The Body in Space: In Search of a Sensuous Dwelling in the Space of Accumulation

By
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Abstract

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This dissertation asks after the possibility of an unalienated relationship to the aesthetic dimension within the confines of the capitalist space of accumulation, and makes the argument for a conceptual foundation from which to consider living well under conditions of subjection. It does this by considering how aspects of 20th century French phenomenology – conceptualizations of the body, of the aesthetic, and of space – might be brought to bear on questions that pertain to the dialectics of captivity and freedom under market capitalism. These questions are further opened by the works of bell hooks and Herman Wallace, whose contemporary projects take on a more explicit political urgency. In this way, the dissertation seeks to bring to the fore ways of reimagining the aesthetic through the question of dwelling in ways that are not free from the forms of subjection inherent in capitalism, but that nonetheless remain unassimilable to market logics.

The first and second chapters of this work trace the conceptual foundations through which the aesthetic might be approached as a structuring force of lived experience. The first chapter turns to Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and draws forth a Nietzschean account of the body in space. Reading the image of a tightrope walker that appears early in Lefebvre’s critique, the chapter attends to the conditions under which the body in space is capable of recuperating an aesthetic knowledge from the logics of abstract space. The subsequent chapter turns from Lefebvre’s account of the space of capitalist accumulation to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh in order to foreground the structuring poetics of the body in space. I then turn to Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, opening onto a critical notion of “aesthetic dwelling.” Aesthetic dwelling is the fulcrum of the dissertation project, offering an account of life structured by felicitous experience of aesthetic dialectics. I read his prioritizing of the felicitous as an ontological move towards a space in which living can be taken up as a poetic and free experience; here, being does not find its dwelling in experiences of oppression. The final chapter addresses the question of accessing this lived experience of the aesthetic under the negative pressures of market capitalism. I focus on the aesthetic subject of capitalism as it emerges in rhetorics of ethical consumption and on the notion of luxury as it evokes and distorts the aesthetic’s non-utilitarian function. The dissertation concludes with an engagement of the “dream home,” first as the spatiality of the aesthetic
subject, and then as it emerges as a collaborative artwork between Herman Wallace and Jackie Sumell. There, I read Wallace’s dream home as a critical site of disidentification with luxury that opens onto a different, lived sense of the aesthetic.
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Introduction

In *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant conceives of aesthetic judgment as the exercise of freedom. In the production of knowledge, the imagination preforms material perceptions that the understanding then dominates and shapes in order to form concepts. Only a judgment of taste, unhindered by the conceptual apparatus of the understanding, enables the free play of the imagination:

If we take stock of the above analyses, we find that everything comes down to the concept of taste, namely, that taste is an ability to judge an object in reference to the *free lawfulness* of the imagination. … Only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony – where the presentation is referred to a determinate concept of an object- is compatible with the free lawfulness of the understanding (which has also been called purposiveness without a purpose) and with the peculiarity of a judgement of taste….When such a judgment is pure, it connects liking or disliking directly with the mere contemplation of the object, irrespective of its use or any purpose. (Kant AK242)

For Kant, aesthetic judgments allow for the free play of the imagination. As argued by Herbert Marcuse in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, it is the power of estrangement found in aesthetic form that enables art to function as radical:

Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society – it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity. (Marcuse 10) …

Art is inevitably part of that which is and only as part of that which is does it speak against that which is. This contradiction is preserved and resolved (*aufgehoben*) in the aesthetic form which gives the familiar content and the familiar experience the power of estrangement – and which leads to the emergence of a new consciousness and a new perception. (Marcuse 41)

In “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde gives poetic voice to the epistemological function of the aesthetic, naming its power for political transformation. She conceives of concepts, knowledge, and understanding as emerging through feeling and articulable as poetry, finding in the process of poetic creation access to an epistemology of freedom:

That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dreams birth concept, as feeling births ideas, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding. (Lorde 36) …

The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet- whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom. (Lorde 38)

These texts theorize the aesthetic as the dimension of freedom. Within the contemporary social space of capitalism, however, the aesthetic dimension comes to function for the maintenance and reproduction of that space - aesthetic contemplation through both art and the natural world is conscribed culturally, and implemented through processes of restriction and access, as an inheritance of the wealthy. Beauty, which for Marcuse represents the pleasure principle as it rebels against the reality principle (Marcuse 64), frames distinctions that naturalize ideological violence, positioning judgments of taste to do the same.
This dissertation stems from what feels difficult about addressing the aesthetic dimension philosophically from within such a social space, and what feels necessary about naming the free quality of the aesthetic dimension for the sake of a relationship to it. Asked as a question, the issue becomes: how do we find a free relationship to the aesthetic dimension within a space of violence and domination, when the harbinger of freedom is the aesthetic dimension itself? What emerges from this question is a desire to determine the logics by which the aesthetic is utilized within capitalism for the sake of capitalism, in order to ask how it might be taken back for the sake of itself, which is for the sake of freedom. bell hooks’ essay, “Beauty Laid Bare: Aesthetics of the Ordinary,” frames this question in terms of a desire for luxury amidst a desire for social change. She reads the desire and choice to procure “nice things” in the midst of economic lack that she experienced in the poor, black southern towns of her youth as a choice and desire worth redeeming. For hooks, there is a quest to return to a relationship to the aesthetic that is not founded in the mandates of black and white bourgeois cultures. She ends her essay with the anticipation that “hopefully, feminist thinkers will begin to engage in more discussion and theorizing of the place of beauty in revolutionary struggle.” (hooks 123) This dissertation is an initial attempt at a response to this call.

The question of the good-life, as it has occurred in the history of western moral philosophy, has occurred primarily as a question of virtue, how to act morally, but also how to know and engage with the beautiful. This project emerges from an investment in the later. The hope that gives rise to this line of inquiry, the utopian impulse of the text, is toward a freeing of society that both engenders and relies upon a freeing of our relationship with the aesthetic – with experiences of grandeur and intimacy, and the cultivation of taste. At various points in the dissertation I engage Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space.* When I do, it is by tracing the theoretical contours of his text. I have found, over years of sitting with this text, that it becomes impossible, as someone who does not study poetry, to move through the text as a text that emerges as theoretical through a string of poets. I read it as doing this, but I do not, for the most part, read its doing of this. Instead, however, I have dwelled with and in some moments, it has felt, in this text. The goal of this dissertation can be framed yet another way then, as asking how that same feeling evoked by Bachelard’s dreams of space, by his joyful stringing together of spaces through a series of poetic verses, might find a space - how it might find itself articulated as embodied, as moving through space- as a life.

Much of the political impetus of this project remains unspoken in the argumentative moves of the dissertation, especially within the first two chapters. However, the goal is to perform an engagement with the philosophical concepts that takes for granted a racialized, queer subject. The project begins, intellectually, from an engagement hooks’ text and the black, working class people that show up within it. To extrapolate from here towards the broader concepts of space, knowledge, the body, and the aesthetic, is to do the first work of the project. It is to name what many of the texts I write with might understand as the ‘other’ or the ‘they’ as the ‘us’ and the ‘we’. It is to task these texts with offering us the concepts of space, aesthetics and the body in an effort to fully utilize the critical potential of such concepts, and in this way to ask how these concepts orient and are oriented by something like the subject towards whom they speak. It is to move to Heidegger, and other philosophers, in such a way that the subject I am

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1 An overview of this history can be found in *Morality and the Good Life: An Introduction to Ethics Through Classical Sources* (Solomon 2009)
asking after Heidegger in the name of is a subject that shows up, or might show up, on the pages of hooks and other black writers.

In chapter one, I set up the question of the body in space to ask after a phenomenological approach to this question of the good-life. Through Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* I map the relationship between space, knowledge, and power, and the place of the aesthetic dimension in moving away from what he calls “ideology” towards knowledge. I focus on an early moment of Lefebvre’s introduction, an image of a tightrope walker that borrows from Frederick Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, arguing that the scene upends the logical and discursive domination that mental space extends over the social and physical dimensions of space within the history of philosophy that Lefebvre outlines. The body in space, here in midair, allows for a reorienting of the relationship between knowledge and power. I then continue to read Lefebvre through his relationship to Nietzsche to trace the inheritance of the aesthetic as a concept and the nature and place of the body for this concept’s politically redemptive quality as it arrives as and through a knowledge of space. I argue that through Nietzsche, Lefebvre arrives at a conception of the body in space as a site that recuperates language, and a view of the poetic as bodiliness in the face of abstraction.

In chapter two, I take up the body in space as an aesthetic location, as the site of knowledge working on and through the body. The chapter works through the problem of how the body, constituted through space, might come to found a spatiality distinct from the one by which it is constituted. To address the challenge of the body giving us space at the same time that space gives us the body, I turn to Merleau-Ponty, Young, and Nietzsche for a corporeal expression of the body’s epistemological potential. I then return to the scene of the tightrope walker to think through the ways that this original image structures the body in space poetically, offering epistemological ground for moving towards a poetics of space capable of holding, of making possible in social space, and of giving theoretical agency to a sensuous corporeality founded in the aesthetic. In this way, I hope to weave a movement between the body and space, co-conceived, that opens onto a version of an aesthetic being in space productive of a space distinct from whence it came.

If the body in space gives us a sensuality by which to know, the question becomes what sensuous experiences make viable such a body. I take this up through Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*. Through Bachelard’s “felicitous space”, a transfiguration of Heidegger’s dwelling becomes possible. Specifically, Bachelard’s “felicitous space” points towards a necessary imaginative function in dwelling, one that requires a dialectical relationship between different sensuous experiences offered through dwelling. The image, for Bachelard, is the creative work of the imagination, and is a site of distinctly human productivity. It becomes an epistemic starting point that speaks the language of immediate sensual experience without having to first remake it in the form of concepts. In this way, the poetics of space that emerge through Bachelard’s text offer a language of space capable of offering sensuous dwelling to the body in space. Through the framework of dwelling the body in space allows for a move away from the moral impetus of the good-life and toward an ontologically grounded mandate of the good-life as the foundation of being. I end this chapter by asking after the implications of not being afforded an appropriately aesthetic world within which to enact dwelling.

The question of chapter three becomes how in social space this space of the body and its sensuality might take form- in what space might the good-life emerge as a way of being? The concept of luxury offers a frame through which to engage the experience of the aesthetic as it emerges in the discourses of contemporary social space and to trace the distinction that emerges
between the aesthetic subject of capitalism and the aesthetic being required of sensuous dwelling. I then look towards the dream house, as it emerges as a fantasy of sensuous dwelling and finally as it emerges as art in the collaborative project between Herman Wallace and Jackie Sumell. Wallace, imprisoned in solitary confinement for over thirty years, works with artist Sumell to plan, draft, and ultimately build a dream home. The project raises the question—might the dream home, a creation of the aesthetic as it emerges through the space of capitalist consumption and consumer identity, rescue or reclaim the freedom of the aesthetic? I claim that the work of the dissertation enables a reading of Wallace’s dream home that allow the philosophical movements of the project to emerge and that Wallace’s project, specifically in the ways that I view it as being misread by discourses surrounding it, offers insight into how one might come to disidentify with luxury within capitalism and how this disidentification might point towards the possibility of a lived sense of the good-life.
Chapter 1: The Body in Space: Henri Lefebvre’s Tightrope Walker

This dissertation takes as its central questions whether and how it is possible to articulate a notion of the good-life within late capitalism. In this first chapter, I turn to Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space to outline how the body in space illuminates the importance of the aesthetic domain for engaging such a project. For Lefebvre, there is a body that recedes and becomes subjugated in abstract space or the space of capitalism. I argue in this chapter that the relationship between this body and knowledge, the non-body and ideology, and the struggle between the body and the non-body can be read as a driving tension of Lefebvre’s project. The body in space offers an epistemological location from which to conceive of space as a unified concept, making possible a conception of the relationship between state power and spatial force that offers up space as a domain of political agency. I argue that the aesthetic, taken in its original definition as sensuousness and in its epistemological function, serves as the redemptive concept for Lefebvre, whose project is invested in moving from ideology toward knowledge. The primary purpose of this chapter is to dwell upon and articulate the place of the body in Lefebvre’s project, the shape of the body as a concept and lived experience for Lefebvre, and the importance of space, as a concept inextricable from the body, for any project considering a politics of liberation through the aesthetic.

I begin the chapter by highlighting how Lefebvre’s project turns away from those conceptions of space that elide distinctions between mental, physical, and social space. This turning away leads him to redefine the terms in which space is conceived, to redefine what it means to think space, which has clear implications for dwelling in space and for the possibility of knowledge itself. Knowledge of space becomes both the goal towards which one strives and the process by which knowledge about life and living is attained in the face of what Lefebvre calls “ideology.” I make an argument for why the aesthetic arrives within Lefebvre’s text, identifying it as the moment the potential for such a knowledge about the good-life is made manifest. Reading through the lens of Frederick Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra, I argue that the aesthetic emerges as an image of the body in space and introduces what I trace as an articulation of Lefebvre’s aesthetic theory through the Nietzschean body. I also seek to bring forward the Nietzschean lineage of Lefebvre’s project more broadly, specifically in his conceptualization of the relationship between sensuousness and knowledge. This all lays the groundwork for explaining how the body lived in space is key to the possibility of living a good life, and how both are linked to the aesthetic experience.

In The Production of Space, Lefebvre argues that ‘space’ is a concept in need of a unified theory. In the first pages of his text Lefebvre gives an account of the term’s intellectual lineage, beginning with its conceptual development within the history of philosophy. In this history, the Aristotelian category of space gives way to space as a Cartesian absolute, and the Cartesian absolute gives way to the a priori, transcendental Kantian spatial category. Moving then from the realm of philosophy into the realm of mathematics, space becomes spaces – curved, non-Euclidian, x-dimensional, etc. Then, due to a widening rift between the spaces of mathematics and the space of ‘real life’ (the space of sociality and physicality), space comes to be understood as distinct from ‘real life’ and rather as, summed up by Leonardo da Vinci, “a mental thing” (Lefebvre 3). The field of epistemology thus inherits space as mental space, mathematical space

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This definition was transformed by Alexander Baumgarten in his 1750 Aesthetica from sensuousness into taste or a sense of beauty. (Baumgarten 1961)
having “aggravated the old ‘problem of knowledge’: how were transitions to be made from mathematical spaces (i.e. from the mental capacities of the human species, from logic) to nature in the first place, to practice in the second, and thence to the theory of social life – which also presumably must unfold in space” (Lefebvre 3).

In his title, Lefebvre presents two terms – production and space. The latter term reads as the apparent object of inquiry; we are to expect an understanding of the production of space. Yet it is the first term, production, that allows Lefebvre to pursue an inquiry into space at all. Or rather, Lefebvre finds in this first term not a general gesture towards the later term, nor a predefined posture from which to engage space – its production rather than its use or its understanding. Rather, Lefebvre arrives at production as the only possible term with which to pursue a knowledge of space, and for that matter a knowledge of its use. Looking towards a unified theory of space, Lefebvre considers the language and theoretical approach needed in order to engage and resolve the problems of space’s division:

What term should be used to describe the division which keeps the various types of space away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap? Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break? As a matter of fact the term used is far less important than the distance that separates ‘ideal’ space, which has to do with mental (logico-mathematical) categories, from ‘real’ space, which is the space of social practice. In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpin and presuppose the other. What should the starting point be for any theoretical attempt to account for this situation and transcend it in the process? (Lefebvre 14)

From here Lefebvre considers and works through a series of discourses and methodologies that do not stand up to the task. He rejects philosophy as a starting point first, owing to the fact that it requires for its own functioning the maintenance of the very divisions he hopes to resolve. We can return to the history given of space’s conceptualization – through Aristotle, Descartes, Kant and contemporary epistemology to understand the ways in which philosophy as a discipline becomes implicated in the problems Lefebvre seeks to resolve. Though he positions himself in many ways within this lineage of a philosophical analysis of space, his position simultaneously demands a theoretical and discursive break from it. From here he considers literature, finding the issue of criteria too burdensome to overcome, “The problem is that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about. What texts can be considered special enough to provide the basis for a ‘textual’ analysis?” (Lefebvre 15) Architecture is subsequently found untenable in that it itself requires a working conception of space in order to articulate itself.

This leaves Lefebvre to consider different categories of notions. He refers to semiological language such as text, code, or sign, as general scientific notions. While he does not suggest that these notions cannot offer the necessary tools of analysis, he rejects them on the basis of their potential to become concentrated in a specific discipline or field of analysis. Thus the discourses they create may enclose the concept of space within their scientific orbit, exacerbating rather than resolving the issue of space’s conceptual division. The other category of notion he offers is the universal notion, different from general scientific notions in their lack of belonging to any specialized discipline. And it is here that he lands on the notion of production as the key to beginning a conceptualization of unified space.: This leaves only universal notions, which seemingly belong to philosophy but not to any particular specialization. Do such notions exist? Does what Hegel called the concrete universal still have any meaning? I hope to show that it does. What can be said without
further ado is that the concepts of production and the act of producing do have a certain abstract universality. Though developed by philosophers, these concepts extend beyond philosophy. They were taken over in the past, admittedly, by specialized disciplines, especially by political economy; yet they have survived that annexation. By retrieving something of the broad sense that they had in certain of Marx’s writings, they have shed a good deal of the illusory precision with which the economists had endowed them. This is not to say that it will be easy to recover these concepts and put them back to work. (Lefebvre 15)

Production, first and foremost, is a concept that resists, has in fact survived, attempts at specialization and illusory precision. As noted earlier, the intellectual gesture towards a specificity that encloses and demarcates, a knowledge that is forever divided among distinct fields of interest and concern, is for Lefebvre a gesture aligned with “a very strong – perhaps even dominant – tendency within present-day society and its mode of production.” (Lefebvre 8)

So taking from Marx an understanding of present-day modes of production, Lefebvre finds in this term a capacity to not double back onto itself and render its use complicit with its own analysis. We could say production itself does not give in to production.

Lefebvre follows production as a term through its use by Hegel, Marx and Engels. He understands production as having a ‘cardinal role’ within Hegelianism:

…first, the (absolute) Idea produces the world; next, nature produces the human being; and the human being in turn, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness – and hence that Mind which reproduces the initial and ultimate Idea. (Lefebvre 68)

He then names two stages of the notion of production for Marx (as well as Engels). He names the first broad, and the second precise, but concludes that in both instances the term does not move beyond a generalized and ambiguous conceptualization. In its broad instantiation, production names the coming into being of all things in history and society, so that “production, in the broad sense of the term embraces a multiplicity of works and a great diversity of forms, even forms that do not bear the stamp of the producer or of the production process.” (Lefebvre 68)

Works, however, are abandoned in the second, more narrow sense of production for both Marx and Engels. There the term production is aimed toward the coming into being of products or things via a particular form of repetitive labor. To produce means to enact this labor, distinguished by its repetition and apparent lack of creativity. This move from a broad to a narrow understanding thus produces a distinction between things and products on the one hand, and works on the other (those things created by nature and, arguably, art). From this narrowed usage taken up by economic theory, Lefebvre notes that the loose usage of the terms production and product have drained them of all sense of definition. (Lefebvre 74)

Lefebvre seeks in his analysis of the production of space to “try and restore their [production and product’s] value and to render them dialectical, while attempting to define with some degree of rigour the relationship between ‘production’ and ‘product’, as likewise those between ‘works’ and ‘products’ and ‘nature’ and ‘production’.” (Lefebvre 70) What is clear then is that the relationship between the terms space and product/production is not unidirectional –

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3 For Lefebvre’s fuller argument on the spatial dimension of Marxian dialectics see Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*. (Lefebvre 1968) For an analysis of the impact of Lefebvre’s emphasis on space within Marxian Dialectics, see "A Marx for Our Time: Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space." (Gottdiener 1993)
these terms enable the full articulation of one another. In his text, conceptualizing space is meant to perform work on the concept of production as production enables the conceptualization of space. Further elaborating what it means for space to be produced, he writes:

Space is never produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is produced. Nor is it an aggregate of the places or locations of such products as sugar, wheat or cloth. Though a product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society. (Lefebvre 85)

Understanding space as product already gives back to the term production its role of narrating the interplay of universal forces. For space to be produced does not immediately render it a product of labor and repetition, but rather suggests a coming into being that manifests an historical interplay between mental, social and physical spheres. Nor is the production of space a unidirectional procedure. Space is produced, but it also produces. There is a double valence to “the production of space,” so that space is rendered simultaneously as object and subject in the pursuit of its understanding. It produces as it is the object that is produced.

The conceptual rift between mathematical space and the space of social life created a situation in which a similitude or symmetry between social/physical space and mental space was often projected onto social space without justification and without a necessary grappling with the potential gap between the space of logic and the space of lived experience. (Lefebvre 3) Mental spaces proliferated so that the space of x, y or z (literature, dreams, ideology, etc) became a way of narrating various theoretical turns that, for Lefebvre, displaced an alive subject with an abstracted subject, and in doing so enfolded social and physical space into the sphere of mental space. (Space 4) This proliferation of mental spaces and the ensuing conceptual enfolding of social and physical space into mental space produce for Lefebvre two distinct but interrelated forms of distortion that hold at bay a unified theory of space. These distortions serve to shape a spatial knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge of space Lefebvre hopes to attain, and an analysis of its engendering illuminates the socio-historical formations that necessitate and rely upon space’s conceptual distortion.

Introducing space through its conception in philosophy and mathematics is not simply an outlining of the intellectual history that Lefebvre proposes to situate himself within, though it is certainly that. Through the telling of this history Lefebvre argues for a co-constituting relationship between space, knowledge and the political. Space’s conceptual distortion, both in the proliferation of mental spaces and in the unjustified symmetries assumed between mental space and social/physical space, serve to produce space as ideologically useful within the socio-historical locations of these distortions’ rendering. For Lefebvre, the fragmentation of space, the splintering of space into mathematical spaces and the consequent enabling of the space of literature, of architecture, plastic spaces, pictural spaces, so on and so forth, is the result of descriptions of space, enumerations of the contents of space, and even discourses of space taking the place of any real theorizing of space (Lefebvre 8):

“Epistemologico-philosophical thinking has failed to furnish the basis for a science which has been struggling to emerge for a very long time... That science is—or would be—a science of space. To date, work in this area has produced either mere descriptions which never achieve analytical, much less theoretical, status, or else fragments and cross-
sections of space. There are plenty of reasons for thinking that descriptions and cross-sections of this kind, though they may well supply inventories of what exists in space, or even generate a discourse on space, cannot ever give rise to a knowledge of space. And without such a knowledge, we are bound to transfer onto the level of mental space—a large portion of the attributes and ‘properties’ of what is actually social space. …it should be pointed out that the very multiplicity of these descriptions and sectionings [of space] makes them suspect. The fact is that all these efforts exemplify a very strong – perhaps even dominant – tendency within present-day society and its mode of production. Under this mode of production, intellectual labour, like material labour, is subject to endless division. In addition, spatial practice consists in a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice. In the process these are separated from one another, though this does not mean that overall control is relinquished even for a moment: society as a whole continues in subjection to political practice – that is, to state power. (Lefebvre 8)

The distortion of space into fragmented spaces precludes any knowledge of space. Further, this proliferation of spaces mirrors the divisions of its socio-historical landscape – the division of labor and the division of spatial practice, the effect of which is a forgetting of distinctions between different spheres of space that itself serves ideologies imbedded within this mode of production. The splintering of space into spaces engenders the conditions for conceiving of a false unity between mental space and social/physical space. Fragmentation thus leads to a ‘unity’ that is inattentive to difference.

This fragmentation leads to the second distortion – that of a false unity. Lefebvre criticizes a long list of theorists including Foucault, Kristeva, Derrida and Barthes, for participating in the proliferation of mental space and producing in their wake the forgetting of spatial distinctions:

Although a few of these authors suspect the existence of, or the need of, some mediation, most of them spring without the slightest hesitation from mental to social.

What is happening here is that a powerful ideological tendency, one much attached to its own would-be scientific credentials, is expressing in an admirably unconscious manner, those dominant ideas which are perforce the ideas of the dominant class. To some degree, perhaps, these ideas are deformed or diverted in the process, but the net result is that a particular ‘theoretical practice’ produces a mental space which is apparently, but only apparently, extra-ideological. In an inevitably circular manner, this mental space then becomes the locus of a ‘theoretical practice’ which is separated from social practice and which sets itself up as the axis, pivot or central reference point of knowledge. The established ‘culture’ reaps a double benefit from this manoeuvre: in the first place, the impression is given that the truth is tolerated, or even promoted, by that ‘culture’; secondly, a multitude of small events occur within this mental space which can be exploited for useful or polemical ends. (Lefebvre 6)

Mental space is imagined as distinct from the social as it erases the possibility of any social space that is not already understood through the discourses and logics of mental space. And, in imagining itself as distinct from the social space it shrouds, mental space takes on the appearance of being extra-ideological.

What Lefebvre claims is needed to move away from the domination of mental space and false renderings of similitude is a true unity. And he equates this unity with what he calls knowledge. To know space means to have a conception of space as a singular, unified space, as
opposed to spaces. And the conceiving of such a space is this very coming to unity. For
Lefebvre, the work of theorizing a unified space is the coming to knowledge of space:

The theory we need, which fails to come together because the necessary critical moment
does not occur, and which therefore falls back into the state of mere bits and pieces of
knowledge, might well be called, by analogy, a ‘unitary theory’: the aim is to discover or
construct a theoretical unity between ‘fields’ which are apprehended separately, just as
molecular, electromagnetic and gravitational forces are in physics. The fields we are
concerned with are, first, the physical – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental,
including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the social. In other words, we are
concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space
occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects
and projections, symbols and utopias. (Lefebvre 12)

This threefold distinction between social, physical and mental space differs from the distinctions
between spaces generated through fragmentation. The issue with these three spheres of space has
historically been the occlusion of difference, rather than the endless splintering of one into many.
It is a forgotten division falsely comprehended as unity. This illusion of unity, the erasure of
difference between social and physical space on the one hand, and mental space on the other, is
what offers up space, qua mental space, for fragmentation into spaces. The recognition of
distinction at the level of social, physical and mental space enables a ceasing of the endless
proliferation of unfruitful division. It also brings to light the necessity for a unification between
these spatial spheres. When the distinction between social, physical, and mental space is lost the
work needed to unite them becomes shrouded and ostensibly unnecessary. It is this work
however, this bridging of difference, that is the formation of a unified spatial theory.

In engaging this lineage of space’s conceptualization we perceive the entangled
relationship between space, knowledge, and the political. Lefebvre choses to approach the
concept of space through its epistemological history and then offers this history of knowledge as
an introduction to the political stakes of space’s conception. And, in engaging the philosophical
history of space we are introduced to knowledge as a political problem. The political, as it first
appears in the text, is a figuring of weaponized knowledge -- a tool of ideology powerful in its
capacity to be recognized and wielded as if outside of ideology and power. It is the history of
this relationship between space, knowledge and politics, or power, that constitutes the history of
space for Lefebvre. Any given space has what he refers to as a code, the means by which a given
space is understood, lived, and produced. (Lefebvre 48) Moving beyond ideology then is a
moving away from the ways in which knowledge functions to produce or maintain the
functioning of a given space. He writes:

Knowledge must replace ideology. Ideology, to the extent that it remains distinct from
knowledge, is characterized by rhetoric, by metalanguage, hence by verbiage and
lucubration…. Ideology and logic may even become indistinguishable – at least to the
extent that a stubborn demand for coherence and cohesion manages to erase
countervailing factors proceeding either from above (information and knowledge
[savoir]) or from below (the space of daily life)….The area where ideology and
knowledge are barely distinguishable is subsumed under the broader notion of
representation, which thus supplants the concept of ideology and becomes a serviceable
(operational) tool for the analysis of spaces, as of those societies which have given rise to
them and recognized themselves in them. (Lefebvre 45)
This desire then to usurp knowledge from ideology is the quest that undergirds his desire for a science of space. The unity he seeks is of a different character than the scattered, divided knowledge of space that fits so seamlessly within the space that produces it.

The space of this knowledge which proceeds from the domination of mental space is what Lefebvre refers to as abstract space. Abstract space developed out of historical space, which developed out of absolute space. This abstract space is the space of capitalism or “the space of accumulation (the accumulation of all wealth and resources: knowledge, technology, money, precious objects, works of art and symbols)” (Lefebvre 49):

Abstract space functions ‘objectally’, as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity) …. Given that abstract space is buttressed by non-critical (positive) knowledge, backed up by a frightening capacity for violence, and maintained by a bureaucracy which has lad hold of the gains of capitalism in the ascendant and turned them to its own profit, must we conclude that this space will last forever?... From a less pessimistic standpoint, it can be shown that abstract space harbours specific contradictions. Such spatial contradictions derive in part from the old contradictions thrown up by historical time… Amongst them, too, completely fresh contradictions have come into being which are liable eventually to precipitate the downfall of abstract space. The reproduction of social relations of production within this space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ‘differential space’, because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will also restore unity to what abstract space breaks up…By contrast, it will distinguish what abstract space tends to identify. (Lefebvre 52)

The value of unity for Lefebvre becomes clear. Uniting space shattered by false distinctions and bringing to light the distance between falsely assimilated spheres of space so that they may be unified disrupts abstract space’s shattering and keeping apart and enables the articulation of a new model of difference.

In describing the state of affairs in which he hopes to intercede, the history of philosophy as it fails to confront ideological habits of rendering space, Lefebvre writes:

The quasi logical presupposition of an identity between mental space (the space of the philosophers and epistemologists) and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on the one side and the physical and social spheres on the other. From time to time some intrepid funambulist will set off to cross the void, giving a great show and sending a delightful shudder through the onlookers. By and large, however, so-called philosophical thinking recoils at the mere suggestion of any such salto mortale. If they still see the abyss at all, the professional philosophers avert their gaze. (Lefebvre 6)

Here I cannot help but picture the tightrope walker whom Zarathustra buries in “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” It is unclear whether Lefebvre intends to suggest the crossing of this abyss as the human condition, or that the bridging of the abyss between mental and social/physical space will pave the way for an ubermensch, or whether we are to merely mourn these prior attempts at
resolution. However, it is a moment work staying with as the emergence of both Nietzsche specifically and a model of the aesthetic more generally into the text.

This early moment in Lefebvre’s text offers us an image that is highly sensual, highly physical. If physicality and sociality are elided in their difference from mental space, here mental space is formed into sociality and physicality. The scene, set by mental space’s domination of space at large, is a scene of audience, performance, and enough of an emotional sociality to produce the effect of a delightful shudder. Mental space itself becomes one side of an abyss deep and wide enough in its physical dimension to provoke the drama of the scene. This is the first potentially literary moment of Lefebvre’s text, so that in some regard it performs an arrival of the poetic. And the poetic here upends mental space from its position of logical and discursive dominance; it does not give us the social and physical, rather the social and physical give it to us.

Moving to Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra, we meet the crowd, the abyss and the funambulist in their original context:

When Zarathustra had spoken thus, one of the people cried: “Now we have heard enough about the tightrope walker; now let us see him too!” And all the people laughed at Zarathustra. But the tightrope walker, believing that the word concerned him, began his performance.

Zarathustra, however, beheld the people and was amazed. Then he spoke thus: “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman - a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under. …

When Zarathustra had spoken these words he beheld the people again and was silent. “There they stand, he said to his heart; “there they laugh. They do not understand me; I am not the mouth for these ears. Must one smash their ears before they learn to listen with their eyes? Must one clatter like kettledrums and preachers of repentance? Or do they believe only the stammerer?

They have something of which they are proud. What do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it; it distinguishes them from the goatherds. …

Then something happened that made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid. For meanwhile the tightrope walker had begun his performance: he had stepped out of a small door and was walking over the rope, stretched between two towers and suspended over the market place and the people. (Nietzsche, 19)

That Lefebvre’s text so closely resembles Nietzsche’s, and that that relationship goes unnamed, suggests an interesting relationship. Here in some way Lefebvre allows Nietzsche to describe for him the state of mental space; Nietzsche’s poetics allow us to begin to understand the effects and shape of this space and this knowledge - poetic knowledge here is Nietzsche’s poetic knowledge. It is not exactly a borrowing from Nietzsche since there is no quotation nor other naming of the source. Rather, Nietzsche intrudes upon the text; his text becomes the text of Lefebvre. Nietzsche arrives on the scene not as guest but rather perhaps, closer and more intimately as an internal feature of Lefebvre’s voice. We become readers of Nietzsche as a way of first gaining access to an understanding of the effects of mental space – its form and its impact. Introducing Nietzsche in this way, pages before he arrives as a scholar of space, Lefebvre introduces him as a poet, or as a source of knowledge in excess of his position in the history of philosophy Lefebvre outlines and critiques. More broadly, the poetic enters the text.
here in a way that is not sequestered or marked as different, but rather offers an opening to elsewhere (here towards Nietzsche’s text) to give us a full articulation of meaning. A fuller knowledge and a more sensual understanding is both hidden and opened on to.

From this image of the intrepid philosopher, Lefebvre continues:

“No matter how relevant, the problem of knowledge and the ‘theory of knowledge’ have been abandoned in favor of a reductionistic return to an absolute – or supposedly absolute – knowledge, namely the knowledge of the history of philosophy and the history of science. Such a knowledge can only be conceived of as separate from both ideology and non-knowledge (i.e. from lived experience). Although any separation of that kind is in fact impossible, to evoke one poses no threat to – and indeed tends to reinforce- a banal ‘consensus’. After all, who is going to take issue with the True? By contrast, we all know, or think we know, where discussions of truth, illusion, lies and appearance – versus-reality are liable to lead.” (Lefebvre 6)

In this passage there seems to be a kinship between the non-knowledge over and against which knowledge is conceived, and the scene of the tightrope walker from which the philosophers avert their gaze. We might look to this scene of danger, bodies, community and delight as embodying the sensuality inherent in lived experience. And we meet the professional philosophers here, averting their gazes from the unthinkably dangerous scenario of the abyss. The result of such an avoidance, however, is not merely a failure to know, or a safekeeping from knowledge. Looking away produces a posture understood to have philosophical merit. We are told that this averting allows for an engagement with a different knowledge – that of the history of philosophy and of science. Somehow then this looking away is a simultaneous looking on towards one another and the knowledge created between them. While this could optimistically be read as a scene of community, of finding knowledge and safekeeping in the caught (averted) gaze of one’s neighbor, any positive reading of the crowd is annihilated by the position of this crowd to the body, the lived, the sensed. This posture, this knowledge of the history of philosophy and science, is conceived in opposition to the lived. For the crowd then, the view across a short distance towards a neighboring onlooker reveals not the lived but the pure, the steady, the disembodied. And so community in this scene is not formed by a shared embodied looking toward one another or looking away together but rather by consensus. (And consensus, Lefebvre tells us, matters more to abstract space than it has to any other, as it is the bedrock of exchange. (Lefebvre 57))

Though the philosophers might have been a part of the scene of lived experience, a delightful shudder crosses the crowd, a shudder perhaps related to the dangerous shuddering and stopping that for Nietzsche is man, the philosophers instead ask us to find the sensual, the lived, over there - away from the crowd. The sensual is marked only by the abyss, by the tightrope walker, by the tightrope walker’s potential fall. A scene which an onlooker is free to engage or disengage at will. The body as over there is a key element of the ideological role this mode of knowledge produces as it conceives of itself as distant from both the ideological and the lived.

We recall that Lefebvre’s response to the problem of knowledge is the search for a unitary theory of space. In the face of knowledge that proves politically symptomatic and ideologically driven, he suggests a different knowledge is found not in a new space, at the end of an inquiry into space, but rather that the conceptualizing process, the process of coming to engage space as space is itself productive of some form of knowing that is distinct from the knowing that serves ideology. The problem then with forgetting the distance between mental space and social/physical space, beyond the capacity for ideology to hide behind this ostensible
similitude, is the erasure of the need for doing the work of uniting them. In paying attention to
this work, the process of coming to know these spaces as a unified space, we can begin to
understand from Lefebvre the place of the aesthetic in his political project and towards political
possibility. We can see from the scene of the tightrope walker that lived experience – movement,
embodiment, death, might be confronted and recuperated in the move from one tower to the next.
Perhaps even that such confrontation and recuperation constitutes in some form the closing of the
abyss.

The body in space, here in midair, becomes the scene upon which we can imagine a
reorienting of the relationship between knowledge and ideology. In Nietzsche’s text, the
tightrope walker represents a moment of language becoming flesh: “When Zarathustra had
spoken thus, one of the people cried: “Now we have heard enough about the tightrope walker;
now let us see him too!” And all the people laughed at Zarathustra. But the tightrope walker,
believing that the word concerned him, began his performance.” (Nietzsche 14) The tightrope
walker appears first only as metaphor, yet the body, perhaps mistakenly interpolated, takes
charge of the scene. That this paragraph begins with Zarathustra and ends with a nod toward “On
Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” (and perhaps its philosophical reception): “After all, who
is going to take issue with the True? By contrast, we all know, or think we know, where
discussions of truth, illusion, lies and appearance – versus- reality are liable to lead” (Lefebvre
6), suggests that it makes sense to proceed to the moments in Lefebvre’s text where he more
fully engages Nietzsche. These engagements take up Nietzsche as a theorist of the body via an
analysis of language.

For Lefebvre, Nietzsche is the single theorist, after Hegel, to maintain a supremacy of
space over time, as time was taken up as the category through which political resistance could be
thought:

According to Hegelianism, historical time gives birth to that space which the state
occupies and rules over. History does not realize the archetype of the reasonable being in
the individual, but rather in a coherent ensemble comprised of partial institutions, groups
and systems (law, morality, family, city, trade, etc.). Time is thus solidified and fixed
within the rationality immanent to space. …As for time, dominated by repetition and
circularity, overwhelmed by the establishment of an immobile space which is the locus
and environment of realized Reason, it loses all meaning. In the wake of this fetishization
of space in the service of the state, philosophy and practical activity were bound to seek a
restoration of time.

…Only Nietzsche, since Hegel, has maintained the primordiality of space and
concerned himself with the spatial problematic – with the repetitiveness, the circularity,
the simultaneity of that which seems diverse in the temporal context and which arises at
different times. In the realm of becoming, but standing against the flux of time, every
defined form, whether physical, mental or social, struggle to establish and maintain itself.
Yet Nietzschean space preserves not a single feature of the Hegelian view of space as
product and residue of historical time. ‘I believe in absolute space as substratum of force:
the latter limits and form’, writes Nietzsche. (Lefebvre 22)

We are left through Nietzsche with the possibility of revolutionary space. Space, which
Lefebvre hopes to attain a knowledge of, whose science promises a view of knowledge,
represents for Nietzsche not the restraint of the state upon the forces of possibility, but rather the
substratum of force itself. Grounding the aesthetic in Nietzsche then grounds it in a theory that
atypically upholds space as a domain not categorically doomed to do the work of the state. This
sets us up then, moving forward, to imagine political freedom played out not on a spatial stage, but through the spatial problematic. What is referred to here as the spatial problematic reiterates a relationship between space, knowledge and the political - in the repetitiveness, circularity and simultaneity that offers space to consciousness, the shape of knowing space, politics can be waged. Through Nietzsche, sensuality and the body begin to emerge in Lefebvre’s text as counter to ideological knowing. Following the Nietzschian thread within Lefebvre’s text, we approach a fuller conception of Lefebvre’s understanding of the aesthetic and the body under the auspices of this politicized understanding of space as force.

Lefebvre aligns the power of space negatively understood with the power of the sign, negatively understood, and turns to Nietzsche for a recuperation of language:

The power of the sign is… extended both by the power of knowledge over nature and by the sign’s own hegemony over human beings; as compared with what is signified, whether a thing or a ‘being’, whether actual or possible, a sign has a repetitive aspect in that it adds corresponding representation. Between the signified and the sign there a mesmerizing difference, a deceptive gap: the shift from one to the other seems simple enough, and it is easy for someone who has the words to feel that they possess the things those words refer to. And, indeed, they do possess them up to a certain point- a terrible point. As a vain yet also effective trace, the sign has the power of destruction because it has the power of abstraction – and thus also the power to construct a new world different from nature’s initial one….

Space is also thought to have this deadly character; as the locus of communication by means of signs, as the locus of separations and the milieu of prohibitions, spatiality is characterized by a death instinct inherent to life – which only proliferates when it enters into conflict with itself and seeks its own destruction.

This pessimistic view of signs has a long pedigree…[and] it occurs in Nietzsche the philologist-poet and philosopher (or metaphilosopher). For Nietzsche, language has an anaphorical even more than a metaphorical character. It always leads beyond presentness, towards an elsewhere, and above all towards a hypervisualization which eventually destroys it. Prior to knowledge, and beyond it, are the body and the actions of the body: suffering, desire, pleasure. For Nietzsche the poet, poetry consists in a metamorphosis of signs. In the course of a struggle which overcomes the antagonism between work and play, the poet snatches words from the jaws of death, and ‘decodes’ on this basis. (Lefebvre 135)

We come here to the body as a site that recuperates language, and a view of the poetic as bodiliness in the face of abstraction. Language, seemingly equated with knowledge, only occurs as an after – a repetition in abstracted form. The power of the body emerges from its prior-ness and beyond-ness in regards to this coming to language. It is this bodily space (beyond-ness) and time (prior) that the poet accesses in order to save language from destruction. For Lefebvre, Nietzsche is central in understanding the body as a political site, and the body (the Nietzshean body) is central to understanding a knowledge that moves beyond the ideology of abstract space. And here I land on a definition of the aesthetic for Lefebvre: through Nietzsche, the aesthetic arises as the scene of the body working on and coming to be worked upon by knowledge. It is in this way that the aesthetic – the sensual, the bodily, the poetic, become an epistemological, and hence political investment for Lefebvre.

To arrive at a definition of the aesthetic for Lefebvre based on a relationship between knowledge and the body requires a sense of what is meant when he refers to both knowledge and
the body. The early part of the chapter as well as the discussion of Nietzsche’s poetics offers a basis of what knowledge is and is not for Lefebvre. I want here to make clear how we can understand his use of the term body, to argue that the body that comes to work and be worked upon for Lefebvre is conceived through Nietzsche. Lefebvre never offers a concept of the body, the body in his text is a body of productive capacities, either stifled, distorted or rebellious, but never a body narrated as arriving from a philosophical lineage as we are given the history of space within western thought. There are some very clear ways in which we can trace the body for Lefebvre as a Nietzschean body. Formally, discussion of Nietzsche and discussion of the body often precede one another (in fact more than half of the text’s explicit mentions of Nietzsche are preceded by an indexical engagement with the body). And then, the logical assumption that the espousing of a Nietzschean aesthetic indicates an underlying Nietzschean notion of the body can be argued for based on the ways that, for Lefebvre, the aesthetic is predicated on the body. However, it also becomes clear narratively that the Production of Space, in its narration of the body’s productive capacities, models a Nietzschean concept of the corporeal.

According to Lefebvre, the body is in revolt (Lefebvre 201); music, a sign of the body, is an onslaught to the reign of optics (Lefebvre 284), the body rises in revenge, bursting into the light alongside demonic and evil forces, plants and animals, and the body of a resurrected Jesus. (Lefebvre 259) The result of this awe-inspiring, if not frightening scene is the submission of the signs of the non-body to this now dominating force of the body. There is a violent or aggressive inclination to the body within Lefebvre’s writing. In writing on the Nietzschean body, In “Bodies and Eternity: Nietzsche’s Relation to the Feminine,” Katrin Froese notes that the Nietzschean body exhibits the darkness inherent to Nietzsche’s larger corpus. In discussing the struggle to draw limits inherent to the will to power, she writes:

Violence is an indelible part of this process, because of the inequalities that make my limits incompatible with those of other forms of life. We cannot walk through the forest, without trampling on some of the flora that ornament its floor. (Froese, 5)

Here Froese is talking specifically about the desire to draw conceptual boundaries – the process of categorization. But already the metaphor is bodily, and the will to power, the feeling of force it produces, along with compulsion, is for Nietzsche the drive of any action that the body takes. In his example, a knowledge or a lack of knowledge does not do the work of making a limb move. Rather, a feeling of force arises, “occasioned by the idea of what is to be done (at the sight of an enemy or an obstacle to which we feel ourselves equal) . . .” (Nietzsche 665, WP) For Nietzsche even passivity requires force; to appear passive is to be on the wrong side of violence: “What is “passive”?—To be hindered from moving forward: thus an act of resistance and reaction.” (Nietzsche 657, WP)

We can see the body that challenges the non-body in Lefebvre’s text as an extension of the Nietzschean body and in some ways a Nietzschean project. Froese writes about this violence as it relates to Apollonian and Dionysian impulses:

When [Nietzsche] describes the Dionysian festival, he vividly describes our appetite for cruelty: ‘In nearly every case these festivals centred in extravagant sexual licentiousness, whose waves overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions; the most savage natural instincts were unleashed, including even that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always seemed to me to be the real witches brew’ (Birth of Tragedy, 2). However, he also suggests that Apollonian abstraction can curb this reckless desire...Because of Apollo, we can experience the Dionysian disindividuation
symbolically, through art forms such as music. If we revel in a piece of music, our frenzy need not eventuate in an actual physical destruction of boundaries. (Froese 5)

Lefebvre diagnoses society as having lost the body save this Apollonian aspect:

> Fluctuations in the use of measures, and thus in representations of space, parallel general history and indicate the direction it has taken – to wit, its trend towards the quantitative, towards homogeneity, and towards the elimination of the body, which has had to seek refuge in art. (Lefebvre 111)

The energy which bound the body is now its only refuge. Here Lefebvre is working to propose a history that privileges space, evoking a nature upon which any given society is grounded. The body has a crucial part of this society’s production, bodies in their peculiarities acting upon and being acted upon by the peculiar nature in which those bodies found themselves, so that the units of measurement of one society – thumbs, palms, etc, would likely be nonsensical to any other. (Lefebvre 110)

Nature and art are both realms of aesthetic inquiry that I have not yet addressed and that are important for Lefebvre’s understanding of social space. So far I have focused on the aesthetic as an epistemological orientation or mode. In the following two chapters, I will take up these other aspects of the aesthetic as they shape the space of accumulation and the possibility of its overwhelm. For now however, it is noteworthy that for Lefebvre, neither art nor nature serve as sufficient stand-ins for the body. The possibility of the body in space producing a new, different space does not equate a return to nature, nor can it be understood as solely an artistic project. Lefebvre writes that the revolt of the body “must not be understood as a harking-back to the origins, to some archaic or anthropological past … It’s exploratory activity is not directed towards some kind of ‘return to nature’, nor is it conducted under the banner of an imagined ‘spontaneity.’” In kind, Lefebvre has noted art as a space of refuge. Art is not the liberator of the body, it is rather for Lefebvre a sphere within current modes of spatial production and reproduction where the signs and logics of the body have managed to survive. Thanks to art, we might say, the body has been all but lost.

Through the gods of Apollo and Dionysius, Nietzsche offers the body as simultaneously individuated and disindividuated: “we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the principium individuationis, through whose gestures and eyes all the joy and wisdom of ‘illusion’ together with its beauty, speak to us.” (Nietzsche 1, BT) On the other hand, Dionysus “is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.” (Nietzsche 1, BT) The body is an individuation that is simultaneously disindividuation from the external world. Froese summarizes this Apollonian/Dionysian distinction, as well as Nietzsche’s broader theorizing of the body:

> This is not an attempt on Nietzsche’s part to reduce all thought, willing and action to crude physiological phenomena. Instead, he uses the body as a metaphor for the complexity of our being. We are situated beings who react to external stimuli and impact the world around us. Since the body’s contours are clearly defined for the visible eye, it is individuated. Yet, tactile and audible sensations collapse the distinction between it and the external world. … The process of both physical and intellectual nourishment is one of consumption and expulsion as the body both acts on the world and is acted upon. … The human being is unique in that it is not only a force that collides and joins with other forces, but also harbours within it a consciousness of the forces struggling amongst each other…. The process of both physical and intellectual nourishment is one of consumption and expulsion as the body both acts on the world and is acted upon. … According to
Nietzsche, it is inaccurate to say that the body re-presents our integration with nature while the mind is a vehicle for its transcendence, since the impulse to go beyond the body has its roots in the body itself: ‘Belief in the body is more fundamental than belief in the soul: the latter arose from unscientific reflection on (the agonies of the body)’ (Nietzsche 491, WP). Nietzsche affirms that the body too is an agent of interpretation, since it excludes certain elements, while imbibing others: ‘The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations’ (Nietzsche 643, WP). We use thought to posit the existence of an ego that is distinct from its empirical determinations. However, the conception of this ego is made possible by reflection on our physical borders…. Thus, rather than being a pale imitation of the Forms, the body spawns them. Abstract thought is an extension of the body’s impulse to redraw its own limits and thus to situate itself. (Froese 5)

Froese calls Nietzsche’s oeuvre a resuscitation of the body from the ravages of traditional metaphysics, (Froese 2) and indeed what Nietzsche offers, the body and its forces as not subservient to thought but rather generative of it, the body as both bounded and boundless, figures strongly in the philosophical genealogies that follow him. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Butler, and others take up, though differently and towards different purposes, the body as Nietzsche has engendered it, constituting as it is constituted, productive as it is produced, figuring, figurative of and figured by thought, recognition, and processes of power. For Lefebvre, he furnishes a relationship between abstraction and the body akin to the non-subjugating order of mental space and physical space that Lefebvre’s project hopes to make manifest in social space. Following a discussion of On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense that I will return to in the next chapter, Lefebvre summarizes what he sees as a through line within Nietzsche’s philosophical and poetic thought:

At several points… Nietzsche stresses the visual aspect predominant in the metaphors and metonyms that constitute abstract thought: idea, vision, clarity, enlightenment, and obscurity, the veil, perspective, the mind’s eye, mental scrutiny, the ‘sun of intelligibility’, and so on. This is one of Nietzsche’s great discoveries (to use another visual metaphor.) He points out how over the course of history the visual has increasingly taken precedence over other elements of thought and action deriving from the other senses (the faculty of hearing and the act of listening, for instance, or the hand and the voluntary acts of ‘grasping’, ‘holding’, and so on). So far has this trend gone that the senses of smell, taste, and touch have been almost annexed and absorbed by sight. The same goes for sexuality, and for desire (which survives in travestied form as Sehnsucht). Here we see the emergence of the anaphorical aspect of language, which embraces both metaphor and metonymy. (Lefebvre 139)

Lefebvre names the prominence of the visual in the production of abstract thought as “one of Nietzsche’s great discoveries,” (Lefebvre 139) and is this aspect of the body’s disappearance that The Production of Space names as a central tenant of abstract space. For Lefebvre, the dialectical relationship between the illusions of obscurity and transparency becomes key to understanding the ideological traps of modern knowledge.⁴ We see here that this ideology functions through a

⁴Lefebvre’s initial discussion of these terms: “If it is true that (social) space is a (social) product, how is this fact concealed? The answer is: by a double illusion, each side of which refers back to the other, reinforces the other, and hides behind the other. These two aspects are the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity, or ‘realistic’ illusion, on the other…. Each illusion embodies and nourishes the other… Symbolisms deriving from nature can
sensuality that enables the body to function towards its own alienation. And for Lefebvre the body, in its rebellious potential against the space of accumulation, is the body as conceived and given power by this Nietzschean insight.

In this chapter I’ve traced Lefebvre’s positioning of himself in relationship to the history of spatial thought and I’ve followed his thinking alongside Nietzsche far enough to trace the inheritance of an aesthetic concept and the nature and place of the body for this concept’s politically redemptive quality as it arrives as and through a knowledge of space. Hopefully at this point what is becoming clear is that, for Lefebvre, the aesthetic is a Nietzschean aesthetic, arrived at through a Nietzschean understanding of the body as it produces and interrupts language and in doing so offers itself as a constellation of knowledge, sensuality, and power. I will sum up this arrival through Lefebvre as he concludes his discussion of metaphor. First: metaphor and metonymy are not figures of speech – at least not at the outset. They become figures of speech. In principle, they are acts. What do such acts accomplish? To be exact, they decode, bringing forth from the depths not what is there but what is sayable, what is susceptible of figuration – in short, language. Here is the source of the activities of speech, of language in action, of discourse, activities which might more properly be named ‘metaphorization’ and ‘metonymization’. What is the point of departure of these processes? The body metamorphosed. Do representations of space and representational spaces, to the degree that they make use of such ‘figures’, tend to ‘naturalize’ the spatial realm? No – or not merely – because they also tend to make it evaporate, to dissolve it in a luminous (optical and geometrical) transparency. (Lefebvre 140)

Lefebvre hopes to reorient space away from its prior relationship to knowledge and move towards a different spatial knowledge – a knowledge of space, and more, a knowledge through space, even a science of space that will enable the unified theory of space he seeks. Here the acts of metaphor and metonym, the figures produced, have an effect on the capacity to know space via both a naturalization of space (space is an absolute truth without ideological implication) and a dissolving of it into transparency (there is nothing to know because it is clear and obvious). If these forms of social space, spatial representation and representations of space (as with the transparent and the obscure, I will return to flesh out these spatial terms in a later chapter) reproduce these ideological understandings of space, then the question becomes whether metaphor and metonym necessarily dissolve into these figures of ideological knowledge or whether there is a moment in their figuration that would produce a different effect.

To decode, to bring from the depths, can be a poetic process, as Lefebvre states of Nietzsche and his snatching of words from the jaws of death, and we can surmise from his commitment to Nietzsche thus far that this poetry, a poetry which manages to metamorphose signs away from their metaphorical character into something more akin with embodiment, is distinct from ideology for him, The issue then becomes, stated again but differently, to proceed through these acts of language – metaphorization and metonymization from a sensuality that is obscure the rational lucidity which the West has inherited from its history and from its successful domination of nature. The apparent translucency taken on by obscure historical and political forces in decline (the state, nationalism) can enlist images having their sources in the earth or in nature, in paternity or in maternity. The rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality.” (Lefebvre 30)
closer to the danger and promise of the sensual than the hypervisual requires. To allow rather the bodily aspects normally attributed to non-knowledge to come into the realm of the sayable. His second conclusion:

These procedures involve displacement, and hence also transposition and transfer. Beyond the body, beyond impressions and emotions, beyond life and the realm of the senses, beyond pleasure and pain, lies the sphere of distinct and articulated unities, of signs and words – in short, of abstractions. Metaphorization and metonymization are defining characteristics of signs. It is a ‘beyond’, but a nearby one, which creates the illusion of great remoteness. Although ‘figures of speech’ express much, they lose and overlook, set aside and place parentheses around even more. (Lefebvre 140)

Here we have the abstract moving beyond the body, so that it becomes unclear to whom the final beyond belongs. Earlier, Lefebvre writes, “Prior to knowledge, and beyond it, are the body and the actions of the body: suffering, desire, pleasure.“ In this telling, the body is beyond knowledge. And now we have the sphere of distinct and articulated unities lying in an even further beyond. These spheres, the close beyond of metaphor and metonym, of knowledge, to the extent that language here continues to stand in for such, and the great remoteness to which it attempts to lay claim, seem to lie on either side of the middling beyond of the body. We are offered here a seeming spatial lay out of these terms, and the body is positioned here literally between the knowledge of language, of metaphor and metonym and the figures they produce, and the knowledge that metaphor and metonym create the illusion of creating, one of distinct and articulated unities.

Though not explicated here, unity has thus far been distinct in its usage, so that we might understand this farthest beyond still as possessing the knowledge that Lefebvre seeks, though not in the imitation form available through the abstractions of metaphor and metonym. The problem outlined with metaphorical, abstracted language is that in metamorphizing the body, it distorts the body, failing to move or develop through the body. If the knowledge that Lefebvre seeks is a knowledge through space, we might take that literally here (and perhaps I mean physically or metaphorically) for a moment to imagine that there is a knowledge that must move through the near beyond of language to the body, and then through the body towards some final notion of unity, some furthest beyond that is a knowledge of space.
Chapter 2: Aesthetic Dwelling

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues for the contradictions of space that emerge when “the forces of production make a leap forward, but the capitalist relations of production remain intact.” (Lefebvre 62) He finds these contradictions “liable eventually to precipitate the downfall of abstract space.” (Lefebvre 52) The space he understands as being made possible in the wake of abstract space’s downfall is differential space, a space productive of difference where abstract space demands homogeneity. His hopes for differential space reflect the radical and utopian elements of his project: “it is a matter of producing the space of the human species – the collective (generic) work of the species – on the model of what used to be called ‘art’…the creation (or production) of a planet-wide space as the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad possibilities – such is the dawn now beginning to break on the far horizon. (Lefebvre 422)

This dissertation hopes to follow Lefebvre’s argument toward the possibility of differential space, asking how the contradictions he traces in and of space, the contradictions that render unsteady the domination of abstract space, might allow for an articulation and lived experience of the good life within the space of accumulation - the social space of advanced capitalism. In other words, might a relationship with the pleasures of being in space, with sensuous, be made in the image of art now? Is a contemporary mode of engaging the aesthetic that takes on the logics of this different space possible, or even necessary for considering its arrival? Or, to use Jose Muñoz’s term, what might allow for a disidentification with the aesthetic pleasures of the space of accumulation that affords a lived glimpse and an ushering forth of a different space.

In the previous chapter I traced Lefebvre’s positioning of his own intellectual project in the context of the history of western spatial thought, his argument for how that history has wrought the logics of contemporary state power, and the importance of taking up the concept of production for divesting from such a lineage. Focusing on the figure of the body in space I then trace, through his engagement with Nietzsche, the way that the aesthetic becomes an epistemological investment for Lefebvre. In this chapter I follow this epistemological investment – the aesthetic as a mode through which space might come to be known, and might in turn offer itself as the space of knowledge – into the realm of social space, asking how the experience of the aesthetic within the space of accumulation might become the experience of the aesthetic within differential space, or rather what becomes of the body in space as it engages, or attempts to engage, aesthetically.

The aesthetic, as a relationship between the body and knowledge, is conceptualized by Lefebvre through Nietzsche. The movement away from the ideology of the space of accumulation towards knowledge is a possibility generated by the epistemological function of the aesthetic. For the body in space, offered as a figure of Lefebvre’s Nietzschean aesthetic and the promise of knowledge therein, to be understood as an epistemological location not only mentally conceived but physically and socially conceived as well, requires addressing the question “what body?” and “in what space?” The body in space becomes a social, localized body in physical and social space. Throughout *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre offers insight into exactly how the space of accumulation, which he understands as the social space of contemporary political logics and power, figures the body in its image and for its purposes. Politically transformative aesthetic knowledge, the hope offered in the scene of the tightrope walker, cannot then be assumed by taking for granted a body in space; rather, the body must first
be attended to as it is produced in and by space. The political efficacy of the body in space requires attention toward both the political efficacy of space and the political efficacy of the body, as they enable and make possible one another.

It becomes necessary then to consider how the body, conceived already through spatial logics, might in turn offer a location from which to conceive of space anew; how it might belong to the space of its production, and, in this case, the case of abstract space, harbor the possibility of a movement away from the spatial logics of its creation. The question “what body?” becomes first a question how the body might ever constitute spatial logics distinct from the spatial logics by which it is constituted. In other words, the body, produced through and for a bonding of sensual experience to ideology, must in turn, through sensuousness, produce the space of knowledge distinct from this ideology.

To address the conundrum of the body giving us space as space gives us the body, I turn first to Lefebvre’s analysis of the space of accumulation and its relationship to the body. He argues that particular to this spatial formation is the potential of the body to overwhelm its own production. I then turn to phenomenology for a corporeal expression of this potential. I find in feminist phenomenology a philosophical narrative of corporeality, arrived at in and through space, that offers an epistemological-political alternative to the logics of abstract space, or the space of accumulation. These texts offer a mode of conceiving of the body that eschews its aesthetic function within the space of accumulation for an aesthetic function that stems from the body in space as its point of departure, a relationship between the body and the world rendered through aesthetic experience. I return then to Lefebvre’s scene of the body in space, putting this body-in-space in space, asking how being in space might uphold and make tenable this body, aesthetically conceived. It is in this way that I hope to weave a movement between the body and space, co-conceived, that opens onto a version of an aesthetic being in space productive of a space distinct from whence it came.

This possibility of a space produced by the body, a space by which the aesthetic function becomes free of its hold within constrictive spatial logics, can be understood as both a spatial foundation for Lefebvre’s differential space, and the spatial concept from which to conceive of the good life within the space of accumulation. Moving towards the possibility of naming a space capable of situating such a conception of the body in space, I turn to the concept of dwelling. I argue for a transfiguration of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling into dwelling-well made possible by considering this aesthetic being in space, and I turn to Bachelard as well as Lorde for a language that articulates dwelling (and the relationship between language and dwelling) as an aesthetically inflected experience. It is this aesthetically inflected experience that offers a ground from which to consider the good life as not only an ethical charge but as an ontological mandate, as invested with the question not only of what makes life moral, but of what makes life possible.

Dwelling-well comes to name the spatial orientation of the body in space. Moving from Bachelard’s insistence on felicitious space and the processes by which Lorde names knowing conceived of through the body in space, I move on to consider the term luxury as the frame through which to think the relationship between this conceived body in space and the space of capitalism in which such dwelling might occur. Working with the concept of luxury offers a model for understanding the difference between the capacity of the aesthetic in its political/epistemic potency and its use as a productive force within the space of accumulation. I argue that the possibility of dwelling within the space of accumulation relies on a reconceptualization of the relationship between luxury and necessity, and the possibility of
orienting luxury towards a model of nonutility that, in its engagement with the body in space, disrupts process of meaning making within the space of accumulation.

Abstract Space and the Space of Accumulation

Lefebvre uses two terms, “abstract space” and “the space of accumulation”, to define the contemporary space from which he writes and with which his text and this dissertation are concerned. The next chapter of the dissertation will address some of the ways in which the contemporary moment of Lefebvre’s writing in the mid 20th century and the contemporary now are distinct. Narrating the advent of the space of accumulation, Lefebvre writes:

Between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries wars would revolve around accumulation. Wars used up riches; they also contributed to their increase, for war has always expanded the productive forces and helped perfect technology, even as it has pressed these into the service of destruction. Fought over areas of potential investment, these wars were themselves the greatest of investments, and the most profitable. Cases in point are the Hundred Years War, the Italian wars, the Wars against the Holy Roman Empire, and the wars of the French Revolution and empire. The space of capitalist accumulation thus gradually came to life, and began to be fitted out. This process of animation is admiringly referred to as history, and its motor sought in all kinds of factors: dynastic interests, ideologies, the ambitions of the mighty, the formation of nations states, demographic pressures, and so on. This is the road to a ceaseless analyzing of, and searching for, fates and chains of events. Inasmuch as space is the locus of all such chronologies, might it not constitute a principle of explanation at least as acceptable as any other? Industry would pitch its tent in a space in which the communitarian traditions of the countryside had been swept away and urban institutions brought to ruin by war… . This was the space, piled high with the rich spoils of rapine and pillage, which was to become the industrial space of the modern state. (Lefebvre 422)

We see in his reference to history that Lefebvre is less interested in chronology and distinction through time than he is in centering space and its forms of distinction. This is a gesture towards an aspect of his project that attempts to redress what he sees as Marx’s emphasis on temporality over space in his conceptualizations of social life and production. I do not plan to fully engage his critique of Marx here, but wish only to note that for Lefebvre the space of accumulation, its advent, as well as its possible falling away, are understood in spatial terms, and that for him, something like the future is found not in time but in space, space becoming “the principle stake of goal-directed actions and struggles.” (Lefebvre 411) Offering this history as the history of war speaks to what Lefebvre sees as a central attribute of the space of accumulation, the economic role of violence and the inseparability of economics and power. (Lefebvre 276)

Medieval space, in what Lefebvre roughly dates as the Western Europe of the 16th century, sees an eruption of the urban in opposition to and in unity with the country that offers the space from which the space of accumulation can form. In writing on the conditions that enabled this transition, from one space to another, Lefebvre gives a spatial history of the shift from medieval space to the space of accumulation:

Perhaps examining space may help us solve the methodological and theoretical problem embodied in the question ‘What changed in this crucial period?’ Transition implies mediation. The historical mediation between medieval (or feudal) space and the capitalist space which was to result from accumulation was located in urban space – the space of
those ‘urban systems’ which established themselves during the transition. In this period the town separated from the countryside that it had long dominated and administered, exploited and protected. No absolute rift between the two occurred, however, and their unity, though riven with conflict, survived. The town, in the shape of its oligarchy, continued to exercise control over its domains. From the height of their towers, ‘urbanites’ continued to contemplate their fields, forests and villages. As for what peasants ‘are’, the town-dwellers conceived these recently converted pagans either as fantasy or as objectors, and accordingly treated them with embarrassment or contempt, as something out of a fairytale or out of a tale of terror. The urbanites located themselves by reference to the peasants, but in terms of a distantiation from them: there was therefore duality in unity, a perceived distance and a conceived unity. The town had its own rationality, the rationality of calculation and exchange – the Logos of the merchant. In taking over the reins of power from the feudal lords, it seized control of what had been their monopoly: the protection of the peasants and the extraction of their surplus labour. Urban space was fated to become the theatre of a compromise between the declining feudal system, the commercial bourgeoisie oligarchies, and communities of craftsmen. It further became abstraction in action – active abstraction – vis-à-vis the space of nature, generality as opposed to singularities, and the universal principle in statu nascendi, integrating specificities even as it uncovered them. …. In a second spiral of spatial abstraction…the state [would] take over: the towns and their burghers would then lose not only control of space but also dominion over the forces of production, as these forces broke through all previous limits in the shift from commercial and investment capital to industrial capital. Surplus value would no longer have to be consumed where it was produced; rather, it would be susceptible of realization and distribution far away from its source, far beyond the local boundaries which had thus far hemmed it in. The economic sphere was destined to bust out of its urban context; that context would itself be overturned in the process, although the town would survive as a centre, as the locus of a variety of compromises. (Lefebvre 269)³

The production of this politico-economic space then became the “birthplace and cradle of the modern state.” (Lefebvre 279) Space came to appear as a homogenous instrument of violence and homogeneity, crushing anything that appeared to be different from or in opposition to the state. Lefebvre notes, however, that from the space of accumulation emerged three distinct but interconnected formants of space that, wrought from violence and a desire for homogeneity, come to constitute abstract space. Lefebvre borrows “formants”, maintained from the French (Lefebvre 328, L’espace), from music, where it serves as a form of distinction within a unitary instrument or sound. His use of this term brings to the fore what he refers to as “the onslaught of music” suffered by the space of the eighteenth century that “stood also for the revenge of the

³ A project I hope to pursue separate from this dissertation is focused on the ways that the aesthetic functioned in social space during these spatial transformations that Lefebvre notes. I am specifically interested in the ways that, as the space of distinction for the aristocracy shifted from a focus on land to a focus on the centralized estate, how the aesthetic transformations that occurred, specifically how in the shift from a warrior class to a courtier class. This, I think, would offer a fruitful historical analysis of the ways in which the aesthetic emerges as a tool of ideology for this space, in ways that are specific to this space and its modes classed and racialized distinction.
body and the signs of the body upon the non-body and its signs.” (Lefebvre 284) A threat to the dominance of geometric optics, Lefebvre’s musical terminology introduces these elements of abstract space: the geometric formant, the optical formant, and the phallic formant, in a way that already suggests their precarity in the face of the body.

According to Lefebvre, these three formants imply and conceal one another in their shared goal of homogeneity. (Lefebvre 285) Lefebvre outlines their interplay as they constitute abstract space, the space born of contemporary modes of production and structuring of modern life, thusly:

Its geometric and visual formants are complementary in their antithesis: They are different ways of achieving the same outcome: the reduction of the ‘real’, on the one hand, to a ‘plan’ existing in a void and endowed with no other qualities, and, on the other hand, to the flatness of a mirror, of an image, of pure spectacle, under an absolutely cold gaze. As for the phallic, it fulfills the extra function of ensuring that ‘something’ occupies this space, namely, a signer which, rather than signifying a void, signifies a plentitude of destructive force – an illusion, therefore, of plentitude, and a space taken up by an ‘object’ bearing a heavy cargo of myth. The use value of a space of this kind is political – exclusively so. If we speak of it as a ‘subject’ with such and such an aim and with such and such means of action, this is because there really is a subject here, a political subject – power as such, and the state as such. (Lefebvre 287)

Through these formants abstract space enacts a conceptual structuring of the body: the use of anatomy to narrativize and metonymically figure violence through the phallic formant and the institutionalization of a hierarchy of bodily functions (the function of sight elevated to the point where the eye comes to stand in for the body when the phallus does not). The body too lived in social space becomes a product of its built environment: “Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence… reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience. Of that experience the tourist, the passive spectator, can grasp but a pale shadow.” (Lefebvre 137)

This is the body, lived and perceived, as a product of state power. And it does not fare much better in the history of western philosophy. Lefebvre summarizes:

Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body. The living body, being at once ‘subject’ and ‘object’, cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the ‘signs of the non-body’. (Lefebvre 407)

The body, theorized in supposed isolated purity from the ideology of the state, comes to instead codify in mental space the fate of the body in social space. This is of course unsurprising given philosophical thought’s taking up of Euclidean space, or the geometric formant, as its absolute space, or its “space of reference.” Euclidean space is the space of a homogeneity that enables utility. (Lefebvre 285) Conceived through such a space, a space with the capacity to be rendered in two dimensions, bodies become the body, not as an effort to conceptualize or name the bodily, but in the sense of a flattening of difference and rendering stable and useful the messy reality of lived embodiment.

The body in space, as given to us by the space of accumulation and abstract space, cannot function as the body from which to seek a knowledge of space. However, it is this figuring of the body in abstract space, or rather abstract space’s inability to fully figure or account for the body, that makes the body in space a site for conceiving of a way towards a unitary theory of space and
the differential space that animates such a theory. In writing of the contradictions inherent to abstract space, Lefebvre writes:

Through their manipulation of abstract space, the bourgeoisie’s enlightened despotism and the capitalist system have successfully established partial control over the commodity market. They have found it harder – witness their ‘monetary’ problems – to establish control over the capital market itself. The combined result of a very strong political hegemony, a surge in the forces of production, and an inadequate control of markets, is a spatial chaos experienced at the most parochial level just as on the worldwide scale. The bourgeoisie and the capitalist system thus experience great difficulty in mastering what is at once their product and the tool of their mastery, namely space. They find themselves unable to reduce practice (the practico-sensory realm, the body, social-spatial practice) to their abstract space, and hence new, spatial, contradictions arise and make themselves felt. Might not the spatial chaos engendered by capitalism, despite the power and rationality of the state, turn out to be the system’s Achilles’ heel? (Lefebvre 63)

The body, a product of space, is not fully contained by it. In his account of the move from abstract space towards differential space, Lefebvre frames the conflict between one space and the next as the struggle between the body and non-body:

The way for physical space, for the practico-sensory realm, to restore or reconstitute itself is therefore by struggling against the ex post facto projections of an accomplished intellect, against the reductionism to which knowledge is prone. Successfully waged, the struggle would overturn the Absolute Truth and the Realm of Sovereign Transparency and rehabilitate underground, lateral, labyrinthine- even uterine or feminine- realities. An uprising of the body, in short, against the signs of non-body. (Lefebvre 201)

The body’s battle against the non-body is, for Lefebvre, a battle against intellectual reductionism and the transparency that presents itself as the goal of such a knowledge. (Lefebvre 201)

This is not, however, an attack on abstraction itself, or the mental space from which abstraction emerges. Abstract space is not the same as mental space. Rather, in abstract space, the physical and social are dominated by mental processes and projections. The project of moving beyond abstract space is not a move away from abstraction but a move away from the abstract as it shrouds and distorts what Lefebvre calls the ‘real’. He finds a model of a more appropriate relationship between mental, social and physical spaces in concrete abstractions, commodities and money (27), production, product, labour (69), exchange (100), “developed by thought – just as [they] are developed in time and space – until [they] reach the level of social practice.” (Lefebvre 100)

In discussing social space he elaborates on the benefit of abstraction:

Like that of exchange, the form of social space has an affinity with logical forms: it calls for a content and cannot be conceived of as having no content; but, thanks to abstraction, it is in fact conceived of, precisely, as independent of any specific content. Similarly, the form of material exchange does not determine what is exchanged: it merely stipulates that something, which has a use, is also an object of exchange. (Lefebvre 101)

The move then toward differential space is not a move away from concepts, but a move toward a non-dominant relationship between the conceptual and the real. Lefebvre seeks a knowledge that is distinct from ideology and here we see the shape of this difference. Ideology obfuscates the relationship between mental space and state power, imagining itself as pure as it works in the service of power. Here a clear relationship with the social and physical is what enables mental space to be productive, and what enables any universality – a form conceivable outside of any specific content (and yet unthinkable as content-less).
In the first chapter I note the figure of the body in space as a gesture towards a similar configuration between mental, social, and physical space, where physical and social space offer mental space its capacity to abstract. Here the question of what body we can conceive the body in space through, and what body we might conceive of it for, becomes a question concerned with the process of conception. Lefebvre warns of a tendency in philosophy to gesture towards an abstracted body as a way of accounting for social and physical space that only re-inscribes the dominance of mental space. He writes:

The unconsidered leap from the mental to the social and back again effectively transfers the properties of space proper onto the level of discourse – and particularly onto the level of discourse upon space. It is true that this approach seeks to supply some mediation between mental and social by evoking the body (voice, gestures, etc.). But one may wonder what connection exists between this abstract body, understood simply as a mediation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, and a practical and fleshy body conceived of as a totality complete with spatial qualities (symmetries, asymmetries) and energetic properties (discharges, economies, waste). (Lefebvre 62)

With an abstracted body, there is no content and no need for content in order for the body to perform its theoretical task as ambassador to social and physical space. The task then in conceiving of a feminist body in space for the sake of this project is to figure the body as it escapes the control of, and its utilitarian function for, the space of accumulation, to figure a relationship between the body and space that offers a robust conception of the aesthetic. This version of the aesthetic as a site of knowledge will be in dialogue with the conception of the aesthetic inherited from Nietzsche, and that resists the trap of abstraction, of remaining a body only philosophically conceived.

The Body in Space

Beginning with Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology has cast the body as experienced and experiencing, understanding this simultaneous subject/object position as key to the production of knowledge and to the understanding of what it means to be in the world. The ways in which this embodied being in the world is productive of and produced by a sensuous relationship to its environment enables it to do the epistemological work invested to it by the figure of the body in space in the hopes of this body overwhelming the logics of abstract space. Inherent to abstract space is the subject of knowing and the objects of its keep. Following the narrative of phenomenology’s conception of the body, we find that the body in space disrupts what for Lefebvre is a key epistemic principle of the ideology of abstract space: the illusion of transparency, and in its stead, offers a conceptual basis for aesthetic knowing.

A space that understands mental space as primary and as dictating the content and logics of social and physical space portends a mind capable of comprehending and thus controlling the world available to its purview. Lefebvre writes:

The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates. Comprehension is thus supposed, without meeting any insurmountable obstacles to conduct what is perceived, i.e., its object, from the shadows into the light; it is supposed to effect this displacement of the object either by piercing it with a ray or by converting it, after certain
precautions have been taken, from a murky to a luminous state. Hence a rough coincidence is assumed to exist between social space on the one hand and mental space – the (topological) space of thoughts and utterances – on the other. By what path, and by means of what magic, is this thought to come about? The presumption is that an encrypted reality becomes readily decipherable thanks to the intervention first of speech and then of writing. It is said, and believed, that this decipherment is effected solely though transposition and through the illumination that such a strictly topological change brings about. (Lefebvre 28)

Through vision, the mind is able to take in space, to see it, process it, understand it. Space is, in fact, that which can be seen, processed and understood by the mind. It is open, free, and luminous, or at least available for illumination, however elusive. Capable of fully engaging all of space, the mind and the mind’s engagement produce a knowledge equivalent to physical space so that physical space becomes the space of action for the mind - of actualized mental processes and desires. This illusion of transparency not only assumes the nature of space (innocent, open, available for activity) but assumes a direct correlation between perception, thought and knowledge. What is seen is what is and what is contemplated is thus known. The object of mental attention and effort is both fully knowable and unchanged by that knowledge or the processes of knowing. The object is necessarily and simultaneously passive, porous and fixed. Passive in the sense that, besides gaining knowledge, the mind is not changed by the engagement with the object.

Moving from this view of space and knowing productive of abstract space and its productive logics, the body of phenomenology offers a conception of embodied being that disrupts these logics of object and subject via the nature of the body’s relationship to space, and offers a conceptual foundation for aesthetic knowing. In his essay, The Intertwining – The Chiasm, Merleau-Ponty gives an account of human being as both of the order of the subject the order of the object. (Merleau-Ponty 137) It touches and is touched, sees and is seen. And this dual belonging, in its lack of actual duality, points to what he calls “quite unexpected relations between the two orders.” (Merleau-Ponty 137) The object world, the world that abstract space would have illuminated by the piercing gaze of the mind’s eye, for Merleau-Ponty becomes a player in a scene of simultaneous unveiling and enshrouding:

What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterwards, would open himself to them- but something to which we could not be closer than by palpitating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that make it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them?

In this scene of vision there is no opening onto or opening for – neither the seer nor the seen produces itself as vulnerable for the other. Rather, there is a palpitating that, in producing contact between the seer and seen also constitutes the limit of that closeness. There is no fear of the seen being absorbed into the seer, nor the seer losing itself fully to the seen. Indeed, touch, here the
touch of sight, clothes as it reveals, demarcates and shields, and yet it is also the process of discovery. And here discovery is not active where being discovered is passive. Nor is discovery an act of summoning forth the discovered, being discovered a form of servitude or “degradation”. Rather, the act of knowing the other, of seeing, is an act of participating in the extension of the other’s being. What is visible “imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence.” And this visibility held at the end of one’s gaze again does not present an aggressive threat to one’s own sovereignty. Rather, the I is born in these moments of participation in the world of the visible, as the experience requires a contemplation of “that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body as a unit, that “I think” that must be able to accompany all our experiences.”

(Merleau-Ponty 145)

Returning to Lefebvre’s description of the illusion of transparency, comprehension occurs for abstract space “without meeting any insurmountable obstacles to conduct what is perceived, i.e., its object, from the shadows into the light.” The object of knowing is conducted even as it is found. It is simultaneously directed and displaced – it is both passively active and actively passive yet finds agency neither in its hiding nor in the performance of its own unveiling. It is the murky turned luminous by the active and dictating mind. Space here is defined as the lack of obstacle. It appears empty, a conduit for the mind’s activity. Lefebvre writes that “space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free reign.” (Lefebvre 27) Luminous space, giving free reign to the luminosity of thought, seems to be produced by and for the fact of this mental activity alone, and it all but collapses once it has produced its effect. Clarity, which Lefebvre describes as the assumed goal of communication within western philosophy (a goal granted the fetishized acts of speech and writing), demands an assumption that “within the spatial realm the known and the transparent are one and the same thing.” (Lefebvre 28) If everything is clear, available to be known in its fullness, and indeed is known, the difference between the object and the knowing of the subject collapses, and with it it seems any notable spatiality. Knowledge here is a dissolution of the difference between knowing and the thing known. There is no distance between them.

In Merleau-Ponty’s The Visible and the Invisible, we can also see space being produced, though not via an active darting from the state of not-knowing to the state of knowing. Rather, in his chapter The Intertwining-The Chiasm, space emerges when the seen rests at the end of the gaze. In the rapid trembling that characterizes palpitation we can imagine space as that which finds itself there and then not there against the boundary of that which is touched. Merleau-Ponty defines the human body, in its being of the order of subject and object, as not a thing with two aspects, but rather as “visibility, sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled.” (Merleau-Ponty 138) Here space expands and constricts, object and subject become orientations of spatial structure and diffuseness. These spaces are different in quality: it can be felt already, from the quality of space produced by the mind’s eye as it seeks, discovers and reveals.

Merleau-Ponty credits the social phenomena of touch and sight to the flesh of things, a “pre-established harmony” between all that participate together in the reversible states of seeing and being seen, of touching and being touched. (Merleau-Ponty 133) This fleshiness names the character of relationship between subject and object. Object and subject neither collapse into one another in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as they do within the illusion of transparency nor does the distinction between them collapse or become meaningless as a result of the rapidity of their reversal or the simultaneity of their being. They remain distinct just as passivity and activity do not dissipate in meaning even as they disorient the logics by which they are usually
assigned. Rather, fleshiness names a spatiality of knowing produced by and productive of the social relationship between bodies in physical proximity. This knowing neither illuminates objects nor produces any other form of similitude between knower and known, but rather understands perception as relying on all that is similar already, and as thus a process of maintaining difference:

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being-perceived- and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. (Merleau-Ponty 135)

The flesh that binds these bodies in a scene of visibility renders space not clear and empty, but thick – as an insistent there-ness. Neither a vacuum for mental action nor a geometry of mental productivity, flesh exists as a social and physical stuff that makes possible but also participates in the physical and social processes of mental productivity. Merleau-Ponty characterizes this stuff-ness as elemental, using the term “element” “in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being. (Merleau-Ponty 139)

Through flesh Merleau-Ponty gives us a conceptual framework from which to articulate the experience of the body in space that itself emerges from the body in space. In her essays within *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays*, Iris Marion Young reformulates the phenomenological rendering of bodies in space that Merleau-Ponty offers within the terms of social space. Flesh gives us the concept of the body in space and Young takes this up, offering experience as a way to move towards a fuller conception of the body in space, and in doing so emphasizing the way that subject/object and especially active/passive are reoriented as concepts through the logic of bodies in space. I want to focus here on one aspect of embodiment that Young emphasizes – that of what she calls feminine comportment. In her essay “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” Young theorizes and describes what she calls “the modalities of feminine bodily existence for women situated in contemporary advanced industrial, urban, and commercial society.” (Young 30)

Young bases her theorizing on the following observations found in studies of ball throwing and other conventionally masculine physical activities:

- girls do not bring their whole bodies into the motion as much as the boys do. They do not reach back, twist, move backward, step, and lean forward. Rather, the girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arms are not extended as far as they could be. Throwing is not the only movement in which there is a typical difference in the way men and women use their bodies. Reflection of feminine comportment and body movement in other physical activities reveals that these also are frequently characterized, much as in the throwing case, but a failure to make full use of the body’s spatial and lateral potentialities. (Young 32)

In her conception of a theory of feminine comportment and motility – which she describes through the modalities of ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity, Young edits Merleau-Ponty’s description of bodily motility that he offers in *The*
Phenomenology of Perception to describe the ways in which feminine comportment within patriarchy takes on a simultaneity of subject and object. The immanence of the body, transcended through action for Merleau-Ponty, is here only ambiguously transcended. Even in action, “feminine bodily existence remains in immanence or, better, is overlaid with immanence, even as it moves out toward the world in motions of grasping, manipulating, and so on.” (Young 36) Young names also the tendency for women to have a latent or conscious fear of getting hurt that they bring into action as a taking up of oneself as an object of the motion, as opposed to its originator. (Young 39) Young categorizes the underuse of capacities, both in terms of strength and the taking up of physical space, as inhibited intentionality. She frames this as a ‘no’ that participates in the ‘yes’, or a ‘cannot’ that participates in the “I can” that Merleau-Ponty defines as the intentionality of the body. For Merleau-Ponty, “To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance.” (Young 37) Young takes this can/cannot embodied in feminine motility as taking on both the possibilities of the world and the frustrations of its limits within oneself – the body, or consciousness, itself becomes one of the worldly obstacles that might prohibit or inhibit intention. (Young 37) Finally, Young concludes that the tendency to isolate parts of the body necessary for a task from other parts of the body that would support action as producing a discontinuous unity within the body, and a discontinuous unity with the environment to the extent that the body “severs the connection between aim and enactment, between possibility in the world and capacity in the body.” (Young 38)

For Young feminine comportment results in what is ultimately an object-ness – or an in-itself-ness, that the body does not overcome in a production of full presence. This model of embodiment articulates a different version of intertwinement of subject being with object being than is presented in “The Intertwining-the Chiasm,” where the body encounters itself as the one

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6 In my favorite example from the text, Young refers to the finding that “women have a tendency to take up the motion of an object coming toward them as coming at them.” (Throwing, 38) Beyond the humor to be found in this misrecognition of intent or potential effect, I find this example especially interesting for the ways in which language, coming to bear on collapsing distinctions between activity and passivity, unveils the shared cultural life of such experiences and the modes by which Young’s analysis might be extended towards other non white-masculine bodies. To “come at” someone means, in broadly unspecified racialized colloquial language and youth culture, means to approach with the perceived intention of attack. For someone or something to “come at” you names an act of aggression, and is often spoken in reference to a suspected act of potential aggression - as in “she better not come at me”, a self-defensive “they were trying to come at me,” or a pointed warning “don’t come at me.” To experience something as coming at you tends to signal a state of defensive passivity – a state of being with a cultural life often articulated by young and or racialized bodies. This phrase “come at” shares a cultural and linguistic life with another racialized aggressive/defensive stance: “I wish a nigga would.” To articulate “I wish a nigga would” is to articulate a reluctant lying in wait. It is a statement of aggressive defense, an “if, then” that, in asserting itself as active, declares its passivity. This prepared passive - the heightened alertness that misrecognizes a coming toward as a grammatically scattered coming at, the wish they would that inherently assumes (hopes?) they won’t – literally speaks to the unsteady defensiveness or passive endangerment characteristic to modes of embodied being (gendered, racialized, and otherwise) that find themselves in discontinuous unity with their environment.
through being the other. As Young writes, “it is not the ever-present possibility of any lived body to be passive, to be touched as well as touching, to be grasped as well as grasping, which I am referring to here as the ambiguity of the transcendence of the feminine lived body.” (Young 36) Instead she articulates a mode of subject being that is objectified, a being experienced as object that inhibits exertion. Within the world of flesh, the subject is given itself and its sight via the extension of the being of the object. Activity and passivity lose their stability as categories to the extent that they come to define neither the being of subject nor object exclusively. For Young and for the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, concerned with the assertion of consciousness, activity and passivity maintain their attachment to subject and object being respectively. The subject acts upon the world.

For Young then, this objectified subjecthood does not represent a destabilization of activity and passivity as categories, but instead disorients the distinction between object and subject through a simultaneity of subjecthood and objecthood that could be described perhaps as active and not active, rather than active and passive. Or, as a passivity that is in advance of an active other, a passivity that proposes for itself an activity against which it must acquiesce. This singularly embodied simultaneity, an experience of self as both subject and object, prohibits distinction between action and passivity to the extent that active and passive are taken up as modes of being within the same space and time. It upends a binary distinction by accounting for a passivity that is active, and in being so marks itself as more passive even than a passivity acted upon, the latter of which Nietzsche would refer to as a force that finds itself on the wrong side of violence. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh, arrived at in his last work, articulates the nature of the body in space. Young, drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, furthers a conception of the body in space by grounding it in the experience of the body in social and physical space. In doing so she especially draws out the ways in which, conceptualizing from the body in space, activity and passivity proliferate as categories, neither falling away as meaningless nor reorienting into a stable alternative dyad.

This body in space, conceived through Merleau-Ponty and Young, challenges the logics of abstract space that would have knowledge and knowing anchored in the activity of the subject. Returning to the illusion of transparency and the proposed ‘magic’ by which social space is understood as equivalent to the mental space that comes to decipher it, Lefebvre writes:

What justification is there for thus claiming that within the spatial realm the known and the transparent are one and the same thing? The fact is that this claim is a basic postulate of a diffuse ideology which dates back to classical philosophy. Closely bound up with Western ‘culture’, this ideology stresses speech, and overemphasizes the written word, to the detriment of a social practice which it is indeed designed to conceal. The fetishism of the spoken word, or ideology of speech, is reinforced by the fetishism and ideology of writing. For some, whether explicitly or implicitly, speech achieves a total clarity of communication, flushing out whatever is obscure and either forcing it to reveal itself or destroying it by sheer force of anathema. Others feel that speech alone does not suffice, and that the test and action of the written word, as agent of both malediction and sanctification, must also be brought into play. The act of writing is supposed, beyond its immediate effects, to imply a discipline that facilitates the grasping of the ‘object’ by the writing and speaking ‘subject’. In any event, the spoken and written word are taken for (social) practice; it is assumed that absurdity and obscurity, which are treated as aspects of the same thing, may be dissipated without any corresponding disappearance of the ‘object.’ (Lefebvre 28)
For Merleau-Ponty there is a magic, a “talisman of color” that enables the visual to be more than what it appears to be— to be more than what is found at the end of the gaze. Here, for the ideology of abstract space, there is a magic that captures, that allows a grasping of the social by the mental. The capacity to curse, to sanctify, to flush out obscurity, is found in the acts of speech and writing. Writing and speech make clear. Clarity here is not a presence— it is not a clearing amidst stuff or a clearness that is tinted or tainted, that obscures via a glimmering or a glaring, or that is otherwise there. Rather, it is a lack of sensuousness—a no longer obscure and no longer murky. It is the clarity of an uninhibited vision. This clarity, the translucence of the known object and of space, as noted earlier, is the aesthetic marker of the non-body— is the sensuousness of abstract space and its knowledge.

Yet the subject of abstract space does show up if only to act upon the object, to grasp and hold by the act of writing. Here the logics of abstraction, and the aesthetic on which its ideology rests—a clarity of vision and a governing tongue, are in conflict with the body in space, with the proximity to the object that grasping and holding requires, with the fact that, in order to cast a spell over the world— one must reside within it. Abstract space cannot reproduce itself without an embodied subject yet the logics of abstract space cannot contain the body. Prior to or simultaneous with its alleged capture by the knowing subject, the object, by virtue of its being in space, establishes the sensuous framework within which knowing must operate, at the level of both understanding and articulation. The object grasped through writing, inhabiting the space that the writer inhabits, sharing a flesh with the subject of knowing, necessarily participates in processes of imagination that enable its articulation. If we are to understand knowing and articulation as action in the world, it becomes unproductive and unviable to think of that action in opposition to passivity in general, and to the passivity of the object in particular. This object, transparent for abstract space, takes on a visibility within the world of flesh. It is seen, but not by the clarifying and transfixing vision of abstraction. Rather, its visibility is that which it shares in nature with the subject. The subject comes to know through visibility, but the phallic visibility of power and the reduction of physical and social space to the optic abstraction of geometry and the flatness of the image give way for a visibility that imbues the subject with its place among things.

**Flesh Over the Abyss**

There is an epistemological structure to being in space engendered by the language of its articulation. The logics of space dictate the structure of knowledge and knowledge acts as a productive force both of space and within it. The importance of metaphor, of the image, of the spatial scene of being in this process, in giving us the capacity to articulate and give content to knowing, makes clear that there is a structuring poetics of space- a language, a process of metaphor, a view onto space that itself produces not only the language by which space and the body are articulated in relationship to one another within a given spatial system, but that is in itself the nature of the relationship between the body and space. This structuring rhetoric produces space to the extent that the body in space is productive of both the body and space. We

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7 This point precedes in some ways the full argument I will continue make for it. Moving through Bachelard in the following section it will become more obvious how the scene of spatial being gives us our capacity to articulate and give content to knowing, as well as the importance of the image to sensuous knowing.
can see this in abstract space through the metaphors of vision and the phallus and we will see this in Nietzsche’s move towards a different set of figures - a different physiological structuring of language that focuses on the bowels and what cannot be seen.

This is what it means to say that the body in space is an aesthetic location, that it is the site of knowledge working on and through the body. In the sensuousness that names and articulates the nature of the relationship between the body and space there is the structure of spatial ideology, or in the hopes of Lefebvre, the knowledge of space. And the difference between ideology and knowledge becomes exactly the difference between an articulation of the body in space that takes up a body for space (or we might even imagine some inversion - a space for the body) - an abstraction upon which concepts can form independently from the lived reality of the body, versus a body in space that demands of concepts a full articulation through mental, social and physical space, where these spaces neither dominate nor artificially collapse upon one another. It is upon this knowledge of space and as the production of this knowledge that Lefebvre’s differential space comes to take shape in the wake of a failing abstract space. Lefebvre offers a strong description of the epistemological stakes of the body’s return to space as a site of conceptualization:

…the flesh (spatio-temporal) body is already in revolt. This revolt, however, must not be understood as a harking-back to the origins, to some archaic or anthropological past: it is firmly anchored in the here and now, and the body in question is ‘ours’ – our body, which is disdained, absorbed, and broken into pieces by images. Worse than disdained – ignored. This is not a political rebellion, a substitute for social revolution, nor is it a revolt of thought, a revolt of the individual, or a revolt for freedom: it is an elemental and worldwide revolt which does not seek a theoretical foundation, but rather seeks by theoretical means to rediscover – and recognize – its own foundations. Above all it asks theory to stop barring its way in this, to stop helping conceal the underpinnings that it is at pains to uncover. Its exploratory activity is not directed towards some kind of ‘return to nature’, nor is it conducted under the banner of an imagined ‘spontaneity’. Its object is ‘lived experience’ – an experience that has been drained of all content by the mechanisms of diversion, deduction/extrapolation, figures of speech, analogy, tautology, and so on. (Lefebvre 201)

The best hope for language, then, is to get out of its own way. A poetics of the body in space that serves to articulate or make possible lived experience must manage to work within language without being of a language that serves to drain or cover over the experience of the body. For Lefebvre the body’s revolt is not a return to nature – it is not prior to language. Nor is it a championing of spontaneity, where we might imagine language as unnecessary – where there is no need for a conceptual bridge between one moment and the next. Rather, language must enable a concept without offering a conceptual foundation.

Merleau-Ponty says of flesh that it brings a style of being to any fragment of Being. (Merleau-Ponty 139) We can understand this style as an aesthetic quality – flesh fashions Being’s being. If clarity, phallic visibility, and the fetishized crystallization processes of speech and writing do not constitute the style of the body’s being in space, the question becomes what qualities and processes mark what could be called the aesthetic of the body in space, the style by which sensuous knowing arrives, gathers, and becomes communicable.

In the remainder of this chapter I want to work towards articulating this style. For Lefebvre, it is Nietzsche the poet who “snatches words from the jaws of death” and otherwise represents the body in space as redemptive of knowledge. I want to begin then by returning to
Nietzschean figures of the body in space. Starting with the body Nietzsche sketches in “On Truth in Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense”, I will then return to the tightrope walker – the site of the body in space that Lefebvre borrows from Nietzsche and upon which I predicate much of my project. In returning to this scene I want to think through the ways that this original image structures the body in space poetically, offering epistemological ground for moving towards a poetics of space capable of holding, of making possible in social space, and of giving theoretical agency to the body in space as it has been articulated through Merleau-Ponty’s flesh, through Young’s ambiguous comportment, and through Nietzsche’s bowels. I want to then think through the ways that the poetic that emerges from this consideration transforms and is transformed by a consideration of dwelling – what I refer to earlier in the chapter as putting the body in space in space.

In the first chapter I discuss though Katrin Froese’s “Bodies and Eternity” the ways in which the Nietzschean body of The Will to Power and The Birth of Tragedy appear to found Lefebvre’s own concept of the body. Here I want to focus on Lefebvre’s relationship to Nietzsche’s early essay “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense” (On Truth and Lies), where Lefebvre reads Nietzsche as a poet and a lover of language. (Lefebvre 138) “On Truth and Lies” offers a theory of language, specifically of metaphor and metonym, that points towards a body founded language and knowledge, even as the body and its concepts are overwhelmed by abstract truth, as Lefebvre summarizes:

The fact is that a ‘pyramidal order’, and hence a world of castes and classes, of laws and privileges, of hierarchies and constraints, stands opposed to the world of first impressions as ‘that which is firmest, most general, best known, most human, and hence that which regulates and rules’. A society is a space and an architecture of concepts, forms, and laws whose abstract truth is imposed on the reality of the senses, of bodies, of wishes and desires.” (Lefebvre 139)

Lefebvre engages explicitly with “On Truth and Lies” only long enough to summarize the radical nature of Nietzsche’s approach to the Greek prefix meta-, metaphor and metonym belonging for Nietzsche not only to the second order of language, but to the first. Lefebvre articulates the value of this for a theory of language – that it founds language as active and figures speech as more inventive than language, writing or reading – a move that asserts a lived bodily relationship to language. (Lefebvre 138) However, by virtue of the fact that Nietzsche articulates his system of anthropomorphic truth through a series of spatial metaphors and in light of the above summary of Nietzsche by Lefebvre, we can discern the here unarticulated depths of Lefebvre’s Nietzschean project.

Lefebvre narrates his own project as seeking truth or knowledge in a way that exceeds what Nietzsche claims to be after. Within “On Truth and Lies,” the poetry that language is capable of, that Lefebvre sees Nietzsche as harnessing, neither articulates nor proves the truth of an underlying Dionysian world. What is true, as far as that concept is tenable for Nietzsche, is the social world produced by Nietzsche’s “columbarium of concepts”, “graveyard of perceptions”, “tower of science”, and so on. (Nietzsche 2010) While for Nietzsche, there is no accessible truth, only a series of metaphors and forgetting, Lefebvre insists upon a knowledge of space offering access to knowledge proper. For him, the heavy promise of moving beyond spatial ideology to a knowledge of space is the attainment of knowledge itself. That knowledge for Lefebvre arrives as a knowledge of space makes it possible to understand Lefebvre as not promising to exceed a Nietzschean concept of knowing but rather as resuscitating and elevating the poetry of Nietzsche to the level of truth. What in Nietzsche’s essay appears as a limit,
namely, that human knowledge is a series of creative gestures capable of constructing a system
of anthropomorphic truths yet incapable of establishing a truth outside of itself, can become, if
considered within Lefebvre’s reading, a poetic articulation similar to the production of a space
built upon, if not truth, the immediate metamorphosis of sense experience. Nietzsche articulates
conceptual building through metaphors of physical building and infrastructure. Metaphor for
Nietzsche does not refer only to a second order of language but rather to language itself – to the
metamorphosis of sense experience into image and sound. Nietzsche’s heavy use of architectural
imagery produces a text in which buildings emerge as images as metaphors emerge as language–
as metaphor flourishes, so does a spatial landscape. The images that give us concepts also give us
a spatial landscape, and these concepts, even as they betray and forget their origins, originate
within the text in a moment of unthinkable metamorphosis between the image and the senses.
Language here is founded in sense experience and for Nietzsche the poet it is productive of a
space founded in sense experience. Here the body, to the extent that it must ground such sense
experiences, emerges as foundational to space.

“On Truth and Lies”, alongside offering a theory of metaphor, offers a theory of the
relationship between being and not-knowing that adds dimension to the epistemological impact
of the body’s boundedness. In doing so it counters processes of knowing and logics inherent to
the aesthetic and epistemological orientations of abstract space, replacing them with the space of
the body and its poetic and epistemic dimensions. The narrator of “On Truth and Lies” takes up
and enacts upon the reader the power of the visual as it structures the knowledge of abstract
space. He refers to the eyes of the universe that maintain their gaze upon the self-centered
philosopher (Nietzsche, OTAL 114), the blinding fog that casts deception (Nietzsche, OTAL
114), and the visual scale by which the smallness of the human, like the gnat, proves its
insignificance. (Nietzsche, OTAL 114) He empathizes with the loss of faith in the telescopic and
microscopic powers of science that he casts upon the reader, (Nietzsche, OTAL 120) but he also
assures the reader that his knowledge is what makes him human – is the capacity for violence
held by humanity in the face of the teeth and horns bestowed upon other animals. (Nietzsche,
OTAL 115) This visuality and this violence come to characterize the capacity of language and of
concepts to the extent that they are the reserve of the philosopher’s desire and capacity for truth.
He confronts the knower of abstract space with his limits – his incapacity to know the thing in
and of itself, to truly capture and own it, as well as his salvation – that knowledge in its capacity
for violence is language – that truth is not necessary for either the maintenance of society nor the
control of nature.

In the process of this confrontation, Nietzsche asks a question that opens onto a different
relationship to knowing and to knowledge.:

What does man actually know about himself? Is he, indeed, ever able to perceive himself
completely, as if laid out in a lighted display case? Does nature not conceal most things
from him – even concerning his own body- in order to confine and lock him within a
proud, deceptive consciousness, aloof from the coils of the bowels, the rapid flow of the
blood stream, and the intricate quivering of the fibers! She threw away the key.8
(Nietzsche, OTAL 116)

8 [Of course she did.] There is a whole life in Nietzsche’s use of the exclamation point followed
by the succinct, period punctuated line “She threw away the key.” The intensity and fiery
absurdity of matters of the flesh followed by a matter of fact absurdity on the part of feminine
nature. Nearly a throw-away line in its anti-climactic brevity, it is as if this later absurdity, that a
In this description of the body Nietzsche ostensibly suggests that the body, with its coiling bowels and rapid flow of blood, is kept from man to maintain his pride. There is an animality or physicality here that we might assume would disrupt the identity of the knowing consciousness that man understands himself to be. But also, as Nietzsche describes, this maintenance is a locking out. That the prideful consciousness that man understands himself to be is perhaps all that he has access to within himself. We can see here a distinction between subject and object distorted, where man, as subject, is unknowing and thus incapable of becoming the object laid out in clear view. Moreover, this description of man’s deception, of the inaccessibility of the coils of the bowels, offers a relationship between individuation and not knowing that upsets the logics of abstract space that would have an object over there and a knowing subject, over here. Or vis-a-versa. Within the logics of abstract space, it is individuation within space that enables knowing. In the grasping and holding facilitated through writing, the subject that knows moves toward an external object. As noted earlier, the illusion of transparency produces space as that through which the subject or the subject’s gaze moves in order to find, attain, clarify, the object of knowing. However, in the scene described by Nietzsche of the unknowable bowels, the over there of the object becomes over here. It is not external to the subject, but rather internal, the distance between subject and object, if one is to remain, engendering an interior space, or distance.

Lefebvre finds disindividuation, the messy collapse of self and other, or of object one and object two, in all of the senses, save vision. (Lefebvre 198) The lack of a bounded over-there-ness of smell, the lack of obvious boundaries between smell, taste and texture, disallow the distinction and clarity that abstract space requires of its knowing. As a form of this disindividuation taken up through art, Lefebvre understands music as itself an instantiation of the revolt of the body. (Lefebvre 284) In the Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche introduces Apollo and Dionysius as “the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor (Bildner) and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionyos.” (Nietzsche BT, 14) In describing the Dionysian quality of music, Nietzsche offers a history of Greek culture in the movement from a rhythmic, image-making Apollonian music and the dithyrambic music of Dionysus. He writes of the impact of this transition:

With what astonishment the Apolline Greeks must have regarded [the dithyramic servant of Dionysos]! With an astonishment enlarged by the added horror of realizing that all of this was not so foreign to them after all, indeed that their Apolline consciousness only hid this Dionysiac world from them like a veil. (Nietzsche BT, 21)

woman might in a single gesture destroy man’s capacity to know, comes as no surprise. She threw away the key. Here nature, in her expected folly, falls in line with what I have come to catalog under “Little Women in Nietzsche”, compiled in collaboration with Suzanne LiPuma: "Great Man! - From the fact that someone is a 'great man' one cannot infer that he is a man; he may be just a boy, or a chameleon of all stages of life, or a bewitched little woman." (The Gay Science, §208) “Fortunately, I am not willing to be torn to pieces: the perfect woman tears to pieces when she loves. . . . Ah, what a dangerous, creeping subterranean little beast of prey she is.” (Ecco Homo, III: 5) “They are rid of the Christian God and are now all the more convinced that they have to hold on to Christian morality: this is an English kind of consequential reasoning which we will not hold against the moralizing little woman à la Eliot. (Twilight of the Idols, Reconnaissance: 5)
This horror, that the dark unknown other is not so foreign, is what I read as central to this description of the coils of the bowel, and what opens up a reading of this passage as offering a poetic of the body in space. Man, in “On Truth and Lies”, is aloof to the coils of the bowels. Nature has thrown away the key and in doing so concealed the truth of his own body from him. Intuitively, we can understand this concealment. Our eyes must face outward, the interior of our bodies in some way always positioned behind the gaze, stationed in the wrong direction. And where this seems otherwise, when we understand our limbs or our nose as in front of us, our own skin serves to snub our sense of sight. A correlation appears between Apollonian consciousness here and the consciousness that conceals in On Truth and Lies, the veiled Dionysian world the world of the body’s interior.

For Nietzsche, Apollo, the god of light, is the “magnificent divine image (Götterbild) of the princpium individuationis, whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of ‘semblance’.” (Nietzsche BT, 17) It is this Apollonian spirit Lefebvre finds in art as the last vestibule of the body within the space of accumulation, and it is this individuation that accounts for the sense of boundedness of the human body and ego (the I, the visual and tactile boundaries of the physical body) as it is simultaneously disindividuated from its environment (the acting and being acted upon by the environment that constitutes any I, the aural and olfactory senses that deny boundaries between self and other, here or there.) This disindividuation is accounted for by a unity that is Dionysian in nature. Where Apollo imbues light and distinction, under Dionysius man finds sublime unity: “he himself now moves in such ecstasy and sublimity as once he saw the gods move in his dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: all nature’s artistic power reveals itself here, amidst shivers of intoxication, to the highest, most blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity.” (Nietzsche BT, 18)

This Dionysian unity, the lack of any reliable or definitive boundaries, is an epistemological problem for abstract space that we can see being dealt with and brought into the conceptual fold by concepts such as flesh, where knowledge no longer relies upon individuation, where knowing becomes fully entangled with being known. However, the problem presented by Nietzsche in the face of nature throwing away the key is not a problem of disindividuation resulting in an inability to know. The body here, in its deep, dark unknowability is not Dionysian in the sense that it is most importantly a distinguished and individuated form. It is skin that conceals as it bounds. Nor is it Apollonian in the sense that here form and distinction are not bastions of legibility, vision and light do not give shape, but rather encounter shape as an unyielding gatekeeper. The body here is neither contained and illuminated nor dispersed and unruly. Rather, in their contained individuation – being clearly of the subject, they become unknowable. The coils of the bowels and the quivering of fibers, in their processes of digestion and nervous activity, enact an acting upon and being acted upon that does not take place in the space where individuation is blurred visually, in an exterior space that is shared. Rather, this process of blurred individuation is concealed. In man being “aloof from the coils of the bowels, the rapid flow of the blood stream, and the intricate quivering of the fibers” while these coils, blood stream, and fibers belong to man, they are “his own body,” the body’s insides constitute an interiority that manages to be both the most individuated and the least accessible to the individual. The body then seems to become an exercise in sensuous dialectics, an opening onto the aesthetic that is akin to neither artist nor art. Rather, it offers up an experience of a presence that is inaccessible, an immediacy that is distant, so far as space constitutes, for abstract space, the mental trajectory of a knowing mind.
In these descriptions, Nietzsche disrupts the phallic geometry of knowing that Lefebvre sees as central to abstract space. Here our ability to differentiate is not our capacity to know; what was clarity has become obstruction. In its place there is a dialectical relationship between closeness and distance, a kinship between being and not knowing, not via a not knowing where one’s being begins and ends, but via not knowing the nature of that which is exactly what we know to be our own. That which might be most differentiated from the environment or the other - our internal organs, our fibers, is hidden most fully from our sight. Within the space of accumulation mental space, in its distorted distance from social and physical space, serves as the foundation of ideology. For Lefebvre the aesthetic, or sensual epistemological form this takes ideology takes is bound to the metaphors of illumination and opacity. As discussed earlier, the illusion of transparency assumes the nature of space as innocent, open, and available, and assumes a direct correlation between perception, thought and knowledge. For Lefebvre, this illusion serves to disguise the social production of space as production only in conjunction with an ostensibly opposing illusion, that of opacity. He writes:

The illusion of sustainability, naturalness and spatial opacity nurtures its own mythology. One thinks of the space-oriented artist, at work in a hard or dense reality delivered direct from the domain of Mother Nature. More likely a sculptor than a painter, an architect sooner than a musician or poet, such an artist tends to work with materials that resist or evade his efforts. When space is not being overseen by the geometer, it is liable to take on the physical qualities and properties of the earth. The illusion of transparency has a kinship with philosophical idealism; the realistic illusion is closer to (naturalistic and mechanistic) materialism. Yet these two illusions to not enter into antagonism with each other after the fashion of philosophical systems, which armour themselves like battleships and seek to destroy one another. On the contrary, each illusion embodies and nourishes the other. The shifting back and forth between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation. Symbolisms deriving from nature can obscure the rational lucidity which the West has inherited from its history and from its successful domination of nature. The apparent translucency taken on by obscure historical and political forces in decline (the state, the nation) can enlist images having their source in the earth or in nature, in paternity or in maternity. The rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality. (Lefebvre 30)

Opacity and luminosity stands as opposites the way two players might stand as opposites in a perfectly synchronized game of catch, or perhaps more exactly the way two players of the same team might hover over two different bases and engage a third in a game of pickle that can only end when the third, running between one false choice and another, chooses one and claims defeat. Here there is a geometry of two that are diametrically opposed, yet their purpose is to ensure the line between them. In this way the non-body of abstract space produces a dialectic of the senses and of knowledge that folds inward upon itself. There is no danger between these poles that is not a foregone conclusion. Opposites reaffirm one another, forming a co-constituted reality that serves to make impossible a perception that exceeds ideology.

What we have in Nietzsche is a different sensuous dialectic, a different logic between pairs that is founded in the body as an inside and an outside, as a dark depth that is both unknown and familiar, the body in space and the body as space. Aesthetically, we are left with a scene of depth and darkness catalyzing of a series of sensuous dialectics proximity/distance, inside/outside, familiar/foreign with poles that do not close in on one another, either in collapse
(as mental and physical/social space do within logics of abstract space) or by design (as the illusions of opacity and illumination do in the production of the space of accumulation), but rather, in their opposition open onto a view of the body and of knowledge. This is not a depth or darkness in opposition to light. We do not now know via darkness where we once knew via light. That light does not shine onto the darkness, that knowing and not knowing cannot be secured through this pairing in either direction, suggests an orientation towards sensuousness not based intrinsically on vision, but rather on broader modalities of physical spaciousness. It also offers darkness up as more than an epistemological metaphor, it becomes a sensuousness not framed only by its epistemic function, but available as an image in itself that can do work as such. Taking this image up, along with the recurring image of differences needing crossing, of opposites working upon one another and being constituted as opposites via a body found somewhere in the middle, returns us to the original image of the tightrope walker and the abyss as the scene where we might encounter an aesthetic founded in the body.

In order to read this scene as offering insight into a concept of poetic articulation that is of the body, rather than one that seeks to found a concept of the body, I want to return to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh, here through Judith Butler’s reading. In reading the chiasm as the space of linguistic and phenomenological crossing, Butler articulates the sensuous geometries of the scene of crossing in such a way as to offer narrative access to the space between poles, to the phenomenology of moving between oppositional concepts. The hope at this point in the dissertation is to narrate a poetic structure emanating from phenomenological experience that founds a poetic rendering of social space so that such a poetic articulation might be put in dialectical tension with the poetics of the space of accumulation. To move toward an articulation of the body in space in space, space that, in its articulation embodies the knowledge produced between the body and space, that emerges from a concept itself founded in the body, is to articulate a form of the body’s revolt against the productive forces of abstract space that, spatially founded, might be able to take sensuous form as lived experience within the space of accumulation.

In her essay “Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty,” Butler reads Irigaray’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, recouping Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the flesh from Irigaray’s accusation of solipsistic narcissism based in an exclusion of the maternal as fleshy substratum upon which all… may be knowable. For Butler, Irigaray falsely equates recognizing one’s self in the other with a solipsistic understanding of the other as the self. Butler argues that, on the one hand, it is possible to be of the other without the other being reducible to the self, and on the other hand, that that substratum of flesh that for Merleau-Ponty allows for such a recognition does not necessitate an equation with the maternal, but rather enables a break from the constitution of the maternal as an excluded origin:

the maternal body is situated in relations of alterity without which it could not exist, and these relations, strictly speaking, precede and condition the maternal body (indeed, often, such relations, understood as norms, restrict certain bodies from becoming “maternal” bodies altogether). The “flesh of the world” in its very generality refuses the synecdochal collapse by which all sensuousness becomes reduced to the maternal as the sign of its origin. Why does the maternal figure that origination, when the maternal itself must be produced from a larger world of sensual relations? To what extent does Merleau-Ponty's insistence on this prior world of flesh offer a way to disjoin the feminine from the controlling figuration of the maternal, and offer bodies a way to signify outside the binary trap of mothers and men?” (Butler 73)
Flesh then, in its insistence on being prior to sensuous relationality, and on enabling all sensuous relationality, enacts a philosophical gatekeeping by which no socially constructed other might come to be the excluded other by which society emerges as legible.9

Butler notes that this inability to be prior to, to stand in for or name the substratum of flesh extends to language. For Merleau-Ponty, it is through language that we can approach the relationalities conditioned by flesh, but language itself remains of this conditioning – it is the flesh of language that gives us access to it. And yet, language does participate within the world of flesh uniquely. It enables an articulation that there is a substratum – it encodes relationalities and substitutions, even as it does not allow an articulation of that substratum itself. It brings into view semblances brought into being by flesh and further, he claims that, as Butler writes, “if we were to give a full account of the body and its senses, we would see that “all the possibilities of language are given in it.”” (Butler 73) This uniqueness of language, that it is of the world of flesh on the one hand, moves to approach flesh itself on the other, yet never reaches it, situates language itself as a perpetual crossing over between the sensuous world and that which enables it. That, for Merleau-Ponty, a full account of the body and its senses would contain all the possibilities of this language that crosses reiterates the body in space as a scene of enunciation, or a poetic rendering of knowing.

This body, for Merleau-Ponty, is “not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a sensible for itself…: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision, hence an exemplar sensible, which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside…..” (Merleau-Ponty 135) Here touch and vision together, in their individual reversabilities, make up the exemplar sensible that enacts a diversified unity with the world, and that in itself comes to offer the possibility of knowledge.10

Butler takes up this closed-circuit between body and world and the unclosed circuit between sight and touch that constitute the original capacity for the closed-circuit between body and world in order to read the chiasm in Merleau-Ponty as a “criss-crossing between touch and sight and language [that] is not always reducible to a continuous and self-referential body[.]” (Butler 75) In her conclusion she writes:

Finally, let me draw attention to one dimension of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writing which seems to me to resist closure and to resist the circularity of solipsism that Irigaray

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9 In this way it also becomes impossible to understand any other as more or less fleshy, more or less of an origin or of the sensuous.
10 Extracted from the published text but copied in the editors notes, Merleau-Ponty has written in brackets here: “One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself- or that the world is at the heart of our flesh.” (The Chiasm, Editor’s note, pg 136) It is a strong statement of the body in space as the site of knowing, and it does work to make sense of the relationship between inside and outside, that this thinking world is equivalent to having the world within us (at the heart.) In this same note, Merleau-Ponty continues: “In any case, once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside.” (The Chiasm, Editor’s note, pg 136) There is a symmetry between the unknowable there-ness of the body’s interiority and the outside of the world that suggests that our within the world-ness is full and constitutive as Heidegger would have it and yet also somehow sensuously carrying within it an outside of the world-ness, a correspondence to the fully other, that which can be but our own.
describes. Let us return to the relation between touch and sight. Is there something which underlies or connects these relations? And can it be described at all? Merleau-Ponty writes, "My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization..." "[T]his incessant escaping" – as he calls it – "is not a failure...is not an ontological void...it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world..." (VI, 147-48) But here it seems the phenomenological experience of not being able to close this circuit, of being as it were in a perpetual relationship of noncoincidence with oneself, is asserted only then to be retracted through the postulation of a body and world which overcomes all such appearances of noncoincidence. Can Merleau-Ponty's own description hold? Or does he give signs that he cannot describe what holds these relations together, that the criss-crossing between touch and sight and language is not always reducible to a continuous and self-referential body? Remember that he describes this "chassé-crosse" as a chiasm, and that the rhetorical figure of the chiasm is such that two different relations are asserted which are not altogether commutative. A chiasm or chiasmus is defined by Webster’s as an inverted relationship between the syntactic elements of parallel phrases,” but in the OED it is specified as “a grammatical figure by which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other.” But note that while there is a formal symmetry in the figure of the chiasm, there is no semantic equivalence between the two phrases symmetrically so paired. For when we say, “when the going gets tough, the tough get going” we actually use two different meanings for “going” and two different meanings for “tough” so that the statements appear to be commutative without, in fact, expressing a relationship of semantic equivalence. What is it that escapes substitutability or equivalence here? I think it is the very capacity of language to mean more and differently than it appears, a certain possibility for semantic excess that exceeds the formal or syntactic appearance of symmetry. For the hand that touches is not identical to the hand that is touched, even if it is the same hand, and this noncoincidence is a function of the temporally noncoincident ontology of the flesh. And the "tough" who get going are not quite the same as the "tough" that adjectivally qualified a certain kind of going. Here meaning is displaced in the course of the claim, as a kind of metonymic effect of writing itself. And this might be understood as precisely the kind of "exceeding of itself" or "escaping of itself" of language that cannot be quite closed up or closed down by the putative project of solipsism that Irigaray claims governs Merleau-Ponty's text. (Butler 76)

Through Butler we can come to read the chiasm, at its broadest definition a crossing, as giving to us the body and language as they intertwine to give us that which they cross. One the one hand, there is the body in noncoincidence with itself, then on the other there is language- Merleau-Ponty’s own writing, in noncoincidence with itself as it names a coincidence between the body and world even as it names non-coincidence between touch and sight, between the right hand and the left. His writing itself becomes an attempt to cross a chiasm across difference and sameness that is itself- is the text, in its attempt at this crossing. And the poles to be bridged, formally symmetrical – one becomes the other as the other becomes the first, as Butler points out, are made of different stuff. What is the same is moved between as such so that what is different offers meaning to that which moves between as it articulates, in moving between, that there is a sameness.

That which moves between for Lefebvre is the funambulist – the body in space that attempts in its crossing to bridge physical and social space with mental space, that seeks
knowledge in a concept founded in the body. There can be a symmetry found between this
crossing and the crossing of language for Merleau-Ponty, between a body founded concept
(flesh) and the world which it enables. We might here imagine one crossing done by language, as
it is encapsulated by the body, between that which might found knowledge for Lefebvre (flesh)
to the world of that concept’s making. And we might imagine it as it intertwines with the
crossing of Nietzsche’s funambulist, moving across for Lefebvre in order to bridge mental space
with lived experience. What can be taken as the poetic structure of this scene, or this
amalgamation of scenes, that gives us knowledge? Butler names the process of the
noncoincidental crossing of language as exhibiting an excess. And this excess too could be
ascribed to that being of flesh that language fails to describe, and to the body itself, that in this
scene comes to escape language and the scene of meaning production. The body for Merleau-
Ponty is perhaps safe, tethered as it is to language, and the body for Lefebvre only just steps out
onto the rope, petrifying the history of western philosophy that turns its gaze from the harrowing
act. But for Nietzsche, of course, in whom Lefebvre finds poetry, there is no arrival and there is
no perpetual suspension. Rather, startled by a clown, the funambulist falls into the abyss, where
he is carried and eventually buried by Zarathustra.

A Poetics of Dwelling

If the body in space gives us a sensuality by which to know, the question becomes what
sensuous experiences make viable such a body. How does it mean or look like for the body in
space to be in space? In this way being in space is an aesthetic/epistemic endeavor as well as/by
way of being an ontological one. In his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, Heidegger offers
dwelling as a concept that gives name to the co-constitution of body and space, that names being
as being in space. For Heidegger dwelling is the process by which our being unfolds as being
among the fourfold of divinities, earth, sky and mortals. Finding a place among the fourfold is
both the goal and the mode of dwelling, which for Heidegger arises through processes of
building and preserving. (Heidegger 147) Dwelling arises through this being-with and that being
requires a space in and through which to become, disrupting ontologies of the knowing and
figuring I of abstract space, for whom space and that which resides within it are peripheral to his
own existence. According to the language of dwelling, what spatial poetic can articulate
dwelling in a way that orients it towards an aesthetic mode of being. How can dwelling be
transfigured into the sensuous dwelling of the body that then allows for an articulation of the
limits and potentials of such a sensuous dwelling within the space of accumulation?

In this section I argue that Gaston Bachelard, in The Poetics of Space, offers a language
with which to arrive at the conception of a being that dwells aesthetically. In their notions of
spatiality, both Bachelard and Heidegger attempt to transcend Cartesian notions of space. Both
are invested in a freeing of human being that comes from being-with the world via dwelling.
Both are invested in the elemental aspects of nature and the ways in which human-being comes
to the fore thorough a relationship to these. For Heidegger, earth and air are two of the fourfold,
for Bachelard, all images stem from an experience of the elemental nature of the object, be it fire,
wind, water or earth. Both understand being in the world as a sensual experience – being and
understand extend from our orientation in space. It is because we come to know via the
imagination, via the image, that Bachelard argues for the poet as the one who gives us our
language of felicitious space. In doing so he offers a figuration of being-well that brings a more
robust, entangled body into dwelling.
For Heidegger we relate to the sensuous world through our dwelling with the earth, the sky and other mortals. As we are part of the fourfold we are sensuous beings. The bodies in Heidegger’s text merge with the environment, they are there to bring us closer to the other entities of the fourfold. For example, when men move “to and fro” across the bridge, they do so “so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side.” (Heidegger 150) In Heidegger it is always obvious that things have shape – the bridge sways, the lumber cart and the harvest wagon cross the bridge with no seeming transcendence into the realm of the divinities. It is easy to imagine that they begin on one bank and move, perhaps slowly, perhaps swiftly, to the other side. However, the bodies of mortals, while present, while offering a presencing through building and preserving, do not show up readily as bodies in his figuration of being. In Heidegger the ability to be other places, via thought, seems to exchange a sort of physicality for the imagination. It is our thinking, for example, that travels the distance between ourselves and the bridge. Not a slow, fast, steady or meandering body.

For Bachelard, it is in the dialectics that take shape through the experience of space, dialectics of freedom and refuge, smallness and expansiveness, intimacy and distance, openness and closedness, above and below, that the pleasure of the aesthetic dimension emerges. These pleasures produced in the text anchor the being who dwells. Half-open being, in its movement between open and closed, operates as a being that both finds pleasure in the dialectic but also exists as one who experiences the dialectics of aesthetic dimension. Aesthetic dimension, and the sensuous engagement of that geometry, offers up being, constitute what it means to dwell. It is this articulation that allows us to fully arrive at a being that dwells-aesthetically, or arrive at a conception of being-well. Half open being is a state that requires the pleasure of poetic reverie to exert itself in the field of language and requires the corporeal enunciation of difference to experience being-with. It is being that experiences and produces, for example, intimacy and distance qua having a body that can perform being close or far from objects of aesthetic experience, and articulate in that relationship a creative image of itself in relationship to that world. If human being is an ontology that requires a dialectical relationship to aesthetic experiences of space so that the pleasures of that experience are no longer ‘good’ but are in fact part of what allows for dwelling, part of what it means to be.

Bachelard began his career as a philosopher of science. His theory of microphysics, a theorizing of the elemental through the study of the atom, had far reaching impact on theories of the social, especially for Foucault.11 Bachelard’s concept of microphysics emphasized the advent of atomist-quantum-physics in shifting scientific understanding from a belief in the underlying unity of things to an understanding that the world of our experience is fundamentally complex. Quantum theory produced a rift in the assumption that the capacity to experience translated into the world that existed, leading to a shift away from the Kantian agreement between the sensuous and the concept, or between the principles of intuition and understanding. (Webb 2005) Bachelard understood the capacity to be swayed by the dynamics of experience to be an impediment to the scientific project of knowledge production. The imagination and its inability

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11 Foucault uses this term in *Discipline and Punish* to name the analysis of the relationship between the body, knowledge and power. In his essay “Microphysics: From Bachelard to Serres to Foucault” David Webb argues that Foucault’s relationship to science can be attributed to his relationship to Bachelard and can be traced as early as *The Order of Things* and through his work on the history of sexuality. (Webb 2005)
to resist the imaginative pull of the elements was for Bachelard an impediment to a positivist scientific knowing and over the course of his career, it evoked for him a new set of questions, transforming Bachelard from a philosopher of science into a philosopher of the aesthetic. (Joan 1997) His epistemological inquiry turned away from science-despite-the-imagination and toward the nature of matter as it impacts the imagination and emerges sensuously through the poetic image. This trajectory from attempting to overcome reverie to seeking to understand its form and the knowledge it produces brings us to his stakes in the \textit{Poetics of Space}. In his introduction Bachelard refers to his project as seeking “a phenomenological determination of images” and later as a “metaphysics of the imagination.” (Bachelard xiii) For Bachelard, matter is ultimately a subterranean force, grounded in either fire, water, air or earth, the image a secondary and subjective iteration of this fundamental state. The image, for Bachelard, is the creative work of the imagination, and is a site of distinctly human productivity.

On his choosing to engage the question of the image and the imagination through the poetics of space, Bachelard writes:

In the present volume, my field of examination has the advantage of being well circumscribed. Indeed, the images I want to examine are the quite simple images of felicitous space. In this orientation, these investigations would deserve to be called topophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. …On the other hand, hostile space is hardly mentioned in these pages. The space of hatred and combat can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images. For present, we shall consider the images that \textit{attract.} (Bachelard xxxvi)

For Bachelard, interest in space supports an interest in images that attract. Indeed, in his introduction, Bachelard notes that “the poetic image is under the sign of a new being. This new being is a happy man.” (Bachelard xxix) Over the course of the text, through encounters with felicitous space, Bachelard gives us a phenomenological account of the spatiality of this being. In his chapter on the dialectics of outside and inside he writes:

It would be contrary to the nature of my inquiries to summarize them by means of radical formulas, by defining the being of man, for instance, as the being of an ambiguity. I only know how to work with a philosophy of detail. Then, on the surface of being, in that region where being \textit{wants} to be both visible and hidden, the movements of opening and closing are so numerous, so frequently inverted, and so charged with hesitation, that we could conclude on the following formula: man is half-open being. (Bachelard 222)

By naming this half-open being, and by distinguishing this half-openness from the broad philosophical concept of ambiguity, Bachelard gives us a name and a geometry for a being that dwells-well, who exists by way of a dwelling that’s functioning and purpose is articulated in relationship to the aesthetic dimension. What might appear broadly as ambiguous is, in its sensuous details, a desire to be visible and hidden, the movement of opening and closing.

Moving his attention away from the problem of how science might, in the face of the elements, hold at bay the irrational feelings and thoughts that intercept man’s more rational knowing, Bachelard now asks after that glimmer of the imagination, that experience of the world that cannot be subsumed or discarded by a scientific rationality, as the place of a knowing engagement with the world. The image for Bachelard becomes an epistemic starting point that speaks the language of immediate sensual experience without first remaking it in the form of concepts. For Bachelard we come into awareness of the world by way of a creative impulse. We come to know through the process of creation. Unlike a creation that produces the object for us
and then collapses that image with what the object is for itself, or objectively, this act of creation that Bachelard offers begins with an engagement with what he understands as the four elements – fire, water, earth, and wind, through which all objects are given. Thus before we know what an object is for us, it is already given its presence in relationship to a world of elements that overpower the human, so much so that we have no option but to succumb to it in the face of our desires for knowledge.

We enter a relationship of knowing in which we are subject to the essence of the thing to be known. This thing cannot be tamed by the human but only engaged through the creativity of the imagination. We can understand this aesthetic knowing, this knowing via creative impulse then not as a superlative mode of engagement – an engagement for the sake of an inessential or irreverent contemplation, but rather as the culmination of a tension between the elements and our desire to know, to be-with. We can understand this then as creative knowing being given to us as our best efforts in the face of an overwhelming confrontation with the elements. This confrontation awakens us necessarily (so far as it is necessary to know) to our capacity as creators – to our capacity to produce the image. For Bachelard we are knowers, and as knowing beings we are at the mercy of the elements. We can thus understand our aesthetic relationship via the imagination as our salvation in the face of the world, and also as a gift from the world in the sense that it is in this epistemological reckoning that our imagination is given the impetus to exert. To the extent, then, that we are creative beings for Bachelard, we become so in this moment of aesthetic engagement. And we become with the world.

Imagery, for Bachelard, is distinct from, and superior to, metaphor. For Bachelard, the image lies at the crux of knowledge and the articulation of that knowledge. He quotes Boris Pasternak as writing, "Man himself is mute, and it is the image that speaks. For it is obvious that the image alone can keep pace with nature." (Bachelard 104) The image, an articulation of the aesthetic experience, utilizes spatiality as an expressive force, creating an immediate relationship between what is said and, for Bachelard, the encounter with space and the objects therein that foreground understanding. On the distinction between this capacity for being-with the world aesthetically and metaphor, Bachelard writes, "a metaphor gives concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express. Metaphor is related to a psychic being from which it differs. An image, on the contrary, product of absolute imagination, owes its entire being to the imagination." (Bachelard 74) While the metaphor takes up the sensual in articulation of ideas, it distinguishes itself from that sensuality. He writes additionally, "a metaphor is a false image, since it does not possess the direct virtue of an image formed in spoken reverie." (Bachelard 77)

Bachelard’s distinction between metaphor and image can be understood as based on the subordination of the sensual to concepts, countering the proposition that the utilization of the creative power of our imagination is to give language to sensual experience. The image translates experience into language while foregrounding sensuality, in its immediacy and particularity. Language works in the service of the sensual, offering itself up as mediator. Metaphor, on the other hand, turns sensual experience into the handmaiden of thought. The image of something past returns to offer itself to a conceptual rendering that takes that sensuality seriously only in its use value for the information being expressed. The details of the image, if they do not fit the function, do not exist. The metaphor does not embody the life of the imagination, but has its allegiances elsewhere. This distinction can explain how Bachelard’s discussions of the bird’s nest and the shell do not turn into mere anthropomorphisms. Taking seriously the knowledge gained from these spaces he enables the poetic specificity of these spaces to bring forth
articulations about the nature of human dwelling, rather than using them to showcase, through a shallow poetic trope, concepts of dwelling already formed.

The specificity of the image is what offers beings concepts, not through an intellectual extrapolation but via an extrapolation from sensuous experience. Both phenomenologically and psychically, the sensuous details of the first home gives us our concepts of doors, doorknobs, and corners, but also broader concepts such as boundary and limitation. The natural landscape of the home’s exterior procures the space of the imagination. From our experiences in these spaces of nature we learn to want to be the being who dwells in the nest, who is encased by the shell. For Bachelard, the verticality of the home, the existence of a ground floor, a cellar, and an attic, enables the home to embody different aspects of individual psychology. The attic embodies the reason, clarity and assuredness of the psychic sphere. In the attic we are near the sky. Our thoughts are clear, and we are able to witness the strength of the home’s constitution— to see the steal and wooden structures. The roof that covers the attic represents the relationship of the home to that which resides without. Bachelard notes, “A roof tells its raison d’être right away: it gives mankind shelter from the rain and sun he fears. Geographers are constantly reminding us that, in every country, the slope of the roofs is one of the surest indications of the climate.” (Bachelard 18) Attic and roof together embody a clarity of being. Thought comes naturally, structures of being expose themselves, and we are encased in a way that purposes to make us legible as part of society. For Bachelard, even dreams are rational in the attic. However, in the cellar, the intellect gives way to depth. The cellar is the space of the unconscious and the space of fear. To express the polarization of these two spaces that surround the primary, ground floors of living, he quotes Jung:

The conscious acts like a man who, hearing a suspicious noise in the cellar, hurries to the attic and, finding no burglars there decides, consequently, that the noise was pure imagination. In reality, this prudent man did not dare venture into the cellar. (Bachelard 19)

Horror stories take place in cellars, and despite the care taken to make a cellar well lit and organized, there is a necessary going under that takes place when one enters a cellar. It represents the darkness of being.

Toward a Consideration of the Space of Accumulation

Bachelard’s first home, the home that for him offers adequate space for the development of imaginative human being, is a home with at least three floors, situated within nature to a sufficient degree that one will encounter, upon leaving the home, animals and the dwellings they produce. If this home represents psychic life and offers the spaces of that life’s enactment, the question arises as to how one who does not live in a home like this comes to be. Or even if, for Bachelard, they come to be. Bachelard gives us no sign of a universal principle extractable from the specificity of his theorizing, and why would he, as a self-described “philosopher of details.” (Bachelard 222)

Bachelard touches on this issue when he discusses Paris. He refers to the dwellings of a large city as “oneirically incomplete.” (Bachelard 26) They lack cellars, forcing their inhabitants to lack depth. He quotes Joe Bousquet: “He was a man with only one story. His cellar was in his attic.” (Bachelard 26) Without nature the relationship between exteriority and interiority becomes artificial and the threats of violence that come from the environment are not felt with enough poetic force. (Bachelard 27) Despite a semblance of extreme verticality, the height of
skyscrapers remain exterior. One’s home is only a box among stacked boxes, lacking its own verticality. And if one is to imagine living in the pent house as an easy, sure-fire way to maintain a clear mind and elevated psychology, he lets us know otherwise: “Elevators do away with the heroism of stair climbing so that there is no longer any virtue to living up near the sky.” (Bachelard 27)

The delight of dwelling in the country, the delight of easy access to nests and shells, stands in contrast to much contemporary urban dwelling where these artifacts of nature are harder to come by. Whether or not we can recuperate the city from Bachelard’s debasement is a worthwhile question. Another, perhaps more pressing question is what happens to the person who does not even have a box among boxes to return to at night. Without the experience of verticality or interiority, without the consistent distinction between the place where one’s embodied and psychological being is formed and the external spaces that come to life as the spaces of the imagination, who one is, how one desires to be, the depths of one’s fears and the clarity of one’s reason lose their most obvious similitude of delineation.

To be for Bachelard we are already, to use the language of aesthetic judgment, in sublime relationship to fire, in conversation with the beauty of the flower. The felicitous dwelling of Bachelard’s half-open being points to a utopian impulse within the text. In studying images that attract he offers us a utopian vision of dwelling. We might think of this utopian vision as a freedom achieved by freeing the aesthetic dimension. This is the space of the aesthetic dimension when it is able to function for itself. As aesthetic beings our freedom is tied up with the freedom of the aesthetic dimension, meaning that when it functions for itself and we succumb to its logics (and language) it gives us our relationship to it, one situated in our nature as dwellers. It is then that we become Bachelard’s happy dwellers. Bachelard offers a vision of felicitous being, and this same felicity points us to an ethics of dwelling. Through Bachelard we find that the being who has access to both vastness and intimacy is sheltered from the literal and proverbial storm, that being requires a shelter that offers both aesthetic contemplation and a retreat from fear. For the sake of this project then, the question must not only be, how to find a space for the aesthetic to be free?; but also: how to find a relationship of freedom with the aesthetic dimension within the space produced by contemporary politics.
Chapter 3: The Good-Life in the Space of Accumulation

In The Poetics of Space, aesthetic pleasure facilitates knowledge. Felicitous space and aesthetic dimension animate the imagination and our capacity for language. To take up Bachelard’s spatial poetics, to know space and to live well become the same quest. The question then becomes two-fold. First, how does the good life become livable within the space of accumulation? And secondly, how do the ethical implications of the good life, as they emerge as a contingency of dwelling, interact with the ethical quandary that the space of accumulation poses through its violence and logics of scarcity as they manifest through the aesthetic? On the question of the body in social space, Lefebvre writes:

For the spatial body, becoming social does not mean being inserted into some pre-existing ‘world’: this body produces and reproduces – and it perceives what it reproduces and produces. (Lefebvre 199)

From this starting point, the previous chapter worked through how the body, conceived through and productive of the space of accumulation, might be cast in light of its aesthetic potential. The question now, of how that aesthetic potential might translate into a lived experience of the good-life, cannot be the question of what world it might be dropped into. It can only be the question of what conditions would enable a co-constituting body and space that emanate from the logics of the body-in-space outlined in chapter two. The purpose of this chapter then is to think through how, in the social world constituted by abstract space and constituting the body of abstract space, these conditions might be sensed - and how a lived experience of that sensing might emerge.

Bachelard gives us a language with which to conceive of space differently – a language with which to narrate a knowledge of space conceived from the body in space. The poetics of space is at once an epistemology and an aesthetic, finding the one through the other – aesthetic value appears through the capacity of the lived environment to offer itself up as image in such a way as to provide a phenomenological and rhetorical orientation. Transfiguring Heidegger’s concept of dwelling through Bachelard, dwelling becomes an ontology invested with an ethical urgency regarding the aesthetic. In its necessity for sensuous dialectics the body of dwelling comes to demand a different space. The needs of the body to function as a phenomenological and epistemic conduit of a fully developed psychic interiority exceed the structures of dwelling produced by abstract space. Through Bachelard, human being becomes an ontology that requires a dialectical relationship to aesthetic experiences of space so that the pleasures of that experience are no longer ‘good’ but are in fact part of what allows for dwelling, part of what it means to be. For Bachelard, felicitous space is necessary for the arrival of a poetics of space. There is no philosophy of the image without felicity. For Bachelard, felicity stands in opposition to hostility, combat, and hatred, and the apocalyptic images necessary to access them. In his choice of images that attract, Bachelard’s poetic points towards a spatiality distinct from the space of accumulation and its inherent violence. For Bachelard, space holds at bay threats of physical violence. Window shutters are stronger than the imposing winds, and there is no mention of doors which might prove stronger than imposing intruders.

This distinction between felicitous and non-felicitous space that enables an ontology of dwelling-well is different than the distinction Bachelard offers between the livable and the untenable. The non-felicitous, while an inadequate space from which to theorize, seems to have a place within his philosophy of dwelling. It is the outside, the apocalyptic, that which repels, that which is unsafe. Whether such spaces enable dwelling is not a question for Bachelard since the dwelling he seeks to name is founded in a poetry of adequate protection and adequate access to
varies aesthetic experiences. There is an ethical “ought” here, as opposed to an epistemological “if”. These infelicitous spaces are distinct from untenable spaces – untenable spaces are spaces that do not produce adequate dwelling: the apartment building, the apartment, the elevator, the city, the one-story house. These spaces disallow adequate psychic experiences of space. They exist within Bachelard’s text in a way non-felicitous space does not. He approaches them and even describes them poetically, even as they themselves do not offer poetry. Bachelard allows them as part of the felicitous landscape, though they blight the relationship between space and the poet. One does not, for example, climb the stairs because the elevator repels. The elevator is not un-felicitous. Rather, one must be capable of climbing the stairs to experience the heroism of high heights. (Bachelard 27) The elevator serves as a foil to the appropriate spatiality of the stairwell.

This inability to imagine heroism outside of ablest tropes – to figure physical disability a hindrance to experiencing the dialectics of high and low, points to a limit within Bachelard’s text. There is a prescriptiveness to Bachelard’s poetic dwelling. Still, I think we can read in the text hope for a non-rigid and non-regimented relationship to his vision of half-open being. I read this hope, this possibility of recuperation, through the fact that within Bachelard’s text there is room for a poetic relationship to space over time. One must not always be in spaces that offer themselves up to the imagination. He writes of one’s relationship to the spaces of solitude: All the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. …even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic. We return to them in our night dreams. These retreats have the value of a shell. (Bachelard 10)

It is also the work of the imagination to hold on to spaces now lost so that we might maintain a relationship to half-open being, we might retreat to our shell, even when one does not presently exist. Having had an experience of felicitous space allows one poetic being in the present, and even further, having an experience of felicitous space now allows one to refer back to an imagined past. He writes on the wonder of finding a nest: This wonder is lasting, and today when we discover a nest it takes us back to our childhood or, rather, to a childhood; to the childhods we should have had. For not many of us have been endowed by life with the full measure of its cosmic implications. (Bachelard 93)

That we should have had this childhood speaks to the prescriptive nature of Bachelard’s poetics of space, and yet the imagination here enables this prescribed life to exist even when it hasn’t quite. A poetic relationship to space might exist without it being the only spatial experiences one has, and without one having had all possible poetic experiences. There is an unspoken good-enough. It is another, future project to perhaps more precisely find that limit within the text, as well as work through the possibility of a less prescriptive embodiment.

While Bachelard describes and instructs a process of dwelling within the space of accumulation, specifically within mid-20th century France, his project, in its explicit attention to felicitous space to the full exclusion of other spaces suggest a project that, while arrived at in and through the space of accumulation, is not of that space. Moving forward with the assumption that there is a way in which the content of Bachelard’s mid-20th century French dwelling, the details of aesthetic dimension and the prescriptive ways in which the body must engage them, might be
transformed for a contemporary setting and a less restrictive notion of the body that is capable of
dwelling-well, the utopian element of Bachelard’s poetic landscape, and the ontology that arises
from it can be taken up as essential to a figuring of dwelling-well in the space of accumulation.
From the utopian image of what being might be, a figure of how being might approach such an
image might appear. As stated earlier, the capacity to structure social space in the image of this
dwelling-well would be akin to the arrival of a different spatial structure. For our purpose, there
is still a gap between the capacity to articulate the scaffolding of a knowledge of space and a
space structured via this knowing. What becomes possible, however, is an asking after how,
within current social space, new spaces might emerge that facilitate a different type of sensuous
being. And, to this same extent, what modes of sensuous being might emerge that facilitate a
new use of current spaces so as to transform them.

The first of these possibilities, the production of new social spaces that attempt to
transcend the confines of social space, founds the history of global utopian movements. The
latter, the process of re-inscribing existing spaces with new meaning and function, is the
production of what Foucault describes as the heterotopia. In this chapter I take up these
possibilities not through outlining traditional utopian projects nor spaces of heterotopia, but
through identifying locations within the space of accumulation where a utopian impulse
manifests through everyday life and offers a glimpse of the aesthetic logics that govern social
space within that space. The question posed through reading these spaces is how a
disidentification with the aesthetic dimension as it is distorted within the space of accumulation
might occur.

In *Disidentifications*, Jose Munoz defines the term disidentification as a process of
“dealing with dominant ideology.” (Muñoz 11) He writes that it is a third mode, neither a
“buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation)” nor
“attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism).” (Muñoz
11) In his text he argues for the power of disidentification through an analysis of queer of color
performance and in his introduction to the concept he writes of the subject that disidentifies:
Like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to
hold on to this object and invest it with new life. …To disidentify is to read oneself and
one’s own life narrative in a moment, or subject that is not coded to “connect” with the
disidentifying subject. It is not to pick and choose what one takes out of an identification.
It is not to willfully evacuate the politically dubious or shameful components within an
identificatory locus. Rather, it is the reworking of those energies that do not elide the
“harmful” or contradictory components of any identity. (Muñoz 12)

Of the performances that Munoz reads throughout his text, the image that has stuck humorously
with me over the 9 years since I first read *Disidentifications* is the scene he relays from Mara
Gomez’s performance at the end of his introduction. In her performance piece *Mara Gomez is
Pretty, Witty, and Gay*, Gomez recalls the following:
Mr. Susskind and the lady homosexuals chain-smoked through the entire program. I think
it was relaxing for them. I don’t think they could have done it without the smokes. It was
like they were in a gay bar just before last call. And all the smoke curling up made the life
seem more mysterious.

The life- that’s what they called it back then when you were one of us. You were
in the life! It was short for the hard and painful life. It sounded so dramatic. I loved
drama. I was in the drama club in high school. I wanted to be in the life, too. But I was
too young. So I did the next best thing. I asked my mother to buy me Life cereal and *Life* magazine. For Christmas I got the game of Life. (Muñoz 33)

Gomez goes on to lament that, by the time she was old enough to engage in the life, it had become the community. (Muñoz 34) Gomez narrates queer history through relationships to both an impenetrable queer scene and the accessibility of what came to stand in for her participation. In doing so she articulates what is queer, what becomes legible as queer, in the quotidian heteronormative world of mainstream commodities. The game of “Life” is after all the children’s game of competing to get married, have children, land a high paying job and retire into the most luxurious retirement home. As an aside, one might win a Nobel peace prize or make an important medical discovery, successes that translate into monetary value for the sake of scoring who wins “Life.” This example of disidentification with the language of popular culture, the use of a popular cereal brand, magazine and board game to find within her childhood a participation in the life of queer culture, is the form of everyday aesthetic experience that I will address in this chapter.

The accessibility of mainstream commodities as objects of (mediated) desire, I argue, both serves the purpose of distorting the aesthetic dimension as it emerges in social space and offers the possibility of a relationship to it through a disidentification with processes of commodity engagement. I take up the commodity as the lens through which to engage the political functions of the aesthetic within the space of accumulation because of the ways in which it serves as the bearer of capital’s sensuousness. As Lefebvre writes,

> Things and products that are measured, that is to say reduced to the common measure of money, do not speak the truth about themselves. On the contrary, it is in their nature as things and products to conceal that truth. Not that they do not speak at all: they use their own language, the language of things and products, to tout the satisfaction they can supply and the needs they can meet; they use it too to lie, to dissimulate not only the amount of social labour that they contain, not only the productive labour that they embody, but also the social relationships of exploitation and domination on which they are founded…. Objects hide something very important, and they do so all the more effectively inasmuch as we (i.e. the ‘subject’) cannot do without them, inasmuch, too, as they do give us pleasure, be it illusory or real (and how can illusion and reality be distinguished in the realm of pleasure?). But appearances and illusion are located not in the use made of things or in the pleasure derived from them, but rather within things themselves, for things are the substrate of mendacious signs and meanings. The successful unmasking of things in order to reveal (social) relationships – such was Marx’s great achievement… (Lefebvre 81)

Here the commodity, an object that holds within itself and hides the truth of social relationships, is also the thing which offers itself up, through its own language, as the vehicle of satisfaction. In its containing and shrouding it comes to mark sensuously a relationship to these otherwise concealed relationships. There is a touching of these relationships even as there is no knowledge of them. The commodity holds the capacity for a pleasure that comes to challenge the distinction between real and illusory. It also produces an illusory relationship to the real as it pertains to labor. In this touching, this potential for pleasure, in the moment of reality and illusion’s more dubious delineation, the commodity comes to offer the aesthetic in relationship to the modes of production within the space of accumulation.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukacs writes of the ‘riddle’ of the commodity thusly:
It is no accident that Marx should have begun with an analysis of commodities when, in the two great works of his mature period, he set out to portray capitalist society in its totality and to lay bare its fundamental nature. For at this stage in the history of mankind there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-structure. Of course the problem can only be discussed with this degree of generality if it achieves the depth and breadth to be found in Marx’s own analyses. That is to say, the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects. Only in this case can the structure of commodity-relations be made to yield a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them. (Lukacs, 83)

My goal in this chapter, in taking up the commodity, is to offer through it a way of thinking though how the aesthetic dimension shows up in the space of accumulation, and to do so in a way that understands this emergence as it is invested in what Lukacs calls above the “structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects.” If the possibility of a relationship to the aesthetic dimension emerges as a structural problem, if the space of accumulation produces a relationship to the body that disallows for an aesthetic knowing, a knowing that would itself enable a knowledge of space as it comes to produce not just this but all spaces, there is then an impetus to think this question through the structure of the commodity. In this dissertation that thinking through is focused on one aspect of that structure- the production of a desire for the commodity that comes to produce the language of aesthetic being in social space and that serves to both homogenize and produce distinction in the service of the space of accumulation.

In “The Wooden Brain: A Conjunctural Reading of Marx’s Capital”, Amanda Armstrong notes the ways that, even in Capital, where Marx attempts to show the processes by which abstraction overtakes the concrete, he opens with an illustration of a wooden table that necessarily undermines any full subsuming of the sensuous to the abstract. Marx begins his chapter on the commodity with a description of wood altered into a wooden table and emerging as a commodity:

The form of wood [Die Form des Holzes], for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing on its own free will. (Marx, 164)

Of this description, Armstrong writes:

The irregularity of wood grain, its irreducible singularity, posed a limit to the mechanization of the furniture industry in the nineteenth century. In part, wood’s graininess prevented furniture making industries from being reconstructed according to the imperatives of abstract time: each item of furniture required an individual, temporally non-identical work process. The substance of this material would seem then to put a spanner in the works of Marx’s implicitly stage-based approach to industrialization. But then, it is Capital itself that gestures toward the limits of abstraction, pointing us in the direction of the furniture industry in part by introducing us in its opening lines to an ostentatious wooden table. (Armstrong, 20)
In his narration of capitalism’s processes of abstraction Marx begins with the materials by which these processes remain incomplete, what Armstrong calls “the recalcitrance of the concrete, the frustration of abstraction.” (Armstrong, 20) In this way the material is recognized in its capacity to resist abstraction, to offer an access to sensuality where the body might be otherwise absorbed by the abstracting processes of production. This aspect of material resistance is true of the grain of wood whether it is un-manipulated, figured into a table, or transformed into a commodity. It is as commodity however that this aspect, this insistent sensuality, produces an experience in excess of both its material nature as wood and its abstracted signification. Armstrong describes the relationship between these registers – material, object, commodity, as rungs on a ladder. She writes:

…the metonymy of the table takes shape as a fantastical personification. Marx describes the table as a being that generates grotesque ideas from its wooden brain. This fantastical, animated object is then compared with a dancing table. …We can begin to understand this play [across rhetorical devices], and ultimately the multi-sidedness of Marx’s analysis, by thinking of a ladder, in which the bottom rung is the substance of wood, the second rung is the form of the table, and the third rung is the commodity form. In the passage from Capital’s Introduction at issue here, Marx walks us up the ladder, beginning with a reflection on the relations of the first and second rungs. Initially, what is at issue is the persistence of the matter of wood even as it is converted, via labor, into different “forms” (i.e. the ship’s hull, the railway sleeper, or the table). Marx then moves from this commonplace philosophical illustration up one rung of the ladder, as it were. In what is ultimately a metaphorical operation, the table as concretely useful object takes the place of the woodenness of the wooden table, while the commodity form takes the place of the table form (rung 1 is substituted for rung 2, while rung 2 is substituted for rung 3). … Once Marx gets to the third rung of the ladder though, a different rhetorical operation commences. In order to illustrate the supersensible quality of value, Marx personifies the table as a being that “stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas.” Here Marx sets in motion a different figural operation, defined above all by prosopopoeia. But just as he seems to be casting off into a new figural sequence, the bottom rung of his original metaphor returns: the table as commodity is depicted as possessing a wooden brain. Through this figure of the wooden brain, Marx short-circuits the metaphorical and conceptual grid he had wired in the immediately preceding sentences. The first rung (woodenness) leaps over the second (the table) to link up directly with the third (the supersensible commodity). (Armstrong 22)

In her taking up of the emergence of the fantastical in this passage, Armstrong reads the wood as a ghost-like figure. The uniting of woodenness with the commodity form though the “wooden brain” figures a return of the forgotten. She argues that Marx’s rhetorical figuring of the spectral presence of wood on the third rung of this ladder comes to stand in for the broader work of Capital, its figuring and working through of class exploitation and labor relations.

What might also be emphasized, through Armstrong’s figure of the ladder, is that the occasion for the fantastical in this passage of Capital is the leap from the first rung of the ladder to the third- the relationship between wood and the commodity form, unmediated by the second rung, or the table as concretely useful. Wood as substance leaps over its utility and finds a relationship with the commodity form. From this leap a poetic voice emerges that seeks to offer an image of the table. Marx tells us that the table, as table, is upright and, as commodity, is on its head. This being right-side up and also upside down, if it is to be imagined as one table,
produces, mentally, a sort of dance-like vacillation as the mind turns it up and then down, attempting to hold both simultaneously. This dancing of the image is then followed by an image of dancing. Of a table dancing, though not this table, in this moment. We have then two tables, one dancing, one not, though to imagine the latter one we might have it dance in our heads, upside down then right-side up then back again. Between the dancing table that doesn’t dance and the non-table that dances, there exists the wooden brain and its wonderful, grotesque creations. It is the brain of a table that dances, more wonderful than a table that dances.

The proliferation of nonsensicality that emerges around the wooden brain offers perhaps a sense of the wonderful grotesqueness that emerges from the thoughts of the commodity. In any case, there is a language here that one might argue offers pleasure, or at least an aesthetic quality that stands out from the immediate text in which it emerges. It is a giving voice to woodenness as it engages the table as commodity, not achieved through a transformation into wooden table, but as a relationality all its own. This side-stepping of the utilitarian function, articulated poetically, I want to suggest, can point us toward the ways in which engagement with the commodity comes to harbor some capacity for engagement with the aesthetic dimension.

In this chapter I find in the concept of luxury a way into thinking the dual process of the commodity’s opening and closing, of making available as it closes down the potential of a relationship with the aesthetic. I read luxury as a sign of the aesthetic dimension as it is distorted by the logics of abstract space and emerges within the space of accumulation, specifically in relationship to its utilitarian and non-utilitarian functions. I argue that moving through luxury, taking seriously the pleasures and desires it describes and incites, enables a view of the aesthetic dimension as it shows up in social space and as it might show up in social space otherwise. I then ask what it might mean to disidentify with luxury. Might disidentifying with Life Cereal take on a broader scope – can one disidentify with the pleasures of market capitalism, the forms of identity it produces through its processes of distinction, in a way that is productive of a sensuous dwelling, finding a space for the body in space amid the inundation of commodified experiences of the aesthetic?

The Sensuous Non-Real

The term ‘utopia’ has been attributed to Thomas Moore’s merging of two distinct etymologies, that of ‘eu’, or good, and ‘ou’, non. Utopia is thus a non-place - topos, the Greek root of place, becomes simultaneously good-place and non-place. Often authored by an individual who sees themselves as different from the society in which she or he dwelled, the utopian settlement was imagined as a place for people to resist social norms, and re-establish a more moral way of living. These Utopian societies were recognizable in large part by their strict temporal and spatial structure - mandated daily routines, and rigid uses of space. Foucault engages one of these societies, the Jesuit colonies established in South America during the 17th and 18th centuries. That he names it a heterotopia, as opposed to a utopian project, suggests the ways in which heterotopia enters the discursive scene. Prior to the term heterotopia, ‘utopia’ has a broad and varied usage, including much of what Foucault would come to distinguish as

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12 For an overview of Utopias, see Fredrick Engels’ Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, which offers an analysis of two historically significant utopian projects, that of Robert Owen and that of Charles Fourier. While starkly different in respect to their purpose and in the particularities of their functioning, these projects nevertheless share the fundamental utopian modes of operation I’ve mentioned above.
heterotopia, framed opposite negative utopias or the dystopian. Reading “Of Other Spaces,” it becomes clear that ‘heterotopia’ serves not to replace utopia nor to name a set of spaces outside the discursive realm of ‘utopia’, but rather to offer an alternative to utopia that, in standing apart, but essentially within the frame of utopia, offers a third reflective space between utopia and heterotopia from which to think the production of other spaces. In other words, what I find most useful in the possibility of heterotopia for the production of new social space is not found in the term ‘heterotopia’ itself, but instead in the performance of its emergence.

In his essay, Foucault defines utopias as “emplacements with no real place. They are emplacements that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. It is society itself perfected, or else it is society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias essentially are fundamentally unreal spaces.” (Foucault 17) He then introduces heterotopias, a term previously used within the medical field as a term used to describe normal tissue located in abnormal places, as “a sort of effectively realized utopia.” (Foucault 17) For him, heterotopias are firstly real places in opposition to the unreal space of utopia. He names a variety of heterotopias through which to illustrate this reality: cemeteries, museums, gardens, colonies, including the Jesuit colonies (previously held up in literature as an exemplary utopian project), psychiatric wards, brothels, and prisons (previously termed dystopian spaces). In some ways, the process of defining heterotopia is, for Foucault, a process of mining the discourse of utopia for examples, without naming them as such. There is, in reading, a sense of erasure or replacement – a narrowing of utopia in order to make space for a new term, rather than a process of distinction. However, in the middle of the essay, after offering his initial distinction between utopia and heterotopia, Foucault introduces the example of the mirror (perhaps an offering of reflection between the first and second halves) that he defines as “a sort of mixed, in-between experience” of the two. (Foucault 17) With the mirror, Foucault evokes the terms utopia and heterotopia to describe the same place.

By positioning heterotopia as a binary term opposite utopia, Foucault makes room for a reflective third space that, in turn, breaks down the binary in a way that establishes new modes of spatial relation. The term heterotopia allows for the mirror, which allows for a nuanced reflection of the construction of social space. Foucault’s writing on the mirror spans a paragraph. First, he describes the mirror as utopian space:

Since these places are absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect, and of which they speak, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. And I believe that between utopias and these absolutely other emplacements, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, in-between experience, which would be the mirror. (Foucault 17)

While prior spaces have for Lefebvre served as example, the mirror, “a sort of mixed, in-between experience,” exceeds example and comes to represent a new spatial category between the preceding two, naming a space that can be articulated only now that we have utopia and heterotopia as separate categories with space between them. The mirror is both in-between and a space of mixture where utopian and heterotopian elements converge. He continues:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a place without place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal space that virtually opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent. Utopia of the mirror. (Foucault 17)
Prior to this line, Foucault had referred to utopia as an ‘unreal space.’ Here it also becomes a ‘place without a place.’ This interchangeability, between real and having a place, suggests that for Foucault legibility in space, having a place, constitutes the real. However, through the mirror space virtually opens up. Unreal space becomes visible. We can see what is in the mirror. The unreal does not become real; utopias do not become heterotopias, but they become visible, take on a sensuousness or physicality characteristic of reality. For Foucault the mirror does not produce an effect of the unreal becoming real, but of the unreal becoming visible. The ‘there’ that is not is there by virtue of its visibility— a virtuality that cannot sustain itself without the real but that nevertheless comes to be real to the extent that it takes sensuous, visible form. The space between utopia and heterotopia is a space of visible non-places, a mixture of visibility and non-existence that was illegible prior to the segregation of heterotopia and utopia.

After discussing the mirror as utopia, Foucault shifts:

But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does really exist, and as it exerts on the place I occupy a sort of return effect; it is starting from the mirror that I discover my absence in the place where I am, since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, cast upon me, from the depth of this virtual space that is on the other side of the looking glass, I come back towards myself and I begin again to direct my eyes towards myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in the respect that it renders this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the looking glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived, it has to pass through this virtual point, which is over there. (Foucault 17)

If utopia of the mirror makes you visible over there, the heterotopia returns you to over here. For Foucault, there is no doubling of the self; rather, “it is starting from the mirror that I discover my absence in the place where I am, since I see myself over there.” The mirroring of utopia creates a new space, over there, that gives the subject to himself. As heterotopia the mirroring constitutes here as here, but also constitutes the limits of that here, since it must be arrived at through the existence of over there. The gaze that is visible in the actual mirror, in the reflective material encased in wood or metal, looks at us, where we sit, and in so doing returns us to our actual physical space as this appearance over there registers as absence over here. The mirror as utopia and as heterotopia does work that neither utopia nor heterotopia alone can perform. It allows the gazer to see herself over there, and in doing so both recognize herself over here and experience her absence. This might be understood as the hope of a dwelling-well within the space of accumulation—a mode of being in space that, while not supported as real by the logics of its spatial production nonetheless exists in sensuous form—a sensuous non-real that does the work of producing absence from this space as one sees oneself in another.

Foucault names the study of heterotopias ‘heterotopology', and defines it as “a sort of systematic system that would have as its object, in a given society, the study, analysis, description, and ‘reading’…of these different spaces, of these other places, as a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.” (Foucault 17) For Foucault, heterotopias are spaces that both challenge attempts at social control and create new forms of sociality. In introducing the term ‘heterotopia’ to the humanities and social sciences he presents six guiding principles of heterotopic space: persistence across culture, the ability to change over time, the ability of to include multiple, incompatible spaces within one space, the ability to challenge normative relationships to time, having systems of opening and closing, or
rituals of inclusion and exclusion, and finally, having a function in relation to the rest of space. The cultural sites I am working with are not necessarily heterotopias. While, in future work, it might be interesting to see how these spaces take on some of these principles, the utopian impulse I find within them is not based on these principles. And for this project it is important to not replace utopia with heterotopia, to the extent that a radical, new space is the hope of Lefebvre’s differential space, the hope that follows from a knowledge of space. Rather, these spaces exist together as a triangulation of spaces within the space of accumulation that in one way or another are exemplary of the space of accumulation and the spaces of everyday life within it. Through these I hope to investigate what processes might allow the aesthetic, as a lived dimension, to accelerate the processes by which the space of accumulation, in its incapacity to fully hold its own contradictions, might give way fully to another space, and how this space that follows from it might take on the qualities of the body in space. That said, what Foucault performs through the mirror as the space produced by heterotopia as it offers a reflective other to utopia, offers a frame for thinking through the sites I explore. Specifically, it is generative of the following question with which I will move forward: how might the space of dwelling-well show up as a sensuous non-place. And, if not necessarily visibly, by what sensuous form does this effect take place? In other words, how might the body in space find space that, while not real, as in not necessarily legible, is nonetheless sensuous, having a felt, physical presence within the space of accumulation?

**Luxury**

The poetics of the body in space, an articulation of being in space that invests in dwelling an aesthetic as well as ontological capacity, founded in the body and thus already conceived from the capacities of the body to sense, must, in order to take form as sensuous experience over time, find legibility within physical, mental and now finally social space. This move, from concept to lived, requires a process of articulation that produces legibility within the frames of social space, that can be articulated and can orient and organize experience in social space, as it is at the same time structured by a logic of articulation or emergence founded in its own sensuous concept. This later aspect, that an articulation of the good-life must not seek to improve social space but rather emerge as a process of finding a space for itself, for the logics of its legibility, is crucial in distinguishing the inquiry into the possibility of an experience of the good-life in social space from an inquiry into the promises of the good-life offered by social space. Lefebvre writes of the utopian impulse within culture, when it does not seek out the production of space:

‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from the Soviet constructivists of 1290-30, and from their failure, is that new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa. … The injunction to change life originated with the poets and philosophers, in the context of a negative utopianism, but it has recently fallen into the public (i.e. the political) domain. In the process, it has degenerated into political slogans – ‘Live better!’, ‘Live differently!’, ‘the quality of life’, ‘lifestyle’- whence it is but a short stem to talk of pollution, of respect for nature and for the environment, and so forth. The pressure of the world market, the transformation of the planet, the production of a new space – all these

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13 In *The Poetics of Space*, Lefebvre discusses processes of heterotopic appropriation. While a central process of social space, it is not interchangeable with the overarching utopian vision of the text. (Lefebvre 164-166)
have thus disappeared into thin air. What we are left with, so far from implying the creation, whether gradual or sudden, of a different spatial practice, is simply the return of an idea to an ideal state. So long as everyday life remains in thrall to abstract space, with its very concrete constraints; so long as the only improvements to occur are technical improvements of detail (for example, the frequency and speed of transportation, or relatively better amenities); so long, in short, as the only connection between work spaces, leisure space and living spaces is supplied by the agencies of political power and their mechanisms of control – so long must the project of ‘changing life’ remain no more than a political rallying-cry to be taken up or abandoned according to the mood of the moment. Such are the circumstances under which theoretical thought must labor as it attempts to negotiate the obstacles in its path. To one side, it perceives the abyss of negative utopias, the vanity of a critical theory which works only at the level of words and ideas (i.e. at the ideological level). Turning in the opposite direction, it confronts highly positive technological utopias: the realm of ‘prospectivism’, of social engineering and programing. (Lefebvre 60)

Heralding the good-life without a grounding spatiality from which it might emerge and towards what it might produce is itself productive of a distorted conception of the political potential of lived experience and social life. We could imagine a poetics of excess, of aesthetic dialectics, finding themselves at home, having done so already, within this space. More, more intensity, more diversity of experience, these concepts, ungrounded from the establishment of dwelling for the body in space, become the ideological versions of themselves.

The problem with a sensuousness founded in the body in space finding legibility within the frames of social space is two-fold. Firstly, experience of the aesthetic is alienated at the sensuous level. The space of accumulation, as social space, produces the space of bodily and spatial distortion, the space of abstraction. This distortion, produced as an alienation from the body and sensuousness for the sake of abstraction, makes untenable in social space an unalienated relationship to sensuous pleasure, the dialectics of aesthetic experience from which Bachelard theorizes, and that would enable a living out of bodily concepts. Second, the good-life is an untenable proposition in the sense that within the parameters of social space, pleasure cannot be engaged outside of an investment in systems of ethical dysfunction, where a production of scarcity demands an uneven distribution of resources and where the symbolic function of more ephemeral pleasures (love, beauty, etc) are coded through and expressed as processes of symbolic violence, racial, gendered, and otherwise. Attempts to find pleasure outside of such confines are readily reincorporated into the processes of the production of space. An example of this is the back to nature movement, which I will discuss briefly later in this chapter.

So far, the dissertation has focused not on determining an ‘ought’ that might serve to ground and stabilize a notion of the good-life, but rather has taken as a starting point the epistemic instability of such a project. In this way, it moves the good-life from the realm of ethics into the realm of epistemology. Historically, the good-life has been understood within the history of philosophy as an aesthetic and ethical predicament, a goal that produces a quandary over how to live well in space and with others, framed as a set of relationalities (often between the beautiful and the ethical), rules, and directives that, it is hoped, bulwark against aesthetic and ethical dilemmas or uncertainties as they play out in everyday life. However, we encounter another predicament when we take seriously the constitutive, productive relationship between the rhetorical scaffolding that articulates the project of the good-life and the social space in which
something like the good-life can be both thought and lived. Framing the question of the good life as a question tied to concrete social conditions requires taking up the ways that abstracted terms such as the good and the beautiful do political work that is inextricable from their capacity to be taken up philosophically. Quickly stated, the ways in which experiences traditionally understood as aesthetic – engagements with nature and art, the study and appreciation of beautiful objects, are produced by the limits, accessibilities and valuations of violent global forces, and the ways in which these enactments serve to produce the space of these material and symbolic forces, an impasse emerges in the quest to engage the good in both its ethical and aesthetic valences.

I want to use this impasse to think productively about the relationship between the ethical and the beautiful as these concepts work to establish the conditions of the good-life within a social context. The goal here not to define pleasure or beauty as that which is ethical from a feminist or any other standpoint, nor to argue for ethical virtue in a set of questionable aesthetic practices or desires within social space, but rather to use the body-in-space as a positionality from which to stake a set of ethical claims.

The body in space, as an aesthetic dwelling, is firstly a space of epistemic shifting, a position from which to imagine, in light of Lefebvre, access to knowledge unmitigated by power. Articulating the good-life as the lived experience of the body in space is to invest in the question of the good life the potential of an aesthetically grounded ethical drive within the space of accumulation. Moving forward I take up the possibility of a sensuous non-place within the space of accumulation as the condition for the emergence of a lived experience of the good-life. Further, I take up luxury as a frame through which to think through the impasse between the sensuous as it is articulated and available within the space of accumulation and the sensuous as it describes the lived experience of the body in space.

In turning to the concept of luxury for the sake of this work, I turn first to bell hooks who, in her essay “Beauty Laid Bare: The Aesthetics of the Ordinary “, takes of this concept in a way that situates it at the crux of the question of aesthetics and the question of politics. In her essay, hooks offers an analysis of the impulse to purchase, as everyday rhetorics of economics would have it, “beyond your means.” In describing her home town and the relationships that existed between people and objects, she writes:

...among the traditional Southern black folks I grew up around there was a shared belief in the idea that beautiful things, objects that could be considered luxurious, that were expensive and difficult to own, were necessary for the spirit. The more downtrodden and unfortunate the circumstances, the more “beauty” was needed to uplift, to offer a vision of hope, to transform. When it came to the issue of desiring and longing for the beautiful object, whether it was a house, a car, furniture, clothing, shoes, etc., everyone agreed, across class, that folks needed to be in touch with beauty…. There was never a need to make someone feel guilty when he or she did without the basic necessities of life in order to acquire an object deemed beautiful, healing to the spirit. At times those objects were luxury items, not intrinsically aesthetically beautiful, but desired because the culture of consumerism has deemed them lovely symbols of power and possibility. Even though folks sometimes laughed at the individual who bought a shiny car bigger than the wood frameshack he or she lived in, underneath the mockery was the understanding that this symbol of luxury was a balm to a depressed and wounded spirit. This stance was in every way oppositional. (hooks 120)

hook’s framing is a fruitful one for several reasons. Placing ‘beauty’ in quotation marks as it contends with its relationship to the term luxury casts the question of the aesthetic into the frame
of capitalism. hooks presents what is ordinary, what is luxurious, and the ways in which the luxurious makes space for itself as the ordinary in tension with pressures to perform a responsible poverty - to avoid judgment by conspicuously prioritizing what is necessary over what is beautiful. She sets up this tension – between not having enough and maintaining a relationship to what one finds luxurious, as the scene of aesthetic inquiry. What this scene offers to such an inquiry, what it requires, is an immediate orientation towards the aesthetic as an ethically invested concept, towards the nature of its human value and its relationship to a social order in which beauty confronts necessity under the pressure of scarcity, where necessity, ordinariness, and luxury becomes the theoretical and social backdrop upon which aesthetic inquiry occurs. For hooks, the aesthetic quickly becomes aligned with a system of values, and becomes the crux upon which different value systems can be distinguished and evaluated.

Through her essay hooks seeks a coming-to-terms between the desire for luxury and the desire to upend the processes by which such desires are fulfilled in late capitalism. Through the examples of her mother, grandparents, and broader community, she offers a view of everyday life that refuses to denounce beauty, carried out in ways that vary in their relationship to capitalist narratives and processes of production. In doing so she frames the seeking and attaining of beauty as a process that can be seen as a through-line across various models of creating, collecting, and consumer purchase. While hooks makes distinctions between these practices as more or less invested in narratives of capitalist accumulation, she argues ultimately that what is politically valuable is not an analysis that defends or rejects certain of these processes, but rather a taking up of the fact that, despite the ravaging of this dimension within capitalism, the valuation of the aesthetic as necessary for survival has remained intact, and seeks fulfillment. Finding in these processes a function of what she calls a human value, she finds it necessary to address this desire, not through renunciation but through an active intellectual and political investment in the question of how such desires might be framed and fulfilled. In her words, “rather than surrendering our passion for the beautiful, for luxury, we need to envision ways those passions can be fulfilled that do not reinforce the structures of domination we seek to change.” (hooks 123)

hooks criticizes feminism and black power movements for disengaging and dismissing this passion for luxury in their drive to produce a social consciousness and livable politic:

Black liberation movement has not addressed the issue of aesthetics in everyday life. Militant black power movements in the 1960s and 1970s did not encourage a reclamation of attitudes about beauty common in tradition black folk culture. While obsessive materialism has been consistently critiqued in antiracist movements, as well as by radicals on the left, the issue of aesthetics has not received much attention, nor has the relationship between the desire for beauty and the longing for material goods. …most radical or revolutionary feminists continue to believe that living simply, the equitable distribution of resources, and communalism are necessary to the progressive struggle to end sexism while ending class exploitation. All too often in the past, living simply was made synonymous with a vulgar antimaterialism or anti-aestheticism that privileged living without attention to beauty, to decoration, either of one’s person or one’s space. Although nowadays the tendency seems to be toward the other extreme, toward indulging to excess, some radical feminists, myself included, grapple with the place of beauty in revolutionary struggle, with our materialism and with our longing for luxury. Just as my southern black ancestors recognized that in the midst of exploitation and oppression suffering could be endured if transforming encounters with beauty took place, many
revolutionary feminists recognize that we need these same values within the progressive feminist movement. Since it is so easy for those of us with material privilege to hoard resources, to have an attachment to wealth or privileged class power, we need to be vigilant in creating an ethical approach to consumerism that sustains and affirms radical agendas for social change. (hooks 123)

Because of the ways in which this desire and its fulfillment structure and are structured by forms of domination and oppression that these movements seek to repair, their fulfillment becomes counter-productive and the desire itself implicated in the effects of such a fulfillment. On the other hand, the denial of such a desire becomes equated with a repudiation and renunciation of the processes by which fulfillment reproduces systems of symbolic and material disenfranchisement. Of course, the enactments of such renunciations become incorporated by the spatial logics by which they are enabled and structured. As such, in the space of accumulation, processes of sensuous renunciation can be reified into an aesthetic of renunciation that comes to perform the function of aesthetics with capitalism broadly. Voluntary simplicity, and the emergent markets that supports it – ‘tiny’ homes, manuals and organizational tools, ‘normcore’ fashion – serve as a contemporary example.

The ‘nowadays’ that hooks refers to are the mid 1990s when her text was written. Since then, the rise of a mainstream organic movement, of voluntary simplicity blogs, books, and consultants, and of a rhetoric of ethical consumption, excess and simplicity, sparsity and luxury, ethical and mainstream consumption, have been articulated, through the branding of consumer goods, as one and the same. “American Consumers in 2020”, a report written in 2015 for marketers and product producers that projects market trends into the following 5 years, offers this advice:

The Great Recession helped create a cohort of young adults who are out to re-think and re-do American consumerism. Living small rather than large, renting tiny spaces in the city rather than owning sprawling houses in the suburbs, re-selling used clothing and buying or renting second-hand replacements, sharing rather than buying vehicles, renting a room in someone’s apartment rather than taking a room in a hotel—these are all manifestations of an emerging consumer culture radically different from that of the past. (Brown 14)

This future of commercial engagement is the future that businesses and their marketers will be prepared for; it is not one that antagonizes the market through its thrift or aesthetic minimalism. This speaks to the necessity to move beyond the attempt to find a stable and meaningful relationship between a political orientation and an aesthetic style. The logics of space – here abstraction and homogeneity, are capable of granting their own meaning to any style and of curating seeming contradictions into a homogeneous unity for the purposes of its own reproduction.

As hooks points out late in the essay, while sensuousness is taken up in feminist discourses, it is not regularly taken up in the same conversation as the issues of consumerism, class, and the desire for pleasurable objects or luxury. This desire for luxury of course does not account for the spectrum of aesthetic experience available in contemporary society, however it is under-analyzed as an articulation of aesthetic experience in everyday life, and the logics and restrictions that make luxury a difficult subject politically point to the ways in which aesthetic subjects often approached apolitically within philosophy interact with the social world of philosophy’s production.
Beauty, art and nature have themselves become in some ways, if not most, implicated under the term of luxury. They are classed experiences and classed aspirations, often narrated as simultaneously necessary and luxurious, and while possibly felt as such, are often articulated as such in the most debased terms – media and social media platforms are full of women ‘needing a spa day’ or, more glamorously, having needed a spa day, photographed in their post-pampered glow. The importance of art and art programming becomes a politicized plea for funding all but emptied of the capacity to articulate the necessary political function of art inherent in its non-utility, and the ways in which nature is marketed as both a destination and as mediated presence through a series of product experiences produces it as both luxury commerce necessary for life (organic, non-GMO, local, etc) and as a necessary luxury (what might be called the right to green space that is foreclosed and consistently held at bay as luxurious).

The first page of a google image search for ‘luxury’ on June 23, 2017 produces, most abundantly, water. There are sprawling homes, ships, resorts, islands, all surrounded by water, or photographed with a foreground emphasis on a pool or a fountain. Even the photos that don’t include water seem to shimmer in a way as to suggest that they are somehow wet – glistening cars and private jets. Water as luxury: both abundant and inaccessible, necessary and yet, perhaps because of the publicness inherent in water, its quality as shared, both as a global resource and as human need, the fluidity of its movement that makes it difficult to pin down and possess – the mundaneness of it as a need, it becomes extravagant to have it to oneself. To contain it in a pool, a fountain, or in the wide vista from a solitary island, ship deck, or boardwalk. Above these images are the words most often searched for alongside ‘luxury’. The top ten are, in order: ‘romantic’, ‘rich’, ‘view’, ‘pattern’, ‘love’, ‘interior’, ‘motion’, ‘vision’, ‘Bentley”, and ‘Lamborghini’. Clicking on ‘romantic’, the new top search phrase is ‘first night’. Clicking on ‘first night’ produces rose petals on beds, rose petals on floors, rose petals falling from the ceiling, an article promising “tips to make your first night more romantic,” and stills from the Telugu language romance film “Jeelakarra Bellam.” Luxury, before it applies to branded consumer products, applies to lifestyle, designating fantasies of wealth, romance, and oceanic expanse more specifically.

This fantastical aspect of luxury maintains itself, discursively, over most class distinction. Even with economic access to commodities marketed as luxury, luxury does not come to stand in for the mundane. Rather that which is marketed as luxury maintains itself at a distance from everyday life. In his market report “US Affluents 2017: Looking Beyond the 1%”, Mark Dollliver 2017 reports that in the segments of consumers defined as affluent, those with annual household incomes over $100,00 (the “mass affluent”) and those with incomes over $250,000, there is not a pull toward excessive luxury spending. Instead, these populations tend to spend more on the non-luxurious:

Political rhetoric about “the 1%” has made them the jowly face of affluence in the US. But most people who meet common definitions of affluence are not super-rich and don’t feel or spend as if they were. Plenty of affluents live from paycheck to paycheck, even if that paycheck adds up well into six figures by year’s end.

Of course, such prosaic realities do not fit the popular caricatures of affluents. And affluents have the distinction of being a demographic group one can still safely caricature, with antipathy toward the 1% creating a receptive audience. For a marketer, though, indulgence in facile stereotypes about affluents is a luxury too expensive to afford.
Although they are often discussed in connection with luxury purchases, affluents are more important as a big and financially solvent portion of the customer base for mainstream brands. Their incomes give them leeway to buy more than other consumers, even if they shun the most expensive options. And they indulge in discretionary spending—again, not necessarily on high-end brands—to a degree non-affluents cannot.

In short, affluents as a market are more lucrative than they are glamorous. But that is not a drawback for marketers who seek revenue rather than entertainment from their target audiences. (Dolliver 4)

Luxury does not become the everyday of the affluent, the literal economic 1% excluded, but rather maintains its status as rare or exquisite, even when the possibility of attaining the luxurious is more ubiquitous.

The term ‘luxury’ stems from the Old French luxurie (“debauchery, dissoluteness, lust”) and the Latin luxuria (“excess, extravagant living, profusion; delicacy”) and luxus, (“excess, extravagance; magnificence”). Usage in the English language began in the 1300’s, used by Chaucer to mean excessive sexual appetite. In the mid-14th century luxury came to mean “lasciviousness, sinful self-indulgence,” and finally in the late 14th century, “sensual pleasure.” If ‘aesthetic’, for Baumgarten and early western philosophy, meant sensuousness, luxury shares an etymological trajectory with the aesthetic that could have it mean aesthetic pleasure, and that, like the aesthetic, has come overtime to move away from the body and its senses and activities in its main usage. “The OED defines ‘luxury’ first as “1. Lasciviousness, lust” and “2. Luxuriance.”, both obsolete. The third definition, the first in common usage, is “3. The habitual use of, or indulgence in what is choice or costly, whether food, dress, furniture, or appliances of any kind,” followed by “4. Refined and intense enjoyment.”

The change in the definition of luxury from sensuous enjoyment to the indulgence in choice and costly things reflects the ways in which the commodity and commodified experiences have become the primary site of aesthetic enjoyment within the space of accumulation. Still, its broader meaning, “refined and intense enjoyment,” remains, though value laden - refined as opposed to course- in an attempt perhaps to disavow the sinful lust that lurks in these waters. There is a history of corporeality in the term luxury that makes it a promising space for considering dwelling-well. And even still, luxury, in its contemporary usage, maintains a corporeality that seems to exceed its refinement, at least in the ways in which it gestures towards a lingering over the body. Luxurious experiences are often excessively bodily, or especially attentive to the body, framed rhetorically as healthfulness or indulgence (utility or contained excess), but in either instance making space for attention.

Reading this etymology through Nietzsche, a case can be made for the luxurious commodity – the Bentley, Lamborghini, perhaps the rose petals, the “indulgence in what is choice or costly” as representing and exhibiting an Apollonian impulse within social space. Where sex and the unwieldy element of water might overwhelm and destroy, the accumulation of luxury, the refined experience of sensuous pleasure, often imagined as the reigning in of water, as the possession of its vastness, enables a contemplation of desire and a mediated experience of pleasure. The rare, exotic and expensive becomes a mode of control and enables a controlled experience of “intense enjoyment.” Lefebvre finds in art the last refuge of the body (Lefebvre 111) and for Nietzsche, art offers an experience of the Dionysian – of our savage instincts and disindividuated nature - through the mediated abstraction of Apollo. (Froese 5) Left here as a question, it becomes important to question, I think, the ways in which the commodity might also serve this function, how the presence of the Dionysian- refined, exalted and
homogenized- might be taken up as granting a magic to the commodity and how its images - labels, branded photographs, commodified objects themselves, might offer, in Nietzsche’s words, “the magnificent divine image (Götterbild) of the principium individuationis, whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of ‘semblance’.” (Nietzsche 1999)

Certainly, as an (perhaps the) aesthetic practice of the space of accumulation, productive of its logics of abstraction and homogeny, the work of marketing and branding is to access what might emerge as desire that destroys, that threatens to unleash the horror of difference (and of unity) at the level of passion, or of the body, and to transfigure it into a set of desires that individuate and distinguish, that make one a part of, the same as, those with whom one desires to be the same. Describing the language of the commodity, Lefebvre writes that “like all languages, the language of things is as useful for lying as it is for telling the truth. Things lie, and when, having become commodities, they lie in order to conceal their origin, namely social labour, they tend to set themselves up as absolutes.” (Lefebvre 80) In this way, the work of branding, of advertising, might be understood as the translation of this language of commodities- an ambassador of their capacity to speak of themselves – to lie about their origins and yet to tell another type of truth. Thought of in the realm of the apollonian and the Dionysian, we might even begin to ask of the commodity and its language whether it shrouds two truths – the truth of its origins (labor) but also the truth of a desire that can be named only once it has been coalesced and brought to have meaning within the timid structures of social viability.

For hooks, her mother, who understood “nice things” as “the objects seen in advertisements, on the screen, and in catalogues” (hooks 119) was driven by conservatism and bourgeois aspirations, whereby her grandmother, who hooks describes as a “style radical” had an aesthetic sensibility “grounded in a more traditional appreciation of the natural world, for color and harmony.” (hooks 119) hooks suggests that this difference that appears in her own family as generational and personal is consistent with a larger decimation of aesthetic traditions within African American communities based on a relationship to the land and the creative expression in space:

The black elders in our community, like Sarah my grandmother and Gus my grandfather, believed it was better to seek beauty in a world that was not subject to monetary exchange. For Sarah, beauty was there in the growing of flowers in her elaborate garden, or in the making of her quilts. Alice Walker, in her insightful essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” acknowledges the way poor black women expressed their concern with beauty in the growing and arranging of flower gardens. Offering the example of her own mother, Walker declares: “her face, as she prepared the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect of the possibilities – and the will to grasp them.” This legacy had been handed down through generations in traditional Southern black folk culture. These were notions of beauty and wealth grounded in a worldview that was in opposition to excessive materialism. (hooks 120)

In contrast to this, hooks writes of contemporary black America:

Contemporary African-Americans have been increasingly socialized by the mass media to leave behind attachments to the oppositional worldviews of our elders, especially to those having to do with beauty, and to assimilate into the mainstream. Hedonistic consumerism is offered as a replacement for healing and life-sustaining beauty. … the
vast majority of the black poor in the United States do not harbor uplifting cultural objects in their homes. This group has been overwhelmingly encouraged to abandon, destroy, or sell artifacts from the past. And this destruction has brought in its wake the loss of an aesthetic sensibility that is redemptive. For example, today’s concrete state-designed and -operated homogenous housing for the poor takes away the opportunity for creativity that was characteristic of the rural shack, its porch and garden. (hooks 122)

hooks herself, in earlier moments in her essay, pushes against this presumption that African American culture fails to retain an awareness of the need for beauty. Her essay argues that just such a valuation can be seen through the everyday life and decisions of poor, rural black Americans. Here however she makes the distinction between uplifting, beautiful objects and uplifting cultural objects. It seems, for hooks, that the process of creation — her grandmother’s quilts and the growing of gardens, does the work of culture in a way that possession alone does not. For her this is especially true in terms of the construction of place, what Heidegger calls building. The development of homogenous housing developments can be understood as the production of the social space of abstract space as it dissolves difference. In doing so it displaces processes of production and of taking up the environment in a process of surrounding. In her critique of “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Young reads preserving as the feminized work of maintaining place where building is the masculinist architectural work of creating place, of gathering that which surrounds what is built and in doing so, establishing a world. (Young 127) Young eventually moves to hooks’ essay “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance” to think through the revaluation of home. We can see here also in hooks a creating of place, of gathering or surrounding, that is itself distinct from building and yet also distinct from preserving in the sense that it is not the work of care but the work of construction, or at least not the work of care in any way that can be distinguished from construction. This offers another way in which the aesthetic might offer an alternative to, or be brought to bear on, Heidegger’s concept of dwelling – the place of aesthetic creation that works to simultaneously preserve and build and that perhaps emphasizes the care inherent in building.

While the goal of the dissertation is to move toward the possibility of an un-alienated relationship to the aesthetic dimension within the space of accumulation, and to think through the ways in which this process is bound up with disarming the logics of capitalistic power, the goal is not to seek the aesthetic in terms of or through experiences imagined to be untouched by capitalism or power. And that means that I do not want to flee concepts like the beautiful or the pleasurable, despite the fact that they have so consistently served logics of power, nor flee toward a fantasy of nature or return to the natural world. If this project can be understood as in line with a black creativity that seeks a restored relationship to the aesthetic, which I hope it can be, it does this by trying to contend seriously with what has come to surround us – commodities and commodified experiences that sometimes bring pleasure despite themselves.

The Culture Industry

In discussing her early relationship to the question of “nice things”, hooks writes: While the folks I lived amongst were often militant in their condemnation of racism, they were pretty much in agreement with many of the other values that trickled down from the worlds of the conservative ruling classes, from the white or black bourgeois world. When it came to materialism, across class it was clear that success in diverse black communities was measured by having nice things. Whether or not something was perceived as “nice” depended on one’s social environment. One of the intense pressures I experienced as an
adolescent was caused by my longing to cultivate my own style and taste, clashing with the pressure to conform to set bourgeois standards. Sarah Oldham, my mother’s mother, was the “style radical.” Her aesthetic sensibility was grounded in a more traditional appreciation for the natural world, for color and harmony. As a quilter she was constantly creating new worlds, discovering new patterns, different shapes. To her it was the uniqueness of the individual body, look, and soul that mattered. From her I learned the appropriateness of being myself. (hooks 119)

For hooks, her early personal struggle with the aesthetic was one of personal taste, of having an aesthetic quality to her own appearance that conveyed her own style. She experienced this desire, as it confronted expectations to conform to bourgeois standards, as an “intense pressure.” As she narrates it, this intense pressure resolved by following the model of her grandmother and in doing so learning the appropriateness of being herself. The question of appropriate for what aside, hooks narrates the clash as having “nice things” or luxury on one side, and something more akin to art on the other. The desire to find a sense of oneself through taste emerges within social space as a central facet of structuring a relationship to the aesthetic. From both the perspective of the consumer and the perspective of the marketer, this alignment with the self and one’s consumer desires (or lack thereof) serves to produce a self legible within the space of accumulation. We see, in hooks’ text, that this takes place both through an embrace of consumerism and by finding the appropriateness of oneself through a relationship to how one might fashion oneself in opposition to the rules of bourgeois culture – an attempt to opt out for the sake of a different set of values.

The valuation of personal style and self-fashioning, as it might structure a resistance to bourgeois cultural values, also does work to frame an exceptionalism within the realm of mainstream aesthetics. Returning to the scene of mainstream luxury, Lamborghini offers its own Ad Personam customization Program as part of what makes it luxurious, the pinnacle of consumption:

The Ad Personam customisation program is available for the Huracán and Aventador, giving customers the chance to create their own personal Lamborghini, making it extra special and meeting any wish. There is an infinity of possible combinations, from the colours to the materials: from the logo on the seat that may be hand stitched instead of branded, to the initials stitched inside the vehicle’s interior, or even a custom colour, all meeting the company’s exacting standards of quality. (Lamborghini.com, 2017)

Meeting any wish is perhaps the full promise of the convergence between personal taste and a luxury that is premised on a relationship to scarcity and to the mastery over this scarcity through excess. Anything that one might want, however eccentric or ‘personal’, one has access to, as far as one’s car is concerned. In their chapter, “The Culture Industry” within *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno deny this capacity for the consumer to access or perform something like personal taste within the realm of capitalist consumption, arguing that rather the subject turned consumer is given their appropriate relationship to aesthetic objects – or to taste, at the will of the state and in service of the relationship between consumption and production. They describe the culture industry as a force of aesthetic homogenization: all cultural production springs from the same source, follows the same motivations, and ultimately dwells in similitude and mediocrity. Through advertising, according to Horkheim and Adorno, consumers define themselves in relation to products which are fundamentally indistinct:
Sharp distinctions like those between A and B films, or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated. The hierarchy of serial qualities purveyed to the public serves only to quantify it more completely. Everyone is supposed to behave spontaneously according to a “level” determined by indices and to select the category of mass product manufactured for their type. On the charts of research organizations, indistinguishable from those of political propaganda, consumers are divided up as statistical material into red, green, and blue areas according to income group. (Adorno 97)

Difference here becomes the false province of the producer. The culture industry forecloses the ability of the consumer to choose in any meaningful way and instead organizes them through its own logics so that they come to relate to each other, and distinguish themselves, their tastes, from one another in ways that are legible to internal cultural stratifications.

In 2005, sixty-one years after the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* was published, I found myself on Madison Avenue in New York as the assistant media strategist for Nivea USA. An international skincare company, Nivea’s tagline was, at the time, a perfect popularization of a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology - “touch and be touched.” The emphasis of all campaigns was the sensuousness of touch that was simultaneously a sensation of touching. As a media agency, the job was to place Nivea’s creative work, determining ideal outlets, schedules, and contexts for promotional material to run across media platforms. Key to strategic decisions were the rhythms, desires, and media habits of Nivea’s target consumer. Internally, this consumer was named Heather. Heather stood at the center of the narrative of what Nivea was and strived to be. Heather was crafted visually and narratively as a real, individual woman. She white, blond, 28, with interests, personality traits, habits, desires, etc. Placement strategy was targeted towards Heather’s lifestyle as well as her interiority - where Heather would see them and how she might react in that context. As much as Nivea strived to reach Heather, it also created her. Heather wears Nivea, and she engages the fantasies produced by Nivea’s aesthetic portfolio (its ads, product packaging, product texture, smell, etc.) She is an amalgamation of research, but she is transformed in the process into a single consumer subject with a set of aesthetic tastes and aversions.

The creation of Heather is, in many ways, in excess of the project of advertising the product. Having worked earlier on the creative side of a large advertising agency, I found that the process there was not to create the consumer, but to create the ad that the media agency then places. The consumer, on the ad side of marketing, is given to the creative department in the shape of a brief – a document that frames the goal of an individual campaign as it relates to the consumer and as it relates to the marketplace at large enough to establish what the ad needs to say. While the process is deeply invested in an understanding of who is being targeted and why, that target remained scattered, unnamed, a recipient of the product, rather than the product themselves. The additional step of reifying the consumer, of knowing one’s target by proper name, is a process that does the work of producing subjects, not products or product desirability. The production of the advertising image, a process of distilling anxieties and desires into aesthetic form and into a promise, does the work of offering what might be, how the consumer might one day find themselves. The work of finding the consumer who will take up this fantasy, who might find themselves interpolated by this promise, is the direct work of crafting the subject.
The aesthetic self within capitalism is, necessarily, able to be interpolated in such a way as to allow the market to give her to herself. The moment of being interpolated, as Heather, a different Heather, or a less ideal extension thereof, is the moment in the space of accumulation when one’s position as a sensuously engaged subject in that space is enacted. Not only is one called to an object, but one can, arguably must, also see oneself as given to oneself through the object, aesthetically, or in terms of taste. The aesthetic judgment moves beyond “that object is beautiful” or “I desire that experience” but rather, given the processes of distinction inherent in expansive consumer choice, it moves into the realm of what that object says about oneself, or how one’s desire for an object articulates one’s desire, taste, or lifestyle more broadly. These choices, overtime, and over a series of purchases, come to make legible a consumer whose prior choices come to enable marketers and strategists to predict new ones. Whether the aesthetic object is obtained or merely acknowledged as desirable, it is this relationship that enables the subject of the space of production to exclaim in the face of aesthetic experience, this or that “is so me!” or perhaps more typically, to perform knowledge of another, to even fortify intimacy, in the ability to sense that this or that “is so them.”

Heather is not the face of Nivea, the image critics of advertising discuss as a false ideal - the perfect woman whom the consumer must attempt, in vein, to become. Heather is herself the consumer, both perfected and imperfect – the perfect consumer in need of the product. Heather points to what Horkheimer and Adorno note as “the agreement, or at least the common determination, of the executive powers to produce or let pass nothing which does not conform to their tables, to their concept of the consumer, or, above all, to themselves.” (Adorno 96) The product itself has an image to uphold and needs its consumer to reflect back upon them the space they wish to take up in the marketplace. And the product executives must, as they have invested in this marketplace, uphold the logics of its hierarchies and distinctions through which they have come to define their products in relation to others. Consumer and producer relations function within the space accumulation through the frame of a desiring self. This self, enabled through processes of false distinction and reified in boardrooms, become the possibility of aesthetic interpolation within the space of accumulation. It is a self that asserts itself through aesthetic judgment and stabilizes through a recognition of aesthetic judgments overtime. The market gives us to ourselves, whether though our desire or disgust. Our aesthetic experiences name a relationship with the aesthetic landscape provided by the space of accumulation.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the experience of the aesthetic in social space is an alienated experience of being sorted into categories appropriate for the state. Luxury, in this context, becomes an emptied category, save for these processes of distinction. A recognition of this emptiness has spurred countless versions of anti-consumerism, of alternative consumerism, and of organized attempts to find value outside of consumption. Dolliver’s “US Affluents 2017: Looking Beyond ‘The 1%’” expressed as much, noting that for many ‘young affluents,’:

old luxury reeks of over indulgence, conspicuous consumption, elitism, extravagance and, most especially, reflects income inequality and the excesses of the 1%.... Now, luxury is more subtle and understated and experiential.... I think if you go back to the ‘80s, there’s a sense yachts and mansions and big cars were the things everybody aspired

14 For an overview of this argument as it shows up in feminist discourses on advertising, see Jean Kilbourne’s series of Killing us Softly films – the most recent being Killing us Softly 4 (Alper, 2014) as well as her book Can’t Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel. (Kilbourne 2000)
to. Now, I think luxury is much more in the eye of the beholder, that different people want different things. (Dolliver 10).

I want to think quickly alongside one such movement that has had an influential hand in reframing luxury within US consumer markets— the natural/organic lifestyle movement, as a way of framing processes of consumer formation within social space. Not yet making an argument for how this movement operates to produce aesthetic subjects, I hope, in moving through some facets of this market phenomena, to offer a contemporary context for the ideas offered by Horkheimer and Adorno in “The Culture Industry” and to allow these ideas to shed light on how luxury and the good-life manifest as lifestyle – what Lefebvre calls “the injunction to change life” without the production of a new space. (Lefebvre 60)  

Local to the bay area and on the heels of Chez Panisse, the early and mid 1970’s saw the inception of small stores that marketed themselves as natural and organic, including The Food Bin and Herb Room in Santa Cruz in 1971, and Berkeley Bowl in 1977. The opening of the first Whole Foods Market in 1980 in Austin, TX then precipitated a larger market and led the way for the mainstreaming of organic and natural food. As it has grown, the natural lifestyle movement has explicitly engaged an aesthetic discourse - a desire to engage ethically with beauty through processes of consumption – to do, eat, and enjoy what is good. In this way, it has articulated the question of the good-life in a substantial way. In its wake the idea of the ethical consumer, and of ethical consumption, has burgeoned into a topic of intellectual discourse.

In the process of becoming an aestheticized lifestyle, ethical consumerism has produced an image of the world in which this ethical action and aesthetic being is performed and a social history from which it has emerged. That world, that of a dying and potent nature, of exotic people with dying and potent cultures is aestheticized through this imagination which then offers a sensuous and ethical relationship to it. Whole Foods decorates its stores with portraits of farmers, sacks of beans and grains, all of which come to signify ‘fair-trade’, and international markets become saturated with US demand for super-foods. In engendering fantasies of nature and the natural and offering an access to those fantasies through the availability of natural products, the organic market insists on the consumer as the one who has lost their connection to nature and must venture a return. This distinction between that which must be returned to (nature) and the one who returns is a distinction that is thus performed and produced in the attempt to return, rather than dissolved.

Through the image of an exotic other that must be protected and dealt with fairly, there is a signaling of a white racialized subject that is always other than nature and whose exertion of ethical behavior is one and the same as their purchasing power. And indeed, the social history

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15 Tracing the arc of this movement over the last 47 years is something I originally hoped to include in this project. For now however I am offering very quick thoughts on the ways this movement can help us think the aesthetic subject in the space of accumulation. These observations remain anecdotal, in hopes of being fleshed out in the future.

16 For this history of market expansion see market report “Natural and Organic Foods and Beverages in the U.S., 5th edition” (Porjes 2016)

17 For a full discussion of these issues and exemplary group of texts on the subject more broadly see Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction. (Lewis 2013)

18 See “Food sovereignty and the quinoa boom: Challenges to Sustainable Re-Peasantisation in the Southern Antiplano of Bolivia” (Kerssen 2015) and "Superfoods Discourse: Between Commodification and Critique." (Loyer 2017)
taken up by the organic movement in the U.S is not the history of people of color engaged in sustainable farming, but rather is a history of alternative white food ways. This framing of ethical consumption as white enables confusions or tensions around the aggressive advancements of white cultural products and processes and, for example, the social project of increasing access to produce for lower income people. In areas where low-income people are predominately people of color and organic produce is figured aesthetically through whiteness, processes of gentrification, whitewashing and cultural condescension come to find refuge in the ethical ‘conflict’ between desirable social advancement and unwitting white advancement. This confusion and conflict is of course fabricated.

Land to be used for cooperative farms topped the list of demands in “The Black Manifesto,” the first fully elaborated plan for black reparations by the Black Freedom Movement, written in 1969. (Kelley 120-121) Thus the oft cited “40 acres and a mule” (2 mules) could be understood as a rallying call of the natural foods movement. In this way, for example, the natural food movement might understand itself in the history of black liberation struggle. However, such histories are left unclaimed, and this forgetting itself has a history. As Cedric Robinson writes in his introduction to Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition, “The obscuring of the Black radical tradition is seated in the West’s suppression of Europe’s previous knowledge of the African (and its own) past.” (Robinson 3) This denial of history to African people, the work of several hundred years, then enabled the transport of a malleable image of Africa and its people to serve the purposes of an emerging Western culture. (Robinson 3-4) In other words, the production of a history that erases black histories enables imagined black populations to serve the imaginary of a white aesthetic, which here includes an ethical subject-hood. For the natural foods movement, it becomes an ethical, albeit complicated endeavor to introduce these sustainable ideas and products to black people and other communities of color. It is a movement founded on a white imaginary that its aesthetic logics come to naturalize.

On the one hand, the organic consumer is figured through a whiteness that distinguishes itself from nature and its exotic inhabitants. On the other hand, as the trend has incorporated a critique of global consumption, attention to locality has engendered a fantasy of participation in modes of production. This can be noted in the increase in packaging space given to informal biographies of founders and the conversational introductions of consumers to the product. Newer products such as “Serious Cheesy Poofs,” founded by “Jack” in Portland Oregon’s only “Micro-Cheesy Poofery,” and “Mother-in-Law’s Kimchi” seem to wink at the consumer, distinguishing themselves from similar products by, in part, signaling a whiteness and a youthfulness on the side of production. Here Kimchi itself remains authentically Korean, through the imagined mother-in-law, as it is sold as a product of white (or at least non-Korean) inventiveness- it is not the producer’s mother, but their mother-in-law who has access to the recipe. The producer has found himself, much like the consumer has, in some new intimacy with the exotic. Through

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20 For an example of such conflict see “Co-ops Find They Aren't to Every Taste” (Yee, 2014)
consumption there is an engagement with a similar other who could be you - who is living as you could live and who is inviting you into their world by sharing their products. With an emphasis on the importance of going back to the land, of consuming locally, there is an aesthetic kinship, a racialized kinship, that stands in for what one might imagine of a pre-industrialized marketplace. There is an imagined collapse in the distance between the consumer and the producer. Relatedly, there is also a new imagining of the product – the ingredients, the origins of the ingredients, and the processes by which the ingredients make their way into whatever form they now exist. There is a revived interest in the interiority of the product, a desire for a piercing knowledge that might serve as a mediating factor between the process of production and consumption, that might come to stand in for that difference or assuage the anxiety of what might take place between farm and table.

What Horkheimer and Adorno diagnose as the false promise of the culture industry takes on a different temporality of loss when for the consumer of nature and the natural. Horkheimer and Adorno note that “the culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasure issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged: the promise, which actually comprises the entire show, disdainfully intimates that there is nothing more to come, that the diner must be satisfied with reading the menu.” Here the packaging is a part of the promise to be fulfilled by what lies within – it is a part of the show. At the level of the package, the consumer is not yet disappointed. Rather, they are at the pinnacle of fulfillment, all that is left is to be disappointed. However, for the consumer of nature and the natural, the scene of the grocery store is already a moment of failure – a disruption of the fantasy. The one who seeks to return to nature is presented not with the sheep and cows of the return to nature lifestyle imaginary, but with a shelf of packaged products. Someone has beat them to the punch, the goat has been milked and the yogurt has been churned and they are left to choose, pay, and leave. The package here serves as lure – it offers a promise, but as package it disappoints – by its very presence, its promise proves to be a false one.

This search for realness, for proximity, and for the natural as a basis for the good-life, as an instantiation of luxury, asks of luxury that it be, rather than excessive or sensuously pleasurable that it in some way bulwark the body against harm and that it assuage a sense of ethical responsibility. In this way, the good-life of consumer capitalism transforms the good from the ethical and pleasurable to the pleasurable as ethical. Indeed, major criticisms of Whole Foods have denounced it as a mirage of the good-life. Asking premium prices for luxury items whose value is based on quality and goodness, and yet emerging as inauthentic in its ethical commitments, Whole Foods sullied the dream of the ethical and beautiful life for those interpolated by its promise. For Horkheimer and Adorno, to the extent that ‘real’ difference might exist, between quality or capacity of consumer goods, these differences do not tend to equate with difference as it emerges on the consumer market – they are not the differences by which value is determined. Rather, “the unified standard of value consists in the level of conspicuous production, the amount of investment put on show. The budgeted differences of value in the culture industry have nothing to do with actual differences, with the meaning of the product itself.” (Adorno 97) The organic movement, in its attempts to disarm this claim, makes the depth of the claim exceedingly clear. That aesthetic and market distinctions have no relationship to real difference becomes clear when the desire for real distinction emerges as a significant cultural force. First in the legal battles to stabilize the label “Organic” and in the more contemporary fights to demand the labeling of GMOs, difference as it appears in the marketplace becomes the
purview of government agencies and political power, the same agencies and powers that cannot be disentangled from the corporate interests invested in the homogenizing function of the state.

The apex of this market trend, and perhaps the fall of its current substantiation as a cultural phenomenon, can be dated a few weeks ago when, on June 16th 2017, online retailer Amazon announced it was acquiring Whole Foods for 13.9 billion dollars. Amazon stock rose 3% with this news, suggesting predictions that ‘green’ will continue to hold sway discursively within consumer markets. (LaMonica 2017) This green, of course, is different from the green on which the consumer market blossomed, and that a different green than the one that inspired Whole Foods and other early marketers of organic. The color green that covers the exterior of The Food Bin is a very different green than the logo of whole foods. This later green is a cleaner green, less muddied, less yellow, and surrounded by bright white. A similar green and white combination can be found in Starbucks’s branding, a company that has historically attempted to straddle the space between mainstream and alternative culture21, and that at this same juncture (1987) transformed its logo from a reddish brown to a saturated, Whole Foods green. Then there are fully mainstremmed organic brands, often originating as small independent brands and then sold to larger companies with as little publicity as possible. These products tend to signal their greenness through a brightness that simultaneously reads as natural and as fully sterile. Nature is depicted in a way that exerts itself as artificial. Earthy colors such as green, yellow and brown become fluorescent. If a rhetoric of the untouched rawness of nature compels the rugged greens of early organic marketing, by 2017 nature’s purity has given way to an untethered purity, resignified through the bright, cheery colors of childhood. From an abstracted nature emerges a concept of innocence, an abstraction that itself affirms the image of space as illuminated and clear – the sensuousness of abstract space and its aestheticized illusion of transparency. As Lefebvre notes, in necessary opposition to this illusion of transparency is an illusion of opacity, or the ‘realistic’ illusion (Lefebvre 29) – an appeal to naturalness and simplicity – to a real that emerges as other than and prior to language or concept. This other purity. And indeed, dark, soft, and muddied greens have not disappeared of course. They, along with rougher textures and muted color contrast, are currently the purview of products marketed as Paleo and Local – the subsidiary market spaces of the organic movement that have taken over the discourse of an authentic nature.

The culture industry and the production of aesthetic selves produce distinction and difference that rely upon and work s in the service of a homogeny through which power is wielded. Lefebvre coins differential space, the space he believes becomes available in the wake of abstract space, as the space of difference that also reunites that which has been falsely separated in abstract space:

Thus, despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space differential space, because, insasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will also restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice. It will put an end to those

21 For a history of Starbucks in this regard, see Starbucks by Marie Bussing-Burks (Bussings-Burks 2009)
localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the
corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge. (Lefebvre 52)
Taking up the work of the culture industry we can think through the ways in which the aesthetic
is utilized as a function of both false distinctions within the social body – here processes of
naturalizing racialized class distinction, as well as a production of homogeneity through a
flattened relationship to the aesthetic through the homogeny of aesthetic experience available
within culture. Further, as dwelling names for Heidegger the process of human-being, and if we
take dwelling-well seriously as a figuring of that concept of dwelling to recognize and make
space for the bodies through which dwelling occurs – we can understand the debasement of the
aesthetic as a part of the shattered integrity of the human corpus of needs.

In this squashing of actual aesthetic difference, we can see the quelling of what gives the
aesthetic its capacity to produce the image, to instantiate being as an aesthetic process. The
discussion of Bachelard in chapter two of the dissertation showed that aesthetic dialectics offers
a geometry to dwelling, articulated through the poetic image. Such epistemological experiences
of difference produce a system of organizing aesthetic experience through sensuous experiences
of space, of navigating inside and outside, the miniscule and the massive, that enable a bodily
logic that can then give language to the idea that, for example, the human is “half-open being”
(Bachelard 2013). This is a different ordering operation than what emerges from structures of
organizing and systematizing sameness, which Horheimer and Adorno equate with an
epistemological passivity:

The active contribution which Kantian schematism still expected of subjects – that they
should, from the first, relate sensuous multiplicity to fundamental concepts- is denied to
the subject by industry. It purveys schematism as its first service to the customer.
According to Kantian schematism, a secret mechanism within the psyche preformed
immediate data to fit them into the system of pure reason. That secret has now been
unraveled. Although the operations of the mechanism appear to be planned by those who
supply the data, the culture industry, the planning is in fact imposed on the industry by
the inertia of a society irrational despite all its rationalization, and this calamitous
tendency, in passing through the agencies of business, takes on the shrewd intentionality
peculiar to them. For the consumer there is nothing left to classify, since the classification
has already been preempted by the schematism of production. This dreamless art for the
people fulfils the dreamy idealism which went too far for idealism in its critical form.
(Adorno 98)

These processes of externalized schematization – the logics by which sameness emerges as
difference - different sectors, different classes, different genres, different producers all organized
to speak to different types of consumers – stand in opposition to what Bachelard notes as the
demand made by poetry – a demand to go inward and to find in oneself the general image which
will allow the specific image of the poet to produce understanding. In order to move forward
with the poetic image one must take it up in a way that allows it to become general – a
universalizing movement inward as opposed to an externalized fury of competitive and
administered difference.

With the externalization of schemas of difference comes a resulting interchangeability of
details, where and difference can be replaced with any other difference. Horkheimer and Adorno
write:
By emancipating itself, the detail had become refractory; from Romanticism to
Expressionism it had rebelled as unbridled expression, as the agent of opposition, against
organization. In music, the individual harmonic effect had obliterated awareness of the form as a whole; in painting the particular detail had obscured the overall composition; in the novel psychological penetration had blurred the architecture. Through totality, the culture industry is putting an end to all that. Although operating only with effects, it subdues their unruliness and subordinates them to the formula which supplants the work. It crushes equally the hole and the parts. The whole confronts the details in implacable detachment, somewhat like the career of a successful man, in which everything serves to illustrate and demonstrate a success which, in fact, is no more than the sum of those idiotic events. The so-called leading idea is a filing compartment which creates order, not connections. Lacking both contrast and relatedness, the whole and the detail look alike. Their harmony, guaranteed in advance, mocks the painfully achieved harmony of the great bourgeois work of art. (Adorno 99)

Returning to the function of felicity and the half open being produced by the dialectics of sensuous experience, we see here an aesthetic subject, with choice, with distinction, fully alienated from what might be called aesthetic being: being and selfhood performed, inscribed, reinforced, limited, through consumer desire and habits; being manifested in the things that people choose to surround themselves with and use. This is the collapse of Bachelard’s aesthetic dialectics. On the other hand, the space of accumulation offers perhaps its own dialectic of boredom:

The only escape from the work process in factory and office is through adaptation to it in leisure time. This is the incurable sickness of all entertainment. Amusement congeals into boredom, since, to be amusement, it must cost no effort and therefore moves strictly along the well-worn grooves of association. The spectator must need no thoughts of his own.” (Adorno 109)

Our aesthetic dwelling hinges upon these experiences of sensuous difference and the pleasures and poetics they enable. The loss of aesthetic difference in the space of accumulation can be read through Horkheimer and Adorno as they describe a culture at odds with what, through Bachelard, emerges as the need for sensuous dialectics to form the half-open being of dwelling-well.

Still, as the sensuous comes to signify difference rather than itself constitute meaningful difference within the space of accumulation, there are ways in which something like a real experience of sensuousness and the distinctions inherent to it wants to emerge as ‘real’ within our experience as aesthetic subjects. It is true that some cars drive better than others. And it is true that some fabrics breathe better than others. And that some perfumes smell more delicately than others, some tomatoes are sweeter than others and that if one wants to touch and be touched, some lotions might produce softer skin and some feel lighter to the touch. Where there are distinctions, they occur on a much smaller scale than the one on which they are projected to distinguish themselves. These experiences are often what luxury, as a marketing term, tries to claim. And what do we do with the fact that, many times, the more expensive choice sold in the rugged yet sophisticated and eclectic packaging does indeed bring the most pleasure? And, further, that the packaging is delightful in a way that exists beyond, or at least cannot be easily conflated with, its signifying of distinction and promise of self-realization?

There seems to be something that exceeds the non-differences of the marketplace, that exist perhaps in correlation with but distinguishable from their conspicuous production. Returning to the scene of this conspicuous production and of marketing difference, Horkheimer
and Adorno note the child’s fascination with the difference between cars as based on, at some level, the imaginary nature of such differences:

That the difference between the models of Chrysler and General Motors is fundamentally illusory is known by any child, who is fascinated by that very difference. The advantages and disadvantages debated by enthusiasts serve only to perpetuate the appearance of competition and choice. It is no different with the offerings of Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer.” (Adorno 97)

As a babysitter, I gained much first-hand experience of the toddler obsessed with these differences, and my own nearly obsessive delight in the business section of the New York Times and the trade magazines of the advertising world stems in part from this same fascination – the pleasure of attuning to difference and marking patterns within the vast proliferation of same but different that constitutes the consumer marketplace. While these appreciations and fascinations with difference serve to perpetuate the appearance of competition and choice, that this is their only function seems to dismiss the fact that, in these processes of distinction, in the sensual experience of preference, and in the visual landscapes that highly curated marketplaces produce, a pleasure emerges.

When the relationship to the object becomes one of sensuous appreciation – of sensuous pleasure and judgment, by the logics of the space of accumulation, this cannot be experienced or gestured toward as distinct from interpolation and distinction as a type of consumer and the experience of being with the object cannot be experienced outside the frame of the social space in which it occurs, and by which one enacts a subject position as consumer within market capitalism. These experiences mark a sensuousness illegible within the space of accumulation, experiences that can only fall back into the discourse of market preference. Pleasure in the object, and pleasure in the sensuousness of distinction, point to an experience of the object of consumption in excess of interpolation as a consumer, even as it is inarticulatable as such. Here, even when interpolated as an aesthetic subject, an experience of aesthetic being asks to emerge. This excess is perhaps what the marketed term luxury promises, without being able to offer it within an ethical frame and outside of the discursive frame of distinctions based in and meant to naturalize these ethical problems.

**The Aesthetic Dimension**

The emphasis on excess as the mainstay of luxury – luxury defined as what is pleasurable but not necessary – and the affixing of this pleasure and unnecessariness to the body and its pleasures, frames the aesthetic and its pleasures as unnecessary. Audre Lorde addresses this through her text “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” arguing that a relationship to the poetic that brings the body and its sensuousness into the fold of the necessary. Lorde names the body and its sensuous knowing in the political language of freedom:

> The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet- whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom. (Lorde 37)

Poetry is not a luxury in the sense that it is useful, but it is necessary for an aesthetic knowing that facilitates freedom, for an understanding of that which she names as dark and deep and that exceeds the reason of abstract space and the social space of its creation. With this Lorde both rejects the primacy of abstract knowing and she rejects systems of oppression as the frame through which to understand being:
When we view living in the European mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. (Lorde 37)

She rejects a view of being under modes of oppression as a process of problem solving and seeks rather to frame it as an experience and a process of interaction. In this way we can see her evoking in a stronger sense something similar to what Bachelard evokes with felicitous space – experiences of oppression do not leave the frame, but Lorde refuses to have being dwell there. It is an ontological move towards a space in which living can be taken up as a poetic and free experience. In this way, Lorde articulates the impact and necessity of what I have traced through Bachelard as the power of poetic dwelling.

I want, however to think of luxury not as opposed to this knowing, nor as external to the appropriateness of being oneself, but rather read it as a framework that enables access to the aesthetic dimension as it attempts to arrive in the space of accumulation, that produces, in its emphasis on excess, a relationality between subject and object of non-utility. Taking up Kant’s concept of purposiveness without purpose, I want to understand this non-utility as the essence of an experience of the aesthetic. For Kant, in the midst of aesthetic judgment, the imagination refers to concepts, but is not subordinate to them. (AK 241) aesthetic judgment places understanding in the service of the imagination, rather than vice versa (AK 242). For Kant, the understanding is the bearer of law. He writes, “The understanding alone gives the law. . . . when the imagination is compelled to proceed according to a determinate law, then its product is determined by concepts.” (AK 241). Aesthetic judgment is distinct from understanding in that it neither deals with concepts, nor produce determinate judgments, but rather is reflexive, experiencing the object of perception in relationship not to what it is, but to what its contemplation brings forth. (lv-lvi) Kant theorizes this free play of the imagination in relation to the understanding as a lawfulness without law. This playfulness, embodied, is understood by Kant as purposiveness without purpose. As lawfulness without law is the structure of freedom, purposiveness without purpose is the structure of beauty. (Eros and Civilization, 177). Beauty, with its purposeful design yet lack of purpose, offers the playfulness and flexibility suggestive of the free imagination in the tangibility and charm of an object.

For Kant, this embodiment symbolizes the morally good. (AK 343). The morally good does not offer itself directly to perception, but rather is offered through the image of the beautiful. A relationship with the beautiful then enables a relationship with morality – it is a moral teacher which eventually enables us to recognize and desire the morally good in moments where it does not come embodied in the charms of the beautiful. (AK 354) Marcuse translates the service of beauty to offer the image of the morally good into the realm of freedom, suggesting that beauty offers an image of the promise of freedom. (46) Beauty is the image of freedom, or of the morally good. This image is has the same structure as that of freedom itself. The purposiveness of the beautiful is that which enables it to appear as a design, as something with charm. And yet this appearance lacks function, or use value.

In his chapter “The Aesthetic Dimension” within Eros and Civilization, Marcuse discusses Schiller’s pleasure principle:

Schiller states that, in order to solve the political problem, "one must pass through the aesthetic, since it is beauty that leads to freedom." The play impulse is the vehicle of this liberation. The impulse does not aim at playing "with" something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion - the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself. . . . Freedom is thus,
in a strict sense, freedom from the established reality: man is free when the "reality loses its seriousness" and when its necessity "becomes light" (Marcuse Eros, 187).

Returning to Lorde, the refusal to “view living in the European mode only as a problem to be solved” and rather to view living as “interaction” can be read as an insistence on freedom through the frame of the aesthetic – as a playfulness: life as a mode of play.

For Marcuse, the imagination running free, its lack of inhibition brought on by the reality principle, is the sort of play enabled by the work of art. In “The Aesthetic Dimension” Marcuse notes that “art stands under the law of the given, while transgressing this law.” (11) There is no external law, no external reality principle which limits the freedom of the work of art, save those laws of nature which maintain it within the material world. Still, the wholeness of the aesthetic form is itself lawful by which is meant that there is an internal logic by which it operates, which allows it to be understood as a unity. It is this kind of lawfulness without law that enables the work of art’s political function. Its autonomous logics, external of the repressive forces of the established reality principle, are what enable alienation from the established reality principle. Both the work of art, and the imagination which views the work of art, participate in a lawfulness without law which Kant describes as the structure of freedom. (Marcuse Eros, 177) Lefebvre notes art as the last vestibule of the body, and he frames differential space, the space constituted by a full knowledge of space, as a space structured on the model of art. (Lefebvre 1991)

In many ways luxury, as the excessive, the corporeally attuned, the exceptionally pleasurable, constitutes the image of this non-utility within the space of accumulation. In its insistence on excess, on the body, and on a nonutility, it summons as nearly visible an aesthetic being in the space of accumulation. And even further, in its evocation of distinction – the OED uses the terms refined, choice and costly, - the exquisiteness denoted by luxury – is itself, as it is use to naturalize racialized forms of domination, not inherently a problem, formally. For Marcuse, distinction, this form of elitism of art, is inherent to its political possibility. The play of the imagination that constitutes the lawfulness without law that occurs in the presence of the aesthetic object and the lawfulness without law exhibited by the work of art in its autonomy resists the modes of social repression that inhibit revolutionary thought and practice. This free play, or lawfulness without law, which compels the imagination to take precedence over reason and function, can be understood as the reason why art, and the artist, exist at a distance from both the people whose political interest is at stake and the work of political praxis. 22

That luxury makes distinctions then, is not the issue. Rather, it is the process of distinction for the sake of the space of accumulation, a space that necessitates for its functioning an alienation from the body and from the senses and that is based upon a system of violence and oppression and flattening of the other. Within the space of accumulation, processes of distinction elide true difference and serve to distort the non-utilitarian function of the aesthetic. To the extent that luxury has a social life as a marker of class, as a form of distinction, part of what gives the aesthetic value in the space of accumulation is its relationship to scarcity – to the possibility of possessing that which is not possessable (water, among other things). It hinges upon logics of access and inaccessibility, abundance and scarcity, experiences of luxury function to reproduce social relationships within social space.

Luxury is invested with the promise of this play and yet fully encumbered by, produced in the service of, the reality principle. The distortion of the aesthetic dimension can be framed in

22 In her book, How To See a Work of art in Total Darkness, Darby English takes this up as the difference between art and propaganda. (English 2007)
part as the utility of the non-utilitarian function. For Lefebvre, the space of human possibility is structured on the model of art. (Lefebvre 422) And, if differential space is about difference for Lefebvre, it seems that processes of distinction might be the way in which such a space is, in its inception, logically founded in the aesthetic. Luxury is, in many ways, how this impulse towards life arrives in the space of accumulation. And yet structurally, luxury holds at bay the promise of the aesthetic dimension. The space of accumulation uses it against itself in this way – the non-utilitarian and the elite becomes the bastion of crude distinction and processes of epistemic violence. What else might become available then through these experiences of preference – how might we move toward a different mode of distinction, that of aesthetic judgment, as well as the distinction that comes from the capacity of art to not engage – the elitism of art?

To move ahead with this question, I want to return to Young’s Essay “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme.” After following Irigaray’s argument on the masculinist nature of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling, Young moves on to discuss the commodified home:

Economic and psychosocial processes collude in the twentieth century in particular to encourage the expression of a subject that fulfills its desire by commodity consumption.

… Under these modern circumstances, home tends to be restricted to the living space of house or apartment. Personal identity is linked to commodified home in specific ways. The house is the primary place of consumption itself. Freedom consists in release from work and public responsibility in activities of leisure, pleasure, and consumption. The house or apartment is the site of many of these activities, filled with comfortable furnishings and gadgets. Commodified home supports identity not only as the site of consumer freedom, but as the mark of one’s social status. The size, style, and especially location of the house, along with its landscaping and furnishing, establish the individual’s location in the social hierarchy. (Young 132)

While of course one’s location in the social hierarchy depends on far more than this display of classed distinction, Young’s point, that the home as a site of both commodity subjectivity and the playing out of leisure and entertainment is an important one as it situates a central aspect of everyday life within a spatial domain, and asks after the ways in which that domain functions to produce those subjects aesthetically. For Young, this commodified home becomes an instantiation of women’s position within the home – that they must find their identity through these processes of identifying with space as opposed to developing an identity within the public sphere. She moves on to address the forms of social expectation and state sponsored surveillance naturalize and enforce this need to display one’s self and one’s capacities as a woman. She then moves on to think the concept of preserving, as a value alongside dwelling, that might offer a feminist relationship with the home. For Young, the commodified home reflects the negative relationship between private life and consumerism. Young recognizes the gendered violence of such a relationship to space and in an attempt to move away towards some other relationship to space, a feminist relationship to space, moves towards the concept of preservation.

Rather than move away, I want here to linger with the commodified home, specifically as it appears in discourses of fantasy as the dream home. The dream home has, in many ways, become the spatialized condition of dreaming within the space of accumulation. Each year, Home and Garden Television (HGTV) gives away a dream home. Given that this dream home exists in a predetermined location and comes built to pre-established architectural standards, the question of whose dream home it is seems to be less important than the fact that it is, inherently, a dream home. The dreams fulfilled by this home come to bare a standard of the dreams of those who might enter such a contest – the subjects of the market stratified as such. For those who are
not lucky enough to win the dream home, there are options available online to visit the dream home virtually and to learn about the local cuisines of the dream home location (hgtv.com/design/hgtv-dream-home), and even an app, “Design Home”, that HGTV has partnered with that enables you to decorate rooms within their HGTV branded dream homes. These fantasies of space, of being in space, of dwelling in perfected surroundings, can be understood as the potential of dwelling well as it is transfigured from an epistemological and ontological frame of aesthetic being into the purview of aesthetic subjects within the space of accumulation.

The concept of a dream home suggests an attempt to produce a poetics of the body in space – a fantasy of the body in space, within capitalism: a speaking through accumulation, a speaking through an aesthetic mastery of space, a speaking of oneself through space. In a dream home, it is assumed, one’s dreams are realized through the perfection of space – or, perhaps inversely, one’s spatial dreams are fulfilled, thus perfecting life. In some ways this articulation of self through dwelling is the commodified version of Bachelard’s articulation of being through space. If in the space of accumulation this being through the aesthetic has become a subj ecthood through the aesthetic – an aesthetic self, then indeed the dream home becomes a frame of dwelling and the home becomes a site of aesthetic articulation. The poetry that Bachelard gives us as articulating this being is indeed enthralled by these everyday items – it is not of a different physical world from the one of HGTV patios and rotundas. A difference seems to be that for Bachelard, poets are dreamers of curtains, writers of the home (Bachelard 39), whereas the dream home seems to ask for a poetry through curtains, a poetry through the home – the curtains speak, one does not speak of the curtains.

“Home Design”, the app that enables one to decorate and vote on a series of rooms that change daily, can be understood as fully typical within the current culture of social media and online entertainment. As a consumer, I was an easy target for its algorithms and an easy sell, as I had spent years on its far more embarrassing cousin app, Covet. Covet requires you to dress models in designer clothes for increasingly bizarre and offensive occasions. That I was able to recruit a dozen of my highly critical humanities graduate student and professor friends to become hooked alongside me, to join my ‘fashion house’ and enter multiple challenges daily, over a couple of years, suggests the ways in which these cravings for aesthetic experience- for entertainment that feels like aesthetic judgment, that calls upon even these false distinctions of value, taste and preference- assuage even as they assault.

Bachelard begins his second chapter, house and universe, with the following passage:

\[Quand les cimes de notre ciel se rejoindront
Ma maison aura un toit.\] (Eluard 115)
(When the peaks of our sky come together
My house will have a roof.) (Bachelard 38)

He goes on to propose that “we shall now read slowly several houses and rooms “written” by great writers.” (Bachelard 38). It is an invitation that I encounter, every time, as a reward for having found myself in the text. Whether or not I continue reading, this invitation in and of itself,

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23 “Home Design”, along with fashion design app “Covet” are the two properties of Crowdstar inc, billed as “the premier interactive entertainment company for women…. The company is backed by strategic investors Time Warner and Intel Capital and boasts global partnerships with Tencent, NHN and Facebook. CrowdStar's games can be found across multiple platforms including Apple's iOS, Google Play, Amazon and Microsoft” (www.crowdstar.com/team/)
to read slowly houses and rooms written, speaks to a poetic rendering of space distinct in every way from the pleasure of “Home Design.” This might be framed, for now, as the experience of alienated pleasure versus the sensing of a possible unalienated relationship to the aesthetic. There is a pleasure in reading Bachelard, as he weaves together poetic instantiations of space, that requires what he refers to as the general image. “We share the writer’s image, thanks to what we are obliged to call a general image, that is, an image which participation keeps us from confusing with a generality.” Bachelard offers an example of this participation, of the need of the reader to enter the image:

We have to withdraw deep into ourselves, for instance, to read this fragment by Maurice Blanchot in the tonality of being in which it was written: “About this room, which was plunged in utter darkness, I knew everything, I had entered into it, I bore it within me, I made it live, with a life that is not life, but which is stronger than life, and which no force in the world can vanquish.” One feels in these repetitions, or to be more exact, in this constant strengthening of an image into which one has entered (and not of a room into which one has entered, a room which the author bears within himself, and which he has made live with a life that does not exist in life) (Bachelard 229)

To enter the space that the poet creates one must, essentially, create it within oneself, with one’s own imaginative resources. It is, in many ways, this mode in which Bachelard’s own text operates. The arrival at understanding requires a leap of faith and also an active pursuit internally of the general image that might allow one to move forward with the text. It is perhaps why he insists on his text being philosophical, but not philosophy. (Bachelard 222) His text resists what Lefebvre calls western philosophy’s insurance of abstract space, its schematizing of social and physical space after the logics of its own mental concepts. This requirement to participate stands in stark opposition with what Horkheimer and Adorno name as the flattening of schematic distinction into a conceptual passivity. (Horkheimer 98) Home Design, even as it ostensibly requires active engagement, has been crafted by social media engineers to function seamlessly with the activities and psychology of everyday life. And as such, it is the form of leisure that, as Horkheimer and Adorno note, must congeal into boredom. (Horkheimer 109)

Still, I want to continue to think alongside the fantasy of the dream home as it exists in a seemingly vapid semblance to the dreaming of space-as it represents the fantasy of living in perfect luxury and figures the space of living as luxury. Thus far I have focused my attention on the relationship between aesthetics and the state as that relationship emerges within the culture industry, as named by Horkheimer and Adorno. In the following section, in an effort to conclude the dissertation, I transition my thinking towards how the aesthetic dimension, as it emerges through the culture industry, can speak to and be spoken about through the space of the U.S. prison system. It is a considering of the space of confinement from the perspective of the realm of freedom, a final dialogue between the free and unfree, the facilitation of which has been the goal of this project. It is worthwhile also to make explicit the ways in which the spaces from which the aesthetics of the marketplace emerge work in relationship to the spaces of imprisonment to produce the social space in which they both function and from which some sense of freedom might emerge.

The relationship between prisons and consumer markets is one of mutual growth. (Davis 85) The violence that Lefebvre notes as inherent to the space of accumulation (Lefebvre 276) can be located in the interaction of these spaces as they form the prison industrial complex and operate in symbiotic relationship to the military industrial complex. In her book, Are Prison’s
Obsoletely, Angela Davis describes this relationship between corporate capitalism, whose rhetorics produce the content of consumer imaginaries, and prisons. She writes:

[A] cogent way to define the relationship between the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex would be to call it symbiotic. These two complexes mutually support and promote each other and, in fact, often share technologies. The transformation of imprisoned bodies-and they are in their majority bodies of color-into sources of profit who consume and also often produce all kinds of commodities, devours public funds, which might otherwise be available for social programs such as education, housing, childcare, recreation, and drug programs.

Punishment no longer constitutes a marginal area of the larger economy. Corporations producing all kinds of goods—from buildings to electronic devices and hygiene products—are providing all kinds of services—from meals to therapy and healthcare—are now directly involved in the punishment business. That is to say, companies that one would assume are far removed from the work of state punishment have developed major stakes in the perpetuation of a prison system whose historical obsolescence is therefore that much more difficult to recognize. It was during the decade of the 1980s that corporate ties to the punishment system became more extensive and entrenched than ever before. But throughout the history of the U.S. prison system, prisoners have always constituted a potential source of profit. For example, they have served as valuable subjects in medical research, thus positioning the prison as a major link between universities and corporations. (Davis 89)

The space of prisons then, while ostensibly removed from the market and entertainment spaces of the culture industry, are integral to its material underpinnings and, to the extent that rhetorics of criminality inform social perceptions of black people (Davis 28), the naturalization of its aesthetics. In their project “The House that Herman Built”, artist Jackie Sumell and Black Panther Party member Herman Wallace, who was imprisoned in solitary confinement for the majority of his life, put the space of the dream home in conversation with the prison industrial complex and solitary confinement more specifically. The project is both significant in the breadth of its reach—from the dreamiest images of social space to its most nightmarish—and as a reminder that these spaces, and the fantasies they stir, exist already in relationship to one another.

Herman’s House

The House that Herman Built is a collaborative art project between Herman Wallace, who was a prisoner held in solitary confinement at Louisiana State Penitentiary from 1972 to 2013, and Jackie Sumell, an artist based out of New Orleans. The project emerged from the question posed by Sumell to Wallace: “what kind of house does a man whose been in solitary confinement for 30 years dream of?” From there, it took on a life as a series of correspondences, blueprints, installations, and the documentary Herman’s House. (Sumell 2006, 2010, and 2013) The documentary, produced by PBS, won an Emmy in 2014 in News and Documentary. It explores the art project as it unfolded and continued to unfold as a travelling installation during the process of filming, offers analyses of the dream home itself, conceived by Wallace, offers a view onto the relationship between Wallace and Sumell, and follows Sumell as she works to find a location for dream house to be built in New Orleans, LA.

As it emerges in the context of imprisonment, the question of a dream home becomes a question of literal freedom. The ways that the aesthetic, as the dimension of play, emerges here—the question of to what extent a mental space of freedom might facilitate a lived sense of
freedom, is put fully to the test in such a context - how the aesthetic dimension in this way may serve as a radical freedom when unfreedom in social and physical space is stark. It also frames the limits of such an understanding of the radical potential of the aesthetic dimension. It points to how this play, with no outlet in the social world- with no space as Lefebvre would say, cannot itself be called freedom. There is a visceral difference between this capacity to escape and a freedom to move and be in the social space of the world. Wallace and Sumell’s project, as it brings together this aesthetic freedom with the unfreedom of solitary confinement, and attempts to project this coming together out into social space in various ways, asks us to think how the freedom of the aesthetic dimension might act upon social space. It also asks critically after the relationship between art and life, after Lefebvre’s call for space to be produced on the model of art. In some ways, the scene of solitary confinement can be narrated as the scene of life as art in its most negative cadence. It is life caged, held at a distance, within a physical frame, life as a possession of the state. Here we might think of the quote from Frederick Douglas with which Angela Davis begins her essay “From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglas and the Convict Lease System”: “Slavery in the United States is the granting of that power by which one man exercises and enforces a right of property in the body and soul of another.” And specifically, I’d like to think of the resonances it holds with a quote from Lévi-Strauss that Berger uses to introduce the oil painting in his *Ways of Seeing*:

> It is this avid ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even of the spectator which seems to me to constitute one of the outstanding original features of the art of Western civilization. (Berger 84)

Berger suggests a reining in of Lévi-Strauss’s historical generalization but goes on to argue that since the sixteenth century traditional oil painting has framed notions of artistic genius, its norms have framed norms of seeing, even after its perspective was overthrown by impressionism, cubism and photography, and the question of what it means to love art continues to be answered in light of oil painting’s history of commission and collection. In this way, the history of art becomes, in western culture, the history of possession. At the height of the oil painting tradition, 1500-1900, a timeframe shared by the height of the Atlantic slave trade, to love art was to collect paintings. “What are these painting?” Berger asks, “Before they are anything else, they are themselves objects which can be bought and owned. Unique objects. A patron cannot be surrounded by music or poems in the same way as he is surrounded by his pictures.” (Berger 85)

I cannot in this project fulfil the promise of bringing these two capacities for possession into conversation – the capacity to own the oil painting, an ownership that offered reflection on not only its own possession but the capacity to possess further that which the painting depicted, and the ownership of slaves as the capacity to express the right of property through the soul and body of another.\(^{24}\) I want to suggest however that the consideration of these in tandem frames the question of life as art in a way that enables art and life, in their capacities to be given meaning through their possession by others, to figure one another in their capacities for both freedom and unfreedom. Taking up the history of art, and the history of slavery as it lives especially through the carceral system, opens onto a different set of questions. When blackness is valued for entertainment and inspiration, when our bodies would be possessed and traded, when there might

\(^{24}\) For a full discussion of the past and present life of Blackness as a human relationship to objectness, see the works of Sadiya Hartman (Hartman 1997 and 2007), Fred Moten (Moten 2003) and Christine Sharp (Sharpe 2010)
already be an understanding, sensuously and psychically, of life as art in art’s most negative valence as an object of consumption and possession meant to facilitate the subjectivity of others, how might a life based on art in its positive valence be imagined and considered? It is through this lens that I consider Wallace and Sumell’s project and what it might offer to the question of aesthetic being in the space of accumulation.

In her book, Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives, Lisa Guenther offers a concise introduction to the project:

Herman Wallace, Robert King, and Albert Woodfox are known collectively as the Angola Three. In the 1960s, each man found himself imprisoned for petty crimes at Angola Prison, a former slave plantation and current maximum-security state prison in Louisiana. Once in prison, they became politically active, and together they organized the first ever prison chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1971. They began educating prisoners on their legal rights, organizing for better prison conditions, and working toward desegregation of the prison population, but in 1972 Wallace and Woodfox were accused and convicted of murdering a prison guard; King was associated with the murder but not charged. All three have denied involvement in the murder, and the case against them is riddled with inconsistencies. But while King was released in 2001 following a legal action concerning another accusation, Wallace and Woodfox have remained in solitary confinement since 1972. In 2003, artist Jackie Sumell began corresponding with Wallace during his two-year confinement to the part of Angola Prison called “the Dungeon,” where even prisoners who are already in solitary confinement are subject to further crushing restrictions on their access to spatial and social depth. Sumell asked Wallace, “What kind of a house does a man who has lived in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?” Since then, Wallace and Sumell have been working together to imagine, draft, build models, and create computer-aided design simulations of his dream home; together with the Community Futures Collective, Sumell is raising money to buy land in Wallace’s hometown of New Orleans and to construct his dream home in reality. (Guenther loc.3966)

Guenther’s interest in the project stems from the ways in which it succeeds in producing spatial depth from the space of solitary confinement. She writes about the project in this way:

Psychic space, like the opening of an inner corporeal depth and like the affective dimensions of spatial and social depth, remains connected to the web of relations between body, thing, and other that together constitute a meaningful sense of the world. … When blocked from a concrete experience of spatial depth in maximum or supermaximum confinement units, many prisoners turn to psychic space as a source of depth and dimensionality, an “elsewhere” beyond the rigid framework of the prison cell. Mark Medley, an inmate in Drew Leder’s philosophy seminar at the Maryland Penitentiary, uses what he calls “autistic thinking”—a retreat from the current reality of the prison cell into a world of fantasy and open-ended creation— as a way of resting or “sleeping” and sustaining a sense of meaningful worldhood in the midst of a situation that blocks both space and meaning. … Some prisoners achieve this by drawing or writing poetry; others challenge themselves with cognitive exercises. Robert King made pralines out of sugar and pecans he had saved from meal trays, melting the sugar in a tin can over a fire made with collected scraps of toilet paper and whatever other paper he could scrounge up. For me, one of the most extraordinary projects of reimagining psycho-social space within
prison is currently unfolding in the collaboration between Herman Wallace and artist Jackie Sumell.

What is extraordinary about this project is the web of relationships that the project has restored and created: Wallace’s relation to Sumell and to the wider public that follows his story; his relation to the psychic, social, affective, and aesthetic depths of space; and his relation to a future in which his legal action may be successful, he may be released, and he may be able to dwell in the place he has so meticulously planned and imagined. There is nothing guaranteed about this future, but the relation to even a contingent future may help sustain the depth of the world within prolonged solitary confinement. (Guenther loc.3991)

It is true that these are perhaps the most important successes of the project, given that the project did not ultimately facilitate Wallace’s release. Wallace, after living in solitary confinement for 41 years, was released by a federal judge three days before he died of cancer at 71. The other success will come about when the architectural models are used to produce the home in New Orleans, which Wallace imagined as a home for youth. (*Herman’s House* 2013) While the aesthetic aspects of the project are certainly not its most or only valuable aspects, it is interesting to note the way in which Guenther engages them. What Guenther finds extraordinary about the spatial life that the project takes on for Wallace, she finds extraordinary in contrast to the dream home itself:

Wallace’s plans for the house are quite modest. The house has many windows, but also differentiated rooms or “places.” It is built of natural materials like wood and stone, and it is surrounded by trees, grass with stone pathways, gardens, and even a rooftop greenhouse. In a letter, Wallace explains his priorities: a well-stocked pantry with easy access from the garage for unloading groceries; a bedroom with a fireplace, African art, mirrored ceilings, soft blue light, and a fake-fur bearskin on the king-sized bed; a six-foot-by-nine-foot hot tub (the same size as his current cell); an underground bunker accessible through a trapdoor in the fireplace; and, finally, a swimming pool with a large black panther insignia on the bottom. What is perhaps most remarkable about this “dream home” is that it is not very remarkable at all: not particularly extravagant or large, not unusual or fantastical, just a pleasant and comfortable middle-class house with a large hot tub, a striking swimming pool, and a trapdoor to a bunker. Call the bunker a fallout shelter or a panic room, and drain the black panther image of its political significance, and this could be any number of ordinary U.S. homes built since the 1980s. (Guenther loc.3991)

To remove the black panther from the bottom of the pool of a Black Panther, to rename the bunker as a fallout shelter, to dismiss the relationship between the hot tub and the solitary confinement cell as a part of a ‘comfortable’ home is, it seems, to miss the point. It is to take up Wallace’s work in imagining this house as an exercise, rather than as art. What would have been striking for Guenther, an extravagant house, spacious, unending, would, of course, likely be highly underwhelming. It would be expected within the realm of dream homes and within the unMOVED imagination of what might look like the dialectical opposite of confinement – free range. If we look at the documentary *Herman’s House*, a similar gaze towards the project emerges that asks to be considered beyond one author’s clumsy handling of the project’s details. In the documentary, there is an emphasis on the two ways in which the project attempts to emerge in social space, on the one hand as an art installation, and on the other hand as a community home in New Orleans. That, at the end of filming, and to date, the art installation has
Indeed been a successful extension of the project, while the home has been left articulated in urban space, suggests the ways in which art often serves a function in social space. In this instance, the production of a space for an art that exhibits the conditions of solitary confinement is more readily available in the space of accumulation than the production of a home built on the contents of that exhibits backbone – the sketches and dreams of Wallace.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger establishes a thesis, that he traces through the history of oil painting and advertising images, that the history of art is a history of dominating class relations. (Berger 2008) This relationship between class and the art world can be seen further in the ways which these exhibitions reproduce the social space of accumulation. In the scenes from the documentary that show the exhibitions 2007 opening in New York City, the camera follows Wallace’s mother, who has been flown in to view the exhibit. What is striking in these scenes is the difference between her movements through the exhibit and the movements of the other attendees. Beyond her emotional response to witnessing the space in which her son is kept imprisoned, there is an engagement with the exhibit that denaturalizes the engagement by the white guests who fill the space. Standing in clusters and drinking wine, they are engaging in a practice of art viewing that is legible as such, and which differs in style and comportment from Wallace’s mother, the only black woman visible in the room.

In the project’s reception it is the installation component, the art of Sumell, that has been given the status of art. The other artistic component of the project, the dream home of Wallace’s creation, is often taken up as the concept behind the art, taking on a life as the foil through which to shed light on the issue of solitary confinement. The sketches themselves, in the context of the project’s reception, tend to recede. To be either diminished in their creative value or criticized on the basis of its nonconformity with architectural conceptions of freedom. For Guenther, Wallace’s work is not extraordinary (Guenther 2013).” Within the documentary, critics are more brazen. One prison architect, Jeff Goodale, noting the bourgeois familiarity of the house, offers that if he were in solitary confinement, the type of house he thinks he would want to live in would be built of all glass. Another prison architect, Melissa Farling, seems confused by the fact that there are 6 rooms in the home that aren’t typical rooms. She notes that someone who is not in prison would build a much larger house, with a bowling alley and a media room, seeming to suggest that there is a lack of imagination of what’s possible in the blueprints Wallace has offered. Goodale suggests this as well, remarking that Wallace’s house is full of rooms, and not made of glass, because he is in solitary. It is what he is used to.

While I hope to explore it in the future, I do not have time here to think through the ways in which 30 years spent in solitary confinement might effect a relationship to historical aspects of architecture and design as well as the possibilities of and orientations toward fantasizing – that is, toward the functions of Kant’s imagination, in terms of both a potential stifling and a potential opening. And, despite his very acute relationship to the question of freedom as a black panther locked in a cell for majority of his life, I do not want to prematurely hold up Wallace’s dream home as the epitome of a dream home. However, what I do want to emphasize here are the ways in which the dismissal of Wallace’s dream home as art relate to how it challenges what is
expected as a vision of luxury\textsuperscript{25} – of a fantasy within capitalism and how, in exactly this way, it might emerge as art.\textsuperscript{26}

Bachelard’s final chapter, in which ‘half-open being’ emerges through a philosophy of detail (Bachelard 222), is titled “the dialectics of inside and outside.” The loss of this dialectic, it seems, comes to emerge as the most excruciating within the space of accumulation. On the one hand, there is imprisonment – a perpetual inside, and on the other homelessness, a perpetual outside. It is the first of these that I attempt to take up here, briefly. Taking this space up, aesthetically, and doing so from the understanding of dwelling as an aesthetic ontology, becomes the work of asking after taste and the positive elitism of art as a foundation for life in the face of a social system that uses the aesthetic to produce, naturalize and inflict violence.

Finally, the question becomes what this project, holding within it all of these elements – the space of art, the space of luxury and market accumulation, and the space of enslavement and imprisonment – might tell us about the relationship between these spaces in relationship to the question of the good-life. The project offers up the solitary confinement cell and its other, the dream home- the space of capture and the space of freedom within the frames of everyday life in social space. How these converge, through the art of Wallace, offers us insight into what becomes available as the space for the body in space- an unalienated relationship to the aesthetic dimension within the confines of the space of accumulation – that might offer up the aesthetic as the dimension of the body and of freedom. What Wallace gives us, through this first passing, is an image of a disidentification with luxury. In the dialectics between freedom and non-freedom, his dream home offers a luxury that is of and yet other than the space of accumulation and its, in Guenther’s language, “pleasant and comfortable middle-class house(s).” (Guenther loc.3991)

I hope in a later project to sit with these aspects in more depth – but, broadly, a panther at the bottom of a pool, still and yet, as swimming, perpetually in motion, a hottub the size of a cage, where water, the element of luxury, taken to the apex of its capacity to soothe and not burn, becomes the alternative to the space in which he has been locked. He tries neither to eradicate this space, nor to eradicate walls. It is not the open air floor plan Herman House’s architectural theorist thinks it ought to be. Even in freedom, Wallace’s dream is a dialectical relationship between freedom and unfreedom, between politics and leisure (the black panther at the bottom of the pool) and with the capacity to enter the cell, to be healed by it, to feel the heightened experience of sensuousness within it (the hot tub). Early in the film, we hear Wallace’s voice:

The gardens are the easiest for me to imagine. And I can see they would be certain to be full of gardenias, carnations, and tulips. This is of the utmost importance. I would like for guests to be able to smile and walk through flowers all year long. (Herman’s House 2013)

At the very end of the film, Wallace relays a dream that he had about leaving prison:

I’ve had a dream where I got to the front gate and there’s a whole lot of people out there. And you ain’t going to believe this, but I was dancing my way out. I was doing the jitterbug, I was doing all kinds of crazy stupid-ass shit. And people was just laughing and clapping until I walked out that gate. And I remember that dream. And I turn around and I look and there are all the brothers in the window waving and throwing the fist sign. It

\textsuperscript{25} We can imagine certainly that HGTV’s dream home winners might be disappointed with Wallace’s dream home.

\textsuperscript{26} This is, of course, in addition to the issue, which I also do not have time to explore here, of who is readily taken seriously as an artist. And how we might label the way in which Wallace is taken up here.
was. It’s rough man. It’s so real, you know. I can feel it even now talking about that.
(Herman’s House 2013)
Wallace’s dream home begins for him from the gesture of a smile and his dream of leaving
prison is a dream scored by the sounds of laughter and clapping. Here his own body in space,
dancing, as well the bodies of other men behind a window\(^{27}\), fists in the air, emerge as the body
in space and as a moment of the sensuous body having found space in the space of accumulation.

\(^{27}\) The exclusivity of gender here, we can figure, is based on the gender division of the prison
from which he imagines himself leaving. While it is ‘brothers’ who wave from behind the
window, it is ‘people’ who were laughing and clapping on the other side.
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