotion and intellect, bent to shaping himself and the world around him in accordance with an (often idiosyncratic) internal model. To this end, then, the dandy makes of himself a work of art, his exterior not an expression of some interior lack but the manifestation of deeply held aesthetic sensibilities.

Lord Breaulove Swells Whimsy, a self-proclaimed modern dandy, admirably articulates (albeit with tongue firmly in cheek) the tension between the dandy’s immaculate surface and what lies beneath:

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<sup>5</sup> As I shall argue, however, this reductive stance fails to take into account the aspirational quality of dandyism.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the dandy is not merely a preening, vacant popinjay; for, in truth, he is a preening, *thoughtful* popinjay. Dandyism pertains to more than the wearing of clothes: It is a way of being, a philosophy. The dandy's attire is but an outer expression of his inner refinement—the delicate glass that holds a finely crafted wine. (4)

The dandy, then, is not simply to be dismissed merely as another *nom de crime* for the two-dimensional paper doll of foppery. While the two do indeed partake of many of the same qualities, some with accompanying negative connotations, the dandy's self-refinement represents his service to a higher ideal; the fop, on the other hand, in succumbing to his impulses toward self-aggrandizement, serves only himself. In his ideal form, then, the dandy combines an attention to style with a mindfulness of the ramifications of his stylistic choices. He is as aware of the impact of a perfectly tailored suit on those who behold it as he is of the tailoring of the suit itself. This twinned emphasis on thought and embodiment, on dandyism as both ontology and epistemology, typifies my approach to the subject in the study that follows, as informed by the tradition of French intellectual dandyism. A thorough analysis of dandyism as performance also yields potential insights into dandyism as philosophy, suggesting the inextricable link between the two.

The dandy (past *and* present) represents a valuable research subject in that he offers the potential to rupture or complicate contemporary notions of hegemonic masculinity as a naturalized phenomenon. As a quintessentially *public* figure, the dandy engages with the macro-level interrogation of how some performances of masculinity make meaning by representing, on a micro-level, an alterity that problematizes the homogenization of gendered performance in

contemporary consumer culture.<sup>6</sup> The dandy haunts contemporary masculinity, his shade an elegant reminder that the business of being a man remains a perilously conflicted, unresolved affair, despite (and perhaps also because of) mediatized representations of a commodified masculinity supposedly available to all for the right price (which, of course, means that such a commodity inevitably remains out of reach for some). Far from being wholly oppositional, however, dandyism remains conflicted and contradictory, potentially offering both support and subversion to the status quo. While the paradoxical nature of dandyism is well understood and argued from a historical standpoint, the continued presence of dandyism in contemporary culture remains relatively undertheorized. This dissertation proposes to expand the critical discourse in order to determine how dandyism (and dandies) might further reveal the complexities of gendered performance in a contemporary context.

The dandy's performance of self operates within a complicated matrix of social conventions. Dandyism, only legible as philosophy or identity within the larger frame of performed masculinity, constructs a world (and worldview) from the materials of modern living, making him decidedly *of* the world. The proposition of this study, that dandyism, ghost-like, haunts the present-day performance of masculinity, intentionally juxtaposes this corporeality, so central to the dandy's worldview, with the specter's incorporeality. The study of dandyism as spectral trace attempts to make sense of this stroboscopic there/not-there effect, to momentarily

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<sup>6</sup> This is certainly not to suggest that the dandy is the *only* such potential intervention in the construction of narratives surrounding masculinity. Rather, dandyism represents a worldview that many have relegated to the dustbin of history. I simply suggest that perhaps we shouldn't be quite so ready to give up the ghost.

stabilize that which adamantly resists all attempts at definition.<sup>7</sup> The dandy, who delights in the specular potential of the self as Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, infuriatingly refuses to sit still long enough to have his portrait made.

I base my theorization of dandyism's spectral possibilities in an understanding of its relationship to capital and consumerism as seen through the lens of Marxist thought, particularly Derrida's explication of hauntology, as detailed in *Specters of Marx*. *Specters of Marx* has as its origin Derrida's lecture in 1993 for a colloquium at the University of California, Riverside. The colloquium (and Derrida's remarks) addressed the question, "Whither Marxism?" As translator Peggy Kamuf notes, "[O]ne may hear beneath the question 'Where is Marxism going?' another question: 'Is Marxism dying?'" (xiii). Derrida, always attentive to the nuance and play of language, clearly heard this sepulchral subvocalization, allowing it to inform his reflections on the question posed by the colloquium, reflections "haunted" by the titular specters. In my own study, I might easily substitute dandyism for Marxism. Thus, "Whither dandyism?" and its attendant whisper, "Is dandyism dying?"<sup>8</sup> Judging by Derrida's title, Marx generates multiple specters; so too does the dandy. As Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, conveners of the

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<sup>7</sup> I do not attempt to stabilize dandyism in the sense of making of it a static identity; such a task would be a fool's errand and, in all likelihood, quite impossible. Rather, I refer to a much more contingent and temporary stabilization, as of the steadying (of both subject and observer) in the process of taking a snapshot, for instance. Of course, even this analogy might be interrogated as presuming that the snapshot purports to represent some arbitrary notion of ontological "truth." I suggest rather that the snapshot merely provides a potential reference point to enable productive discourse.

<sup>8</sup> Or, perhaps more to the point, "Is dandyism dead?"



original colloquium, note in their introduction to Derrida's text, "The proper names 'Marx' and/or Marxism have always already been plural nouns, despite their grammatical form, and despite the fact that they have been understood as if they were rigid designators" (x). Likewise, the dandy and dandyism have also always already been plural nouns, etc. I take as a given that dandyism encompasses a range of practices, some occasionally seen as inconsistent (or at least not wholly consistent) with one another. Similarly, I adopt (and adapt) another maxim from Magnus and Cullenberg, replacing Marxism with dandyism: "[Dandyism is] historically sited, situated, inflected, mediated by particular traditions and histories" (x). Individual instances of dandiacal performance necessarily have as much (if not more) to do with their specific historic emergence as with any transhistoric notions of dandyism writ large.

This study concerns itself primarily with the following questions: How do traces of dandyism continue to manifest themselves in contemporary performances of masculinity? Secondly, what do these traces suggest about the relationships between masculinity, performance, and contemporary consumer culture? Finally, how do such traces offer both challenge and support to constructions of hegemonic masculinity?

I take as my starting point the idea that, indeed, dandyism did not *fin* with the *siècle*, but instead continues to find expression as a powerful trope within the performance of masculinity. I also recognize, however, that dandyism's autonomous force and power to effect change have undergone radical alterations since its heyday in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In keeping with postmodern discourses of fragmentation, I look not for the presence of extant dandies, but instead for traces, fragments, residue, fossils, for, in the words of W.S. Gilbert, the "shreds and patches" of a once-proud nation now reduced to nomadic shadows.

I take as a given the idea that cultural forces and institutions intersect in multiple ways, and that the examination of these intersections will yield insights as to the functioning of their constituent parts. With this understanding, I propose that the study of dandyism, as one such intersection between masculinity, performance, and consumer culture, has much to teach us about the circulation and operation of cultural ideologies.

Finally, as an aspirational, messianic philosophy, dandyism aims, through the initial perfection of the self, for the perfection of everything. A study of the efficacy of its practices in performance hopefully reveals strategies or pitfalls related to (potentially) nonnormative expressions of masculinity in relationship to hegemony.

Examinations of the dandy often take as their starting point the career of Beau Brummell, the prototype for the dandy as a polarizing social figure. Captain William Jesse's two-volume rendition of the life of George Brummell, published in 1844, stands as the first extensive examination of Brummell and his impact. Jesse's text might rightly be criticized as an exceedingly minor addition to the traditions of both literary styling and biography, but his biographical anecdotes do serve to illustrate the manner in which Brummell's public persona stood as a conscious act of self-fashioning, a means of establishing (though not necessarily maintaining) a recognizable and distinct way of appearing in the world. Jesse's book explicates the habits and behaviors of this prototypical dandy, thereby establishing Brummell in many ways as the model on which later dandies would base their own self-creations.

While his depiction of Brummell might be enough to merit his inclusion in any thorough study of dandyism, Jesse also opens his work with an attempt to more broadly sketch, however briefly, the history of the "beau" as a type. He argues for the phenomenon as more than simply a then-recent fad; it had existed, he writes, "[f]rom the earliest ages." Like many who would

follow him, Jesse also characterizes this figure as essentially motivated by vanity, resulting in his complete absorption “in the study of dress” (2). He thus establishes the beau as a type concerned both with outward appearances (“the study of dress”) and the psychological or philosophical implications of that study (his vanity). His rudimentary genealogy, while not particularly thorough, does attempt to call attention to such stories as the Hebraic tale of Joseph and the coat of many colors as exemplifying this historical sense of “distinction in dress.”<sup>9</sup> While he admits that little evidence remains of “the toilet of the Hebrew beau or belle,” he calls special attention to their Roman conquerors, writing that “of their dandyism many and amusing particulars have been handed down to us in those works which treat of their domestic manners, after riches and luxury had increased in Rome, and corruption had stamped the character of her citizens with effeminacy and voluptuousness” (3). Here, in one brief passage, Jesse not only explicitly links the name of the beau and the dandy, but also quickly sketches some of the major motifs which dominate later discourse surrounding the dandy: his relationship to the performance of daily life, particularly in the so-called “domestic” sphere; the twinning of his own ascent with that of his nation’s economic fortunes; and the suggestion that his “failure” to adequately perform masculinity can somehow be paired with larger cultural failings. Despite these early critical assertions, however, Jesse clearly evinces some admiration for his subject. He argues that

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<sup>9</sup> While I choose not to examine this particular tale here, it is worth noting that even in this arguable example of proto-dandyism, the discourses important to my study are already in play. The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers arises in the context of masculine competition, and Joseph’s very name, evoking both addition and subtraction, references the duality of absence and presence. And, of course, the theatrical value of the story has been demonstrated by Andrew Lloyd Webber’s popular musical adaptation, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Brummell somehow transcends the role of the beau and ought not to be truly grouped with them. In Jesse's terms, "a beau is a fop, and a fop a man of small understanding" (15). As he asserts, then, Brummell is no true beau, for he had an all too keen understanding of precisely how he presented himself to the world.

While Captain Jesse generally treats Brummell sympathetically, the Beau certainly had his share of harsher critics, as clearly demonstrated in a then-contemporary review of Jesse's Brummell biography. The reviewer takes on a dismissive, moralizing tone that often characterizes those who set themselves in opposition to dandyism on the basis of utility: "We never could find that Brummell's usefulness went beyond the invention of the starched neckcloth, or that his genius amounted to more than an appalling impudence" ("1844"). The reviewer's choice of passages to excerpt from Jesse's text suggests a preoccupation with the dandy as a figure in twilight, a type whose time was passing or had already passed, a view later expanded on by Baudelaire. Indeed, this sense of the dandy as the last of a dying breed remains a potent identificatory sign. The review also highlights the tension between two possible visions of the dandy as, on one hand, an asserter of individual taste and, on the other, representative of collective values.

Views of Brummell by his near contemporaries establish many of the key arguments that continue to surround the dandy. Another piece, originally appearing in an 1844 issue of *Blackwell's Edinburgh Magazine*, opens with an almost startling comparison of the beau to then-fashionable exhibitions of Native Americans as specimens, asserting that the native man and the beau take equal care in dress: "Their *coiffeur* might not altogether supersede either the Titus or the Brutus in the eye of a Parisian, but it had evidently been twisted on system; and if their drapery in general might startle Baron Stulz, it evidently cost as dexterous cutting out, and as

ambitious tailoring, as the most *recherché* suit that ever turned a ‘middling man’ into a figure for Bond Street” (“Beau”). This passage mirrors similar assertions in the opening of Jesse’s biography, as when he writes that a close attention to sartorial display “is exhibited by the savage in the taste he displays in the choice of his beads, shells, and feathers, and the variety and elegance shown in the design of his tattooing” (4). The unnamed *Blackwell’s* author continues in a refrain grown familiar to the reader of the period, arguing that the beau (read: dandy) is essentially a specimen characterized by his inutility, his status as “mere” ornament, thus parroting the (perhaps too readily accepted) commonplace that ornament serves no real function. The author does, however, also point to Brummell as the “last” of the beaux, thus making this dying aristocratic breed contrast starkly with the spirit of his time, the “age of masses and classes” the writer notes at the beginning of the article. Clearly, then, the rhetoric that places the dandy in tension with capital, as both colluding with and resisting consumerism, manifested itself at quite an early point in the dandy’s history.

While Brummell developed the English sartorial prototype for the dandy, it would take the French, particularly Balzac, d’Aureville, and Baudelaire, to elucidate the foundational philosophy on which most later portraits of the dandy rest.<sup>10</sup> In “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863), for instance, Baudelaire presents the dandy as the embodiment of contradiction. “Dandyism,” he writes, “an institution beyond the laws, itself has rigorous laws which all its subjects must strictly obey, whatever their natural impetuosity and independence of character” (26-7). The dandy, both bound by and “beyond” law, occupies a position potentially complicit *and* contesting. In Baudelaire’s conception, however, the dandy most clearly promotes the ideal

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<sup>10</sup> Part I (Chapters Two, Three, and Four) constitutes a close reading of the three writers’ major texts relating to dandyism.

of individualism (if not always its practice). Perhaps most importantly, however, in his essay Baudelaire marks dandyism as characteristic of periods of transition.

While “The Painter of Modern Life” provides the clearest distillation of Baudelaire’s thoughts on dandyism, his other essays also provide interesting perspectives through which to view the dandy. In particular, “On the Essence of Laughter,” a study of the relationship of caricature to the plastic arts, provides a useful template for examining the manner in which the dandy established conventions and then stretched them to the breaking point. Baudelaire’s exploration of laughter also holds relevance for the image of the dandy as a wit. Beginning with Brummell, dandies have distinguished themselves not only through their dress but also through their tongues. Baudelaire makes the argument, based in “the unanimous agreement of physiologists,” that laughter derives from “superiority” (152). Baudelaire theorizes laughter thusly: “Laughter is satanic; it is thus profoundly human. It is the consequence in man of the idea of his own superiority” (153). This aligns with his explorations of dandyism insofar as the dandy utilizes the power of what Baudelaire terms “imagination,” that synthesizing, synoptic faculty that enables him to take in and critically evaluate that which surrounds him. This powerful detachment enables the exhibition of (a sometimes cruel) wit, as he orders the world around him and ironically distinguishes between those who think themselves great but who, in his own estimation, deserve humbling.<sup>11</sup> Baudelaire’s conception of laughter, however, also reveals his fundamental belief in the debased nature of humanity. Corrupted by original sin, human beings may only transcend their own state through the power of imagination (and the effort of its

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<sup>11</sup> As I shall discuss later, however, the dandy’s essential detachment means that, while he may very well evoke laughter in those around him with his witticisms, it is unlikely that he himself will join in the frivolity.

employment). While laughter at the dandy's more pointed witticisms may illustrate humanity's corruption, his perfection of the self through aesthetics (or perfection of the aesthetic in the self) represents the aspirational application of his imaginative faculties, as well as the source of his messianic appeal.

Imagination serves the dandy as the chief of his faculties, enabling his critical approach to the world. As I hope to amply demonstrate, however, contradiction and inconsistency also characterize the work of those who theorize the dandy. Baudelaire's dandy, with his studied detachment, doesn't achieve complete congruence with Baudelaire's image of the critic. The criticism espoused by Baudelaire operates as the result of a double consciousness.<sup>12</sup> This double consciousness enables the dandy's particular ability to act simultaneously as critic and artist, a role that would be more fully explored (and exploited) by another noted dandy: Oscar Wilde.

Wilde's brand of dandyism took its cue from the Aesthetic movement, a philosophy championed by Walter Pater in his book *The Renaissance*.<sup>13</sup> While Pater's text is perhaps most famous for its conclusion, with its admonition "[t]o burn always with [that] hard, gem-like flame," the individual essays illustrate his attempt as critic "to see the object in itself as it truly is" (152). He does so through a variegated method, combining philosophy, history, even fiction. Adam Phillips, in his introduction to *The Renaissance*, describes Pater's method as "densely self-referential: providing, intermittently, an implied commentary and critique of itself. It is also, through the endless qualifications of its elaborate style, drawing attention, sometimes obtrusively, to its own medium" (vii). These characteristics put Pater's text squarely in line with

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<sup>12</sup> I explore this further in Chapter Four.

<sup>13</sup> Here I reference the text of Pater's final corrected edition of *The Renaissance*, published in 1893.

many of the works that have been said to characterize what has sometimes been termed “the modernist enterprise,”<sup>14</sup> thus aligning this particular brand of aestheticism with some of the goals and philosophies of other modernist thinkers and writers. Through his effort to define the “Renaissance,” Pater inadvertently goes a long way toward defining aestheticism and its role in the so-called “modernist enterprise.” Pater abjures Matthew Arnold’s model of criticism as cultural consensus in favor of a more individualistic, subjective critical mode, a mode that would find another champion in Wilde.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, through Pater and Wilde, the dandy took aestheticism as his bedfellow, and J.K. Huysmans, in his 1884 novel *A Rebours*, would add decadence to this ménage. One critic, describing Huysmans’ pessimistic novel as a “study of individualism and alienation,” identifies the fashion in which Des Esseintes, the novel’s protagonist, exemplifies the contrary and contradictory nature of the dandy and the aesthete. Profoundly individualistic, the aesthete alienates himself from the majority of society through the isolating power of his own superior taste. The novel’s descriptions of excess illustrate the dangers of an aestheticism unmoderated by judgment. Tellingly, like so many others writing about the figure of the aesthete or dandy,

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<sup>14</sup> I take it as a given here that there is no monolithic “modernist enterprise.” Rather, there are a series of interlocking discourses that have been gathered together by certain scholars under that rubric for their own ends. Suffice it to say, however, that dandyism (and Pater’s contribution to it through the Aesthetic movement) is one of the discourses that might fall under that modernist rubric.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note here that the trajectory for the English dandy varies somewhat (and somewhat significantly) from his Continental counterpart, particularly in terms of his philosophical worldview.



Huysmans casts Des Esseintes as caught between conservative and progressive (or transgressive) impulses. On the one hand, his aesthetic desires lead him to become a kind of cultural conservator, consuming or collecting artifact or experience, while on the other, his own sense of aesthetic superiority casts his consumption with a kind of nihilistic tint; only he can fully appreciate the world, so only he deserves to experience it. Huysmans' aesthete is incapable of creation, only of collation, reference, and imitation. He is necessarily the last of his kind because nothing about his aesthetic sense is generative. This view of the dandy as decadent thus stands in sharp opposition to the more generative model proposed by Baudelaire.<sup>16</sup>

In many (if not most) cases, the philosophy of the dandy has historically been expounded by the dandy himself, as in the case of figures such as Jerome K. Jerome or Max Beerbohm, English essayists and humorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively. Beerbohm's "Dandies and Dandies" (1896) explicates the dandy as the aristocrat "ruling" English society. Like others before him, he takes Brummell as the apotheosis of his type. Here, perhaps, the title of his essay makes itself most clear, as, in comparing Brummell to others who followed him, he intimates that there are dandies, and then there are *dandies*. Or, perhaps more to the point, there are dandies and there is Beau Brummell. Beerbohm's depiction of the Beau centers on his absolute sense of discipline and style. He notes that, unlike some other dandies of renown, d'Orsay or Disraeli, for instance, with their ornamentations and affectations, Brummell distinguishes himself not in excess but through "the utter simplicity of his attire" (7). He argues

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<sup>16</sup> John Lanchester's novel *The Debt to Pleasure* takes this trope even further. Not only is his protagonist, the ludicrously named Tarquin Winot, not generative; he is a serial killer. This arch-aesthete and gourmand (gastronomy being his primary area of expertise and the source of much of his snobbery) explicitly casts the murderer as the contemporary answer to the artist.

for this sense of simplicity as one of dandyism's primary goals, "the production of the supreme effect through means the least extravagant" (8). This is not to say, of course, that the dandy or beau could necessarily achieve his idiosyncratic aims in dramatically straitened circumstances. While the purest expression of his philosophy strives for a certain level of economy, the sartorial tools of his trade remain rather incompatible with poverty. For Beerbohm, however, the dandy's chief concerns are aesthetic rather than economic (perhaps because he finds an impoverished dandy a contradiction in terms); like Baudelaire, he steadfastly affirms the dandy's status as an artist. "No poet nor cook nor sculptor," he writes, "ever bore that title more worthily than he" (8).

Beerbohm takes care to distinguish his notion of the dandy as something more than simply an expression of English social life. Indeed, he argues that dandyism stands somewhat apart from that life, exemplifying not the actual but the ideal, "the perfect flower of outward elegance," to which that society aspires (9). Dandyism's connection with social life, he argues, is mere happenstance, the result of coincidence rather than any concerted effort or plan. Despite this, though, he asserts that the dandy exerts a sort of influence, albeit an unconscious one, on social behavior and custom, in a manner he likens to that of a flower. Here, his evocation of the natural world defends the dandy as something more than mere ornament. By linking him with the flower's "natural" beauty, he imbues the dandy's elegance with a kind of inevitability, an assured place in the order of things that transcends its seeming opposite, the "artificiality" of ornamentation. In some respects, Beerbohm's elevation of Brummell as artist "reduces" him to an utterly refined aesthetic impulse, and little more. Ironically, then, he also takes issue with d'Aurevilly<sup>17</sup>, who "belittle[s] to a mere phase that which was indeed the very core of his

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<sup>17</sup> I examine d'Aurevilly in greater detail in Chapter Three.

existence” (11). Brummell’s dandyism, Beerbohm argues, was the product of his character, the sum of his parts rather than simply another one among them. While d’Aurevilly argues for dandyism as merely one facet of Brummell’s character, Beerbohm collapses the distinctions between Brummell’s dandyism and his life, making of them a single, unbroken unity.

Beerbohm very briefly surveys some other thinking related to dandyism, such as that of Thomas Carlyle, noting importantly that the dandy’s reception as an “artist” of the self (primarily through his dress, his particular mode of performance) is diminished by the necessity and cultural habit of everyone to wear clothes. Consequently, few are able to witness what the dandy does as particularly distinctive in aesthetic terms. Indeed, in this context, in which everyone dresses (and thereby performs), the dandy, while he may be notable, is hardly remarkable. Writing from a position of relative privilege, however, Beerbohm fails to note how the dandy’s sartorial self-presentation truly represents a way of approaching the world unavailable to those without the access to either the materials or concepts used to performatively encode or decode the dandy’s particular identity. In contemporary terms, the force of Beerbohm’s argument is leavened by the changed sartorial codes of our modern culture, a state of affairs that distinctly marks figures such as André 3000 or David Beckham in their chosen fields. Beerbohm also notes that the dandy occasionally distinguishes himself from the culture of which he is a part by incorporating intentional archaisms in his personal presentation of self. Ultimately, however, Beerbohm’s argument, that the rest of society rarely views the dandy as an artist, seems to continue to hold true. Beerbohm firmly refutes this negation of the dandy’s artistic role, asserting dandyism as “one of the decorative arts” (12). He even goes so far as to provocatively position the dandy as the least “selfish” of artists, given that he ostensibly grants the world free admission to his exhibition “whenever he sallies from his front door” (13). In doing so, Beerbohm’s

assertion of the dandy's coincidental connection to society begins to appear somewhat disingenuous, as he renders the dandy inseparable from the conditions of capital in which he operates.

Another of Beerbohm's essays, "The Pervasion of Rouge," originally published in 1894 as "A Defence of Cosmetics," also merits a closer look for its examination (and humorous celebration) of the power of artifice. Though his reflections on cosmetics concern their application to feminine beauty, Beerbohm's work in this regard has potential ramifications when juxtaposed against writings on the dandy. Defining artifice largely as a feminine characteristic, he refers to her as a queen, echoing Balzac's similar characterization of vanity.<sup>18</sup> In defending the use of cosmetics, Beerbohm argues that every historical moment contains within it something of aesthetic interest. "[O]nly fools and flutterpates," he argues, "do not seek reverently for what is charming in their own day" (49). Beerbohm argues that, for the women of his time, this charm was, in part, the artificial result of cosmetics. Far from condemning this artificial beauty, however, Beerbohm lauds the women who employ it for their efforts to improve on nature's gifts. He also cites the technological developments enabling the production and application of new cosmetics. The end result of this widened acceptance for the use of cosmetics, Beerbohm argues, "is that surface will finally be severed from soul" (53). Like the dandy, then, the woman who uses cosmetics constructs her outer self for presentation to the world. To argue, however, that surface and soul will cease to be regarded as one and the same suggests that, unlike the woman who uses makeup and artifice as a means of enhancing her appearance, the dandy's self-presentation might be the direct extension of an inner substance, and that it does not necessarily differ radically from an internal sense of self. The dandy, then, uses fashion to express his inner

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<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see Chapter Two.

“nature,” while women use “artifice” to either enhance or conceal. In Beerbohm’s terms, then, cosmetics disrupt the interdependence of surface and soul, while dandyism unites the two through a perfected, “natural” sense of aestheticism. Beerbohm’s characterization of the dandy/aesthete allows for a more subtle interpretation than is often depicted in the caricatures of excess leveled against him by his critics. “Fashion does not rob him of free will,” he writes. “It leaves him liberty of all expression” (16). In this, Beerbohm seems to echo Baudelaire’s assertion that the dandy operates and finds his power in the limits circumscribed by his place within culture.

Jerome K. Jerome, in the essays collected as *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886), offers a prime example of the power of the dandy to simultaneously critique and celebrate. His essays treat individual subjects with the sort of seemingly self-deprecating humor that serves to clearly elevate the humorist above those around him. Of his own work, he writes, “I cannot conscientiously recommend it for any useful purposes whatever” (7). As Wilde had already demonstrated by this point, however, utility for its own sake was not necessarily a principle to be unquestioningly admired. Many of Jerome’s essays (“On Being Idle,” “On Vanity and Vanities,” “On Getting on in the World”) directly treat the material conditions enjoyed by the proponents of aestheticism. Unlike Baudelaire or even Beerbohm, however, Jerome’s philosophy remained more implied than stated.

Dandies such as Beerbohm or Baudelaire, however, occupy only a very few seats at the critical table. Contemporary scholars in a variety of disciplines have made the dandy (particularly the nineteenth century variety) a recognized object of study. Tellingly, most book-length scholarly work on the dandy has focused on the historical rather than the contemporary, as in James Eli Adams’ 1995 *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity*. Adams’

study explores the relationship between the intellectual work of Victorian writers and then-circulating discourses of masculinity. He characterizes Victorian masculinity as conditioned by mechanisms of self-discipline. To this end, Adams argues that Victorian dandies identified as masculine insofar as the rigorous application of their aesthetic principles served as a means of reconstructing masculine identities in the face of rhetoric identifying intellectual vocations with the “effeminate” or “unmanly.” This makes the dandy part of a coterie of identities previously marked by their presumed difference: “the gentleman, the prophet, the dandy, the priest, and the soldier” (2). In linking these unusual suspects, Adams makes connections between writers normally viewed as wildly divergent in style and philosophy.

The writers Adams uses as his subjects, however, all share a middle-class background, thus suggesting class and Victorian consumer culture as connecting points of uncommon importance to his argument, though he forgoes an extended discussion of their relevance. Rather, Adams focuses much of his attention on the tension between individual authority and collective identity. This goes some distance towards creating a common discourse in which the individual figures to whom the articulation of English dandyism is most commonly attributed (Pater, Wilde), can be seen as participating in a wider popular discourse on the nature of Victorian masculinity. Adams, then, provides me with a historicized precedent for the work I hope to accomplish in this dissertation. I attempt to engage the spirit of dandyism as it circulates within Western cultural discourses. I posit that this spirit remains active and emblematic of unresolved tensions regarding the performance of masculinity in a consumer culture.

Like Adams, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein centers his argument on the dandy as an exemplar of individualism in his 1995 essay “Rule-Following in Dandyism: ‘Style’ as an Overcoming of ‘Rule’ and ‘Structure.’” He argues that the dandy is a kind of anarchist because he rejects all

rules and norms, preferring instead to play a game devoted to nothing other than style. Botz-Bornstein contends that most so-called “dandies” have merely been imitations of the (very) few “real” dandies, namely Brummell, Baudelaire, and Barbey d’Aurevilly. The real dandy recognizes that he plays a game and consequently takes nothing seriously, while the poseur takes his identity as dandy far too seriously to ever actually *be* a dandy. As a figure, then, the dandy consistently embodies the spirit of revolution without actually ever revolting. In Botz-Bornstein’s words, he “founds his existence on the sublimation of revolt” (286). Whereas some critics might argue that the dandy’s foundation is expressed in a particular style, Botz-Bornstein believes that the dandy simply *is* style without subscribing to any one sense of that style.<sup>19</sup> Ironically enough, Botz-Bornstein, in arguing for “real” dandy vs. the poseur, posits a central characteristic that widens the field of who we might consider to *be* a dandy. At his heart, Botz-Bornstein recognizes the dandy as a creature of irony. While Botz-Bornstein’s essay is complex, he seems to have found a sophisticated way to recuperate the dandy from those who merely see him as an archconservative. This is most clear in his telling comparison of the dandy and the snob: the snob imitates in order to play by what he perceives to be the rules, while the dandy imitates no one and ignores rules altogether.

While Botz-Bornstein’s ideas suggest ways in which study of the dandy might have wider-reaching implications, Rhonda Garelick has thoroughly amplified this potential importance of the dandy. Though Garelick, like Adams, examines the historical dandy *in situ*,

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<sup>19</sup> I fear I do some small violence to Botz-Bornstein’s ideas here. He does, however, potentially enable me to argue for the dandiacal qualities of contemporary figures that don’t necessarily readily conform to commonly understood standards of dress for the dandy. Hence, even David Beckham in jeans can potentially be understood to be somehow dandified.

she also makes potent arguments for the manner in which the dandy continues to have an impact on cultural production. She parses out the role of the dandy during the decadent movement in order to make the claim that contemporary constructions of media celebrity derive from the self-fashioned persona of the dandy as developed during this particular historical and cultural moment. She claims that the DNA of the decadent dandy, when combined with that of the female performer of the late nineteenth century, gave birth to the modern celebrity icon. As Garelick writes, “Both indulge in self-conscious, highly theatrical gender play—the dandy in his sexually ambiguous social polish, the woman in her explicitly staged and painted erotic charms” (3). The fusion of these two, then, creates modern conceptions of the self as commodity, of personality as product, a concept intimately understood by the subjects I examine in this dissertation.

Garelick takes care to note that dandies exist both as real, historical figures and as literary characters, perhaps giving some further clarity to critic Ken Gelder’s assertion that dandyism is more a genre than a subculture (Gelder 125). Garelick examines both the literary and biographical importance of several influential figures, thereby explicating several “treatises” on dandyism, including Balzac, d’Aurevilly, and Baudelaire. She then traces a path for the dandyist projects of Mallarmé to Loïe Fuller. Fuller’s self-invention served to *reinvent* the self as media-driven spectacle in support of commodification, a move that Garelick sees as intimately tied to the development of a new camp aesthetic that would reach its pinnacle in the person of Oscar Wilde.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fascinatingly, Garelick also makes a link between dandyism and literary academia in the 1980s. She notes that, while dandyism did not seem to be a fashionable subject in and of itself during the time she was in graduate school, dandyism seemed to be the primary mode through which much literary theory and criticism was being disseminated. She cites Jacques Derrida and



Though Garelick's study focuses primarily on historical dandies as a way of explicating modern celebrity, other scholars do provide more direct readings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century dandies. Ken Gelder does so in the context of his work on subcultures, though as noted previously, he balks at describing dandies as a subculture. Gelder undertakes the task of investigating the social logics of subcultures. In doing so, he develops a theory of subcultural practice that provides useful insight into how such groups function. One of the most striking of his concepts is that of subcultural geography, the idea that a given subculture has specific locations through which it can articulate and strengthen its shared self-fashioning. I would argue that the subcultural geography of the dandy has traditionally revolved around urban, metropolitan spaces, though I would argue that digital communications and information technologies have complicated this assessment.<sup>21</sup> In any case, an understanding of both the spaces in which contemporary dandies and their historical antecedents might congregate,

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Paul de Man as exemplary of the cult of personality cultivated by the dandy: "Dandyism embodies the contradiction of the self-proclaimed, independent social genius and his need to exist within (and reproduce) the very institutions he critiques. At its height, deconstruction in America embodied the same contradiction" (164). Thus, my use of Derrida as a central theoretical text is wholly in keeping with the spirit of dandyism.

<sup>21</sup> With the advent of the internet, virtual *flânerie* can assist the budding dandy in London and Louisville; New York and New Mexico; Paris, France and Paris, Texas. He can now communicate easily with like-minded individuals in *any* locale. Thus, the dandy need no longer remain an urban phenomenon by necessity, though my suspicion is that he largely persists primarily in metropolitan locations.

whether “actual” or “virtual,” provides valuable insight into the tension between individualism and the need to be identified with a group.

Though Gelder’s study only takes dandies as one instance among many, it provides a brief but illuminating commentary on the evolution of the figure, linking him to both American zoot-suiters of the late 1930s and early 1940s and English Teddy boys of the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, he argues for the dandy as strategically employing anachronism as a means of social protest, thereby enabling the dandy to serve a more than decorative function. By trading on historical referents, contemporary iterations of dandyism establish both relationship with and authority over the past, simultaneously evoking continuity and breach.

Contemporary dandyism finds one of its most effective champions in Susan Fillin-Yeh, who, along with the contributors to her volume, *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture*, provides a much-needed expansion to theories of dandyism. As I have noted earlier, Fillin-Yeh forthrightly asserts that dandyism continues into our present day, an assessment with which I more or less concur. She and her contributors aim to expand the definitions of dandyism beyond the traditional image of the “Western European man-about-town.” The essays in the volume encompass such diverse topics as Coco Chanel, so-called “Indian Dandies,” Georgia O’Keeffe, cross-dressing in Yoruba, and black male dandies, among other subjects. Expanding the “canon” of dandies in this fashion allows for my own research to range more widely in search of the inflection of dandyism in contemporary culture. Thus, André 3000, for instance, can and should be explicitly linked to an already existing tradition of male sartorial splendor, rather than simply being viewed as a black artist “sampling” a predominantly white trend.

Fillin-Yeh identifies art history as the source of the text’s major methodology, though she clearly cites the debts owed to feminism and queer theory, as well. The primary mode of

identifying dandyism in most of the essays in the collection focuses on the dandy's clothing, so visual spectacle rather than philosophy or worldview reigns supreme in these particular manifestations of the dandy. That being said, however, the contributors recognize that clothing can be seen as a potentially oppositional signifier, so the dandy's body may function as a subversive sign. This is largely the case, for example, in "Dandyism and Abstraction in a Universe Defined by Newton," in which Carter Ratcliff analyzes the development of abstract art in relation to the dandy. Ratcliff argues that the "blankness" of the dandy is pitted against the emptiness of modern institutions:

[E]ach real institution is driven by an ideal, some absolutist notion of efficiency, profit, or power. These notions are voids designed to absorb and transform all that lies outside the institution, all that is not yet institutionalized, especially the self, which is to be turned into data, the better to snare it in patterns of cause and effect or supply and demand or fact and explication. Like an inert passage in a painting, the dandy's blankness resists this process. (121)

In this passage, Ratcliff powerfully suggests the complicated relationship of the dandy to the institutional processes of modern life. In examining the influence of dandyism on contemporary masculinity, particularly through the lens of celebrity, it would be hard to argue for figures such as Beckham or André 3000 as exemplars of the "blankness" to which Ratcliff refers, particularly given their implication in the consumerist structures of supply and demand.

Drew Todd also argues for the dandy as a potentially subversive figure, though in the context of Art Deco Hollywood rather than abstract art. He examines filmic representations of masculinity in the 1920s and 1930s in order to argue that, along with the gangsters so prevalent in films of the period, another kind of male hero emerged: the dandy. Actors such as Fred

Astaire, Basil Rathbone, Cary Grant, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. exemplified this type, and they were successful precisely because of the way in which they were able to both express and exploit their own liminality. Todd argues that this particular figure appealed to moviegoers during the Depression because of “[h]is mockery of bourgeois values and high society” (169). This echoes Baudelaire’s notion that the dandy is a figure marking and marked by transition.

Jeremy Kaye’s essay on metrosexuality presents one of the more recent examples of scholarship linking the dandy to contemporary concerns. He posits a connection between the metrosexual and the Victorian dandy, asserting that both ostensibly “interrogate conventional conceptions of masculinity and the homo/hetero binary that defines those concepts” (107). Far from celebrating these figures’ transgressive appeal, however, he ultimately argues that both serve to reify rather than challenge heteronormative values under the guise of a progressive rhetoric. Interestingly, Kaye’s conceptions of both the dandy and the metrosexual seem to differ from some other theorists in that he views the so-called “rules” or “codes” of behavior as paramount to the identification and classification of these types. While he perhaps oversimplifies the dandy in this regard, thus making of him an explicitly conservative figure, he makes a valuable point that such phenomena as dandyism and metrosexuality don’t necessarily equate to liberation. After all, gay men, he argues, cannot be metrosexuals;<sup>22</sup> rather, gay style is

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<sup>22</sup> Notably, the appellation of “metrosexual” has been applied to David Beckham, the subject of Chapter Six. Beckham’s much-publicized marriage to former Spice Girl Victoria “Posh” Beckham has been hypersexualized in any number of fashion magazine photo shoots, perhaps in an attempt to cement Beckham’s reputation as a heterosexual man. Ironically, this insistence on his heterosexuality within the context of fashion photography has also served potentially to destabilize that reputation.

appropriated in order that metrosexuality may exist. While I find Kaye's argument foundationally flawed in the way it constructs the dandy, his efforts to link the historical and contemporary figures provide another precedent for my own inquiry.

In the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy Garland's Dorothy thinks she has reached the end point of her journey when she finally receives an audience with the eponymous wizard. What she discovers (and what we, the audience, discover along with her) in that grand hall, however, is that perhaps wizardry isn't precisely what it seems. Enter Jacques Derrida, his hand pulling back the curtain so that we can get a better look.

Hauntology, a neologism originally coined by Derrida in 1994's *Specters of Marx*, playfully addresses ontology's shadow side. Philosophically, ontology puts presence front and center, privileges the here, the now, the *is*. Ontology studies the appearance of Oz the Great and Terrible in all his floating fury and majesty, examines the manifestation of his emerald presence, affirms his (not so) great "I am." If we define ontology in this fashion, as the study of being and existence (no matter how illusory), does hauntology then study *non-being*, *non-existence*, the "*amn't*" (or wasn't)? Ontology vs. hauntology, simply another variation on an Elsinorean theme. Hauntology concerns itself with that humbug behind the curtain, the "present" absence (the human scale) effaced by, well, that giant face. This somewhat trite allusion fails to capture the complexity of the relationship between ontology and hauntology, however. True to form, of course, Derrida complicates any simple inversion. Ontologists and hauntologists can't merely be reduced to Wizards of Is or Wasn't. The hauntological deconstructs the life-death binary, asking what occurs or passes between the two. For Derrida, the specter represents that which makes the life-death binary apprehensible. Indeed, he makes the bold assertion that all relationships, all binarisms, fully depend on the spectral: "What happens between two, and between all the 'two's'

one likes, such as between life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost” (*Specters of Marx* xviii).<sup>23</sup> Hauntology, then, interrogates the liminality of the ghost as a central component to fully understanding existence, being, presence. No ontology without hauntology. And hauntology, Derrida argues, is a matter not only of understanding, but also of justice. The very concept of justice (as distinguished from that of law) hinges on a sense of responsibility to the specters surrounding us, to the ghostly presence of those absented from us by biology or history or politics. Derrida thus links not only justice, but also the actuality of any sense of futurity to the spectral:

Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (*Specters of Marx* xix)

Thus, both utopian idealism and dystopian anxiety gain legibility through their relationship to the spectral. As articulated by the central texts of French philosophical dandyism, the dandy’s utopian bent, his desire for better living through aesthetics, provides a clear rationale for the application of hauntology to the question of dandyism. In order to understand the futurity the dandy proposes to bring into being, we must reckon with the specters enabling a consciousness of that futurity.

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<sup>23</sup> In the case of the dandy, one of the “two’s” under consideration is certainly the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity. The dandy occupies a liminal space between the two, haunting the masculine with the intimation that it somehow partakes of or is corrupted by the feminine.

Contradictorily, Derrida argues that this questioning impulse, that which I position at the heart of the dandy's messianic idealism, the inquiry "with regard to what will come in the future-to-come," simultaneously moves in two directions, both driving toward the future and approaching from it (*Specters of Marx* xix). Thus, future, as site of the impulse's origin, turns its face backward, looking to past for its own actualization. What lies before it is only the past. As a result, this future is, "like any provenance, absolutely and irreversibly past" (*Specters of Marx* xix). This impulse, which Derrida makes virtually coextensive with his idea of justice, holds just as true for those absent as for those present. It thus transcends any singular notion of either living present or dead absent, encompassing and surpassing both. Derrida refers to this moment, "beyond the living present in general," as a "spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time" (*Specters of Marx* xx).

Anticipating the counterargument that justice only truly demands an ultimate responsibility to the living present, to "the life of a living being," Derrida argues that this very conceptualization of "life" ("whether one means by that natural life or the life of the spirit") depends on a sense of futurity, on the presupposition that justice

carries life beyond present life or its actual being-there, its empirical or ontological actuality: not toward death but toward a *living-on* [sur-vie], namely, a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces and traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or disadjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity. (*Specters of Marx* xx)

Thus, the concept of justice rhetorically invokes or conjures the spirits it means to protect. Hauntology, then, seeks to address these spirits, to redress the wrongs worked against them, to do them "justice." As Hamlet notes (enabling Derrida's inspired riff on the Danish prince's

plight), “The time is out of joint” (I.v.188), a disjuncture made manifest to him by the presence of his father’s ghost. Specters (re)assert life beyond life, beyond the present, the living-on on which Derrida predicates justice.

For Derrida, this experience of the spectral characterizes modern European history. He recalls the opening of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism” (Marx 55). He likens this haunted condition to the state of Denmark at the opening of *Hamlet*; the anticipation of the specter’s appearance, the fear of its imminence (or its immanence within the human sphere) conditions all that follows. As Derrida notes, however, in Shakespeare’s play, the ghost *returns*: “Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a *re*-apparition, but a reapparition of the specter as apparition *for the first time in the play*” (*Specters of Marx* 4). Part of the specter’s effect relies on this uncanny condition. His appearance evokes the absent presence (or present absence?) of the ontological, the body of that which has disappeared, but something in him remains foreign, other to our understanding of that ontology. Derrida, citing Valéry, argues for the specter as an incarnation of what he terms “spirit”:

Or rather, as Marx himself spells out, and we will get to this, the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. (*Specters of Marx* 6)



Derrida's explanation of the conditions for the specter's manifestation remains somewhat elusive throughout his analysis. Attempts to distinguish between spirit and specter, he argues, are thwarted by a gap in our ability to know that which has appeared before us. As he notes, "One does not know if it is living or if it is dead" (*Specters of Marx* 6). The specter creates a problem of ontology; its presence leads the viewer to contemplate, even in its presence, whether the thing *is* or *is not*. His close reading of *Hamlet's* opening scene provides Derrida the opportunity to illustrate the specter as something that constantly evades understanding through traditional means. We look at the specter but fail to see it for what it is (or might be). It, on the other hand, sees us not seeing it, a phenomenon Derrida terms the "visor effect": "This Thing meanwhile looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony" (*Specters of Marx* 6-7). Derrida uses the figure of Old Hamlet to illustrate this point. The specter appears in full armor; with the visor down, whatever inhabits the armor can see those to whom it appears without truly being seen itself. In this respect, then, the specter defies complete knowledge or understanding of it; while spectral, it may not, in fact, be the spirit of Hamlet's father at all. The visor masks it from study (or, if not from study, then at least from knowledge or certainty).

Derrida links the visor effect to a psychoanalytic understanding of the law of the father. The specter appearing to Hamlet is father in both the filial and political senses; the wellspring of the law, he appears in full armor, the concrete symbol of his authority. Given the armor's ability to mask identity, then, Hamlet must take the specter at (unseen) face value: "Since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders "swear," we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice" (*Specters of Marx* 7). Thus, the specter's voice

carries with it some of the weight associated with the authority of its dress. The visor shields it from view and from knowledge, granting it an authority in excess of any questions of materiality. For the specter, then, authority and power derive explicitly from the indeterminacy of his “costume” or “armor.” For those to whom he appears, it is impossible to determine whether the outer shell cloaks the apparition or is part of it. Indeed, this shell makes it impossible to determine even whether that within is truly what it claims to be.

Why use Derrida’s hauntology as a method for analyzing dandyism, however? I choose to figure dandyism as a specter precisely because of the dandy’s indeterminacy, the manner in which he ambivalently looks both to future and past, forward and back. Derrida describes the specter as that which “seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum” (*Specters of Marx* 10). The notion of a contemporary dandyism, of the aristocrat in twilight, seems to be met with a kind of ambivalence, or even indifference, that would construct him (or deconstruct him) as something essentially ineffectual or insubstantial, as a simulacrum of a rapidly vanishing (if not wholly vanished) ethos. Ironically, however, the dandy’s insubstantiation, his spectralization in discourse, also grants him his very specific effectiveness.

Hauntology, the “logic of haunting,” attends the beckoning spirit, listening to its disembodied voice demanding justice. In the case of the dandy, the voice emerging from behind the sartorial visor speaks troublingly of both justice and privilege. It attempts to perform a form of masculinity based in an alterity informed by an ostensibly unifying, beautifying aesthetic. Simultaneously, though, dandyism undercuts any appeal to democratization through its capitulation to a rapacious consumerism. In any event, despite its ambivalence, dandyism’s aspirations to social transformation mark it (or at least *should* mark it) as a political stance.

Contemporary discussions of so-called “modern dandies” diminish the politicization of dandyism by recasting it not as the refinement of a particular aesthetic to a particular end, but solely as a celebration of commodification and consumerism. A glance at the “Modern Dandies” website reveals a completely commercialized enterprise with little, if any, separation between editorial content and advertising. This site suggests dandyism as a purchasable commodity, an identity based on a series of luxury goods presumably available to anyone with sufficient funds. A banner at the top of the web site divides postings by subject matter (“Trend Report”; “Style Notes”; “Body, Hair & Skin Care”; “Footwear & Accessories”; “Gadget & Gear”). The individual postings under each subheading detail these goods as material objects largely divorced from any acknowledgment of their implication within a larger political or ideological sphere. By insisting only on the physical qualities of such items rather than their potential expression of metaphysical qualities, the website corporealizes the dandy and diminishes his spectral power (*Modern Dandies*). This “realization” of the dandy is consonant with Derrida’s explication of how Marxism’s revenant, its return, is made palatable or acceptable, in that “silence is maintained about Marx’s injunction not just to decipher but to act and to make the deciphering [the interpretation] into a transformation that ‘changes the world.’” (*Specters of Marx* 32). Similarly, the specter of dandyism loses its power to frighten when it is robbed of its political significance as an explicitly idealistic, transformative practice.

In attempting to suggest a method or approach for an analysis of these specters, Derrida suggests “three things of the thing,” the “thing” being, in Derrida’s playful parlance, the “King,” the father-ghost of Hamlet’s vision (or of Marx’s). Firstly, he links the specter to a notion of mourning. Mourning, he writes, “consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead”

(*Specters of Marx* 9). These acts of identification and localization function as an attempt to determine and stabilize a specter's who and where, thereby enabling the interlocutor (Hamlet/Marx/Derrida/myself) to parley with ghosts. Secondly, Derrida cites language (and the voice) as conditional to his understanding of the specter's function. In speaking of the physical remains, the body (and embodiment) that precedes the spirit/specter, Derrida recognizes the ability that body once had to speak, and to speak *for itself*. The specter's return, then, is as much (if not more) a return of the voice (or of *a* voice) than it is a return of the body. Finally, and this point is crucial to his discussion of the specter in Marxist terms, Derrida notes that the specter is indivisible from the notion of work or labor: “[T]he thing *works*, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, the ‘spirit of the spirit’ is *work*” (9). In asking, then, “whither” the spirit (of Marxism, of dandyism), Derrida interrogates precisely what it might mean to pursue a specter, and indeed whether pursuit doesn't result in “being followed by it, always, persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading” (9). In my own analysis of dandyism as a haunting, then, I will attempt to attend to the manifestation of these three ideas, mourning, voice, and work, in the case studies I examine.

My relationship to the dandy may merit some further explanation. My motivations for choosing this particular area of study stem primarily and perhaps even unflatteringly from desire and envy: desire for a time not my own, desire for a status not my own, desire for particular bodies not my own, and envy for those who possess any of these things. While a dandy in spirit I may aspire to be, a dandy in body (or in pocketbook) I most manifestly am not. In writing about the dandy, then, I hope to propel myself in one of two directions. Unlike the dandy, who evinces ennui in the face of imminent (and generally unavoidable) change, I actively hope to write myself either further into or out of my desire and envy. Or perhaps I can somehow do both

simultaneously. Certainly this would be in keeping with the contradictory spirit of the dandy, who disciplines himself both physically and sartorially in an effort to achieve a kind of freedom from what he might see as the tyranny of sameness imposed by democratization.

Of course, (not so) implicit in that sense of freedom from tyranny is an elitism I find both attractive and repellent: attractive in that it promises validation of one's own sense of aesthetic value, and repellent in the manner in which it intentionally attempts to invalidate that same sense of value in others. This rather studied ambivalence, perhaps more than anything else, typifies my relationship to the dandy. I am equal parts awe and disdain, the desire to both embrace and debase powerfully present in my response to him. Perhaps, then, my real hope is not to reconcile those responses, but to productively mine them.

In this dissertation, I position dandyism as a spectral force haunting contemporary masculinity. In order to do this, I examine the foundational texts of French philosophical dandyism in an attempt to tease out the ambiguities and ambivalences present in the construction of the idea of the dandy. I then undertake three case studies of contemporary celebrities whose self-presentations demonstrate the complexities surrounding dandyism as a hauntological performance. Consequently, I divide my study into two parts shaped by these concerns.

In the first part, I prepare the surface for that which follows, laying the groundwork or, to perhaps use an analogy more appropriate to the dandy's love of artifice and grooming, applying the foundation. I ground my understanding of dandyism primarily in the work of nineteenth-century French intellectuals Honoré de Balzac, Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, and Charles Baudelaire. Taken collectively, their thinking on the dandy defines the period later identified as dandyism's second phase. Unlike its first phase, associated almost exclusively with the example of Beau Brummell, who left behind no consistent record of his thoughts on dandyism,

dandyism's second phase saw a somewhat systematic (albeit inconsistently so) working-through of the wider implications of dandyism for aesthetics, economics, and social development. As a consequence, the thinkers of dandyism's second phase worked toward the establishment of a philosophy of dandyism.<sup>24</sup> They consciously configure the dandy as the embodiment of an aspirational ideal.<sup>25</sup> In order to best understand how the embodied traces of such philosophies continue to haunt contemporary masculinity, then, I find it necessary to thoroughly grapple with the complexities of their respective arguments. I take each of them in chronological order, beginning with Balzac's *Treatise on Elegant Living* (1830) in Chapter Two, moving next in Chapter Three to d'Aurevilly's *On Dandyism* (1844), and concluding Part I with Chapter Four, an examination of Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863). By performing close readings of each of these three texts, I hope to illuminate the conflicted and ambivalent nature of dandyism as it relates to questions of capital and social (in)equalities. The ambivalence characteristic of French philosophical dandyism serves as a central signifier in the case studies I examine in Part II.

In the second part of this study, I examine particular performances of contemporary masculinity and argue that traces of dandyism haunt these performances (and, indeed,

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<sup>24</sup> As I shall demonstrate, however, the works of these thinkers never achieve the coherence of a consistent philosophy. Rather, they individually arrive at related conclusions; only intermittently do they reach consensus, as they never couch their individual works as responses to one another so much as responses to dandyism as a phenomenon (and, of course, as a response to the singularity of Beau Brummell).

<sup>25</sup> The particular brand of aspiration envisioned by each, however, varies in kind as well as degree.

masculinity writ large). The spectral, dandiacal elements of such performances illustrate the unresolved tensions surrounding the construction of masculinity in contemporary consumer culture.

Chapter Five constitutes the first of my three case studies, this one focused on British artist and provocateur Sebastian Horsley. In this chapter, I introduce Derrida's notion of mourning as a performative means of investigating the specter's phenomenality. The act of mourning serves to establish the identity and location of the body in question, that being mourned. In this case, the figure of Sebastian Horsley, self-proclaimed dandy, serves as the pretext for mourning, though he metonymically stands in for dandyism writ large as well. I perform readings of Horsley's autobiographical text *Dandy in the Underworld*, as well as the Tim Fountain play of the same name, in order to demonstrate the presence of performative traces of dandyism in Horsley's work, as well as how those traces ambivalently position the dandy in relation to contemporary consumer culture.

The subject of Chapter Six's case study, David Beckham, presents an opportunity to more closely examine the relationship of dandyism to capital. I utilize the Derridean notion of the "visor" in order to articulate how dandyism gives "voice" to the capitalist structure in which it implicates itself. I employ Werner Hamacher's extension of Marxist and Derridean concepts to argue for the "voice" of dandyism as coterminous with that expressed through the commodity language of the "cloth," a linguistic representation enabling the political economy of commodification. Consequently, dandyism as a phenomenon cannot extricate itself from the matrix of consumer culture in which it manifests. I examine the dandiacal performance of football star David Beckham as a means of exploring this phenomenon, paying particular attention to the ways in which accounts of Beckham link his self-presentation with consumer

culture. Finally, I address the masculine anxiety engendered by Beckham's dandiacal performance.

Chapter Seven centers on the third of my case studies, André Benjamin, better known as André 3000 of the hip hop duo OutKast. In this chapter, I argue for the dandy's "work" as a transformative process that potentially enables a messianic alterity standing in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. I expand on Part I's assertion that imagination and fantasy function as the primary tools through which the dandy performs the "work" of self-fashioning, thereby establishing an alternative to more traditionally rendered (and more traditionally normative) masculine identities. This work, then, results in the dandy's spectralization and is the source of his unique power. I trace the evolution of Benjamin's visual and sartorial style as a means of demonstrating dandyism's potentially messianic aspirations.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes my study, and here I grapple with the philosophical ramifications of posing dandyism as a specter haunting masculinity. Ultimately, I argue that positioning the concept in such a way enables the individual subject more agency in the performance of masculinity, potentially allowing for a more expansive range of possible performative expressions.



## PART I. APPLYING FOUNDATION

**foundation**

1. the basis or groundwork of anything: *the moral foundation of both society and religion.*
2. the natural or prepared ground or base on which some structure rests.
3. the lowest division of a building, wall, or the like.
4. the act of founding.
5. the state of being founded.
6. an institution financed by a donation or legacy, as to aid research, education, or the arts.
7. an endowment for such an institution.
8. a facial cosmetic used as the undercoating for other makeup; base.
9. foundation garment.

## CHAPTER II. BALZAC

Disappointingly, Napoleon Jeffries opens his translator's introduction to Honoré de Balzac's 1830 *Treatise on Elegant Living* with this bold assertion: "As long as clothes make the man, the dandy will continue to cast his shadow into the twenty-first century" (vii). While Jeffries essentially makes precisely the claim I intend to further argue in this study, he appends a telling condition to his sibylline pronouncement. He too readily (if only momentarily) accedes to the commonly held (and mistaken) belief that the cut of his coat alone determines a dandy's outline. Of course, Jeffries' understanding of the dandy holds more nuance than this shot across the bow of the dandy's critics might imply; nonetheless, he sets the terms of discourse here, and this conditional potentially encourages the popular perception of the dandy as little more than a clotheshorse, a mindless mannequin on which to drape fine garments. His near-immediate about-face in the rest of the sentence, however, more than makes up for my initial disappointment, as he intimates the dandy's continued presence (and relevance) through a clever rhetorical flourish that sheds valuable light on the dandy's contemporary role.

Early in the sentence he repeats a well-worn phrase ("clothes make the man") that nods to the materiality of the dandy's existence, the performance of fashion, and to the corporeality of the dandy himself. Clothes, after all, may "make the man," but with some rare exceptions, they themselves only take shape through their overlaid presence on the architecture of the body. Here then Jeffries presents the material, lived conditions in which dandies exist(ed), as actual bodies wearing actual clothes, those garments the material product of other bodies' labors.<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this element becomes even more important in the case studies I examine in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. Almost without exception, the historical conditions in which the subjects of these case studies exist mandate an increased emphasis on the body as a commodified object of

remainder of the sentence, however, disembodies the dandy and focuses attention on his shadow. From a semiotic standpoint, Jeffries' sentence encourages the deconstruction of the dandy as sign. The shadow, the signifier, refers to the dandy's corporeality (and, by the manner in which it differs from the body's "natural" silhouette, to the materiality of his dress). The dandy's embodied performance, the signified, completes the dyad. If, however, we understand dandyism as marked primarily by its association with the past, by its own "pastness," then it exists, as I have argued earlier, largely as a near-exclusively historical phenomenon. To speak of the dandy's continued existence or influence, then, rhetorically positions dandyism as asynchronic (diachronic?).<sup>27</sup> As a result, while Jeffries attempts to knit past and present together in the figure of the dandy, his evocation of the shadow simultaneously sunders them through its disjunctive power. When we attempt to understand the shadow diachronically, it faces us (if only we could make out that face!) with a dilemma: if the dandy's shadow is visible today, then its presence argues, alternately, for the dandy's like presence all along, for his return after some

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sexual display, and thus resolutely material in its presence. There is no hiding the fact that Sebastian Horsley, David Beckham, and André Benjamin all represent themselves as both sexual subjects and objects. As such, their individual corporeality insists upon itself much more fully than it might in a more asexual representation of dandyism.

<sup>27</sup> The question of whether we ought to read dandyism as asynchronic or diachronic evokes tensions well-articulated in discourses surrounding modernism and postmodernism. Does the dandy remain present over time (diachrony), or does he disappear, only to reemerge at a later date (asynchrony)? If we posit the dandy as a diachronic figure, then we argue for a rhetoric of continuity; if asynchronic, a rhetoric of rupture. For the moment, at least, I choose to leave this an open question.

indeterminate absence, or, most chillingly, for the shadow as a signifier with no visible signified, not shadow but shade.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, this seems to be Jeffries' intent: "He may at times seem like a pale shadow, an outline without actual content—the ghost of an apparition of a man: superficiality remains, after all, one of the more superficial attributes ascribed to the dandy" (vii).<sup>29</sup> While Jeffries' language ("pale," "without actual content") signals ineffectuality, for a ghost the threat of presence may be threat enough. As a haunting of contemporary masculinity, then, the dandy offers the potential for terror not as a signifier with no signified, but because he signifies a performed masculine identity that threatens the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Why, though, should this figure threaten?<sup>30</sup> To understand this more clearly, I look first to Balzac.

Balzac's *Treatise on Elegant Living* marks, for some scholars, a clear shift from dandyism's first phase, the superficial Regency dandyism of Beau Brummell, to its second,

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<sup>28</sup> This does not, of course, invalidate the shadow's role in creating the sign of "dandy." The signified is only invisible, not absent, the dandy's corporeal presence as signified unnecessary to the existence or maintenance of the sign. To argue otherwise is to give in to the referential fallacy. I *do* propose, however, that there is a qualitative difference between the understanding of this sign from a referential (Peircean) or non-referential (Saussurean) standpoint.

<sup>29</sup> Jeffries' rhetorical tack is already a shadow, however, of the imagery employed by Balzac, who describes the elegant man as "reduc[ing] respect to nothing more than a gentle shadow" (60). The dandy, the shadow of a shadow, implies infinite regress, the constant, unrealized threat of dissipation held in tension with an elusive immanence.

<sup>30</sup> And as can clearly be seen in some reactions to the subjects of the case studies to follow, there *is* a perceived threat of some sort.

French intellectual dandyism, with its attempts to theorize what Brummell had initially put into practice.<sup>31</sup> Though Brummell often serves as dandyism's patron saint (or rebel angel), he was not solely responsible for dandyism's continued force throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, had Balzac (followed later by d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire) not chosen to spin Brummell's fashions into philosophies, he might only persist as a figure in a number (albeit an admittedly great one) of biographical and historical anecdotes. Balzac, as the earliest of the major French writers to take on the dandy and related subjects (under the rubric of elegant living), set dandyism's second phase in motion. Jeffries argues that French intellectual dandyism helped to create a figure situated "between the late eighteenth-century libertine and the late nineteenth-century decadent" (xi). While the Sadean libertine's passion ruled over all, inspiring him to dominance (sexual or otherwise), the dandy's subtler exhibition of taste demanded a more circumspect self-discipline. The epigraph to Balzac's work, taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*, suggests the beginnings of a paradigm shift from the materiality of the first phase of Regency dandyism to the emerging second phase of French intellectual dandyism: "*Mens agitat molem*" (1).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jeffries also acknowledges a third phase, the "commercial dandyism" characterized by Oscar Wilde. I focus my attention primarily on the second phase.

<sup>32</sup> The particular passage in the *Aeneid* from which Balzac draws his epigraph relates Aeneas' meeting with his father in the underworld. The phrase translates loosely to "mind moves matter," though this necessarily reduces the sense of Virgil's poetry. The verse here presents a material world constructed by and through the power of the mind. This reference also prefigures Derrida's use of the ghost of Hamlet's father as one of the signature images of hauntology. Such confrontations with the shades of our forefathers (either figurative or literal), freighted with the

Curiously, though, despite his place in some critics' eyes as the beginning of this phase, Balzac's depiction of the dandy bears little resemblance to the later portraits of d'Aureville and Baudelaire. In one of the many aphorisms/axioms studding his treatise, he refers to dandyism as "a heresy of elegant life" (58). Informed less perhaps by Brummell than by his lesser imitators, Balzac exposes dandyism as affectation. He casts the dandy as a mere actor (and a cynical one) playing a role,<sup>33</sup> and contrasts him with the practitioner of his neologic "elegantology," the systematic study and implementation of elegance as a way of life. He attributes the "performances" of these elegantologists with utter sincerity. This sincerity and an accompanying commitment, evidence of a thoughtful nature, mark essential differences between Balzac's elegant men and the *poseurs* immediately preceding them. Their thoughtfulness,<sup>34</sup> developed to a high degree, imbues them with what Balzac terms as "divine and concomitant grace" (61). The secret of these creatures' external beauty, unlike the merely superficial glamour of the dandy, lies in its connection to the beauty of their souls. The man who leads an elegant life represents a kind of Classical ideal of perfection and moderation. Balzac describes his "harmonious voice," his

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baggage of masculine anxiety, demonstrate the haunted/haunting qualities with which dandyism engages.

<sup>33</sup> The idea of cynical and sincere performances is drawn from the work of Erving Goffman, which I address in greater detail later in this chapter.

<sup>34</sup> This, of course, connotes much more than "mere" courtesy, though an appropriate level of courtesy remains an essential component of elegant living. The thoughtfulness here might more accurately be likened (particularly given the occasionally metaphysical tendencies of French intellectual dandyism) to the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. Mind and/or thought stand at the heart of the dandy's power.

“pure” language, his “affable and pleasant” manner, his “inexplicable magnetism” (60).

Balzac’s treatise thus acts as a philosophical vessel, cutting waves with this paragon at its prow. In his aspiration, however, he indulges in nostalgia for the fiction of a utopian Classical past. As the case studies in later chapters will demonstrate, the utopian ideal(s) associated with dandyism don’t always possess such clear antecedents. Nonetheless, the dandiacal impulses on display in figures such as Horsley, Beckham, and Benjamin share an urge toward the perfection (and unattainability) of such (no)times and (no)places.

The presence of the elegant man, Balzac argues, transitively bestows his elegance on those material things around him through a cognitive process that conflates past and present in a kind of investiture. As Balzac writes, “you will recall his spirit of good grace imprinted on the things that surround him” (60). The act of recollection, central to creating this unified impression of elegance, depends on a kind of cognitive oscillation, a constant shifting between past (the witnessed spectacle of the elegant man) and present (the objects that seem invested with his elegance), and vice versa. This acts as a kind of “instant nostalgia,” a desire to experience again the sight of that we have only just seen, if only to serve as verification of its perfection. This nostalgia hearkens back to another nostalgia, that for a mythic past, the past of originary stories and national histories. Balzac’s elegant man, a prelapsarian Adam, “allows you to breathe as if it were the air of your homeland” (60).

I intentionally make the Biblical comparison, as Balzac casts his argument in religious terms that have a profound effect on discourses surrounding dandyism, particularly that of the French intellectual stripe.<sup>35</sup> It is no accident that later depictions of the dandy have an almost

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<sup>35</sup> The religiosity of dandyism shines through quite clearly in the example of Sebastian Horsley, the subject of Chapter 5’s case study.

messianic quality. Balzac imbues his figure with near-divinity, granting him a superhuman capacity that invites religious devotion:

He accepts men as God does, forgiving faults and silly ways, understanding every age and never feeling any irritation, because he is tactful enough to anticipate anything. He obliges you to him before consoling, he is loving and cheerful: and so you will love him irresistibly. You take him for a classic example and devote a cult to him. (61)

Despite the seeming singularity of the elegant man's cultic appeal, however, Balzac affirms this power as potentially within reach<sup>36</sup> and also as the explicit endgame of elegant living. This is no less than an analogue to the promise of a Christian "heavenly reward," which he evokes linguistically: "We must try everything to lay hold of it; but a successful outcome is always difficult, for the cause of success lies within a beautiful soul. Happy are those who exercise it!" (61). Balzac appropriates the language of the beatitudes (or, as Michael McMurray has called them, "Jesus's guide to happy living") to anoint his civilized saviors: "Happy are those," indeed.<sup>37</sup>

If Balzac presents the elegant man as a kind of holy prophet, however, his social cosmology brands the dandy as a heretic, though one in little danger of the *auto-da-fé*. I argue

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<sup>36</sup> At least within reach of the man blessed with the necessary prerequisites for elegance.

<sup>37</sup> In an interesting side note, some Biblical scholars, among them Augustine of Hippo, have argued for seven beatitudes rather than eight, seven being the Biblical number of "perfection." The beatitudes, like Balzac's treatise, concern themselves with the perfection of the self in order to achieve a utopian end. Ultimately (and inevitably?), the "scripture" expressing the means of achieving such perfection is itself somehow imperfect.



that this characterization of dandy, based on the cynical performances of those aping Brummell, actually has little to do with dandyism in its second phase. Indeed, we might mark this as precisely the point at which the definition of the dandy begins to shift from the strictly material elegance of Brummell to a more wide-ranging, all-encompassing philosophy of elegance, thanks largely to Balzac's treatise. Reading him in conjunction with d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire, it seems clear that his elegant man shares more in common with the other men's aspirational dandies than does his portrayal of the dandy as a creature of thoughtless superficiality. I propose, then, to examine the *Treatise on Elegant Living* not as a counterargument to d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire, but as their precursor, in that it establishes the ground against which French philosophical dandyism would fully emerge.

The first part of Balzac's treatise, helpfully titled "Generalities," begins by setting out three kinds of men ("The man who works; The man who thinks; The man who does nothing") who correspond to three different kinds of life ("The busy life; The artist's life; The elegant life") (3-4). The worker, the man who leads the busy life, toils at the base of the social pyramid (indeed, constantly hauls the great stones of that pyramid back and forth under the watchful eyes of the overseers, their own eyes stand-ins for those of the presumably elegant pharaoh). Balzac refers here not only to so-called "unskilled" laborers, the clearest example of such a caste, but to more "professional" men as well: doctors, lawyers, priests, all those who still define themselves through their labor, albeit mental rather than manual. For such as these, there exists no question of elegance; they have neither the time nor the imagination for such elegance as leisure might provide. Even for those who achieve some capital or standing, "their luxury is always an investment," rather than an end to itself (7). For the busy man, expressions of luxury provide a means of leveraging material possessions for social reasons, either to gain increased social access

or to demonstrate superior social standing. The busy man, consumed by and subservient to the modern ideals of a continuous (and never-ceasing) “progress,” remains agitated and anxious even in luxury.

Balzac’s anatomy of the busy life thus gives rise to the first of the aphorisms peppered throughout his treatise. In these he sets out the general principles of elegant living. First, he argues, “[t]he goal of the civilized man as of the savage is repose” (8). Though he does not define the constitution of such repose, he clearly opposes this to the work of the busy life. This should not be confused with sheer indolence, however, as another aphorism suggests that “[e]legant living is, in the broad acceptance of the term, the art of animating repose” (8). This animation echoes the movement evoked in the epigraph. The application of elegance provides meaning to repose, just as the animating power of mind provides the spark of life to creation in Virgil. Balzac’s repose, however, cannot be “earned,” as he demonstrates in a “corollary” to his first set of aphorisms:

To be fashionable, one must enjoy repose without undergoing work: in other words, one must get the four winning numbers in a lottery, be the son of a millionaire, prince, sinecurist, or a holder of several remunerative positions. (9)

Repose, unattainable through labor, is the product of fortune and favor. As Ira Gershwin would opine a century later, “Nice work if you can get it.” Unlike Gershwin, however, Balzac seems to suggest that you *can’t* “get it,” even if (or especially if) you try. This tension, between the activity of the busy life, “business” itself, and the animated repose of the dandy, becomes one of the ways in which the subjects of the case studies I examine in Part II fail to meet Balzac’s standards; their projected illusion of animated repose becomes, itself, their very “business,” in both senses of the word.

Between the busy and elegant lives, Balzac interposes the artist's life, the category that in some respects most closely resembles the form French intellectual dandyism would eventually take in d'Aureville and Baudelaire. "The artist," Balzac asserts, "is an exception" (9). Unbound by the strictures Balzac applies to the busy man, he possesses a freedom and range of motion perhaps not so fully enjoyed by either busy or elegant man. This figure occupies dandyism's middle ground (its no-man's-land?), a space between bourgeoisie and proletariat. He represents the aristocratic power of thought to transform, regardless of the circumstances in which it is found. He remains unconstrained by the dictates of fashion, instead fashioning those dictates himself: "[H]e is elegant and slovenly in turn; he dons, as he pleases, the plowman's overalls, and determines the tails worn by the man in fashion; he is not subject to laws: he imposes them" (9). In fashion, then, the artist fights on the front; he is decidedly *avant-garde*. This progressive impulse extends even to his financial dealings. The artist's designs are explicitly transformative. For him, the trappings of luxury and capital offer not the notion of wealth for its own sake, but the promise of possibility. Though Balzac names this idealist as an artist, his values will come to be virtually synonymous with the dandyism of d'Aureville and Baudelaire. When combined with the notion of elegance as explicated by Balzac in the remainder of his treatise, a vision of the dandy emerges.

After the busy life and the artist's life, the elegant life stands as the third in Balzac's triumvirate of life "styles." Thankfully, he expends some initial energy in defining the elegant life for his reader. Unsatisfied with a single meager definition, however, Balzac serves up a veritable bounty:

Elegant living is the perfection of outer and material life; Or: The art of spending one's income as a man of wit; Or even: The science that teaches us to do nothing

like anyone else, while appearing to do everything just like them; But perhaps even better: The development of grace and taste in everything that belongs to us and that surrounds us; Or more logically: Knowing how to honor oneself with one's fortune. (11)

This excerpt doesn't even take into account the many allusions to the elegant life drawn from other thinkers.<sup>38</sup> What unites these definitions,<sup>39</sup> however, seems to be the individual faculties of the man who enjoys the elegant life. He possesses wit, individualism, grace, taste, and a modicum (but only a modicum) of pride or vanity. Further, he possesses an understanding of how best to leverage these qualities in relation to capital. Without the cultivation of such faculties (whether innate or learned), an elegant life would inevitably be an impossibility. Interestingly enough, Balzac's initial definitions don't specify the sum of the fortune or income of the man in question. They merely suggest that whatever fortune he has be judiciously (and tastefully) spent.

Questions of economics so far addressed only tangentially in Balzac, however, now emerge fully. He dismisses the idea of "[a] nation of wealthy people" as "a political dream...impossible to realize" (12). Society, he argues, invariably consists of consumers and producers. Those who consume the most are, in all likelihood, those who produce the least, and vice versa. As a consequence, he argues, government has traditionally functioned primarily to protect or preserve richer from poorer. This very system then breeds a desire among the latter to

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<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the most amusing comes from Chodruc, who calls it "a tissue of trifles and nonsense" (qtd. in Balzac 12).

<sup>39</sup> And as I will argue, in the world of the dandy, such unifying impulses are of great value, given the contradictory impulses that threaten to stretch dandyism to the point of disintegration.

attempt an ascent in fortunes until they either reach or even surpass the level of the former. This desire manifests itself in displays of excess vanity or pride as a means of jockeying for position.

Balzac goes on to explain the functioning of vanity in this economy of social place:

Given that vanity is nothing but the art of putting on one's Sunday best all the time, every man felt the need to have, as an example of his power, a loaded sign to inform the passersby of where he was perching on the great greasy pole, at the top of which the kings exercise their power. (13)

In this manner, differentials of power historically manifested themselves in the material, semiotic cues of “wardrobes, liveries, chaperones, long hair, weathercocks, red heels,” to name only a few. This, at least, has changed remarkably little since Balzac's writing. Material symbols still connote relative status. If anything, the symbols of leisure, invested with the power of corporate branding, have become more stylized, more iconic, more fetishized and uniform (and fetishized *as* uniform) than ever before.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> At the level of *haute couture*, for example, it is often customary to signal an entire fashion ethos through the evocation of a single name, designer-as-brand: Armani, Louboutin, Versace, Lacroix, Prada, Gucci, Dior. This move toward stylization, from the level of the human to the level of icon, can move in the direction of even further reduction. Thus we arrive at the luxe designations of D&G, DKNY, and BMW. The next step? Complete dematerialization of the linguistic features of brand management in favor of sheer iconography. Take, for instance, the Apple logo. One need not even know the linguistic associations of the word Apple to recognize the status implied by the logo itself. In this fashion, traditional notions of literacy cease to be prerequisite to recognition of the symbol and thus to the assertion of its superiority and dominance.

Following the thorough development of vanity as a systematizing force, however, Balzac argues that the introduction of paper currencies fomented the idea of class revolution in Europe and, ultimately, after the overthrow of existing regimes, led newly-minted ruling classes to institute even stricter social controls.<sup>41</sup> Such controls justified themselves partially through supposedly self-evident means, those in power tautologically endorsing their own positions of privilege:

I am above them; I dazzle them, I protect them, I govern them, and every one of them can clearly see that I govern them, protect them, and dazzle them; for I am a man who dazzles, protects, or governs others, who speaks, eats, walks, drinks, sleeps, coughs, dresses, and enjoys himself differently than those dazzled, protected, and governed. (Balzac 15)

The result of this self-delusion? Elegant living, of course! Elegant living distinguishes refined from coarse, exalted from debased, worthy from unworthy. The elegant life, insular and hermetic, erects a financial barrier to easy entry through the pricing of luxury goods. This scheme finds its near-perfect implementation in the institution of fashion, with its rapidly shifting modes. Certain luxury goods, subject to the whims of fashion, achieve obsolescence with great rapidity, necessitating an ever-increasing outlay of capital to live the so-called elegant life.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Balzac, born in 1799, had not himself lived through the Revolution's Reign of Terror, but its aftershocks could still be felt in the France of his time.

<sup>42</sup> Some luxury items, particularly those intentionally brushed with the valuable patina of "history," aren't quite as subject to the vagaries of fashion as others. I refer here to "antiques," *objets d'art*, and the like, but even an Arne Jacobsen chair has moments when the spotlight in which it sits shines more or less brightly. Danish Mid-Century Modern doesn't mean eternal.

Thus, over time such a life makes itself available to increasingly few. Capital itself does not guarantee elegant living, however; as another of Balzac's aphorisms notes, "It is not enough to become or to be born rich to lead an elegant life: one must feel it" (16).

Balzac predicates this "feeling" for elegant living on "a complete understanding of social progress" (17). He argues that only then-recent social changes enabled such an understanding. Prior to this elegant living expressed itself only in particularities, not as a way of life. This gradual transition from particularity to generalization, from example to rule, also aligns, in his view, with the historical shift from feudalism to mercantilism. Balzac avoids valorizing this shift, however, noting that, while the Revolution brought with it certain improvements, it also reinstated disparities in the distribution of wealth:

Do we not have, in exchange for a ridiculous and fallen feudal system, the triple aristocracy of money, power, and talent, which, however lawful it may be, lays no less of an immense burden on the masses when it imposes on them the patriciate of the bank, the ministerialism and the ballastics of the papers and the tribune all stepping stones for people of talent? And so while sanctioning, by its return to the constitutional monarchy, an illusory political equality, France has never done anything but generalize misfortune: for we are a democracy of the rich. (20)

By this means, then, Balzac asserts that those who lead the elegant life will always dominate those who lead the busy life, not least because, due to the leisure he enjoys (a leisure facilitated by money, power, and talent), the man who leads the elegant life will view those who lead the busy life as little more than his playthings, provided for him to lend interest and amusement to his leisure. This insight would receive further exploration by d'Aureville, as I shall show in Chapter 3.

Balzac's ultimate aim, though, takes on a utopian cast. He envisions a transformed world in which nuance replaces stark difference. Thought transforms the notion of privilege by making it the result of "moral superiority" rather than birth (23). If one also subscribes to the possibility of moral improvement, then the benefits of inheritance consequently dissipate and presumably everyone may share in the redemptive promise of elegance. This world of shared privilege, however, still remains a distant dream under Balzac's conditions, for neither birth nor wealth suffice to fit one to lead the elegant life, and moral improvement only counts for so much. One must also possess "that indefinable faculty...that always prompts us to choose truly beautiful or good things, things whose unity matches our physiognomy and our fate" (24). Despite his difficulty in defining it, however, it seems clear that such a faculty will remain the privilege (or responsibility) of the very elite. He thus guarantees that his utopia will never come to pass, for though he wishes to democratize privilege through the attainment of elegance, he asserts the capacity for elegance as inborn, if not fully heritable.

Like d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire after him for dandyism, Balzac argues that elegant living deserves serious consideration, both concepts revealing much about the social conditions in which they respectively emerge. As he queries regarding the elegant life, "In short, if it is the sign of a perfected nature, shouldn't every man wish to study it and discover its secrets?" (25). Obviously, my answer to Balzac would be affirmative, for almost two hundred years after the publication of his treatise, the elegant life has yet to fully yield up its secrets, nor have Balzac's "perfected natures" been widely realized. Therefore, in order to encourage continued examination of the elegant life, Balzac discourages the trivialization of fashion as meaningless and unworthy of study. He returns to his epigraph at this point, clarifying it as it relates expressly to fashion. Just as mind moves (or expresses itself in) matter, he argues, so "a man's mind can be



known by the manner in which he holds his walking stick” (25). Material embodiment reveals immaterial (though certainly not unimportant) patterns of thinking and understanding. An observer can thus read repertoire performance as expressions of both ontology and epistemology. Indeed, the case studies of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven propose to do exactly that, to read their subjects as engaging with a repertoire of performance acts associated with and informed by dandyism. The dandy’s choices as to dress and behavior represent an assertion of the utopian reality of his most perfect self; they also simultaneously offer the dandy a way of knowing, a rehearsal for the ultimate expression of that perfection, a being-through-becoming. In terms of the process/product dichotomy, then, dandyism is both/and, and this simultaneity gives the pursuit of the elegant life its peculiar strength in Balzac. Self-perpetuating, “[i]t tends to make a nation less poor by inspiring in it a taste for luxury,... gives a more picturesque look to a country, and improves agriculture; for the beauty of an animal’s race and produce depends on the care given to its living and shelter” (29). In human terms, Balzac argues that attention to the external will ultimately effect an internal transformation. Surface, if not depth’s equal, is certainly its correlative.

The remainder of the treatise, then, aims to set out the specifics of how this might be so. “A treatise on elegant living,” Balzac writes, “being the combination of inalienable principles that must guide the expression of our thought through exterior life, is, as it were, the *metaphysics of things*” (26). He sets himself to the task of investigating, within the context of elegance, the intersection between the objects of the material world and the patterns of thought that make such objects possible. Having articulated this as his aim, then, he outlines the genesis of his treatise in a chapter narratively structured as a meeting between Balzac, his friends, and the famous dandy Beau Brummell. While Balzac leaves most of the participants unidentified, he does mention

some by name. One he simply terms L.-M., though Jeffries helpfully reveals this to be Charles Latour-Mézeray, editor of the *Journal des Enfants*, and apparently a dandified figure of some note, known as “the Man with the Camellia” due to the ever-present flower in his buttonhole. Another, Eugène Sue, Balzac notes as a potential contributor to the treatise.<sup>43</sup> The significance of these figures lies in their status as recognized adherents (at least to a degree) of dandyism. Though Balzac doesn’t name them as dandies, their presence signals the dialogue as the discourse of a specific aesthetic community. The presence of these dandies goes some way to validating Balzac’s own dandyish sympathies and grounds his philosophies in specific aesthetic and performative practices legible to his readership. With the added narrative presence of these figures, this chapter neatly parrots (and nearly parodies) a dandified version of a Socratic dialogue, interrupted by occasional asides from Balzac to the reader.

For performance scholars, Balzac’s assertion (through the “character” of Latour-Mézeray) that “[e]legance dramatizes life” stands out as especially noteworthy. Though the remark doesn’t receive much elaboration, the idea that the dandy, as the exemplar of elegance, might embody a kind of conscious dramaturgical impulse raises tantalizing possibilities. To dramatize life is to aestheticize it, to consciously exert an artistic impulse in the living of everyday life. Moreover, dramatization itself functions as a kind of unifying artistic impulse, as Richard Shusterman has argued. Two different strains of thought, Shusterman asserts, have typically dominated aesthetic philosophy; he terms them naturalism and historicism. Naturalism views art as transhistoric, transcultural, and essentially inherent to human nature. Historicism, on the other hand, attempts to describe artistic expression “as a particular historical cultural

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<sup>43</sup> Apparently, this contribution, a reflection on impertinence, was never realized or, if so, has since disappeared.

institution produced by the Western project of modernity” (Shusterman 366). These two notions of aesthetic philosophy offer competing views of art’s essential components; the naturalist approach places emphasis on the universal nature of what Shusterman terms “experiential intensity and meaningful substance,” while the historicist argues for the primacy of the social frame in which the individual work of art is produced (367). Shusterman suggests that the concept of dramatization potentially unifies these disparate aesthetic standpoints, incorporating both the sense of dramatization as emphasizing the theatrical quality (the historicist’s “frame”) and the sense of it as referencing a kind of heightened reality (the naturalist’s “intensity”). In both cases, dramatization suggests a separation from a mainstream notion of “reality.” Balzac’s elegance, then, provides form and content, frame and intensity. Within this frame, the man who leads the elegant life experiences the intensity in question, serves as performer in this drama. Elegance thus unifies art and “everyday” life, makes of them a single, unbroken endeavor rather than incompatible undertakings separated by an aesthetic barrier. The dandy (or the “elegantologist”) embodies the utopian unity that Balzac (and those who follow him) attempt to formulate as a way of life. Shusterman similarly argues that

art’s apparent diversion from real life may be a needed path of indirection that directs us back to experience life more fully through the infectious intensity of aesthetic experience and the release of affective inhibitions. This suggests that the long-established art/life dichotomy should not be taken too rigidly, that we have here at best a functional distinction that surely seems to dissolve with the idea of the art of living. (370-1)

The central feature of elegant living, then, the recognition of life (and particularly *elegant* life) as performance, addresses the philosophical divide historically characterizing aesthetics. Baudelaire would further explore these ideas in “The Painter of Modern Life.” In this light, therefore, the

performance of Balzac's elegant man differs primarily from the so-called dandy's in that it is sincere rather than cynical, as Erving Goffman might put it.

Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (63). This definition seems as useful as any in looking at historical or current performances of the type under scrutiny in this study. It does not overly limit the scope of action under analysis, but provides a structure that imposes certain conditions ("continuous presence," "observers," "influence") on the performance. He positions the performer somewhere between two extremes of belief. On one end of the spectrum, the performer may, in all sincerity, believe in the veracity of his performance. In this case, the performer essentially creates his own reality, the belief in which may or may not be shared by those observing him. At the other end of the spectrum, the performer may cynically "guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to other ends, having no ultimate concern in the conception that they have of him or of the situation" (61). These opposite positions typically do not remain static, however, and Goffman details the potential movements from belief to disbelief and in the reverse direction. At points, Balzac seems to assume the inherent sincerity of the man of elegance, failing to account for the possibility that a cynical performance may begin to generate actual belief, resulting in an internal transformation of the kind for which he longs. He also does not allude to another possibility, that of a move in the opposite direction, that the courtesy of an elegant man might change into something less than sincere. Present-day narratives of fashion (one facet of elegant living) do nothing to clarify which trend might be more likely, though in industry terms, models (consumers) are more typically rendered as cynical performers (just taking a paycheck) than are designers (producers), who have the *bona fides* of "art" to

confirm their sincerity.<sup>44</sup> Goffman notes, of course, that such shifts are not unidirectional and may occur multiple times during the extent of a person's performance of a given role.

Goffman's method of performance analysis also enables an examination of the performer's *mise-en-scène* as what he terms "front." He defines this as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (63). Moreover, he extends this definition to also include "personal front" in reference to that "expressive equipment" most closely associated with the performer, such as "insignia of high office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristic; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (64). Goffman's "fronts" thus expand the parameters of performance to encompass not only actions and behaviors but also the material frame in which those actions and behaviors are situated. Given the relationship between these frames and those things they both enclose and keep out, my analysis of dandified performance also incorporates a necessary examination of performance fronts.

Like d'Aurevilly after him, Balzac attributes Brummell with popularizing the pursuit of the elegant life and with embodying the principles of the philosophy expounded in his treatise. He cites him as "living proof of the influence exercised by fashion" (32). Mythologized by friend and foe, Brummell serves, Cronus-like, as dandyism's titanic patriarch, the brilliance of his presence threatening to swallow up the lesser lights following him. In Balzac's sketch of the meeting with Brummell, he initially tells not a simple story of uncomplicated origin, but of the treatise's near stillbirth. Balzac and his associates, conferring with the dandy in decline, divide

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<sup>44</sup>Art and business (or aesthetics and utility), two of the primary concerns of dandyism, provide another structure of binary opposition onto which the sincerity/cynicism dyad can be mapped.

men into two types: “poets and prose-writers, elegant men and the common run of martyrs” (34). The assembled men quickly come to the conclusion that, in the case of such a division, a study of dandyism or elegant living would thus be of little use, for the poets, the “elegant men,” would have no need of it, while the “common run” could not learn from it. The impromptu think tank of dandyism would seem then to have little intention of embracing a wholly democratic view of the world, instead subscribing to an elitism that limits dandyism to the fortunate few who possess the aptitude for it.

Balzac and his compatriots complicate this elitism, however, with a further axiom: “Though elegance is less an art than a feeling, it is also the result of instinct and habit” (34). Thus, aristocracy does not guarantee elegance, but only provides the conditions in which to best cultivate it. The men cite education as the aristocrat’s luxury, the element that enables habit and consequent privilege. Surrounded by the trappings of elegance and a historical tradition of valuing beauty, the aristocrat thus potentially develops a taste for such things, resulting in a habit of elegance. As one of the men suggests, “it takes a surly nature to resist the constant appearance of truly beautiful things” (34). Assuming the aristocrat doesn’t surround himself with the trappings of vulgarity, then, he stands a better than average chance of reaping beauty’s proximal benefits. Balzac’s explanation of how this might occur shows him to possess a somewhat more democratic streak than his previous elitism might otherwise suggest. Any egalitarianism in Balzac, though, takes on a somewhat unexpected form.

Through their dialogue, the men argue for equality of the senses rather than of the intellect. Each man, they assert, has essentially the same basic sensory tools with which to perceive the world. Of course, this assumes materiality, the external world, as a stable reference

point for knowledge and understanding.<sup>45</sup> While they posit the intellect as the result of “inner perfection,” elegance is stated as “simply the perfection of perceptible objects” (35). Men ostensibly possess the same organs with which to apprehend such objects, so their study therefore results in the inculcation of elegance as a habit. In this manner, presumably any man might learn elegance. Brummell, however, objects (perhaps predictably) to this line of reasoning, arguing that exceptions to such rules will always exist. The assembled men then formulate a number of axioms in an attempt to establish boundaries for the elegant life. These axioms ultimately expose these wider, potentially more inclusive applications of Balzac’s dandyism as fundamentally compromised by an elitism of a particularly metropolitan bent.<sup>46</sup>

Balzac further sets down the limits of his proposed “elegantology” when he has Brummell classify the objects of study for this new field. He gives primary importance to “speech, gait, [and] manners,” those attributes “that proceed *directly* from a man.” He includes dress as part of this field. Of secondary interest are those things derived *indirectly*: “[t]he table, people, horses, carriages, furniture, the upkeep of houses” (37). He argues that those objects

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<sup>45</sup> It also, of course, precludes individuals of differing abilities, as it assumes equal access to all sensory input.

<sup>46</sup> Among these axioms are the following: “One must have studied at least as far as rhetoric to lead an elegant life;” “Retailer, businessmen, and teachers of the humanities fall outside the scope of elegant living” (a personal favorite); “A banker who reaches the age of forty without having gone into voluntary liquidation, or who has more than thirty-six inches in girth, is the damned soul of elegant living: he will see paradise without ever entering it;” and “Anyone who does not frequently visit Paris will never be completely elegant” (36-7). These should clearly illustrate the exclusionary nature of the elegance Balzac propounds.

most directly the product of individual thought ought to receive the most attention. I propose to use this division in my own examinations of contemporary performances, giving most focus to those things that most directly proceed *from* the performer. While I certainly would not exclude *indirect* expressions that contribute to the creation of an impression of a dandified masculinity, they do not provide the major objects of analysis for my study.

In the second part of the treatise, Balzac sets out the general principles for elegance, that quality so closely associated with dandyism. He identifies unity as its chief component, then further subdivides unity among cleanliness, harmony, and simplicity. Of these three, he claims, none dominates over the others; rather, they work in conjunction to create the conditions in which elegance might emerge. These qualities become useful in attempting to determine whether a dandy, who ought to embody elegance, truly adheres to this formulation. For Balzac, whose philosophy in this work seems to vacillate between a more liberal, democratic impulse and the tug of elitism, this rubric for elegance allows easy classification and the clear delineation of criteria for exclusion from the ranks of the truly elegant. Moreover, these criteria establish the elegant man (the dandy) as a kind of critic, an arbiter whose sense of unity allows him to include the entire world in his purview. As Balzac notes, “In the elegant life, everything is linked and connected” (44). This philosophy carries with it some potentially unpleasant implications, however. Unification carries with it the possibility of uniformity. Though its utopian aim would make of the world a perfect, unified whole, an aesthetic mastery centered in the elegantologist could easily slide into totalitarianism. Unless truly lived by all, Balzac’s elegant life runs the risk of steamrolling individuality in the name of an aesthetic Stalinism.

This sense of unity definitely provides a notable benefit, though, enabling the elaboration of an entire system based only on minimal detail. In theory, an elegantologist can deduce an



individual's worldview from as little as the appearance of his cuffs or the choice of chair in his sitting room. Every detail serves a greater whole, and the misplacement of a single piece destroys the integrity of that whole: "Unity rigorously demands this whole, which makes every accessory of existence interdependent; for a man of taste judges, like an artist, based on a mere nothing" (Balzac 45). The achievement of this unity depends, however, on a further condition: balance. The practitioner of the elegant life carefully walks a tightrope between vanity and modesty. Neither ostentatious display nor false humility accurately represents the unity to which Balzac refers, and to misstep in the direction of either extreme disrupts balance, which distorts unity, which destroys elegance. This translates directly into economic concerns, as "[t]he most essential effect in elegance is the concealment of one's means" (46). Their revelation would unnecessarily insist on either the vanity or modesty Balzac abhors. Thus, they should remain essentially invisible. Brummell, initially something of a peacock, would eventually adopt this more sober and subtle approach to self-styling, demonstrating taste and elegance through a simplicity of style rather than through a self-conscious display of virtuosic fashion.<sup>47</sup>

A potential elitism insinuates itself again, however, as any relationship between simplicity and modesty remains perilously unstable in Balzac's formulation of elegant living. While the elegant life demands the concealment of means, its practice is more effectively enabled by an ease that only access to capital can provide. Another of Balzac's aphorisms argues this point: "Harmony between exterior life and fortune results in ease" (47). A man of little means who attempts to make himself appear an aristocrat may have temporary success, but some

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<sup>47</sup> This phrase, "virtuosic fashion," with its connotations of both individual skill and collective custom, is yet another attempt on my part to represent the contradictory impulses generated by dandyism.

level of struggle and anxiety, anathema to the elegant life, will inevitably characterize his efforts. To lead such a life, according to Balzac's plan, a man must live within his means. In this way, he will achieve what Balzac refers to as the "consciousness of comfort" (48). Balzac's elegant man never worries overly much about the maintenance of his material goods. The "harmony" between his fortune and his exterior life is such that he need not worry. Here, of course, Balzac's philosophy of elegant living clearly demonstrates the difficulty (if not impossibility) of such a life for those whose fortunes allow only consciousness of their potential *discomfort*. "The man of taste must enjoy everything he owns," Balzac enjoins (48). This enjoyment seems to consist at least partially in demonstration, however. He describes the elegant man as unafraid of "flaunting" his material conditions; for Balzac, elegance clearly deserves (even demands) an audience. Thus, elegance itself is as much a performance as it is a condition. One achieves elegance through its performance, but that performance necessarily remains somewhat precarious. It demands constant vigilance.

In terms of capital, this vigilance necessitates a constant outlay for the maintenance of elegance. This outlay (or "upkeep," as Balzac refers to it) partially results from technological developments in manufacturing. As an example, he describes the shift from the heavy cloths of the Middle Ages to lighter, more easily manufactured textiles. Due to the decreased cost of clothing made from these fabrics, those with the wealth to afford it could purchase clothes more frequently. The speed with which fashions changed and shifted sped up as a result. Eventually entire wardrobes went out of style within a season's time, and the aristocracy accustomed themselves to supplying the growing clothing industry with an increasingly regular stream of income. The products of this fashion cycle also served as objects of aspiration, markers of status, either achieved or desired. The commodification of elegance thereby helps to sustain an

economy dependent on consumer goods. With a positivist certainty, Balzac associates these developments with a move toward elegance and simplicity, noting that, in England, “the material of life is looked upon as a great garment that is essentially mutable and subject to the whims of fashion” (50). This “mutable” simplicity, however, still comes with a significant surcharge. As another aphorism cannily observes, “Luxury is less expensive than elegance” (51). Balzac thus distinguishes elegance from luxury. This distinction, however, only reinforces elegance (and its association with the dandy) as complicit with a rhetoric that comes perilously close to the encouragement of conspicuous consumption.

Balzac also seems to characterize elegance with a certain degree of circumspection, however, as he associates it with comfort. Unlike the busy man, the elegant man holds luxury in no particular esteem (perhaps due in part to its lesser expense?) and doesn’t reserve it for special occasions. He weaves the fabric of his entire life from the materials other men reserve for ornamentation, and thus makes of them things of comfort rather than luxury. He presumably does this not as a display of superiority, but as a matter of course or habit. This makes his elegance legible through a unified display of elegance instead of through individual manifestations of it: “The man silly enough to introduce into the whole of his life a single example of a superior existence is trying to appear as something he is not” (Balzac 51). Such a man would be guilty of a cynical performance, in Goffman’s terms. The sincerely elegant man would know better. Balzac here demonstrates some of his treatise’s internal inconsistencies regarding the relative social position of the elegant man, who, understanding himself already as superior, has no need of demonstrating it. Despite Balzac’s implications that elegance serves to better society holistically, stratification will continue to characterize life under the rule of the elegant.

These divisions reveal themselves clearly in another of Balzac's aphorisms: "To receive a person into your home is to assume that he is worthy of dwelling in your sphere" (53). To pen such an axiom assumes the existence of those *unworthy* of a place in that sphere. This assumption goes unquestioned in Balzac's treatise. How does one recognize the "worth" to which Balzac refers? He asks, "Are there not, for decent well-bred people, Masonic signs by which they are to recognize each other?" (53). For Balzac, what are such signs other than the performance of elegance? Thus, the proving of one's worth is contingent on the success of one's performance. If a man can effectively perform within the accepted standards of elegance, standards enumerated in Balzac's treatise, then his performance demonstrates his worth. Those who fail such a test of performance, either through ignorance or indolence, prove themselves unworthy. They are like men who speak a complex language without knowing that every word has two meanings. While such men undoubtedly make themselves intelligible to one degree or another, their speech will never be granted authority. Without a lexicon of some sort to act as Rosetta stone, the rarefied tongue of the august body to which they hope to gain admittance defies all outside efforts at either deciphering or imitation. Its grammar, mutable and shifting, exists only in performance, as Balzac notes: "The relative distance separating our men of leisure from busy men is represented by etiquette" (53).

As Gwendolyn Foster has argued, nineteenth century etiquette and conduct texts emblemized an ideology "preoccupied with transforming the performing self, and the grotesque desires of the body, into an aestheticized version of the 'natural' self, a gilded body at times indistinguishable from a decorated home" (1). As a disciplinary force, etiquette sought to unify external behavior with an internal sense of propriety, creating a body that would adhere to consistent standards imposed by an outside source. Though Balzac's masculine "elegance" never

found itself codified with the same rigidity exemplified in many conduct manuals of the period aimed at women, those who wished to be considered its adherents knew there were standards they were meant to uphold. In conduct manuals, “the body of the reader receives discipline from the author, who continually regulates the desired performance in a manner that obsequiously urges reader identification through textual strategies designed to submit her to a system in which she is consistently urged to deny the ‘natural’ self” (Foster 2). Similarly, Balzac’s text, as well as the physical examples provided by the men he alludes to within it, served as a regulatory device by which those who aspired to elegance might discipline themselves.

Thus, those who fail to display the proper etiquette not only fail to successfully perform elegance; they essentially reside almost completely outside the system in which the elegant man functions. Balzac implies as much: “It is as tactless for an elegant man to make fun of the industrial class as it is to torment honeybees, as it is to disturb an artist working: it is in bad taste” (54). He dehumanizes the working class by likening them to honeybees, making them quite proverbially “busy.” While he also brings artists into this comparison, he has already distinguished the busy man from the artist. Balzac’s hierarchy of value clearly shines through in this passage. He excuses the elitism of his proposed elegance, by virtue of its practitioners’ superiority to their perceived inferiors. He writes, “Superiority no longer exists in elegant living: there one treats power with power” (54). Elegance makes equals of all its adherents, so it follows that elegance neither bows its head nor looks down its nose. Indeed, it only invites equals into its inner sanctum, so it never has any need to do so. However, if Balzac aims to make the entire world as elegant as the innermost boudoir, then those poor benighted souls not invited into that sanctum simply find themselves utterly beneath notice, of no importance whatsoever. Balzac’s elegance thus effaces what it cannot accommodate.

To summarize, then, Balzac's "elegantology" provided the potential ground or foundation on which both d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire would paint their later dandified portraits.<sup>48</sup> This marked a shift from the first phase of dandyism, which had centered on the Brummellian cult of personality. Balzac's *Treatise on Elegant Living* presented an argument for an entire way of life, however, crystallizing a philosophy around a conceptual and performative framework that, to that point, represented to most onlookers little more than a privileged outlook expressed through fashion. In his treatise, Balzac limns a figure reliant not, as some might think, solely on physical presentation, but on the power of the mind. His faculties of cognition and perception explicitly enable his aesthetic apprehension, and as a result, his external performance merely reflects his ongoing efforts at the perfection of an internal state. As I shall show in Chapter Three, d'Aurevilly would further examine this relationship between internal and external, between mental and material. Through the cultivation of his own inner aesthetic sense, the figure Balzac constructs reorders the material conditions of his external world to match that sense. Balzac's connection of the elegantologist with the goods surrounding him proves particularly prescient in relation to the case studies I undertake in Part II, as contemporary dandies (or their ilk) find themselves mired in consumer culture. This reordering, based in large part on a growing relationship to commodities, consequently serves as an example for others to follow. This process- (rather than product-) based philosophy obviously has a kind of idealistic aspiration, but this aspiration is confused and ambivalent, a quality that would continue to exhibit itself in the writings of both d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire. In his quest for something approximating the

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<sup>48</sup> It seems appropriate that both ground and foundation can be inflected in multiple ways, implying the continuum of aesthetics and utility represented variously by architecture, painting, and Max Beerbohm's favorite, cosmetics.

utopic, Balzac simultaneously looks backward and forward. He casts his eyes backward, positing a lost Classical ideal to which he hopes elegant living might enable a return. The exemplar of such a life thus takes on a messianic quality, the futurity of He-who-is-to-come, as only through his example can such a return to an Edenic state occur. This example is enabled, however, through enhanced and increased access to the new purchasing power offered by a shifting economy, resulting in a paradise increasingly furnished by the products of a rapacious consumer culture.

## CHAPTER III. D'AUREVILLY

Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly's 1844 Brummell biographical sketch-cum-treatise, *Dandyism*, takes as its jumping off point a brief meditation on that most decried of sentiments, vanity. As he notes, "Sentiments have their destiny," and it appears foreordained by the Fates that vanity persist as one of the occupants of the lowest castes of human feeling (23). D'Aurevilly, however, unwilling to consign it to such a humble station, argues for a reassessment of vanity's role. He thus implies that the dandy, typically associated with a sartorial care and flair denoting pride in his own appearance (a pride some might term "vanity") similarly deserves not outright dismissal, but a second, more appreciative look. For, d'Aurevilly argues, we should not consider vanity merely a baseless pride, a worthless ornament on the costume of character; rather, we might recognize that it possesses, in and of itself, a clear use value. Indeed, he posits this utility as the very criterion by which we might order the sentiments:

What gives value to the sentiments is their social importance: granting this, can anything in the hierarchy of the sentiments be of greater use to society than the anxious research of other's approval, this quenchless thirst for the applause of the gallery, which is called love of glory in great things, and in small ones vanity?  
(23)

Seen through d'Aurevilly's lens, then, vanity reveals itself to have an important social function: it serves to order the world through the act of comparison. Vanity necessitates a kind of thorough surveying in order to assert its own authority (and to assure itself of the correctness of such an assertion). For instance, a gentleman cannot truly pride himself on the stylishness of his mode of dress until and unless he has fully adjudicated the dress of those around him. Only then may he



pronounce himself satisfied (and best-dressed).<sup>49</sup> Vanity actively creates the hierarchy over which it reigns. It thus functions much in the manner that one of d'Aurevilly's English translators, Douglas Ainslie, ascribes to dandyism itself: "[It] may be taken as the art of selection, practised by a lover of the visible world" (19). For d'Aurevilly, vanity seems to facilitate this process of specular selection, thus giving vanity an implicit political dimension it might not otherwise seem to possess.<sup>50</sup> From a (presumably) representative sampling, vanity selects the most suitable (and the most aesthetically pleasing) as its own, combining the singularity of the autocratic with a more wide-ranging appeal to the democratic. Despite this, however, I do not intend to claim for vanity anything approximating an egalitarian nature. While it necessarily takes in a wide range of stimuli in order to establish its dominion, vanity's selection also necessitates the exclusion of that deemed unsuitable (either aesthetically or otherwise). Vanity thus still asserts dominion, remains patrician rather than plebeian, prince, not pauper.

To call vanity prince, however, runs the risk of confusing it with pride, as d'Aurevilly carefully distinguishes between the two on, among other things, a gendered basis. If pride is a

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<sup>49</sup> And such pronouncements, however indirect, are generally, to a greater or lesser degree (though usually greater), made publicly.

<sup>50</sup> As even the most cursory internet search amply demonstrates, the term "selection" shows up with a great deal of frequency in discussions relating to politics, whether in reference to candidate selection by political parties, the so-called "negative selection" of incompetent subordinates by those at the top of a hierarchy, or even the process through which sites, persons or organizations receive "official" recognition or sanction. In many ways, politics and selection are arguably one and the same.

solitary king, his crown over his eyes, then vanity is “a busy, clear-sighted queen, with a court, and her diadem is placed where it becomes her best” (24).<sup>51</sup> D’Aurevilly’s distinction here, in addition to asserting intentionality over ignorance, also explicitly genders vanity. By allying vanity with the feminine monarch, he suggests the possibility that the dandy, vanity’s male exemplar, somehow shares kinship or fellow feeling with the queen he serves, thus purposefully setting himself apart from the hegemonic masculinity represented by the figure of the king. The dandy, notable for his vanity, thus stands alongside the queen of d’Aurevilly’s example, a kind of *chevalier*, in opposition to his prideful king.

For d’Aurevilly, the dandy represents an alterity closely linked to that of woman to man, of feminine to masculine, of homosexual to heterosexual, of English to French. The interrogation of such binary divisions typifies deconstructive methods. As Eve Sedgwick puts it:

[C]ategories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions... actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each

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<sup>51</sup> While it might be tempting, given vanity’s negative associations (often explicitly gendered as feminine), to take him to task for (a historically contextualized) sexism, d’Aurevilly explicitly refers to pride as “idle” and “blind,” so his association of vanity with the feminine shouldn’t be seen merely as a case of negative gender-based stereotyping. Vanity emerges the clear victor in this contest. While we ought not to impugn him with easy charges of misogyny, however, this concession to the feminine does not, of course, position him as any kind of proto-feminist, either.

dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (9-10)

In the above constructions, then, woman is subordinate to man, feminine to masculine, homosexual to heterosexual, and English to French.<sup>52</sup> Half of each set of terms is linked to the others by general relationships of connotation; in comparison to man, woman<sup>53</sup> is understood (or tacitly agreed) to be subordinate, a quality then yoked to woman's so-called "femininity." Likewise, heterosexuality has traditionally been hegemonically validated over homosexuality.<sup>54</sup> In comparing themselves to the English, the French have sometimes replicated these power structures by rhetorically feminizing the English (and, inevitably, vice versa). When understood through the lens of deconstruction, however, the category of "man" cannot be understood other than through its relationship to the category "woman" (and, again, vice versa), meaning that neither term enjoys primacy over the other. This understanding does not enforce political or social equality, of course, but it does serve to denaturalize the devaluation of one term in favor of the other.

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<sup>52</sup>Though such national rivalries do not typically receive as much attention in this regard as sex or gender, d'Aurevilly's national origin generally privileges the French over the English. The remainder of his text, however, goes a long way toward unsettling that easy understanding.

<sup>53</sup> Post-feminism (he writes facetiously), it is perhaps a truism that such essential categories are incredibly fraught. Nevertheless, it bears repeating.

<sup>54</sup> While male homosexuals have traditionally been associated with femininity, female homosexuality is often stereotyped in terms of its "masculine" qualities (i.e., "butchness"). This does not, however, mean that lesbians have necessarily enjoyed a less subordinate cultural position than gay men.

Of the four sets of terms I include here, the naturalized structure of three would generally be considered more widely held than the other. The power structures expressed in terms of the English/French binarism, obviously more localized in character, operate in ways that the others do not. Claims that one nation or the other exhibits feminine characteristics are essentially claims for its subordination. While the same might be said of such claims as applied to homosexuals by heterosexuals, the reverse argument is only very occasionally marshaled. For the French and English, however, such arguments are potentially interchangeable. When France claims England to be weak or feminine in character, when d'Aurevilly, after identifying the dandy explicitly with the English national character, describes the dandy as "a woman on certain sides," he feminizes the English by association; whether or not the subordination of the English to the French is his intent, his rhetorical maneuvering leads to this cul-de-sac. The same is true when English writers speak of French "corruption."<sup>55</sup> Regardless of the aim, the result subordinates one nation to the other, makes of that nation the literal "other," through the mechanisms of sex and gender.

Marked by discourses of geography and national character that feminize and subordinate him to the hegemony, then, the dandy plays the role of the other in d'Aurevilly's drama. In distinguishing the particularly English vanity of dandyism from its more "universal" cousin, fatuity,<sup>56</sup> he seeks recourse to a linguistics that smacks of nationalism: "Since everything that is

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<sup>55</sup> Surprisingly enough, d'Aurevilly himself takes this more typically English approach. As with so many things about dandyism, his representation of the English and the French relative to one another exhibits more than a trace of ambivalence.

<sup>56</sup> He describes this as "the vanity of those who please [women] and who think themselves irresistible," a characteristic he defines as "common to all nationalities where women mean

universal, human, has its name in the language of Voltaire, one is forced to find a name for what is not; and that is why the word Dandyism is not French—it will remain foreign, like the thing it represents” (25). Dandyism, in some way essentially “other” to the French national character of d’Aurevilly’s time, finds its expression as something uniquely English in nature. Consequently, the French language, unable to (re)create dandyism linguistically, simply takes it on as the cognate “*dandysme*.”<sup>57</sup> According to d’Aurevilly, this cognation results not in assimilation by the Frenchmen who fancy themselves dandies after the English model, but in sad imitation, “a false air of Dandyism” (26). In this, he suggests dandyism as more than mere costume. Fashion breeds followers, and costume is copied, but the inner workings and ideals of the dandy remain inimitable, *sui generis*. Like Balzac’s elegant living, dandyism depends on one really “feeling” it.

D’Aurevilly locates dandyism even more specifically, however, and in doing so reveals another of its principal characteristics (though one which he himself only passingly delineates), its metropolitanism. In much the same way that Balzac explicitly identifies elegant life as essentially Parisian, d’Aurevilly posits London as the locus and source of the dandy’s notoriety: “His fame was born there; it was autochthonous to those drawing-rooms, where riches, leisure and supreme civilization have produced those charming affectations which take the place of nature” (51). London, the teeming nexus for English social and political life, acted as the

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anything” (25). He thus distinguishes it from dandyism, which he argues as unique to the English.

<sup>57</sup> It is perhaps no accident that “cognation” also refers to relationships of descent through the female as opposed to “agnation,” which denotes relationships of descent through the male. The feminized dandy translates himself in similar fashion.

historical crucible in which the dandy fired his fame. In the crowds promenading in Hyde Park or showing themselves off at the Haymarket or Theatre Royal, his vanity found sufficient material against which to measure itself. D'Aurevilly thus puts dandyism forward as an explicitly and exclusively metropolitan phenomenon, one intimately connected with the social workings of the city. He writes, "The pearl of Dandyism living in shoddy Manchester is a thought almost as monstrous as that of Rivarol inhabiting Hamburg" (51).<sup>58</sup> As a creature defined by social interaction, the dandy necessarily thrives in society's heart; he subsists on reaction, so he makes his home where the whispers of gossip and intrigue carry furthest.

As a result, this particular breed of dandyism, easily identified, if difficult to replicate, shows itself as a highly localized cultural phenomenon. What better than the avatar of the specifically local or national to haunt us in the age of global markets? How fitting that the ghostly traces of a burgeoning empire's aristocratic impulses serve, hundreds of years later, to potentially threaten any easy exportation of a One World Masculinity? "[T]he country of Richelieu will never produce a Brummell," d'Aurevilly states, invoking the language of industry. While this little witticism may have some truth to it, even France could not shrug off the dandy's presence (26). Even at this relatively early stage in the history of its theorization, then, dandyism navigates by a ghost light beacon, the spectral will-o'-the-wisp of that which has already disappeared.

In the case of French articulations of dandyism, this specter ironically coalesces most clearly in that favorite of commentators on dandyisms (and Regency romance novelists), the

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<sup>58</sup> Antoine de Rivarol, a notable French writer, supported the monarchy during the Revolution. Consequently, he left France in 1792, Hamburg the final stop in his self-imposed exile.

remarkably mundane form of George Bryan Brummell, more popularly known as “Beau.”<sup>59</sup> Brummell came to his own position through his father’s service to the aristocracy. The senior Brummell had served as private secretary to Lord North, and as a result of his connections was eventually made high-sheriff of Berkshire. From his childhood, then, Brummell understood the importance of cultivating advantageous relationships in order to promote one’s own self-interest. This would serve him well during his time at Eton and Oxford, and was even more beneficial when he undertook military service with the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars under the Prince of Wales. During his soldiering days, Brummell attracted the attention of the monarch-to-be, a feat d’Aurevilly attributes to the power of the prince’s vanity and to the recognition of a kindred soul in the young man: “. . .[S]crofulous in soul and body, but retaining the grace which is the last virtue of the courtier, the future George IV recognized in Brummell a portion of himself, that part which remained wholesome and luminous” (45-6). For the prince, then, Brummell represented a kind of

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<sup>59</sup> As Quentin Crisp, another important figure in the history of dandyism, relates in his introduction to the PAJ edition of d’Aurevilly’s text:

We like to think that, though the Regency Bucks may have been wicked, at least they were handsome and gifted. Mr. Brummell was neither. He had short legs, thin blond hair, and small pale eyes. Furthermore, he had almost no talent though one of his poems, “The Butterfly’s Funeral,” sold three thousand copies—a success of which many modern poets might be glad. His friend, Lord Byron, admired him but, if we compare their talents, then Mr. Brummell was the merest dilettante. (9)

At the very least, this makes me feel slightly better about any of my own aspirations to dandyism.

utopic, idealized version of himself, a body untouched and untainted by the physical ailments of which he complained. Haunted in Brummell by the apparition of his own lost vitality, the prince's relationship with the budding dandy thus takes on a tinge of the supernatural, the ghostly, though in this case the prince, initially at least, seems to have looked on this spirit with a nostalgic longing and fondness rather than with mistrust or fear. Bestowing his favor on Brummell, the prince helped to create a climate in which the dandy's qualities could best flourish. The connection between the two men thus suggests one of the ways in which dandyism transmits itself and its ideals: through homosocial liaisons.

While homosociality has sometimes "simply" referred to relationships between persons of the same sex, I specifically use it here in the sense argued by Eve Sedgwick, who writes in *Between Men* of the "oxymoron" of "homosocial desire":

[I]t is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. (1-2)

While I do not intend to argue the legibility (or even the presence) of sexual desire between Brummell and the prince, Sedgwick's formulation of homosociality allows for its strategic deployment as a means of theorizing and problematizing relationships between men, particularly in the social contexts of a consumer culture. "Desire," in this context, refers then to the force that



binds male relationships, even if such a desire expresses itself in “negative” terms. The sexual quality of such desire remains an open question in Sedgwick’s readings of homosociality. Taking a cue from Foucault, Sedgwick troubles the notion of a dehistoricized sexuality, asking us to consider precisely what “sexuality” might mean at any given moment.<sup>60</sup>

Based on the example of Brummell, d’Aurevilly casts the dandy’s homosociality (if not homosexuality) as one of his greatest strengths, as it frees him from the potentially constricting chains of heterosexual love. As his preferred social bond, the dandy’s homosociality, ostensibly based in vanity rather than desire, means that he owes no allegiance of the sort demanded by a lover. (Here we can clearly see the so-called discontinuity between homosociality and homosexuality as argued by Sedgwick.) Moreover, by refusing to engage in heteronormative rituals of courtship and intrigue, the dandy, by d’Aurevilly’s estimate, actually *increases* his power over and attraction to women. This blanket assessment, of course, rests on the assumption that both the men and women surrounding the dandy all behave in a homogeneous manner circumscribed by hegemonic notions of sexuality.<sup>61</sup> As such, it fails to account for the potential responses to Brummell of women (and of men) who may have found little romantic appeal in him or in his particular brand of dandyism. While d’Aurevilly’s argument regarding the dandy’s power over women buckles somewhat under closer scrutiny, I believe he intends largely to

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<sup>60</sup> Though I am well aware of Foucault’s efforts to historicize the use of words like “homosexual” or “heterosexual,” I use them somewhat freely (though not unthinkingly) in this study.

<sup>61</sup> Moreover, d’Aurevilly again makes dandyism as much a function of location as of history. He writes, “If by chance such a man were to exist in Italy, what women really in love would think of him?” (48).

demonstrate that Brummell exemplified dandyism because he remained unaffected by or disinterested in women, as indeed he apparently remained unaffected by or disinterested in much of anything beyond himself.

Once again, then, d'Aurevilly's analysis of dandyism reveals itself as decidedly ambivalent and conflicted. If, as I have suggested earlier, dandyism aligns itself with an alterity opposed to strictly conventional notions of masculinity, it does not therefore follow that it shares easy kinship with the feminine behaviors d'Aurevilly associates with the women of Brummell's time. While he indirectly likens the alterity of dandyism to that of women, he rather inconsistently applies this likeness in painting his portrait of the dandy. Indeed, he clearly demonstrates their difference, establishing a hierarchical relationship by distinguishing between the expressions of vanity in the two sexes. In discussing the courtesan Harriette Wilson's<sup>62</sup> antipathy toward Brummell, he writes: "The qualities that made the power of the Dandy would have made the fortune of the courtesan" (49). In addition to citing envy as the motivating factor for Wilson's dislike of Brummell, he characterizes women as incapable of the same feats made so easy for the dandy by virtue of his unique character. D'Aurevilly clearly (and stereotypically) makes distinctions between women and dandies on the basis of emotionalism:

There is in Dandyism, something cold, sober and mocking, and although restrained, yet capable of instant motion, which must terribly shock those dramatic tear-machines, for whom emotions are even more than tenderness. (71)

While he goes on to grant that these "tear-machines" may possess as much "genius" as any man, he also bequeaths to them a jealousy (and an apparent accompanying lack of emotional control) that renders them dangerously vulnerable in the face of the dandy's indifference. D'Aurevilly's

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<sup>62</sup> Wilson was paramour to the Prince of Wales. Well, one of them, at least.

dandy, then, may present a challenge to entrenched views of masculine self-presentation, but he hardly challenges traditionally hierarchical structures of gender. For the dandy, women, while beautiful, pose no threat to the exertion of his sovereignty over his fellows. The primary relationships in the lives of dandies, then, exist between men.

The relationship between Brummell and the prince also foregrounds the relative humility of the beau's heritage. D'Aurevilly's account of their friendship takes special note of Brummell's middle-class background:

[I]t was Brummell, the son of the simple Esquire, of the private secretary, with a merchant for a grandfather, who was chosen, in preference to all the great names of England, to fill the post of best-man to the heir-apparent on his marriage with Caroline of Brunswick. (46)

This emphasis on the dandy as the offspring of the middle class would receive further elucidation from Baudelaire. As Brummell learned from his father's example and illustrated for those who followed him, while a dandy lived by his wit(s), he could not rely solely on himself for continued wellbeing. Indeed, in the absence of his own wealth and status, the dandy's place in society depended on the fellowship and financial generosity of well-placed men.<sup>63</sup> Without the benefit of such benefactors, the dandy's currency of a quick tongue and a handsome wardrobe would amount only to a paltry sum. By nature, then, dandyism, both aspirational and relational, must resort to social means to achieve its individualistic ends.

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<sup>63</sup> The role of women in cultivation of the dandy's social standing should not, however, be underestimated. In Brummell's case, for instance, the Duchess of York remained a valuable friend to him long after his self-imposed exile to France.

In background, then, very little distinguished Brummell from so many other young men of his era. He came from the upwardly mobile middle class, was, by all accounts, of strictly average physical attractiveness (if that), and possessed no exceptional talent for art, business, or politics. D'Aurevilly presents Brummell's very mundanity as the chief reason for his great success as the dandy *par excellence*. While Richelieu, to whom he compares Brummell, possessed an abundance of qualities that might have suited (and, indeed, *did* suit) him for the endeavors that brought him fame, Brummell had only his dandyism on which to hang his hat: "He was fit for nothing more and for nothing less than to be the greatest dandy of his own or of any time" (29). To d'Aurevilly, Brummell combines the perfect amounts of both innate qualities and serendipitous fortune. It was this conjunction (for good and ill) that made him what he was and that brought him fame. Poet enough to avoid ridicule but not enough to invite posterity, rich in connections but lacking in birth, with the intelligence to amass a handsome sum and the foolishness to gamble it away, Brummell possessed no quality in great quantity other than his own vanity. He demonstrated no notable passions other than this self-interest. Unlike Richelieu, for instance, he appreciated women without feeling compelled to make conquests of them.<sup>64</sup> As a result, he does not find his way into the historical company of other dandies cited by d'Aurevilly, such as Sheridan or Byron. Instead, he achieves something altogether more singular:

...Brummell did not possess that something which with some was passion or genius, with others high birth, or great wealth. He profited by this want; for reduced to that force alone, which distinguished him, he rose to the rank of an idea, he was Dandyism itself. (29-30)

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<sup>64</sup> D'Aurevilly vividly describes Richelieu as "too much inclined to imitate those Tartar conquerors who made for themselves a bed of women interlaced" (47).

This direct identification of Brummell with dandyism, however, still leaves unanswered the question of its precise constitution, a problem d'Aurevilly recognizes and attempts to correct.

Quick to note, like Baudelaire after him, that dandyism consists of more than sartorial elegance, in a footnote he castigates previous thinkers on the subject for their continued assertions in this regard. Rebutting Carlyle's statement to this effect, he argues that dandyism encompasses both content and form: "It is not a suit of clothes walking about by itself! On the contrary, it is the particular way of wearing these clothes which constitutes Dandyism" (31). He does not go so far as to say that dress-as-content doesn't contribute to the man's making. He realizes this would go too far. Content, however, while always important, never completely trumps form. Interpenetrating influences, their conjunction enables what might otherwise be impossible in the case(s) of either's complete ascendance. Thus, the particularities of dress occupy less importance in defining a dandy than how said dandy expresses those particularities, or how those particularities express the essence of dandyism. He thus elevates dandyism from merely a keen sense of fashion to a philosophy or worldview. In attempting to define dandyism for a modern, more demonstrably casual context, this position becomes invaluable, for, as d'Aurevilly notes, "One may be a dandy in creased clothes" (31). Once dandyism dispenses with restrictive notions of style and fashion as its sole criterion for expression, it can limn itself with the much broader array of hues now at its disposal.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> D'Aurevilly relates an anecdote regarding a brief fashion among dandies for ripped and torn clothing. He claims this was meant to suggest the appearance, or at the least the general feeling, of a cloud: "They wanted to walk like Gods in their clouds!" (32). From here, it seems a rather short walk to the contemporary fashion for pre-distressed clothing, with its allusion to dress as performative marker and carrier of both personal and cultural memory. In our three hundred

The dandy paints on these fresh and novel tints with a purpose that reveals what d'Aurevilly takes to be dandyism's defining (or at least most prominent) aim or effect, "always to produce the unexpected, that which could not logically be anticipated by those accustomed to the yoke of rules" (33). Here, then, we witness the somewhat paradoxical operation of vanity as it temporarily inverts itself, questing systematically outward in order to determine, via a studied comparison, what might constitute the unexpected, before ultimately reasserting itself in satisfaction at achieving the desired reaction. Thus a systemic approach serves as the means to call those very systems into question through the performance of their subversion. When retroengineered in this fashion, vanity as systematic process holds little mystery, but viewed only as product or effect, as the unexpected, this flouting of convention potentially strikes the viewer as willfulness or caprice. D'Aurevilly labels this love for producing the unexpected (or even the unwanted) as "eccentricity" (33). Just as he finds a certain kind of vanity prevalent among the English, so he identifies this eccentricity as a particularly Anglo-Saxon characteristic. He takes care to reveal it as more than sheer willfulness, though. Eccentricity may rule the English, but the eccentricity of the dandy isn't simply a contrarian streak writ large. Instead, the dandy is arguably a subspecies of Huizinga's *Homo ludens*.

Huizinga argues for play as a cultural phenomenon worthy of analysis, stating that "even in its simplest forms on the animal level, play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex" (117). To Huizinga, play has meaning beyond sheer instinct or simple exercise. It has no need to serve a biological function; play is its own end. Play, evident in any

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dollar, pre-distressed Diesel jeans, we are, if not quite heavenly, still deities of a sort: not Gods, but Rock Gods. Once subcultural fashion becomes mass-produced, however, can it still be the province of dandyism?

number of species, does not exist solely (or even primarily) as a rational phenomenon, nor does it confine itself to a particular era or location. Play, unbound by species, location, or time, is a kind of abstraction that transcends the physical and actually assists in defining for Huizinga what constitutes human consciousness: “Animals play, so they must be more than merely mechanical things. We play and know that we play, so we must be more than merely rational beings, for play is irrational” (119). Huizinga also asserts play as pre-cultural, in the sense that it exists prior to culture and thus is always present in culture, usually as “a well-defined quality of action which is different from ‘ordinary’ life” (119). He has no interest in attempting to quantify play; rather, he concerns himself with a qualitative analysis, viewing it as a social construction “based on the manipulation of certain images, on a certain ‘imagination’ of reality” (119). From this basis, Huizinga establishes play as a kind of exploration of the space between matter and mind.<sup>66</sup> Play (re)imagines reality, whether through language, myth, or ritual. In the case of the dandy, play, the imaginative transformation of the world, occupies nearly all of his efforts and energies. The type of play in which the dandy engages, however, does not always clearly mark itself as such.

The dandy’s play exhibits itself as wit, as fashion, as philosophy, but with an eye toward transformation it explicitly and purposefully engages with culture, with society, as d’Aureville makes clear:

Dandyism...while still respecting the conventionalities, plays with them. While admitting their power, it suffers from and revenges itself upon them, and pleads them as an excuse against themselves; dominates and is dominated by them in

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<sup>66</sup> Here, then, we return to Balzac’s epigraph from Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “*Mens agitat molem.*” The dandy animates the material world through the agility of his mind, so play serves as his fundamental medium.

turn. To play this twofold and changing game, requires complete control of all the suppleness which goes to the making of elegance, in the same way as by their union all the shades of the prism go to the making of the opal. (33)

Again, this asserts the dandy's intentionality; every breach with mainstream fashion and tradition amounts to a conscious declaration of purpose, albeit a purpose which doesn't take itself overly seriously. The dandy's behaviors (when understood as play) are permitted as nonthreatening. To a bored and jaded culture, play, given the tacit understanding of it as pretense, appears as simply another mode of self-amusement, another pointless if pleasurable gratification of vanity. The dandy understands, though, that play can have serious consequences. Aware of the normative power of hegemony, he exerts his agency in order to play both with and against this most fearsome of opponents. D'Aurevilly, in referring to the game as "twofold," demonstrates that the blade of convention can cut both ways, and that the dandy plays a dangerous game. He also implicitly invokes the bifurcated, conflicted nature of dandyism (and, indeed, of modernity itself).

However unconventional, though, the dandy's play never descends into caricature. He always knows precisely where to draw the line. As d'Aurevilly puts it, "Every Dandy *dares*, but he dares with tact, and stops in time at the famous point of intersection of Pascal, between originality and eccentricity" (51). The dandy, always constrained by his own vanity, retains a certain reserve; he would not wish play, no matter its capacity to astonish, to make him appear ridiculous. The progressive impulse to challenge systems wars with the vanity's conservative dictates. While as a young man Brummell's sartorial choices tended towards the more flamboyant, this was perhaps more a function of youth than of dandyism. As Brummell's fame grew, he left behind his ostentatious flouts of fashion's conventions in favor of a more sober,



though no less meticulous, style of dress. As one aphorism of the period had it, “To be well dressed, you must not be noticed” (qtd. in d’Aurevilly 52). The older Brummell dressed impeccably, but in darker colors and simpler cuts than he had years earlier, with less overt effort expended on his toilet. D’Aurevilly identifies this period as the pinnacle of Brummell’s art, “where it meets nature” (53). The dandy’s skill makes his craft nearly invisible; he strives, not for artificiality, but for the perfect, seamless blend of artifice and nature. In other words, dandyism stands at the juncture of lively art and artful life. This accounts for the seeming trend in a dandy’s dress, then, to oscillate between the desire to astonish and the need to go unnoticed. Such inconsistencies or contradictions, typical of d’Aurevilly’s definitions of dandyism, suggest the irreconcilable conflict at the heart of modernity.

While the dandy’s sense of play derives from his desire to astonish, it does not however necessitate any sense of good feeling; his play has high stakes and serious consequences. The dandy plays in order to catalyze a new world, one in which the aesthetic unites the material and the ideal. To this end, his “playful” attacks on convention serve not only to astonish, but potentially to terrify, and in this, his power as revenant fully manifests itself. D’Aurevilly alludes to this in his analysis of Brummell: “Like all Dandies he preferred astonishing to pleasing, a very human preference, but on that leads a long way; for terror is the supreme form of astonishment, and where is one to stop on such a decline?” (56). Brummell, however, did stop, and, according to d’Aurevilly, he never offered terror without some form of amelioration. Had he inspired only terror in his audience, he undoubtedly would not have received the social sanction he enjoyed for so many years. This power, however, not to astonish, but to terrify, represents the threat the dandy poses to contemporary masculinity. He may be dismissed as an outmoded, even laughable

relic of bygone fashions, but his unblinking, laconic presence potentially resists the dictates of hegemony.

While the dandy seeks to astonish (or even terrify), he also attempts to do so without making it appear as if this were his aim. To reveal his intentionality is to reveal his desire, and for the dandy the revelation of desire is tantamount to an admission of weakness: “His indolence forbade his being lively, for to be lively is to be excited; to be excited is to care about something, and to care about anything is to shew oneself inferior” (D’Aurevilly 56). Dandyism prides itself on its individuality, on its dependence, and desire suggests a need for the other; therefore, desire has no place in the dandy’s world. He adopts and maintains a pose of indifference, and this indifference acts as both shield and weapon; it shields him from the sting of ridicule and likewise stings those unworthies who appeal to the rarefied ranks of dandies for admission to their exclusive club (usually with an actual membership of one). He purports to care nothing for his effect on society, when in actuality, the dandy’s sole purpose is not a transformation of the self, but a transformation of society, an effect achieved through his own unique powers.

Despite d’Aurevilly’s explication of Brummell’s power, however, he remains cognizant of the irretrievable nature of the beau’s performance of dandyism. While traces of it may linger in the repertoire via lines of possible influence (à la Joseph Roach’s performance genealogies), as in the particular manner of wearing a neckcloth, Brummell’s singular performance of dandyism remains forever inaccessible to the archive. D’Aurevilly’s insights suggest his awareness of the distinction between archive and repertoire as distinct modes of storing and transmitting knowledge. He writes, “Herculaneum is found again beneath the cinders; but a few years fallen upon the manners of a society bury them deeper than any lava. Memoirs, the history of these manners, are themselves merely approximations” (35). Memoir, the tool of the archivist,

cannot adequately hope to contain the full nuance and complexity of the manners of a time or a people, bound as it is by the strictures of language. To complete this depiction also necessitates an examination of the repertoire. Regrettably, our portrait of Brummell must always remain incomplete, then, given an inability to access his repertoirc performance of dandyism. In this way, then, the fullness of individual performance gradually diminishes, first to caricature or anecdote, then to historical footnote, ending perhaps as simply dehistoricized cipher of a name with only the barest hint of accompanying context or, alternately, as habit or tic, a behavior with no history, a style lacking origin.

This gradual disappearance, however, this slow slide into a Lethean oblivion, does not necessitate a concomitant loss of power or influence. On the contrary, the ghost, the aftershock, potentially has more impact than its enflashed counterpart. Indeed, we might measure the dandy's power by the length of time it takes for the effects of his presence to fully dissipate. This forms the basis of an aphorism quoted by d'Aurevilly: "In society, stop until you have made your impression, then go" (49). When it can do the job just as well, absence obviates continued presence. D'Aurevilly thus cannily understands not only the mechanism of Brummell's incredible vanishing act, but also the power it grants him and, by extension, dandyism:

Since the admiration he excited is not justified by facts, which have perished entirely, because they were by nature ephemeral, the weight of the greatest name and the homage of the most enticing genius do but serve to render the enigma more obscure. (37)

By "facts," I think we can understand d'Aurevilly to mean the first-hand, observable evidence of the repertoire, as opposed to the secondhand reportage of the archive. For those who come after Brummell (myself included), his very absence paradoxically creates a mystique that mere

presence could never hope to match. For this to occur, however, absence cannot be truly complete; some trace or fragment must remain. This Derridean trace haunts. Glimpsed from the corner of the eye, the incorporeality of the trace ambivalently stokes both terror and desire. We long to touch (whether to stroke or strangle) that which, by its absence, history has forbidden us, and the spectral presence of that which seems to persist in the face of eradication or effacement has the potential to powerfully unnerve.

Though he points to the difficulty with which the historian or biographer attempts to fix living subjects,<sup>67</sup> d'Aurevilly nevertheless takes as his task an illustration of Brummell and the type he represented, the dandy. He acknowledges other attempts to perform similar feats, referring to both Thomas Lister's *Granby* and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*, both novels that feature fictional dandies arguably based in part on Brummell. He also cites Captain Jesse's two-volume biography of Brummell. Despite Brummell's presence (either direct or indirect) in these sources, however, d'Aurevilly avers that the dandy has yet to receive an objective adjudication by an impartial observer. While he doesn't claim this role for himself, he does suggest this lack as partially responsible for Brummell's enigmatic appeal, likening the dandy's fame to a mirror for his vanity: "While he lived, she reflected him in the sparkling purity of her brittle surface, and after his death, like mirrors when there is none to reflect, she has retained nothing" (39). To d'Aurevilly, fame is only one in a series of mirrors left empty by the absence of Brummell's repertoirc performance. In referencing the mirror's "brittle surface," he also establishes the need for dandyism to aspire to a philosophy of dandyism, as the ephemerality of fame cannot establish

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<sup>67</sup> After all, even a fly in amber remains, physically, a fly; a biographer of necessity reduces his subjects to chronology, anecdote, and observation. For preservation through language, the spirit may be all too willing, but the flesh is notoriously weak.

any longevity or lasting impact for an individual dandy, let alone for the collective individualists of dandyism as a “movement.”

Though he never describes dandyism in the terms of political or social activism, d’Aurevilly clearly positions dandyism as the result of social and political conditions rather than merely as the offspring of individual genius. To this end, he attempts to trace the phenomenon’s history. Interestingly, given that he has already cited the dandy as a particularly English type, he cites a French influence on the English national character as the origin of dandyism itself. According to d’Aurevilly, on the restoration of Charles II to the throne, the English returned from their French exile bearing with them a new combination of “Elegance” and “Corruption” (40). In response to their liberation from the Puritanical and austere Roundhead regime, the *Beaux* of the Regency surged ahead with a new emphasis on a more relaxed, libertine code of manners. These men should not, however, be mistaken for dandies, according to d’Aurevilly:

Their elegance was like their name. It was not sufficiently indigenous, nor sufficiently mixed with the originality of the people, among whom Shakespeare was born, nor with that special power which was destined to penetrate it later.

(41)

While the *Beaux* shared with the dandies a love for refinement, he finds them specifically lacking in their obeisance rather than opposition to custom, greedy rather than vain. He identifies Bolingbroke as the only real dandy of the period, and in enumerating his qualities, he also clarifies the qualities of dandyism itself: “He has all the boldness in action, the sumptuous impertinence, the preoccupation as to the effect produced, and his vanity is ever on the alert” (42). Like an archeologist (an occupation traditionally devoted to the archive), d’Aurevilly unearths the dandy’s history, in the process attempting to gently brush away the dust of history

so as to reveal the outlines of his form. These outlines reveal a figure actively positioning himself against the mainstream in a decidedly calculated manner, always conscious of how he might exploit appearances (both his own and others') and representations of those appearances to greatest effect.

Perhaps "active" doesn't accurately describe d'Aurevilly's dandy, however, as in a footnote he contradicts this characterization of the dandy as "[having] all the boldness in action":

Dandyism introduces antique calm among our modern agitations; but the calm of the Ancients arose from the harmony of their faculties and from the completeness of a life freely developed, whereas Dandyism is the attitude of an intelligence familiar with many ideas and too tired of them all to become animated. (42)

Here d'Aurevilly explicitly positions the dandy as an embodied link between past and present, revealing, like Baudelaire after him, a concern with how the dandy relates to the condition of "modernity." This dandy, unlike the forces of technological progress which move faster and faster, always looking forward, futureward, attempts to remain still, impassive, imperturbed, glancing backward over his shoulder with a sphinxlike regard for the past.<sup>68</sup> These two visions of the dandy, as either active or incapable of action, remain somewhat irreconcilable throughout d'Aurevilly's text. Indeed, this mixed and contradictory account of dandyism perhaps

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<sup>68</sup> In this, he shares much with Walter Benjamin's famous "angel of history," his back to the future but helplessly blown toward it by the storm of progress while the calamitous pileup of the past mounts before his eyes. Though he would like nothing more than to mend the wreckage and create of the present a Paradise, the force of the storm blows him ever onward, leaving him with only the melancholic pain of nostalgia for a utopic vision that exists as a possibility only within his own imagination.

demonstrates the notable difficulty with which theorists make of it a singular, unified philosophical stance.

Perhaps, however, the inconsistencies in d'Aurevilly's presentation make more sense when viewed as the acknowledgment that dandyism operates, at least in part, according to the whims of those who exemplify its characteristics. Any expression of rule or law on the part of dandies is contingent not on an arrival at some consensus, but on the force of a stubborn individualism. D'Aurevilly, quite insistent in this regard, states explicitly that "independence makes the Dandy" (51). By arguing that independence "makes" dandies, d'Aurevilly suggests a construction of dandyism in which the *performance* of this independence, the active struggle for authority, brings the dandy into being. As a result, the dandy maintains his existence through performance, through the continued exertion of such independence. The very notion of the dandy's being entails constant struggle, dandyism as a continual striving. In the case of the dandy, being and becoming are one and the same. This embattled representation of identity as perpetually in the process of formation would seem to problematize the trope of the dandy's studied indifference. If constant struggle characterizes the dandy's performance of self, then his surface impassivity is merely superficial, a falsehood masking that struggle. This masquerade should not be read as cynicism, however; rather, through performance the dandy attempts to realize a utopian state in which his individualism, his quest to manifest beauty in the self, functions as the norm.

And this quest really forms the heart of French philosophical dandyism. As Wilde would do later for the critic, d'Aurevilly posits the dandy as artist, "but his art was not specialized nor manifested within a limited time" (54). The dandy uses his own life as canvas, as page, as clay, as stage, uniting life and art in his own person. He creates beauty from the self; but this beauty

isn't merely for its own sake. It serves a social function, thus also uniting the opposed poles of ornament and utility. The dandy designs the self both to astonish and amuse, setting himself apart in so doing. He can thus, within limits, speak truth to power under the guise of his own disinterest. In this, he shares certain characteristics with the traditional court jester. Unlike the jester, however, the dandy attempts not to make himself laughable in the process. As d'Aurevilly puts it, "He drew out of its torpidity a *blasée* and learned society, wearied with the emotions of an old civilization,--and to effect this he did not sacrifice an inch of his personal dignity" (55). And in the event that the dandy met with ridicule, he had his wit to aid in staving off those who would attack him.

D'Aurevilly ascribes much of the dandy's power to his wit. This wit, expressed primarily in terms of irony, acts as a kind of funhouse mirror, in that it results in a kind of cruel reflection of the negative characteristics of those set before the dandy. The dandy's wit, though, also partakes of the indifference that characterizes most everything about him. It does not force itself upon its objects. Of Brummell's remarks, d'Aurevilly writes, "He did not press them forward, but let them fall" (56). So, while Brummell could be cruel, he left to others the responsibility of pressing the advantage through the recounting of his japes. The dandy's audience, rather than the dandy himself, thus expends the effort that results in the extension of the dandy's authority over the targets of his wit. The cruelty of this wit, however, does not simply stem from the dandy's own capriciousness; it can also be attributed to the demands placed on him by the maintenance of his dignity.<sup>69</sup> The appearance of vulgarity (or even real interest) negates the dandy's power, so he avoids it at all costs. Consequently, the dandy lays constraints on how far his wit may extend,

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<sup>69</sup> D'Aurevilly connects this sense of dignity to the influence of Puritanism, which he likens to disease: "They live in the tower of the Plague, and such a dwelling is unhealthy" (56).



fearing to appear undignified. D'Aurevilly explains, "They live impaled upon the idea of dignity, which slightly interferes with the ease of their movements and makes them hold themselves too stiffly, however supple they may be" (56). This concern for dignity only illustrates one influence on the force of the dandy's wit, however; while it acts to restrain him, other factors encourage him to unleash his cruelty on those around him. Dandyism emerges among an aristocracy losing their position in the old order of things; no longer directly in charge of overseeing the production of material wealth, they have increasingly little to do with England's growing mercantile economy. Thus, the dandy's wit springs directly from the social conditions that spawned the dandy. As d'Aurevilly notes, "Dandyism is the product of a bored society, and to be bored does not conduce to being kind" (55). The dandy, with his cruel wit, makes a dangerous opponent in a society with little use for kindness, but cruelty cuts both ways, and a sharp wit necessitates care lest the dandy find that same cruelty leveled against himself, irony's cavalier hoisted with his own petard. The dandy moves through society with care, then, "for wit borders on vulgarity as the sublime verges on the ridiculous, and the least false step is fatal" (56). The dandy stands at a crossroads. One aspirational foot points up the treacherous path leading to his utopian paradise of aestheticism, the possibility of the sublime. The other trail, a well-trod road, promises ease and ultimately insignificance. The true dandy attempts the more difficult route, with irony his only guide. Ironically, however, the achievement of his paradise would render the dandy as insignificant (even extinct) as its alternative, as the struggle for individualism defines him. The threat of extinction, however, remains a toothless one when dandyism as a means of actualization remains so elusive.

While accounts such as d'Aurevilly's attempt to extrapolate a philosophy of dandyism from the example of men such as Brummell, the dandy's individualism ensures that no true codification can result:

If there were such a code, those would be Dandies who obeyed its rules. Anyone could be a Dandy: It would be merely a following of precept....Though there doubtless exist certain principles and traditions of Dandyism, the whole is controlled by Caprice, and Caprice is only permitted to those whom she suits, and with whom manner atones for matter. (51)

The acceptance by an entrenched aristocracy of the dandy's capricious idiosyncrasies as mandate or dogma depends precisely on that very entrenchment, and on the monotony engendered by a prolonged experience of it. Thus primed for novelty, a conservative aristocratic class essentially welcomes the dandy as arbiter of taste, if merely for the opportunity that he provides to alleviate the continued *ennui* of their languorous existence. His interests in the material world as an expression of personal worth (in both financial and moral terms) seem to coincide with theirs, and his aesthetic rather than political bent appears to pose little threat to the established order of things. Now, however, the caprice of the spectralized dandy acts as haunting reminder of narrowed social possibilities. Once the harbinger of utopian ideals (albeit ambivalently elitist ideals), he haunts contemporary masculinity, confirming the death of social mobility and of aesthetic actualization. The dandy, as exemplified in Brummell, represents the revenge of the middle class, a reversal of authority based in the tyranny of aestheticism. As ghost, however, he suggests that any celebration of ultimate victory would be premature. Now, for the men of contemporary consumer culture, dandyism demonstrates precisely what happens to a dream deferred: it dematerializes, but refuses to completely disappear. Caprice is permitted not "to

those whom she suits,” but to those who can afford her. As the middle class loses its purchasing power (or, indeed, disappears altogether), those who can afford caprice grow fewer and fewer, and generally don’t emerge from backgrounds as comparatively humble as Brummell’s.

Though d’Aurevilly explicates caprice primarily as an aid to his theoretical discussion of process, his remarks also double as his narrative account of how dandyism reached its English ascendance in Brummell:

It is thus that Frivolity, on the one hand, acting upon a people rigid and coarsely utilitarian, on the other, Imagination, claiming its rights, in the face of a moral law, too severe to be genuine, produced a kind of translation, a science of manners and attitudes, impossible elsewhere. And of this Brummell was the final expression and can never be equalled. (43)

D’Aurevilly thus presents Brummell as the product or inexorable result of a confluence of social forces. To the question of whether the dandy is born or made, we might imagine him knowingly smiling and offering an ambivalent: “Yes.” If the dandy is born, he can only be said to be born under certain social conditions; if made, it cannot be from whole cloth.

As a result, the genealogy of the dandy attains a special place of importance in d’Aurevilly’s biography of Brummell. He notes the presence of Charles James Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan<sup>70</sup> as frequent visitors to the Brummell home. These men, he argues, provided

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<sup>70</sup> Charles James Fox, a prominent eighteenth-century English politician, distinguished himself in conservative circles for his radical ideas. The dramatist Sheridan shared some kinship of feeling or behavior with the later dandies; one source describes him as “a macaroni and brilliant loungeur in the Carlton House” (qtd. in Shipley 144). The macaroni, a kind of cousin to both the earlier

the budding dandy with a sense, albeit a limited one, of what an individual could make of himself: “They were his good Fairies, but they bestowed on him only half their strength, the most ephemeral of their faculties” (44). According to d’Aurevilly, these unlikely godfathers blessed the young Brummell with, to put it rather colloquially, the gift of gab. They acted as models for the qualities of wit and linguistic grace under fire that would later serve as the dandy’s calling cards. In this sense, though the social conditions necessary to dandyism made an opportunity of Brummell’s birth, proto-dandies such as Sheridan helped shape those attributes later identified as the dandy’s signature.

Brummell would further cultivate these characteristics in the all-male enclaves of Eton and Oxford, where his schoolmates took to calling him Buck Brummel, “buck” being an appellation then applied to the “despots of elegance” not yet known as dandies (45). Brummel’s graces would see further flower during his military career, enabling his advantageous connection with the future George IV, before coming into full bloom in the London clubs and drawing rooms where his name became synonymous with dandyism. Ultimately, however, both his good fortune and his money ran out, and the sharpness of his witticisms alienated his most important

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fop and the later dandy, received the kind of negative assessments critics would level against the dandies, as in this 1770 report from the *Oxford Magazine*:

There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up among us. It is called a Macaroni. It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion. (qtd. in Shipley 143)

In the case of the macaroni, critics of the type cited Italian rather than French influence.

benefactor, the Prince of Wales.<sup>71</sup> Going into self-imposed exile in France, he ended his life as a shadow of his once-elegant self and as a (fore)shadow of the specter the dandy would one day become. Ultimately, d'Aurevilly argues that whatever goes under the name of dandyism after Brummell essentially counterfeits itself. "He did not descend," he writes, "but fell from his position, bearing with a kind of perfection which has not since reappeared, save in a degraded form" (60).

This dour note tinges the end of d'Aurevilly's account of dandyism with more than a hint of apocalyptic melancholy. He identifies a kind of masochistic social impulse, the desire for castigation, as the only possible explanation for Brummell's social success. This success is fated for failure, however, as he asserts "that Dandyism will perish the day the society which produced it is transformed," a metamorphosis he argues as already having occurred (76). This death, however, need not be permanent. He argues that a resurgent tide of Puritanism, formerly the target of the dandy's barbed wit, threatens to swamp any inroads made by dandyism. Like Arthur

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<sup>71</sup> Though the accuracy of some of the remarks attributed to Brummell is disputed, the result is not: he lived out the end of his life in severely reduced circumstances, away from the dandy's *mise-en-scene*, the metropolitan swirl of the city. Eventually Brummell apparently succumbed to what d'Aurevilly terms "madness." The biographer relates a pathetic incident, supposedly not an isolated one, in which Brummell had his rooms decorated "for a reception." This completed, he stood in his best clothes, announcing a glittering parade of guests, none actually present. Eventually, d'Aurevilly reports, "he would realize the madness of his illusion. Quite overcome, he would throw himself into one of the empty chairs, where he was found bathed in tears" (74). The overdetermined Gothicism of Brummell's final years (Exile! Poverty! Madness!) sets the stage for the dandy's return as revenant.

from Avalon, however, the dandy may return in England's need, though his dress may change to suit the time: "There will never be another Brummell; but we may be certain that there will always be Dandies in England, whatever uniform the world may make them wear" (D'Aurevilly 78). The dandy thus makes his final appearance in d'Aurevilly's treatise as reluctant messiah, somewhat indifferently leading culture warriors to the battlefields (or playgrounds) of drawing rooms, theatres, and concert halls, bearing no arms other than the ones up their well-tailored sleeves:

Humanity needs them and their attractions as much as her most imposing heroes, the austerest of her great men. They procure for intelligent beings the pleasure to which they have a right. They form part of the happiness, as other men of the morality of societies. Twofold and multiple natures, of an undecidedly intellectual sex, their Grace is heightened by their Power, their Power by their Grace; they are the hermaphrodites of History, not of Fable, and Alcibiades was their supreme type, among the most beautiful of the nations. (78)

For my purposes, then, d'Aurevilly's dandy effectively takes the baton from Balzac's elegantologist and carries it forward.<sup>72</sup> Based in a conception of vanity as an ordering principle, the dandy reveals himself as an almost exclusively metropolitan figure, characterized by the homosocial relationship emblemized by that urdandy Beau Brummel's friendship with the Prince of Wales. Such homosocial bonds, not to be confused with homosexual desire, meant that the dandy's power operated largely outside the sphere of direct female (or feminine) influence,

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<sup>72</sup> Of course, I should note that no such positivist "hand off" between Balzac and d'Aurevilly truly exists. Rather, an examination of cultural discourses surrounding dandyism benefits through the comparison of the two men's ideas.

thus clearly positing the dandy as a figure of alterity, neither wholly masculine nor feminine. This problematization of a dualistic worldview would prove one of the hallmarks of the Baudelairean conception of the dandy, as I shall show in Chapter 4. For d'Aurevilly, and for Baudelaire after him, the dandy's primary modality is expressed through transformative play, through ludic performances aimed at demonstrating his power by the provocation of astonishment, or even terror, in those who view said performances. The ultimate goal of such play is nothing less than the transformation of the world around him to accord with his aesthetic sensibilities. Thus, even if only inadvertently, d'Aurevilly's philosophy of dandyism echoes Balzac's elegantology, bestowing the dandy with a messianic role characterized as a continual striving, becoming-as-being (or *vice versa*). D'Aurevilly argues for the dandy as an artist of the self, one who fashions his own person and the world around him in such a way as to have a fully transformative effect. In this, d'Aurevilly's ideas display a continuity both with those of Balzac before him and Baudelaire after him.

## CHAPTER IV. BAUDELAIRE

In his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” Charles Baudelaire sketches a critical portrait of a particular artist’s work as a means of setting his mind to an apparently vexing problem: the relationship of art and artists to the larger notion of modernity. For Baudelaire, the idea of modernity served to foreground the sometimes jarring (and potentially transcendent) collision between past and future, between that then passing away and that yet to fully emerge. Critic Jonathan Mayne articulates the tensions inherent in Baudelaire’s historical moment:

He was living at a time when artistic anarchy and its natural counterpart, artistic Puritanism, were both rampant; when the “great tradition” had been lost, and the new tradition had not yet been discovered; when “wit” and “anecdote” and “erudition” were already beginning to flourish on the soil left vacant by “history” – and his deeply serious aim was to attempt to call back the visual arts to what he held to be their proper functions. (xii)

Baudelaire’s concern in “The Painter of Modern Life” centers on the attempt to adequately define the fashion in which an artist may effectively represent Beauty in the context of modernity. As Mayne notes, Baudelaire’s age, one of flux and transition, witnessed the challenge of long-held standards of Classical idealism by Romantic individualism. As a result of this challenge, the politics of representation stood solidly at the center of aesthetic discourse during the period.<sup>73</sup> In this context, Baudelaire’s examination of aesthetics and modernity sought to articulate safe passage, like Ulysses navigating the strait, between the whirlpool pull of the past

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<sup>73</sup> 1863, the same year that saw serialized publication of Baudelaire’s essay in *Allegro*, also saw the scandalous exhibition of the Salon des Refusés, with its controversial paintings by Manet and Whistler.



and the destructive intimations of an uncertain future, locating the nexus for the modern firmly in the present. To be sure, the past had its own lure, its own *value* (his word, not mine), but, as Baudelaire argues, we might say the same of the present. The Beauty of any given moment, then, is directly contingent on its temporal relationship to that moment itself. As Baudelaire frames it, “The pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present” (1). This “essential quality” extends itself not least to the physical appearance of the individual in his or her own moment. It permeates costume, structures behavior, and informs physical expressions of psychology. For Baudelaire, then, this sense of temporal relationality is performative in nature, though such performance(s) may not necessarily be a conscious proposition. Consequently, Baudelaire’s essay has great value to the scholar of dandyism as an engagement with the performative aspects of its expression and even with specific performances of it.

These performances need not necessarily result in beauty, however. Baudelaire readily distinguishes between expressions of beauty and ugliness in historical representation. As he notes, “in one direction, they become caricatures, in the other, antique statues” (2). In either case, though, their reception depends on a connection with (and expression of) the moment in which they originally emerged. He implicitly notes the difficulty with which contemporary audiences view artifacts of the past, particularly artifacts dependent on their relationship to a dynamic, physicalized performance to bring them “life.”<sup>74</sup> He then envisions the possibility for “intelligent actors and actresses” of the present to take on the fashions of the past and render an audience capable of viewing the beauty such garments might have possessed when worn by their original wearers. Thus, such beauty would transcend the quaint limitations of its “pastness” and emerge,

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<sup>74</sup> Here, Baudelaire uses the example of historic costume in engravings.

through performance, as fully “present.” As a result, while Baudelaire highlights the relationship of the painter to modernity, his insights also suggest the importance to his thinking of performance as a trope.

The specificity with which Baudelaire attempts to order this relationship of beauty to history forms an essential component of what he terms “a rational and historical theory of beauty” (3). He opposes his own theory to “academic” standards of beauty as an immutable and singular ideal, instead arguing for beauty as a kind of alloy or compound that produces a singular effect: “Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions” (3). For Baudelaire, both elements are essential to any conception of beauty, and they point to, and are the result of, an inherent “duality of man.” Here, Baudelaire posits a body/soul binarism, likening the eternal element of beauty to the soul and the transitory element to the body.

The key element in unifying these dual elements into the singular impression of beauty is, for Baudelaire, imagination. This faculty, essential to aesthetic “success,” is responsible for synthesizing and ordering the artist’s impressions so as to produce an inclusive, if not complete, vision of the subject. Mayne describes the workings of this faculty thusly:

The Imagination, in fact, is that capital faculty of the creative artist whereby he is enabled to see all in one synoptic glance, and thus to order his work in such a way that the topical shall co-exist with the eternal, the natural with the supernatural and the moral with the metaphysical. (xiv)

The model for these ruminations, Constantin Guys, notably employed his artistic eye and visual flair in drawings and watercolors for the *Illustrated London News*, sketching scenes drawn from

his travels in Spain and Turkey, from the Crimean War, and from the world of ballet and opera. As a result, the subjects of Guys' work encompassed a diverse range of social institutions and types, not least among them the dandies Guys saw attending the theatre or strolling in Hyde Park. In fact, Baudelaire goes so far as to describe Guys himself as potentially a dandy. He does this partially because he feels this appellation more adequately represents the qualities he values in Guys' work, "for the word 'dandy' implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of the entire moral mechanism of this world" (9). In typical fashion for Baudelaire, however, representation through language remains somewhat insufficient to the contradictory nature of reality. While Guys may exhibit *some* of the characteristics Baudelaire attributes to the dandy, he simultaneously exhibits a distinct and telling difference: passion. Guys' salient characteristic in Baudelaire's estimation, this passion ("for seeing and feeling") determines his relationship to the subject(s) of his art. The dandy, however, sublimates any visible passion in favor of an appearance of indifference. "The dandy is blasé," Baudelaire writes, "or pretends to be so, for reasons of policy and caste" (9). Ultimately, then, he categorizes Guys as a *flâneur*, a "passionate spectator," rather than as a dandy.

Guys exemplified the modern artistic spirit valorized by Baudelaire in his essay, a spirit that makes of art more than simply the expression of feeling or sentiment. For Baudelaire, the very process of artistic creation necessitates a kind of double consciousness that results in a sustained critical engagement with the ideas or objects that serve as the impetus for art. Mayne posits this idea as central to Baudelaire's aesthetic philosophy: "The poet – that is, the creative artist, whatever his medium – is thus a double man who both feels and analyses his feelings; and the movement of his critical thought will be powered by the same central force which is also behind his creation" (x). While this force, the idea or subject, "powers" the artist's creative

impulse, however, it doesn't serve as some kind of original for the artist to copy. Rather, the artist, in Baudelairean terms, "complicates" the model in the process of completing the portrait. In the case of the dandy, simultaneously artist and artwork, his own body serves as the canvas on which he paints an image of beauty. No accessible original exists for the dandy's portraiture, as he strives to realize and personify the Ideal of beauty through his own self-fashioned image. Thus, the artist-dandy applies his own critical faculties to the question of aesthetics through a performative appeal in part to dress and fashion as a means of representing Beauty-as-Ideal. Baudelaire begins his section on the dandy with a preliminary and implicit definition of the type:

The man who is rich and idle, and who, even if blasé, has no other occupation than the perpetual pursuit of happiness; the man who has been brought up amid luxury and has been accustomed from his earliest days to the obedience of others – he, in short, whose solitary profession is elegance, will always and at all times possess a distinct type of physiognomy, one entirely *sui generis*. (26)

In this brief description, Baudelaire identifies this potential dandy as the confluence of economic, social, philosophical, and physical characteristics. Though later in the essay he complicates this portrait, here he deftly establishes this figure as at least partially a function and product of economic privilege and access to capital, linking him to the aristocratic by dint of his monetary holdings, if nothing else. The leisure afforded him by his wealth (or by the ready availability to him of others' wealth) distinguishes him socially from those forced by need, by custom, or by habit to labor for the accumulation of capital, those "others" whose "obedience" he presumably commands.

Tellingly, however, the dandy possesses more than mere wealth to mark him out as separate. He also possesses, in Baudelaire's words, "a distinct type of physiognomy," a corporeal

appearance both reflective and suggestive of the ineffable characteristics potentially defining the subject. For Baudelaire, at least, this particular relationship between outer form and inner content is unique to the dandy.<sup>75</sup> This inside/outside binarism characterizes Baudelaire's construction of the dandy, and his emphasis on the dandy as an identity *dependent on* corporeality invokes a performative dimension key to understanding how the figure functions in Baudelaire's conception of him. The dandy must perform himself as a public figure.

Baudelaire also argues for dandyism as more than mere contemporary fashion or fad, explicitly asserting for it both transhistorical and transnational status. He writes, "Dandyism is a mysterious institution, no less peculiar than the duel: it is of great antiquity, Caesar, Catiline and Alcibiades providing us with dazzling examples; and very widespread, Chateaubriand having found it in the forests and by the lakes of the New World" (26). In this, then, Baudelaire's relatively early analysis of dandyism<sup>76</sup> complicates narratives of dandyism that would attempt to confine the academic study of the dandy to a nineteenth century Eurocentric context. While the French and English dandies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries undoubtedly remain key to an understanding of the cultural development of the dandy as a recognizable public figure, Baudelaire suggests that dandyism itself transcends easy temporal or geographic categorization.

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<sup>75</sup> This is not, of course, to say that other social roles exhibit no relationship between form and content; rather, Baudelaire seems to argue for the uniqueness of the dandy's *particular* appearance and the relationship of that appearance to the philosophical underpinnings identified by Baudelaire in his essay.

<sup>76</sup> "Early" in the sense that, though he argues for dandyism as a phenomenon dating back to antiquity (as did d'Aureville with his reference to Alcibiades), public discourse surrounding the so-called "dandy" was, both for him and for his contemporaries, relatively recent.

He does not go so far, however, as to make of dandyism a thing wholly indefinable. Instead, he argues that dandyism adheres to a rather strict set of rules or principles, though he leaves such rules implicit in his analysis. “Dandyism,” he argues, “an institution beyond the laws, itself has rigorous laws which all its subjects must strictly obey, whatever their natural impetuosity and independence of character” (26). This contradictory invocation of the dandy as somehow both beyond laws and bound by them, illustrates the typically paradoxical role inhabited by the dandy. He must be fastidiously attentive to details of dress, but he must simultaneously be viewed as essentially indifferent to the pressures of conformity; indeed, he cannot be seen to particularly *care* about his personal toilet, remaining essentially *blasé* in the face of both praise and ridicule. The dandy who defines himself as a dandy is, in fact, no dandy at all. For the dandy, then, the act of self-definition is simultaneously an act of potential self-negation. His identity, constantly in danger of disappearing, achieves stability only through relationality. The dandy, who most typically prides himself on the level of his distinction from the masses of humanity, can only be defined through a relationship to a larger social body. As an “institution” (and as an organism dependent on the social body for sustenance), dandyism necessarily exists in tension with any individualism exhibited by particular dandies. And this very individualism is precisely the engine driving the dandy’s attempts to distinguish himself as unique.

For the Baudelairean dandy, however, the ultimate end to any activity, an almost sacred goal, is an aesthetic one: the pursuit and attainment of beauty itself. Baudelaire’s explication of this point emphasizes the contradictions inherent in the dandy’s nature:

These beings have no other calling but to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think. They thus possess a vast abundance both of time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to a state of

passing reverie, can hardly be translated into action. It is sad but only too true that without the money and the leisure, love is incapable of rising above a grocer's orgy or the accomplishment of a conjugal duty. Instead of being a passionate or poetical caprice, it becomes a repulsive utility. (27)

The dandy achieves action not through labor but through leisure, an idea that would seem, on its surface, counterintuitive or paradoxical (like so many things about the dandy). However, only time and money provide the dandy with the opportunity to fully indulge fantasy, and only fantasy, as active engagement in the fashioning of a surface to present to the world, enables the dandy's self-actualization as an object and exemplar of beauty. Fantasy, then, for the dandy, is a sort of work, and the pursuit of beauty, a kind of exquisite labor, though Baudelaire would never name it as such. Beauty, as an end worthy in and of itself, must be achieved by a means equally as poetic, as elegant. Thus, Baudelaire opposes the aesthetic to the utilitarian, the ornamental to the merely functional, a move that would later be taken up by Wilde and the Aesthetic movement. Baudelaire's rhetoric illustrates the few true dandies as figures of dedicated and disciplined elitism elegantly poised atop a pyramid built solidly on a foundation of those laboring in the name of utility and functionality. For Baudelaire, however, this elitism, essentially philosophical in nature, does not map out onto notions of greed. The industrialist or merchant prince may be among the financial or social elite, but in his valorization of money over beauty he cedes pride of place to the dandy. The dandy cares little for money as an end; as Baudelaire quips, "he would be perfectly content with a limitless credit at the bank" (27).

Baudelaire refutes the characterization of dandyism as simply an exercise of economic privilege, arguing that, for the dandy, capital serves only as a means to achieve an end. This extends also to the dandy's exhibition of sartorial splendor, typically the feature most identified

with the type. “Dandyism,” he clarifies, “does not even consist, as many thoughtless people seem to believe, in an immoderate taste for the toilet and material elegance” (27). With this, he reveals dandyism as philosophical stance done up in performative drag. This posits a clear division between surface and depth, but a division further complicated by Baudelaire’s explication of the dandy. So perhaps it might be more accurate to claim that he asserts the interpenetration of philosophy and presentation, of form and content, mind and body. In the dandy, neither exists independently of the other, as surface both represents and reproduces inner philosophical reality rather than serving as the exterior counterpoint masking some form of inner “truth.” Ironically, then, unlike the wit and cynicism typically associated with the later Wildean dandy, Baudelaire’s exemplar is sincerity *par excellence*. Exterior and interior exhibit a singular sensibility with no disjunction between the two. This sincerity, however, does not necessarily result in any kind of beneficence. It certainly doesn’t preclude the charges of elitism often leveled against the dandy. Indeed, Baudelaire admits as much in his discussion of the dandy’s external exhibition of taste: “For the perfect dandy these things are no more than symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind” (27). A display of superior taste corresponds to a superior intellect enabled and supported by a monied life of leisure.

The superiority of Baudelaire’s dandy is virtually tautological in nature, as, in Baudelaire’s day, ready access to capital remained largely (though not exclusively) the province of the aristocracy. Indeed, Baudelaire explicitly presents the dandy as an aristocrat, thus conservatively linking him to the hereditary passage of cultural, social, and economic power prevalent among aristocrats in the period. This serves to essentially naturalize the notion that the dandy is born rather than made. The dandy, produced primarily through access to capital and leisure, could most reliably achieve such access through inheritance rather than through the



limited mobility offered as the fruits of labor. Consequently, the ideal world of the Baudelairean dandy would seem to bear little resemblance to emerging democratic ideals in the period, instead bearing a more striking affinity to conservative aristocratic ideals or, even more chillingly, to later social Darwinist rhetoric justifying social inequalities as the inevitable price of meritocratic thinking. Indeed, Baudelaire explicitly positions the dandy in opposition to democracy, as I discuss later.

Far from mindlessly endorsing elitism, however, Baudelaire recognizes the potential for dandyism to develop its own abuses. In attempting to define the inner philosophical and psychological forces motivating the dandy, he nods briefly to the potential dangers associated with the type: “What then is this passion, which, becoming doctrine, has produced such a school of tyrants? what this official institution which has formed so haughty and exclusive a sect?” (27). Regrettably, however, he chooses not to pursue this line of inquiry, reverting instead to a psycho-spiritual portrait of the dandy that largely disregards the more problematic implications of dandyism’s insularity.

For Baudelaire, the core of the dandy’s being coalesces around a need for individuation, the desire to set oneself apart. The establishment of dandyism as a social institution, however, meant that the means of such individuation calcified into a codification of behavior bordering on the dogmatic. It is no accident (and no surprise), then, that Baudelaire describes dandyism as a “sect,” given the seemingly univocal nature of its behavioral dictates. Baudelaire’s dandies are individualists who have ironically coalesced under a communal ideological banner. The collectivity of dandies in any age, however, remained (and remains) positively Lilliputian in comparison to the perceived monolith of those excluded from their ranks. This very exclusion,

however, as deconstructive criticism has so amply demonstrated, is essential to the definition of the dandy.

Again, Baudelaire emphasizes dandyism as the site of warring impulses: “It is a kind of cult of the self which can nevertheless survive the pursuit of a happiness to be found in someone else – in woman, for example; which can even survive all that goes by in the name of illusions” (27). Besides emphasizing the gendered nature of the Baudelairean dandy, this passage again underscores the self-definitional complexities of the dandy. He aims for individuation, for distinction, but this distinction from the mass of society can only be achieved through interaction *with* society, so his separation can only be predicated on a certain degree of proximity. He desires to stand apart from society but must remain a part of society. The dandy may delight in his own difference, but this difference lacks self-sufficiency; rather, he must constantly display and perform it in order to maintain it. As an identity, the dandy can only be relational. While a tree falling in the forest may or may not make a sound with no one there to hear, a dandy will certainly make no impression with no one as witness.<sup>77</sup> A masturbatory audience of one, himself, is insufficient to the dandy’s purpose. Without the presence of a spectator, of someone to help define him, the dandy becomes simply another mannequin on which to hang finely tailored clothes, and thus incapable of the pursuit of his own particular brand of happiness. As Baudelaire notes, this happiness “is the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished” (27-8). This astonishment, the astonishment of others at the performance of the self, and its concomitant satisfaction again serve to define the dandy, in his Baudelairean iteration, as a being interested in the play of extremes and opposition, in the tensions expressed

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<sup>77</sup> And make no mistake, the dandy depends on his own spectacularity. He is a phenomenon, meant to be *experienced* not only intellectually but also sensorially as an expression of beauty.

by polarity and binarism. Baudelaire and d'Aurevilly reinforce one another, then, in their depictions of dandyism as a performative brand of play aimed at producing certain effects in its audience, in this case astonishment.

Baudelaire goes so far as to assert that “dandyism borders upon the spiritual and stoical,” though he couches this rhetoric carefully, perhaps so as not to alienate readers who might feel this argument borders on sacrilege (28). To those who would characterize the dandy solely as trivial or foppish, Baudelaire provides a curious counterargument. He reminds the reader “there is a grandeur in all follies, an energy in all excess” (28). Though this only implicitly suggests dandyism as a kind of folly, its connection of dandyism to rhetoric of excess provides an interesting counterpoint to the accompanying discussion of discipline and submission that follows. For Baudelaire, the dandy’s near-fanatical attention to personal appearance at all times speaks to a level of discipline he likens to that of monastic orders or of other sects, such as “the inexorable order of the Assassins” (28). Viewed from this perspective, then, the dandy’s life, far from resembling the carefree existence of the fop, a life of excess freedom, looks more like that of the soldier or the scholar, bounded by strict adherence to a code or regimen of behavioral order. This discipline, for the dandy, ostensibly functions as a conditioning agent for the soul, establishing a mode of rigor that consequently allows for the singular pursuit of beauty to which the dandy must devote himself. This dogged presentation of the devotion to beauty reinforces the religiosity with which Baudelaire imbues dandyism (a religiosity associated with its philosophical underpinnings by Balzac as well), making of it a life to which one submits, a life which, Baudelaire writes, “also imposes upon its humble and ambitious disciples – men often full of fire, passion, courage and restrained energy – the terrible formula: *Perinde ac cadaver!*”

(28).<sup>78</sup> Baudelaire's dandy, then, bears a striking resemblance in his behavior to the ideals of Christian martyrs. He seemingly bears all (or most) without complaint, a placid, undisturbed surface clear evidence of the firmness of his commitment to his ideals.

Moreover, this similarity extends also to another quality Baudelaire ascribes to the dandy, that of the revolutionary. He argues that the dandy and his brethren ("exquisites, *incroyables*, beaux, lions or dandies") exemplify "what is finest in human pride, . . . that compelling need, alas only too rare today, of combating and destroying triviality" (28). Baudelaire inverts the criticism leveled against the dandy, that he merely represents the shallowest and most trivial impulses of those termed "fashionable," in order to establish the dandy as the champion of a certain aesthetic ideal.

Though in his citation of historic antecedents to the dandy of his own day Baudelaire argues for dandyism as a transhistoric phenomenon, he does not completely uncouple the dandy from historical specificity. Certain conditions appear to be necessary for the emergence of the dandy in a particular time and place, not least among them a characteristic social or political liminality. He clarifies:

Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall. In the disorder of these times, certain men who are socially, politically and financially ill at ease, but are all rich in native energy, may conceive the idea of establishing a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to shatter as it will be based on the

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<sup>78</sup> This phrase, drawn from St. Ignatius' instructions on obedience, suggests a level of submission not typically associated with the dandy. It is important, however, to note that this submission is not to those around him, but to the discipline required of his aesthetic pursuits.

most precious, the most enduring faculties, and on the divine gifts which work and money are unable to bestow. (28)

This passage is particularly interesting for the ways in which it complicates the portrait of the dandy already painted by Baudelaire. He describes these men who will come to be known as dandies as potentially “ill at ease” in a number of ways, a characterization that seems to run counter to that provided at the start of his explication of the dandy. What this passage truly does, however, is clarify that the dandy, rather than being the “man who is rich and idle,” is the man who aspires to be worthy of the gifts of ease unfairly lavished on undeserving subjects merely through the lucky accident of fortunate birth. Thus, the dandy exists uneasily between the status quo of the existing aristocracy and the radical promise of democracy; eternally liminal, his wish for a new aristocracy is simultaneously conservative and progressive. Baudelaire clearly valorizes dandyism, calling it “the last spark of heroism amid decadence” (28-9). This heroism consists of a revolutionary spirit that flies in the faces of both existing elites and their corresponding opposite masses, neither of whom seem possessed, like the dandy, to pursue beauty, material or spiritual, as its own end. The dandy’s revolt largely seems to eschew the political in favor of the aesthetic. This is revolt of a profoundly distinct character, sharing little with the militant agitation of many political upheavals. This is a revolt seemingly resigned to its own failure: “Dandyism is a sunset; like the declining daystar, it is glorious, without heat and full of melancholy” (29). Thus, Baudelaire casts the dandy in typically aestheticized, if potentially clichéd terms, as the recognizable subject of so many painted landscapes. The sunset is a potent image of dandyism, as it reinforces the liminality of his state. Sunset marks the passage of day into night, and the horizon as line of demarcation for presence and absence would seem clear and distinct enough, the process of the sun’s setting entails the establishment of a new twilight

regime, one characterized by a less easily discernible transition between light and darkness. The dandy is a figure of twilight, and the exact moment of his appearance or disappearance is inevitably somewhat difficult to pinpoint with any certainty.

What is certain, however, is that Baudelaire opposes the dandy to the forces of nineteenth century democratization:

But alas, the rising tide of democracy, which invades and levels everything, is daily overwhelming these last representatives of human pride and pouring floods of oblivion upon the footprints of these stupendous warriors. Dandies are becoming rarer and rarer in our country, whereas amongst our neighbours in England the social system and the constitution (the true constitution, I mean: the constitution which expresses itself through behavior) will for a long time yet allow a place for the descendants of Sheridan, Brummel and Byron, granted at least that men are born who are worthy of such a heritage. (29)

Baudelaire's use of tidal imagery in his description of democratization is an apt one as, more than its counterparts in Britain, Germany, or the United States, France's political fortunes vacillated with some regularity between the autocratic and the democratic.

Baudelaire returns to Guys' illustrations of dandies as a means of finally delineating the primary characteristics of dandyism as he sees them. He notes Guys' ability to impart to his subjects a sense of what he terms "historical personality" (29). This personality perhaps represents the nexus of the specifics of the dandy's performed identity with the material conditions in which that identity is performed. Baudelaire asserts that Guys' powers of observation encompass everything that contributes to the dandy's performance of self:

Nothing is missed: his lightness of step, his social aplomb, the simplicity in his air of authority, his way of wearing a coat or riding a horse, his bodily attitudes which are always relaxed but betray an inner energy, so that when your eye lights upon one of those privileged beings in whom the graceful and the formidable are so mysteriously blended, you think: ‘A rich man perhaps, but more likely an out-of-work Hercules!’ (29)

Certainly, for Baudelaire, the “historical personality” of the dandies he describes depends on the material conditions in which he exists. In the long nineteenth century, then, a coat or a horse serves as a suitable marker with which a dandy might be identified. In attempting to determine the “historical personality” of a present-day dandy, however, it should be clear that different measures are necessarily in order. The temporal and geographical specificities of the dandy’s iteration determine the particularities of his portraiture. It should be possible, however, to extend Baudelaire’s philosophy of dandyism without relying solely on waistcoats and types of necktie as the primary means by which contemporary critic-artists might attempt to identify the modern dandy.

The core tenets of this philosophy position the dandy as an explicitly performative identity, one dependent on corporeality for its force and power. Moreover, this corporeality relies on its own public exhibition. His identity contingent on public exhibition of the performing (and performed) body, only through this public performance can the dandy make material one of his central concerns: the relationship of beauty to history. The presence of the body, traditionally opposed dualistically by the soul, provides the transitory component of beauty, the temporal figure performing against the ground of eternity. For the dandy, then, the act of self-fashioning is a performative act of imagination that transcends dualism and unifies body and soul, yokes limit

to limitlessness, ultimately making of the dandy a living ideal of beauty. As Baudelaire demonstrates, however, such a performance is a high wire act. Distinct from the *flâneur*, the dandy must act without passion, perform without desire, lest his status as a dandy be called into question. He flouts societal and sartorial law in his efforts at individualism, while simultaneously letting the very dictates of those laws define his constitution. His leisure paradoxically makes up his labor, and his philosophy and the performance of that philosophy are indivisible. One cannot exist without the other. He must constantly perform and reaffirm his difference, yet he potentially submits and conforms to strict regimes of bodily discipline in order to achieve the desired physical effect. Neither aristocratic nor democratic, he exists uneasily at any number of crossroads, like the point of origin on a graph, the sun halfway down (or up?) its twilit journey across the horizon, like uneasy zero alone (and lonely) at the number line's center.



## PART II. MAKING UP

*make up*

1. To put together; construct or compose: *make up a prescription.*
2. To constitute; form: *Ten years make up a decade.*
3. To alter one's appearance for a role on the stage, as with a costume and cosmetics.
4. To apply cosmetics.
5. To devise as a fiction or falsehood; invent: *made up an excuse.*
6. To make good (a deficit or lack): *made up the difference in the bill.*
7. To compensate for: *make up for lost time.*
8. To resolve a quarrel: *kissed and made up.*
9. To make ingratiating or fawning overtures. Used with *to*: *made up to his friend's boss.*

## CHAPTER V. DANDIES IN THE UNDERWORLD

To begin with, then (though of course we have always already begun): I undertake this study, at least in part, as an act of mourning, mourning of course being the first of Derrida's "three things of the thing." The "thing" itself is the specter, but the specter of hauntology distinguishes itself from the ghost, just as the dandy distinguishes itself from the hegemonic masculine. Part I examined the philosophical foundation of dandyism and to clearly establishing the implications of this foundation on its parameters as a phenomenon. The application of foundation, in the cosmetic sense, implies embodiment or corporeality, and at the very least suggests one of the key qualities of Derrida's spectrality: "[W]hat distinguishes the specter or the *revenant* from the *spirit*, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X" (6). This phenomenality makes the thing *legible* as a "thing," so the ability to foundationally en flesh it allows the Derridean analysis to proceed. This analysis, this mourning, grapples with the need to reckon with the dead, to *know* the thing. "One has to know," Derrida writes. "*One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* [Il faut le savoir]." (9). Mourning is predicated on this knowledge, on the awareness of who the thing is/was and where it lies. Until I know who the dandy is and where his body lies, mourning him is impossible. Implicit in this statement is a relationship (subject/object): I, the self,<sup>79</sup> mourn something else, the other. Also implicit here are respective states of being: the self, the mourner, lives, while the other, the mourned, does not. In short, mourning as an act commemorates that

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<sup>79</sup> Of course, the assumption here is that we can posit such a thing as a "self." This assumption, while not unproblematic, underpins the idea of relationality essential to understanding the Derridean conception of mourning.

which does not live (at least, not *now*).<sup>80</sup> Mourning demonstrates, whether publicly or privately, a dedication or devotion to the object of mourning. In this sense, mourning, contingent on relationality between self and other, occupies a profoundly personal place in the pantheon of emotional acts. The act of mourning may be viewed as an attempt to resolve the unresolvable, to complete an interrupted conversation that can have no real conclusion. The mourner, isolated by loss, is a term without an equation, half a dialectic, unable to reach synthesis. (No man is an island. Well, at least until he mourns.) At the same time,<sup>81</sup> however, mourning possesses a powerful social dimension. The mourner performatively displays grief and other attendant emotions or states, often through the enacting of accepted rituals or customs *within a community*. Mourning is potentially an act of affiliation, not only with that being mourned, but with other mourners. We attend funeral services and wakes in order both to comfort the bereaved and to show our connection to or affiliation with the deceased. We send cards or casseroles (or, depending on your region of origin, “hot dishes”) ostensibly as part of the act of commemoration, though such efforts primarily insist not upon the deceased’s change in state but on the unbroken continuity of life *as life* for those who remain. Mourning reifies the boundaries

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<sup>80</sup> Thus we leave open the possibility for mourning that which has not yet come to pass.

Mourning, then, like spectralization, is cosynchronous (or, to be both more and less accurate, *asynchronous*) with a time not its own. It is an activity “out of joint” with time as we traditionally understand it.

<sup>81</sup> The “same” time? Such shorthand phraseology often indicates the juxtaposition of two states or conditions which would seem mutually exclusive (or, at the very least, counterintuitive). The “same” time should actually be two very different times. Yet here (and “now”) we are, time once again “out of joint.”

between living and not-living.<sup>82</sup> And mourning is, of course, a performance. As Susan Cole has argued, “Mourning ritual, like tragedy, is a performance of ambivalence on behalf of an absent presence” (1).<sup>83</sup>

But, of course, it’s not (indeed, is *never*) quite that simple. The relationship of living to non-living depends on a kind of temporality, on the knowledge that one must always proceed from one state to another, and that in the relationship between self and other, one precedes the other in this process. As Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas reframe Derrida’s thoughts on the matter, “One must always go before the other” (1). For Derrida, this knowledge, that death chooses its moment, and that we have little control over the order of that choice, conditions every relationship, particularly friendship. One cannot help but enter into knowledge of the other without understanding that, of the two, one will perish before the other, leaving one to perform the work of mourning alone. In this, then, every relationship is a triangular negotiation with impending mortality. Of course, we can also see illustrated here the deconstructive principle that insists on the interpenetrating quality of relationships. In friendship, one can only be defined through the other. Indeed, one’s existence *depends* on the other, and in the case of friendship,

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<sup>82</sup> I am tempted here to write “between corporeal and non-corporeal,” but what strikes me as particularly notable about the act of mourning is the way in which it also insists on the corporeality of both living *and* dead. The corpse is no less material than the breathing body, which is a primary component of the potential horror it holds for those who face it. Life and death both depend for their distinction on this very corporeality; spectralization, however, operates in the realm of the noncorporeal, neither recognizably living nor dead. The potency of the spectral rests in its ability to destabilize easy conceptions of “living” and “dead.”

<sup>83</sup> Ah, ambivalence! It seems the dandy never met a valence he didn’t like. Or like. Or...

both are bound by mortality, much as Baudelaire's dandy brings together the temporal and the eternal under the rubric of beauty. The rupturing of that mortality, however, its cessation through death, disrupts the congress between the two.

In attempting to complete or continue the interrupted dialogue, then, mourning addresses a new relationship, even a new language. Mourning attempts to speak in the tongue(s) of ghosts, to parlay with the specter. As discussed in Chapter One, the visor effect lends a special power and gravity to the specter's voice, divorced from any certainty provided by the authority of the corporeal present. For the living, however, to perform the work of mourning, to attempt to speak with ghosts, results in a kind of impediment, a difficulty related to speech. Brault and Naas note how many of Derrida's texts of public mourning open with his admission of "how difficult it is to speak at such a moment of mourning, difficult to get the words out and difficult to find the right words" (5). Death disrupts the register in which we are accustomed to addressing our friends. We find ourselves simultaneously unable to speak and compelled to speak, to bear necessary witness to that which seems somehow unreckonable. Speech in the face of death is necessity so that the name of the other will not be forgotten or effaced. Ultimately, too, we hope that the same rites will be performed for us, that the living will speak for us when we no longer have living voices. For the living, though, death constrains speech, while simultaneously making it possible for the specter. The living struggle to speak through their own faltering and faulty corporeality, while the specter's voice emerges with a newfound power from behind a mask whose very imitation of the formerly living body incites hesitation about the actual nature of what lies beneath. Conversation with ghosts is nothing if not fraught with uncertainty.

It is also weighted down with questions of responsibility. In various sources, Derrida wrestles with the ethics of speaking for, with, or about the dead.<sup>84</sup> The pitfalls involved in such speech range from the “literary” uses to which one might put such speech (as Derrida accuses himself of doing in *C* in regards to his mother’s death) to the more overtly insidious political uses to which death might be put as a means of making a profit out of loss. As Brault and Naas argue, mourning runs the risk of representing itself solely *through* the self, a form of narcissism expressed as “the ‘egotistical’ and no doubt ‘irrepressible’ tendency to bemoan the friend’s death in order to take pity upon oneself” (7). In the case of the dandy, who seems to mourn his own disappearance (ever imminent, ever immanent), this narcissism strikes me as fully in keeping with the capricious, contradictory impulses he exhibits in many regards. The dandy’s narcissistic mourning is simultaneously in jest and in deadly earnest. The sense of the living dandy mourning his own future self (or selves) strikes an ironic, witty posture, while it is precisely the knowledge of his coming extinction that lends the spectral dandy his unique power. The dandy’s sense of ethical responsibility, then, is to himself; he speaks to, with, and about his own shade, and in doing so, continues the project of dandyism: representing responsibility to the world through responsibility to oneself. In this way, the dandy, making the speech at his own funeral in his best suit, leads through example. What, to Derrida, stands as one of the paramount dangers of mourning becomes, for the dandy, a means of survival, of ensuring his continuance as a specter.

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<sup>84</sup> Indeed, one might argue that the entirety of this study serves as a kind of extended dialogue with the dead, an attempt to hear the voices of the dead speaking through the texts they leave behind. I leave it to the reader to decide whether or not I have discharged my duty to the dead in an ethical fashion.

Talia Schaffer has attempted to articulate the potential appeal of mourning to the Victorian aesthete:

First, mourning was a system of dress in which clothing embodies emotion, a kind of poetics of clothing. This system, which seemed to require a Teufelsdröck to explicate it, fascinated male dandies. Second, mourning worked with a very limited palette: black, white, grey, and lavender. In that sense, it replicated the dandy's extreme discipline and self-restraint...Third, mourning colors were precisely the colors that men were permitted to wear. As we have seen, Wilde's and Beerbohm's sartorial experiments were countenanced when they stayed within the range of somber colors associated with mourning, thereby playing with, but not violating, the essential dictum that men's clothing be solemn. Fourth, mourning appealed to aesthetes because it posited clothing devoid of enjoyment—certainly the opposite of the dandy's *raison d'être*, a prospect that demanded dandy attention...Finally, mourning was (or tried to be) outside fashion. Thus it held the appeal also associated with aesthetic garb: it was a sartorial system that operated according to its own laws and ignored the fleeting fashions of the day. (116)

For the dandy, then, an association with mourning seems a natural extension of his interest in style and fashion as an aestheticized system. It provides the structure for a particular performative mode that allows the dandy to individuate himself within a highly coded structure. By appropriating the garb of mourning, a style outside (but not *too far* outside) the conventions of Victorian masculine dress, the dandy insists on his own alterity, using the mourning costume to subvert its solemn intent. This need for individualism, the urge to distinguish himself, is

central to the philosophical conception of dandyism framed by d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire. In this, he remains true to that passed (or passing) away: himself.

Above all, Derrida figures mourning, following the influence of psychoanalytic discourse, as a question of fidelity. Fidelity *is* mourning, and mourning means that the self has in some way interiorized the other. This interiorization, characterized as something akin to consumption (à la the Eucharist), concretizes the dead's disappearance. The dead only continue in the living, incorporated as part of the work of mourning. Again, however, we come face to face with contradiction, that go-to motif of dandyism, as the other cannot be fully interiorized: "The friend must be interiorized, but the singular alterity or 'infinite transcendence' that marked our friendship and constituted the very friendship of the friend cannot" (Brault 11). As a result, Derrida argues that when mourning "succeeds," it fails, and vice versa. By this he means that when we successfully, through mourning, interiorize the other, we fail to respect his essential alterity. Thus, "successful" mourning fails as an act of fidelity. Conversely, a failure to mourn actually succeeds in respecting the difference of the other.

No theory of mourning articulates itself as practice, however, until it settles on an object, that which it will mourn. I concern myself in this chapter with one such object.<sup>85</sup> On June 9,

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<sup>85</sup> But my object/subject serves as a metonymy for many such objects/subjects. At the outset of this chapter I suggested that the work of mourning constitutes part of this study's concerns. But mourning what, precisely? The short list (and there really is no short list) might include: my own youth; the starched neckcloth; the possibility of utopia; the intersection of irony and aristocracy; the green carnation; the sartorial codes of the past; the body I never did/never will possess; the not-yet-gone, already-gone melancholy specter of dandyism; etc. There isn't room enough in any



2010, London's Soho Theatre premiered a new work by Tim Fountain, *Dandy in the Underworld*, a one-man play based on an autobiography of the same title. Just over a week later, on June 17, the play's subject, Sebastian Horsley, British artist, provocateur, self-proclaimed dandy, and *enfant terrible*, died of a heroin overdose. Fountain's play thus found itself pressed into unintentional double service, simultaneously celebrating the spirit embodied by Horsley's life and mourning the loss of that same spirit in the wake of his untimely death. In the final chapter of his autobiography, Horsley penned an eerily chilling (and typically cheeky) eschatological presentiment:

The only truly stylish ending to an autobiography is a suicide note. Well, here is mine: "I have decided to stop living on account of the cost." As all self-respecting dandies know, suicides are the aristocrats of death. They represent a triumph of style over life. My existence is a work of art. It deserves a frame – if only to distinguish it from the wallpaper. Suicide will look nice. It will match the home furnishings. (321)

Along with the dandy's traditional expertise with the well-placed *bon mot*, a quality he reportedly possessed in abundance, Horsley also understood the theatrical value of making an exit. In this particular case, he had prepared his audience on what to expect, if not precisely when to expect it. Despite his own words, however, Horsley's friends insisted on describing his death as an accident. Writing in *The Telegraph*, Toby Young remarked, "As Tim [Fountain] said, if it had been suicide Sebastian would not have passed up the opportunity to write a note." While his own autobiography might suggest that Horsley had not, indeed, completely passed up the

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cemetery as the potential corpses pile up, one atop the other, until it begins to resemble the floor of Elsinore at the conclusion of Act V.

opportunity, the question of whether his overdose ought to be read as accidental or intentional remains an open one. Irrespective of intent, however, the circumstances of Horsley's death are consonant with his self-dramatization as a so-called "dandy."

In his autobiography, Horsley explicitly positions himself as a contemporary dandy. "Dandyism is as natural to my personality as a petal is to a flower," he writes (177). Horsley's brand of dandyism, however, cannot simply be construed as an updating of that of his forebears. While Horsley clearly has familiarized himself with the major texts and tenets of dandyism, he filters these ideas through his own contemporary sensibilities, resulting in a philosophy that abandons the utopian aspirations of French philosophical dandyism as a hopeless impossibility. As with many theorists of dandyism, Horsley feels compelled to return to the example of Brummell, though in this case he refutes the Beau's value as a role model. Horsley derides Brummell's snobbery, his efforts at both attaining and maintaining social standing. This concern with position, he argues, reveals Brummell as a conformist rather than a true dandy: "True dandyism is rebellious. The real dandy wants to make people look, be shocked by, and even a little scared by the subversion which his clothes stand for" (178). Again, d'Aureville and Baudelaire, their insistence on the dandy's need to astonish, echo through the text. For Horsley, dandyism represents a radical break with the status quo, a continuous pushing against the boundaries of social acceptability. Coming of age in 1970s Britain, Horsley raided the performative closets of punk and glam rock for his countercultural repertoire. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the manner in which Horsley repurposes the performative tropes of dandyism in the context of late capitalism. In doing so he simultaneously constructs the self as both artwork and commodity. I argue that the coincidental timing of Horsley's death only serves to literalize the dandy's spectralized role as the shadow side of contemporary masculinity in a

conspicuously consuming (and consumptive) culture. I provide a reading of examples from Tim Fountain's adaptation and Horsley's autobiographical text in order to demonstrate the haunting power of dandyism's performative trace.

Never one to bury his influences too deeply, Horsley evokes the specter(s) of his forebears even in his chosen title.<sup>86</sup> *Dandy in the Underworld*, the sobriquet of both Horsley's autobiography and Fountain's stage adaptation, derives much of its allusive power from haunted associations with the specters of those dead too soon. Most immediately, the title refers to a song and album by 1970s British glam rockers T.Rex, fronted by charismatic Marc Bolan, who died in a car accident months after the release of the album. Early in his autobiography, Horsley establishes his affinity for the musical icon, arguing that, "having danced myself out the womb, I could have been named after my first hero, Marc Bolan" (1). This passage enacts one of the central motifs of Horsley's work, namely the unattributed appropriation (an act others might construe, variously, as either allusion, repurposing, or outright theft) of others' artistic or intellectual work as a means of demonstrating his own propensity for self-making. He argues that he "danced [himself] out the womb," suggesting a kind of sole responsibility not only for his own birth, but also for the artistic trajectory his life would follow. He makes a direct (though not explicitly acknowledged) reference to Bolan's lyrics for the T.Rex song, "Cosmic Dancer": "I danced myself right out the womb." (Bolan)

Horsley describes Bolan as a hybrid, both "dandy and poseur" (30). In linking these terms, Horsley apparently asserts some authenticity for dandyism, an authenticity placed in opposition to the artifice of the poseur. Curiously, though, the reputation of dandyism rests

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<sup>86</sup> Again, we have recourse to return to *Hamlet*, for Shakespeare's title performs much the same function, the name conjuring up both the young protagonist and his ghostly father.

largely on his skill at exploiting artifice and superficiality. Horsley seems to suggest that Bolan somehow reconciles the opposition between two poles that, on closer examination, may not be opposite at all. Indeed, what he perceives to be this contradictory, paradoxical quality seems to make up a large part of what Horsley found attractive about Bolan. If we accept Bolan as dandy, however, this should be unsurprising, for, as Ellen Moers has argued, hybridity stands at the center of the dandy's makeup. He remains notable precisely because of his very indeterminacy: "The ambiguous symbol of the dandy brought together ideas and attitudes of the most unlikely contemporaries...Politically, the dandy appealed to both the reactionary and the revolutionary, as man of the past or man of the future" (13). This ambiguity allows the dandy a kind of spectral liminality; never seeming to fully engage with and thereby inhabit any social sphere, the dandy speaks, ghost-like, from a space neither past nor future, from a time "out of joint." This Derridean liminality is fully in keeping with that previously elucidated by Baudelaire. Now, however, another dimension is added, that of Derridean spectrality.

Horsley acknowledges an early performative debt to Bolan. The young Sebastian idolized the star and found in Bolan's self-presentation an alternative model to the hegemonic masculinity embodied by his businessman father. Horsley writes in his autobiography of putting on his mother's makeup and dressing in her boa and gloves<sup>87</sup> in an attempt to transform himself into a facsimile of Bolan. Thus accoutered, he "would stage concerts where [he] mimed along to

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<sup>87</sup> Even the fact that his mother owned (and, based on Horsley's description, presumably wore) a boa and gloves suggests his childhood home as a kind of theatricalized space in which self-dramatization would seem, if not natural, then certainly understandable. Horsley writes as much of his mother: "Life is only theatre – and Mother understood that it was mostly cheap melodrama at that. She was a performance in search of an audience" (15).

Marc's gorgeously nonsensical and deliciously fey lyrics" (27). In retrospect, Horsley consciously links the performances of Bolan and other glam rockers (such as David Bowie<sup>88</sup> and the New York Dolls) to explicitly gendered characteristics, characteristics he also associates with his parents:

Through Father I had learnt that men were of the air. They had the adventurous spirit of ruthlessness and distance. Through Mother I had learnt that it was women who were the repository of the passions. My emotions were always in motion – I was starting to feel more and more of an honorary woman as a result. (27)

For Horsley, the glam rock androgyny of Bolan offered a sartorial counter to the sober staidness of the more traditional masculine business attire worn by his father. In the performances of Bolan and his contemporaries Horsley found a means of reconciling paradox through the cultivation of the self as art. He writes, "The mass of contradictions could be held together only by the unifying power of art" (30). This particular philosophy allows for a concentration on the aesthetics of surface to ostensibly smooth out any internal inconsistencies. Such artists (and artworks) share this emphasis on appearance, on apparition, on the appropriately spectralized figure of the dandy.

Horsley's title, then, sets the scene for, among other things, a dialogue with the dead. Having made his way to the underworld (an arduous journey, no doubt), the dandy may speak with the spirits who reside there. (Indeed, he may be one himself.) Thus, *Dandy in the Underworld* points to an even older performance tradition, echoing the title of Jacques

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<sup>88</sup> Of Bowie, Horsley writes, "He too was a self-made man in love with his creator. He too had sacrificed himself on the altar of artifice" (80-81). The casting of Bowie (and glam contemporaries like Bolan) in the terms of martyrdom correlates to the messianic overtones of dandyism as described by Balzac, d'Aureville, and Baudelaire.

Offenbach's *opéra bouffon*, *Orpheus in the Underworld*.<sup>89</sup> The Orpheus myth, as documented in any number of accounts, presents the artist as he who, through the artistic crystallization of his own mourning, attempts to penetrate the mysteries of the chthonic feminine and, ultimately, to transcend death itself. As many versions of the story suggest, however, due to the artist's own self-interest and self-consciousness (his vanity?), such transcendence is never truly realized. Unlike Orpheus, though, the dandy, particularly as inflected in the French philosophical dandyism of the nineteenth century, would refigure the self not simply as the source of art, but as the *objet d'art* itself.

Horsley positions the self, and specifically the *art* of the self, at the center of his philosophy. Indeed, he views capital-A Art as essentially synonymous with the self: "Art is I; science is we. I was becoming the Romantic – the one who discovers himself as centre" (46). For Horsley, his role as a self-proclaimed dandy depends on, is only made possible by, a narcissistic focus on the self.<sup>90</sup> This focus on the self as center also makes self-determination paramount.

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<sup>89</sup> Offenbach's work, like many burlesques or parodies, functions as a kind of haunted house in that the targets of its satire linger spectrally over the proceedings. *Orpheus in the Underworld*, itself a kind of metacommentary on Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and the dramatic failings of the Comédie Française, works on one level as a conversation with the ghosts that haunt it.

<sup>90</sup> My use of the term "narcissism" here in reference to the dandy follows Horsley's lead. In one passage in *Dandy in the Underworld*, he likens Johnny Rotten to a reincarnation of Rimbaud: "He had all the unmistakable signs – the charismatic aura, the dandy's narcissism, the canny look of the holy tramp" (57). Like Bolan, Rotten appealed to Horsley in part because of the sense that his iconic persona was, in some fundamental way, a self-creation, of which his creator could be justly proud. The dandy is nearly something of a closed system. In aesthetic terms, he is both

Any outside influence or constraint on the dandy's ability to construct his own world fundamentally destroys his aesthetic power: "A dandy can be seduced, enticed, enraptured. But he cannot be caged any more than a butterfly can, without losing his beauty in the process" (120). Horsley has more than philosophy in mind, however. The sense of captivity he describes here derives from his feelings surrounding his marriage and the decidedly *un*aristocratic middle class duties and demands associated with it. The dandy's narcissism seems incompatible with the relationality of a traditional marriage.

Early in Fountain's adaptation, the playwright and Sebastian both stress this conception of the self to the audience. Set in the studio of Horsley's flat, the play opens with late morning sun feebly trying to press in through the shutters. The room is in "semi-darkness," as if already shrouded for the tomb, setting the stage for the specter's appearance: "In the half-light we hear a phone ring and the answer machine kick in" (22). Horsley's disembodied voice emerges from the machine, exhorting the caller to leave a message. Like *Hamlet*, then, the play begins with the revenant's return, though in this case the specter speaks not through a literal visor but through the technological screen of the answering machine. Horsley himself (or at least the actor playing him) emerges from the bedroom after a moment, but the ghostly voice in the machine has already established the question of corporeal authority. The power of Horsley's appearance to delight, shock, or horrify rests in part on the expectation already created by that disembodied

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artist and art; in religious terms, both priest and offering. And in his love for art or offering, he becomes both audience and congregation as well, closing the circuit through his narcissism.

Curiously, however, Horsley's sense of narcissism as part and parcel of the dandy's *raison d'être* stems from his desire to be like Rotten or Bolan, from an outward focus on others rather than an inward focus on himself.

voice. At the performances immediately following Horsley's death, what must audiences have felt when they first heard the sound of that voice from the machine? Did they wait, collectively holding their breath, imagining for a moment that perhaps they would approach the tomb to find the rock rolled away? That initial moment, the cheeky voice introducing itself as "Sebaaaaaastian" through the mundane medium of the answering machine, may have served as an uncanny reminder of the real Horsley's absence. Indeed, Sebastian flippantly reinforces the characterization of his appearance as a return from some sort of underworld: "Mind you, sleep has always been like death to me but without the long-term commitment" (22). Unlike the dandy, then, who I characterize as a kind of metaphorical revenant or specter, Horsley, in typical fashion, makes the metaphorical as viscerally literal as possible:

I once spent seventy-two hours asleep in my old flat in Shepherd Market. I was on Heroin at the time but still it was quite an achievement. I'd just read a book by a man called Ernest Becker who argued that everything we did in life was about distancing ourselves from our own inevitable death and that only if we admitted we were just doomed and defecating creatures could we begin to transcend our plight. So I did a crap in the middle of the room and caked it all over myself. I smeared *man* on my stomach and *pig* on the walls and then I put on Beethoven's Ninth and had a good wank. (22)

Horsley's story refutes Becker's argument with two raised fingers.<sup>91</sup> While Becker suggests that the only real hope for transcendence lies in recognizing our debased, human state, Horsley indicts the uselessness of such a recognition. There is no transcendence, no meaning to derive

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<sup>91</sup> The work being referred to here, as Horsley reveals in more detail in his autobiography, is Becker's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Denial of Death* (1973).



from life, he seems to say, only shit, art, and semen (and, based on his paralleling of the three, not all that much of a difference between them and any other bodily effluvia). In this, then, he reveals himself as a pole apart from the philosophical dandyism of Balzac, d'Aureville, and Baudelaire. For Horsley, the perfection of the self through dandyism has little to do with utopian idealism. Horsley's brand of dandyism runs more closely akin to a kind of cry in the face of futility, a last ditch effort to laugh in the face of nihilism.

Having set the scene with this scatological story, he opens the curtains to let the morning light into the room.<sup>92</sup> The stage directions reveal the extent to which Horsley's artwork, his painting, comes in second to his true work, himself:

Downstage left there is his throne. There is a painting upstage centre on an easel and covered in a sheet. Behind it on the back wall is a kind of shrine to St. Sebastian. There are hundreds of photographs and pieces of publicity material dedicated to him. (24)

The play's *mise-en-scene* thus explicitly positions self-obsession as the dominant force in Horsley's life and art, an obsession immediately reinforced by Sebastian's following line: "Welcome to the strong sad kingdom of self" (24). The ambivalence of this greeting, characteristic of the philosophical strand of dandyism expressed inconsistently in the nineteenth century by Balzac, d'Aureville, and Baudelaire, suggests the unresolved complexities beneath

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<sup>92</sup> It seems fitting that Fountain's play begins in a state of morning, an unintentional punning on the play's (and dandyism's) concern with "mourning." In this, it mirrors the story of Christ's resurrection, with the mourners approaching the tomb only to find it already vacant. One can imagine Horsley's amusement at the way in which this echo of the Biblical story ambivalently oscillates between sacred and profane.

Sebastian's surface, the dichotomy at Horsley's heart, alternatingly self-aggrandizing and self-destructive.

Early on, the Horsley of the play demonstrates the ways in which his own particular brand of self-interest shades over into misogynistic attitudes and behaviors that once again demonstrate his worldview as markedly different from the ideals espoused by French philosophical dandyism. Though his expressions of sexuality, as presented in both his autobiography and Fountain's play, might be described as nonnormative, given his proclivities for the outré and shocking, his self-obsession (even, at times, self-loathing) lead him to a kind of sexual narcissism. He attempts to position himself as a kind of libertine, proponent of a sexual philosophy that argues itself as somehow above more traditional, bourgeois behaviors, such as monogamy. Fountain's Horsley informs the audience of his upcoming lunch date with an Austrian publishing associate, Henrietta, describing her as "eminently fuckable," even though she has rebuffed his advances on the grounds that she is already in a relationship. He bemoans this state of affairs, using it as an opportunity to opine on sexual mores: "Of all the sexual perversions I find monogamy the most un-natural. In my opinion if you say you are enjoying sex with the same person after a couple of years you're either a liar or you're on something" (23). For Horsley, novelty and shock trump the more traditional dandiacal virtue of refinement.<sup>93</sup> Horsley's practices articulate a sexual economy informed by the historical development of

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<sup>93</sup> While it might be argued that Horsley's disdain for monogamy can be read as an attempt to refine sexual behavior through experiment and variety, his own account of his sexual life suggests little to do with the pursuit of elegance. Moreover, the shock the dandy delivers has most traditionally been understood as sartorial rather than sexual (though the two are not necessarily unrelated).

industry and capital. Unlike monogamy, which might be likened to the practice of the traditional artisan or craftsman, affording each product its own attention as a work whole and entire, Horsley's polygamous philosophy takes its cue from the "advances" of the Industrial Revolution, viewing the sexual liaison as a collection of interchangeable acts, parts, and partners designed to (re)produce themselves with ever-increasing efficiency. Thus, while Horsley's sexuality serves as a model of productivity, I would not describe it as particularly "generative." Even in his sexuality, Horsley's dandy is hopelessly compromised by his capitalist origins.

It ought to come as little surprise, then, that Horsley's primary objects of sexual interest are prostitutes. He claims in his biography to have "slept with more than 1,000 prostitutes, at a cost of 100,000" (197). Horsley betrays the thoroughgoing influence of capitalism in his obsession with quantification. It isn't enough to tally up the number of women with whom he's slept, he also needs to enumerate their cost. He even constructs a kind of equation in which to insert himself (and, by extension, the dandy):

If  $x$  is a conventional relationship and is equal to utter mundanity, and  $y$  is loads of money and equals soaring individuality, then  $x$  plus  $y$  plus a dandy twerp can only add up to one answer when an unemployed sex maniac (who had never been any good at maths) also came into the equation.

Whores. (196)

For Horsley, the prostitute represents one half of a quintessentially capitalist relationship. As such, he argues that the exploitative nature of the relationship cuts both ways. He likens the prostitute's exploitation of the client to the dealer's exploitation of the addict. Regrettably, Horsley's reductive analysis fails to examine the ways in which the exchange between prostitute and client fits into larger economic systems. The client/prostitute relationship, far from being an

isolated dyad, potentially impinges on any number of other relational connections. The prostitute, for example, may need to give over her earnings to a pimp, or may need to support dependents through her sex work, while the client may spend money, with or without permission, considered to be the joint possessions of another relationship. Typically, Horsley prefers to confine himself to pithy observations rather than engage in extended analysis. In Fountain's play, Sebastian quips: "I remember the first time I had real sex – I still have the receipt" (27).

Though he makes clear that its illicit nature formed a good part of prostitution's attraction for him, he also argues that, for the dandy, the female prostitute (and Horsley seems to have been exclusively heterosexual in this regard, at least) occupies a different position than she does for most men. In Fountain's play, Horsley suggests that most men view prostitutes as "a substitute for regular women," while for the dandy, the reverse is true. While he does little to further elaborate on this explanation, it seems likely that Horsley views the prostitute and the dandy as similar in their recognition of the self as product. Like the prostitute, the dandy constructs himself explicitly for the consumption of others.

Horsley clearly (and carefully) constructs himself as, in his words, a literal "product of [his] times," thus invoking the language of the marketplace (and, not coincidentally, of Marx) (152). The dandy attains legibility and distinction only through his materiality. Without his distinctive style, the dandy would merely fade into the off-the-rack legions of business-suited clones populating the halls of hegemony. The dandy's power comes primarily in his ability to spectrally disrupt (in spectacular fashion) received notions of sartorially encoded masculinity. This might manifest itself in, among other possibilities, the particularly sober style of the Baudelairean dandy or, as in Horsley's case, a tendency toward the decidedly flamboyant. The

materiality of Horsley's dandyism found its expression primarily through *outré* nods to past fashion traditions, and he cultivated a personal style predicated primarily on its ability to provoke. Perhaps this represents Horsley's attempt to serve as one of the "intelligent actors" Baudelaire believed might bring life to antique fashions through performative engagement. In any event, Horsley recognizes the divided position of the artist who uses the self as canvas: "In a world in which we see ourselves as both a commodity and its seller, to be flogged off on the markets, our self-esteem depends on conditions beyond our control. If we are 'successful' we are valuable; if we are not, we are worthless" (152).<sup>94</sup> For the dandy, whose art consists of the careful cultivation of his own surface, the language of commerce comes as easily (and is equally as necessary) as the language of aesthetics. With sartorialism as one of his primary artistic modes or mediums, the dandy necessarily foregrounds the materiality of goods and commodities as his stock in trade. His dress, perhaps the most overt expression of the dandy's aesthetic sensibility, acts as the signifier that clearly places him within the social milieu. As Susan Fillin-Yeh has argued, the dandy's dress is "the 'social [thing]' that Karl Marx described in identifying the 'fetishism of commodities'" (2). Thus, much of the "action" of Fountain's play consists largely

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<sup>94</sup> It seems clear from Horsley's autobiography that he essentially views this as the human condition. As both commodities and sellers of those commodities, we place ourselves in an untenable position. The odds of continued, unalloyed success are overwhelmingly *not* in our favor, and therefore the likelihood of our experiencing feelings of being valued diminishes as well. Horsley argues that most of us delude ourselves as to this condition, a notable exception being prostitutes. This sense of their clearer self-understanding perhaps goes some way toward explaining Horsley's abiding fondness for them and their trade.

of Horsley's toilet, replicating the private construction of the public persona in a decidedly public, theatrical fashion.

Near the end of his discourse on prostitution, Horsley briefly excuses himself from the stage in order to "run some water over [his] features" (28). He returns with only a towel around his waist, then briefly leaves the stage again to return in a silk dressing gown. Tellingly, Fountain specifies that this dressing gown be different from the one worn at the play's opening, visually articulating the fetishistic consumption that marks Horsley's dandyism. The Horsley of Fountain's play makes clear this fetishism through a spectacular costume parade. At one point, he brings on a clothes rack laden with suits wrapped in plastic. Again, the impulse to quantify dominates the scene. Horsley individually counts the suits, thirty-one of them, nearly three times in all (he interrupts himself once to address the audience). While he ascribes his counting to an obsessive-compulsive disorder, it might just as easily be seen as an expression of his desire to "show his work," in a mathematical sense, to demonstrate the extent of his diligence as a student of capitalism. After all, we can understand each individual number to represent a larger number, the cost of each suit adding up to an impressive sum.

Under the ostensible guise of attempting to decide what suit to wear to his luncheon with Henrietta, he displays individual garments, one by one, eight in all. One suit is described in the stage directions as "remarkable," another as "an utterly outrageous multi-coloured sequined number" (32). Accompanying the visual revelation of each suit, he extensively details the purchase of his wardrobe ("69 suits in all"). In a kind of campaign of sartorial shock and awe, he obsessively lists each variation:

I tried out every cut of jacket; single breasted, double-breasted, big breasted, drape jacket, box jacket, straitjacket. And I had a special pocket sewn into each

one to accommodate my heroin syringes. Colour and pattern wise I bought herringbone, hounds tooth, dogtooth, tartan, chalk stripe, pin stripe, Prince of Wales, prince of darkness, polka dot. I bought every colour except green, as I don't go to the country. (33)

A potential cumulative effect of this recitation is to impress the listener with the rhetoric of excess. With the flip, self-deprecating digs at such excesses (“straitjacket,” “prince of darkness”), Horsley seems to want to reassure his audience that, like a true dandy, he remains essentially indifferent to such an emphatic variety. The carefully rendered details of his account, however, accompanied with the revelation of the alleged extent of his wardrobe expenditure (“over £100,000”) undercut his humorous attempts to paint himself as fully in control. Horsley reveals himself instead to be a true addict, a clotheshorse, to borrow Carlyle’s description of the dandy, hopelessly hooked on both clothes and “horse.” In teasing out the implications of his parallel addictions, then, I would suggest that each act of self-presentation, every day of dressing up, serves as rehearsal for a singular, final performance. Each suit stands in as just another “next-to-last” suit, the penultimate ensemble anticipating the ultimate suit, his funeral suit (which, incidentally, is explicitly identified as the aforementioned “utterly outrageous multi-coloured sequined number”). The plastic-wrapped suits depend from the rack like so many body bags, a kind of ironic mortuary where mortal remains find themselves replaced by material remains. The dandy elides and conflates spirit and flesh, surface and depth, the ineffable spirit perhaps finally inseparable from its fleshly casing.

Fountain reinforces this as Horsley makes the final selection for his assignation with Henrietta, a red velvet suit: “*He starts to ritually lay out his clothes on his throne. They look like a person*” (35). Horsley creates an effigy of the dandy and then proceeds to enthrone it. This suit

represents the dandy's specter. It is the visored armor through which the spirit will speak, a spirit that, in donning the attire, Horsley takes on himself. As in *Hamlet*, a visored specter exhorts the protagonist to action as a means of enacting a vision of vengeance, of justice, of responsibility. In Horsley's case, that vengeance is wreaked not against a single miscreant, but against an entire way of living. As he lays out the suit, Horsley describes his childhood fascination with dressing up, with pretending, with the performance of the other. Fountain relies on Horsley's childhood anecdotes about dressing as Marc Bolan, or as a woman, in order to illustrate his feelings about the relationship between fantasy and reality: "To me [they] were not merely different; they were opposed" (35).

For Horsley, the performative act of dressing up, taking on the spectralized armor of the dandy, allows him to speak with spirits. As Horsley dresses himself, he simultaneously describes his family, taking on the voices first of his grandmother, then his mother. Fountain peppers Horsley's speech with the quotation marks that denote direct attribution (though everything from Horsley's mouth might be considered somewhat suspect). By the time he ties his tie, his speech emerges, altered, from behind the mask of dress:

He was so absurd – a brilliant businessman who ran a two billion pound business called Northern Foods which sold pork pies to Marks and Spencer but who really wanted to be Allen Ginsberg. (*As Father, in Northern accent*) "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix!" He was a drunk and a cripple and the only thing I have to be grateful to him for is



that he broadened my emotional range – I never thought it possible to want to murder a drunk cripple. (37-8)<sup>95</sup>

In this way, Horsley can not only speak with/as the spirit, he can also provide a rebuttal to its assertions. Thus, he recasts his father in the meanest terms possible, rendering his cultural aspirations essentially fraudulent. Horsley's dress and behavior offer him the only real ripostes available to him, particularly once his father has died. When he describes "Glasgow gangster Jimmy Boyle" sodomizing him in his father's bed, he refers to the act as "symbolic parricide" (38). But he reserves his truest expression of infantile rage for his father's funeral service. Though he notes that he didn't attend the funeral, he describes the wardrobe he donned to mark the occasion: "pink gabardine with magenta and diamante tie to match" (38). He uses his outrageous dress as a means of demonstrating his disdain for his father. Flouting tradition and convention, Horsley thumbs his nose at the social niceties that dictate how he ought to behave in such an event, niceties he both alludes to (and undercuts) in his final cutting words on the subject: "My only concession to misery was hidden – my heart was black. You see I was actually in mourning – because I wasn't in the will" (38). Typically, Horsley inverts the work of dandyism, transforming it into a particularly vicious sort of play that, rather than attempting to commemorate his relationship with his father, aims to supplant or efface it. Ironically, however, the costume's very effortful gaudiness merely insists on the power of the deceased to command a place in Horsley's imagination. The practice of dandyism opens a space in which Horsley's dead father speaks more eloquently and with more authority than if Sebastian wore traditional mourning clothes.

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<sup>95</sup> Father's quotation, of course, appropriates the famous opening lines to Ginsberg's *Howl*.

Horsley's emphasis on *outré* sartorial gestures, however, stems from his need to distinguish himself from others. Both d'Aureville and Baudelaire attribute to the dandy this desire, to deliberately assert his alterity. In this, however, French philosophical dandyism differs from the earlier Regency dandyism of Beau Brummell, at least in Horsley's opinion. He asserts Brummell as "essentially a conformist," claiming oppositionality as dandyism's true character (40). "The real dandy," he claims in the play, "wants to make people look, be shocked by and even a little scared by the subversion that his clothes stand for" (40). Horsley carried this desire to be looked at, to shock, to its extreme. No sober blacks for him, when a riot of mauve or puce might be had. As noted above, he paid very close attention to his sartorial presentation, claiming the ideal as "dress[ing] in a style that would attract attention at a Liberace concert" (39). Indeed, Horsley doesn't complete his transformation simply by putting on a gaudy (though exquisitely tailored) suit. Fountain's stage directions describe Horsley putting on makeup as he stares at his reflection in a hand mirror, a task that barely stems the flow of narcissistic tales, now self-aggrandizing, now self-skewering, from his barbed, if witty, tongue. The Horsley of Fountain's play is nothing if not relentlessly self-reflexive, and this extends to his dissection of the dandy as well. Even given his disdain for Brummell, he still admits to being influenced by the Regency style in his own dress, while, if not quite decrying, at least not wholly defending the period's rampant inequalities: "It was marvelous, gentleman [sic] were having their shoelaces ironed whilst children were sweeping their chimney. Wilberforce was denouncing the slave trade while Beau Brummell was denouncing the imperfect cravate" (40). While Horsley's close attention to his own toilet might suggest sympathy with Brummell (and a concomitant lack of interest in the injustices exemplified by the "slave trade"), Horsley clarifies that he fails to identify with

Brummell in any fashion. Rather, he suggests that dandyism has more to do with Wilberforce than with Brummell:

Being a dandy is a condition rather than a profession. It is a defence against suffering and a celebration of life. It is not fashion, wealth, learning or beauty. It is a shield and a sword and a crown – all pulled out of the dressing up box in the attic of the imagination. (40)

Horsley's mention of imagination suggests Baudelaire's articulation of that same force as the structuring principle uniting various binarisms. And once again, Horsley likens dandyism to child's play, though in its attendance to questions of "suffering," this play, composed at least partially of the desire to shock bourgeois sensibilities, has the potentially serious aims and consequences associated with it in the work of Huizinga.

Unsatisfied with mere notability brought to him by his eccentricities in dress, Horsley set his sights on notoriety. He attempted journalism (a column in *The Erotic Review*), but found it not wholly satisfying, preferring a more material mode of expression. He describes his dissatisfaction in his autobiography: "I am not a writer. I am a performer. Writing is merely a way of bringing myself to the notice of the world. And it is the world I care about, not the writing. The fact that I could not live by words alone – despite the fact that I often had to eat them – did not dismay me" (259). For Horsley, the dandy's perfection of the self ultimately failed to suffice. He sought to carry the impulse to shock a step further, not through perfection of the surface, but through its mortification. He chose to have himself quite literally crucified.

In 2000, Horsley traveled to the Philippines to take part in a ritual in which young local men enact the rites of Christian mortification and "martyrdom" as a testament to and affirmation of their faith. Peter Bräunlein counts such crucifixion rituals, as well as those of self-flagellation,

as the most spectacular examples of what has been termed Philippine “Calvary Catholicism” (896). As Horsley notes in his autobiography, the ritualistic suffering emerges from the participants’ intense commitment to their particular brand of Catholicism: “They believe that through pain they may reach more closely towards the divine, that their prayers for sick relatives, for the abeyance of floods, for the flourishing of crops, will be heard by a loving God” (298). Bräunlein argues that, while self-flagellation has a long history in the Philippines, the emergence of modern crucifixion practices in the Philippines can be traced to 1961, when Arsenio Añosa, a faith healer, had himself crucified in the belief that “proximity to the dead Christ through the performance of crucifixion was a means to acquire healing power” (896). Now practiced annually by tens of participants, these rituals clearly possess a performative, theatrical dimension, and have even become tourist attractions witnessed by up to 20,000 spectators. Like the dandy, the performative ritual’s male participants enact a regime of bodily discipline in an attempt to realize their own utopian aspirations. Horsley, in order to convince the locals of his sincerity, had to make a case for himself. His atheism precluding an honest disclosure of his reasons for undergoing the ritual, he argued instead for art as a kind of religion, and for artists as its priests. “Art,” he writes, “is in itself religion, a devotional act offered to some transcendent aim.” Moreover, in a move that surely would have dismayed at least some of those he aimed to assure of his sincerity, he posits Christ as “the ultimate dandy” (299). In Horsley’s terms, both his own dandyism and his crucifixion are performance-based art practices that, respectively, adorn or efface the body in an effort to achieve a kind of transcendence. Horsley’s crucifixion, however, as documented by photographer Dennis Morris and videographer Sarah Lucas, suggests limits to Horsley’s simplistic rendering of Christ as simply the ultimate expression of the dandy’s self-dramatization.

While Bräunlein argues “the ritual of nailing is embedded in theatrical, expressive forms,” particularly the still-influential tradition of the passion play (901), the video document of the event reveals little of this overt theatricality. In this instance, the performance of Horsley’s dandyism, characterized by facile witticisms and outlandish costuming, comes in a very distant second to the trepidation and apprehension expressed in the face of bodily trauma. In a review of the exhibition that resulted from the crucifixion, *Irish Times* critic Aidan Dunne notes the inadequacies of the art resulting from the experience:

In the accompanying material, much is made of the contrast between Horsley's cultivation of a dandyish persona, his theatrical foppishness, and his pitiful plight as victim, stripped and pinned to a cross. Lucas and photographer Dennis Morris capture his doubt and uncertainty very effectively. Yet the experience seems to leave him at a loss. One feels that he is not by nature one of the "Brit Art" pack. He is not in tune with the language of neo-conceptualism and in offering himself up to a raw, difficult experience he is unprotected by the buffer of irony. It doesn't matter whether he means it or not, he has put himself on the spot and it is going to hurt.

Horsley, through his performative act, identifies himself with “the ultimate dandy,” Jesus Christ, enacting a ritual that ostensibly aims to symbolically transform him, through mock crucifixion, into the messianic, utopian vision of the returned spirit.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes of the specter as the revenant, as that which returns, but returns *from the future*. “At bottom,” he writes, “the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back” (39). Through the example of Christ’s death and resurrection, Christian martyrdom also carries with it the promise of return,

a sense of the afterlife's assured futurity. For Horsley as sacrificial artist, as martyred dandy, then, the crucifixion served as a means of attempting to assert his own continued relevance, a stopgap measure against a feeling of entropic impotence couched in the most overtly self-indulgent performance possible. In his autobiography Horsley criticizes the paintings that emerged from his experience as "the weakest part of the show" (315). Critiquing art as "essentially conservative," he derides art as mere commodity, exalting the act over its trace. Ironically, however, what remain to haunt us are precisely the traces of that act, those bits and pieces of the experience preserved in language and image like holy relics. Through these traces and their continued existence, Horsley the dandy continues always to return, comes back again and again, a disembodied voice echoing down the hallways of history, *look at me, won't you?*

*Look at me.*

To reiterate, then, Derrida's three things of the thing constitute an analysis of spectrality itself, of what makes up or constitutes spectrality. The first, mourning, depends on the *who* and *where* of the specter, the identification of its remains and the establishment of their locality, particularly in relation to the mourner. My case study of Sebastian Horsley attempts this undertaking, tries to create a space in which the specter of dandyism might be mourned by identifying the performative traces left behind by Horsley and establishing its locality in the temporal and cultural specificity of those traces. This investigation concludes with a vanishing act, Horsley the magician-ventriloquist leaving us to ponder only the rapidly dissipating echoes of his sardonic voice. That voice, or rather, the very notion of voice itself, and the language it expresses, marks the next stop on the journey into the land of the dead.

## CHAPTER VI. DANDIES AT PLAY ON THE FIELDS OF SPORT

Derrida positions language, the second of his “three things of the thing,” as conditional to understanding spectrality. “[O]ne cannot speak of generations of skulls or spirits...except on the condition of language—and the voice, in any case of that which *marks* the name or takes its place” (*Specters of Marx* 9).<sup>96</sup> One can only apprehend the specter through language, through its use and exchange. As a medium of exchange, then, such a language (indeed, *any* language), far from being a neutral, expressive medium, expresses the human condition as one essentially inflected in economic terms. All languages, then, are related variants, what Werner Hamacher terms “dialects of the universal commodity-language” (174). Each tongue contains within it the preconditions for commodification. Hamacher refers to this language, after Marx, as the language of cloth.

The language of cloth, he argues, is the language of the commodity, that language which, in the parlance of textiles, “weaves itself and joins with comparable fabrics” (168). This cloth-language enables the political economy it ostensibly expresses. Hamacher chooses cloth as the representative commodity for this language not only for its appearance early in *Capital*, but also for its expression in Derrida. This commodity-language, the language of the cloth, slyly unspools a utopian promise, a promise seized upon by the dandy: “The commodity cloth not only speaks, it promises (itself) something else, and it *is* its promise of something else: as a phenomenon it is, like every phenomenon and every possible and real world, spectrally and henceforth messianically constituted” (170). The dandy, dependent on the sartorial application of the cloth for legibility, makes himself into a kind of avatar of the cloth. The cloth, shaped into suits and

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<sup>96</sup> Again, Derrida cites *Hamlet* as an exemplar of the workings of spectrality: “That Scull had a tongue in it, and could sing once.”

waistcoats, gabardines and brocades, serves as the visor through which the dandy speaks (or, perhaps even more perversely, the dandy's corporeal form serves as the screen through which the cloth itself speaks). This cloth-speech, a function of its status as fetishized commodity, holds forth the possibility of a better world, offering with its commodified tongue a fiction of value and the promise of equivalence. I am valuable as the product of labor, says the cloth, and as waistcoat, or neckcloth, or handkerchief, I am equally valuable, for we are all products of human labor. The cloth as commodity invokes the value of labor in order to lend itself legitimacy, to make itself *apparent*. As Hamacher explains, "When a thing – the cloth, for example, – socializes with another thing in the form of equality, equivalence, symmetry and reversability, it – this cloth – gives itself what it formerly lacked, it gives itself a value and thus appears for the first time in the world of commodity-society, appears for the first time in the world and *appears* for the first time" (171). Likewise, the dandy, who makes himself apparent in large part through his sartorial presentation, (re)appears<sup>97</sup> precisely because of his relationship to the commodified objects that define his appearance. Indeed, his (re)appearance only becomes possible through the presence of the goods with which he adorns himself. The messianic promise of the dandy, then, predicates itself on the presence of the commodity. This explicitly links the dandy to the futurity suggested by dandyism's philosophical underpinnings as established by Balzac, d'Aureville, and Baudelaire. They positioned the dandy as a social savior, and I suggest here that that hoped-for "salvation," the transcendence into beauty, is, for the dandy, inextricably linked to commodification. Just as the cloth exists in a relationship of equivalency to the coat, so too does

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<sup>97</sup> I note his appearance as a reappearance because, as Derrida has noted in the case of the specter, the revenant's appearance is always a return, never originary.



the dandy. Demonstrating Hamacher's notion of the relationship's "reversability," the dandy's clothes quite literally "make" the man (or, at the very least, the *kind* of man).

When the dandy speaks, then, the cloth speaks as well. And both cloth and dandy are spectral. Their speech is a haunting. Both of them are "material incorporation[s] of universal abstractions, neither flesh nor blood, but materially appearing form" (Hamacher 178). The dandy's speech, as that of the cloth, is the voice of the specter, of all the specters, for, as Hamacher notes, "there is not only one specter but several, always more than one" (181). As I have noted earlier, this spectrality, while apparent in the present moment, is out of joint with that moment. It is the past come to collect on what the future feels it's owed. It is the dandy presenting his own brand of spectral messianism. And his speech proffers the promise of the transformative beauty intimated by Baudelaire and the other philosopher-dandies of the nineteenth century.

In contemporary popular culture, few figures have come so close to embodying this peculiar sense of spectral difference as athlete David Beckham. Beckham, perhaps the most widely recognized figure in international football,<sup>98</sup> often finds himself the object of media attention as much for his presence off the pitch as on. Beckham has parlayed his athletic prowess into an extremely lucrative career as celebrity endorser and fashion icon. In certain respects he has come to embody some of the central debates regarding contemporary masculinity, particularly in its manifestation in the matrix of celebrity. These debates have become so much a commonplace surrounding Beckham's persona that their legibility almost goes without saying.

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<sup>98</sup> Though many American readers would likely name soccer as Beckham's chosen sport, reserving football to refer to what the rest of the world describes as "American football," I defer to "football" as the more widely-used international appellation.

Tim Edwards states that “[e]ven Mrs. Anybody gathering her shopping on a Monday morning knows that the fuss about David Beckham has something to do with his masculinity” (1). Despite Edwards’ somewhat questionable reification of gender stereotypes here, his fictitious “Mrs. Anybody,” with her Monday morning shopping routine, effectively positions Beckham’s masculinity (and celebrity) within the capitalist matrix of consumer culture and commodification. Beckham’s performance of masculinity intertwines inextricably with the social, cultural, and economic forces that both constrain and enable that performance.

My intent in this chapter is not to argue for Beckham as a contemporary dandy; rather, I hope to explore the manner in which dandyism is inflected both by Beckham’s performative choices and by those whose commentary assists in constructing the icon publicly known as “David Beckham.” Accounts of Beckham’s public appearances often rely on the term “dandy” as a kind of shorthand rhetorical gesture to the semiotic complexities of his sartorial choices.<sup>99</sup> For instance, a February 8, 2011 headline on the fashion blog Style Queen 101 reads “Oh My Dandy! David Beckham’s Style Looks Very Country-Gentleman While Watching Football in the

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<sup>99</sup> It is reasonable to assume that, like many (if not most) celebrities, Beckham’s wardrobe is not entirely self-determined. Stylists, publicists, spouses and partners, all likely contribute to the construction of a celebrity’s public persona. In the case of David Beckham, I assume that his “look” is the product of multiple inputs and points of view. Thus, “David Beckham” the celebrity is a corporate performance played out on the body of David Beckham the individual. For the purposes of this study, unless explicitly stated otherwise, when I refer to Beckham I refer to this idea of celebrity as corporate performance.

Weekend” (Style Queen).<sup>100</sup> The accompanying photograph shows Beckham wearing a tweed jacket and scarf. The idea that his appearance emulates that of a “country-gentleman” (sic) foregrounds the class dynamic that contributes to making Beckham a compelling figure of celebrity.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* helpfully reveals the extent to which the notion of a country gentleman plays on pre-existing ideas of class and its performativity, rather than constructing them anew. It defines the type as “[a] gentleman who lives in the country, *spec.* one who owns and resides in landed property” (“Country Gentleman, *n.*”). Despite this tautological use of the term “gentleman,” the definition reveals the country gentleman’s solid connection with capital in the form of property. It also reveals the performative history of this particular nomenclature, noting its early usage in the *dramatis personae* for Richard Brome’s play, *Court Begger*, first published in his 1653 collection *Five New Playes*. One of the subsidiary characters, a Mr. Swaynwit, is identified as a “blunt Countrey Gentleman” (“Country Gentleman, *n.*”). The notion of the country gentleman, then, coalesced early as a dramatized “type,” as the performed representation of a particular class identity. Brome’s play, a social satire, positions Swaynwit, like his counterparts Court-wit and Cit-wit, as figures of ridicule, types disdained for their social pretensions. Consequently, the use of this sobriquet in relationship to Beckham presents the interesting possibility that, while Style Queen’s commentary on Beckham’s appearance might indeed be read as a playfully allusive gloss on the particularities of his dress, it might also be read as an ironic commentary on his own upward mobility within the British class system.

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<sup>100</sup> It’s perhaps worth noting that the blogger in question appears to be an aspiring stylist herself. In a link on her page, she solicits her readers to become her “first styling client.”

Regardless of whether Beckham's style serves as either provocation or critique, however, the image cultivated for (or by) him inarguably participates in the process of self-commodification. As Barry Smart notes, "Sport stars are increasingly being employed to endorse, help promote and market consumer commodities" (10). Through this process, the celebrity encourages identification of his or her image with a particular product. Often, marketers present such products not solely as discrete purchases, but as necessary, if interchangeable, pieces of a larger lifestyle brand. The viewer desires not only the product, but everything that the product implies about the lifestyle on display. Through the lure of identification, the advertiser or marketer offers the implied possibility that purchase of the product might effect a transformation in the viewer. The celebrity serves as both promise and guarantor of that possibility as represented in the product. The process of identification described here offers, through the product, the possibility of collapse, of elision between the self and the celebrity other. As a result, the product becomes not only a representative of the hoped-for lifestyle, but through the act of marketing, also potentially coterminous with both the consumer and the commodified celebrity.

Beckham's celebrity status (and photogenic good looks) has made him extremely popular with advertisers seeking a sports figure to endorse their products. In addition to appearing on the covers of countless non-sporting magazines, his celebrity endorsements have included "modelling *Police* sunglasses, designing clothing for the *adidas* 'DB' range and appearing in commercials for the soft drink manufacturer *Pepsi* and razor company *Gillette*" (Smart 10). Beckham's appeal as a celebrity endorser resides in his ability to appeal to multiple, even contradictory, markets. His sporting prowess and athletic physique help to signify a hypermasculinity, while his interest in fashion (and that same lean physique) also brand him as a

proponent of what has often been termed “metrosexuality.” As his football career has waned, Beckham has placed more and more emphasis on cementing himself not only as a celebrity but as a “brand.”

As Ellis Cashmore and Andrew Parker have noted, it is difficult to speak with any authority about a “singular” David Beckham:

[T]here is more than “one” David Beckham, there are several: the flesh-and-blood father-of-two; the working-class-boy-made-good with a fondness for fashion and cars; the David Beckham on whom, for men and women of all ages, fantasies are spun; the David Beckham whose footballing skills command the admiration and affection of so many soccer devotees; the David Beckham who exists independent of time and space and resides in the fertile imaginations of countless acolytes.

(214-15)

These various Beckhams (and the ways in which they serve as markers against which to measure various qualities, traits, or even fantasies) suggest the application of d’Aurevilly’s analysis of vanity as one of the central components of dandyism. In the case of David Beckham, the identificatory process of celebrity commodification means that the consumer adopting Beckham’s image as his or her ideal potentially uses Beckham’s characteristics as a means of comparatively ordering the world as a dandy might, with the idealized celebrity image standing in for the consumer. Thus, the consumer has available to him or her each of the aforementioned Beckhams, and indeed the football star’s recognizability as a global brand depends in part on the effective exploitation of all of these facets. This representational multiplicity ensures his viability in a variety of different spheres, spheres which some might position as definitionally opposed to one another. His status as sports star entails an engagement with the hard-edged ideal of

heterosexual masculinity typically associated with the occupational culture of football, while his standing as fashion icon calls that very masculinity into question.

Beckham's engagement with the world of fashion has provided the primary basis for discussion of him as a dandy. Beckham's image off the pitch is immaculately coiffed and styled. He wears designer clothes, changes his hair on regular basis, and lends his name and image to products associated with metrosexuality and peacockery. As Vincent, Hill, and Lee have noted,

The Beckham body, hard and toned, is aligned with his metro-sexual tendencies and that also makes him a popular figure in the gay community. Far from discouraging this androgynous image, Beckham chooses to reinforce this 'bisexual persona' through his choice of fashions as well as appearances in gay magazines. (Vincent 176)

As a result, then, of this image management, Beckham has regularly been named a dandy, if occasionally with a certain degree of sarcasm or disdain, as when Teo van den Broeke notes for *Esquire UK* that, "Worryingly, over the past few years David Beckham has become one of the key proponents of the Dandy trend."<sup>101</sup>

Other commentators, however, less flippantly describe Beckham as a dandy. Nick Foulkes, author of a biography of Count d'Orsay, has no trouble in calling Beckham a dandy, even if he finds the notion of a modern dandy something of "an oxymoron." Foulkes finds the idea of the dandy too dependent on "the wit, elegance, snobbery and recklessness of early 19th-century Britain." He thus calls for a redefinition of dandyism, one that would include Beckham as exemplar. He goes so far as to describe the football player as "[t]he man who has done most

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<sup>101</sup> One can almost imagine Alfred E. Neuman in an immaculate bespoke suit, uttering his famous phrase: "What, me worry?"

for the cause of modern dandyism.” For Foulkes, this honor rests largely on Beckham’s role as forward-looking fashion icon, a modishness that runs counter to Beckham’s class associations. Foulkes notes this point, clearly demonstrating a difference between the traditional dandy and his modern equivalent: “Nevertheless, Beckham is hardly the sort of character one can imagine charming an early-19<sup>th</sup>-century drawing room.” While the traditional dandy’s appearance served as a means of articulating social relations, embodying a utopian aesthetic ideal, a contemporary dandy cut from Beckham’s cloth serves as signifier with no signified. The Beckham dandy is a simulacrum, a modern Narcissus trapped by the image of himself recirculated in the media. In allying himself with the corporate interests of a commodified culture, he makes himself emblematic and representative of product rather than process; instead of exploring the aesthetics of self-presentation as a model for an ideal of large-scale refinement, he collaborates with corporate interests to make of himself another brand to exploit, a point elaborated on by both Tim Edwards and Ellis Cashmore, among others. In this, Beckham occupies a virtual “No Man’s Land” between two masculine archetypes: the New Man and the New Lad.

Emerging from the sexual politics of the 1980s and 1990s, the New Man represents a revised masculine archetype, purportedly a kind of response to the cultural insights of feminism. The New Man, repudiating traditional masculinist rhetorics of exclusion and authority, places an increased value on male expressions of tenderness and sensitivity. As Edwards notes, however, the New Man “has been and perhaps continues to be an oddly dualistic or two-sided phenomenon” (39). While he turned one supremely caring and understanding face to the world, another stared longingly at his own reflection, as demonstrated by a concurrent upswing in advertising focused on men’s grooming products. The New Lad, on the other hand, represented a pendulum swing back in the other direction, offering a supposed return to traditional notions of a

more self-consciously “macho” masculinity. Both identities roughly mapped out onto class distinctions, with the New Man emerging largely from the middle class, while the New Lad took his cues from masculinities traditionally coded as working class. Beckham synthesizes elements from both the New Man and the New Lad, both widening his appeal and making him a potentially polarizing figure.

While Beckham comes from a distinctly working class background, his public appearance has all the semiotic hallmarks of conspicuous consumption. In an essay on Beckham and the popular press, Garry Whannel quotes *OK*'s account of Beckham's wedding to former Spice Girl Victoria Adams (a.k.a. “Posh” Spice), focusing specifically on the couple's spectacular rings:

3 grain-set baguette diamonds and set in 18 carat yellow gold. Each side of the shank of the ring is set with six diamonds with the total diamond weight adding up to 5.82 carats. David's ring is a full eternity ring set with 4 baguette diamonds with 24 smaller diamonds set on one side of the shank, in 18 carat yellow gold adding up to a total diamond weight of 7.44 carats. (qtd. in Whannel 243)

Whannel notes that the popular press generally covered the Beckham nuptials as examples of conspicuous consumption, though their reactions to such consumption varied. Magazines and newspapers reported on every detail of the celebration, giving special attention to quantities and sums, as if to generate the impression of opulence or elegance through the rhetoric of accountancy. Whannel astutely identifies in the reporting a strain of nostalgia “for earlier periods of excess which the real Royal Family could no longer stage” (211). Becks and Posh, stand-ins



for a fallen aristocracy, paraded the trappings of elegance before the public eye.<sup>102</sup> More cynically, however, such accounts might also be read as indirect indictments, insinuations that, while the ability of the Beckhams to afford such finery was beyond question, their taste level was still very much in doubt. Whannel also clearly articulates the class bias in critiques of the couple's nuptials, noting that tabloids typically reported positively on the display of wealth and opulence, while broadsheets generally sniffed at the affair as a display of coarse excess. As a public figure, then, David Beckham occupies a liminal space; his humble background attests to the potency of working class dreams, while his wealth and fame mark him as member of that neo-aristocracy formed around modern celebrity. Again, liminality of this nature is one of the hallmarks of dandyism, perhaps most notably articulated by Baudelaire.

Whether Beckham is a dandy or not, though, his self-presentation (and its concomitant liminality) evokes the dandy's Derridean spectrality. The specter represented by Beckham's indeterminacy as a signifier is the specter that engenders terror and, in this case at least, a particularly masculine brand of gender-based anxiety. Derrida, in analyzing Marx's obsession with ghosts, argues that Marx "pursues relentlessly [*il s'acharne lui-même*] someone who almost resembles him to the point that we could mistake one for the other: a brother, a double, thus a diabolical image. A kind of ghost of himself. Whom he would like to distance, distinguish: to *oppose*" (*Specters of Marx* 174). Beckham cuts just such a figure for the masculine tradition. His persona represents a locus of potential masculine identity, the "brother," the "double" of traditional masculinity. However, his adoption of traits associated with the dandy serves to trouble the stability of this identity. By refusing to appear as either the New Man or the New

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<sup>102</sup> In this case, of course, *OK* represented the public eye, and reportedly paid one million for that exclusive privilege.

Lad, Beckham represents the specter of failure, of masculinity in crisis. Nowhere is this failure more apparent than in arguments over the voice emerging from this specter, from Beckham himself.

Beckham's voice, thin, high, and reedy, has long been a sticking point in the pitched battle over his masculinity. Bloggers and online commentators point to the football star's voice as a characteristic seemingly at odds with the rest of his self-presentation. A blogger for the website Celebitchy alluded to this in a brief piece on Beckham: "He was recently on Craig Ferguson's show, and he was so, so lovely. His voice didn't even bug me! I think his voice seems to be getting deeper, honestly" (Kaiser). Even Victoria Beckham has had to respond to accusations that her husband's voice somehow betrays the masculine ideal. In an interview with *Marie Claire*, she responded in a manner designed to reinforce traditional notions of heterosexual masculinity:

I don't really notice that he's got a high-pitched voice. I just think he's so goddamn perfect that people have to find something wrong with him. We were about to go out somewhere the other day, and he was sending an email. He was sitting at the end of the bed, and he had no clothes on whatsoever. I was getting out of the shower, and I just stood there looking at him. He was all tan. Has all those tattoos, which I love. Hadn't done his hair. He just naturally looks good all the time. He never looks like s—t in the morning. Never. So he's sitting there sending his e-mails, all ripped. Not an ounce of fat on him. And I thought, you done good, girl. I sure wasn't thinking of his high-pitched voice. (Young)

Victoria Beckham opens her defense of her husband by acknowledging the critique of his vocal delivery, insisting that criticisms of the pitch of his voice are merely attempts to find a flaw in an

otherwise flawless surface. In her narration of the incident, she invites the listener first to imagine her husband's naked body, a body regularly on display on the football pitch and in advertising. She then mentions an otherwise irrelevant fact, that she "was getting out of the shower," thereby obliquely evoking the image of her own naked form. By bringing the images of these two naked bodies into proximity, even imaginary proximity, with one another, she reinforces the image of David Beckham as a traditionally masculine, heterosexual male. Similarly, the rest of her description casts him in a light designed to maximally demonstrate his heterosexual, masculine appeal. The nod to his tattoos reinforces Beckham's narrative regarding his working class origins, while his preternaturally good hair ("he never looks like s—t in the morning") distinguishes him from popular (and sexist) notions of women as needing to engage in elaborate toilets in order to make themselves presentable for the day. The visual image evoked by Victoria Beckham's narration serves to silence his voice, to thrust it back behind the visor of masculinity where it can be (safely?) contained. Even the activity in which he engages, sending an email, obviates the need for the reader to consider the materiality of Beckham's voice. The entire narrative is designed to present David Beckham as the strong-but-silent, hypermasculine stud, a narrative entirely undercut by the reification in her final statement of the reality of Beckham's voice: that it is, indeed, "high-pitched," and that such a quality is seen as not wholly compatible with traditional ideas of masculinity.<sup>103</sup>

Beckham's voice, however, isn't the only marker of how the public might judge his masculinity. The perceived femininity emerging from his mouth must stand in juxtaposition to the more fully embodied, physical attributes expressed in his self-presentation. In a series of

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<sup>103</sup> In terms of pitch, perhaps if he were able to "bend it like Beckham" he might find as much success with one (his vocal pitch) as he does on the other (the soccer pitch).

group discussions held with London men aged 18-21, researchers asked participants to evaluate and discuss images of men, many of them celebrities. When queried about David Beckham, the respondents replied with the following:

Sean: He's like a gay, man. He just poses for the cameras. [laughs]

*Int: OK. Well what about the fact that he is a good player and England captain? Wouldn't that normally be seen as a masculine thing?*

Sean: No, I lost all respect for him, man, in the Euro, 2000s. I just lost all respect for him. I don't think he's masculine at all, though.

Marcus: I think being obsessed with your image is a very unmasculine thing. It's... I don't know, it's seen as feminine. (De Visser 1053)

The study's participants clearly link homosexuality and femininity in the question of Beckham's self-presentation. This, when coupled with what might be perceived as his vocal shortcomings, make for a complicated picture of masculinity. The young men clearly reveal some ambivalence regarding Beckham's masculinity:

Arjuna: His voice is very, a soft gentle voice and, um, the way he dresses, the emphasis he puts on his looks ... a lot of people do think he's very feminine, but the fact that he, all the ladies love him, and the fact that he's world-renowned as a good footballer distract you from the fact ... from that.

Rahul: Mm.

Arjuna: I think a lot of people would, if he wasn't as good a footballer as he was—

Rahul: —He can virtually get away with whatever he wants, though, can't he? If he wasn't as good a footballer as he was then a lot of people would slate him. I don't think he—

*Int:* So what if he was an average player in the second division?

Arjuna: No way!

Rahul: You couldn't get away with it really, could you?

*Int:* But the fact that he's England captain—

Rahul: —that allows him to do those, sort of, weird things. (De Visser 1053)

These “weird things” Beckham does, of course, are precisely those things most closely aligning him with dandyism. Thus, these “things” can be seen as in some way communicative with Derrida’s “things of the thing,” in this case, language. The sound Arjuna hears, Beckham’s “soft, gentle voice,” the marker of his femininity, is the sound of the cloth-language, the sound of a spectralized, commodified, *dandified* masculinity. It is the same sound Tim Edwards’ Mrs. Anybody hears as she goes about her Monday morning shopping.

While the specter may seem somewhat apprehensible through its visor, through the language it speaks, and thus may seem to be something we recognize from before, from the past, it also portends the future through its own alterity. This spectral alterity mirrors the dandy’s own sense of difference, a difference noted by each of the philosophers of dandyism examined in Part I. Moreover, this alterity stands in for and signifies the very promise of futurity, the transformation the dandy hopes to bring about. As Hamacher notes, “Specters, parting from the departed and on the brink of becoming independent, consist of splits, live in fissures and joints, in intermundia...they are monsters of difference” (181). The specter that is dandyism is such a monster. Refusing to commit, neither masculine nor feminine, neither radical nor reactionary, he uneasily and diffidently stands astride the fissures and gaps that threaten to sunder the illusory stability of identity categories. Marked by dandyism, masculinity’s spectral other, David Beckham performs an alternate mode to hegemonic masculinity, albeit a mode which does not

pose a radical threat to that hegemony. To use another metaphor, we might also figure the gap he straddles as a median between two parallel roads. This median, the dandy asserts, will disappear at some point beyond the horizon. The dandy has returned from such a place, from this distant moment both past and future, and brings with him his knowledge that the two roads can and do, at some point, merge into one. The promise of this unity may strike some ears as utopian, but to others it appears only as effacement of identity, as threat. As such, the voice of the cloth, Beckham's voice, holds out an ambivalent promise: *this is the future we are working toward*, it says. *I am the future.*

## CHAPTER VII. DANDIES IN THE STUDIO

By this third case study, this third iteration of dandyism (or something very much like it), it may have become clear that the dandy refuses to remain still, declines to exhibit himself as a singular, unchanging object. Indeed, this characteristic of dandyism, this transformative impulse, is exemplary of Derrida's third "thing of the thing": work. "The thing *works*, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, the 'spirit of the spirit' is *work*" (9). What may seem self-evident to some, then, that the dandy is a figure of idleness, of indolence, belies the dandy's true nature, which, far from exemplifying only a static conservatism, is potentially dynamic and transformative. As I argue in Part I of this study, the dandy's efforts at self-fashioning, his imaginative engagement with fantasy in the pursuit of a transformative aestheticism, essentially constitute the bulk of what might be termed his labor or work. This labor is not always apprehended as such, however, as its product (the dandy himself) is not easily divisible from the consumer goods through which those fantasies are enacted. Nowhere are these qualities of dandyism more powerfully demonstrated than in the figures of black dandies.

Monica L. Miller notes that historically dandyism may have provided blacks with an opportunity to partially recoup or reconfigure identities disrupted by the intervention of slavery: "For blacks in the diaspora, the dandy's special talent—the possibility of converting absence into presence through self-display—is not only a philosophical or psychological boon, but also, initially, a practical concern" (10). As a manipulation of sartorial codes, dandyism held an added level of meaning for black slaves, who were often inducted into their new world with the issue of

new clothing, articles neither truly belonging to them nor of their own choosing but which they nonetheless often modified to indicate some sense of personal subjectivity (10).<sup>104</sup>

In an attempt to pinpoint some sort of historical origin for the idea of black dandyism, scholars such as Miller have pointed to early exhibitions of black sartorial splendor as part and parcel of the economic system in which blacks had forcibly been made objects of exchange. Slaveholders dressed some young black men and boys in fashionable attire as a means of displaying their own wealth. In this sense, the “work” of these men and boys, and the work of all dandies everywhere, was (and is) to *represent*, to signify by upholding a certain image or standard. While this may seem like hardly any work at all, the consequences of failure in the context of slavery were potentially catastrophic. Initially, then, while black dandyism may not seem a significant site of individual agency, over time the adoption of finery in dress became a source of pride and potential freedom. Miller details one early account that illustrates the power of dress for black Americans during slavery:

In Virginia in 1769, a mulatto slave named Joe, a “genteel and active Fellow,” who “has always been kept as a Gentleman’s waiting Man, his Hair comb’d very nicely, [who] can write a good Hand,” escaped on a fine horse with “a large

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<sup>104</sup> In the United States, given the importance of both cotton and slavery to the economy of the South, the circulation of labor and commodities proved fraught indeed. Slaves provided the labor to pick cotton, which then served as raw material for the textile mills of the Northeast and Great Britain. Eventually, the cheapest, most durable of the resulting textiles would then return to the South for paternalistic distribution by slaveholders to their slaves. Thus, the product of labor returns to the laborer, who fails to recognize it as such, having been completely alienated from his or her role in its production.



bundle of Cloaths and other things with him,” including, “a blue over coat and Breeches, a Lead colour’d Cloth Coat and Vest, with Metal Buttons, and Silver Lac’d Hat, several summer vests, white Shirts and Stockings, of which some are silk.” Clad in such finery, Joe rode toward the shore, where, as he told some people he met on his journey, he hoped to get a ship to London and live as a free man. Here, dress and fashion are practically and symbolically important to a slave’s sense of individuality and liberty... (5)<sup>105</sup>

As is so often the case with the dandy, the catalog of his wardrobe serves almost as a sort of incantation, the accretion of objects calling into being the figure they cover. The work of self-fashioning, then, of transformation (and maintenance of that transformation), enabled the possibility of self-definition, of wresting control over one’s own disposition away from those who would keep blacks subjugated. The voice of the slave, a voice that would be, in most cases, ignored at best or silenced completely at worst, might be transfigured through the visor, altered or disguised by the voice of the cloth. The cloth, or the clothes, held forth the utopian promise of (re-)making the man. The application of the dandy’s transformative, utopian impulse to America’s peculiar institution suggests that even the seemingly elitist philosophies of Balzac, d’Aurevilly, and Baudelaire have their unforeseen (even unforeseeable) democratizing potentialities. Histories such as Miller’s perform the valuable work of tracing the development of black dandyism and the manner in which that development went hand in hand with the formation of black identities. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to treat this history in depth, it ought to be noted that the self-presentation of someone like André Benjamin, the subject of this

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<sup>105</sup> This excerpt displays the quantitative impulse that leads to the rhetoric of accountancy. I point to similar instances of such rhetoric in Chapters Five and Six.

chapter's case study, relies heavily on the examples of those black dandies who came before him.

André Benjamin is most well known, in the form of his alter ego “André 3000,” as one half of the critically acclaimed hip-hop duo, OutKast.<sup>106</sup> Benjamin and Antwan “Big Boi” Patton, OutKast's principals, have long met with praise for their adventurous and stylistically voracious approach to music making, but Benjamin in particular has also been hailed from many corners as a contemporary style icon. In 2007, Dandyism.net noted that “[t]o the chagrin of some, we have always applauded OutKast's André 3000 as a modern dandy” (“Kast Away”).<sup>107</sup> The hip-hop site *Complex* has dubbed Benjamin (in an arguably racist appellation) an “urban dandy” (Grant).<sup>108</sup> A

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<sup>106</sup> He has also gained some fame as an actor and as a designer; in 2008, he released his own clothing line, Benjamin Bixby.

<sup>107</sup> Though the writer of the blog post doesn't elaborate on why some readers might feel chagrin at the mention of Benjamin as a dandy, it seems reasonable to speculate that any objections to his categorization as such might not rest solely on aesthetic criteria. I would argue that aesthetics as such, particularly in relationship to a discussion of dandyism, remain inextricable from the cultural matrices out of which they emerge. As a result, consideration must be given to the intersectionalities of identity, particularly as manifested through such categories as race and class.

<sup>108</sup> The notion of an “urban dandy” comes near to being a redundancy, for, as the French philosophical strain of dandyism would have it, dandyism is essentially an exclusively urban, resolutely metropolitan phenomenon (though, of course, as I have noted earlier, the advent of the internet may have changed this to a certain degree). Hence, no real distinction need be made

*Guardian* profile described him as “a modern-day dandy who epitomises cool” (Vernon).

Though it may not *quite* be consensus, there seems to be a general agreement that, even if Benjamin isn’t in *fact* a dandy by the term’s strictest definitions,<sup>109</sup> he comes awfully close.

Benjamin’s development as a musical artist parallels the development of his approach to fashion as a means of self-presentation. The points at which music and fashion intersect for Benjamin might well be described as the transformative output of his “work” as a dandy. Benjamin’s own transformation, however, demonstrates a distinct shift in his relationship to the performance of masculinity. Early OutKast music videos, such as 1993’s “Player’s Ball,” demonstrate an approach to fashion that conforms to dominant notions of acceptable masculine expression within hip-hop culture. This concern with the relationship between self-presentation and identity evinces itself clearly in OutKast’s songs, as well as the videos based on them. “Player’s Ball” illustrates this connection by linking the lyrical presentation of masculinity with its visual counterpart in the music video. The phrase “Player’s Ball” refers to the annual gathering of pimps held in Chicago since 1974. Though the song itself isn’t explicitly about the Chicago Ball, the title links the narrative voices of the song, those of André 3000 and Big Boi, to preexisting tropes of black masculinity represented by the pimps of the Player’s Ball. As a result, the song’s lyrics can be read as an engagement with one ideal of the performance of black masculinity: the pimp. The opening lyrics of the song are as follows: “Scene was so thick, low rides, seventy-seven Seviles/El Do’s, nuttin but them ‘llacs/All the players, all the hustlers, I’m

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between an urban dandy and any other kind. Moreover, in current parlance, “urban” is often merely a euphemism for “black.”

<sup>109</sup> Though as is probably clear by this point, strict definitions seem to be a straitjacket from which the dandy handily wriggles free.

talking about/Black man heaven, yah know what I'm saying? Peace.” In citing the Ball as “black man heaven,” the lyrics position the pimp ideal of masculinity as a desirable one, at least for the young African-American men who comprised the group’s earliest core of fans. In one of the video’s setups, Benjamin appears in an Atlanta Braves jersey worn atop a long-sleeved white undershirt, blue jeans, tennis shoes, and a grey Kangol, or flat cap.<sup>110</sup> In a second setup, Benjamin is seen only from the waist up, but he wears a white t-shirt with some sort of logo.<sup>111</sup> In a third, he appears shirtless, his jeans riding low to reveal striped boxer shorts, and the Kangol makes a return appearance. All of these ensembles fall well within the (hetero)normative ranges for masculinity established by hip-hop culture of the time. As Nicole Fleetwood has noted, “Like popular sports and the music itself, hip-hop clothing style is virulently and heterosexually

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<sup>110</sup> The cap appears and disappears throughout the video. Interestingly, the style of cap worn here by Benjamin, in all likelihood a Kangol (a brand popular in the hip-hop community), has its own interesting history. Various known as a flat cap, Paddy cap, cabbie cap, longshoreman’s cap, scally cap, Wigens cap, ivy cap, golf cap, duffer cap, driving cap, bicycle cap, Jeff cap, Irish cap, bunnet, Dai cap, or cheese-cutter, it has the English Parliament to thank for its popularity as, in 1571, an Act was passed mandating that any male over the age of six was to wear such a cap every Sunday and holiday. Exclusions were allowed for nobility and “persons of degree.” The Act, intended to stimulate the wool trade, ensured that the cap would come to be associated, initially at least, with those not of noble standing. While the Act itself was eventually repealed (in 1597), the flat cap has made something of a comeback, and now finds itself a fashionable accessory for such style icons as David Beckham and the Prince of Wales. (“Flat Cap”)

<sup>111</sup> In the copy of the video I viewed, the shots did not allow for a concrete identification of the logo in question.

masculine and designers cater to male teenagers and adults” (160). Additionally, sports and music both provide possible images of success to young African-American audiences. Hip-hop fashion adopted sportswear as a go-to signifier for aspiration, and athletes used their affinity for and connections with hip-hop culture to maintain a level of credibility. Elena Romero clearly articulates the relationship of sports to hip-hop:

For athletes, hip hop signified a badge of credibility in helping some athletes maintain an allegiance to their fans and culture as they faced the daily challenge of “keeping it real.” Many basketball players have taken that same MC swagger and used it to define themselves as they stepped into the professional arena. Some even tried their hand at rhyiming such as Shaquille O’Neal, Kobe Bryant, Ron Artest, Jason Kidd, and Allen Iverson. (154)

The image presented by Benjamin in the early OutKast videos reinforces the idea of him as exemplar of aspirational, “real,” black manhood. Lyrically, he links himself to the pimp ideal, and his use of dominant hip-hop fashion trends mark him as an up-and-comer. Additionally, his Braves jersey lends him credibility through its signification of hometown pride.

Five years later, by 1998’s *Aquemini*, the style parameters for Benjamin’s OutKast alter ego, André 3000, had shifted significantly. Where previously André 3000 had accoutered himself in the period’s hip-hop “uniform,” now he broke free from the pack in favor of a radically anarchic style drawing on multiple influences.<sup>112</sup> A survey of OutKast music videos

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<sup>112</sup> I think it important to note that Big Boi’s sartorial choices remain fairly “mainstream” for hip-hop in comparison to André 3000’s. In terms of the group’s sartorial self-presentation, it is perhaps this grounding, centering force, appealing directly to fans without challenging their

from the period reveals a new theatricalism in André 3000's self-presentation. In the spoken intro to the video for "Rosa Parks," Big Boi stresses the need for the first video off the album to make a big splash. He makes the following recommendation: "30's, Impalas, everything. Put your pimpin' down." Here he appeals to a shared history, a recognition of their former image, and also a larger cultural tradition of pimping as it relates to hip-hop culture and fashion. André 3000 acknowledges Big Boi's desire, but expresses an alternate possibility for their performance, one that looks to the future instead of the past: "We need some space, futuristic type things, you know what I'm saying? Let's do that. They scared [sic] of that." Big Boi agrees that they'll do both,<sup>113</sup> and the video proper begins. André's first outfit consists of wildly patterned oversize furry pants, shiny black football chest pads, and a darkly colored pith helmet, not to mention a pair of ornamented sunglasses. A later outfit, worn for his solo verse, substitutes a pair of baggy tiger-striped pants and a black chest pad resembling those worn by baseball catchers. If these ensembles don't quite mesh with what we might imagine as "space, futuristic type things," they certainly offer the potential for satiric commentary on dominant fashion trends. The use of sporting pads instead of jerseys takes the sporting gear from the realm of the functional to the sheerly ornamental. There is no indication in the video that André 3000 will participate in

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personal sensibilities, that allows for André 3000 to roam rather further afield, relatively speaking. As Jeff Weiss has noted, "You need Big Boi to have André" (Pitchfork Staff).

<sup>113</sup> This dialectical arrangement, in which Big Boi and André 3000 serve as individuals in collaboration rather than as a group, becomes the driving engine of much of their success, reaching its apotheosis in the 2003 double album *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*, essentially two solo albums united under the OutKast banner (though each makes appearances on the other's "record").

anything for which the pads might be considered useful. As a result, his sartorial choices call into question the traditional relationship between sports and hip-hop culture, suggesting that the connection is essentially decorative rather than in any way utilitarian. Further, the severing of this linkage suggests that the link between hip hop, sports, and masculinity is in some ways an arbitrary one, a connection that might just as easily be replaced by fashion or some other point of reference. Every piece of clothing seems chosen to contribute to the viewer's sense of cognitive dissonance. Even the wildly patterned pants seem to make a more troubling nod toward an Afrocentric essentialism equating animal prints with an acknowledgement of historical roots in African cultures.<sup>114</sup> At this point, Benjamin seems to have recognized the power of his self-presentation to create complex aesthetic significations, an awareness aligned with, if not actually partaking of, the dandy's own awareness of the transformative power of self-fashioning.

The video for "Skew It on the Bar-B," filmed concert-style in front of an audience at Atlanta venue the Tabernacle, features an even more outrageous approach to fashion from André. Gavin Godfrey describes his appearance as follows: "André, shirtless, jumping back and forth while rocking a white wig, ski boots, and what looked like ostrich shorts." Benjamin's choice of signifiers in this concert appearance/video mixes the masculine and the feminine in striking fashion. The hypermasculinity emblemized by both his bare, muscular torso and the

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<sup>114</sup> Or, just as possibly, the pants, when taken in conjunction with André's notion of "futuristic, space type things," gesture to the trend of Afrofuturism, an aesthetic tradition that utilizes the tropes of speculative fiction (particularly the idea of space travel and extraterrestrials) as a means of critiquing racial politics and identity. These ideas can be prominently seen in the works of such musicians as Sun Ra and Parliament. In her study of Afrofuturism, Ytasha Womack specifically identifies André 3000 as a contemporary exemplar of this aesthetic tradition.

donning of sporting apparel remains, but is made parodic through the use of ski boots and goggles rather than the jerseys or caps worn by more traditional hip-hop artists. Conversely, the styling of the wig suggests femininity, looking strikingly like the pixie cuts worn by such starlets as Goldie Hawn and Joey Heatherton in the 1960s.<sup>115</sup> The choice of ostrich for the shorts also problematizes any simplistic readings of gender. While the ostrich feather made early appearances as an accessory in men's hats, it is much more commonly seen as a feature in women's apparel and accessories.<sup>116</sup> The development of this playfulness in regards to the conventions of hip-hop masculinity, a transformation that had begun on OutKast's previous release, *ATLiens*, led some to posit Benjamin's sartorial choices as representative of a crisis of masculinity, charges directly responded to in *Aquemini*'s opening track, "Return of the G":

"Then the question is Big Boi what's up with André?/Is he in a cult? Is he on drugs? Is he gay?"

Accusations of homosexuality in hip-hop typically dog performers who fail to conform in some way to prevailing standards of masculinity. Simona Hill and Dave Ramsaran have argued that hip-hop's relationship to homosexuality illustrates an internal inconsistency in regards to views on inequality:

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<sup>115</sup> In its platinum coloring, it also brings to mind the powdered wigs worn by many of this country's early residents, including the wealthy slaveholders of colonial America. Benjamin has continued to occasionally wear white wigs of varying styles since the "Skew It on the Bar-B" video.

<sup>116</sup> Ostrich feathers have a long history as a stage accouterment. In his study of the ostrich, Edgar Williams points out this connection and its relationship to the performance of gender: "Besides being used to decorate ladies' hats, ostrich feathers in the Victorian era were popular on the stage. They were used by female performers to enhance their stage presence" (142).



Not only is patriarchy reinforced by the overall notions of having sex with many women but it also reinforces masculinity purely in terms of heterosexuality. The term “faggot” has become central for MCs trying to use the most derogatory term to diss their opponents. In hip hop culture, the gay man is the archetype of a weakling. There is serious debate over homosexuality within the African American community, but this is grounded in a larger debate over gay rights in the wider society... Whatever the debate, a lot of hip hop is used to demonize homosexuality... In many ways, then, hip hop culture reinforces the normative values of the wider society about homosexuality. To call a black male a “bitch-ass nigga” is the ultimate humiliation. So, on the one hand, hip hop artists call on white society not to discriminate against black society, but in the same voice, they reinforce the broader notions of the white patriarchy against homosexuality to the point of legitimizing violence against gays and promoting socially acceptable homophobia. (81-3)

By donning clothing that thwarts simplistic semiotic readings, André 3000 calls into question hip hop’s prevailing attitudes, suggesting alternative modes of performance. The masculinity presented by André 3000 runs counter to the dominant images of hip hop masculinity presented by Big Boi and other artists. A dialectical reading of OutKast as a whole, then, offers to its audience the possibility for a gender presentation not so tightly constrained by cultural norms. For many in the audience, however, the adoption of such revolutionary sartorial codes would come with its own set of risks. The fan daring to tread into this “no man’s land” between strictly codified notions of masculinity and femininity might face sanctions from social groups unwilling to allow for such individual freedoms. No male hip hop fan would want his choice of dress to

mark him as a “bitch-ass nigga.” Given that Benjamin’s lyrics painted him as exclusively heterosexual, as did mainstream public coverage of his personal life, he may have had more buffers against this type of ostracization than those without his social standing.<sup>117</sup>

By the time of 2003’s “Hey Ya!,” the breakout hit from the double album *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*, Benjamin’s style transformation, from the uniform of the typical hip hop youth to an iconoclastic explosion of styles outside the hip hop norm, was complete. *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* essentially combined two solo records, one each from Big Boi and André 3000, under the rubric of the OutKast name. “Hey Ya!” is drawn from *The Love Below*, Benjamin’s half of the record. In a video clearly meant to evoke a reversal of the British Invasion on the Ed Sullivan Show, Benjamin plays all eight members of fictional band, The Love Below, as they make an appearance on a London television show. Benjamin, in all of his manifestations as The Love Below, functions as the dandified Derridean “double” or “brother” to the originary Beatles. A whole coterie of specters coalesce in the material (though mechanically reproduced) form of Benjamin.<sup>118</sup>

The video opens not at the start of the song, but with a prelude set backstage in a dressing room. Big Boi makes a cameo as the manager of the Love Below, and he urges André 3000 to maintain a certain standard of behavior: “For the sake of everybody in the band, act like you got some sense.” As he does so, 3000 stands in front of the dressing room mirror, tying a striped ascot as the finishing touch to his ensemble, which consists of high-waisted, blue and green plaid pants, white shoes and suspenders, a green shirt, and the aforementioned striped ascot. The mode

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<sup>117</sup> At the time, Benjamin was romantically linked with R&B singer Erykah Badu, with whom he shares a son.

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin (André) by way of Benjamin (Walter).

and style of his dress are a conscious throwback to European styles of the 1940s and 50s. In the context of twentieth-century male fashion, the style is deliberately anachronistic, looking to the past for a possible vision of future styles. Benjamin's sartorial choices deliberately put him "out of joint," temporally speaking, opening up the space for the alterity around which the identity of the dandy coalesces, and from which stems much of his spectral power to discomfort. The video's prelude, then, foregrounds the idea that André 3000's persona, and his presentation of such, is a source of anxiety. Big Boi wants André to make "sense," to clearly fit into a preexisting structure, of which gender presentation is an important part. Both Big Boi's dialogue and the visual emphasis on André 3000's self-styling suggest a preoccupation with the semiotics of style, with how André 3000 (and indeed, all of the other characters he plays in the video) will be read.

The video itself reveals the crisis represented by André 3000's appearance to be within masculinity itself. The television studio "audience" for The Love Below's performance is composed entirely of women clearly enthralled by and enamored with Benjamin in all of his incarnations. In a parody of the 1960s "Beatlemania," the women in the audience scream and faint as the band's performance inspires them to higher and higher heights of frenzy.<sup>119</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>119</sup> This passionate response brings us once again to the Orpheus myth, as the frenzy evoked in the female fans resembles the faint contemporary echo of the ecstatic cries of the maenads responsible for Orpheus' death and dismemberment in Classical mythology. A similar fate, of course, befalls Pentheus in Euripides' tragedy, *The Bacchae*. Read through this lens, Benjamin's performed identity, which potentially calls into question heteronormative values, explicitly endorses and aligns itself with one vision of performative female power, the physical, fully embodied expression of abandonment and ecstasy as a public marker of female sexuality.

then, André 3000's performance runs no risk of alienating his female fans. Why, then, does Big Boi seem to be so worried in the video's prelude? Why do fans question André 3000's sexuality on the basis of his sartorial choices?

The answer seems rooted in a well-worn, tried (tired) and true trope, one only too familiar to the dandy and those who study him: a fear of queerness. As Phillip Brett and Elizabeth Wood have noted, "The art of music, the music profession, and musicology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have all been shaped by the knowledge and fear of homosexuality." While I do not argue that André 3000 expresses any kind of radical queer identity, Big Boi's admonition to "act like you got some sense," coupled with the implied fan critique in the lyrics of "Return of the G," suggests an anxiety that André 3000's display of eccentricity might somehow tip over into a full-blown display of queerness, thereby subverting the stability of the previously "masculine" persona he had to that point affected, and by extension, highlighting the perilous, constructed nature of masculinity itself. Within this framework, Benjamin's performance as André 3000 reveals the potential for a reading of his sartorial choices as oppositional, rather than merely idiosyncratic.

Although Benjamin's performance of self outside the context of his role in OutKast demonstrates some notable differences to the André 3000 persona, Michael Lubarsky has argued a clear continuity between the two: "[Benjamin's] musical talent and contributions to OutKast are well-known and fans soon learned that his stage wardrobe was nothing more than an evolution or re-interpretation of his own personal style culled from his many interests and penchant for English-inspired vintage clothing." This veneration for traditional, "classic" styling is no recent development, either; Benjamin has pointed to his high school days as a "prep" as one of the elements that influenced the designs for his fashion line, Benjamin Bixby. In true dandy

fashion, he reaches a hand back to clasp the hands of his forebears, while recognizing the need and desire to thrust another forward in an attempt to grasp at the future:

Tearing pages out of magazines as a kid left Benjamin with a reverence for English style: He fetishizes “timeless” clothes, name-checks old-school brands like Turnbull & Asser, and calls his own style “classic spontaneity” or “rebel gentleman.” What this means, in effect, is doing a little remix. Here, he’s wearing a Façonnable shirt with Polo khakis and a tie from his new line worn as a belt. “There has to be something inventive about it,” he says. “But not so inventive that it’s a turnoff. So that some of the greats, like Beau Brummell or the Duke of Windsor, would nod and say, ‘Well done.’ Those guys killed it.” Now, that’s hip-hop. (Lubarsky)

The hip hop dandy, then, “remixes” the traditional and recombines it with the “inventive,” in essence transforming existing sartorial codes in the service of an aesthetic vision of his own. This vision runs counter to the seemingly casual (though just as highly styled) “thug” image pervading some elements of hip hop, but doesn’t go so far as to repudiate hip hop masculinity completely. Indeed, the sartorial fastidiousness (and willingness to go against the grain of what might be considered “mainstream”) of Benjamin’s styling has much in common with the pimps referenced in the early hit “Player’s Ball” (though perhaps not on the level of taste). The pimps in that “black man heaven” have had a hand in that heaven’s own creation, fashioning the world they desire in part through their own sartorial self-creation. Similarly, I would argue that Benjamin’s self-styling, the transformational “work” he performs, has an aspirational quality to it, containing within it its own ideology of another vision of “black man heaven.” In this vision, heaven clearly looks to the past for inspiration, particularly to historical images most typically

associated with whiteness. And the means to reach such a heaven are most profoundly suggested through dandyism's messianic aspirations, as expressed in the philosophies of Balzac, d'Aurevilly, and Baudelaire.

In typical dandy fashion, then, an examination of Benjamin as a subject reveals a powerfully ambivalent vision. The visor he puts on, the clothes in which he garbs himself, make specific reference to colonial histories (vintage English style) that contributed to the subjugation of people of color around the world. While it might be argued that through appropriation and reconfiguration, he subverts those histories and makes them his own to do with as he will, the message is not so clear cut as not to be potentially mistaken. Moreover, the image Benjamin cultivates relies, as do most dandified constructions, on the presence of (and access to) capital. He hopes to have his clothing line carried by Barney's, a luxury department store, essentially making it unaffordable (or even unavailable) to the vast majority of those who began as OutKast fans back in the days of their debut album, *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*. As a result, Benjamin's "work," the commodification of the dandified self, means his own spectralization, and the spectralization of those who follow in his path. For Derrida, the commodity, that which speaks in the language of cloth, *is* the specter. Ostensibly, the producer should recognize in the commodity "the social form" of his own labor. But here our journey into the land of the dead spirals nearly to an end, returning unexpectedly to a stopping point nearly where we began, in the chamber of the great and powerful Oz, a world of smoke and mirrors:

Here the theatrical *quid pro quo* stems from an abnormal play of mirrors. There is a mirror, and the commodity form is also this mirror, but since all of a sudden it no longer plays its role, since it does not reflect back the expected image, those who are looking for themselves can no longer find themselves in it. Men no

longer recognize in it the *social* character of their *own* labor. It is as if they were becoming ghosts in their turn. The “proper” feature of specters, like vampires, is that they are deprived of a specular image, of the true, right specular image (but who is not so deprived?). How do you recognize a ghost? By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror. Now that is what happens with the *commerce* of the commodities *among themselves*. These ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts. And this whole theatrical process (visual, theoretical, but also optical, *optician*) sets off the effect of a mysterious mirror: if the latter does not return the right reflection, if, then, it phantomalizes, this is first of all because it naturalizes. The “mysteriousness” of the commodity-form as presumed reflection of the social form is the incredible manner in which this mirror sends back the image (*zurückspiegelt*) when one thinks it is reflecting for men the image of the “social characteristics of men’s own labor”: such an “image” objectivizes by naturalizing. Thereby, this is its truth, it shows by hiding, it reflects these “objective” (*gegenständliche*) characteristics as inscribed right on the product of labor, as “the socio-natural properties of these things” (*als gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge*). (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 195-6)

The image Benjamin creates of himself, the commodity he makes available to his fans, naturalizes the product of his transformative labor as something somehow created *through* the commodity, as the product of products, divorced from any understanding of those products’ relationship to labor. Hence, the dandy himself will seem to have sprung like Athena, fully formed and immaculately begowned, from the mind of his creator. He will seem to have

appeared from nothing, his anachronistic dress linking him to both past and future, his cloth-language masking the arduous labor that went into his creation.



## CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

In an essay responding to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Frederic Jameson writes:

Now, however, we must ask what spectrality holds for the future: *Hamlet* was after all not a ghost story very specifically in this, that it did not merely tell about some grisly hold of the past on the present (as in *The Turn of the Screw*), but rather showed the apparition of the past in the act of provoking future action and calling for retribution by the living. (59)

Here Jameson poses the question hanging over my study: if indeed dandyism is a specter that haunts contemporary masculinity, then what are the ramifications of this insight? What possibilities or portents does he suggest to those who behold him? What "future action" or "retribution" might be enabled by his appearance? The answers to these questions, as one might expect at this point, are either somewhat indeterminate or marked by ambivalence. With no definitive and consistent agenda, dandyism presents a prismatic, shifting face that, while providing him with maximum flexibility, also presents difficulties in understanding the effects of his endeavors. If, as Baudelaire has argued, dandies aim to incarnate "the idea of beauty in their persons," then the end result of that beautification ought to be a transformation, first of oneself, then of one's surroundings, with the ultimate aim being a complete aesthetic and social metamorphosis. This aim, however, may fall into the category of Utopianism, the realm of impossibility. The dandy's *modus operandi*, hopelessly intertwined with the commodity goods

that are his stock in trade, problematizes the messianic potential suggested by the philosophies that helped to instantiate his presence as a legible figure.<sup>120</sup>

In all three of the case studies I examine in Part II of this study, the “dandyism” of the subjects (or traces thereof) inflects<sup>121</sup> itself through a relationship with consumer goods: Sebastian Horsley continually foregrounds his own conspicuous consumption; David Beckham’s public persona is constructed almost entirely through his relationship to consumer goods; and the milieus for André Benjamin’s work (music, fashion, and film) serve as clearinghouses for commodified identity. On the surface of things, then, the dandy’s messianic pretensions, mired in nostalgia for the past, attempting to perform a kind of sartorial séance, find themselves hopelessly compromised by the systems in which they operate. Dandyism holds little hope for a

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<sup>120</sup> There is some semantic debate about the validity of such terms as “Utopian” and “messianic.” Jameson utilizes both somewhat interchangeably, while Derrida argues that Jameson has misunderstood him in substituting Utopianism for messianism:

Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe) is anything but Utopian: it refers, in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness. Nothing is more “realistic” or “immediate” than this messianic apprehension, straining forward toward the event of him who/that which is coming. (“Marx & Sons” 248)

I tend to privilege Derrida’s framing of these ideas, though not exclusively so.

<sup>121</sup> In “speaking” of inflection, I hope to purposely recall the cloth voice that speaks through the dandy, the spectral voice of the commodity intoning a call (to what?) from behind the visor.

viable alternative to modes of masculine performance conditioned and constrained by capitalist structures. And yet...

And yet perhaps it is the spectral quality of dandyism that might be said to provide the potential for political force. Jameson argues that “spectrality is...the form of the most radical politicization and that, far from being locked into the repetitions of neurosis and obsession, it is energetically future-oriented and active” (60). If this is the case, then the specter that is dandyism must turn this “future-oriented and active” face to the world at some point. Certainly this orientation can be seen in some sense in André Benjamin’s fashion forward sensibility, in his mélange of stylistic trends put toward a redefinition of masculine performance. No less an arbiter of taste than *Vogue* magazine has hailed Benjamin for this very quality:

Fashion fans have felt the void left by frontman André 3000 deeply—his daring, bold, performance looks make him one of the most forward-thinking style icons of our times. After all, there are really few men on the planet who can work a poncho and knee-high Pocahontas moccasins quite like André—let alone a high-waisted pant artfully tucked into a sock. Yet look past some of the wilder flourishes, and you’ll find sartorial gems in his wardrobe that have trickled down to the street. Let’s not forget the throwback sport jerseys of his early years that were miles ahead of the current obsession for team fashion shirts. And has anyone made a stronger case for the Texan tuxedo than André? (Nnadi)

While the piece suggests that Benjamin is in a small minority in his ability to bring together fashion trends, he should be seen as no less potentially radical for all that. The vision of masculinity Benjamin displays relies on the alterity of dandyism to potentially redefine what it means to perform masculinity. Moreover, Benjamin denaturalizes the masculine costume,

instead presenting it as something wholly constructed and arbitrary and thus available to change. This specter holds out the promise of difference as a viable alternative to the conformity of a hegemonic masculinity.

This promise of futurity, however, is not assured. Jameson unpacks the notion of messianism as it has been traditionally expressed in the Jewish faith:

But we must be very subtle in the way in which, particularly those of us who are not believing Jews and are very far from such kinds of beliefs, we understand the coming of the Messiah. The non-Jews imagine that Jews think of Messiah as a promise and a future certainty: nothing could be farther from the truth. (62)

Rather, Jewish messianism is marked by “the pain of disappointment and the sharp experience of defeat” (62).<sup>122</sup> For Jameson, then, the messianic quality of the specter only manifests itself in non-revolutionary periods, in those moments when hope seems somehow impossible, or at least very unlikely. In this, he seems to echo Baudelaire’s argument regarding dandyism’s appearance, that it emerges “in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall” (28). Likewise, the messianic appears at a moment about to enter into transition, in a time when all else seems lost. The dandy, as a manifestation of the messianic impulse, represents a kind of hope for the future, but a hope tinted (tainted?) by the possibility of failure. As Jameson notes:

The very idea of the messianic then brings the whole feeling of dashed hopes and impossibility along with it... You would not evoke the messianic in a genuinely

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<sup>122</sup> Here Jameson makes reference to Sabbatai Sevi, a mystic who claimed to be the Jewish messiah and gathered a significant following. He ultimately converted to Islam, however, leading to a great deal of understandable disillusionment among his followers.

revolutionary period, a period in which changes can be sensed at work all around you; the messianic does not mean immediate hope in that sense, perhaps not even hope against hope; it is a unique variety of the species hope that scarcely bears any of the latter's normal characteristics and that flourishes only in a time of absolute hopelessness, a period like the Second Empire, or the years between the Wars, or the 1980s and 90s, when radical change seems unthinkable, its very idea dispelled by visible wealth and power, along with palpable powerlessness. It is only in those trough years that it makes sense to speak of the messianic... (62)

If we could view history as a vast cemetery, then, we might note these trough years as depressions in the soil marking gravesites, spots from which the revenant form of dandyism emerges to speak in his cloth voice for a kind of justice.

As a call to futurity, however, the dandy's justice cannot be constructed in any unilateral fashion.<sup>123</sup> His philosophy, as can be seen in Balzac, d'Aureville, and Baudelaire, shares common points of interest but has no consistent through line. If the dandy represents the revolution yet to come, even he has no true idea what form that revolution will take. He knows only that it will involve a reckoning of some sort, that the past will be called to account for itself, and that this accounting may demand redress of some sort. In the dandy's case, this notion of redress has both a literal and metaphoric dimension. The dandy often reconfigures the material and sartorial trends of the past, and in doing so he suggests a way forward that potentially

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<sup>123</sup> Though perhaps it need not be said at this point, pun fully intended. And even a cursory glance through the wardrobes of my case studies' subjects would surely attest that any unilateral "fashion" (or even an approximation of consensus) would be well nigh impossible.

addresses imbalances in power conditioned by gender, social class, race, and other identity markers.

Ultimately, however, the “way forward” suggested by the dandy is only one among many, as I might write of dandyism(s) as a plurality rather than a singularity. Expressions of dandyism, whether they take the forms of a Horsley, a Beckham, or a Benjamin (or any other of a myriad of possibilities), stand alone as individuated expressions of a prismatic philosophy, bright shards in an ever-shifting peacock mosaic. One may stand next to the other, and they may share common antecedents, but they can hardly be said to be a part of the same group. They are only united, if they can be said to possess any sense of unity at all, by their opposition to the hegemonic standards of masculinity that both enable and constrain their performance(s). And by their spectrality, by the condition of being a ghost. As Pierre Macherey notes,

[a] ghost is precisely an intermediary “apparition” between life and death, between being and non-being, between matter and spirit, whose separation it dissolves. And an inheritance is also that which the dead return to the living, and that which reestablishes a kind of unity between life and death. (19)

Dandies, then, occupy this middle ground. Not quite extinct and not fully extant, neither here nor there, the dandy returns to masculinity its inheritance, and reinstantiates masculinity as a part of a greater unity. But a unity between itself and what else?

It is tempting here to posit femininity as masculinity’s other, as the term with which masculinity must achieve some kind of unity or parity. This implies, however, that dandyism exists somewhere on a continuum between poles of masculinity and femininity, and I find this construction unsatisfactory. Rather, masculinity can be seen as an insistence on a particular kind

of self, a particular sort of presence, in opposition to which we might pose an absence.<sup>124</sup> If masculinity is marked by conformity, then, we can view one end of the continuum as a kind of collective identity, one characterized and conditioned by uniformity and an adherence to existing norms. Masculinity is the concretization into presence of particular codes and performed behaviors. At the other end of the continuum is a complete absence of identity, collective or otherwise, a kind of undifferentiated oblivion marked not by actuality but by possibility. This might be framed as the messianic or the Utopian, depending on one's allegiances. And in the middle of this continuum, this continuity, is the self of dandyism, the individuated presence that insists on the relationship between the two poles, a presence that claims to speak the language of one in the form of the other. A presence marked by the possibility (even the probability) of its preceding (or forthcoming) absence. The inheritance it returns is nothing less than the promise of freedom from the bondage of an identity that brooks no alteration. But the act of accepting that freedom is a kind of death to the traditionally masculine. Thus, the specter haunts.

In returning to my initial motivations for undertaking this study, desire and envy, I find that little has changed. I still feel desire, from the sharp tug of the physically immediate and sexual in a photograph of David Beckham's athletic form defined by an immaculately cut suit, to the more ill-defined, melancholy longing evoked by the little-boy-lost expression behind Sebastian Horsley's eyes. These bodies, with their easy, lithe athleticism, their cleanly defined lines, their unapologetic, embodied sexuality, stand in contrast to my own perceived amorphousness. They are bodies characterized by desire, by the desire they evoke in others, by

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<sup>124</sup> In no way do I mean to imply here that this quality would necessarily be specific to masculinity. Nor do I mean "absence" to imply "lack." One might conceivably construct a similar sort of relationship between femininity and related performances of feminine identity.

the desire they perform and enact on other bodies, and I envy them for that. I envy their seeming ease in front of an audience, in front of a camera, in front of a mirror, and I envy them the access to capital that ensures their ability to outfit themselves in a manner most befitting a dandy. I feel this desire and envy so palpably, at times it nearly borders on revulsion.

But of course this revulsion is not for the dandy. Rather, this disgust is for the self that does not, cannot measure up to an impossible standard. For ultimately, though dandyism attempts to manifest beauty in the self, in the body, beauty remains primarily immaterial, an idea. It is the Platonic ideal that remains inaccessible to the realm of the corporeal. It is an idea or an ideal that dies, will die, has died, for its inaccessibility is as much an assurance of death as any corpse. And the corpse (the corpus) of this ideal provides a pretext for text, for mourning, for the “work” of mourning, in Derridean terms. And that is surely what this study, this text, this corpus, undertakes: the work of mourning an idea of the self that never came/never will come to fruition. In his remarks on the death of his friend Sarah Kofman, Derrida writes:

For what does Sarah Kofman tell us of this *corpse*...? That this image of the *corpse* is *replaced* or *displaced*, its *place taken* by the book (as seems to be happening to us at this very instant), replaced-displaced by “a book wide open at the foot of the deceased.” This open book organizes: an organ detached from the body, it has an organizing mission. Detached from the body, this quasi organ, this corpus, in turn organizes space. In an at once centripetal and centrifugal fashion. Decentered with regard to the body, as you look at the body, it centers or recenters in turn a new magnetic field; it irradiates it but also capitalizes upon it and captures all the forces of the painting. An open book attracts all the gazes.



This book [*lui*—masculine pronoun—*Trans.*] stands up to, and stands in for, the body: a *corpse* replaced by a corpus, a *corpse* yielding its place to the bookish thing, the doctors having eyes only for the book facing them, as if, by reading, by observing the signs on the drawn sheet of paper, they were trying to forget, repress, deny, or conjure away death—and the anxiety before death.

(“.....” 176)

This book, then, this study, attempts to perform, not the work of the doctor, but the work of the medium, to speak with, about, and for the shade of dandyism, the specter of my own nonexistent self, the self never-yet-to-come. I hope, however, that this work serves not to “forget, repress, deny, or conjure away,” but to remember, to commemorate, to insist upon, to reckon with. Perhaps *this* open book, in attempting to “attract all gazes,” bears its own trace of dandyism. Surely each footnote, each self-conscious sentence, each allusion and reference, attest to a kind of verbal peacocking, a corpus decked out in its own funereal finery.

And in all of this parlaying with and about corpses, in all of this death, this dying, this hopelessness, the space opens up for a return, for the messianic, for the specter. And with the specter comes the notion of inheritance, that which the living receive from the dead:

For an inheritance is not transmitted automatically but is reappropriated. To follow the spirit..., to obey its injunctions, is not to repeat its formula mechanically, as if it were already finished; but it is actively to reaffirm its significance, for the latter must be produced or reproduced anew from the perspective of an interpretation which reveals what remains living in it...In fact, one does not inherit only from the past of the past, and it must even be said that, from that which is dead once and for all and cannot return, there can be no

inheritance. Rather, one inherits from that which, in the past, remains yet to come, by taking part in a present which is not only present in the fleeting sense of actuality, but which undertakes to reestablish a dynamic connection between past and future... (Macherey 19)

In interrogating the specter of dandyism, then, I hope to have discovered “what remains living in it,” to have “reaffirmed its significance,” and in doing so, to have claimed from it my own inheritance. The birthright I claim from it is one of possibility, of the promise of masculine performance free from hegemonic constraints. I claim for myself the very presence of an individuated self, one situated between past and future and beholden to neither. The king is dead. Long live the king.

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