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THE CITY BY FOOT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENT PATHS OF LITERARY
WALKERS IN NEW YORK CITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses how, in contemporary urban literature, New York City serves as a mechanism for self-chronicling, a mechanism for self and community production, and a mechanism for self-dissolution. This paper details these phenomena in three separate chapters, utilizing the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau. This paper further explores each of these mechanisms through six separate works – A Walker in The City by Alfred Kazin, The Colossus of New York by Colson Whitehead, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Saffron Foer, City of Glass by Paul Auster, Maggie: A Girl of The Streets by Stephen Crane, and Call It Sleep by Henry Roth.

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Introduction

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Teresa Carpenter's latest project is entitled New York Diaries: 1609-1909. In this book, Carpenter compiles journal entries from native New Yorkers and visitors alike across the span of four centuries. The journal articles Carpenter chooses are fascinating, sometimes humorous, and often emotional. In her preface, Carpenter reveals that each entry she chose serves a "vital purpose," and that purpose is "to transform the New York of postcards, the gray, still abstraction of granite, the denatured Gotham of science fiction, the out-of-time videoscape of crumbling towers, into a living city" (Carpenter xii). This concept of the city gaining agency as a living entity through the narratives of individuals is an essential premise of New York City literature. This agency allows for the construction of narratives where cities have the ability to interact with their inhabitants and is inscribed through providing a means of self-chronicling, self and community production, and self-dissolution in the works of Alfred Kazin, Colson Whitehead, Henry Roth, Jonathon Safran Foer, Stephen Crane, and Paul Auster.

"New York, as it emerges from [Carpenter's] pages is by turn a wicked city, a compassionate city, a muscular city, a vulnerable city, an artistic wonder, an aesthetic disaster, but forever a resilient city" (Carpenter xiv). Perhaps it is the resilience of New York that has consistently made it so intriguing for authors. No matter what trauma or tragedy, New York lives on. Thus, New York literature may be differentiated from other genres through its deference to its setting as a shaper of its characters as opposed to a simple backdrop for their story. Diane Levy defines New York literature as "that where the setting takes precedence over character; where, in fact, the setting rises to the level of protagonist" (Levy 66).

While each of the works addressed in this thesis do indeed have significant protagonists which are not outdone by the city (as Levy suggests), the city does "rise to the level" of a central

character. In these writings, the city becomes personified, incessantly driving the plot and the evolution of the story as a whole. These works also present New York as an entity that exists on the same wide spectrum, from “wicked[ness]” to “compassion,” that Carpenter refers to in her preface. These conflicting images of New York have been represented throughout literary history. According to Levy, the city is simultaneously a “measure of human strength and intelligence – and folly” (Levy 66).

New York City’s unique complexity as a setting that can exacerbate both human “strength” and human “folly” harmonizes with a philosophical view of the city as both man’s creation and man’s creator. While “nature is at best indifferent to man[,] [t]he city, on the other hand, is his creation, and in it he must realize his own salvation or damnation” (Levy 66). Yet, [the city] control[s] his life; it generate[s] his realities and stimulate[s] his unconscious fears and fantasies” (Levy 73). This dichotomy between the city as a place of “salvation” and of “damnation,” as a place that “generates realities” while also independently producing “fears” and “fantasies,” fascinated Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau and influenced them to produce a wide array of theories analyzing the interdependent relationship between the walker and the city.

Through examining New York City literature via the theories of Benjamin and de Certeau, I will analyze New York City’s enigmatic ability to adopt an infinite number of roles in the lives of the characters that dwell in her streets. With these theories, I will address how the city serves simultaneously as a means for self-chronicling, as in Alfred Kazin’s A Walker in the City and Colson Whitehead’s The Colossus of New York; a means for self and community production, as in Henry Roth’s Call it Sleep and Jonathon Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close; and a means for self-dissolution, as in Stephen Crane’s Maggie: Girl of the Streets and Paul Auster’s City of Glass.

The City as a Means of Self-Chronicling

The City is an infinitely multiple text through which every New Yorker narrates their lives. A Walker in the City by Alfred Kazin and The Colossus of New York by Colson Whitehead both pay tribute to this concept. Each text uses the city to drive and create a self-chronicling narrative. To fully understand the impact of these narratives as urban texts, it is exigent to invoke the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel De Certeau. Through the lens of these two theorists, Kazin and Whitehead unfold their journeys as flaneurs in New York City, evolving from walkers in the street to authors *of* the street and of themselves as well.

For Kazin and Whitehead, walking is not merely a physical act; it is a way of being. According to Michel de Certeau, “The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below’, below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city” (158). These “practitioners of the city” walk to experience, walk to rebel and walk to create a relationship with the pavement they tread on. Kazin and Whitehead are what Walter Benjamin refers to as “flaneurs.” The flaneur approaches “city life with a proprietary luster” (Reflections 156). The flaneur owns the streets while remaining an outsider, he rebels against the “bourgeois” and the dominant power structure yet “he seeks refuge in the crowd.... The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city lures the flaneur like a phantasmagora (i.e like a fantastic series of images, as in a dream)” (Reflections 156).

In A Walker In The City, Kazin establishes himself as an outsider in a community of outsiders. His ethnic identity surrounds him in the heavy accents of his immigrant parents and the smells that emanate from the kosher delis and street carts, penetrating through their tenement windows. While Brownsville is Kazin’s home, he feels alienated from his family and his peers – his sanctuary is in the streets. Kazin reminisces on his boyhood stutter:

Only when I was alone in the open air, pacing the roof with pebbles in my mouth, as I had read

Demosthenes had done to cure himself of stammering; or in the street, where all words seemed to flow from the length of my stride and the color of the houses as I remembered the perfect tranquility of a phrase in Beethoven's "Romance in F" I could sing back to myself as I walked – only then was it possible for me to speak without the infinite premeditations and strangled silences I toiled through whenever I got up at school to respond with the expected, the exact answer. It troubled me that I could speak in the fullness of my own voice only when I was alone on the streets, walking about. There was something unnatural about it; unbearably isolated. I was not like the others! I was not like the others! (Kazin 24)

For Kazin, being a flaneur was not a chosen fate. The street chose him, offering him a "cure" for his stutter simply through his "stride" - walking was the existence by which he had to forge his own identity. It is only on the street where he can speak fully, only in his steps that he begins to forge his own story. "I was not like the others! I was not like the others!" he repeats emphatically, embodying the plight of a flaneur who lives forever on the threshold of his community, being interminably present but never truly belonging. Yet, once again in the fashion of flanerie, it is this lack of belonging that drives Kazin to begin his personal relationship with his city and his relationship starts on the very block on which he grew up. "The block: *my* block," Kazin says, noticeably invoking the "proprietary" sense that Benjamin mentions in his description of the flaneur, "It was on the Chester Street side of our house, between the grocery and the back wall of the old drugstore, that I was hammered into the shape of the streets" (Kazin 83).

Both de Certeau and Benjamin discuss the nature of how city spaces are defined. Streets are home to the flaneur, but in a city where everyone engages in flanerie as a form of writing their own narratives, these narratives often have no choice but to intertwine – forming communities, clubs, and what de Certeau refers to as the "collective." "Streets are the dwelling place of the collective.... For this collective, glossy enameled shop signs are a wall decoration as good as, if not better than, an oil painting,... walls with their 'post no bills' are its writing desk,

newspaper stands its libraries, mailboxes its bronze busts, benches its bedroom furniture and the café terrace is the balcony from which it looks down on its household” (Arcades 423). In this analysis, Benjamin explains how “the collective” defines its own city streets. Even though Kazin was often an outsider, he was “hammered into the shapes of the streets” and the community or “collective” that he grew up in also “hammered” the streets into their own unique space. For example, “All bank corners on Pitkin Avenue were gathering places. Even banks that had failed in the depression and had closed their doors forever still kept their fascination for the groups that had always met outside them” (Kazin 36). Just as in Benjamin’s analysis, the Brownsville collective turned the deserted bank corner into the family meeting room. It is with these observations that Kazin enters into a mutual relationship with his city. Yet, Brownsville isn’t enough and was never enough. Kazin longs for more streets.

They published *The World* under the green dome on Park Row overlooking the bridge; the fresh salt air of New York harbor lingered for me in the smell of paint and damp newsprint in the hall. I felt that my father brought the outside straight into our house with each day’s copy of the *World*. The bridge somehow stood for freedom. (Kazin 53)

Kazin sees the bridge as signifying his freedom, providing him with passage into the city that he so admires. Yet, until he crosses the Brooklyn Bridge, his relationship with the city is still one of a secret admirer – he longs from afar but lacks the familiarity of having embraced its routes and avenues. “We were of the city, but somehow not in it.... I saw New York as a foreign city. There, brilliant and unreal, the city had its life, as Brownsville was ours” (Kazin 11).

It is only through reading stories of the history of New York that Kazin can find his own bridge to freedom. This too harmonizes with the flaneur trope. “The anamnestic intoxication in which the flaneur goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge – indeed, of dead facts – as something

experienced and lived through.... The study of...books constituted a second existence, already wholly predisposed toward dreaming; and what the flaneur learned from them took form and figure during an afternoon walk” (Arcades 417). Kazin already experienced the sensory “intoxication” of the city, but it was his “abstract knowledge” of the city that he “experienced and lived through.” It was old stories of Theodore Roosevelt that Kazin was particularly fond of. These books gave him a second existence that connected him to the city, and this existence took “form and figure” as he crossed into the city that had gone from “foreign” to a familiar haven.

Then, among the darkly huddled crowds waiting to go out to the train, looking out on Brooklyn Bridge all dark sweeping cable lines under drifts of snow, I pretended those were gaslights I saw in the streets below, that all old New Yorkers were my fathers, and that the train we waited for could finally take me back – back and back to that old New York of wood and brownstones and iron, where Theodore Roosevelt as Police Commissioner had walked every night (Kazin 90).

Through reading, Kazin felt that he “had at last opened the great trunk of forgotten time in New York,” and that through reading he could absorb the lessons of the city’s past – providing him with the glue he needed to piece together his own identity and his own contribution to the wisdom of the city. Kazin “read as if books would fill [his] every gap, legitimize [his] strange quest for the American past, remedy [his] every flaw, let [him] in at last to the great world that was anything just out of Brownsville” (Kazin 172). Kazin needed these tales of the past because “in the course of the flanerie, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment” (Arcades 419). For Kazin, as with every flaneur, narratives of the past are essential in constructing the city of his present.

Thus, in the course of Kazin’s narrative, time “is not continuous and linear, but spatial; the past is not a time, but a place” (Hazlett 335). The New York of the past is forever superimposed over the New York of Kazin’s present and both New Yorks exist simultaneously,

allowing Kazin to exist in two centuries at once just as he can travel back and forth between Brownsville and Manhattan. This relationship with space, that encompasses not only what presently exists but also everything that has come before it, is cardinal to the life of the flaneur. According to Benjamin, “The space winks at the flaneur: What do you think may have gone on here?” (Arcades 419). With this question, Kazin is consumed.

Beyond! Beyond! *Beyond* was “the city”...*Beyond* was the canvas awnings over an El station in summer. Inside, the florid red windows had curlicues running up and down their borders.... Those windows were richer than all my present...promised to lead me straight into the old New York of gaslight and police stations I always looked for in the lower city.... Dusk in America any time after the Civil War would be the corridor back and back into that old New York under my feet that always left me half-stunned with its audible cries for recognition. The American past was gaslight and oil glaze, the figures painted dark and growing darker each year on the back walls of the Metropolitan. But they had some strange power over my mind as we went down the white steps into Fifth Avenue at the closing bell – the little Greek heralds on top of the traffic boxes gravely waving me on, my own loneliness gleaming back at me as the street lamps shone on their nude gold chests – that would haunt me any time I ever walked down Fifth Avenue again in the first early evening light. (Kazin 89,96)

The teenage Kazin is forever trying to go “beyond” Brownsville. Yet for Kazin, he is going “beyond” to the past. Again, the past has transformed from time to *place*, and is destined *before* him as he rides the “El,” whose “windows were richer than all [his] present.” This “Old New York” cries out to Kazin, demanding recognition and “haunt[ing]” his present. Just as time and history cannot be contained inside generic boundaries, neither can Kazin be contained in Brownsville. Kazin’s interaction with “Old New York” becomes another part of himself that he chronicles through his walking. This space “winks” at Kazin through the flicker of the gaslight on the street, playfully reminding him that he can never neglect the times and places that create New York city, just as New York City will not neglect to provide Kazin with the streets and avenues that carry his feet “beyond,” comprising his narrative. It is this evolution of Kazin’s

relationship with the city that allows him to finally own the streets in a city that he used to consider “foreign,” just as the streets own him. Upon spotting half-century old pictures of “skaters in central park, a red muffler flying in the wind; a gay crowd moving round and round Union Square Park; horse cars charging between the brownstones of lower Fifth Avenue at dusk” Kazin finally embraces New York City as *his* just as he had embraced Brownsville so long ago, “I could not believe my eyes. Room on room they had painted *my* city, *my* country” (Kazin 95).

Kazin weaves together these strands of his past as a grown man. He has returned to Brownsville to visit his history. Kazin’s work is disjointed and difficult to follow chronologically, as it largely exists in the realm of memory. As Kazin builds the world of his childhood, he demonstrates how he and the city are woven of the same cloth – sharing a common history. For instance, Kazin tells us that his mother’s “left hand had been pierced through when as a girl she had worked in the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on the East Side. A needle had gone straight through the palm, severing a large vein” (Kazin 68). The infamous fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was an event that significantly altered the narrative of the New York collective, and thus of the city itself. Yet, it also altered the narrative of his mother’s life and transformed the dialogue of his familial history. In this instance, Kazin’s memory *was* the memory of New York.

As an adult, Kazin steps out from the ‘El’ platform, as he had done so many times in his youth. As soon as he sets foot on the Brownsville sidewalk, “the street conducts the flaneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward – if not to mythical mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding.... It always remains the time of a childhood. But why that of the life he has lived? The asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance” (Arcades 416). Indeed, that Brownsville street did return Kazin

to the childhood of “the life he has lived,” and as his steps pass over the asphalt that had been his for so long (so long ago) he awakens the memory of his childhood Brownsville. Yet, this memory is a tangible space that superimposes itself over the Brownsville of the present, just as Teddy Roosevelt’s “Old New York” had superimposed itself over the New York that Kazin first embraced. In the “new” Brownsville, used furniture stores had replaced all of the old shops. Yet, in Kazin’s words, “walking past what had once been the candy store, I tasted all the old sweetness of malted milks on my tongue.... Going past what had once been the rummage shop I could feel in my pocket the touch of all the hand-me-down Frank and Dick Merriwells I had bought there for a nickel each” (Kazin 113). In these moments, the Brownsville of Kazin’s childhood is as real and current as the Brownsville of the present.

As a flaneur, Kazin walked to live and according to Benjamin, “to live means to leave traces” (Reflections 155). Benjamin defines “trace” as the “appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be” (Arcades 447). As Kazin walks, he collects the traces that he left behind, bringing him “near[er]” to the world of his memory. In doing this, Kazin creates a cohesive narrative of himself that has come full-circle, chronicling his life and occasionally sealing in loose ends with the help of the city itself.

Whitehead’s collection of essays, in The Collosus of New York, also embodies the spirit of the flaneur. As opposed to being a narrative of a single individual, Whitehead’s essays narrate trips to single locations – such as Central Park and Grand Central Station – and significant events – such as the Subway ride – that are essential to the experience of New York. His nameless subjects relive his own experiences within the city. He leaves them nameless, perhaps, to establish New York City as the sole protagonist in his musings. Each of his subjects, and all of his fellow New Yorkers, are flaneurs “on the threshold of the city.” Whitehead addresses New

Yorkers as a collective body. Their commonality emerges because they are each initially presented with the same city and the same “charter,” yet they live in a city of their own creation.

Walter Benjamin says that the flaneur “seeks refuge in the crowd.... The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city lures the flaneur” (Reflections 156). As Whitehead addresses a fellow flaneur on the Brooklyn Bridge, he tells him to “Disappear into a crowd. It’s right there in the city charter: we have the right to disappear.... It’s the law” (Whitehead 61). This hyperbolized “charter” unifies New Yorkers into a collective – one that lives by “the law[s]” of the city. Benjamin defines the collective as “an eternally unquiet, eternally agitated being that – in the space between the building fronts – experiences, learns, understands, and invents. For this collective, glossy enameled shop signs are a wall decoration...better than, an oil painting in the drawing room of a bourgeois” (Arcades 423). Whitehead’s collective New Yorkers exist to challenge their own version of the bourgeois, “agitated” by the dominating forces that wish to control them.

In *Walking in The City*, de Certeau also discusses the concept of walking as a form of rebellion. Through walking, New Yorkers “link acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions...emptying out and wearing away [a space’s] primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied” (Walking 162). With this sentiment, de Certeau declares that the walkers and flaneurs of New York City should redefine the spaces that have been controlled, created, or regulated by the dominant hierarchy. This can be accomplished by engaging in their everyday practices, which in turn “liberate” and “invent spaces” (Walking 163).

On the Brooklyn Bridge, Whitehead encourages his fellow New Yorkers to engage in their own rebellions: “Sit a spell to appreciate. According to ancient calculations, municipal commissions decide where to place the benches. But they have always tried to regulate your

views. As they sit there listlessly gazing, none suspect his palm cups her ass beneath denim” (Whitehead 57). In this excerpt, Whitehead recognizes that the dominant hierarchy, embodied by “municipal commissions, decid[ed] where to place the benches” as yet another way to “tr[y] to regulate your views.” Yet, through the natural and rebellious practices of “his palm cup[ing] her ass beneath denim,” the space is liberated and thus occupied by the couple taking a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge.

Through the act of walking, this same rebellious couple composes their own self-chronicling narrative. Their steps serve in place of pens, “their bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (Walking 161). De Certeau recognizes the existence of these texts from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, a “stage of concrete, steel and glass.” From his perch, he declares, “the tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric” (Walking 157). By granting New York City skyscrapers the communicative power of letters, de Certeau recognizes that the city is a text.

Yet, this “gigantic rhetoric” is constantly being rewritten by the flaneurs on the city streets. Tamar Katz describes Whitehead’s work as “an expansion of oral history, which took the memories and narratives of ordinary people as the basis for telling history from below” (Katz 816). By invoking the term “history from below,” Katz directly references de Certeau, who declares that the true authors of the city exist on the streets far below his “stage” on the 110th floor of the World Trade Center. De Certeau presents this contrast between the walkers “down below” and his perch atop the World Trade Center as a way of discounting the rich New York oligarchy who often believe that they can run the city and write its narrative from their corner offices and penthouses above the streets through the forces of money and political power. De Certeau presents these elites as attempting to confine the ordinary people “down below” into

regulated spaces of the city. However, de Certeau asserts that this confinement cannot occur as long as long as they are walking “down below” – defining their own spaces and writing their own narratives as opposed to being confined within ones that have been prescribed to them. This assertion of de Certeau’s is reflected throughout Whitehead’s narratives, where “ordinary people” engage in the “rhetoric of walking,” where “the art of ‘turning’ phrases finds an equivalent in an art of composing a path” (Walking 161).

He wish[es] that every step he ever took left a neon footprint. Every step, from his first to these. That way he could catch up with himself, track himself through city and years. See that the last time he walked this block he was tipsy or in love. Here determined, there aimless like today, no particular place to go. If he could see his footprints, he’d know his uncharted territories, what was yet, and where never to return. (Whitehead 45)

De Certeau says that, through walking, people create their own narrative. Yet, as the participating writers they will never be able to read their work, unable to ever take a totalizing viewpoint of their experience because it is forever changing. In this passage, Whitehead laments this inability of an individual flaneur to read the rhetoric of his steps. Thus, in a form of post-modern ‘meta-literature,’ Whitehead creates this narrative for his unnamed subject. He turns his steps down Broadway into “neon footprints” and creates a readable text. Back on the Brooklyn Bridge, Whitehead points out the discrepancy between the solid “bronze plaques” dedicated to the history of the city, while there is “nothing to commemorate the magic spots of people.” Indeed, this bridge had proven to provide “magic,” or at least moments of prophetic significance, for those walkers in the city. “A couple of years ago he stopped in this very spot, shook his fist at indifferent skyline and declared, you can’t break me. Now he has two kids and a corner office. The day after their first night together they walked across the bridge, seeking its blessing” (Whitehead 57).

While Whitehead cannot chronicle all of the moments and footsteps of each person in the city, he does explain how each New Yorker creates a city unto themselves. These personal cities exist as each individual's narrative, with the ability to create plaques that commemorate their own histories. Whitehead's first essay in this compilation is entitled *City Limits*. With *City Limits*, Whitehead endows his reader with his own narrative and the wisdom he has acquired spending a lifetime as a flaneur on the New York City streets.

I started building my New York on the uptown No. 1 train. My first city memory is of looking out a subway window as the train erupted from the tunnel on the way to 125th street and palsied onto the elevated tracks. It's the early seventies, so everything is filthy. Which means everything is still filthy, because that is my city and I'm sticking to it. I still call it the Pan Am Building, not out of affectation, but because that's what it is. For that new transplant from Des Moines, who is starting her first week of work at a Park Avenue South insurance firm, that titan squatting over Grand Central is the Met Life Building, and for her it always will be. She is wrong, of course – when I look up there, I clearly see the gigantic letters spelling out Pan Am, don't I? And of course I am wrong, in the eyes of the old-timers who maintain the myth that there was a time before Pan Am. (Whitehead 8-9)

With this presentation of his own New York, “Whitehead's text introduces the figure of urban memory in ways that give it a peculiar power to construct a city in which the past is present in more than individuated, subjective terms: the past appears a collective, contentious structure embodied in New York City's built environment” (Katz 822). The New York City that Whitehead lives in can simultaneously support the Met Life building, the Pan Am building, and whatever structure came before it. These three buildings coexist as part of a collective structure. Yet, in Whitehead's individuated New York, only the Pan Am building exists, with no room for a predecessor. Yet, Whitehead's city will always be at odds with the “new transplant from Des Moines.”

There are eight million naked cities in this naked city – they dispute and disagree. The New

York City you live in is not my New York City; how could it be? This place multiplies when you're not looking. We move over here, we move over there. Over a lifetime, that adds up to a lot of neighborhoods, the motley construction material of your jerry-built metropolis. Your favorite newsstands, restaurants, movie theaters, subway stations and barbershops are replaced by your next neighborhood's favorites. It gets to be quite a sum. Before you know it, you have your own personal skyline. (Whitehead 9-10)

While this "personal skyline" certainly documents personal memory, "it does not promise a shared city quite like the one in the history books, it produces a multiplying and very material urban past that lives on into the present" (Katz 826). Like Kazin's New York, the "8 million cities" are constantly present, simply superimposing themselves over one another, as well as of the cities of the flaneurs of the past. According to Whitehead, "You start building your private New York the first time you lay eyes on it" but "No matter how long you have been here, you are a New Yorker the first time you say, That used to be Munsey's, or that used to be the Tic Toc Lounge... You are a New Yorker when what was there before is more real and solid than what is here now" (Whitehead 8). Just as it was for Kazin, the New York of Whitehead's past is not a linear history; it is instead a place unto itself.

Each New Yorker in Whitehead's chronicles is taking a place in this system as they design their own skyline. "The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story...shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces" (de Certeau 158). Yet, as with Kazin's New York, The city is what provides cohesion to each individual's story. The city exists in symbiotic relationship with those that create and inhabit it. To live in the city "means to leave traces," and each occupant acquires traces from the city as well (Reflections 155).

You say you know these streets pretty well? The city knows you better than any living person because it has seen you when you are alone.... Consider what all your old apartments would say

if they got together to swap stories.... Cherish your old apartments and pause for a moment when you pass them. Pay tribute, for they are the caretakers of your reinventions. (Whitehead 11-12)

Whitehead refers to past apartments as being the “caretakers of your reinventions.” While New York is a city with more people than apartments, these moments of reinvention exist in a private conversation between the occupant and the city, each leaving its “trace” on the other. It is with this sentiment that de Certeau says “[street] names articulate a sentence that... steps compose without knowing it.... These names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by” (Walking 162). One apartment or one bench on the Brooklyn Bridge could serve as the “caretaker of the reinventions” of millions of New Yorkers. So, it is with each individual’s steps that they compose the street names, and each one derives their own meaning each time they pass through the streets that comprise their New York.

Through the works of Kazin and Whitehead, the quiddity of the “practitioner of the city” is revealed. By analyzing the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau, the means through which each author grants agency to a world where New Yorkers walk as a necessary method of forging an interdependent relationship with the city streets is elucidated. Each of these walkers takes on the identity of the flaneur, chronicling their own lives through the avenues and subway routes – not only of their New York, but also of the New York that existed for the “practitioners” that came before them.

The City as a Means of Self & Community Production

As established in the previous chapter, the city is an infinitely multiple text through which New Yorkers narrate their lives. However, these texts and narrations are not inherently autonomous – they intermingle, altering each other and the city itself as paths cross and lives change. According to the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau, it is the intermingling of these narratives, the ability of the flaneur to actualize and invent possibilities within the city, and the walker’s ability to compose and produce himself through city objects and history that allows the city to be a source of both self and community production. These ideas can be granted agency through analyzing Jonathon Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close and Henry Roth’s Call it Sleep.

Call it Sleep is a tale of a young boy’s quest for familial love and self-definition in Pre-World-War-One New York City. The narrator introduces David upon his arrival to the shores of Ellis Island as a 17-month-old baby in his mother’s arms. As the ship approaches the Island in the preface, the narrator documents David’s mother, Genya, as she witnesses the skyline of her new home – “Before her, the grimy cupolas and towering square walls of the city loomed up. Above the jagged rooftops, the white smoke, whitened and suffused by the slanting sun, faded into the slots and wedges of the sky. She pressed her brow against her child’s, hushed him with whispers. This was the vast incredible land, the golden land of freedom, of immense opportunity, that golden land” (Roth 16).

The mother and son had embarked on their journey from Austria to New York City, where they would meet Albert, the harsh and angry father and husband who had forged the path ahead to the new world. The pair had previously only held witness to the hills and greenery of their homeland – an entirely foreign world to the streets and avenues of New York City. Yet, by

the end of the novel, David is an eight-year-old member of the “sidewalk-and-gutter generation” (as deemed by his Rabbi), and it is these sidewalks and gutters that help David in his journey of self-production and eventually the production of a community in his mother’s “golden land.”

Early in the novel, Albert remarks, “When you come out of a house and step on the bare earth among the fields you’re the same man you were when you were inside the house. But when you step out on pavements, you’re someone else. You can feel your face change” (Roth 32). In this vein, the city serves as an agent for David’s change and growth in a manner that no other place could. David, as with the protagonists discussed before him, is a young flaneur. He is a quiet child with a strong bond to his mother and little tie to those his own age. He often finds himself an outsider, looking in on the games and antics of the other children on the street with no distinct desire to participate. On one particularly fateful afternoon, David had a scuffle with another child on his block. A blow from David sent the other boy falling to the sidewalk and David fled the scene in terror. Yet, it was not long until the city opened up to provide David with a distraction to his troubles and a quandary through which David must further grapple with his existence and, in doing so, continue his journey of personal growth.

At the next corner he stopped with a cry of delight and gazed about him. Telegraph poles! Why hadn’t he come here before? On each side of the street, they stretched away, the wires on their crosses swinging into the sky. The street was wide, divided by a seamed and frozen mudgutter. At one end, the houses thinned out, faltering into open fields. The weathered poles crowded up the hill of distance into a sheen of frayed cloud. He laughed, filling his eyes with dappled reach, his lungs with heady openness, they go way and away...way, way, way...cold follow... they dropped behind him. Three...four...five...six...drew near, floated by in silence like tall masts. Seven...eight...Nine...Ten...He stopped counting them, and with them, dwindling in the past, all he feared, all he loathed and fled from: Luter, Annie, the cellar, the boy on the ground. (Roth 93)

This is one of the first instances that David reveals himself as a true flaneur. In running away from the fallen boy on his block whom he fears he has killed, David is also running away

from the totality of his troubles, including his dad's boss Luter- who has a propensity to make unwanted advances toward Genya – and his upstairs neighbor Annie – who forced David to touch her “knish” against his will and to his utter dismay. Yet, the telegraph polls offer David a sense of freedom and sanctuary. In describing the flaneur, Walter Benjamin says, “An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum... ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name” (Arcades 417). It is this “magnetism of the next street corner,” that draws David along through the telegraph lines. This is the first time in the novel where David experiences happiness in the absence of his mother. The quest to follow the telegraph lines makes David laugh, “filling his eyes with dappled reach [and] his lungs with heady openness.” As a true flaneur, it is only the city streets that can rid David of his troubles. As he passes each telegraph poll “all he feared, all he loathed and fled from” slipped away – leaving only David and the “magnetism” of the street.

Yet, eventually David finds himself at the end of the telegraph polls in utterly unfamiliar territory – he is lost with no recourse for finding his way back home. He stumbles along the sidewalks, asking for help but unable to properly pronounce his own street name. David quickly reaches a stage of hopelessness, and when one elderly woman delivers him to the local police station against his express pleas, he enters into an existential crisis – convincing himself that no one is to be trusted and that he will never see his mother again. David's head spins further into the depths of fear and loathing for himself, his family, the police, and the boys on the street until his mother walks through the door. Her appearance pulls him away from his most base concerns and he is able to consider other, less distressing modes for interpreting the human condition. It is moments like these, where David is forced to grapple with his very mode of existence, that lead

David to a greater understanding of himself and his relationship with the city around him. He carries his memories and realizations with him – each one influencing his decisions and helping him on his path to self-production.

As David grows older, his relationship with the streets matures, but the moments of joy they give him continue - “Let other boys boast of prolonged visits to the seashore or to the mountains or to camps. For him the mere passing of time was a joy. The body was aware of a lyric indolence, a golden lolling within itself. He felt secure at home and in the street – that was all the activity he asked” (Roth 262). The sea and the country mean nothing to David; as a true flaneur, “he seeks refuge in the crowd.... The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city lures the flaneur like a phantasmagora” (Reflections 156). For David, the crowded streets provide a level of security and dream-like hope that neither the mountains nor the ocean could replicate. And, what David needs, the streets provide.

As David gets older, his world expands in many ways. First, his family moves from their original apartment in Brownsville to the Lower East Side – providing him with a new set of streets to traverse. Then, David’s parents decide to send him to “cheder,” a Hebrew school where he is expected to learn about his Judaism and chant the texts of his ancestors. This new world comes with new fascinations – David is entranced by the stories in his ancient Hebrew books and the enigmatic concept of the divine. For David, learning to read ancient scripture changes the way he reads the streets themselves. One Passover, David is sent to perform the ritualistic tradition of burning the wooden spoon that had been used to clean the last of the “chometz” (bread products) from the house. The fire he initially desires to offer his spoon to is acrimoniously extinguished by an Italian street-sweeper, so David is propelled to find a place to light his own fire in order to burn away the last of that year’s bread. As if providing elucidation

from god himself, the city seems to present David with the answer to his prayers – the East River.

The uncommon quiet excited him. Beneath him and under his palms, the dry, splintering timbers radiated warmth. And beneath them, secret unseen and always faintly sinister, the tireless lipping of water among the piles. Before him the river and to the right, the long grey bridges spanning it... A cloud sheared the sunlight from the wharf; his back felt cooler; the wind sharpened... [and] smokestacks on the other bank darkened slowly, fluting filmy distance with iron grey shadow.... His gaze shifted to the left. As the cloud began to pass, a long slim lath of sunlight burned silver on the water.... Gee, didn't see before! Widened to a swath, a lane, widened. Like a ship just went... a plain, flawless sheer as foil to the serried margins. His eyes dazzled. Fire on the water. White. His lids grew heavy. In the water she said. White. Brighter than day. Whiter. And he was. Minutes passed while he stared. The brilliance was hypnotic. He could not take his eyes away. His spirit yielded, emitted into light. In the molten sheen memories and objects overlapped. Smokestacks fused to palings flickering in silence...it was as though he had seen it in another world, a world that once left could not be recalled. All that he knew about it was that it had been complete and dazzling. (Roth 247-248)

At a moment when our young protagonist desired nothing more than to fulfill his religious duty, the city was able to provide him with a religious experience. “White. Brighter than day,” was how his mother had explained God to him. And, in this instance, David believes that God presented himself to him. While David is still engrossed in this moment of religious realization, several boys approach – exhibiting a level of threatening inquiry about David’s activities that frightens him. They ask him what he is doing out of school and, regardless of his neoteric realization of faith, he decides that it would not be wise to tell them that he is Jewish. Initially, the boys don’t believe his excuses – suspecting that he really is Jewish and attempting to rough him up all the same. Eventually, the leader steps in and informs David that if he follows them to the car tracks and joins them in some abstruse affair, they will release him. The leader had been carrying a thin strip of sheet metal, and as they approach the tracks he passes this

possession to David and instructs him to place it on the tracks, connecting the two rails. David completes this task and for the second time that afternoon, he sees a light brighter than any he had ever imagined – this time of his own production. It entrances and enthralls him – providing the schema for his ultimate fateful afternoon at the rails, which offers David the agency to be born again at the culmination of the story. On this afternoon, David’s “spirit yielded,” becoming one with the light and with the city itself. The “fire on the water” and the light on the rails welcomed David into the world of all the ‘memories’ and ‘objects’ of New York – a brief insight into the “complete and dazzling” repertoire of all the narratives and texts contained in New York City.

This ‘repertoire’ is what de Certeau might refer to as “an ensemble of possibilities organize[d by] spatial order” (Practice 103). According to de Certeau, “the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge” (Practice 103). Thus, while the city provided David with the “spatial order” that granted him the possibility to have his experience at the river, it was David that actualized that possibility. To anyone else that afternoon, The East River was the plain body of water it had always been, but to David it was an awakener of faith and provider of insight. From then on, the city was brighter to David than it had been before. His faith provided him with a new trope to read the city and the city provided him with new light to help him grow.

Gee! Used to be darker. Funny. Gee! Look! Look! Is a light! In the corner where baby carriages-
no. Looks like though. On the stairs too. Ain’t really there. Inside my head. Better is inside. Can
carry it. Funny! Ain’t so dark anyway. Ain’t even scared. Remember how I was? Way long ago?
Scared. Used to run up bing bang biff. Hee! Hee! Funny I was. I’m big now. Can go up alone.
Can go up slow, slow, slow as I like. Can even stand here and don’t even care. Even between the
windows, even if nobody’s in the toilet, even if nobody’s in the whole house. Don’t even care.
I’m big now, that’s why.... Funny. Still can see it. There. And over there. And over in the corner
where its real dark. It sticks inside all the time, gee can’t never be scared. Never. (Roth 261)

The city is made brighter by a light that David knows to be “inside [his] head.” Yet, the city gave this light to him through his experience at The East River. This light strips away his fears and allows him a new sense of independence and maturity, and with it, he can “never be scared.” Thus, the city provides David with an opportunity for self-enhancement or self-production, yet still maintains the security of the streets that he holds so dear.

Beyond the flaneur’s ability to make possibilities exist or emerge, de Certeau says, “he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements...the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else” (Practice 103). For David, the roof of his apartment building is an inhabitable space of his own invention – providing him with the opportunity to “transform spatial elements.” The roof was forbidden ground for David and was just one floor above his mother’s kitchen – making rooftop shenanigans a risky endeavor. Yet, in a search to create a space for his own escape, David braved the steps to the roof of his building – and suddenly, the space was his.

When David thought of the roof the next morning, he thought of it with so peculiarly selfish a joy that it kept him from thinking any further. The roof, that precinct in the sky, that silent balcony on the pinnacle of turmoil, demanded that what thoughts one had be had there. He culled them, sorted out what he would think when he got up there – he would allow them to blossom once he had climbed up the stairs. And a little while later he was there. What sounds from the street, what voices drifted up the airshafts, only made his solitude more real, the detachment of his reveries more delightful. (Roth 299)

The roof was a space of David’s own creation. Through rebelling against the idea of the roof as a forbidden zone and instead embracing it as a personal sanctuary, David became what de Certeau refers to as a “practitioner of the city.” He “open[ed] meanings and directions...wearing away [the roof’s] primary role...liberat[ing] the space [so] that it [could] be occupied.” David’s rooftop escapades allowed him to “articulat[e] a second poetic geography on top of the

geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning” (Walking 162). This “second poetic geography,” is part of the world that David creates for himself, which – while filled with trials and tribulations – in turn helps David produce who he will become.

It is on the roof where David meets Leo, an older boy whose blonde hair and blue eyes alert David to his status as a “goy,” yet who intrigues David and forces him on a journey toward self discovery. Leo appears to have complete independence. His father passed away when he was a young child, forcing his mother to work all day and largely leaving Leo to his own devices. David is fascinated by Leo’s mode of operation – his perceived invincibility because of the “Katolick” amulet that he wears about his neck, his roller-skating liberation and his ability to eat whatever he wants, whenever he wants. In a quest to please Leo, David reveals to him that he has two attractive cousins who live in the back of his Aunt’s candy store. Leo is instantly intrigued. Lording David’s admiration over him, Leo convinces his younger companion to take him to the candy store. David unwittingly becomes an accomplice to Leo’s eventual ‘crimes’ against his cousin Esther. Esther and Leo are caught in an inappropriate exchange and David’s world begins to fall apart.

When Esther’s father Nathan finds out what has happened, he storms over to David’s apartment on a mission to inform Albert of his son’s discretion. Upon arriving on Avenue D and witnessing Albert’s already present rage, Nathan aborts his mission and comes up with an alternate excuse for his actions, relying on the help of his wife’s quick tongue. Yet, David’s father cannot be fooled and Albert proceeds to hold the apartment hostage in terror. In agonizing fear, David begins to inform his father of what had happened. Upon hearing just a few words from David, Albert enters a state of blind fury and the other adults in the apartment restrain him so that David can run free to the street. “The street. The street. He dared to breathe. And

stumbled to the sidewalk and stood there, stood there” (Roth 403). It was this chain of events – from discovering his rooftop sanctuary, to befriending Leo, to incurring the wrath of his father – that forced David into the streets for a journey of ultimate self and community production.

On his previous outing to The East River, David had been shown how to create the type of divine light that he sought within himself through putting a strip of sheet metal on the nearby car tracks. In his moment of desperation and exile, he sought out that light once more. De Certeau ponders, “What does travel ultimately produce if it is not... the discovery of relics and legends? What this walking exile produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one’s own vicinity” (Practice 107). For David, his travels had produced the discovery of light and, in his “walking exile,” he searches for “the body of legends” that he cannot find in his father’s home.

The narration of David’s feverish departure from the corner of 9th street and Avenue D is one of disjointed multi-accented conversations, interspersed between David’s brief subconscious spurts of thought. De Certeau posits, “To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that is to be sure, broken up into countless deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric (Practice 113-114). Certainly as David flees his house he “lack[s] a place” and is “in search of a proper.” However, the various accented dialects of the several conversations that David overhears on his way to the tracks pose another question – one of the displacement inherent to the life of an immigrant. Doesn’t the immigrant “lack a place?” Isn’t the immigrant forever in the “indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper?” David’s walk through the streets

that evening does indeed provide him with an “immense social experience,” where it becomes obvious that all those around him lack a place as well. All of the disjointed voices and exiled beings suddenly merge when David fails in his endeavor to produce the light on the rails and his unconscious body lies burned on the car tracks.

W’at? W’ut?” “va-at?” “Ga blimey!” “w’atsa da ma?” The street paused. Eyes, in a myriad of eyes, gay or sunken rheumy, yellow or clear, slant, blood shot, hard, boozy or bright swerved from their tasks, their play, from faces, newspapers, dishes, cards, seidels, valves, sewing machines, swerved and converged. While at the foot of Tenth Street, a quaking splendor dissolved the cobbles, the grimy structures, bleary stables, the dump-heap, river and sky into a single cymbal-clash of light. Between the livid jaws of the rail, the dipper twisted and bounced, consumed in roaring radiance, condaltescent – “hey!” (Roth 419)

In this passage, all of the accented voices unanimously express their mutual concern for David. A neighborhood that had once been so divided by ethnicity, formerly composed of conflicts between Italian street cleaners and Jewish butchers, comes together to save the boy on the tracks. Kremena Tordova notes Roth’s “Play between the urbanites’ different accents, on one hand, and their celebration of a common goal, on the other” (Tordova 265). In their compassion for David, the exiled and displaced immigrants by The East River become a community. De Certeau expresses that as individual walkers come together and form a collective, they are “compensated” for their plight “by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric” (Practice 113-114). In Call it Sleep, this community, or “urban fabric,” emerges from the intertwined texts and narratives of immigrant New Yorkers; each helping each other toward a common goal and, in turn, producing a community.

The concept of language plays a very interesting role in the narration of this scene. Upon witnessing a policeman and an ambulance return David to his home, Genya is distraught and incapable of understanding the doctor’s English instruction. Yet, neighboring women gather to

help Genya with translations. Eventually, even the doctor himself tries to break through the language barrier. “Now make him some tea,” instructs the doctor. “Teh, Mrs Schearl...Geh mach teem teh,” translates a woman from the hall. “Teh?” “Yes! Teh!” the doctor says – now in Genya’s own dialect. “Quick!” (Roth 436). Tordova brings to attention that “this is the first time that a non-Jew tries to speak Yiddish in Call it Sleep” (Tordova 267). In a similar motion toward solidarity, Albert acknowledges David as his son to the officer in his own broken English – a rare occurrence where Albert uses “English in a non-threatening way” and makes a “gesture of reconciliation” toward his son (Tordova 267). In this instance, “speech becomes the medium for what Roth calls ‘building a picture of any society or city’” (Tordova 258).

Thus, in David’s initially selfish attempt to re-ignite the light that had so aided in his growth and self-production, he produced a community as well. Perhaps the fact that he sought that light from the car tracks was a byproduct of his flanerie. According to Benjamin “building projects of the nineteenth century – railroad stations, exhibition halls, department stores – all have matters of collective importance as their objective. The flaneur feels drawn to these “despised, everyday” structures. In these constructions, “the appearance of great masses on the stage of history was already foreseen” (Arcades 455). For those around him, the car tracks were “building projects of the nineteenth century” and constituted “despised, everyday structures,” yet David was drawn to them just the same – viewing the tracks as a mystical space. David sought out a place designated for “great masses.” And, with his accident, David took a “great mass” and formed a great community.

When David’s mother finally asks him what he was doing by the tracks, his answer is “I don’t know...and the answer was true. He couldn’t tell now why he had gone, except that something had forced him, something that was clear then and inevitable, but that every passing

minute made more inarticulate” (Roth 437). It seems that this “force” is the force of the city. The city drew David in, driving him toward self and community production, and he succeeded in both. As David recalls the events of the evening, he says,

It was only toward sleep that ears had power to cull again and reassemble the shrill cry, the hoarse voice, the scream of fear, the bells, the thick-breathing, the roar of crowds and all sounds that lay fermenting in the vats of silence and the past. It was only toward sleep one knew himself still lying on the cobbles. Felt the cobbles under him, and over him and scuddling ever toward him like a black foam, the perpetual blur of shod and running feet, the broken shoes, new shoes, stubby, pointed, caked, polished, bunions, pavement beveled, lumpish, under skirts, under trousers, shoes, over one and thorough one, and feel them all and feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence. (Roth 441)

This “triumph” and “acquiescence” comes after David is saved by items that compose his beloved city, and in turn compose his new self. He observes the disembodied “broken shoes, new shoes...pavement bevelled [and] under trousers” as coming to his rescue in the form of the city itself. David has a revelation that, not only did he find self-fulfillment from the events of the day, but that he created a sense of fulfillment and community in those around him. Thus, for David, the city provided a means for endless self and community production.

A century after David’s story takes place, Jonathon Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close follows 9-year-old Oskar Schell in a similar fashion. While David had trolley cars on the Lower East Side and Oskar rides in limos on the Upper West Side, the two protagonists share many more commonalities than one would initially expect. Like David, Oskar embarks on a mission of self-fulfillment and self-production through embracing the ways of the flaneur and traversing the city streets. Also like David, Oskar is able to engage in self and community production through utilizing the interwoven texts of the city, actualizing and inventing possibilities within the city space, and composing and producing his new self through

incorporating objects and history of the city into his narrative.

This novel is a story of post 9/11 New York and one child's journey to come to terms with his father's death in the Twin Towers. Oskar is intelligent beyond his years, a fact that makes him an outsider amongst his peers but drew him ever closer to his father when he was alive. Oskar's fondest memories of his dad include looking for mistakes in the New York Times, listening to foreign tongues come across their short wave radio and going on elaborate treasure hunts through Central Park. Once his father passes away, Oskar feels lost and alone. One evening, while rifling through his father's closet, Oskar finds a blue vase with a key inside of it and an envelope with the word "Black" scrawled on it's front. Oskar embarks on a journey to find the lock that matches his key in an attempt to keep his dad close and gain closure.

After consulting the manager at an art supply store, Oskar is informed that "Black" is most likely a person's last name. At that moment, Oskar decides to talk to everyone in the city with the last name Black, and thus begins his adventure through and relationship with New York City. According to Benjamin, "The city is the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth. It is this reality to which the flaneur, without knowing it, devotes himself" (Arcades 429). While Oskar believes that his quest to speak with every Black in the city emerged out of devotion to his father, it transforms into a pilgrimage resulting from his devotion to the city itself.

As with every flaneur or "walker" discussed thus far, Oskar is an outsider. His Father's death eliminated the one person that made him feel truly at home. Oskar's circumstances call to mind de Certeau's assertion that "To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that

is...compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name, The City” (Practice 113-114). Oskar indeed walks because he “lack[s] a place” – a place that he hopes to find when he locates the lock that matches his key. Initially, Oskar associates this lack of place with a lack or uncertainty of his own identity. “I took a step forward, and it was my first time in Queens. I walked through Long Island City, Woodside, Elmhurst and Jackson Heights. I shook my tambourine the whole time, because it helped me remember that even though I was going through different neighborhoods, I was still me” (Foer 58). Without his father and without his “place,” Oskar is uncertain of who he *is* and must cling to his tambourine to maintain some semblance of identity. Yet, the city helps Oskar uncover and produce his identity throughout the course of the novel. Oskar finds solace in the communal memory of all the Blacks. He eventually builds himself a new New York City, constructed of the text he composes with each of his footsteps as he walks from Black residence to Black residence.

While Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close is largely about embracing the city experience as a way of forming community, Oskar’s journey allows him to engage in self-production as well. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Oskar has been scared. He’s scared of elevators, public transportation, tall buildings, large civic structures – anything that he considers to be an ‘easy target.’ Yet, his desire to speak to Abe Black pushes him to ride the ferry, and his necessity to speak with Ruth Black pushes him to conquer his biggest fear and climb to the top of the Empire State Building. Each of these acts is one more step toward Oskar redefining who he is in a post 9/11 New York and taking his life back from the fear that has engulfed him for so long.

While Michel de Certeau wrote *Walking in the City* long before September 11th 2001, there are many interesting parallels between the works of de Certeau and Foer. For instance,

Walking in the City begins at the “summit of the World Trade Center,” the symbol of the new era in Foer’s work. Additionally, much of de Certeau’s discussion of viewing the city from the top of the World Trade Center is reflected in Foer’s scene on the observation deck of the Empire State Building.

To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp. One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators.... It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god.... It’s hard to be down when you’re up. (Walking 157)

On the observation deck of the Empire State building, Oskar also feels as though he has been “lifted out of the city’s grasp...no longer clasped by the streets.” Oskar remarks, “you can see what [New York is] really like, instead of how it feels when you’re in the middle of it” (Foer 156). It is interesting that Oskar feels this way. De Certeau recognizes that it’s “nice” to have a panoramic view of the city so that one may “read it as a text,” just as Oskar “see[s] the most beautiful things from the observation deck of the Empire State Building,” and “reads” the “little people,” “little cars,” and “little buildings” and “all of the locks [he] tried to open, and the 161,999,831 that [he] hadn’t yet” (Foer 156). However, de Certeau also states that it is the people down below, the walkers and flaneurs, who are the “true practitioners” of the city. Thus, the bulk of Oskar’s self and community production is accomplished when he is “possessed” by the streets down below, as opposed to observing them from the loneliness of his watchtower.

True to Benjamin’s theories, Oskar – as a flaneur – eventually embraces the city out of a dream for humanity. Oskar becomes devoted to every Black he meets along his way and seeks to

benefit and connect the humanity of New York through his wide array of inventions. These inventions include a chemical in the water that would cause people's skin to turn color in accordance with their moods so that "everyone could know what everyone else felt, and we could be more careful with each other" (Foer 103) and "pockets big enough for our families and our friends, and even...people we've never met but still want to protect. We need pockets for boroughs and for cities, a pocket that could hold the universe" (Foer 48). Oskar feels a sense of interconnectedness to those around him, particularly to the Blacks who become incorporated with his urban text. He wishes to protect and help them, just as they have helped him.

As de Certeau asserts is true of all "practitioners of the city," Oskar's walking leads him to encountering many other inhabitants of his city that also lack a place. As with David in the end of Call it Sleep, Oskar's narrative joins with those whose paths he crosses and eventually, they form their own collective place – their own "urban fabric." This becomes evident when Oskar attempts to explain to his grandmother's "Renter" (who is actually his grandfather) why he came into his grandmother's apartment so upset. Oskar was distraught that afternoon because he believed that his quest to meet every Black in the city was ruined before he could accomplish his mission - finding the lock that fits his key (or so he says).

I told him about the voice of Aaron Black, and how I was so incredibly close to kissing Abby Black...I told him about Abe Black in Coney Island, and Ada Black with the two Picasso paintings, and the birds that flew by Mr. Black's window. Their wings were the first thing he'd heard in more than twenty years. Then there was Bernie Black, who had a view of Gramercy Park, but not a key to it, which he said was worse than looking at a brick wall. Chelsea Black had a tan line around her ring finger, because she got divorced right after she got back from her honeymoon, and Don Black was also an animal rights activist, and Eugene Black also had a coin collection. Fo Black lived on Canal Street, which used to be a real canal. He didn't speak very good English, because he hadn't left Chinatown since he came from Taiwan, because there was no reason for him to. (Foer 151)

The way Oskar interweaves the stories of all of the Blacks into his own narrative suggests that his journey has begun to mean more to him than the key itself. Oskar cares about Aaron Black's voice and Abby Black's lips; Mr. Black's birds and Bernie Black's view of the park. Like Oskar, many of the Blacks are also lacking a space. Chelsey Black's almost immediate divorce and Fo Black's self segregation leave both of them with holes waiting to be filled. One Black in particular struck a chord with Oskar. "She had been a waitress at Windows on the World," and died with his father on 9/11 (Foer 126).

That's so weird to think about...that she worked there. Maybe she knew my dad. Or not knew him, but maybe she served him that morning. He was there, in the restaurant. He had a meeting. Maybe she refilled his coffee or something...Maybe they died together... of course they died together. The real question was how they died together. (Foer 126)

This instance seems to be Oskar's first realization of 9/11 as an interconnecting force – a shared trauma with another. Oskar is immediately concerned with whether the waitress had kids, like him, that were left behind. Mathew Mullins asks, "Whose trauma was this? Did it belong to the victims of the attacks, the people directly connected to those in the towers, New Yorkers, Americans, The West, The world" (Mullins 317)? The answer is that the trauma belonged to and united everyone. For Oskar, this interaction leads him to realize that suddenly the trauma wasn't *only* his and suddenly he wasn't so alone.

This idea of shared experience is persistent throughout the novel. Oscar has a scrapbook entitled *Stuff that Happened to Me*. However, it is mostly filled with 'stuff' that hasn't actually happened *to* him, like "a picture of Jean-Pierre Haignere, the French astronaut who had to be carried from his spacecraft after returning from the Mir Space station" (Foer 154). Yet, in Oskar's mind, these things are a part of him – a part of his narrative and textual composition. On a visit to Ruth Black, whose address was on the eighty-sixth floor of the Empire State Building,

Oskar is informed that “New York’s most famous building is made with materials from just about everywhere but New York, in much the same way that the city itself was made by great immigrants” (Foer 158). Oskar is also made up of things from “just about everywhere,” his letters from Stephen Hawking and his clips of the French astronaut ‘build’ him and are a part of what will come to compose his identity, even if they didn’t happen to him personally.

Foer portrays this concept of collective identity across time as well as space. Benjamin says, “we know that, in the course of flanerie, far off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment” (Arcades 423). In Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close, the narrative of Oskar’s present day is interspersed with detailed accounts of the historic WWII bombings at Dresden and Hiroshima. On one occasion, Oskar uses a tape of a graphic account of the Hiroshima bombing as a class presentation. He analytically dissects the situation from a medical and scientific standpoint, perhaps in an attempt to understand these past traumas in a way that he could not understand the one that had defined his own existence. Never-the-less, these past voices are a part of Oskar’s identity as he journeys through the city – even earning a place in his *Stuff That Happened To Me* book.

According to Mullins, “Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close posits an unbreakable bond between identity collectives, such as nations, based on the common experience of trauma” (Mullins 301). In Oskar’s New York, 9/11 presents itself as an unbreakable bond between New Yorkers. With this bond, Oskar manages – as David did a hundred years before him – to create a community. During the course of Oskar’s escapades around the city, he is also balancing being in the school production of Hamlet. Oskar invites each new Black he meets to come see his play. To Oskar’s surprise, almost all of the Blacks show up. After having shared a city for so long, they now share a school auditorium and their narratives become *that* much more intertwined as

part of a collective. None of the Blacks seem to know each other, nor are they aware of what they have in common. However, their commonality is based in the desire for community and for a relationship with the young boy that sought each of them out individually – this desire is produced by trauma and embodied in Oskar. Each Black has influenced Oskar and helped direct his narrative, just as Oskar has affected each of theirs.

Throughout the novel, Foer time and again discusses this concept of communal history and communal identity through returning to tales of Central Park and New York’s fabled “Sixth Borough.” It seems that Foer’s “Sixth Borough” is exactly what de Certeau envisioned when he stated, “the identity furnished by [the city] is a...universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed of places” (Practice 103). According to the story,

The Sixth Borough was also an island, separated from Manhattan by a thin body of water whose narrowest crossing happened to equal the world’s long jump record, such that exactly one person on earth could go from Manhattan to the Sixth Borough without getting wet.... When the time finally came, the long jumper would begin his approach from The East River. He would run the entire width of Manhattan, as New Yorkers rooted him on from opposite sides of the street, from the windows of their apartments and offices, and from branches of trees. Second Avenue, Third Avenue, Lexington, Park, Madison, Fifth Avenue, Columbus, Amsterdam, Broadway, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth...and when he leapt, New Yorkers cheered from the banks of both Manhattan and the Sixth Borough, cheering the jumper on and cheering each other on. For those few moments when that jumper was in the air, every New Yorker felt capable of flight. (Foer 135)

The story suggests that, at the time when the Sixth Borough existed in this manner, all New Yorkers, as well as the streets and rivers that composed the city, lived in unified harmony – they were all “cheering each other on” and “capable of flight.” However, this harmony is threatened when catastrophe strikes and “a millimeter at a time, the Sixth Borough receded from New York” (Foer 136). While New Yorkers tried to save the borough with chains and concrete, nothing would keep the Sixth Borough in its place to maintain the equilibrium of this idyllic New

York. Foer's depiction of the New York identity is reminiscent of de Certeau's description; it is "haunted" by this "dreamed up place" of the Sixth Borough. With this fable, "the novel depicts a seemingly lost unity that was never really lost at all" (Mullins 318). The story goes on to say,

Central Park didn't used to be where it is now...it used to rest squarely in the center of the Sixth Borough. It was the joy of the borough, its heart. But once it was clear that the Sixth Borough was receding for good, that it couldn't be saved or detained, it was decided by New York City referendum, to salvage the park... and it was unanimous. Even the most stubborn Sixth Boroughers acknowledged what must be done.... Enormous hooks were driven through the easternmost grounds, and the park was pulled by the people of New York...from the Sixth Borough into Manhattan.... The children of New York lay on their backs, body to body, filling every inch of the park, as if it had been designed for them and that moment...and the children were pulled, one millimeter and one second at a time into Manhattan.... By the time the park found its current resting place, every single one of the children had fallen asleep, and the park was a mosaic of their dreams. (Foer 138-139)

Thus, at the end of the story, the Sixth Borough is "floating about aimlessly with a hole in its heart" (Mullins 318) – just as Oskar, Ruth Black and Chelsea Black all had holes in their hearts at the beginning of Oskar's journey. However, this unified New York does not appear to be lost – it can be restored and made anew, just as Oskar and his new found companions will eventually restore and refill the holes in their own hearts. At the heart of the Sixth Borough was Central Park, and while it is no longer connected to the Sixth Borough it is also not lost – Central Park still "remains common and available to all people...the heart of the once-unified world remains in the midst of Manhattan" (Mullins 318). As with the Sixth Borough, Oskar's once unified heart still remains in the "midst of Manhattan," and the "midst of Manhattan" is where he is able to put it back together once again.

It was Oskar's father who first told him the tale of the Sixth Borough. In trying to convince his son of the power of belief and optimism, Thomas Schell says, "Its hard for anyone,

even the most pessimistic of pessimists, to spend more than a few minutes in Central Park without feeling that he or she is experiencing some tense in addition to the present, right?... Maybe we're just missing things we've lost, or hoping for what we want to come. Or maybe it's the residue of dreams from that night the park was moved. Maybe we miss what those children had lost, and hope for what they hoped for" (Foer 140). It seems that, with this closing remark, Thomas Schell is leaving his son with a few words of city wisdom. When he is in Central Park, he should think in a "tense in addition to the present," think of his future hopes and the memories of his father and know that they may all exist simultaneously. Oskar is allowed to move on, to fill the holes in his heart without giving up on the memory of his father. This is the magical power of Central Park as it embodies the city. The city provides Oskar with the objects and histories that allow him to engage in self and community production in the wake of his father's death, yet their ability to exist in a multiple tense also allows Oskar's father to have a continuing and necessary presence in Oskar's ever-developing personal narrative.

The texts of Foer and Roth document the journey of two young boys as they embark on separate quests for self-definition and self-production throughout the New York City streets. Both Oskar and David use their steps to take their place within the larger text of the city. Yet, as each boy forges his own path, he crosses ways with other walkers – other "practitioner[s]" who also lack definition and coherence in their lives. As these paths cross, Oskar and David are able to unify and produce communities, often resulting in events that help the boys reach a state of self-actualization and fulfillment. Explanations for these phenomena of production lie in certain theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau that are embedded in the texts of Call it Sleep and Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close. Each theorist details concepts and ideologies that are played out in these novels – including the ability of "practitioners of the city" to attain self

and community production through the intermingling of narratives, the actualization and invention of possibilities as presented by the city space, and the adoption of formerly autonomous objects and history into one's personal narrative.

The City as a Means of Self-Dissolution

Earlier this year, Teresa Carpenter released a book entitled New York Diaries, in which she edited and compiled four hundred years of journal articles written in New York City. This compilation of journal entries only serves to emphasize the ways in which the city can serve as a means of self-chronicling, self-production and self-dissolution. However, the honesty and embodied reality presented through these texts offers an insight into exactly how the city can serve as a destructive force that is difficult to find in other publications. One striking excerpt was composed in the 1924 journal of Winifred Willis. On a particularly dreary early January day, Winifred decried, “I don’t for a moment suppose it’s the weather that ails me. Too much New York cheer, no doubt! I am exhausted, mentally and physically, unable to see things as they are. Straight normalities have a dark and crooked look when I am low and fagged” (Carpenter 5).

Winifred’s sentiment that the city is to blame for her exhaustion and dissolution is not particularly uncommon, yet her expression of despair is significant and haunting – deserving of further explanation. This explanation lies, once again, in the theories of Michel de Certeau and Walter Benjamin. Just as these theorists manifested ways that the city can serve as a method of self-chronicling and self-production, they also demonstrate how the city can be the undeniable cause of self-dissolution. Through reading Stephen Crane’s Maggie Girl of the Streets and Paul Auster’s City of Glass via the insight of Benjamin and De Certeau, it becomes possible to grasp the level of despair felt by Meredith in January of 1924 and it becomes evident how easy it could be to lose oneself to the commodifying, totalizing and obfuscating effects of New York City.

Maggie Girl of the Streets begins as the story of a late nineteenth-century family who has made their home in New York City’s Bowery. Crane provides details of this traditionally downtrodden neighborhood with carefully constructed dialect intended to embody the Bowery as

an omnipotent force of being. The sounds of each Johnson family argument in their Rum Alley tenement becomes one with the “dismal wailings of babies at night, the thumping of feet in unseen corridors and rooms, mingled with the sound of varied hoarse shoutings in the street and the rattling of wheels over cobbles” (Crane 21). The Bowery is personified as a miserable being, whose inhabitants are forced to be miserable by association.

Michel de Certeau addresses the formation of such destitute places in *Walking in The City*. Through his work, de Certeau dictates how the modern city, as created by the industry elite and disconnected bourgeoisie, has a totalizing effect in its inhabitants. These inhabitants, as subjects of this manufactured city, are approached by the monarchical figures of the urban elite as objects that must be classified into a manageable space. With this mode of urban creation comes “a rejection of everything that is not capable of being dealt with...and so constitutes the ‘waste products’ of a functionalist administration (abnormality, deviance, illness, death, etc)” (Walking 159). The impoverished Bowery and its inhabitants are immigrants and working-class drunks who are unable to be “dealt with” via compartmentalizing them into pleasing packages. Thus, they are an aforementioned “waste product” of a city that approaches its inhabitants (or its walkers) from a dispassionate totalizing perspective.

The particular miserable Bowery inhabitant that Crane’s novel revolves around is the Johnson family’s only daughter, Maggie. According to the text, “Maggie blossomed in a mud puddle. She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl” (Crane 38). Maggie’s identity as a “pretty girl” separates her from her surroundings. Her beauty grants her the prospect of no longer being a “waste product” and perhaps being embraced by the “functionalist administration” of the city elite. Such an embrace would allow Maggie to escape the “abnormality” and “deviance” of the Bowery and live in the world of the respectable and

“manageable” – no matter how manufactured that world may be. However, this brief prospect of hope proves to be delusive, and at the end of the novel Maggie is left more disconsolate than ever before.

As Maggie gets older, she strikes the fancy of one of her brother Jimmie’s companions – Pete. Pete is a well-dressed young bartender, who imitates the styles and mannerisms of his patrons in a way that exudes upward mobility and hope – at least in Maggie’s naïve worldview. Maggie’s short-lived affair with Pete and their excursions to the streets outside of the Bowery provide her with the unfortunate fate of juggling the responsibilities and stigma of the world in which she grew up with the temptations of the world in which she desires to live. Pete begins to court Maggie by taking her to Vaudeville shows at a local stage, which “[gave] to the Bowery public the phantasies of the aristocrating theatre-going public, at reduced rates” (Crane 56). This local venue, with its “phantasies” and five-Cent beers had the same effect on Maggie that the World Fair had on the Parisians of Walter Benjamin’s *Paris: Capital of the 19th Century* - “[it open[ed] up a phantasmagoria that people enter to be amused. The entertainment industry facilitates this by elevating people to the level of commodities. They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others” (Reflections 152). It was the theater and Maggie’s relationship with Pete that indoctrinated her into the commodity culture of New York City – a culture that eventually leads to her own self-dissolution.

Crane narrates, “Maggie always departed with raised spirits from the showing places of the melodrama. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually surmounted the wealthy and wicked. The theatre made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps grotesquely, by the heroine on stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory” (Crane 66). Thus, the

“entertainment industry” of New York Vaudeville “manipulated” Maggie into feeling that her “tenement house” and job in a “shirt factory” “alienat[ed]” her from the “heroine on stage” – a heroine that only existed for the short time an audience was there to applaud. The stage transformed the perceived “culture and refinement” of the characters in an act (facilitated by the entertainment industry) into a commodity. Regardless of how artificial the “culture and refinement” of actresses on a Bowery Stage must have been, they became a commodity that Maggie coveted.

Maggie, like those protagonists discussed before her, is a “walker” in the city – exhibiting many characteristics of Benjamin’s flaneur. Maggie’s excursions with Pete lead her to be ostracized from her home in the Bowery – her family and neighbors see her as a ruined woman for all of her late nights and cross-city gallivanting. Maggie’s lack of belonging to the Bowery of her childhood as well as the bourgeois class she so wishes to be apart of grants her a defining characteristic of the flanerie – she is an outsider “on the threshold of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed [her]; in neither is [she] at home” (Reflections 156). Thus, in Maggie’s state of desire and self-doubt “[s]he seeks refuge in the crowd” (Reflections 156). As Maggie walks, she adopts the typical flaneur role of the observer “studying faces” and taking note of “the well-dressed women she met on the avenues. She envied elegance and soft palms. She craved those adornments of person which she saw every day on the street, conceiving them to be allies of vast importance to women” (Crane 62).

Andrew Lawson notes that “modern urban society increases both the freedom of movement of the individual and the number of persons before whose eyes each one carries on his life. At the same time, there are decreasing chances for the awarding of esteem on any other basis than that of immediate appearance” (Lawson 598). As Lawson explicates, Maggie’s walks

through her “modern urban society” allow her to observe the lives of others in a way that could not exist out of the context of the city, yet her continued journeys and observations only drive Maggie further toward succumbing to a manufactured commodity culture where “esteem” and self-worth rely solely on the superficial basis of “immediate appearance.” One night at a show, toward the end of Maggie’s relationship with Pete, Maggie “contemplated Pete’s man-subduing eyes and noted that wealth and prosperity was indicated by his clothes. She imagined a future, rose-tinted, because of its distance from all that she previously had experienced” (Crane 96). With this passage, Maggie fully embraces an ideology where she and all those around her are nothing more than commodities in a culture of exchange. Maggie commodifies Pete, imagining that the “wealth” and “prosperity” in the “immediate appearance” of his clothes define Pete’s worth as a person and as a life partner. Furthermore, Maggie envisions that her engagement in this culture of exchange will bring her happiness and grant her a path from the Bowery to the Bourgeoisie.

Through establishing this insurmountable “distance” between Maggie’s life in the Bowery and a “rose-tinted” future of “wealth and prosperity” Crane “highlights and exacerbates the incommensurability of urban realities” (Lawson 699). It is this incommensurability and utter lack of common ground that allow Crane to paint a world where the entirely commodified “practices [of class]” – how one dresses, where one eats, and the entertainment venues one frequents – “both make and unmake the self, weaving and unraveling the fabric of identity as they perform their cultural work” (Lawson 699). By carrying on with Pete in his “practices of class,” Maggie ostracizes herself from her home in the Bowery – “unraveling the fabric of [her] identity” as she tries to “weav[e]” a new identity of her own accord.

Unfortunately for Maggie, the same beauty that allowed her a brief excursion from the

Bowery was nothing more than a commodity for Pete. It was only Maggie's appearance that attracted Pete to her – making her an object with a value that he exchanged for a more desirable prize as soon as he found one in the marketplace of the concert hall. Thus, before Maggie had the opportunity to “weave” a new identity, she was simply left in the “unraveling[s]” of her old self – unable to return to her tenement house on Rum Alley.

Having no home to return to, yet once again being placed in the role of the “abnormal” and “devian[t],” Maggie did the only thing that a flaneur could do – she embarked on a journey through the streets. “Soon the girl discovered that if she walked with such apparent aimlessness, some men looked at her with calculating eyes” (Crane 128). This realization of herself as a body to be appraised, along with her transactional ending with Pete provided Maggie “empathy with the commodity” and “fundamentally empathy with exchange value itself” (Arcades 448). According to Benjamin, “the flaneur is the virtuoso of this empathy. He takes the concept of marketability itself for a stroll” (Arcades 448). In Crane's narrative, Maggie is forced to be the “virtuoso” of this “empathy with the commodity” – she turns to a life of prostitution and thus makes herself the ultimate commodity, literally “tak[ing] the concept of [her own] marketability...for a stroll” through New York City.

In Benjamin's words, the “image [of] the prostitute, who is saleswoman and wares in one” is “presented by the pure commodity-as-fetish” doctrine that embodied Parisian Arcades – and, apparently, New York City as well (Reflections 157). The City's commodity culture causes the streets to “constitute the department store that puts [Maggie] to use for commodity circulation” she must “pay a visit to the marketplace... to find a buyer” (Reflections 156). Maggie's ability to succeed in her occupation and “find a buyer” is dependent on how well she can sell her “wares” in the marketplace of the streets. During one such transaction,

A tall young man, smoking a cigarette with a sublime air, strolled near the girl. He had on

evening dress, a moustache, a chrysanthemum, and a look of ennui, all of which he kept carefully under his eye. Seeing the girl walk on...he stared glassily for a moment, but gave a slight convulsive start when he discerned that she was neither new, Parisian, nor theatrical. He wheeled about hastily and turned his stare into the air, like a sailor with a search-light. (Crane 130)

In this particular instance, the young man's "sublime air," "evening dress," and "chrysanthemum" are all commodities in his possession that indicate he is well off and a decent potential customer for Maggie's services. Yet, Maggie's "wares" were "neither new, Parisian, nor theatrical" so, after assessing Maggie's value as a good, the young man determined Maggie was not a commodity that he wished to obtain at that juncture. Thus, the commodity culture that Maggie had once so desired to be a part of now provided for her ultimate undoing. As a commodity, she was no longer able to compete in the marketplace of the streets and avenues of her choosing. It is therefore the New York City streets, and the commodity culture they embody, that lead to Maggie's complete self-dissolution. The last time Crane presents Maggie as a living entity, she is lost in a crowd that has just emerged from an up-town theatre.

The pavements became tossing seas of umbrellas. Men stepped forth to hail cabs or cars, raising their fingers in varied forms of polite request or imperative demand. An endless procession wended toward elevated stations.... A girl of the painted cohorts of the city went along the street. She threw changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations to men of rural or untaught pattern and usually seeming sedately unconscious of the men with a metropolitan seal upon their faces.... She hurried forward through the crowd as if intent upon reaching a distant home. (Crane 130-131)

In this passage, Maggie is the "girl of the painted cohorts of the city." Maggie finds solace in the crowd. Benjamin says "[the masses] stretch before the flaneur as a veil: they are the newest drug for the solitary...the newest asylum for the reprobate and the proscrip" (Arcades 446). Having failed in the marketplace of the New York City streets, Maggie is indeed "solitary" and, as a struggling prostitute, she is certainly one of "the reprobate and the proscrip." The

commodification-of-self that Maggie once thought would remove her from the “abnormality” and “deviance” of the Bowery is precisely what turned her into the “abnormal” and “devian[t].” Maggie’s original identity as a “pretty girl” initially appeared to challenge her status as a “waste product.” Yet, it ultimately contrives her commodification and in turn produces her as “waste” once again.

No longer having the Bowery to return to, Maggie immerses herself in the crowd, searching for a “home.” During the final narration of Maggie’s life, Crane has her embarking on “the last journey of the flaneur: death” (Reflections 157). Maggie begins this journey consumed in the throng outside an uptown theater and slowly descends through the streets and avenues of a “multilayered sexual geography of New York City” (Lawson 608).

The girl went into gloomy districts near the river, where the tall black factories shut in the street and only occasional broad beams of light fell across the pavements from saloons. In front of one of these places...there stood a man with blotched features. Further on in the darkness she met a ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimy hands. She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over them, beyond them, at other things. Far off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance. Streetcar bells jingled with a sound of merriment. At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeing unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence. (Crane 133-134)

One by one, no matter how horrible or destitute, each man that Maggie passes rejects her until she is left only to be judged by “the shutters of the tall buildings.” Yet, even these structures “looked over” and “beyond” Maggie, at other things. Maggie had dissolved into the world of the invisible. With the sounds of streetcar bells and the lights of the avenues glittering in the distance, Maggie is reminded of the world she had once dreamed of being apart of but could

never succeed in. Perhaps in a tribute to the commodifying forces of the city that ostensibly destroyed Maggie's life, she takes her last breaths by the factories, "in a space of industrial production and debased consumption" (Lawson 610). Maggie then succumbs to the self-dissolution of the city – plummeting into The East River and becoming an eternal warning of the potential destruction harbored in the streets of New York.

Almost a century later, Paul Auster presents his own ill-fated city-dwelling protagonist in City of Glass. Similar to Maggie, Auster's protagonist, Daniel Quinn, enters the narrative in an already fragile state – having tragically lost his wife and son some years prior. The start of Auster's narrative depicts Quinn as a writer who, after exploring several other genres, has become a fairly successful author of mystery novels. The moderate success of his books allows him to survive in a manner that suits his needs – spending the first half of each year writing and having the other half to be "free to do as he wished" (Auster 4). In this manner, Quinn initially lives his life true to the ways of the flaneur - "he read many books, he looked at paintings, he went to the movies...more than anything else, however, what he liked to do was walk. Nearly every day, rain or shine, hot or cold, he would leave his apartment to walk through the city- never really going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him" (Auster 3).

Through engaging in this aforementioned mode of walking that requires no destination, Quinn initially understands the city streets as a place where he can create his own urban text simply by exploring the parks and avenues of New York City. Thus, in the words of Michel de Certeau, Quinn begins the novel as a "practitioner of the city" (Walking 158). According to Benjamin, it is fitting that one who engages so thoroughly in the lifestyle of the "practitioner" or, in Benjamin's vocabulary, the flaner, would write detective novels - "preformed in the figure

of the flaneur is that of the detective. The flaneur required a social legitimation of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence presented as a plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight” (Arcades 442). True to Benjamin’s words regarding the flaneur-as-detective, Quinn writes detective stories as a “plausible front,” because he requires a “social legitimation of his habitus.” Walking had become a necessary “habitus” that Quinn engaged in to cope with his tragic circumstances – the loss of his wife and child. Walking allowed Quinn to “leav[e] himself behind and ... giv[e] himself up to the movements of the streets,” which, in turn, provided him with a method of “escap[ing] the obligation to think” and brought with it a “measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within” (Auster 4). It is Quinn’s aforementioned “practice” of turning to the streets for solace that initially allows him to maintain a modicum of sanity.

De Certeau emphasizes that it is the “practitioners,” such as Quinn, those who make their lives “down below” on the streets, that truly understand and define the city (Walking 158). Quinn’s walks serve him as a method of remaking his own life in a way that allows him to address his grief. Often on these walks, when life as Quinn had become too difficult, he would force himself to continue his journey through embracing the identities of the characters in his novels. By approaching the world from the perspective of detective Max Work, the protagonist of his series, Quinn is able to embody an alter ego of his own creation. This alter ego allows Quinn to continue to engage in society and “live in the world of others,” regardless of his pain. As long as Quinn can continue to engage in walks as a manner of producing what de Certeau calls the “thicks and thins of [his own] urban text,” and the texts of his novels, he can continue to produce the places and characters of solace that allow him to maintain an identity in a world of his own creation (Walking 159). Quinn’s ability to produce his own urban texts through his

wanderings is essential to his mode of operation as an autonomous urbanite – without this ability Quinn is left to dissolve into the city itself.

The alternative to an urban text that Quinn composes of his own accord is one defined by “totalizing forces.” According to de Certeau, these forces disregard the individual “practitioner[’s]” contribution in favor of a “manufactured” city that rejects an individual “that is not capable of being dealt with” (Walking 159). In Quinn’s case, his abnormal professional circumstances and the untimely death of his family leave him forever at odds with a totalizing force that would attempt to either neatly categorize him or cast him aside. As opposed to Maggie, whose dissolution is a result of the commodifying effects of the city, Quinn’s downfall comes with his failure to continue to engage in the signifying individual practices that allow him to compose his own urban text and his resultant submission to the totalizing forces of the city. Without these practices, Quinn loses every part of his identity and eventually dissolves into the streets.

Quinn’s neglect for his role of “practitioner” begins late one evening when he receives a phone call for a man named Paul Auster. The person on the other end of the line informs Quinn that he requires the services of Auster’s private investigator business. Quinn’s curiosity eventually gets the best of him and he decides to take the case under the false identity of Auster. Quinn learns that his assignment is to protect an odd young man, Peter Stillman, from his father (also Peter Stillman). The elder Peter had been committed to a psychiatric facility after locking the younger Peter into a room for nine years of his childhood in an attempt to discover the “language of innocence,” which he believed to have been spoken at the biblical Tower of Babel. Quinn, as Auster, is informed that Stillman will be released from the facility and arriving at Grand Central Station the following day. Quinn is sent to observe Stillman from the moment that

he gets off the train – ensuring that the younger Stillman will have time to escape the impending wrath of his father.

Once Quinn reports for duty at Grand Central, “he wander[s] through the station...remind[ing] himself of who he was supposed to be” (Auster 50). Just as Quinn had formerly embraced the alter ego of Max Work, he now believes that embracing Auster will allow him an escape from his own inner-monologue and provide him a safe identity through which he may interact with the world. “The effect of being Paul Auster, he had begun to learn, was not altogether unpleasant. Although he still had the same body, the same mind, the same thoughts, he felt as though he had somehow been taken out of himself, as if he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer” (Auster 50). However, Quinn soon learns that, unlike the characters and stories of his own creation, taking on the identity of Auster to solve an actual case is far from freeing. Quinn had always found his escape and his inspiration for creating his own characters and story lines through the act of walking. Yet, he neglected to realize that what he would be required to do under the auspices of Paul Auster in the Stillman case was not his individualized practice walking, but the much more totalizing practice of following – a distinction that Quinn’s failure to comprehend eventually leads to his own dissolution.

Quinn was used to wandering. His excursions through the city had taught him to understand the connectedness of inner and outer. Using aimless motion as a technique of reversal, on his best days he could bring the outside in and thus usurp the sovereignty of inwardness. By flooding himself with externals, by drowning himself out of himself, he had managed to exert some small degree of control over his fits of despair. Wandering, therefore, was a kind of mindlessness. But following Stillman was not wandering. (Auster 61)

In this passage, the narrator once again reinforces that walking is what allows Quinn to

maintain his balance and control. His peace of mind and self-awareness is dependent on the inexplicable forces that drive his feet as he walks aimlessly through the city. According to Benjamin, “an intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets” (Arcades 417). Yet, rather than partaking in this intoxication of “long” and “aimless” walks, Quinn “must now track another – meticulously observ[ing] the space and self of his quarry” (Alford 616).

Quinn records his observations “of his quarry” in a red notebook that he purchased specifically for the purposes of this case. Interestingly, even though Quinn is conducting the case as Auster – the name he scribes into the notebook is his own – “It was the first time in more than five years that he had put his own name in one of his notebooks” (Auster 39). By signing the notebook as himself rather than a pseudonym, Quinn takes personal responsibility for solving the Stillman case, and eventually begins to define himself through the narrowly ruled pages of the red notebook. Regardless of Quinn’s sense of responsibility and devotion to the case, “after thirteen days of following Stillman’s aimless wandering...Quinn becomes increasingly hopeless,” no doubt craving some aimless wanderings of his own (Auster 85).

Finding no other points of inspiration, Quinn turns to his red notebook and begins to “set down with meticulous care an exact itinerary of Stillman’s divagations, noting each street he followed, each turn he made, each pause that had occurred” (Auster 62). Yet, after days of this, the notebook is still full of nonsensical scribbling – it is not until Quinn begins to draw maps of Stillman’s routes that they become *readable* (Auster 66-69). The idea of a map transforming the incomprehensible discourse of a walker’s steps to a single readable application is, in itself, totalizing. This view, now embraced by Quinn, flies in the face of the walker-as-“practitioner” model that Quinn embodied at the start of the novel.

In the introduction to *Walking in the City*, de Certeau discusses this idea of city space as being “readable” from a totalizing perspective,

To be lifted to the summit of the world trade center...puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one is ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. (Walking 157)

As Quinn traces out Stillman’s paths of each day, he concludes that “[his] walks were not random at all, but a mapping out, with his steps through the streets of Manhattan, of the words THE TOWER OF BABEL” (Alford 616-617). These maps serve the same role for Quinn as being “lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center.” They place him “at a distance” and transform an illusive mystery, which had once “possessed” him, “into a text that lies before [his] eyes.” However, while suddenly Stillman’s actions are “readable” to Quinn, de Certeau warns that this new totalized “knowledge” is a “fiction,” not to be trusted.

Quinn would have been wise to heed this warning, for once he had determined Stillman’s pattern, he assumed that he would have the remaining number of days that it would take for Stillman to finish his sentence at his disposal to crack the case. Yet, this was not an accurate assumption. One morning, before the end of the supposed map of “BABEL,” Quinn finds that Stillman had disappeared from his hotel without a trace. “Stillman was gone now. The old man had become part of the city. He was a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks” (Auster 90). Thus, whatever “knowledge” Quinn believed his maps provided turned out to be nothing more than “fiction,” and the man who he had so thoroughly tried to “read” was now as untraceable as a single brick in the skyline of New York City.

Quinn’s initial failure is a result of a disregard for and neglect of the individualized practices of the city. Instead of adhering to these practices, Quinn wrongly embraced the

totalizing force of a map, when even Stillman himself didn't compose anything so totalizing. Rather, Stillman's steps "follow[ed] the thicks and thins of an urban text" – as Quinn's had before he took on the Stillman case (*Walking* 159).

Stillman had...created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. It was like drawing a picture in the air with your finger. The image vanishes as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done. And yet, the pictures did exist – not in the streets where they had been drawn, but in Quinn's red notebook. (Auster 85-86)

In other words, the ability to produce an urban text (having once belonged to Quinn) now lay with Stillman. This mode of production was removed from Quinn once he began the totalizing procedure of following and chronicling an existing person in an actual case rather than creating one of his own volition. Quinn's life was once inspired by his own footsteps, but now his life is driven by Stillman's. By embracing these maps, Quinn allows the city to become a totalizing place – suffocating the embodiments of his own urban text and forcing himself to take a singular, mechanical viewpoint. For Quinn, as a man who formerly only survived through staying in motion – a forced singular point-of-view proves to be his downfall. In *Walking in the City*, de Certeau explains how this downfall occurs:

It is true that the operations of walking on can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths and their trajectories. But these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking, wandering or 'window shopping', that is, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic set in the nowhen of a surface of projection. Itself visible, it has the effect of making invisible the operation that made it possible. These fixations constitute procedures for forgetting. The trace left behind is substituted for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten. (*Walking* 161)

Through wholly devoting himself to the Stillman case and meticulously transcribing

“paths and trajectories” into maps, Quinn totalizes not only Stillman’s actions, but also his own. In allowing himself to be fully devoted to “following” Stillman, Quinn neglects his own “operation of walking” and instead transforms his life into “totalizing” points on a map. “These fixations” cause Quinn to forget his own “way of being in the world,” and this forgetfulness results partially from the fact that “the map is not a simple representation of space. It represents a space from which perspective has been removed” (Alford 627). Therefore, through pursuing this case, Quinn forces himself to attempt to embrace the point of view of a map. This viewpoint, however, is impossible for any human to occupy – “because, to be human in space is to possess a perspective” (Alford 62). Quinn’s efforts to adopt this impossible perspective, or lack thereof, begins his dissolution from a member of humanity to a conquered entity that has been absorbed into the city streets.

After Stillman disappears, Quinn feels as though he has failed in his mission. He speaks with the younger Stillman’s wife, Virginia, and promises that he will continue to look out for the couple’s wellbeing. However, shortly after this conversation takes place, the Stillman’s phone becomes the possessor of an interminable busy signal. The next morning, Quinn attempts to take to the streets in a walk similar to those he used to find refuge in. However, instead of providing temporary relief for his troubles, this walk seemed to prolong them. “Every twenty minutes he would go into a phone booth and call Virginia Stillman...By now Quinn expected the number to be busy...the busy signal had become a counterpoint to his steps, a metronome beating steadily inside the random noises of the city” (Auster 104). In this passage, having neglected to engage in practices that produce his own text for so long, Quinn has forgotten how. He now clings to the Stillman’s busy signal and his red notebook as his only source of self-definition – they are a “counterpoint to his steps.”

That day, Quinn decided that he would return to the Stillman's residence and complete the mission that had defined him for so long. He would not let the Stillmans be hurt. The narrator acknowledges that this is the point in the narrative where Quinn begins to come unhinged. Quinn leaves his apartment and takes up residence in the alleyway in front of the Stillmans' building. Quinn forces himself to become a machine – sleeping and eating as little as necessary so that he can maintain as totalizing a view of the building as possible – embodying the inhuman perspective of a map. Quinn's life is now dictated by his immediate surroundings. He no longer walks, except to purchase food on occasion. After Quinn forgot the practices that allowed him to author his own urban text, he began to dissolve into the totalizing effects of the city, barely maintaining an independent heartbeat from the cityscape – “Quinn lived by the rhythm of [a nearby] clock, and eventually he had trouble distinguishing it from his own pulse” (Auster 113). Once Quinn's pulse had become one with the rhythm of the streets, he begins straddling the border of non-existence. The narrator reinforces this assessment, commenting that, “remarkable as it seems, no one ever noticed Quinn. It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city” (Auster 115).

However, Quinn had not melted away yet. Having run out of the little money he was spending on food after months of living in the alley, Quinn accepts that he must return to the world, if only briefly, to cash some checks. Yet, upon returning to his apartment he is confronted by a horrible truth – his former home was no longer his. Quinn's landlord had removed his belongings and taken in a new tenant in his prolonged absence. When Quinn realizes that, through neglecting the practices of his own life for so long, his life essentially lost all agency – “Quinn let out a deep sigh. He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him. There was nothing left” (Auster 123).

Having no other place to go and having already accepted defeat, Quinn returns to the Stillmans' residence. This time, instead of remaining in the alley, he goes into their building and enters their apartment – finding it completely barren. Quinn walks until he finds himself in a small dark room with nothing but his red notebook. He then lays down on the floor and falls asleep. Each morning for the remainder of the story, Quinn wakes up and spends the day writing in his notebook. Yet, each time Quinn awakens, daylight seems to get more and more scarce – until there is hardly enough light for Quinn to write a single word.

This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. Little by little, Quinn was coming to the end. At a certain point, he realized that the more he wrote, the sooner the time would come when he could no longer write anything. He began to weigh his words with great care, struggling to express himself as economically and clearly as possible. He regretted having wasted so many pages at the beginning of the red notebook, and in fact felt sorry that he had bothered to write about the Stillman case at all. For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost. Quinn no longer had any interest in himself... He tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage. He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again. The last sentence of the red notebook reads: what will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook? (Auster 129)

With this passage, the extent that Quinn's entire being is dependent on the totalizing effect of the red notebook becomes clear. As the pages of the notebook dwindle, so do the pages of Quinn's life. Quinn acknowledges that the Stillman case was the bridge between his former self, which survived through being a "practitioner" of the city, and his current self – which had become the victim of the totalizing forces of a city that would reject him as an entity "not capable of being dealt with" as soon as the pages of his notebook run out. Quinn contemplates the concept of himself after the notebook – wondering if he would one day be able to speak. The

end of this story indicates that the answer to Quinn's question is "no."

In City of Glass, just as walking provides an opportunity for self-production, "language provides the possibility for establishing a perspective by establishing a self" (Alford 628). According to de Certeau "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered" (Practice 99). Yet, both the discourse of walking and the discourse of speaking require engagement with another – even if that other is the city itself. However, Quinn is left with nothing but the "other" of his notebook, whose pages count down to his lack of existence. The totalizing effect of the red notebook removes and replaces all "others" that Quinn had formerly used to derive meaning. Quinn can no longer walk – his independent urban text has been taken from him. He is no longer able to use his words or his actions to reclaim his status as a "practitioner" of the streets. Thus, once the notebook runs out, the last "other" from which Quinn may derive meaning is gone, and he dissolves into nothingness – leaving nothing behind but his existential question – "what will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (Auster 129).

In the novels of Stephen Crane and Paul Auster, each protagonist succumbs to a level of impenetrable despair – a despair that Winifred Wilson so eloquently articulates in her journal entry, but which is difficult to comprehend without the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau. Through applying the theories of Benjamin and de Certeau to the texts of Maggie: Girl of the Streets and City of Glass, it is possible to demonstrate how New York City's omnipotent commodity culture and totalizing forces of individual abandonment can lead to the city-dwellers ultimate self-dissolution.

Conclusion:

New York City takes on an infinite number of roles and meanings within our national dialogue. It is the city of Babe Ruth and Frank Sinatra; of Broadway and Carnegie Hall; of multi-million dollar penthouses and homeless villages in deserted subway stations. New York City takes on almost as many identities as there are New Yorkers, and it is these identities that make New York such an enthralling setting for literature. Each of the preceding three chapters has been dedicated to utilizing the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau as a method of analyzing the role of the city, and its multiple identities, in works of New York City literature as a means of self-chronicling, self and community production and self-dissolution.

A Walker in the City by Alfred Kazin and The Colossus of New York by Colson Whitehead both grant insight into the soul of the walkers and flaneurs of New York City as they chronicle their lives. Analyzing these works through the theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau elucidates how walking is the *modus operandi* through which New Yorkers craft the identity of *their own* New York and synthesize a symbiotic relationship with the past and present city streets. Kazin and Whitehead diagram how walkers in New York City chronicle their lives using their steps through the streets and avenues of New York as a means of crafting their own textual narrative.

While Kazin and Whitehead present works that are integral to understanding New York City as a means of self-chronicling, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathon Safran Foer and Call it Sleep by Henry Roth are fundamental to comprehending how the city can serve as a means of self and community production. These texts demonstrate how the intermingling of multiple paths and narratives in New York City literature provide for situations where an individual may be serendipitously influenced by those around him. Michel de Certeau and

Walter Benjamin explain how these influences allow “practitioners of the city” – represented by Oskar and David – to attain self and community production through learning from those whose paths they cross, embracing possibilities for redefining city spaces and incorporating city objects and history into their personal texts.

Finally, the texts of Maggie: Girl of the Streets by Stephen Crane and City of Glass by Paul Auster demonstrate how New York can provide a means for self-dissolution as well. The theories of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau shed light on complex mechanisms of New York City’s omnipresent commodity culture and the totalizing forces of oppressive means of city composition. Once detailed, it becomes evident that these notions can be acutely destructive, eventually leading to the self-dissolution of both Maggie and Quinn.

Thus, the theories of Michel de Certeau and Walter Benjamin provide the ultimate apparatus for which to analyze several essential compositions of New York City literature and deconstruct the city’s intricate role in the lives of characters. Through analyzing the texts of A Walker in the City, The Colossus of New York, Call it Sleep, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, Maggie: Girl of the Streets, and City of Glass via the works of Benjamin and de Certeau, the means by which the city synchronously serves as a mechanism for self-chronicling, self and community production and self-dissolution become accessible.

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Internship Experience

U.S. Senate Intern

Summer 2011

**Office of Senator
Barbara Boxer**

Washington, DC

- Conducted extensive legislative research and provided necessary information and policy suggestions to develop legislation pertaining to the national budget, housing, education, healthcare and pay equity
- Attended 2-3 Congressional hearings per week and composed memos to convey new policy developments and provide concise but detailed information to Senate staff.
- Provided constituent services, including conducting detailed tours of the Capitol, fielding several hundred constituent calls per week and participating in constituent meetings
- Executed essential office tasks utilizing the 'Voice' scheduling program, Lexis/Nexis and Congressional Research Service

Intern

Summer 2010

**Feminist Majority
Foundation**

Arlington, VA

- Completed detailed research and conducted interviews to make recommendations on which candidates the Feminist Majority PAC should support in the 2010 elections.
- Served as the 'Outreach Chair' for the annual FMF Congressional briefing, lead an outreach team in conducting phone calls and distributing flyers to local organizations and government offices. Facilitated a turnout of approximately 200 individuals, the largest audience in history.

Intern

Spring 2008

**Hillary Clinton For
President, HQ**

Arlington, VA

- Engaged in grassroots community outreach; served as a community organizer
- Organized and improved accessibility of official administrative documents
- Participated in meetings pertaining to campaign strategy
- Made phone calls to raise voter awareness and coordinate rides to the polls

Activities & Scholarship

**Secretary
Penn State
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- Secretary, Spring 2011 - Present; Member since Fall 2008
- Led engaging programming, organized successful events and developed innovative outreach strategies that furthered the success of our organization on and off campus
- Improved accessibility and distribution of essential information through use of social media

**Phi Alpha Delta
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- Founding Member
- Member from Fall 2010 – Present

**Phi Sigma Delta
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