**The Ragged Claws of Crisis:**

**Reading ‘Prufrock’ in Detroit**

Between the windows of the sea

Where lovely mermaids flow

And nobody has to think

Too much about Desolation Row

 – Bob Dylan

**One, Two, Possum’s Coming For You…**

A 270-degree panning shot from the second-to-back row of a college classroom: our gaze turns slowly from the teacher’s lectern to the window on our immediate left and finally settles on the girl seated behind us. The teacher is a middle-aged African-American woman. Her words are familiar. ‘I should have been a pair of ragged claws,’ she reads. ‘Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.’ Lines from T. S. Eliot. ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.’ The girl behind us looks out the window and the scene cuts to her perspective. An embodied point-of-view shot, gently zooming on the classroom’s exterior. Out across the quadrangle, beneath inclement skies and autumnal leaves, stands an old woman in hospital robes. ‘And in short,’ the teacher presses on, ‘I was afraid.’ The woman treads slowly toward the window. Over a series of reverse-shots, cutting between the increasingly agitated girl’s face and her field of vision, we see the woman ambling closer and closer out of the middle distance and into a medium close-up. Her expression is locked in a blank stare. A dead gaze that returns our own. The teacher’s recitation drowns in shrieking synths and distorted bass-swells. The woman, whatever she might be, is a threat. And she keeps coming. Forget poetry. Leave the classroom while you still can.

This perfectly menacing sequence is from the second act of 2015 horror movie, *It Follows*, whose enthusiastic critical reception derived from its welcome familiarity as an old-school slasher flick and simultaneously from the novelty of how it inhabits both that genre and its geographical setting. Set in and around Detroit, Michigan, the film’s narrative centres on a group of teenagers pursued by an unstoppable, shape-shifting force of bodily destruction, a nameless entity that remains invisible to all but its potential victims and which frequently takes on the appearance of those it previously mangled. ‘It could look like someone you know,’ we are told, ‘or it could be a stranger in a crowd.’ But unlike the genre to which this film gleefully pays homage – namely, the ultra-conservative and almost exclusively suburban slasher movies of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s – the horror witnessed here is just as knowingly about the experience of life during an economic crisis as it is about puritanical morality.[[1]](#endnote-1) In this scene the homage is especially apparent, given that it reimagines two better-known scares from classic horror: one from 1978, when Laurie Strode first espies Michael Myers through a classroom window during a discussion on immutable fate; and another, from 1984, when a classroom reading of Shakespearean tragedy provides the soporific impetus for Nancy Thompson’s departure from reality and into Freddy Krueger’s nightmare realm. And while, in this more recent film, characters are still marked for death by their sexual proclivities – ‘it’ is passed from victim to victim like an STD – the film’s geography and how it occupies time and space seem altogether allegorical in some deeper historical sense.

Detroit has become exceptional within cultural imagination for its synonymy with economic crisis: ‘it is,’ suggests Joshua Clover, ‘a laboratorial clarification of a dynamic proceeding unevenly across the overdeveloped world, a dynamic based in the great transformation of capitalism that will be known as deindustrialization, accompanied by waning accumulation and changes in the global division of labor and of nonlabor.’[[2]](#endnote-2) If the gutting of large-scale manufacture, the mortgage default bubble, and the ensuing financial meltdown are to be remediated into popular narrative, then surely Detroit is the perfect location in which that remediation should take place. The film seems to know this. Jay, the girl whom we met in the classroom, contracts and is introduced to the eponymous ‘it’ outside an abandoned factory. She and her friends are then pursued from the middle-class suburbs, which come replete with numerous boarded-up houses, to a lakeside holiday property from which they are similarly ousted, before crossing 8 Mile Road to enter the city proper. Or, more specifically, the narrative begins in the affluent Sterling Heights, encounters the source of horror first at the Redford Theatre then definitively at the Packard Automotive Plant, journeys north to the shores of Lake Huron, and returns south for its denouement to the Water Works Park in the City of Detroit. This trajectory of passage, tantamount to a series of evictions, redoubles the horror of supernatural antagonism by coupling it with middle-class deracination into a hazardous urban milieu.

 That this horror film is indeed thinking about the economy makes good on an intuition already familiar to the economists, who have described capitalism and its crises in remarkably similar terms. ‘Conjure, if you will, a primal sequence encountered in B-grade horror films, where the celluloid protagonist suffers a terrifying encounter with doom, yet on the cusp of disaster abruptly wakes of a different world, which initially seems normal, but eventually is revealed to be a second nightmare more ghastly than the first.’[[3]](#endnote-3) This cinematic scenario, invoked by Philip Mirowski in a recent book about financial crises and neoliberal capitalism, is used to describe the cycles of catastrophe and resolution sustained by the world economy over multiple centuries. While, as an aesthetic model, the B-grade horror film might provide a populist update of modernism’s frequently cyclic worldview, the horror film in question here gives that worldview a properly materialist recalibration. Because the forms taken by ‘it’ frequently belong to disenfranchised lumpen, and because the film takes place within a GFC-shadowed zone of historically outmoded or offshored industry, we can advisedly speculate on the economic intelligence that informs this anonymous malevolence. In its perpetual motility, ‘it’ comes to resemble what Karl Marx famously described as the ‘moving contradiction.’ While capital, driven by the market imperative, seeks to reduce labor time to a minimum, it simultaneously posits labor time as the exclusive source of wealth. It is in this way that production and exchange are forever at odds with each other, and it is through their opposition that capitalism undercuts its very means of subsistence and simultaneously produces vast legions of unemployed. ‘Forces of production and social relations,’ writes Marx, ‘appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.’[[4]](#endnote-4) If, as Mirowski’s scenario suggests, the horror film is an apposite genre with which to apprehend economic crises, and if this particular horror film gives spectral form to the moving contradiction, the question I want to answer with the present essay is this: why might it have chosen to emphasize, of all the overly familiar and eminently quotable works of literature, T. S. Eliot’s ‘Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’?

 A century of criticism tells us that ‘Prufrock’ is about a middle-aged man who, in Grover Smith’s phrasing, ‘suffers in a hell of defeated idealism.’[[5]](#endnote-5) Indeed, the poem’s eponymous speaker languishes in a state of emasculated longing forcefully circumscribed by an awareness of impending mortality. He is the archetypal bourgeois subject, dolefully personifying the diminished vitality of his class. The poem’s form, which notoriously announced the aesthetic changeover from romantic verse to a modernism proper, knowingly matches its content. Perhaps most obviously, this is witnessed in the privileging of metonymy over metaphor, as best described by Terry Eagleton: ‘unable any longer to totalize his experience in some heroic figure, the bourgeois is forced to let it trickle away into objects related to him by sheer contiguity.’[[6]](#endnote-6) Ennui and fragmentation, subjective disillusionment and historical disarray: these are the experiential poles between which this poem and by extension literary modernism entered into being. And yet, this poem with its broken psyche and its metonymic fragments nevertheless mediates into a cohesive whole if viewed through the materialist optic provided by our late-coming horror film. That is to say, ‘Prufrock’ occupies the one synergistically composed temporal and spatial landscape, which I will want to show is structurally analogous to that of its filmic recitation insofar as both texts are responsive to the crises and contradictions of modern capitalism. Indeed, the poem’s disjunctive shocks and the film’s manifold jump-scares are of a piece. Both animate the experience of life within a specifically financial if not a more generalized economic crisis.

This essay uses *It Follows* as a critical lens for re-reading the poem rehearsed therein. It does so to see if we can read the film’s allegorical tale of economic crisis back into Eliot’s poem, and to thereby approach the poem’s relatively uncontroversial claim to modernism not as another tired registration of bourgeois disenchantment or of an historically abstracted fragmentation but as a textual imprint of the crisis-prone system to which it belongs. In other words, I submit that by coupling the poem and the film, released exactly one century apart, we will gain new insight into the deeper tectonics of modernism and specifically of modernist literary horror. The potential significance of such a reading is not only that it forces a high modernist text back into confrontation with the historical conjunction in which modernism was formed, but also that it militates against the frequently mystifying ideology of modernist poetics by accentuating the poem’s immersion in what Christopher Nealon describes as ‘the matter of capital’ – namely, a textual awareness of literature’s propensity to actively mediate the economic systems upon which it is predicated.[[7]](#endnote-7) To that end, my argument comprises three sections, each of which shuttle back and forth between poem and film. The first section explores the relationship between an aesthetic of horror and interclass antagonism, looking at ‘Prufrock’ in relation to two of its literary antecedents, Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe, whose influence manifests in the poem as a violent subtext that will be taken up and amplified by the film. The second section looks at what connects the poem and the film both textually and contextually. It argues that a shared emphasis on liquid and downing is responsive to the hegemony of finance capital and to finance capital’s reliance on liquidity. The final section, a brief coda, speculates on what it means to resurrect modernism, and to resurrect a modernism exemplified by Eliot’s poem, a century after its inauguration. It asks what our historical present can tell us about Eliot’s poem, and what Eliot’s poem can tell us about our historical present.

**Baudelaire, Poe, Prufrock: Men of the Crowd**

Because of its status as a seminal if not the inaugural event in Anglophone modernist poetry, ‘Prufrock’ has been critically isolated from its historical moment. That isolation is what we encounter most formidably in Marjorie Perloff’s description of Eliot’s symbolist inheritance. According to this influential account, Eliot was positioned at the forefront of the avant-garde because of his commitment to a belief that ‘no poet’ writing in the English language ‘could have been of use to a beginner in 1908.’[[8]](#endnote-8) In his own words, Eliot found aesthetic inspiration not in his contemporaries but, rather, by retreating into ‘another age and to poetry of another language,’ by which he meant French literature of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and especially symbolism.[[9]](#endnote-9) The unspoken implication is that if Eliot was not drawing on British or American poetry it is highly unlikely his poem would reflect the circumstances of its historical moment. ‘Finally,’ writes Perloff, ‘there is Eliot’s particular brand of urbanism, an awareness of proletarian life, derived, no doubt, at least in part from Baudelaire, but quite new on the Anglo-American scene.’[[10]](#endnote-10) And yet, though it might seem that such a reading dooms Eliot’s modernism to a vacuum of anxious influence and ahistorical formalism, that modernism’s textual lineage nevertheless charges it with a desire to think historically. ‘Eliot was not one to write about politics in his early career, and he seemed largely uninterested in contemporary debates,’ suggests William Q. Malcuit. ‘What he was interested in, however, was the position of poetry within modernity, an interest that necessarily led to political engagement and placement in modern culture.’[[11]](#endnote-11)

 Charles Baudelaire, Jules Laforgue, and Gustave Flaubert. Eliot’s named forerunners scandalized precisely with their sense of history: because they allowed for the corruption of poetic vision by ‘a crude realism offensive to public decency’ or, in the case of Baudelaire, by a realism that actively defiles beauty with visions of horror.[[12]](#endnote-12) So we read in the opening address from *The Flowers of Evil*, its apostrophe to the reader:

Serried, swarming, like a million maggots

A legion of Demons carouses in our brains,

And when we breathe, Death, that unseen river,

Descends into our lungs with muffled wails.[[13]](#endnote-13)

These lines are thoroughly wrought with abjection. They open up the body and pollute it with a death as metaphysically terrifying as it is organically detailed. The figuration is truly horrific. But notice, underlying all that horror, the organizing presence of what Arthur Rimbaud would have called the ‘swarm,’ a teeming insect-figure of collective life.[[14]](#endnote-14) In this case, however, the swarm is more larval than insect, and in that way it appears so much more grotesquely fleshy. A squirming biomass. The collective pronouns, ‘we’ and ‘our,’ find their enumerative adjunct in ‘a million maggots.’ It is thus that collective life becomes synonymous with the mortification both of others and of the self. That Baudelaire wrote this way in much of his lyric poetry indicates a desire to convey the ‘shock’ that came with the first industrial revolution and the resulting urbanization of modern life. This is how Walter Benjamin famously interprets the poet, emphasizing the affective energy that discharges itself nowhere more potently than through the coded depiction of anonymous crowds. There is, for Benjamin, a ‘close connection in Baudelaire between the figure of shock and contact with these urban masses.’[[15]](#endnote-15) Here, however, collisional shock has decayed into a revolted shudder. In Baudelaire’s Paris, crowds horrify and the horrors crowd.

As Benjamin well knew, Baudelaire evolved this crowd aesthetic through an engagement not only with his own historical context, Paris of the Second Empire, but also with the writing of Eliot’s fellow expatriate, Edgar Allan Poe, whose ‘Man of the Crowd’ provided the archetype for Baudelaire’s multitude. In that story, an unnamed narrator observes the evening commute from a coffeehouse in central London. He records the crowd in extraordinary detail, narrating a long catalogue of particulars rendered in a parataxis whose objects range from ‘Jew pedlars’ through ‘professional street beggars,’ ‘feeble and ghastly invalids,’ ‘drunkards innumerable and indescribable,’ and on and on right down to:

pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps; organ-grinders, monkey-exhibiters and ballad mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artizans and exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye.[[16]](#endnote-16)

It is within this mass, the seething monster of social reproduction, that Poe’s narrator trains his focus on ‘a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,’ who, unlike the obviously classed types surrounding him, wears an ‘absolute idiosyncrasy of expression,’ which is eventually said to conceal ‘the type and genius of deep crime.’[[17]](#endnote-17) This man is the affective centre to Poe’s story and in that capacity he is a source of an unspeakable horror, carrying with him the ‘worst heart of the world…’[[18]](#endnote-18) Whereas Baudelaire registered horror first-hand as lyric experience, Poe senses it out as a detached observer. When it comes to the horror of crowds, here literary decadence has its origin in detective fiction.

It is common knowledge that Eliot found immediate kinship in the symbolists when, in 1908, he read them via Arthur Symons, in a book he would later describe as life changing. Comparatively less familiar is Eliot’s reading of Poe around the same time. It was not until 1949 that Eliot – when assessing Poe’s influence on Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry – conceded the gothic writer’s potential presence within his own work. ‘And yet,’ he speculates, ‘one cannot be sure that one’s own writing has not been influenced by Poe.’[[19]](#endnote-19) This is an apt description of a writer whose stories and poems were so frequently about uncanny presences and malevolent forces that may or may not be real in the first place. Nevertheless, and even though that spectral influence would not be acknowledged as such until late in Eliot’s career, we can be sure he was reading Poe ahead of writing ‘Prufrock.’ Indeed, Eliot first encountered Poe in the waiting room of a dental surgery, where the young poet was to have his teeth straightened. ‘From the age of ten,’ writes Lyndall Gordon, ‘he had to go to the dentist twice a week for two years: he found the collected works of Poe in the waiting room, and managed to read them through.’[[20]](#endnote-20) While this encounter might underwrite the figural etherization in the first strophe of ‘Prufrock,’ more important for us is that, in the lead-up to writing this poem, Eliot was not only familiar with Baudelaire’s decadent version of realism, but also with its patently gothic source material.

From a certain standpoint, the essence of realism is its desire to apprehend historical totality, a sublime matrix that is systematically undermined by the autogenesis of its own fragmentation, and to conceptualize the means by which we are to relate ourselves to it and to each other both as individuals and as classes.[[21]](#endnote-21) Such is encoded in the gaslight spectacles descried by Baudelaire and Poe, whose prosody and prose form seem mimetically responsive to the relations of production: swarming crowds stratified along the descending ‘scale of what is termed gentility’ at whose lowermost rung one finds ‘darker and deeper themes for speculation.’[[22]](#endnote-22) Though Benjamin compares Baudelaire and Poe to Friedrich Engels, whom he describes as an exemplar of social lucidity, he also insists that to look closely at the textual lineage from Poe through Baudelaire and to their shared imagery of big-city crowds is to encounter the irreducible ‘aspects of social forces of such power and hidden depth that we may include them among the only ones that are capable of exerting both a subtle and a profound effect on artistic production.’[[23]](#endnote-23) The point, then, is that two of Eliot’s influential antecedents were not simply tarrying with historically abstracted and metaphysical horrors; rather, their shared aesthetic mobilized horror precisely to convey something of the world they inhabited, and specifically to convey the lived experience of capitalist modernity. What Eliot might derive from Baudelaire and Poe is not the peculiarity of historical circumstances, which remain very different from his own, but a desire to convey the experience of history – and to convey that experience as horror.

 Let us now turn to the opening strophe of Eliot’s poem, in which these derivations and that desire are first discerned:

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent

To lead you to an overwhelming question…

Oh, do not ask, ‘What is it?’

Let us go and make our visit.[[24]](#endnote-24)

These lines are only suggestive of the horror that Baudelaire and Poe encountered in the metropolitan crowds. Unlike the heaving cities envisaged by those nineteenth-century writers, this one seems mostly desolate. Wanting in collective vitality, the miserably intimate dyad becomes a figure of public space on the whole via a simile that conjoins the streets themselves with the couple’s ‘tedious argument’ – and, with that, public space becomes charged with the speaker’s private anxiety. The content of his knowledge – the secret ‘it’ about which we are instructed not to ask – infuses the nocturnal streetscape with an unmistakable dread, the object of which is soon realized as a series of shocks whose dominant affect is not existential ennui but a more visceral revulsion. To be sure, this poem is haunted at every turn by the threat of anonymous violence that might or might not be internal to the speaker. That is what we might sense, for instance, in the prefiguring simile of ‘a patient etherized upon a table,’ which is made all the more sinister in relation to a destination marked out by ‘insidious intent,’ but also in the poem’s forbidding epigraph, in its invasive smoke and fog, in overheard ‘voices dying with a dying fall,’ in the insistence that there ‘will be time to murder and create,’ in being ‘pinned and wriggling on the wall,’ and so on. There is something fantastically demonic that lurks on the edges of this poem without ever delivering itself into full view.

Writing many years later, Eliot suggested that his ‘urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed.’[[25]](#endnote-25) In Baudelaire’s Paris and Poe’s London, the shock was of the crowd itself, and especially in how singular and collective bodies reveal the deformations caused both in and by exclusion from the factories and the workhouses of the first industrial revolution. The mere presence of the crowd in Baudelaire is an index to the demolition of proletarian housing in Paris and, in that crowd’s numbers, we see clearly what Adorno was right to describe as a ‘reverse image of the false purposefulness of industry.’[[26]](#endnote-26) For Poe, the crowd’s ‘stiff-frozen’ movements exemplify the mechanical automatism of factory workers, as though collectively dulled by industrial brutality so as to become, in Benjamin’s phrase, ‘mimetic shock absorbers.’[[27]](#endnote-27) Comparably, and returning to our horror film, that the eponymous ‘it’ takes the form of the collectively deracinated and disenfranchised means the promise of violence can blend seamlessly into the public spaces of post-crisis Detroit in such a way that the entire populace become threatening. The audience in a movie theatre or the figures outside a diner or the shadows surrounding an abandoned factory: while these, metropolitan public spaces, are first to be rendered dangerous, soon enough the threat enters that most private sanctum of all, the home, before going on to invade those superlatively conspicuous signs of wealth, the beachside holiday house and the accompanying yacht. As with Eliot’s poem, here public and private intertwine under the sign of horror. If, as in Alex Woloch’s memorable phrase, ‘minor characters are the proletariat of the novel,’ in this film the proletariat, having been ousted from the wage-commodity nexus, is finally staging its insurgency.[[28]](#endnote-28) Similar things can be said about the crowds in Baudelaire and Poe, that theirs is a violent immanence, and also about Eliot’s poem.

While, in ‘Prufrock,’ there is no crowd proper, the avatars of urban life nevertheless threaten the poem’s bourgeois domesticity. That is what we encounter, in the first instance, with the pall of ‘yellow fog’ and ‘yellow smoke’ that forces its way into the domestic interior. That choice of color is not just to emphasize sickliness and neither does it result in mere symbolism. A yellow skyline is, more precisely, the result of sulphurous dioxide borne into the atmosphere by way of the coal-burning power stations of the second industrial revolution – which, at this point in time, powered the British Empire. ‘This is,’ as Charles Dickens once put it, ‘a London particular.’[[29]](#endnote-29) Not only are the factories metonymically present via this detail; they have also, from the standpoint of the propertied, created something that is intrusively and threateningly alive: namely, the industrial proletariat. Moreover, and despite this poem’s sheltered interiority, it still features a handful of working-class cameos, such as the ‘lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows,’ but these characters are all destined to the peripheries of a privatized social space made up of the various drawing rooms. That, or they are cloaked by allusion, such as the Hesiodic hospitality workers suggested in the ‘time for all the works and days of hands that lift and drop a question on your plate.’ Or they are punitively excised, such as ‘the blind old drunken man who sings and mutters, with broken boot heels stained in many gutters,’ who vanished between the drafts and the published poem. The economic depredations so shocking for Eliot’s precedents are, in these instances, relegated to the margins of the poem and sidelined from its imagined social space. And all of this, the subterranean presence of an anonymous and semi-visible underclass, stands in absolute contrast to the imagined solidity of its resolutely bourgeois speaker.

What makes ‘Prufrock’ a modernist poem is its sense of beauty marred by horror – or, put differently, its chronicle of bourgeois excess rendered vulnerable by intimations of carnage. It is in precisely this way that the poem’s metonymy starts to become abject. ‘Arms that are braceleted and white and bare’ are, in this poem, more than just disembodied images of wealthy bedazzlement. When ‘lamplight’ reveals their detail in close-up (‘downed with light brown hair!’) and when that detail is made to collocate with the surgical setting of the opening strophe (‘Arms that lie along a table…’) these arms appear to have been amputated. But of course, this is only implied via the association of metonyms. Violence is suggested, sotto voice, but never made explicit – and that’s what makes it so horrifying. So muses Joseph Maddrey, who recalls having first read ‘Prufrock’ alongside a book on Jack the Ripper: ‘I was convinced I understood the hidden meaning of the poem, which the poet conveyed through tone rather than a straightforward narrative. In my mind, Prufrock’s ‘insidious intent’ was the dark matter of a Stephen King novel … or worse.’[[30]](#endnote-30) Small wonder this poem was taken up as the classroom set piece with which we began: its social dynamic is contiguous with that of any given slasher film, in which a middle-class world is turned inside out by the knife-wielding agents of vengeful mutilation. And yet, all of this remains historically imprecise and tells us very little about those ‘social forces of such power and hidden depth,’ for which we will need to think about the poem and its filmic remediation within their structurally corresponding historical contexts.

**… and we drown.**

How does the economy during the years in which Eliot came to intellectual maturity relate to our own? Looking at Eliot’s poem and its adaptation into the film, my argument is that the shared social dynamic and its attendant atmosphere of horror is indeed a matter of historical circumstances and more specifically that it has much to do with the hegemony of finance over capitalism in general. One of the principal means by which capitalism displaces crises wrought by the moving contradiction is through finance, which consists of an attempt to extract profits solely from the field of exchange as opposed to production. When declining returns in surplus value cause a fall in profits, it is finance that temporarily restores profitability. ‘The credit system then comes to the rescue,’ writes David Harvey, describing how finance ‘has the potential to resolve all of the imbalances to which capitalism is prone, to resolve the contradictions earlier identified.’[[31]](#endnote-31) But that restoration, the apparent resolution of a crisis, decouples profit from production. As Franco Berardi explains: ‘In the world of financial capitalism, accumulation no longer passes through the production of goods, but goes straight to its monetary goal, extracting value from the pure circulation of money, from the virtualization of life and intelligence.’[[32]](#endnote-32) In the book from which that definition of finance is taken, Berardi gestures at the apparent incompatibility between poetry and this unique mode of accumulation. ‘Investors, stockholders, and bankers are usually too busy, so they don’t waste their time with poetry. Poets,’ by contrast, ‘are too poor to invest money in the stock market.’ While the suggestion here is only playful – and neglects the likes of Katy Lederer, the ‘Hedge Fund Poet’ – what remains of serious interest to us is Berardi’s exception to this rule of mutual exclusivity: Eliot, the poet who ‘was employed at the Lloyds Bank while writing *The Waste Land*.’[[33]](#endnote-33) Here I want to argue that before working for Lloyds, where Eliot intended to learn this ‘extraordinary science of banking,’ the poetry was already intuiting the machinations of the economy, and that this intuition is what we encounter in horrors of ‘Prufrock.’[[34]](#endnote-34) Before that, however, we will need to remind ourselves of some economic history.

The period of Eliot’s early modernism was the overlap between two long centuries, the nineteenth and the twentieth, in which the British Empire was about to give way to its American successor. Internally, the economic restructurings repeated what took place under radically different circumstances in Florence during the ‘very first financial expansion of the European world-economy,’ when ‘the massive relocation of surplus capital from industry to finance resulted in unprecedented prosperity for the bourgeoisie, partly at the expense of the working class.’[[35]](#endnote-35) In this view, taken from Giovani Arrighi’s world-systemic history of capitalism, finance is the means by which economic superpowers temporarily displace crises, by abandoning manufacture to the less powerful states and by seeking new profits in exchange and credit. And this, Arrighi argues, is precisely what was taking place in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Eliot was writing:

In short, just as the Great Depression of 1873–96 had been primarily a malady of businessmen depressed by ‘excessive’ competition and ‘unreasonably’ low profits, so the ‘beautiful times’ of 1896–1914 were first and foremost a recovery from this malady following the dampening of inter-enterprise competition and a consequent upturn in profitability. But in so far as the expansion of trade, production, and working-class incomes were concerned, we can hardly speak of an upturn. Like all the wonderful moments that had characterized the closing phases of previous cycles of accumulation, the moment was wonderful only for a minority, and even for that minority it was short-lived. Within a few years, the ‘rattling of arms’ – which was music to the ears of the European bourgeoisie as long as it inflated profitability by intensifying interstate competition for mobile capital – turned into a catastrophe from which nineteenth-century capitalism would never recover.[[36]](#endnote-36)

In short, it was on the heel of the nineteenth century that the British Empire entered a circulation-based economy and thus increased profitability. However, because this upturn was engineered and enabled by finance capital, victory in the profit sector could only be won at the expense of the working class and that victory would be destined for impermanence. The return to profitability would be short-lived because, in finance, there is no new surplus-value, only extant profits, and without surplus-value the economy as a whole stagnates. Indeed, this is why the North American economy overtook the British Empire, precisely because it expanded industrial manufacture – and so, for a period of decades, it gained not only in surplus-value, but also in trade, production, and working-class incomes.

These are the specific capitalist conditions registered in Eliot, observed from the standpoint of a self-styled ‘European bourgeoisie,’ a young man who was recalled from his vacation in France and Germany back to England precisely because the ‘rattling of arms’ had grown too fierce, all of which landed him in London, in 1914, where he composed ‘Prufrock’ from the centre of a failing empire right when geopolitical tension had mounted into declarations of war. Of course, we can now see the repetitions from this moment of post-Depression financialization in the years leading up to own crisis, which entered collective imagination in or around 2008, but whose origins date back to the downturn of the 1970s.[[37]](#endnote-37) Like England before it, after the initial crisis in manufacture the United States shifted profit extraction from industrial production and into finance, thus signalling the imminence of a more comprehensive economic collapse. All of this, both then and now, bespeaks an insoluble truth recurrent throughout economic history. ‘Turn and twist then as we may,’ writes Marx of finance, ‘the fact remains unaltered. If equivalents are exchanged, no surplus-value results, and if non-equivalents are exchanged, still no surplus-value. Circulation, or the exchange of commodities, begets no value.’[[38]](#endnote-38) Indeed, the finance sector’s post-crisis assertion of pre-eminence over the economy as a whole does not obviate against contradiction but instead internalizes contradiction deep within.

 What the poem and the film share, much more obviously that any sort of schematic interest in finance, is a superabundance of what Gilles Deleuze might have called ‘liquid perception.’[[39]](#endnote-39) Both overflow with liquid imagery in such a way that their figural register seems to become, by some well-nigh Hegelian logic of transformation, an extended meditation on financial liquidity. At its plainest, financial liquidity refers to the ability of an asset to be converted, or liquidated, into currency for exchange. In short, it names the way material things are decoupled from their status as commodities and translated into derivatives for trade and investment. Liquidity is, of course, a transhistorical mechanism of finance capital and, despite major differences between finance in 1916 and finance in 2016, liquidity persists as a consistently workable instrument for profit extraction. Predictably enough, the liquid metaphor is an old one, which predates not only the high frequency trading with which it has become associated but also the credit market of Eliot’s moment. Decades if not centuries before John Maynard Keynes could popularize the term, Daniel Defoe, David Hume, and Adam Smith were describing the way that money circulates and flows, and would variously assert the dependency of all social health of the solvency of that hydraulic system.[[40]](#endnote-40) Correspondingly, economic crises are typically figured in terms of profit stagnation and financial bubbles, and have been thought of using such language since the seventeenth century. The financial lexicon is one of deep marination. Market saturation, money laundering, slush funds, frozen assets, floating loans, sinking funds, capital drain, underwater pricing: such descriptors proliferate. Responding to a shared context of imminent crisis, in which financial hegemony means peak liquidity, both poem and film submerge their narratives in the horrific-sounding imagery of what Peter Hitchcock describes as financial ‘dark pools,’ which are just as much an economic phenomenon as they are an aesthetic trope. ‘Dark pools,’ he writes, ‘form a liquidity mechanism meant to achieve efficiencies beyond the excesses that produced the crisis, particularly beyond the effulgence of regulation intended to address them.’[[41]](#endnote-41) This, the dark pool of financial liquidity, is the vortex through which all things pass in the transition from a manufacture to a finance economy. It also serves as a tonally apposite figure that works on a similar level of economic signification when deployed as the aqueous imagery in both the poem and the film.

Eliot’s ‘mermaids singing, each to each,’ his ‘chambers of the sea,’ and his Rhine-maiden-esque ‘sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown’ articulate something of the credit economy from which manufacture has disappeared and in which the poem’s speaker knows that he and his class are soon going to drown. If the yellow smoke and yellow fog are signs of industrial production, and if at dusk the by-products of industry begin to seem predatory, in the dead of night the same figures become altogether more horrific, but also and significantly that horror is suggestively aquatic. This is what we encounter in an episode drafted but expunged from the published poem:

And when the midnight turned and writhed in fever

I tossed the blankets back, to watch the darkness

Crawling among the papers on the table

It leapt to the floor and made a sudden hiss

And darted stealthily across the wall

Flattened itself upon the ceiling overhead

Stretched out its tentacles, prepared to leap[[42]](#endnote-42)

This episode is more Lovecraftian than Tennysonian, surely, but is also speaks serendipitously to Matt Taibbi’s infamous description of Goldman-Sachs, the world’s largest finance operator, as ‘a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money.’[[43]](#endnote-43) While Taibbi’s metaphor became popular because of its affective gravity – and because its seemed prescient of the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico – it also suggests imperial overreach stretching up from unfathomable depths of what Marx and Engels once called ‘the icy water of egotistical calculation.’[[44]](#endnote-44) This Cthuloid vision is, it would seem, a nightmare peculiar to finance capital. The question, then, is this: could it be Taibbi’s economically significant creature, the vampyroteuthis infernalis in its infancy, which hisses and stretches from within Eliot’s poem?

Making good on these premonitions of the deep, the triplet that ends the poem plunges us into the dark pool with irrevocable finality:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Consider the collective pronoun, ‘we,’ which is only uttered twice in the poem, both times here, thus marking an important shift in identification. Even with its opening ‘you and I,’ which is now returned imperfectly and modified by ‘we,’ the poem has so far been dominated by the individual first-person; it is only here, in sensing an immanent termination, that the speaker looks sidelong to his compeers. Most readers interpret this ending as the speaker being wakened from a narcissistic reverie. To drown, in that view, is to be forced out from the subjective interior. And yet, the pronoun suggests that this awakening might be something different: rather than staging the conflict between intellect and emotion, between the individual and his milieu, this could well be a reckoning with collective fate. The financial bubble in and by which the bourgeois are temporarily protected – figured here in multiple, as ‘chambers of the sea’ – is going to rupture. Even if the sea of these lines is only the fantastical stuff of dreams, within a frame of reference clarified by the horror film and by the slasher film in particular, we know that fantasy can still prove fatal.

And indeed, such liquid imagery – which is taken up conspicuously by *It Follows* – speaks to a trend in contemporary horror, of rendering liquidity as one and the same with bodily contamination. So writes Annie McClanahan on a comparable splatter film, which uses blood and guts and vomit and saliva to formalize the inter- and intra-subjective streams of liquid capital: ‘the free flow of liquid money that for early twenty-first-century investors was the perfect expression of a fully financialized mode of profitability, must now be prevented, lest its poisonous toxicity spread throughout the social order.’[[45]](#endnote-45) This anxiety is familiar to both our poem and our film. If, as in Michael North’s reading of Eliot, ‘the horror of sex seems to come in part from its power to metonymize,’ if ‘desire pulls the body apart, so that to give in to it is to suffer permanent dismemberment,’ the film’s erotic imperative supplies that horror with its economic corollary, registering middle-class anxiety about financial contagion through sex, rendering liquidity as pathogenic genital fluid.[[46]](#endnote-46) We see this narratively with the characters’ interlocking preoccupations with sex and class, but also at the level of mise-en-scène, so much of which involves eroticized bodies floating in liquid. In good epic fashion, the film opens in media res, with a teenage girl’s flight from the suburbs, away from her home and her family, to the water’s edge, where she awaits death. The first time we see Jay on screen she floats beneath autumnal skies in an outdoor swimming pool. The lakeside scenes in the film’s second act provide Jay and her gang the chance for a subdued beach party. And Jay’s friend, Yara, is conspicuously portrayed as a mermaid: in one critic’s exacting description, she is ‘a Hipster Ariel doppelganger, with big glasses, reddish hair, and a seashell Kindle-type device.’[[47]](#endnote-47) Most importantly of all, the film’s denouement, the final showdown between Jay and ‘it,’ takes place in a massive indoor swimming pool. The journey to the pool, from the affluent Sterling Heights into the City of Detroit, reflects a shift down the economic scale. Along the way houses become more and more dilapidated. The architecture looms. ‘When I was a little girl,’ says Yara, the Ariel doppelganger, ‘my parents wouldn’t have allowed me to go south of 8 Mile. And I didn’t even know what that meant until I got a little bit older, and I started realizing that’s where the city started and the suburbs ended.’ They enter the waterpark building right on twilight and, having emerged poolside after venturing through a series of subterranean tunnels, they prepare to fight. The plan is to electrocute their invisible assailant.

Various electronic devices surround a multi-lane swimming pool and Jay is submerged in the middle. Her friends sit poolside. Every shot emphasizes liquid. The brightest lighting is from under water within the pool itself, into which the camera follows our heroine, bobbing up and down below the surface. Aqueous shadows ripple across tiled walls. A storm rages off-screen. ‘It’ finally arrives, visible to Jay only, and reveals itself to the others by hurling their appliances into the water. Televisions, a foldout chair, a typewriter, another television, a hair-dryer, and a radio: the kind of stuff typically looted during riots or repossessed during foreclosure. Splashing and screaming. Asymmetrical jump-cuts. Gunshots. ‘It’ collapses into the pool and tries to drag Jay under. More gunshots. Bullets trail through the water. One connects, tearing through the assailant’s skull. She escapes. ‘Jay, is it still down there, do you see it?’ A blistered handprint on her ankle. She crawls, slowly, back to the pool’s edge. Still dripping. The camera looks down into the water from her perspective, tentatively peering over the tiles. Cut to her frightened visage. Then, from overhead, the water swims with billows of red and brown. Seaweed bloodclouds. Crisis averted, or at least forestalled.

The key difference, then, is temporal. That is what changes between 1916 and 2016. For Prufrock the crisis remains imminent. For Jay and her friends it has just passed, leaving behind a trail of human wreckage and wrecked commodities. In both cases, however, the crisis is manifestly liquid. It begins and ends in the depths. Having seen these overlaps between the poem and the film, their shared translation of financial hegemony into liquid imagery, we can now return to the lines quoted in the classroom, repeated here in full:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!

Smoothed by long fingers,

Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,

Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet – and here’s no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

This retreat from the drawing room to the alien seafloor puts us in the mind of the poem’s potential invocations of a credit economy via liquid imagery. That first unrhymed couplet is perhaps the most fascinating thing here, with its monstrous synecdoche and its onomatopoeic alliteration combining for a proto-Vorticist rendition of the modernist crustacean. Like the hands that appear elsewhere in the poem, such as those belonging to the unseen hospitality worker, this ‘pair of ragged claws’ refers to the disembodied objects of reification (keeping with the poem’s aesthetic technique, this is less Smithian metaphor and more the metonymy underscored by Marx). The figure connotes labor, and it does so as the productive obverse to credit or finance. Despite the crushing weight of the ocean, the claws are protected by a hardened exoskeleton. Why, then, might the speaker claim that he ‘should’ have been this figure – for what reason might he desire a demotion from the upper or the middle to the lower, working class? The following lines suggest an answer. Prufrock’s luxurious idyll is, he prophesies, soon to be interrupted by a ‘crisis,’ and that crisis is seen as both the potential for bloody horror (‘I have seen my head brought in on a platter’) and as a result of implicit class-conflict (‘I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker’). In these lines, the old regime now sustained beyond its superannuation by finance knows that it will soon ‘flicker’ out, and that it will do so neither with a bang nor a whimper but with spectacular decapitations. Prufrock, the poem’s resoundingly bourgeois speaker, has good reason to be afraid.

The economic source or referent of this prophecy is all but confirmed at the opposite end of Eliot’s career, with ‘The Dry Salvages,’ which was written during the London Blitz in 1940. In this poem, whose elemental imagination is profoundly concerned with water in its many forms, we are first introduced to the river as a god, then as ‘as a conveyor of commerce,’ and then, for ‘the dwellers in cities,’ as a ‘destroyer,’ a vengeful ‘reminder of what men choose to forget.’ (184) That something crucial has been forgotten, and that this thing might have its basis in commerce as much as divinity, is a lesson already inscribed by Eliot if not explicitly in ‘Prufrock’ then soon later, in 1922. The fourth part of *The Waste Land* recalls the tale of a drowned trader to caution an implied listener:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,

Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell

And the profit and loss.

                                   A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell

He passed the stages of his age and youth

Entering the whirlpool.

                                   Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (71)

To say that Phlebas failed to remember birdsong, waves, and the market does not necessarily mean that such forgetfulness secured his death. It does, however, allow for polysyndeton to combine the three, so that an oceanic voyage doubles with capitalist speculation. Venture thus finds not only its etymological root but also its conceptual origin in the mercantile adventure. But the speculation is not just that of historically abstracted capitalism, the presence of which numerous critics have sensed in the third line. The speculation belongs specifically to finance capital. That is to say, the Phoenician economy is known not as one of manufacture but, rather, of a vast exchange network predicated on maritime diaspora: ‘the profit and loss,’ but not the production, which was outsourced to other nation states. What Karl Polanyi famously termed the ‘port of trade’ is emblematic of the operation as a whole. ‘The port of trade,’ he explained, ‘was often a neutrality device, a derivative of silent trade, of the prehistoric Mediterranean low-walled emporium, open to the sea, and of the neutralized coastal town.’[[48]](#endnote-48) It is into this, a whirlpool of ancient finance that uncannily prefigures our own, that Phlebas’ body has descended and in which his bones have been picked clean. Again, and definitively, finance is brought to life in liquid imagery and to horrific affect. And, as with ‘Prufrock,’ this account is intended as a warning. Take the apostrophe that comprises the final three lines. Its addressee, a figure both complex and explicit, is a collective entity. This much is made legible by the universalizing antinomy, ‘Gentile or Jew,’ but the collective entity to which that antinomy refers also has singular features, as Phlebas is said to have been both ‘handsome and tall as you.’ While these final five words suggest an elegiac pentameter, the framing admonition to ‘Consider Phlebas’ renders them less mournful than forward-facing. These lines imply a handsome, tall collective – the living embodiments of what Arrighi called the ‘wonderful moments’ and the ‘beautiful times,’ or what Prufrock intuited as a passing ‘greatness.’ It is a collective that should do well to recall its historical antecedents. The poem knows its economic history, it knows that within capitalism history moves in cycles, and it knows this as horror. ‘Fear death by drowning,’ warned the clairvoyant in the poem’s first part.

**Coda: Prufrock’s Secret**

‘The corpse of modernism,’ claims Ruth Jennison, ‘has been raised and reanimated at various moments of capitalist crisis.’[[49]](#endnote-49) Though we should remain suspicious of modernism as a mystifying ideology, with this essay I have suggested that one of modernism’s seminal poems presents us with a vision of finance being used to displace the moving contradiction, but doing so in a way that nevertheless catalyzes the potential for cutthroat insurgency from the social peripheries. This is something that had been there all along but which comes to the fore now, a century after publication, because that poem has been raised and reanimated. ‘I am Lazarus,’ we read in lines that now seem prophetic, ‘come from the dead, Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all…’ What, then, does the undead speaker of Eliot’s poem want to tell us? Prufrock’s secret, which horrifies its possessor and thereby animates the poem’s horrific imagery, is that finance will soon meet its end and in that ending reparations will be sought. That is what *It Follows* makes plain in its resurrection of a modernism whose animate corpse now arises from the haze of financial crisis. Both poem and film experience this horror from the standpoint of a deteriorating middle class. We are asked to once again venture through the failing metropolis, and again we learn the consequences of a crisis in accumulation and the displacement of profits from manufacture into finance. The working class was first to suffer. You’re next.

1. For a good historical account of the politics of the slasher film, see chapters five and nine, ‘The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’ and ‘Horror in the 80s’ from Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP), 2003. For a more theoretical take, see Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Joshua Clover, *Riot-Strike-Riot: The Era of New Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2016). Ebook. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Philip Mirowski, *Never Let A Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Martin Nicolaus. London: Penguin, 1993. Ebook. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot’s Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Eagleton quoted in Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Eliot, quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *21st Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics* (London: Blackwell, 2001), 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. William Q. Malcuit, ‘The Poetics of Political Failure: Eliot’s Antiliberalism in an American Context’ *Twentieth Century Literature* 62.1 (March 2016): 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See, for an account of Baudelaire’s aesthetic from the standpoint of this ‘crude realism,’ Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 37-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno, California: Academy Library Guild, 1954), 3-4. For analysis of the different translations of these lines, see Derek Attridge and Henry Staten, *The Craft of Poetry: Dialogues on Minimal Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 2015), 148-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See chapter four, “The Swarm,” in Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Commune* (London: Verso, 1988), 100-122. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Walter Benjamin, ed. Michael Jennings *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940* (Harvard, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 320. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales* (Library of American, 1984), 391-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Poe. 396. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Poe. 396. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (London: Vintage, 1998), 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. György Lukács, ‘Realism in the Balance,’ *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 1033-58. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Poe. 391. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Benjamin, 324. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Eliot’s poetry are taken from T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poetry and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969). Quotations from ‘Prufrock’ are all taken from between pages 13 and 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Eliot, ‘The Influence of Landscape Upon the Poet’ *Daedelus* 89 (1960); 420. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Inventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), 151. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Benjamin, 328. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (London: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 1974), 76. For a fascinating history of London smoke and fog, which properly contextualizes this phrase, see Christine L. Corton, *London Fog: The Biography* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Joseph Maddrey, *The Making of T. S. Eliot: A Study of the Literary Influences* (London: McFarland: 1979), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2007). Ebook. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012), 23-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Eliot to Graham Wallas, 23 March 1917, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot: Volume One, 1898-1922*, eds. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 183. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origin of Our Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 178. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Significantly, these dates bracket the period in which the slasher genre rose to and sustained its popularity, and we might even speculate that slasher films confront the affluent with a catastrophe yet to strike historically. In responding to that catastrophe from within its wake, *It Follows* articulates a truth about the genre in which it participates: even if the films don’t always know it, this genre is always about the economy. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1, The Process of Capitalist Accumulation*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Friedrich Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1906), 181-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London and New York: Continuum, 1986), 76-80. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See Brad Pasanek and Simone Polillo, eds. *Beyond Liquidity: The Metaphor of Money in Financial Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Peter Hitchcock, ‘Accumulating Fictions’ *Representations* 126.1 (Spring 2014): 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. These lines are from a section of the poem known as ‘Prufrock’s Pervigilium,’ which is collected in Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Harcourt, 1996). For a detailed account of that section in relation to the poem as a whole see Nicholas B. Mayer, ‘Catalyzing Prufrock’ *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (Spring 2011): 182-98. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Matt Taibbi, ‘The Great American Bubble Machine’ *Rolling Stone* 1082 (July 9, 2009). Web. Though it is doubtful that Eliot had read Lovecraft, Lovecraft certainly read Eliot, and even published a long, parody poem: “The Waste Paper: A Poem of Profound Insignificance.” There is an argument to be made the Eliot and Lovecraft were indeed swimming in the same current. The seeds of the argument can be found in an unpublished dissertation: Charles Elliot, ‘Chthonic Powers: T. S. Eliot and H. P. Lovecraft’ (Unpublished dissertation) Eastern Michigan University, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 475. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Annie McClanahan, ‘Dead Pledges: Debt, Horror, and the Credit Crisis’ *Post-45* 5 (July 2012). Web. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. North, 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Lenika Cruz, ‘What’s in a Name? The Anonymous Horror of *It Follows*’ *The Atlantic*. March 13, 2015. Web. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Karl Polanyi, ‘Ports of Trade in Early Societies’ *The Journal of Economic History* 23.1 (March 1963): 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ruth Jennison, ‘29 | 73 | 08: Poetry, Crisis, and a Hermeneutic of Limits’ *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 28.2 (Spring 2015): 40. And indeed, the recitation of Eliot’s poem in a classroom in Detroit is not the only time the same words have appeared on film. Most notably, they are given manic expression by Dennis Hopper’s acid-crazed photojournalist in *Apocalypse Now*. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)