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For my parents

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Abstract

Many accounts of Anglo-American modernist fiction presuppose its postwar termination and the consequent anachronism of its commitment to autonomous artistic form—a commitment that is now often understood as a merely sociological matter of taste and, as such, a dissimulation of social reality. This dissertation challenges these positions. Building on recent reappraisals of aesthetic autonomy, I demonstrate how the modernist commitment to art's autonomy can be understood not only in more formally rigorous and less sociological terms than are conventional but also in more historically capacious terms. I explore how a modernist principle of aesthetic autonomy emerges in antagonism to fin-de-siècle processes of marketization and persists today within fiction whose circulation is subsumed by the market. I base this expanded periodization of modernist fiction on an analysis of how works can assert the autonomy of their aesthetic meaning in mass-market contexts where this autonomy has not been analyzed as it has been within the market-insulated contexts of canonical modernism. Taking up key works of Anglo-American fiction whose modernist form has been neglected or misunderstood, I show how these works assert aesthetic autonomy through and against the way they must fashion themselves for mass-market circulation and, in this way, embody a form of realism rooted in irony. What I call the "market architecture" of modernist fiction consists of medium-specific conceptual structures that transform the external, instrumentalizing pressures of market demand into internal, aesthetic problems of self-legislating form. By analyzing the structuring presence of market architecture in forms like popular genre fiction, experimental novels about race, political performance art, and

the contemporary sequel novel, I show how cultural problems and projects often deemed antithetical to autonomous art can actually be intrinsic to it.

Introduction

Figure 1. Alvin Langdon Coburn, "The English House," frontispiece to the third volume of Henry James's New York Edition, 1908.[1]

When Henry James compares fiction writing to a house in his 1908 preface to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, he evokes a vertiginous domestic façade to make a point about

[1] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1908), ii. James elsewhere describes Coburn's photograph as a "slightly nebulous view of the English country house (Hardwicke, near Pangbourne, on the Thames) which I had vaguely and approximately had in mind, years ago, for the opening of the *Portrait.*" James, *Letters, 1895–1916*, ed. Leon Edel, vol. 4 (Harvard University Press, 1974), 410.

the autonomy of art. James's "house of fiction" has "not one window, but a million," and each is an attempt to open the "aperture" of novelistic form onto the "spreading field, the human scene… the 'choice of subject.'"[2] Here, fiction writing is a distinctly architectural space of artistic possibility: a façade "piercable in its vast front" by the "vision" and "will" of individual authors. But just as James begins to construct this architectural metaphor for fiction, he curiously involutes it. Novels as "apertures" are, he continues, "but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life." A dead wall is a wall without openings; "mere holes in a dead wall" is a paradox.[3] While this phrase seems immediately to refer to the mere materiality of windows and walls, its technical reference directs its sense toward the sheer idealism of what cannot be the case. Thus, at precisely the moment that the architectural terms of James's metaphor coalesce to align fiction writing with opening a window onto the world, these terms also lock into a paradoxical relation with each other that walls them off from the world. Here and at length throughout the rest of this preface, James presents fiction writing as a kind of metaphor writing in which domestic-architectural forms comprise the literal material that must be taken up and—as in metaphor—meant in a way that demands immanent interpretation. To compare novels to "windows" yet distinguish them from "hinged doors opening straight upon life" is to emphasize the fictional work's aesthetic autonomy, its self-legislating form. In James's 1907 preface to *Roderick*

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[2] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, x-xi.

[3] Anna Kornbluh analyzes this paradoxical phrase as a figure for the non-mimetic realist capacity of art fiction in *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 35-36, 174n1.

Hudson, also written for his Edition, he phrases this commitment to the autonomy of art more concisely: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."[4] The geometric concision of this metaphor complements James's "house of fiction" by cutting the latter's involuted architecture down to its conceptual core: a figure for the immanent purposiveness of the artwork. If the million windows of James's "house of fiction" open onto the endless relationality of the world, the paradoxical construction "mere holes in a dead wall" embodies a "geometry of [its] own" that opens determinately onto itself.

James is generally understood to be the Anglo-American progenitor of the art novel: that formally innovative strand of narrative fiction that literary studies now calls modernist fiction.[5] Yet, to call art fiction "modernist" conventionally entails siloing it within an early- to mid-twentieth-century canon of classical works. One aim of this dissertation is to sketch a broader historical trajectory of Anglo-American modernist fiction that persists into our present and within which this classical canon is an integral but relativized part. This kind of contestation of modernism's historical and formal boundaries is foundational to the field of modernist studies, yet, since the emergence of what is known as the New Modernist Studies, the very capacity of

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[4] Henry James, *Roderick Hudson*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1907), vii.

[5] Mark McGurl argues that it is James who leads the way in forging Anglo-American modernist fiction as, above all, a technology of social distinction. McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton UP, 2001). Yet McGurl's commitment to a Bourdieusian philistinism leads him to abbreviate often incisive interpretations with ascriptions of elitism and snobbery. Admirably reflexive, McGurl does reflect on this philistinism as a "method," albeit with concepts of "immanent critique" and "the aesthetic" that are necessarily abbreviated by it (19-20).

this field to have a foundation has increasingly been called into question. Many accounts of modernism presuppose that the postwar institutionalization of modernist studies coincides with the end of modernism and its commitment to aesthetic autonomy, which is now often understood as an anachronistic, sociological matter of taste and, as such, a merely "aesthetic" dissimulation of social reality. Accordingly, the foundational question of which works or discourses count as modernist is, of late, often addressed as a matter of offhand, heuristic specification rather than of argument rooted in the interpretation of works themselves. Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers retrace the history of this shift in the study of modernism and distill its logic into a twofold tendency: "Modernism will at times appear to cohere as a single, unified concept… but at other times it will emerge as a kind of strange attractor around which different creators, events, objects, and media can be gathered and dispersed."[6] Modernism's emergence in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century capitalist core was initially understood, Latham and Rogers suggest, according to the former, integrative model. Yet, from the 1970s onward, the ascent of cultural studies' sociological-contextualist paradigm ushers the latter, dispersive model of modernism into a position of dominance. Within this paradigm, Latham and Rogers note, "all aesthetic value is relative, and therefore modernism can be found everywhere or nowhere depending on the fields of intellectual, political, or social force used to align its fragments" (111). What is now known as the New Modernist Studies emerges out of this paradigm shift and, often, out of a postmodernist critique of intentionality and thus of determinate meaning in art—of the very idea, in other words, that there could be a modernist "there there:" an essence embodied by

[6] Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers, *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 5.

certain artworks and autonomous of readers' subjective experience and relativistic matrices of taste.

Acknowledging certain contributions of the New Modernist Studies' sociological skepticism about aesthetic modernism, this dissertation pursues a substantialist alternative to it. Building on recent reappraisals of aesthetic autonomy in literary studies, I hold modernism to exist as a substantial aesthetic project and contend that its criterion within works is an assertion of autonomous artistic form that is ultimately irreducible to sociological explanation. This assertion of autonomous form makes works count as art in the specific, modernist sense I elaborate, in an Anglo-American context, across this dissertation. In the chapters to follow, I explore how aesthetic autonomy emerges as a regulative principle of Anglo-American modernist fiction in antagonism to fin-de-siècle processes of marketization and persists today within works whose circulation is subsumed by the market. I base this expanded periodization of modernist fiction in analyses of how works can assert the autonomy of their meaning—which is to say, their immanently purposive form—in mass-market contexts where this autonomy has not been analyzed as it has been within the market-insulated contexts of canonical modernism. At the bookends of this dissertation's account of modernist fiction, for example: whether in the market-exposed context of H.G. Wells writing a utopian romance in 1885 or of Jennifer Egan writing a sequel novel about digital social media in 2022, I argue that modernism has been understood to be irrelevant or misunderstood as merely an extension of— as James might put it, a "hinged door opening straight upon"—the market-driven sociological processes of capitalist modernity. Taking up such works of misunderstood or unaccounted-for Anglo-American modernist fiction, I show

how they assert aesthetic autonomy through and against the way they must fashion themselves for mass-market circulation—that is, through what I call their *market architecture*. At the outset, James's fin-de-siècle commitment to aesthetic autonomy lets us begin to see how this commitment can be at home, as it were, in not only the domain of fiction writing in general but also the domain of the mass market.

I. An Elevation

James's modernism may culminate artistically in his late novels and theoretically in his Edition's prefaces, but it finds perhaps its most concise expression several decades earlier in his 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction." Here, James simply asserts that the writer of fiction "competes with life."[7] What, then, does James's specifically domestic-architectural elaboration of the art of fiction offer in his 1908 preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*? Couched in the instrumentality of windows, walls, and doors, James's "house of fiction" registers more concretely how he understands his art to "compete" with all that upon which it depends: its sociological content and context, the stuff of modern life. For while the 1884 pretext for James's "Art of Fiction" essay is an audience receptive to Walter Besant's recent middlebrow musings on the topic and, James hoped, receptive in turn to his own more serious vision for the art,[8] in 1908, the pretext for James's "house of fiction" metaphor is his hope for a market receptive to nothing less than the materialization of his vision: the best of his oeuvre, available for purchase—now with prefaces.

[7] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Partial Portraits* (Macmillan, 1888), 390.

[8] Mark Spilka, "Henry James and Walter Besant: 'The Art of Fiction' Controversy," *Novel* 6, no. 2 (1973): 103.

James's Edition is his attempt to exploit the possibility of an untapped market for his work and thus, in Michael Anesko's account, to secure adequate funds for his retirement.[9] "To assist the public in its search and to satisfy its craving for novelty," Anesko suggests, "James was eager to embellish his Edition with prefaces and frontispieces and to rework his earlier fictions. To captivate a publisher and a public, James was prepared to frame his artistic goals in distinctly marketable form" (144). By shifting his principle of art fiction's "competition with life" into the unavoidably instrumental logic of domestic architecture, James finds an idiom of aesthetic autonomy adequate to his Edition's highly commercial context. Thus, while "competition with life" is James's prospective vision of fiction elevated to an art, over two decades later his "house of fiction" is a retrospective figure of this process of artistic elevation as an architectural elevation.

James's "house of fiction" is, in this sense, an architectural synecdoche of his Edition's prefatory structure. For as James immerses himself in "the curiosity of analysing the structure" of *The Portrait of a Lady* (xii)—"a structure reared with 'architectural' competence" (xvi)—he elaborates his "house of fiction" metaphor in terms of a tension that ramifies throughout his Edition's prefaces: a tension between the inward perfection of form and the outward effectivity of reader appeal:[10]

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[9] Michael Anesko, *"Friction with the Market:" Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986), 141.

[10] In the preface to *Portrait,* James equates fiction's "architecture" with its "composition" in relation to "The French" (viii) and Ivan Turgenev (xvi). For James's comment on the Turgenev's "want of 'architecture'" as such, see "The Art of Fiction," 315.

> On one thing I was determined; that, though I should clearly have to pile brick upon brick for the creation of an interest, I would leave no pretext for saying that anything is out of line, scale or perspective. I would build large—in fine embossed vaults and painted arches, as who should say, and yet never let it appear that the chequered pavement, the ground under the reader's feet, fails to stretch at every point to the base of the walls. That precautionary spirit, on re-perusal of the book, is the old note that most touches me: it testifies so, for my own ear, to the anxiety of my provision for the reader's amusement. (xvi)[11]

Precisely this tension between internal coherence and external effect structures James's prefaces because, oriented toward a mass-market audience, they are not merely a useful selling point, "provision for the reader's amusement;" his Edition's prefatory architecture consists more fundamentally in a balancing act between formal ambition and commercial exigency. James's prefaces, that is, attempt to both elucidate (clarify the meaning of) and sell (derive a marketable effect from) his innovative fiction. In a 1908 letter to William Dean Howells, James writes that his prefaces are "in general, a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on

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[11] Traces of this metaphor's logic and perhaps its origination appear in an early scene in *The Portrait of a Lady* where James describes, as a kind of focalized architectural plan, how "[t]he foundation of [Isabel Archer's] knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had highly uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces… she was guided in her selection chiefly by the frontispiece" (29-30). This scene unfolds into a description, charged with mystery and foreboding, of a "condemned" door that opens from the library onto the "vulgar street" with a windowed view that is obscured because the door's "sidelights [have] been filled with green paper" (30-31). Anesko reads this scene suggestively as "[a]t one level of significance… a blueprint of Isabel's innocent consciousness, a physical representation of her sheltered experience. But at another level, James has constructed a model of his own professional situation. The 'mysterious' link between works of literature and their potential audience, between the sanctuary of culture (the library) and the vulgar street, is the marketplace (the office), a businesslike domain where values are filtered through the sole medium of exchange: windows papered in bank-note green" (13).

other than infantile lines."[12] The "infantile" form of appreciation that James hopes to bolster his work against would, on the mechanical model of "hinged doors opening straight upon life," be an appreciation of effects that merely open a work's meaning to the contingent purposes of its readers. Indeed, to hit on a distinction central to this dissertation's argument, the threat that the market poses to modernism consists precisely in its social validation of art's salable effects rather than art's meaning. While the idiosyncratic architecture of "holes in a dead wall" demands interpretation, "hinged doors opening straight upon life" are an architectural metaphor for communication; opening a causal passage between work and reader, such "doors" merely demand use.

When Le Corbusier asserts in his 1923 modernist manifesto *Towards a New Architecture* that a "house is a machine for living in,"[13] he brings the aesthetic significance of James's "house of fiction" metaphor into sharper focus, even if fiction writing is far from Le Corbusier's immediate concern. Le Corbusier is concerned with houses of reality and argues that architects must design them like airplanes. While airplanes have been designed "without paying the slightest attention to what is alien to pure mechanics" (165), Le Corbusier challenges architects to pose the problem of the house in starkly utilitarian terms. Just as the airplane must fly, the house must shape and enable domestic life with the utmost efficiency. Architecture is a material support for life. But crucially, for Le Corbusier, modernist architecture must go beyond this level of utilitarian purposiveness. His criterion of architectural art is a narrow band of aesthetic

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[12] Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), xx.
[13] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Courier, 1986), 95.

sensuousness that nonetheless arises out of the ordinary experience of fulfilling instrumental needs: "By the use of inert materials and *starting from* conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotions. This is Architecture" (203). For Le Corbusier, such emotional arousal is a matter of sensuous, formal harmony:

> Architecture has another meaning and other ends to pursue than showing construction and responding to needs (and by "needs" I mean utility, comfort and practical arrangement). ARCHITECTURE is the art above all others which achieves a state of platonic grandeur, mathematical order, speculation, the perception of the harmony which lies in emotional relationships. This is the AIM of architecture.[14]

Thus, against Adolf Loos's influential 1910 polemic against architecture as art, which holds that "everything that serves some practical purpose, should be ejected from the realm of art"[15]—and further, in contrast to what Le Corbusier imagines to be "pure art, a concentrated thing free from all utilitarian motives" (142)—Le Corbusier contends that the assertion of aesthetic autonomy is possible in architecture, but only insofar as the uselessness of the aesthetic consists in a determinate negation of use rather than its mere rejection or abolition.[16]

Yet architecture only dramatizes this dialectic of use and uselessness, which is essential to all autonomous art. Theodor Adorno's 1965 critique of Loos and purely functionalist architecture recurs to this point: "Purposefulness without purpose [*Zweck*] is thus really the sublimation

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[14] Le Corbusier, 110-111. References here to the "platonic" and "mathematical" are more polemical than rigorously worked out. While the former emphasizes non-instrumentality, the latter follows from Le Corbusier's fascination with Taylorism.

[15] Adolf Loos, *On Architecture* (Ariadne Press, 2002), 83.

[16] See Todd Cronan's gloss on these issues in "Why Architecture Matters as Art as Never Before: Le Corbusier, Tony Smith and the Problem of Use," *nonsite*, no. 21 (July 17, 2017), https://nonsite.org/why-architecture-matters-as-art-as-never-before/.

[*Sublimierung*] of purpose. Nothing exists as an aesthetic object in itself, but only within the field of tension of such sublimation."[17] On the face of it, then, architecture might be classified as among the most "applied" of the fine arts. Yet Adorno's point is that such an abstract distinction between the fine and the applied conceals the dialectic at hand: the fine must always emerge through the applied. For Adorno, any material taken up within an autonomous artwork, that is, can be said to have a purpose external to it, a use value—and thus a relation to commerce and the market—that the work's aesthetic purpose must sublate as part of a self-legislating whole. The extent to which architectural art lays bare this dialectic—the autonomous artwork's determinate negation of use—returns us to James's "house of fiction." For as James prepares his Edition, the instrumentalizing pressures of mass-market circulation appear to him with particular vividness as an unavoidable aspect of his art, and his "house of fiction" metaphor inflects these pressures into an aptly architectural metaphor for the modernist "elevation" of fiction in which he has played a decisive part.

James's metaphor crystallizes the concept at the core of this dissertation: the *market architecture* of modernist fiction. The necessity that an artwork foreground its instrumentality in

[17] Theodor W. Adorno, "Functionalism Today," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 8. While "sublimation" (*Sublimierung*) is Adorno's psychoanalytically inflected sense of Hegelian "sublation" (*Aufheben*), I use the latter term here to bracket the idiosyncrasy of Adorno's term. For Adorno at once rejects "sublimation" theories of the aesthetic on the grounds of their reductiveness and complicity with "affirmative culture" while recurring often to the term and its opposite, "desublimation," as a means of mediating art and social process. Martin Jay, "Adorno and the Role of Sublimation in Artistic Creativity and Cultural Redemption," *New German Critique* 48, no. 2 (143) (August 1, 2021): 63–84; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (U of Minnesota Press, 2020), 238-239, 319-320.

the process of sublating it within an artistic meaning that has no external purpose is, I argue, not only characteristic of architectural modernism but also characteristic of modernist fiction under conditions of high market exposure. The market architecture of modernist fiction consists of medium-specific conceptual structures that transform the external, instrumentalizing pressures of market demand into internal, aesthetic problems of self-legislating form. "Architecture"—over and against the more neutral term "structure" or the more emphatically instrumental term "infrastructure"—emphasizes market-exposed modernist fiction's tense, twofold orientation toward both commercial instrumentality and aesthetic uselessness. Market architecture, then, is how the autonomous artwork's particular kind of structure can constitute itself within and against the market-driven infrastructure of the culture industry. The artistry it capacitates is, as James puts it, "that benefit of *friction with the market* which is so true a one for solitary artists too much steeped in their mere personal dreams."[18] For even if an artwork's structure is necessarily oriented toward the market, it may nonetheless be aesthetically autonomous in a specific sense: sensuously intelligible thus medium-specific, and conceptually determinate yet ultimately irreducible to external concepts. Through the immanent interpretation demanded by this aesthetic structure (the autonomy of which I further elaborate in abstract terms below and in concrete terms throughout the dissertation), yet with attention to sociological context, this dissertation explores how fiction writers must, at certain historical conjunctures, orient their work's assertion of autonomous form toward the market's systemic indifference to the kind of meaning embodied

[18] Henry James to Hendrik Anderson, November 25, 1906, MSS 6251 (46), Henry James Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Collections Library, University of Virginia.

by this form. Whether or not market architecture is couched in the thematics of buildings—we will see that often it is not—its aesthetic structure is how modernist fiction can assert the autonomy of its form through and against the way it must fashion itself for mass-market circulation—the systemic imperative of which is to present consumers with effects that sell rather than internally coherent meanings.

It is crucial that the meaning, structure, or form of artworks be understood here as synonyms that coalesce as such around one concept: intention. For when it comes to interpreting art or any expressive act, meaning must be analytically identical to intention. But only if we understand intention correctly: neither as an event in the mind of the artist nor as any kind of cause external to the intended matter in hand. Rather, as G.E.M. Anscombe argues—building on Ludwig Wittgenstein and, indirectly, G.W.F. Hegel—intention is simply the way we talk about action. In Anscombe's account, intention is the form of "vital description" of events according to which we answer the question "why?" with reasons rather than causes.[19] This formal conceptualization of intention deflates a range of aporetic theoretical conventions in literary studies that have, in various ways, structured the emergence of the New Modernist Studies' sociological relativism. For example, as Jennifer Ashton argues, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe

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[19] Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard UP, 2000), 85-6. Anscombe is the primary interlocutor for Wittgenstein's non-causalist identification of meaning and intention. However, her work has not always been read in this way—most notably by Donald Davidson. See Davidson's *Essays on Actions and Events: Philosophical Essays*, vol. 1 (Clarendon Press, 2001), 3-19, 59. On the non-causalist intervention Anscombe poses in *Intention*, over and against Davidson's causalism, see Anton Ford, "The Arithmetic of 'Intention,'" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (April 1, 2015): 129–43; Walter Benn Michaels, "Blind Time (Drawing with Anscombe)," *REAL* 35, no. 1 (December 2019): 49–60.

Beardsley's "intentional fallacy" should be understood in its historical context as an argument, pitched against facile biographical criticism, that rightly rejects the idea that authorial intention is the cause of a literary work's meaning[20]—even as Wimsatt and Beardsley nonetheless fail to produce the alternative, non-causalist concept of intention that Anscombe develops, unbeknownst to them, at around the same time. Likewise, as Walter Benn Michaels argues in an elaboration on his and Steve Knapp's canonical defense of the analytic identity of meaning and intention in their 1982 essay "Against Theory," literary studies' broad deference to the radical interpretive indeterminacy entailed by Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* should be understood as a problematic embrace of a causalist theory of intention that even Derrida's argument runs aground on.[21] Taking up a similar position, Lisa Siraganian contends that Derrida's causalist account of meaning cannot explain "what writing must be; it only tells us what corporate and commodified speech wants to be."[22] Understood on the model of event

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[20] Jennifer Ashton, "Two Problems with a Neuroaesthetic Theory of Interpretation," *nonsite*, no. 2 (June 12, 2011), https://nonsite.org/two-problems-with-a-neuroaesthetic-theory-of-interpretation/.

[21] Walter Benn Michaels, "Produced and Abandoned: Action and Intention in Derrida," *nonsite*, no. 45 (February 14, 2024), https://nonsite.org/produced-and-abandoned-action-and-intention-in-derrida/; Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 723–42.

[22] Lisa Siraganian, "Corporate Communiqué: The Derrida-Holmes Merger," *nonsite*, no. 45 (February 14, 2024), https://nonsite.org/corporate-communique-the-derrida-holmes-merger/. One inadvertent achievement of Derrida, Roland Barthes, and other poststructuralists was the affective redescription of the mid- to late-twentieth-century saturation of market heteronomy as a radical politics of semantic contingency: consumer sovereignty as reader empowerment. On Foucault's contribution to this left-neoliberal ruse of history, see Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, "Beyond the Sovereign Subject: Against Interpretation," in *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (Verso Books, 2021), 73–105.

causality, meaning (as intention) is essentially indeterminate—but expedient for limited liability corporations—because it is a matter of causes located in an ultimately irrecoverable context. Derrida's theoretical significance lies, then, in his rigorous thus necessarily performative immanence to this aporetic, causalist model of meaning. However, if meaning (as intention) is understood not as a cause or as anything added to or imposed on an utterance, text, or work but simply as what an artist has done by their expressive act, it is the determinate form or structure of a work. As such, meaning is in all cases autonomous from its causes and effects and always open to interpretive contestation.

The constitutive challenge of modernism is to carve out the autonomy of art as a domain of specifically aesthetic meaning. Within the formal unity of the artwork, such aesthetic meaning makes a claim to freedom from external determination that, in its adequacy to the sensuous medium of its presentation, is inextricably affective and conceptual. Again, in James's lapidary phrasing: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so" (I, vii). The unity of the artwork evokes conviction not only because the "circle" of its immediate appearance may be felt or sensuously intuited alone but also because its essential, subtending "geometry" can always be explained in interpretive acts premised on the possibility of disagreement.

Domestic architecture is ready to hand as a figure for the medium or material support through and against which modernist fiction writers like James understand their commitment to aesthetic autonomy because the novel's emergence under capitalism is historically embedded in

the social-reproductive realm of the home. Nancy Armstrong argues that the novel is the primary capitalist cultural form that, since its eighteen-century origins, functions to induce and reproduce the middle-class social discipline of the single-family household.[23] Indeed, Armstrong suggests that the British novel initially develops as a narrative dilation of eighteenth-century domestic conduct books and, as such, significantly mediates the emergence and reproduction of the domestic private sphere under capitalism. Armstrong argues, in short, that the domestic sphere privatizes social conflict by reifying political thinking according to the gender-divided, sentimental model of the family and, in this way, gives rise to social atomization that facilitates paths of least resistance for the exploitation of labor and expansion of capitalist markets.[24] From the standpoint of the nineteenth-century marketplace within which novels circulate before an increasingly literate public, fiction is, then, a particular kind of commodity: one variably offering readers private yet politically consequential effects of not only moral edification and class distinction but also the generic pleasures of escapism and relaxation. It is in this sense that fiction predominantly evolves alongside the nineteenth-century emergence of industrial capitalism as a social-reproductive instrument for imagining and sustaining middle-class forms of individual and familial autonomy—not, that is, as an artistic medium oriented toward a horizon of aesthetic autonomy. Fiction under capitalism necessarily gravitates toward the market-mediated,

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[23] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford UP, 1987).

[24] Armstrong surveys and revises her argument about the domestic-ideological function of the novel's emergence in "Why Looking Backward Is Necessary to Looking Forward," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 123–55; and "Afterword: Waiting for Foucault," *Modern Language Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 37–49.

instrumental role of domestic architecture: a social-imaginative but essentially private material support for life.

James's "house of fiction" metaphor exemplifies how modernist fiction takes up this domestic-architectural function of the novel's emergence as a problem of artistic medium.[25] For a modernist medium is precisely the normative structure of external determinations that an artwork depends on but, in an assertion of aesthetic autonomy, renders internal and self-legislating. In the 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Virginia Woolf affirms this formal autonomy of modernist fiction from domestic architecture while dramatizing a crucial distinction between her context and James's. Woolf advocates for modernist fiction's pursuit of "character in itself" and distinguishes this pursuit from that of a group of Edwardian writers including Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H.G. Wells.[26] Given Woolf's admiration for James,[27] his absence from her canon of Edwardian writers seems necessary to sustain the polemical critique that motivates her periodization. Yet Woolf's version of modernist fiction's antagonism to domestic architecture is also markedly different than James's because she claims that this antagonism is to be superseded not only in the autonomous working of art fiction, as we have seen in James, but also in the unfolding of literary history from the Edwardian era of James's Edition through to her moment of now-canonical 1920s modernism. Of Bennett's novels, Woolf suggests, "he is trying to

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[25] James critiques this particularly English, conduct-book approach to the novel in "The Art of Fiction" (404-8).

[26] Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924).

[27] See Virginia Woolf, "The Method of Henry James," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, 1912-1918*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, vol. 2 (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 346–49.

hypnotise us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (16). Here, a "house" is Woolf's figure for fiction that fails to convince because rather than express what she calls "character in itself" (6), it tangles excessively with the literal, material conditions of characters. Woolf elaborates this account of literary character in her 1925 essay "Modern Fiction," which contrasts Edwardian "materialism" to modernist "idealism."[28] While highly abstract, this opposition takes a more concrete form in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," where Woolf likens the Edwardian work to a "boot" and the modernist work to a "watch" (21). While the latter works on its own, the former is incomplete without a foot. The Edwardians and their "boots," Woolf remarks, "were never interested in character in itself; or in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside. Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself" (12). Like James's "hinged doors opening straight upon life," Woolf's boots displace meaning with use. Accordingly, Woolf contends that

> the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it. (19)

In Woolf as in James, domestic architecture is a figure for the art novel's heteronomy: its external dependence that must be overcome for the work to "compete with life" or assert "character in itself." But where James identifies ambitious fiction with domestic architecture only to

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[28] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925-1928* (Hogarth Press, 1986), 157–65.

complicate this identity by foregrounding its idiosyncratic metaphorical logic, Woolf asserts outright the opposition between ambitious fiction and the "house" because she locates the "house" as such in the fiction of past. What has changed between Woolf's moment and James's?

II. Two Faces of Modernism

Disparate market exposure is an essential aspect of James and Woolf's divergent figurations of how modernist fiction relates to domestic architecture. Where James inflects the instrumentalizing pressures of his Edition's mass-market circulation into a figure for fiction that is immanent to the instrumental domain of the house, Woolf altogether disavows the "materialism" of the Edwardian "house" from the "idealist" vantage of her Hogarth Press.[29] More concretely: with its own means of circulation, Woolf's modernism is insulated from the market in a way that James's simply is not. Hogarth Press is one of the aesthetically discerning small presses that, along with numerous limited-circulation magazines and journals, constitute

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[29] The abandoned house of the "Time Passes" chapter in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is something of an artistic culmination of Woolf's critique of Edwardian fiction's domestic-architectural heteronomy. Set during the onset of the first World War, this chapter concludes the Edwardian era and opens the era of canonical Anglo-American modernist fiction with a *tabula rasa* figure of a house "left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it." The Ramsays' empty house stands as the literal architecture—like Lily Briscoe's canvas, the material support—through and against which Woolf asserts the formal autonomy of her emphatically experimental fiction. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981), 137. In turn, "A Room of One's Own" (1929) is a more pragmatic culmination of Woolf's critique insofar as this essay is, in part, an account of the separation within and from the historically feminine, domestic realm of the house that is the condition of possibility for women to become serious writers and, as it were, enter James's "house of fiction."

what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "field of restricted production."[30] This cultural field restricts its circulation to critics, artists, and connoisseur readers and thereby develops, in Bourdieu's account, an "autonomy [that] can be measured by its power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products. This implies translation of all external determinations in conformity with its own principles of functioning" (5). Modernism's field of restricted production emerges in antagonism to what Bourdieu calls the "field of large-scale cultural production," a domain "whose submission to external demand is characterized by the subordinate position of cultural producers in relation to the controllers of production and diffusion media" and, as such, "principally obeys the imperatives of competition for conquest of the market" (17). Bourdieu's distinction between restricted field and mass market maps neatly onto a distinction between autonomous art and its other: mass culture.

Yet, this dissertation explores precisely how modernist fiction's market architecture folds this Bourdieusian opposition back into itself by asserting aesthetic autonomy that is immanent to mass culture's "submission to external demand." Thus, while James's "house of fiction" and Woolf's critique of the Edwardian "house" each index a modernist involution of the novel that challenges its historically social-reproductive function,[31] the way that they reflexively figure

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[30] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Columbia UP, 1993), 112–41.

[31] In an 1857 letter to Ernest Feydeau, Gustave Flaubert crystalizes the logic of the restricted field with a particularly masculine, architectural bravado: "Books aren't made like children but like pyramids, with a premeditated design and by carrying one great block on top of another, and it takes guts, time, and sweat, and it isn't good for anything! and it stays in the desert! albeit prodigiously dominating it. The jackals piss on the base and the bourgeois climb up it—continue the comparison." Adamantly noninstrumental, Flaubert's pyramid seems to transcend circulation entirely. Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau, (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 2:783.

their disparate sociological contexts of circulation indexes an involution within modernist fiction itself. We can begin to see, that is, how the canonical periodization of Anglo-American literary modernism as an early- to mid-twentieth-century phenomenon—with Woolf at its center—attends primarily to only one face of modernism: its restricted-field face. The other face is what we might call mass-market modernism: a modernist formation characterized by the architectural mode in which it asserts aesthetic autonomy through its greater exposure to the instrumentalizing social metabolism of the market. In short, mass-market-modernist fiction must sell itself to an extent that restricted-field modernism need not and therefore develops formal tendencies that this dissertation calls market architecture. For example, in chapter one we will see that within Woolf's disavowed Edwardian canon Wells's "boot" does, in fact, work like a "watch"—but with such immanence to the market genre of the utopian romance that, for Woolf, his modernism is understandably unrecognizable. Woolf is correct that Wells's genre fiction is "interested in something outside" itself—mass-market circulation, in short—but she misses the intricacies of Wells's market architecture.

To grasp how modernist fiction extends in this way, across Bourdieu's two-field sociological critique of art's autonomy, does not necessitate a rigid taxonomical distinction between the two broad modernist formations that thereby come into view. Mass-market modernism and restricted-field modernism are intertwined formations within the dialectic of modernism and mass culture[32] whose respective availability for writers depends on market exposure and is therefore subject to all of the historical contingency of individual writers'

[32] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 133-34.

relations to the market. The point is that canonical modernist writers of fiction like Woolf, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Wyndham Lewis, and Gertrude Stein (and most canonical modernist poets, from T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore to William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, given their work's commercial non-viability as poetry) often directly defy the pressure of market demand given their emphatically experimental orientation toward the restricted field. Yet such defiance of the market is unavailable or unattractive to more market-oriented writers whose work can, in the specific formal terms set out here, nonetheless be understood as modernist. To be clear, restricted-field circulation does not necessarily entail defiance of the market—but it often does—and such defiance does not necessarily entail a plausible assertion of aesthetic autonomy. There are no criteria for a work's autonomy apart from those it has rendered internal to its aesthetic purpose. Further, I use terms "oriented," "exposed," and "subsumed" to described writers' relation to market "pressure," "constraint," and "heteronomy" at a level of abstraction that encompasses how this relation can entail many artistic postures—some affectively negative, others not. Such terms are shorthand for concrete social relations that vary widely according to the historical conjuncture and author in question. But at a high level of abstraction here, and more concretely in the chapters to follow, this dissertation shows how mass-market modernism and its architectural formal tendencies can be mapped—in an Anglo-American context—onto a general historical trajectory in which market architecture is not only the dominant form that modernist fiction takes in the fin-de-siècle period—before the predominant emergence of Anglo-American modernist fiction's restricted-field infrastructure—but also the means of modernist fiction's persistence amid the relentless marketization of our neoliberal, "postmodern" present. In

general, mass-market modernism bookends the restricted-field modernism of the early- and mid-twentieth century.

Crucially, this two-field schematization of modernist fiction is specific to liberal-capitalist contexts. For it is in such contexts—particularly in the Anglo-American contexts that are the focus of this dissertation—that outward-turning instrumentalizations of formally ambitious fiction have historically entailed heteronomy to the market rather than heteronomy to politics that genuinely challenge the market. That is, art fiction's double bind between formal autonomy and market heteronomy only has a general objectivity when there are no plausible political challenges to capitalism that a work's social-imaginative form can be heteronomous to. This context-dependent objectivity of fiction's art-commodity problematic must, of course, be concretized in every case according to the terms of a modernist work's specific formal intervention and its institutional milieu; such is the aim of each of the chapters to follow. Yet the point here is that within the Anglo-American context of this dissertation's argument, the presence of a plausibly revolutionary social field that can encompass modernist fiction—and thereby shear away the objective conflation of its social-reproductive instrumentality with its commodification for market circulation—has been the exception rather than the rule.[33] In socialist modernist formations like Russian Constructivism, however, political heteronomy to a post-capitalist world

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[33] In the realm of literal architecture, Le Corbusier is acutely aware of the possibility of such a revolutionary exception in a post-WWI France. He concludes *Towards a New Architecture* with a plea for reform: if the "man of to-day is conscious… [that] his town, his street, his house or his flat rise up again him useless, hinder him from following the same path in his leisure that he pursues in his work," then the choice is clear: "Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided" (289-89).

to be won can more substantively displace market heteronomy as an alternative to formal autonomy. Thus, when embedded in left-political institutions that pose a plausible threat to the market-driven status quo under capitalism, fiction's social-reproductive use can plausibly appear social-revolutionary. Consequently, the distinction between aesthetic autonomy and social-political autonomy can blur in complex ways and modernist formal innovation can unfold less hermetically within social history.[34]

Yet there are few, if any, substantive equivalents to such socialist modernism in the Anglo-American literary culture that is the focus of this dissertation. The politics entailed by modernist fiction's market architecture are largely indeterminate because the normativity of the autonomous artwork only holds sway within its frame, thus restricting its intrinsic politics to a humanist commitment to art for art's sake. Such humanism can be consistent with Left politics but need not be. For modernist art's medium-specific normativity can enliven or reinforce a range of political norms that are institutionally operative at a given historical conjuncture, like the individual, rights-based autonomy of the liberal citizen. As Siraganian argues, for many canonical Anglo-American modernist writers "autonomy was understood as the art object's freedom from the reader's meaning and exemplified the subject's desired relation to political liberalism."[35] Yet, even as aesthetic autonomy can be understood by artists in relation to the external normativity of the state, party, or church, the self-legislating normativity of the

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[34] See Todd Cronan, *Red Aesthetics: Rodchenko, Brecht, Eisenstein* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

[35] Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

modernist artwork acquires its fundamental force in liberal-capitalist contexts from the suspension of normativity entailed by market circulation, where sale-inducing effect supersedes coherent meaning. Which is to say that market heteronomy can, in historically contingent ways, be alloyed with directly institutional forms of heteronomy—like the socialist-realist conventions enforced, in an Anglo-American context, by the midcentury Communist party. Yet this fact does not fundamentally transform how, in non-revolutionary capitalist contexts where "reality" is not apparent "in its revolutionary development,"[36] the commodity's meaninglessness constitutes the general horizon of art's heteronomy. To be sure, midcentury US writers like Ralph Ellison and Saul Bellow may understand their fiction's autonomy vis-à-vis the heteronomous demands of socialist aesthetics. Yet it is precisely because the instrumental-political norms that such socialist aesthetics aim to reinforce or enliven are felt to be inadequate to these writers' realist commitments to representing the non-revolutionary social reality of the midcentury US that the problem of market heteronomy can be understood to subtend such political heteronomy. The suspended normativity of the market—the priority of salable effect over internally coherent meaning—objectively haunts the imperative to align a work's meaning with external political ends when such ends, embodied in a work of fiction, must be metabolized by the market.

In non-revolutionary, liberal-capitalist contexts, to take up the realist problem of representing social reality is necessarily to make sense, in part, of the meaninglessness entailed

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[36] A.A. Zdhanov, "Soviet Literature - The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature," in *Soviet Writers Congress 1934* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), 15–26, https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/zdhanov.htm.

by commodification.[37] It is in this sense that mass-market modernism's unemphatic yet fundamental antagonism to the suspended normativity of the market capacitates a particular kind of realism rooted in irony. Its market architecture embodies an unemphatic critique of the market and the ideologies that stabilize it by relativizing their indeterminacy within a determinate, aesthetic structure—albeit a structure that is esoteric and therefore has highly constrained exoteric political entailments. As I argue in chapter two, modernist fiction's market architecture can internalize the saturating racist ideology of the 1920s U.S. and crystallize how this ideology naturalizes the logic of the market. Such is also the case for the relationship between modernism and avant-gardisme, if the latter is understood in contrast to modernism as a cultural formation intent on abolishing the autonomy of art by merging it with the practice of life in general. As I show in chapter three, while peripheral-capitalist modernist formations like Brazilian Concretism draw on the avant-gardiste legacy of Constructivism and embed themselves within a revolutionary or proto-revolutionary social field, importing their formal strategies into a non-revolutionary context like that of the U.S. in 1968 capacitates a form of realism but renders such formal strategies politically indeterminate.[38] Absent a revolutionary social field, merging art with market-subsumed life merely entails dissolving art into consumer-oriented effects.

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[37] Indeed, canonical modernists writing for the restricted field like Woolf and James Joyce surely grapple with their art's heteronomy to church and state in the form of censorship. But censorship has always been a problem for artistic expression. Heteronomy to church and state may be sufficient to galvanize artists' rationalizations of their commitment to autonomous form, but these forms of directly institutional heteronomy are not necessary to the specifically capitalist emergence of a modernist ontology of art, which is premised on precisely the institutional decoupling of art from church and state.

[38] Michaela Bronstein attends to a similar dynamic in James's fiction in "Revolutionary Violence and the Rise of the Art Novel," *Novel* 54, no. 3 (November 1, 2021): 379–403.

III. Autonomous Fictions

This dissertation traces a literary-historical dynamic according to which Anglo-American modernist fiction emerges and transforms, its market architecture variably coming to the fore and receding, as its objective preconditions shift between those of the mass market and the field of restricted production. Thus, in the chapters to follow, I build on Marxist approaches to modernism as an uneven and combined process of aesthetic response to the unfolding of capitalist modernity—a process that constitutes the domain of the aesthetic itself around an ontology of the autonomous artwork. This ontology has, since the early- to mid-nineteenth century, coalesced as the institution of art's utopian response to its decoupling from institutions of church and state, and its concomitant subjection to the market forces of capitalism. While the autonomous artwork cannot avoid becoming a commodity, it resists the market imperative to embody a use value and an exchange value by embodying a medium-specific meaning reducible to neither—that is, by asserting a meaning legible only on the terms it sets for itself. A recent reappraisal of aesthetic autonomy in modernist studies that is instructively different than the account presented here is Andrew Goldstone's *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (2013). Taking autonomous artistic form to be "philosophically suspect," Goldstone approaches the modernist commitment to autonomy in Bourdieusian terms attentive to how writers produce reflexive representations of their sociological freedom, as artists, from

constraints like labor, personality, political community, or linguistic reference.[39] In contrast, this dissertation takes aesthetic autonomy seriously as an ontology of art—albeit as a social ontology rather than a transcendental ontology. Thus, aligned more with the concretely interpretive and historicizing priorities of Hegel's account of fine art than with the abstract subjectivism of Immanuel Kant's transcendental account of aesthetic judgment,[40] I hold aesthetic autonomy to be neither a mode of subjective experience nor an artist or artwork's abstract assertion or assumption of freedom from constraint. Rather, drawing on Michael Fried's principles of aesthetic conviction and medium specificity and their elaboration in the work of Walter Benn Michaels and Robert Pippin,[41] I hold aesthetic autonomy to be an artwork's concrete uptake of its external determinations as mediated parts of a sensuously intelligible whole that convinces on its own terms. Pace Goldstone's account of "fictions of autonomy," this dissertation analyzes autonomous fictions.

As such, this dissertation builds in particular on Nicholas Brown's *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (2019)*,* which argues that the "postmodern" hegemony of the

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[39] Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

[40] A decisive moment when Hegel displaces Kant's subjectivist aesthetics with an ontology of art is in Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 56–61. See Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (Duke UP, 2019), 10-14.

[41] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72; Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Robert Pippin, *Philosophy by Other Means: The Arts in Philosophy and Philosophy in the Arts* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

logic of the market within the field of culture under neoliberalism is precisely where modernism's autonomous artwork is most perspicuous as the "internal, unemphatic other to capitalist society."[42] Elaborating Fried's art-critical categories in relation to Hegel's account of fine art and Karl Marx's critique of the commodity form, Brown argues that aesthetic autonomy is dialectical negativity transposed into a sensuous medium (30). As such, the autonomy of art within postmodernity is, Brown contends, necessarily its autonomy from the market. For while works of art have always been commodities under capitalism, Brown argues that this fact takes on a new meaning under neoliberalism, where the reduction of art to a mere commodity is not only compounded objectively by the general collapse of modernism's restricted field and the unprecedented reach of the culture industry, but also compounded ideologically in humanistic disciplines that, with a hegemonic "will to heteronomy" (35), cling to postmodernist valorizations of indeterminacy and contingency rooted in non-dialectical notions of materiality, identity, and affect that variably entail misunderstandings and/or rejections of the autonomy of art.[43] Nonetheless, Brown argues that works of art can internally suspend their commodity form by demanding medium-specific interpretive attention. Indeed, for Brown, the "originality of the present [neoliberal] moment is that the concept of medium or material support must be expanded to include the commodity character of the work" (22-23). This dissertation, however, traces a longer historical trajectory of the process through which an autonomous ontology of art emerges through and against the subsumption of Anglo-American fiction's circulation by the mass

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[42] Brown, *Autonomy*, 8.

[43] See Brown, "Affect, Sociology, Index, and Other Critical Evasions," *Constelaciones: Revista de Teoría Crítica* 15 (2023).

markets of the culture industry. I suggest that mass-market modernist fiction has, from the start, constituted its concept of medium as an immanent—and distinctly architectural—negation of the commodity form. Thus, as a concept, market architecture complicates what Brown takes to be the postmodern "originality" of this process. The chapters to follow take what Brown holds to be the market-oriented expansion, within postmodernity, of modernism's concept of medium and reframe this phenomenon as the ascendance to dominance, within an expanded trajectory of modernism, of what has been an emergent process within market-exposed modernist fiction throughout capitalist modernity, but predominantly, in an Anglo-American context, since the late-nineteenth century.

Building on Marxist approaches to the study of modernism, I hold the primary causal mechanism behind modernism's constitution of aesthetic autonomy as its regulative principle to be the commodification attendant to capitalism's reorganization of social life around the logic of the market.[44] Yet, this dissertation takes a more historically capacious approach to modernism

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[44] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 225-61; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (Verso, 2014), 152-53, 182; Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism," *New Left Review*, no. I/152 (August 1, 1985): 67; Brown, *Autonomy* 1-39. It is in this sense that this dissertation takes seriously György Lukács' claim that "at this stage in the history of mankind there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to [the] question [of the totality of capitalist society] and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of the commodity structure." Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 83. However, it is necessary to historicize Lukács's rejection of now-canonical modernist literature. See Mary Gluck's two-field schematization of modernism rooted in the specific revolutionary-socialist context of Lukács's Hungary—a context that, she suggests, decisively conditions the anti-modernist position Lukács takes in the expressionist debates of the 1930s. Gluck, "Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 4 (1986): 845–82. See Brown, "Lukács/Fried," *nonsite*, May 10, 2021.

than is conventional in literary studies by assuming that modernism's emergence exhibits a complexity comparable to the emergence of capitalism as a mode of production. For while decisive moments like 1848 and 1914 can always be isolated with analytic payoffs, the historical appearance of modernist formal criteria will always defy rigid periodization. In turn, this historically capacious approach to modernism understands its ontology of art to be a genie that cannot simply be put back into its bottle because the autonomous artwork is a social form whose specific mode of sensuous, self-legislating normativity is conditioned by market heteronomy: precisely the external dependence that, for postmodernists and literary sociologists, would spell the end of modernism by the mid-to-late twentieth century or relativistically call its aesthetic existence into question altogether. Attention to the market architecture of modernist fiction in its historically specific instantiations shifts these postmodernist and sociological critiques of art's autonomy out of the abstract realm of theory and into the concrete terrain of interpreting how artworks may succeed or fail at asserting the autonomy of their form. This entails attention not only to the formal innovation characteristic of modernist fiction but also to how authors necessarily route such formal innovation and, in turn, their works' assertions of autonomous artistic meaning, through their dependence on the market-driven sociological processes of capitalist modernity. It is this ironic immanence to market heteronomy that imbues the fiction analyzed throughout this dissertation with its particular kind of realism.

The four chapters to follow explore how the market architecture of modernist fiction illuminates abstract yet consequential ways that marketization shapes fiction's representation of social reality under capitalism. Chapter one and four comprise a bookending pair that analyzes

the significance of genre fiction within market architecture's fin-de-siècle emergence and its persistence today. Chapters two and three turn to the 1920s and 1970s, respectively, to explore how market architecture's critical immanence to the logic of the commodity clarifies modernism's relation to race and politics.

Chapter one, "Market Texture: The Art of Genre Fiction," argues that a fin-de-siècle art of genre fiction is the artistic milieu in which market architecture first emerges as a substantial aspect of Anglo-American literary modernism. I show how genre-fictional art inhabits the generic constraints of an emergent culture industry and finds paradigmatic expression in a formal problematic that relates the medium-specific materiality of writing to the social-metabolic materiality of the market. This *market-texture* problematic is, I suggest, the paradigmatic means of market architecture's emergence (hence the pun). With a focus on how market texture animates H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* (1910), and Ford Madox Ford and Conrad's *The Inheritors* (1901), this chapter shows how aesthetic autonomy and medium-specificity emerge, outside of the field of restricted production, as regulative principles of Anglo-American modernist fiction. Ultimately, I suggest that what is often referred to as the "genre turn" in late-twentieth and twenty-first-century fiction can be understood to first emerge in this fin-de-siècle moment and capacitate a horizon of mass-market modernism that persists today.

Chapter two, "Bull Market, Black Fiction: Aesthetic Racecraft and Modernism in the Jazz Age," explores how a novel's dependence on the category of race can intertwine, in its literary form, with a dependence on the market. I develop a concept of *aesthetic racecraft* to analyze the

conceptual proximity of aesthetic autonomy and racial particularity in Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929) and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Written amid the saturating racist ideology of the jazz age, these mass-market-modernist novels present a parallax view of how the the market-stabilizing social construction of race can either foreclose or capacitate the modernist assertion of autonomous form. By parsing out the valences of fictional plausibility through which McKay and Hemingway take up and mediate the subjective indeterminacy of racist ideology, this chapter clarifies the conceptually determinate domain of the aesthetic that orients this dissertation's overarching argument about modernism and, in this way, specifies the aesthetic logic of modernist fiction's market architecture over and against racist tendencies to reify it.

Chapter three, "Concretizing 1968: The Neo-Avant-Garde Commodity," turns to graphic form and performance in modernist poetry. So while this dissertation primarily focuses on fiction in the conventional sense of imaginative prose narrative, this chapter explores how modernist fiction in the more capacious sense of imaginative verbal-representational narrative can, with particular attention to the communicative instrumentality of typography, assert its formal autonomy through market architecture. Taking up the work of Mary Ellen Solt, the Brazilian *Noigandres* group, and William Carlos Williams, I show how the modernist trajectory of concrete poetry runs up against the market logic of an emergent postmodernism in the U.S. In particular, this chapter focuses on Solt's *The Peoplemover* (1978), a fictional protest that pushes concrete poetry toward the graphic form of the protest poster. This "demonstration poem" stages how the logic of its political circulation—imaginatively projected beyond Solt's restricted-field context into the tumultuous events of 1968—resembles the logic of the market. By attending to

how Solt figures this slippage between New-Left protest politics' political demands and market demand, I argue that *The Peoplemover* produces a market-architectural "demonstration" of postmodernism's neo-avant-gardiste dissolution of art into market-subsumed life.

Chapter four, "The Modernist Sequel: History as Product Iteration," explores how the horizon of genre-fictional art analyzed in chapter one extends into the twenty-first century, where market-architectural formal strategies undergird modernist fiction's embattled persistence amid neoliberalism's onslaught of marketization. I argue that as today's digitally-mediated market culture shapes our experience of narrative form around brand-recognition feedback loops—a phenomenon typified by the marketing strategy of the expanded universe—Jennifer Egan's novel *The Candy House* (2022) exemplifies how the thoroughly commercial form of the sequel is emerging as a modernist medium. By expanding on its bestselling predecessor to produce an immanently purposive narrative allegory of the platform economy's emergence in the U.S., Egan's novel exemplifies the space of artistic possibility opened up by the *modernist sequel*: a mass-market modernist form that represents historical process as aesthetically convincing product iteration. A long way from James's "house of fiction" yet nonetheless part of the same story, Egan's "candy house" of fiction embodies one way that a modernist commitment to autonomous form can persist within the cultural logic of an ever-later capitalism.

1. Market Texture: The Art of Genre Fiction

> that benefit of *friction with the market* which is so true a one for solitary artists too much steeped in their mere personal dreams
>
> Henry James[1]

In *The Inheritors*, a 1901 novel written collaboratively by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer), the materiality of writing is the materiality of the market. When an editor throws "a heavy, ribbon-bound mass of matter" into the lap of the protagonist Granger, this editor is "writing his report upon its saleability as a book."[2] "The heavy black handwriting of the manuscript sticks in [Granger's] mind's eye" because, as a struggling writer, he identifies with its author: "He [the author] became a pathetic possibility, hidden in the heart of the white paper that bore penmarkings of a kind too good to be marketable" (49). This carefully balanced sentence is immediately ambiguous: is the work "too good," or the handwriting? Through this ambiguity, Conrad and Ford conflate the meaning of this manuscript with its materiality and then relate this literalism to a problem of genre, that is, whether "a kind" of writing will literally circulate on the market. The manuscript is "of a kind too good" to circulate, and Conrad and Ford frame it as such between the resonant words "penmarkings" and "marketable." Thus, "penmarkings of a kind too good to be marketable" evokes—and even spatializes across the page—the *pen* and

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[1] Henry James to Hendrik Anderson, November 25, 1906, MSS 6251 (46), Henry James Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Collections Library, University of Virginia.

[2] Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1923), 49.

table of a scene not only of writing but of marking and marketing.[3] Ultimately, in "arguing that man's case" to his editor, Granger realizes: "I was pleading my own—pleading the case of my better work" (49).

The Inheritors follows Granger as he redirects his literary ambitions into a career writing journalistic portraits of the rich and powerful. Granger's market-*Bildung* is shaped by a time-travel premise in which a mysterious cadre from the "Fourth Dimension," a kind of transcendental antechamber onto history, pulls the strings behind the novel's political intrigue. Only at the end of the novel does Granger fully realize that his new career has drawn him into "the heart of a machine" (206) that is a "Fourth Dimensionist" plot to "inherit the earth" (207). But until then, Granger's sudden and wide-eyed writerly access to the upper echelons of imperialist power mitigates his suspicions about this plot. He recalls writing a popular magazine portrait of the Duc de Mersch, a fictional King Leopold II who is intent on profiting from a financial bubble that he will inflate—with the help of Granger's glowing portrait—around a fraudulent plan to colonize Greenland:

> I turned into the twilight of my room and began to write. I can still feel the tearing of my pen-point on the coarse paper. It was a hindrance to thought, but my flow of words ignored it, gained impetus from it, as a stream does at the breaking of a dam.
>
> I was writing a paean to a great coloniser. That sort of thing was in the air then. I was drawn into it, carried away by my subject. Perhaps I let it do so because it was so little familiar to my lines of thought. It was fresh ground and I reveled in it. I committed myself to that kind of emotional, lyrical outburst that one dislikes so much on re-reading. I was half conscious of the fact, but I ignored it. (101)

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[3] The paper before Granger also "bore" these penmarkings in a complexly punned, twofold sense: obviously, as literal inscription, and more subtly, as the expression of a writer who is "too good to be marketable"—that is, "that bore."

Each paragraph presents an impediment to artistic expression that Granger tells us he "ignored." The merely literal "tearing of my pen-point on coarse paper" becomes the merely generic "kind of emotional, lyrical outburst that one dislikes so much on re-reading." Yet these impediments also spur Granger on to write. The "flow of words" he carves into the page before him ends up feeling, despite its vapid sentimentality, like "fresh ground" to which he can commit himself as a writer. Granger can, at least in the process of writing, produce a relation of conviction to what appears to be ideological fluff for a mass-market audience.

Conrad and Ford's narration of this scene of writing—and Granger's earlier scene of reading—evokes the structure of a specific literary-historical problematic that binds the materiality of writing to the constraints of generic form intended for the market. This problematic is what Granger both "ignored" and "gained impetus from" while writing the "sort of thing [that] was in the air then." My claim in what follows is that certain fin-de-siècle fiction writers in the capitalist core take up this problematic when the pressure of the literary marketplace makes the materiality of their writing—the literal texture of textuality—a source of anxiety that feels correlated with the generic fulfillment requisite for their work's commercial success. This chapter argues that this problematic underwrites the emergence of modernist fiction's market architecture by underwriting an emergent form of literary art: an art of genre fiction. First, I elaborate the formal logic of this new art form within the historical context of its emergence, highlighting its mediation of inscriptive materiality and generic constraint. Then, I work out the entailments of these claims by exploring a set of genre-fictional artworks that are exemplarily structured by this problematic, beginning with an elaboration of Ford and Conrad's ambivalence

about *The Inheritors* and a detailed reading of H.G. Wells's 1895 debut *The Time Machine.* I subsequently sketch the literary-historical ambit and formal heterogeneity of the art of genre fiction's emergence around this problematic via readings of works by Stephen Crane, Conrad, Guy de Maupassant, Ford, and Muriel Spark. Ultimately, I show that what makes this problematic a significant strain of response to the fin-de-siècle marketization of culture is the way it enables medium-specificity and aesthetic autonomy to emerge as regulative principles of literary modernism within the domain of the mass market rather than the field of restricted production.

Michael Fried argues that literal writing is the central concern of literary "impressionism."[4] In his account, Crane, Conrad, Ford, Wells, Frank Norris, and W.H. Hudson—among others writing in the period between 1890 and 1914—structure their fiction around a simultaneous evocation and repression of inscriptive materiality. The formal problematic that Fried, in his heterodox account,[5] identifies with literary "impressionism" binds an unprecedented emphasis on visuality and subjectivity with a medium-specific reflexivity and a dynamic of thematic repression. Thus Conrad's well-known aim to achieve sensuous, primarily visual fidelity in narrative form—"before all, to make you see!"—is more substantively, as Fried claims

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[4] Michael Fried, *What Was Literary Impressionism?* (Harvard UP, 2018).

[5] Many reviewers of *What Was Literary Impressionism?* have acknowledged the strength of the Fried's interpretive work while also expressing a frustration with his commitment to making a fresh start of the problem of literary impressionism by choosing not to engage with prior scholarship. See Kate Flint, "What Was Literary Impressionism? By Michael Fried (Review)," *Modernism/Modernity* 27, no. 3 (September 2020); Zachary J. Roberts, "On Michael Fried and Literary Impressionism," *Raritan* 39, no. 4 (Spring 2020): 47–63; Jonah Siegel, "Review of Michael Fried, What Was Literary Impressionism?," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 4 (2019): 999.

of Crane, the impressionist "compulsion to declare but also to disguise and in a sense to disavow both the literal circumstances and the material product of his activity as a writer" (14). This chapter, however, pushes beyond Fried's notion of "impressionism" by pushing literary history into the orbit of a Marxist critique of the commodity form.[6] For once we grasp Fried's "impressionism" in relation to genre, its formal problematic discloses an involution of realist narrative in relation to its *twofold* material support: not only the medium-specific materiality of pen and page but also the social-metabolic materiality of the literary work's circulation on the market as a commodity.[7] Authors produce this involution through the problematic we have glimpsed in Conrad and Ford. This *market texture*, as I will call it, is a formal problematic in

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[6] Literary impressionism has generally been approached through epistemological and psychological frameworks that depend on external reference to a pluralistic field of philosophical and art-historical uses of the word "impression." Jesse Matz and John G. Peters's respective accounts of literary impressionism, for example, have prompted much critical discussion, but their focus on "impression" as a perceptual category that mediates between subject and object—paralleling what Ian Watt has called "delayed decoding"—often leads to interpretations that remain at the indeterminate level of philosophical exemplification. In short, investigations of literary impressionism often end up rehashing platitudes about the mind and its uncertain relation to reality. See Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); John G. Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Bruce Johnson, "Conrad's Impressionism and Watts's 'Delayed Decoding,'" in *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1983), 169–180. This chapter aims to avoid such pitfall by developing its claims, like Fried, out of more immanent and formally-attuned interpretation. Yet Fried's ability to draw our attention to the texts themselves also leaves questions of historical context unanswered. So this chapter builds on Fried's unorthodox but convincing study to redirect the investigation of literary impressionism away from the notion of "impressions" and toward a formal problematic of reflexive literalism embedded not only within literary history, but also within the social history of capitalist modernity.

[7] Fried encourages this line of inquiry (*Literary Impressionism*, 25). On Fried's literary "impressionism" and marketization, see Brown, "Lukács/Fried."

which an ironic evocation of inscriptive materiality, the literal texture of textuality, must be effaced or thematically repressed by its immanence to generic fulfillment. I argue that an art of genre fiction emerges around this market-texture problematic once the historical novel splits—and, on György Lukács's influential account, abstracts and reifies[8]—into novelistic "sub-genres" whose formal constraints are inextricable from the economic constraint entailed by writers' dependence on the market. That is, as marketization increasingly embeds the Flaubertian tradition of art fiction within the commercial field of genre fiction, the possibility of an autonomous formal architecture afforded by market texture grips certain aesthetically ambitious fin-de-siècle writers as they try to work out the problem of the commodity form through their art.

The challenge embodied by an art of genre fiction is to produce a formal mediation between the often opposed criteria of market success and aesthetically ambitious fiction writing. Thus, genre-fictional artworks tend to be just as amenable to leisurely reading—they afford the merely instrumental architecture of generic fulfillment that one expects of a mass-culture commodity—as they are amenable to close reading, with an attention to how prose fiction can assert medium-specific artistic meaning. Through this surface/depth structure, genre-fictional art initiates an essential way that aesthetically ambitious literature persists within and against the marketization of culture that attends capitalist development. For while the novel—and more broadly, fiction writing under capitalism—has always faced the problem of the market, the art of genre fiction emerges, in an Anglo-American context, out of competitive capitalism's fin-de-siècle accumulation crisis, concomitant with the rise of imperialist monopoly capitalism and the

[8] György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Merlin Press, 1962), 240.

spread of its sales effort within the field of culture.[9] Emergent genre-fictional art mediates a nascent form of the dialectic of modernism and mass culture by contrapuntally balancing medium-specific experimentation—like the evocation of inscriptive materiality—with an often imperialist imaginary shaped by highly marketable genres like the utopian romance, the maritime adventure story, or the psychological horror story.

This chapter holds market texture to be this emergent art form's paradigmatic means of making market genres not only entertain but also convince as aspects of works of art. This problematic is paradigmatic because while there are other formal means of ironizing the constraints of market genres and thereby subordinating them to a work's artistic purpose,[10] generically-effaced inscriptive materiality is the most fundamental of these; the pen and page are the literal condition of possibility for any work of fiction prior to the early twentieth century. Immediately, then, for fin-de-siècle writers who face unprecedented pressure to write for generically-bound market demand, the necessity that their writing literally circulate and sell on the market as a printed and bound commodity can make the literal materiality of their writing feel correlated with its generic form, the "mark" of their writing's market heteronomy. Thus, market texture mediates generic constraint and inscriptive materiality in a way that offers

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[9] Incisive sociological accounts of this fin-de-siècle periodization of the literary marketplace include, in a Marxist vein, Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (Verso, 1996), 23-30, 72-80; and in a Bourdieusian vein, Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*, 1880-1914 (Cambridge UP, 1997).

[10] For example, frame narratives, focalizational ambiguity, and intertextual allegories also assert formal criteria against which artworks can relativize generic conventions that would otherwise appear subordinate to market pressure.

ambitious writers a medium-specific means of overcoming the threat of meaninglessness entailed by their work's market circulation.

What is this threat of meaninglessness? On the face of it: in the same way that writing reduced to mere marks on a page will feel meaningless, an aesthetically ambitious author writing for the market may feel—within a range of affective and thematic registers—the possibility of a mass audience's incomprehension of their art. This is the basic correlational or mediating structure of what I call market texture. Here, we can sketch—and, in what follows, explore more concretely—how this problematic produces a literary architecture that inhabits yet attempts to elude the market's organizing principle of consumer sovereignty. For what necessarily matters according to the value-added logic of the market is whether a work of fiction sells—not whether it can embody a meaning that supports close interpretive attention—and the extent to which a work sells depends on how well it responds to consumer preferences. Thus, as Nicholas Brown argues, the market "subtracts normativity from the product of labor… in commodity production, consumer preference is prior to the intention of the producer."[11] The market conventionalizes forms of judgment and, in turn, modes of artistic production that shift the criterion of a work's meaning from its internal formal relations—the normative structure of what its author intends—to the external effect that the work has on its reader. Thus, insofar as market judgment grasps a work's meaning as a matter of preferences and effects rather than interpretations and intentions, the object of this judgment will not be the meaning of the work, but the causality of the market;

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[11] Nicholas Brown, "What We Worry About When We Worry About Commodification: Reflections on Dave Beech, Julian Stallabrass, and Jeff Wall," *nonsite*, April 5, 2016, https://nonsite.org/what-we-worry-about-when-we-worry-about-commodification/.

audience appeal and influence supersedes what a work means on its own terms. The market-texture problematic, then, indexes how certain fin-de-siècle writers take on the market's threat of meaninglessness via a tropological practice that intricately draws a work's generic architecture into relation with its own, literal act of writing—but, crucially, without compromising the work's legibility as genre fiction. As we will see, works structured around market texture take generic aspects that would otherwise appear externally determined—mere responses to consumer preference—and subtly figure them as subsumed within authorial action, thereby rendering these generic aspects internally determined parts of a self-legislating whole. Here, modernist principles of medium specificity and aesthetic autonomy emerge within and against market constraint because, under the conditions of fin-de-siècle monopoly capitalism's emergent sales effort, accessible genre writing that implicitly thematizes inscriptive materiality can be a market solution that also embodies a distinctly reflexive and hermetic artistic challenge.

Market texture's mediation of writerly materiality and market materiality is an artistic challenge whose availability is literally built into fiction writing of the fin-de-siècle period. This means that when writers take up this problematic, they need not be fully conscious of it. Writers who gain an awareness of market texture as an artistic challenge within their fiction can, it seems, only ever exert more or less control over it, with more or less artistic success. As the paradigmatic means of market architecture's emergence (hence the pun), genre-fictional art's market-texture problematic emerges primarily in the fin-de-siècle period, dissipates with the advent of canonical modernism's restricted field, and seems to re-emerge, dilute and transformed, in postmodernist metafiction.

I. Ambivalent Inheritors

The Inheritors is Ford and Conrad's attempt to write modernist fiction about the difficulty of writing marketable modernist fiction. Their ambivalence about the novel's artistic merits concretizes something of the anxiety, excitement, and confusion—the structure of feeling, as it were—attendant to the fin-de-siècle emergence of market-mediated generic constraint as a modernist medium. In a 1924 memoir of his relationship with Conrad, Ford describes *The Inheritors* as "a queer, thin book which the writer has always regarded with an intense dislike. Or no, with hatred and dread having nothing to do with literature," and claims to have written the entire manuscript before handing it off to Conrad for proofreading with "polite contempt," assuming that "Conrad disliked it as much as he did himself."[12] It is not until the novel's republication in an American edition of Conrad's collected works that Ford recalls Conrad taking a position on the novel by remarking, "with a great deal of feeling—with more feeling than the writer [Ford] otherwise remembers in him—'Why not? Why not republish it? It's a good book, isn't it? It's a *damn* good book!'"[13] Ford ultimately leaves Conrad's reasoning unelaborated but suggests that while the novel's "farrago of nonsense" may have attracted Conrad as a financial opportunity—"a book finished quickly…another unexplored creek with possible gold in its

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[12] Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), 124. In general, critics have also dismissed *The Inheritors* for its thin premise, listless plot and characters, and awkward style. Exemplary in this regard is Pat M. Esslinger, "A Theory and Three Experiments: The Failure of the Conrad-Ford Collaboration," *Western Humanities Review* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 59–67. In 1917, H.L. Menken writes "It is easy to see in this collaboration, and no less in the character of the book, an indication of irresolution, and perhaps even of downright loss of hope;" see Menken, *A Book of Prefaces* (A. A. Knopf, 1917), 53.

[13] Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance.* 126

shallows or its huts"—there was also "some mysterious attraction" irreducible to financial gain: "Conrad's manner was too animated, his enthusiasm too great at the first reading" (154). Indeed, as Ford tells it, Conrad seemed to grasp the artistic significance of *The Inheritors* in only its first four pages.[14] Like most of Ford's autobiographical writing, this is factually inaccurate but, as fiction, it undoubtedly traces out Ford and Conrad's preoccupations.[15] "Conrad," Ford recounts, "was sitting gloomily reflecting—upon his career… upon the possibility that he would have to get over neck into debt before he should have finished 'The Rescue'—a slight book almost no longer than a novelette, which was already mortgaged to Heinemann,"[16] when Ford begins reading the manuscript to him. It is precisely the introduction of the novel's sci-fi premise that strikes Conrad and spurs him to collaborate with Ford on the novel. More precisely, in Ford's account, it is a single sentence, describing the effect of the novel's Wellsian "Fourth Dimension" on Granger. After a beautiful and mysterious woman identifies herself as a "Fourth Dimensionist," Granger narrates, "I recovered my equanimity with the thought that I had been visited by some stroke of an obscure and unimportant physical kind" (6). It is this description of

[14] As if suggesting this kind of microcosmic meaning, *The Inheritors* opens by aligning its political intrigue with the Dimensionist's appearance: "I looked at her—intent on divining her in that one glance. It was of course impossible. 'There will be time for analysis,' I thought" (4).

[15] Zdzisław Najder refers to a letter written by Elsie Ford on October 6, 1899, in which she recalls that upon reading the first chapters of the manuscript, "Conrad was 'upset with the novel' and evidently set Ford to rewriting it;" see Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life* (Camden House, 2007), 297. Ford characterizes his 1924 memoir as "the writer's impression of a writer who avowed himself impressionist. Where the writer's memory has proved to be at fault, over a detail afterwards out of curiosity looked up, the writer has allowed the fault to remain on the page; but as to the truth of the impression as a whole, the writer believes that no man would care—or dare—to impugn it" (*Joseph Conrad,* vi-vii).

[16] Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 139.

literal shock—the meaningless of which feels like a physical blow yet also leads to a restoration of composure—that strikes Conrad as "magnificent," and compels him to assure Ford of his commitment to the manuscript (140).

What *mot juste* does Ford's Conrad find in this sentence? Immediately, there is the same sequence of literal physicality leading to composure that structures the scene of Granger writing his portrait of the Duc. The generic improbability of this sci-fi premise is, for Granger, a hindrance to meaning that, like the materiality of his writing in the scene examined above, also becomes an impetus. So even though Granger thinks this premise sounds like "a parody of scientific work recited by a phonograph" (9), he is struck by the beauty and mystery of this Dimensionist, and plays along. Which is to say that the action of the novel unfolds, within Granger's suspension of disbelief, out of this blunt delivery of a Wellsian premise. Later, as it becomes clear that this Dimensionist has manipulated the Duc and is herself the main player in the Greenland colonization plot that finances Granger's budding career in journalism, Granger starts to "feel that we had passed out of a realm of farcical allegory… that she might be speaking the truth" (123). But at this point in *The Inheritors*, introspection like this reads as metafiction. The Dimensionist has already acknowledged the derivativeness of her plot—"There will be friendships and desertions… there's irony in it, and pathos, and that sort of thing" (63)—so whatever truth Granger has grasped comes across, at the level of narration, as the sheer fulfillment of genre. In Ford's telling, it is this ironic attitude toward genre, marked by a figure in which literalism both constrains and propels composition, and narrated through a tale of artistic compromise in the face of market forces, that strikes Conrad as "magnificent."

With Ford's introduction, Conrad first meets Wells in 1899,[17] several years after Wells jump-starts his career by cashing in on the sci-fi device of the Fourth Dimension with *The Time Machine*. In a letter to the editor Edward Garnett (the same fictionalized in the above scene) filled with characteristic lamentations that he will "never write anything worth reading," Conrad describes his first correspondence with Wells as an encounter of unequals: "Anyway he descended from his 'Time Machine' to be as kind as he knew how."[18] The point of connecting these biographical dots is to suggest that Wells' *Time Machine* looms behind Conrad's first encounter with *The Inheritors*—Ford's account of it, at least. And in a later encounter, Wells seems to Conrad one of the "*savant cyniques* of the literary industry" who "made [Conrad] feel so dowdy."[19] If the Dimensionist cadre in *The Inheritors* descends from their transcendental antechamber onto history as "a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition" (10), the allusion is undeniable: Wells himself is something of a Dimensionist. The awkward "Fourth Dimensionist" plot that shapes *The Inheritors*'s satire of the fin-de-siècle literary marketplace seems, in part, to be an ambivalent and even anxious response to the

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[17] Jeffrey Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). 150.

[18] Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 281.

[19] Najder describes this anecdote, told by St.-John Perse to Igor Stravinsky, as "an apt, even if not wholly accurate, illustration of Conrad's attitude toward a different, more 'practical' brand of writer: 'Conrad once told me about a dinner he had had sometime in the country with Shaw, Wells, Bennett. When these *savants cyniques* of the literary industry talked about writing as 'action,' poor Conrad, horrified, left the table, pretending he had to catch an earlier train. He told me later…: 'Writing, for me, is an act of faith. They all made me feel so dowdy.'" Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life*, 363.

inextricably commercial and artistic nature of Wells' genre-fictional coup, published five years earlier. While such allusion to the ostensible cynicism and opportunism of Wells doesn't exhaust the meaning of Conrad and Ford's premise, the point is that Wells's debut novella looms as a model of both the commercial success Ford and Conrad hoped for but failed to attain, and, this chapter will argue, as a model of the modernist approach to genre fiction that Ford's Conrad ambivalently intuits—indeed, inherits—as a possibility within *The Inheritors.* Regardless of its questionable artistic coherence, *The Inheritors* is an essential document of the art of genre fiction's emergence because it combines Ford and Conrad's market-textural preoccupations with a vantage on the *fin-de-siècle* literary marketplace such that these preoccupations, while never cohering successfully within the novel's architecture, stand out with a revealing degree of sociological contextualization.

II. Wells Writing "Wells"

Wells's *The Time Machine,* in contrast, is a more artistically unified dramatization of how market texture structures the emergence of genre-fictional art. Wells seems to discover market texture while writing *The Time Machine,* absorbed in his temporal medium and surely aware that his genre of choice, the utopian romance, is currently flying off the shelves in the form of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). To begin with, an authorial pun is integral to *The Time Machine*'s engagement with market texture. Wells's Time Traveller protagonist has, in utopian-romantic fashion, arrived in the year 802,701 via his Time Machine and, intent on theorizing the state of decadence he discovers there, finds that his "attention was attracted by a pretty little

structure, like a well under a cupola. I thought in a transitory way of the oddness of wells still existing, and then resumed the thread of my speculations."[20] While critics have interpreted this authorial pun as a quip about Wells's ill health as a child and adolescent,[21] it is more substantively a reflection on the captivating power of Wells's narration. The "oddness" of Wells the author "still existing" in his own narrative is the oddness of breaking the fourth wall to acknowledge *The Time Machine*'s fictionality and, as we will see, its literal writtenness.

This dimension of the "wells" pun emerges more fully several pages later once the Time Traveller has formed his initial evolutionary theory of humanity's future, in which even "artistic impetus would at last die away—had almost died in the Time I saw" (28); and once, in turn, his Time Machine has disappeared, leaving him marooned in the future. Distraught at having thereby made "the most complicated and hopeless trap that man ever devised" (33), the Time Traveller rediscovers these "circular wells," several "of very great depth… rimmed with bronze, curiously wrought, and protected by a little cupola from the rain" (34):

> peering down into the shafted darkness, I could see no gleam of water, nor could I start any reflection with a lighted match. But in all of them I heard a certain sound: a thud—thud—thud, like the beating of some big engine; and I discovered, from the flaring of my matches, that a steady current of air set down the shafts. Further, I threw a scrap of paper into the throat of one; and, instead of fluttering slowly down, it was at once sucked swiftly out of sight. (34)

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[20] Wells, *The Time Machine* (Dover, 1995), 25. For my purposes, and unless otherwise noted, the differences between this Heinemann version of the text and the less common Holt version are insignificant.

[21] For example, see Patrick Parrinder, *Shadows of Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction, and Prophecy* (Syracuse UP, 1995), 36-7.

The Time Traveller will soon find that these "wells" lead to an underworld populated by the bestial humanoids he calls the Morlocks, who both slave away in darkness to sustain the decadent life of the surface-dwelling Eloi and, under cover of night, come above ground to hunt and devour them. This Darwinian extrapolation of industrial class conflict is the moral substance of Wells's utopian romance and has fascinated a century of readers and critics. But of interest to us here, to begin with, is the piece of paper cast into blackness to gauge movement. With this image, Wells evokes not only the generic depth of detective-plot intrigue (what lurks within the "wells"?) but also a form of perspective that is bound up with but irreducible to generic convention. A moment in Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) where he recounts writing precisely this scene in *The Time Machine* draws this form of perspective into focus:

> I still remember writing that part of the story in which the *Time Traveller* returns to find his machine removed and his retreat cut off. I sat alone at the round table downstairs writing steadily in the luminous circle cast by a shaded paraffin lamp… The best part of my mind fled through the story in a state of concentration before the Morlocks but some outlying regions of my brain were recording other things. Moths were fluttering in ever and again and though I was unconscious of them at the time, one must have flopped near me and left some trace in my marginal consciousness that became a short story I presently wrote, *A Moth, Genus Novo*.[22]

[22] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography : Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1967), 436. *A Moth, Genus Novo* (1895) allegorizes an entomological scene of writing structured by a doubled gaze that balances writerly focus over against merely looking at the inscribed page. The fluttering moth of Wells' scene of writing *The Time Machine* appears in this short story as a specter haunting its protagonist. With the chameleon-like ability to camouflage itself, this moth appears transparent—or, appears as a hallucinatory manifestation of the narrator's anxiety and guilt about killing another entomologist by defeating him in a scholarly argument (about a moth)—that is, killing him with writing. The moth's first appearance evokes Wells' scene of writing and stages a binocular shift from one eye to the other that entails a shift from absorptive writing to sheer observation of the marked page: "One eye was over the instrument, and bright and distinct before that was the circular field of the microscope, across which a brown diatom was slowly moving. With the other eye Hapley saw, as

The space of inscription between author and page is a fact about any writing. But this passage illuminates the constitutive significance of this perspectival space for Wells's writing of *The Time Machine.* Immediately, the "luminous circle cast by a shaded paraffin lamp" corresponds to the shape of the "wells," the depth of which finds an equivalent in the depth of Wells's absorption in his writing.[23] Yet the incongruity of this lamp's circular brightness with the "shafted darkness" of the "wells" also seems to contradict such a correspondence between this motif and its scene of writing. That is, except for how Wells's writing is what literally darkens and, in its basic referential function, dematerializes the illuminated paper before him, just as the well is what "swiftly sucked out of sight" the scrap of paper thrown by the Time Traveller.

I am suggesting that Wells embeds this authorial pun in the narrative through an allegory of his scene of writing. This allegory structures the whole of *The Time Machine* and appears

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it were, without seeing. [Footnote: The reader unaccustomed to microscopes may easily understand this by rolling a newspaper in the form of a tube and looking through it at a book, keeping the other eye open.] He was only dimly conscious of the brass side of the instrument, the illuminated part of the table-cloth, a sheet of note-paper, the foot of the lamp, and the darkened room beyond. Suddenly his attention drifted from one eye to the other. The table-cloth was of the material called tapestry by shopmen, and rather brightly coloured. The pattern was in gold, with a small amount of crimson and pale blue upon a greyish ground. At one point the pattern seemed displaced, and there was a vibrating movement of the colours at this point. Hapley suddenly moved his head back and looked with both eyes. His mouth fell open with astonishment. It was a large moth or butterfly; its wings spread in butterfly fashion!" Wells, *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents*, vol. 3128, Collection of British Authors (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1896), 251-52.

[23] According to a full-text search of the gutenberg.ca HTML edition of Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography*, this description of Wells' scene of writing is the only time in his autobiography that the word "circle" refers to the literal shape. Evidently, the pun on "wells" may also suggest an inkwell.

most explicitly just before the novella's frame narrative opens onto the Time Traveller's story. Here, a motif of circular illumination reappears when Wells's frame narrator recounts how

> In writing [this story] down, I feel with only too much keenness the inadequacy of pen and ink—and, above all, my inadequacy—to express its quality. You read, I will suppose, attentively enough; but you cannot see the speaker's white, sincere face in the bright circle of the little lamp, nor hear the intonation of his voice. You cannot know how his expression followed the turns of his story!… At first we glanced now and again at each other. After a time we ceased to do that, and looked only at the Time Traveller's face.[24]

In "the bright circle of the little lamp," the Time Traveller's face collapses into the white "face" of the page on which his tale will unfold, as literally written by the frame narrator—and likewise written by Wells. Thus, Wells's allegory of his scene of writing brings the sheer materiality of "pen and ink" into tense proximity with the meaningful depth of language, aligned here with the expressiveness of a face engaged in storytelling. In this light, Wells's peculiar attention to the cupolas over the "wells" might seem arbitrary, except for the proximity of "cupola" to "copula" —that principal form of grammatical joining: this *is* that. At the level of Wells's allegory, this phonetic resonance figures that "pretty little structure, like a well under a cupola" as nothing less than the predicative structure of language. Just as the "shafted darkness" of the "wells" evokes but conceals the Morlocks' realm of production, Wells evokes his work's material process of production while at the same time concealing it within the generic narration of his utopian romance. Like the moth fluttering before the lamp—an image that will materialize later, at a decisive moment in *The Time Machine*—this "pretty little structure" is a "trace" in the "marginal

[24] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 15.

consciousness" of Wells that, with what seems like a dawning compositional awareness, he writes into the work.

Immediately, our attention here to implicit formal concerns may seem incompatible with making sense of Wells's more immediately legible Marxist, Darwinian, and imperialist themes. But the way that the sweeping themes and gripping immediacy of Well's narrative seem, on the face of it, incompatible with nuanced formal interpretation is precisely the point. In the art of genre fiction, the commercial viability of genre-fictional immediacy—pushed here, by Wells, into the realm of sweeping yet generically reified social allegory—intertwines with medium-specific subtlety. The market architecture of Wells's fiction foregrounds its use value in the form of exoteric generic fulfillment that, at the same time, evokes yet effaces its esoteric reflexivity. For instance, just after the well has sucked up the Time Traveller's scrap of paper, Wells recapitulates his utopian-romantic premise in the same stroke as he aligns the "wells" with writing that, in its incomprehensibility, verges on the materiality of mere sound and shape. The Time Traveller narrates:

> Those waterless wells, too, those flickering pillars. I felt I lacked a clue. I felt—how shall I put it? Suppose you found an inscription, with sentences here and there in excellent plain English, and, interpolated therewith, others made up of words, of letters even, absolutely unknown to you? Well, on the third day of my visit, that was how the world of Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One presented itself to me! (35)

The strange "wells" of the future appear to the Time Traveller as unrecognizable words and letters that would, as such, present only a confused phonetic denotation or the sheer materiality of a mark, respectively. As if to fortify the narrative against this meaninglessness, the next paragraph narrates the Time Traveller's rescue of Weena, his beloved Eloi companion for the

remainder of his stay in the year 802,701. Wells could hardly make Weena's generically romantic counterpoint to this literalist evocation of writing clearer than when she and the Time Traveller subsequently encounter "an inscription in some unknown characters," and the Time Traveller narrates: "I thought, rather foolishly, that Weena might help me interpret this, but I only learned that the bare idea of writing had never entered her head" (53). While the Time Traveller recognizes these marks as "inscription," Weena's immunity to any experience of writing counterpoints her generically reified characterization as a beautiful love interest to the writerly incomprehensibility of the "wells."[25]

But if the extra-diegetic, writerly literalism of the "wells" and the diegesis of the Time Traveller's romance with Weena are contrapuntal, the generic quality of this diegesis also gives rise to a literalism and meaninglessness of its own. That is, at the same time as the unfolding of the Time Traveller's utopian-romantic plot contrapuntally displaces the inscriptive materiality evoked by the "wells," the background condition of mass-market demand for utopian romances raises the possibility that his plot appears as merely the mark of, or meaningless response to, the market. In a 1931 preface to the novella, Wells recounts "living from hand to mouth as a journalist… and wrote this story on the chance of finding a market for it in some new quarter… writing it late one summer night by an open window, while a disagreeable landlady grumbled at the excessive use of her lamp."[26] So this counterpoint of "wells" and Weena, writerly literalism

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[25] Weena also appears in relation to the novel's theme of circular illumination. The Time Traveler, "Glancing upward" from the bottom of the well, "saw the aperture, a small blue disc, in which a star was visible, while little Weena's head showed as a round black projection" (44).

[26] Wells, *The Time Machine* (Broadview Press, 2001), 249.

and generic fulfillment, is market texture's counterpoint of two forms of meaninglessness: inscriptive materiality and the market-mediated possibility of producing merely generic writing. Again, in a market-exposed context like Wells's, the merely generic threatens to appear meaningless because external criteria of audience appeal seem to supersede the internal criteria of what an author intends a work to mean on its own terms. Matters of commercial viability seem, that is, to supersede meaning discernible to immanent interpretation. So if genres can be understood as empirical processes through which authors, audiences, and critics construct assumptions about the social and artistic purposes of works,[27] the fin-de-siècle emergence of an art of genre fiction is a constellation of authorial efforts within such processes to assert aesthetic autonomy within and against the commercial pressure to pander to the generic demands of a mass audience. Wells writes to sell his utopian romance at the same time as he grapples—market-texturally—with its generic conventions by aligning them with an implicit evocation of the literal page before him. The stakes are, as it were, artistically commercial. In a well-known 1894 letter written just before *The Time Machine*'s publication, Wells touts the novella as his "trump card," and worries that "if it does not come off very much I shall know my place for the rest of my career."[28]

The Time Machine's climactic episode is a "trump card" of science fiction *avant la lettre.* The Time Traveller reclaims his Time Machine and careens 30 million years into the future with an abandon and descriptive intensity that seems to register Wells reaching an internal limit within

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[27] Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre," *New Literary History* 17, no. 2 (1986), 210.

[28] H.G. Wells, *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells: Volume 1 1880–1903*, ed. David C. Smith (Routledge, 2021), 226.

the generic terms of his utopian romance. Indeed, the novella's acceleration into geologic time, beyond the human-evolutionary time of the Eloi and Morlocks, abstracts its thematic content from expansive Darwinian and Marxist questions about social history and into an existential encounter with time and meaninglessness. Here, as Wells zeroes in on the basic matter of narrative that subtends his time travel premise, the Time Traveller "heard a harsh scream, and saw a thing like a huge white butterfly go slanting and fluttering up into the sky" (68). The fluttering moths that Wells recounts in his autobiography not only lead him to write *A Moth, Genus Novo* (1895), where an entomologist describes a pale specimen as both a moth and a butterfly; but also, this fluttering form ultimately impinges on the work under Wells's paraffin lamp, suturing the fictional world of *The Time Machine* to its literal scene of writing. At the material limit of the Time Traveller's utopian-romantic journey, Wells seems to thematize the material limit of his writing: the perspectival space between him and the blackened page.

On the "desolate slope" of futurity, the Time Traveller thinks he sees "some black object flopping about" on a sandbank that breaches the surface of the sea, and, as a solar eclipse begins, he "stared aghast at this blackness that was creeping over the day" (70). Like the moth passing before Wells's lamp, the transit of "the moon or the planet Mercury… across the sun's disk" (70) interrupts the light that is the condition of possibility for, on one hand, Wells's literal writing and, on the other hand, the Earthling life of his fiction. While subtle, this eclipse appears to be a figural condensation of market texture:

> It would be hard to convey the stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over. As the darkness thickened, the eddying flakes grew more abundant,

> dancing before my eyes; and the cold of the air more intense. At last, one by one, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the distant hills vanished into blackness. The breeze rose to a moaning wind. I saw the black central shadow of the eclipse sweeping towards me. In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. The sky was absolutely black. (70)

Wells seems to allegorically superimpose his scene of writing onto this desolate landscape—the material limit of the Time Traveller's journey—so that the eclipse's blackness encroaching on whiteness thematizes not only inscription's literal darkening of the page, but also a state of presentness that brackets "the background of our lives." The "great horror of this great darkness" that grips the Time Traveller may, in part, be the "horror" of encountering the sheer materiality—thus meaninglessness—that subtends even the most entrancing verbal form. Which is to say that in this scene, Wells may be doing slightly more than setting a high imaginative bar for the science fiction of the twentieth century. He may be binding into a unity the contradictory poles of the problematic we have traced throughout *The Time Machine*: materialized writing and captivating genre fiction.

III. Now in 4-D

Market texture conventionalizes a form of novelistic perspective that perhaps no work of fin-de-siècle Anglo-American fiction embodies more paradigmatically than *The Time Machine*. In the novella's opening scene, Wells stages this perspective when the Time Traveller tries to explain the "Fourth Dimension" to his frame-narrative audience:

> "Now, it is very remarkable that this is so extensively overlooked," continued the Time Traveller, with a slight accession of cheerfulness. "Really this is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension, though some people who talk about the Fourth Dimension do not

> know they mean it. *It is only another way of looking at Time. There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it…* (4, emphasis in the original)

Immediately, the Time Traveller is talking about four-dimensional geometry. That our first three dimensions are spatial and afford us mobility while our fourth dimension is temporal but does not afford mobility as such leads the Time Traveller to the clichéd qualification that in memory and imagination we can achieve four-dimensional mobility. The implication is clear, and key to the novella's genre-fictional appeal: as a work of fiction *The Time Machine* is itself the reader's "time machine," which lets them "travel" through the four-dimensional "space" of its narrative form.

More generally, *The Time Machine*'s genre-fictional appeal is premised on a fascination with the "higher space" of four dimensions that, in the fin-de-siècle, encompassed a tangle of period concerns—from the popularization of scientific advances in mathematics and physics to occultist rationalizations of the spatial derangements attendant to capitalism's imperialist expansion. While the impact of this "higher space" discourse on twentieth-century modernist aesthetics and mass culture is a well-documented topic,[29] the aspect of this discourse most relevant to the market-texture problematic is an anti-positivist tendency to figure the fourth

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[29] See Lisa Henderson's sweeping account of the fourth dimension's impact on modernist aesthetics in *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Revised Edition (MIT, 2018). Mark Blacklock expands on aspects of Henderson's study and pays particular attention to genre fiction in *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension: Higher Spatial Thinking in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford UP, 2018), 166-205. Mark McGurl lucidly identifies the trope of the "fourth dimension" in Edwin Abbott's 1885 novel *Flatland* and H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) as a "solution to the crisis of indistinction" faced by the period's increasingly market-exposed fiction in *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton UP, 2020), 57-77.

dimension as the creative imagination. For Wells and many other fin-de-siècle writers, this figural tendency is a resource for reflecting on imaginative literature's capacity to negate the mere givens of empirical experience. Here, however, this anti-positivist aspect of "higher space" discourse also offers Wells a resource for his modernist negation of the merely given nature of generic convention. For at the same time as Wells tees up the narratological reflexivity of the book-as-time-machine for his general audience, he more subtly stages within it the form of perspective that concerns us here. The Time Traveller continues: "You know how on a flat surface, which has only two dimensions, we can represent a figure of a Three-Dimensional solid, and similarly they think that by models of three dimensions they could represent one of four—if they could master the perspective of the thing. See?" (4). Then, a member of the frame-narrative audience objects to the notion of four-dimensional mobility—"You can show black is white by argument… but you will never convince me"—and the Time Traveller replies, "Possibly not… But now you begin to see the object of my investigations into the geometry of Four Dimensions. Long ago I had a vague inkling of a machine" (6). The by-now familiar evocation of inscriptive materiality in "inkling of a machine" implies and even literalizes how Wells's artistic solution to the problem of the "Fourth Dimension" is, as he writes, "so extensively overlooked." For "on a flat surface" like the page on which Wells writes this passage, it is only the three-dimensional perspectival space of inscription—with the vertical axis of the pen engaging the horizontal plane of the page—that "represents one of four" in the "space" of narrative form. As "our consciousness moves along it," we see the narrative of Wells's utopian romance implicitly yet intricately bound to the perspectival space of its literal inscription. Market texture is Wells's

tesseract. To "master the perspective of the thing" is not only to theatrically dramatize the subjective experience of the reader as "time travel" that unfolds "indifferently in any direction of Space and Time, as the driver determines" (6) but also to "master" readerly "time travel" as such by structuring it implicitly within the encompassing perspective of the author: a *market-textural perspective* that ironizes this entire genre-fictional operation through an evocation of inscriptive materiality. Wells achieves this perspective through the problematic we have traced across *The Time Machine*.[30]

Thus, in the above passage, what seems to be Wells's perfunctory introduction of a fourth-dimension premise is his way of staging the market architecture of his fiction: a formal

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[30] This frame-narrative discussion of the "Fourth Dimension" was serialized in the *National Observer* in 1894 and the relevant passages here were included, largely unrevised, in the definitive, 1895 Heinemann edition. This means that Wells writes this dialogue before his composition of the broader work and, in turn, before what I have suggested is his concomitantly dawning awareness of market texture. Yet Wells seems retrospectively aware of this frame narrative's resonance with his ultimate conception for *The Time Machine*. As Robert M. Philmus argues, the conceptual parts of *The Time Machine* are largely present in Wells's 1894 serializations before their synthesis in the Heinemann edition. Philmus, "Revisions of the Future: The Time Machine," *The Journal of General Education* 28, no. 1 (1976): 28-29. And in Wells's manuscript for the Heinemann edition, he includes cut-out and annotated excerpts of *National Observer* passages. One revealing annotation of the exclamation "You can show black is white by argument" proposes that the Time Traveller's skeptical interlocutor Filby, here named "the common-sense person," is a "white faced man with lank hair." While Wells does not include this in the Heinemann edition, noting in an adjacent annotation, "so I won't call him that," Wells links every instance of a "white face" in *The Time Machine* to the inscriptive materiality of the upturned page. In addition to the aforementioned "white, sincere face" of the frame-narrator (15); there is the "white leprous face" of the sphinx at the moment of the Time Machine's disappearance, which feels like "lash across the face… the bare thought of it was an actual physical sensation (29), and the appearance of Weena's face as "white and starlike" displaces the thought of her sheer materiality as meat for the Morlocks (51). H.G. Wells, "The Time Machine" (Manuscript, England, 1888-1895), University of Illinois Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 145-6.

problematic in which the generic terms of his narrative evoke yet efface his literal, authorial-compositional perspective onto the represented time of his work. This distinct form of metafictionality is convergent with the "fourth dimension" preoccupations of the fin-de-siècle period but not reducible to them, and therefore better grasped in formal terms. For instance, since market-textural perspective is analytically distinct but empirically inseparable from the novelistic problem of characterological perspective, the art of genre fiction is likewise distinct yet inseparable from Henry James's "art of fiction."[31] That is, as E.M. Forster suggests in *Aspects of the Novel*, "Wells's characters are as flat as a photograph. But the photographs are agitated with such vigour that we forget their complexities lie on the surface and would disappear if it [sic] was scratched or curled up… It is the deft and powerful hands of their maker that shake them and trick the reader into a sense of depth."[32] While Forster is not talking about market texture, he nonetheless seems to intuit its stakes and those of the art of genre fiction more broadly. For what is mechanical in the indexical factuality of an aesthetically compelling photograph is analogous to what is mechanical or literal in Wells's genre-fictional art. In each case, mere givens—accidents of photographic capture, genre-fictional conventions—are convincingly "agitated" or textured by the arranging hand of the author. Which is to say that the "sense of depth" Wells conjures via market texture is neither characterological nor limited to his incisive elaboration of a premise; *The Time Machine*'s "depth" is also metafictional. Wells's mastery is thus the Flaubertian mastery "the artist in his work… like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; you

[31] James, "The Art of Fiction."

[32] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harcourt, Brace, 1927), 110.

can sense him everywhere, but you cannot see him"[33]—yet in a newly embattled relation to the reified genres of the rapidly expanding fin-de-siècle literary marketplace. Further, while the art of lyric poetry may indeed be overheard,[34] the emergent art of genre fiction is, in more sense than one, "overlooked." Which is to say that its market texture conventionalizes a novelistic form of the non-narrative "temporality of writing… the set of all moments at which writing can say 'now,'" that Jonathan Culler argues the apostrophe has long evoked in lyric poetry.[35] Rather than apostrophize "O, this," the market texture of emergent genre-fictional art implies the prosaic irony of *I literally wrote this*. Through the "now" of market texture's metafictional "fourth dimension," certain fin-de-siècle writers figure their production of narrative meaning under direct bodily control—the work under the point of the pen—to assert an inalienable level of writerly intention that, as an ironic undertow to generic fulfillment, actively stages the tragic architecture of their art's market heteronomy rather than passively bearing its mark.

I have suggested that the market-texture problematic appears primarily from the 1880s through the 1910s as not the only way but the paradigmatic way that an emergent art of genre fiction works on its own terms. *The Time Machine* brings this fin-de-siècle periodization into particular focus because its market-textural irony is built into the way it reifies its novelistic capacity for historiographic representation into a time-travel event or technology. That is, history is literally the view from the Time Machine: "I saw trees growing and changing like puffs of

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[33] Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert, Selected Letters*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin Publishers, 1997), 247-48.

[34] John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," *The Crayon* 7, no. 4 (1860): 95.

[35] Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (1977): 66.

vapour, now brown, now green: they grew, spread, shivered, and passed away. I saw huge buildings rise up faint and fair, and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed—melting and flowing under my eyes" (16). It should by now be clear that this transcendental view from the "Fourth Dimension" evokes Wells's market-textural perspective onto the time of his work while recontaining it within the conventional machinations of utopian-romantic narration. Yet, in the same stroke, Wells's novella reduces "the broad living basis of historical events in their intricacy and complexity, in their manifold interaction with acting individuals," as Lukács notes of the classical historical novel, to a kinetoscopic blur of temporal indices.[36] This generic reification of historical process marks *The Time Machine* as a limit case of the classical historical novel's fin-de-siècle declension into what Lukács calls a "special genre" or "genre in its own right" (*The Historical Novel*, 239-40).

Indeed, the art of genre fiction exemplifies how by the late-nineteenth century the revolutionary narrative of Lukács's classical historical novel is deracinated from concrete social history and recontained within artistically productive but politically ambiguous anxieties about genre and the market. Grasped in this way, the "Fourth Dimension" of *The Time Machine* and *The Inheritors* is not only bound up with the market-texture problematic of genre-fictional art; it is also a residual fantasy of the historical novel's capacity for representing revolutionary social process once, by the mid-nineteenth century, the objective conditions for this novelistic capacity have been all but subdued in the capitalist core. In the wake of the failed revolutions of 1848, when the once-radical European bourgeoisie failed to overcome the narrow class interest of

[36] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 43.

apologetic liberalism, the historical novel's declension into problems of the merely generic indexes not only the marketization of literary production but also a foreclosure of emancipatory political perspective in the literary culture of the capitalist core. That said, if Flaubert's 1856 *Madame Bovary* is a watershed moment for the emergence of an art novel whose formal hermeticism rejects a bourgeois audience that can no longer plausibly stand in for the universal interest, my argument has been that aesthetically ambitious fin-de-siècle fiction in the capitalist core must grapple with a more ramified market for literary goods than in Flaubert's moment. Thus, genre-fictional art emerges less in opposition to the middle-class political interest of its audience, and more in opposition to a mass audience's middle-brow demand for generic narrative. This is how aesthetically ambitious writers take up Flaubert's mantle, but under objective constraints that require their art fiction to become genre fiction.

IV. Modernist Ships that Pass in the Night

With Lukács's sweeping literary-historical declension as a backdrop and *The Time Machine* as a paradigmatic example of market texture, we can now demarcate this problematic's historical ambit and space of artistic possibility in more detail. To begin with, if there is a movement of fin-de-siècle writers whose work is structured around market texture, this movement is only loosely affiliative. From Conrad and Ford to Wells, many of the writers whom Michael Fried identifies as "literary impressionists" clearly grapple with market texture and, as such, seem to constitute a loose movement oriented by what I have argued is, in fact, the emergence of an art of genre

fiction.[37] Wells in particular exemplifies the range of individual affiliation with modernist aesthetic criteria that this problematic and, more generally, the emergent art of genre fiction can encompass as a cultural formation.[38] In his autobiography, for example, he recalls:

> All this talk I had with Conrad and Hueffer and James about the just word, the perfect expression, about this or that being "written" or not written, bothered me… in the end I revolted altogether and refused to play their game. "I am a journalist," I declared, "I refuse to play the 'artist.' If sometimes I am an artist it is a freak of the gods. I am journalist all the time [sic] and what I write *goes now*—and will presently die." (16)

The ungrammatical form of "I am journalist" inflects Wells's self-quotation with a certain self-deprecating irony that points up how, while the art of genre fiction can appear highly heterogeneous in terms of theoretical position-taking, the artistic meanings that writers actually produce in their works can tell a different story. Wells the "journalist" can, as we have seen, forge a market-subsumed approach to medium specificity alongside self-proclaimed "artists" like Conrad and Ford.

Compositional awareness of market texture is concomitantly heterogeneous. Within the genre of maritime adventure fiction, for example, Stephen Crane's *The Open Boat* (1897) and Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* (1910) exemplify how authors can take up market texture with

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[37] As Fried acknowledges, "impressionism" is something of a misnomer in literary criticism, but was a term of affiliation among writers preoccupied with literal writing (*What Was Literary Impressionism?*, 340).

[38] Wells's falling-out with James dramatizes the divergent views of literature and aesthetics that characterized this highly influential cohort of fin-de-siècle writers, all of of whom lived primarily in Kent and Sussex. See Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray Ray, eds., *Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of Their Friendship, Their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and Their Quarrel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958); Sarah Cole, *Inventing Tomorrow: H. G. Wells and the Twentieth Century* (Columbia UP, 2019), 16-29.

variable degrees of compositional awareness and, in turn, with variable degrees of complexity and artistic achievement. In each work, a vessel's dramatic course toward land allegorizes the materialization of each author's composition into the inscribed page before them. In *The Open Boat*'s account of Crane's near-death experience in a shipwreck, this allegory is sparse, but resonates out from one image in particular:

> At last, from the top of each wave, the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper… Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white—trees and sand.[39]

Crane's literal writing emerges as a horizon hypnotically keyed to the rhythm of waves. Like the sentences Crane shapes with characteristic intensity and balance, these rising and falling waves precipitously conceal and, "at last," reveal the land toward which he struggles in his dinghy. But while this writerly literalism patterns Crane's entire short story (and his oeuvre more broadly), it exhibits a high degree of independence from other aspects of the narrative and for this reason seems primarily unconscious.

In contrast, Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* develops a more integrated allegory of inscriptive materiality within a self-consciously generic narrative about a novice captain's first command. Its opening lines establish inscriptive materiality as a ground note for the tale of maritime adventure to come:

> *On my right hand there were lines* of fishing stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of

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[39] Stephen Crane, *The Open Boat: And Other Tales of Adventure* (Doubleday & McClure Company, 1898), 18, 20.

> tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fisherman now gone to the other end of the ocean. (7, my emphasis)

This image of maritime obscurity evokes Conrad's writerly perspective onto the page before him while introducing a feeling of alienation in his protagonist that, as we will see, is bound up with Conrad's ironic engagement with genre-fictional form.[40] The captain soon discovers Leggatt, a fugitive whom the captain is immediately and peculiarly intent on secreting away from his crew and in this way saving from the nearby ship that wants to try Leggatt for murder. To the captain, Leggatt is like "my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror" (14). This homoerotic and possibly hallucinatory doppelgänger relationship pivots *The Secret Sharer* away from the narration of nautical action and into the captain's "mental feeling of being in two places at once" (31). That is, this characterological doubling induces a theme of perspectival ambivalence that, like Conrad's characteristic use of frame narratives, displaces the action-driven conventions of maritime adventure fiction with psychologically nuanced renderings of the captain's thoughts and—perhaps the same thing—his furtive conversations with Leggatt.

Nautical action only predominates in *The Secret Sharer* once Conrad acknowledges its reified generic conventionality. Entertaining the dangerous possibility of sailing his ship as near to land as possible to facilitate Leggatt's escape, the captain balks, and exclaims, "'Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale;" and Leggatt, "with scornful whispering," replies: "We aren't indeed! There's nothing of a boy's tale in this. But there's nothing else for it. I want

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[40] Josian Paccaud notices this reflexive opening note as well Conrad's alignment of nautical command and writing in "Under the Other's Eyes: Conrad's 'the Secret Sharer,'" *The Conradian* 12, no. 1 (1987): 60, 65-6.

no more."[41] The threat of the merely generic tale materializes as the possibility of the captain finally taking assertive command of his ship, in turn, as the threat of the ship running aground. So when the captain accepts Leggatt's challenge and turns his ship toward shore, Conrad takes this threat on and immanently confronts the mass-market genre of the "boy's adventure tale" that has marked his oeuvre.[42]

The Secret Sharer's climactic conclusion unfolds as a drama of inscriptive materiality emerging through an ironic orchestration of maritime-adventure conventions. For the captain's ultimate assertion of control over his ship exemplifies what Margaret Cohen calls the "performability effect" at the heart of maritime adventure fiction, where the representation of nautical labor as a highly legible and logical progression offers readers the pleasure of projecting themselves, as if participating, into an "operable" depiction of action at sea.[43] As the ship drifts perilously close to shore, the captain's haranguing of his panicked first mate ironically stages this genre-fictional effect's theatrical, participatory quality: "I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it. 'Ready about, do you hear? You go forward'—shake—'and stop there'—shake—

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[41] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer and Other Stories: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism* (W. W. Norton, 2015), 35.

[42] Conrad writes *The Secret Sharer* during the final stages of completing *Under Western Eyes* in November and December of 1909 (3), and seems to do so as a kind of genre-fictional respite from the former, which, along with *The Secret Agent* (1907) and a handful of short stories, traded Conrad's typical milieu of maritime adventure for land-bound political and military intrigue. *The Secret Sharer*, then, seems to be Conrad's plunge back into his genre-fictional wheelhouse; John G. Peters notes that Conrad "wrote *The Secret Sharer* quickly and had a great deal of confidence in its success" (*The Secret Sharer,* x). In turn, the captain's ordeal may, in part, be a sublimation of the ordeal Conrad faces in completing *Under Western Eyes,* which was critically ill-received, unprofitable, and precipitated his nervous breakdown in 1910.

[43] Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton UP, 2021), 11, 75.

‘and hold your noise’—shake—‘and see these head sheets properly overhauled’—shake, shake —shake” (41). Then, night falls. Drifting in shallow water, the captain faces a problem of relative motion not dissimilar to that faced by the Time Traveller, peering into the “wells:”

> I had not learned yet the feel of my ship. Was she moving? What I needed was something easily seen, a piece of paper, which I could throw overboard and watch. I had nothing on me. To run down for it I didn’t dare. There was no time. All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship’s side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing?... I recognized my own floppy hat. It must have fallen off [Leggatt’s] head... Now I had what I wanted—the saving mark for my eyes. (41-42)

Conrad materializes his scene of writing through a flurry of images—from “a piece of paper” to “the saving mark for my eyes”—that cohere around a generic problem of representing nautical action. The ship’s motion and, in turn, the captain’s command rely upon their relation to a “saving mark”—notionally, “a piece of paper.” Under the ironic pressure of this market-textural patterning, the predictably “operable” action of the “boy’s adventure tale” undergoes a subtle shift into the self-legislating “relative motion” of a genre-fictional artwork that counterpoints, in a seamless narrative operation, the twofold aspect of its material support: market-bound generic fulfillment and pen-marked page.

The generically-effaced inscriptive materiality that remains largely unconscious for Crane in *The Open Boat* seems present to mind here as a compositional concern for Conrad. This is because market texture is formally integral to the *Secret Sharer*; Conrad’s climactic conclusion is the finessed culmination of a narrative allegory rather than a glimmer of unconscious patterning. From the moment Leggatt appears overboard as “something elongated and pale floating very close” (11), Conrad suggests that the captain’s introspective and possibly hallucinatory relation

to Leggatt resembles his own authorial relation to the inscribed page. The captain's "scheme for keeping my second self invisible" is a writerly spatial arrangement: "I at my writing-desk ready to appear busy with some papers, he behind me, out of sight of the door" (24). Further, his inability "to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second self" (25)—that is, his "mental feeling of being in two places at once"—suggests the writerly feeling of being simultaneously absorbed in and estranged from the genre-fictional world issuing from the point of one's pen. Leggatt, like the sheer materiality of the marked page, must remain hidden because while his appearance is an intra-diegetic transgression of the captain's duty, the marked page's appearance is an extra-diegetic transgression of narrative plausibility—an interruption of the sign by the signifier. It is fitting, in turn, that the captain's anxiety about nautical command evokes an authorial anxiety about how the automatism of merely generic composition threatens signification: "There are to a seaman certain words, gestures," the captain laments, "that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me" (31). The captain is all too aware of his actions and paralyzed because of it —paralyzed, that is, to the extent that he may be hallucinating (as it were, "writing") Leggatt as a sublimation of his desire to escape the (generic) constraints of his first command. Ultimately, the anagnorisis of *The Secret Sharer* integrates these aspects of the work's market texture. Just as the captain's assumption of nautical command is the condition of possibility for Leggatt's escape, the assumption of generic form—"the boy's adventure tale"—is the condition of possibility for this

genre's market-textural ironization. Inducing medium-specific "relative motion" within narrative material that would otherwise be merely generic, Leggatt's escape is Conrad's market-textural "escape" from reified convention. Across the market-texture problematic's range of compositional awareness, Conrad pushes to new heights what Crane seems to have only intuited.[44]

Guy de Maupassant, a student of Flaubert and with him a major influence on fin-de-siècle fiction, seems to pose this range of compositional awareness as itself the genre-fictional premise of his 1887 ghost story *The Horla*. Maupassant's protagonist recounts the haunting presence of a poltergeist in a series of journal entries. This "Horla" may equally be the protagonist's post-hypnotic split personality or, in his paranoid mind, an "epidemic of madness" borne on a ship from the colonial periphery. In the work's climactic moment, the protagonist writes how the specter appears vividly to him for the first time:

> I was just pretending to write in order to trick him, for he too was spying on me; and suddenly, I felt, I was sure, that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, grazing my ear. I stood up with my hands outstretched, turning around so quickly that I almost fell down. And? Everything there was clear as in full daylight, but I could not see myself in my mirror—it was empty, clear, profound, full of light! My image was not inside it … yet I myself was facing it! … Then suddenly I began to see myself in a mist, in the depths of the mirror, in a mist as if through a sheet of water. It seemed to me that this water shimmered from left to right, slowly, making my image more precise, from second to second. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever was obscuring me seemed not to possess any clearly defined outlines, but just a sort of opaque transparency, little by little becoming clearer. Finally I could distinguish myself completely, just as I do every

[44] Fredric Jameson's reading of Conrad's *Lord Jim* attends congruently to a tension between an emergent modernism and an adherence to mass-market genre. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 206-8.

> day when I look at myself. I had seen him! The terror of it has remained with me, and makes me tremble still.[45]

This passage's drama of supernatural intrusion ("he was reading over my shoulder") is an implicit drama of authorial intrusion in which literal writing appears as a reflection that "shimmered from left to right, slowly, making my image more precise, from second to second." The protagonist recognizes his poltergeist in the mirror as himself writing at his desk and *being written* as such. Maupassant stages his work's generic premise—a conflation of haunting, hypnotism, and imperial angst—as a revelation of his authorial hand literally writing the tortured consciousness of his protagonist *word to word* across the page. The heightening sense of horror the protagonist feels toward his supernatural or post-hypnotic subjection to the *hor-là*, or "out there," precedes and frames this passage such that when Maupassant literally shows his hand, he does so in the same way that a writer's unconscious evocation of literal writing might precede and frame their conscious integration of it within the generic terms of their fiction. Like the Time Traveller's "horror" in the face of the far-future eclipse that marks the material limit of his journey, the highly marketable horror of *The Horla* is the market-textural "horror" of fiction writing's materiality.

V. The Genre Turn, Emergent

This chapter has argued that what primarily produces formal architectures that ironically bind generic fulfillment to literal writing within this set of exemplary fin-de-siècle works is the

[45] Guy de Maupassant, *The Horla*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2005), 28-29.

necessity that these works literally circulate in mass markets as commodities and, as such, respond to the generic pressures of market demand. Crucially, these works are not yet responding to demand that has been institutionalized into market niches for specific genres. As Andrew Goldstone argues, "though by the late nineteenth century fiction production was a genuinely massified affair, fiction categories remained weakly institutionalized… to impose a generic code, developed later, back onto the late nineteenth century would be to miss the fluidity of now-familiar categories."[46] Focusing on the U.S. publishing industry, Goldstone suggests that it is not until the mid-twentieth-century that popular fiction publishing generally exhibits systematic genre classifications, with specific labels marking out distinct market segments. Assuming that a comparable trajectory appears in the U.K., I have argued that an emergent art of genre fiction necessarily predates this institutionalization of what Goldstone calls a "genre-fiction system" (204). That is, prior to the institutionalization of genre fiction as a market-driven system, mass-market-modernist writers are intuiting and ironizing the market-oriented systematicity of genres that they know sell well. These genres may not yet appear as labels in bookstores or as variables in publishers' marketing strategies, but they nonetheless shape the space of artistic possibility that writers feel amid an emergent culture industry. Market texture is the paradigmatic formal problematic through which ambitious Anglo-American fiction writers intuitively negotiate this space of artistic possibility. And surely, market heteronomy is not the only form of necessity that shapes market texture and the "4-D," metafictional perspective to which it gives rise. At different

[46] Andrew Goldstone, "Origins of the US Genre-Fiction System, 1890–1956," *Book History* 26, no. 1 (2023): 207.

historical and material conjunctures the market-texture problematic might, for example, take up the gendered division of writerly labor or racially trope black and white motifs of inscription. These articulations are promising directions for future research. But the Marxian wager of this dissertation is that under capitalism, the social-metabolic process of marketization is primary to and exerts a shaping, selective pressure on other forms of social necessity.

Accordingly, an art of genre fiction emerges in the fin-de-siècle period not only before the institutionalization of the culture industry's genre system but also, and more consequentially, outside of the market-insulated institutions of canonical Anglo-American modernist fiction. For the restricted-field infrastructure of small and experimental presses and magazines whose circulation will be a primary condition of possibility for canonical literary modernism emerges primarily in the 1910s and 20s and therefore does not encompass the production of most works structured around market texture, which generally appear earlier. Market texture predominantly structures works that face high market exposure and are first serialized adjacent to advertisements in the newly widespread medium of the mass-audience magazine. Thus, fin-de-siècle writers who take up market texture find an impulsion to medium-specificity not in the genre-fiction-defying experimentalism of canonical modernism's field of restricted production, but earlier, in the heightening, market-mediated impulsion to write genre. As such, the market texture of the emergent art of genre fiction constitutes one notably market-subsumed way that a self-legislating ontology of the artwork emerges as a regulative principle of literary modernism. From Wells to Conrad, we have seen how this problematic mediates formal strategies, specific to

prose fiction, for asserting aesthetic autonomy within and against the meaninglessness attendant to the marketization of literary production.

By way of conclusion: market texture marks the emergence of Anglo-American modernist fiction's market architecture and, thereby mediating the nascent dialectic of modernism and mass culture, presents us with two heuristic endpoints—one in the restricted field of production and one in the mass market. To begin with, restricted-field modernism's more explicitly and often disorientingly visual and material registers index a different relationship between writer, market circulation, and literary form than that which gives rise to the problematic we have been tracing. In short, Anglo-American modernist fiction's increasingly restricted-field orientation in the first decades of the twentieth century seems to condition the supersession of market texture as a formal problematic. Thomas D. Moore argues that Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) stages this restricted-field exhaustion of generically-effaced inscriptive materiality.[47] In Moore's reading, an elaborate narrative allegory renders the character system of Ford's novel an implicit scene of literal writing, all while retaining many of the generic conventions of detective fiction. With each of Ford's central characters standing respectively for author, amanuensis, and inscribed page, the main intrigue of the novel unfolds as an experiment in subsuming the extra-diegetic irony of the market-textural perspective back within the diegetic logic of characterological perspective—as if to signal the anachronism of the former's disarticulation from the latter. That is, Ford seems to recognize that with the emergence

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[47] Thomas Moore, "Lashes of the Pen: *The Good Soldier* and the End of Literary Impressionism," (unpublished manuscript, 2023). PDF.

of a more robust restricted-field infrastructure for Anglo-American modernist fiction than had been available for much of the fin-de-siècle period, textual materiality and in turn the guiding hand of the author no longer need to be alloyed with genre-fictional narration oriented toward a mass audience; by the end of *The Good Soldier,* its characters are modernist "shuttlecocks" ironically batted about by the "Omnipotent Deity," Ford himself.[48]

And by the 1930s, market texture's restricted-field endpoint in Ford finds a mass-market analogue—albeit not necessarily a modernist one—in time travel fiction. Here, the textual materiality that emergent genre-fictional art evokes and recontains within its market-textural perspective becomes merely a generic convention. As David Wittenberg argues, time travel fiction only emerges out of the utopian romance as a coherent genre in itself once the 1920s popularization of Einsteinian relativity makes temporal paradox and its narrative implausibility a formal criterion that can begin to find a mass audience.[49] For Wittenberg, temporal paradox—for example, your parents met *and* never met—abolishes the narratological a priori of a single tale (*fabula*) behind a telling (*sjuzhet*). This makes the telling of a tale flatten out, as it were, into a tale of sheer telling—the narrative implausibility of which prompts readers' literal experience of

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[48] Ford, *The Good Soldier* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 197.

[49] David Wittenberg, *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013), 36-37. While *The Time Machine* predates the emergence of time-travel fiction as an autonomous genre, it is already formalizing the fictional "location" that Wittenberg argues is essential to this genre: what he calls "hyperspacetime." This is the fictional location of time travel that figures, in mind-bending sci-fi fashion, the transcendental location necessary for any narrative experience: the empirically-unobservable object or *Ding-an-sich* that is consciousness. While Wittenberg argues that time-travel fiction "literalizes" this transcendental object, it seems more precise to say "figures" or "allegorizes" because that which is non-empirical cannot, by definition, be literal; it must be rendered through what it is not.

the page; just as a time traveler views history from without, the reader of time travel fiction views its tangled narrative on the upturned page before them. Unbound from the effaced yet literally shaping hand of the author, this fully generic "Fourth Dimension" is no longer, as Wells's Time Traveller puts it, "a fixed and unalterable thing" (5) but rather a paradoxical space of "odd potentialities" and "utter confusion" (11). The time travel premise that Wells takes up to court the *writerly* literalism of market texture becomes, by the 1930s, a mass-market narrative device for producing a *readerly* literalism—undoubtedly a clever and entertaining one—that is merely generic.

Further afield from these heuristic endpoints to our fin-de-siècle periodization, historical extremities of market texture deserve more scrutiny. Elizabeth Renker and more recently Katie Mettigen have explored the importance of inscriptive materiality to Melville's market-embattled art.[50] And a century beyond Melville, Muriel Spark's 1956 debut novel *The Comforters* is a typewriter afterlife of market texture that reads like a mystery novel inflected by the literary-theoretical irony characteristic of postmodernist metafictionality. The protagonist Caroline, well-schooled in "the art of the novel," starts hallucinating typewriter clicks and a chorus of voices that parrot what seem, in her dawning understanding, to be lines from the novel in which she is a character.[51] The novel's climactic moment aligns Caroline's car (driven by her lover) and the car

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[50] Elizabeth Renker, *Strike through the Mask: Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996); Katie McGettigan, *Herman Melville: Modernity and the Material Text* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2017).

[51] Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (New Directions Publishing, 2014), 144. Caroline is writing a book of literary criticism, "*Form in the Modern Novel,*" and "having difficulty with the chapter on realism" (57).

they pursue with typewriters: As “two girls in a shining black open racer skimmed the wet road,” with “the throb and tapping of the engine and the rain,” Caroline exclaims, “I haven’t been studying novels for three years without knowing some technical tricks. In this case it seems to me there’s an attempt being made to organize our lives into a convenient slick plot.” Slick road, contrived plot, and wet typewriter ribbon converge as Caroline’s car crashes and actualizes at the level of plot her thought, a moment earlier: “If I had my way I’d hold up the action of the novel. It’s a duty,” as well as her “resolution not to be involved in any man's story” (107-9). Spark dramatizes how as twentieth-century literary production mechanizes with the typewriter and, in the postwar period, professionalizes within the market-exposed “Program Era” of creative writing, aspects of market texture remerge, yet tend to reify into theoretical preoccupations with metafictionality that, as external criteria, tend to compromise a work’s immanent purposiveness.[52]

While the market architecture of modernist fiction persists into the twenty-first century, the market-texture problematic that is its paradigmatic mode of emergence is now an anachronism. To be sure, afterlives of market texture shape literary production up to and beyond literary postmodernism’s theatrical obsession with textual and writerly literalism. An adequate account of these afterlives would have to make sense of the postwar expansion of the culture industry and the ramification of its market logic through the professional milieu of the creative writing program. And while the broader historical contours of modernist fiction’s market

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[52] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009),. 9.

architecture are resistant to theoretical generalization and may be delineated only through the compelling interpretation of works themselves, market texture's integral role in the emergence of a modernist commitment to medium-specificity and aesthetic autonomy in market-exposed fin-de-siècle prose fiction offers a general insight into the trajectory of modernist fiction across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. For after the "postmodern" collapse of modernist fiction's restricted field and amid neoliberalism's onslaught of marketization, market architecture becomes increasingly necessary for the persistence of ambitious fiction—fiction, as we have seen, that asserts its aesthetic autonomy through the way it fashions itself for market circulation. For instance, in what is often referred to as the "genre turn," late-twentieth and twenty-first-century literary fiction increasingly inhabits the rigidities of mass-market genres because it faces an imaginative horizon structured by a thoroughly institutionalized genre-fiction system.[53] Now, all fiction is genre fiction. But this chapter suggests that this turn to genre is an emergent tendency in the fin-de-siècle period, and, as such, galvanizes the emergence of modernist fiction's market architecture. If market texture is the paradigmatic formal problematic through which modernist fiction first grapples with this long-term genre turn as it emerges in the fin-de-siècle, other problematics necessarily contour modernist fiction's immanence to market genres across its many national-political contexts, from the nineteenth century to present. While

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[53] Goldstone, "Origins of the US Genre-Fiction System, 1890–1956," 207. On the "genre turn," see Mark McGurl, *Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon* (Verso Books, 2021), 167-69; Paul Crosthwaite, The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 58-60, 87; Brown, *Autonomy*, 25-27; Tim Lanzendörfer, "Introduction: The Generic Turn? Toward a Poetics of Genre in the Contemporary Novel," in *The Poetics of Genre in the Contemporary Novel*, ed. Lanzendörfer (Lexington Books, 2016), 1–16; Jeremy Rosen, "Literary Fiction and the Genres of Genre Fiction," *Post45*, August 7, 2018.

chapters two and three focus on market-architectural formal problematics in the 1920s and 1960s that are less directly related to genre fiction, chapter four is a bookending return to the art of genre fiction in the twenty-first century. Here, as the long-term genre turn enters its dominant phase, modernist fiction must relentlessly reinvent its medium to make sense of how historical process appears, from the reified yet increasingly unavoidable standpoint of the literary marketplace, to be a process of product iteration.

2. Bull Market, Black Fiction: Aesthetic Racecraft in the Jazz Age

> Death over there! Life over here! Shake down Death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy.
>
> Claude McKay[1]

Claude McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* follows a group of men in precarious flight from maritime employment as they "spread joy" (24) around the *vieux port* neighborhood of Marseille, France. A *roman à clef,* the novel draws on McKay's experiences during the summer of 1926, when he discovered an idyll of vagabond cosmopolitanism in the *vieux port*.[2] "It was," McKay writes in the novel's opening pages, "as if all the derelicts of all the seas had drifted up here to sprawl out the day in the sun" (18). And in his 1937 autobiography, McKay reflects on the "relief" he felt that summer "to live in among a great gang of black and brown humanity… odors of dark bodies sweating through a day's hard work, like the odor of stabled horses, were not unpleasant even in a crowded café. It was good to feel the strength and distinction of a group and the assurance of belonging to it."[3] In novel and autobiography alike, a particular "crowded cafe" is a focal point for this feeling of group belonging. McKay opens an early chapter in *Banjo* titled "Jelly Roll" by describing how popular dance music—specifically, "Shake That Thing!," a version of the 1920s jazz hit "Jelly Roll Blues"—catalyzes this feeling:

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[1] Claude McKay, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), 57.

[2] Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay, Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance: A Biography* (LSU Press, 1987), 229.

[3] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (Rutgers UP, 2007), 277.

> Shake that thing. The opening of the Café African by a Senegalese had brought all the joy-lovers of the darkest color together to shake that thing. Never was there such a big black-throated guzzling of red wine, white wine, and close, indiscriminate jazzing of all the Negroes of Marseille. (45)

McKay unfolds ascriptive identification as a kind of dance. The song's vocal hook stands alone as an imperative and the next sentence describes how a group of people come together, as if hailed by this hook, to "shake that thing." Looking the same—"the darkest color"—they do the same thing—"shake that thing"—because they like the same thing—"joy." The third sentence's subject complement then pairs the stark chromaticism of "black-throated guzzling" with the cohesive revelry of "close, indiscriminate jazzing" and McKay's presentation of these attributes together culminates in an ascription that figures these people as "of" a racial group: the "Negroes of Marseille." This final, charismatic preposition is exaggerated—are "all" of the "Negroes of Marseille" really "jazzing" at the cafe?—but easy to overlook.[4] For the idea of race requires the synecdochic identification of an individual or concrete group of individuals with an abstract group whose members cannot, by definition, "all" show up anywhere or do anything because their common attribute is race, an erroneous account of human difference. But in McKay's prose, "all the Negroes of Marseille" "shake that thing." People in the cafe come together in musical movement just as by the end of this passage their attributes appear to cohere along the taxonomical lines of a race. While racial ascription posits an identity between a part and a non-existent whole—an individual or individuals and a race—McKay embeds this synecdochic logic within a specific evocation of wholeness: "jazzing," the participatory and improvisational

[4] This exaggeration is easy to overlook even as it makes less sense than the earlier phrase "all the joy-lovers," which seems justified by its infinitive phrase "to shake that thing."

melding of dancing bodies and rag-time music[5]—to make the existence of a race feel real: described rather than ascribed. To be part of the black race in the Café African feels like being part of the rag. McKay identifies the plausibility of race with the plausibility of a participatory art form: a sensuously intelligible whole of which you are a part.

This passage is a particularly finely-wrought instance of what Barbara Fields and Karen Fields refer to as "racecraft:" language use that is conventionalized by historical practices of racism and contributes to the ideological persistence of the category of race as a just-so taxonomy of ascriptive difference that rationalizes market-generated class inequality under capitalism.[6] Fields and Fields further define racecraft:

> Distinct from race and racism, racecraft does not refer to groups or to ideas about groups' traits, however odd both may appear in close-up. It refers instead to mental terrain and to pervasive belief. Like physical terrain, racecraft exists objectively; it has topographical features that [we] regularly navigate, and we cannot readily stop traversing it. Unlike physical terrain, racecraft originates not in nature but in human action and imagination; it can exist in no other way…. Finally, *racecraft* is not a euphemistic substitute for racism. It is a kind of fingerprint evidence that *racism* has been on the scene. (19)

Fields and Fields's attention to racecraft's objectivity in language use opens up the commonplace phrase "race is a social construction" to the kind of specification this phrase often forecloses. For the shorthand claim "race is a social construction" often stands in for analysis of which agents in

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[5] Throughout the 1920s, "jazzing" was used as an intransitive verb to refer to both playing jazz or rag-time, dancing to it, or, more generally, acting "in a vigorous, wild, or spirited manner." Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "jazz (v.), sense 2.b, 2.c, 4" July 2023.

[6] Karen E. Fields and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012).

which contexts construct the category of race in which ways for which practical purposes.[7] As such, assertions that "race is a social construction" tend to underwrite an essential operation of racecraft: a conflation of race and racism, each of which is a different kind of social construction.[8] While race is a taxonomy of ascriptive difference, that is, "an ideology that constructs populations as groups and sorts them into hierarchies of capacity, civic worth, and desert based on 'natural' or essential characteristics attributed to them,"[9] racism is the social practice of a double standard that takes for granted the objective reality of racial characteristics as such (*Racecraft*, 16-17). As Fields and Fields put it, "Race belongs to the same family as the evil eye. Racism belongs to the same family as murder and genocide. Which is to say that racism, unlike race, is not a fiction, an illusion, a superstition, or a hoax. It is a crime against humanity" (101). Fields and Fields's racecraft neologism makes sense of race as both a "hoax" and a "fiction" because, by invoking the term "witchcraft," it formulates the social problem of race's ideological recalcitrance not only in true-false terms of error but also in practical terms of plausibility:

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[7] Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 100-1. On the construal of race as a social construction in black studies, see Kenneth W. Warren, "The Ends of Black Studies," in *The Ends of Knowledge: Outcomes and Endpoints Across the Arts and Sciences*, ed. Rachael Scarborough King and Seth Rudy (Bloomsbury, 2023), 203-13.

[8] Fields and Fields analyze this conflation through an example: "the statement 'black Southerners were segregated because of their skin color'—a perfectly natural sentence to the ears of most Americans, who tend to overlook its weird causality. But in that sentence, segregation disappears as the doing of segregationists, and then, in a puff of smoke—*paff*—reappears as a trait of only one part of the segregated whole. In similar fashion, enslavers disappear only to reappear, disguised, in stories that append physical traits defined as slave-like to those enslaved" (17).

[9] Adolph Reed, "Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism," *New Labor Forum* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 49.

> Far from denying the rationality of those who have accepted either [witches or races] as truth about the world, we assume it. We are interested in the processes of reasoning that manage to make both plausible. Witchcraft and racecraft are imagined, acted upon, and re-imagined, the action and imagining inextricably intertwined. The outcome is a belief that "presents itself to the mind and imagination as a vivid truth."[10]

The point of racecraft as a concept is to critique shorthand thinking and spur concrete analysis of how the erroneous idea that races exist in the world is socially constructed, for different political ends at different historical moments, to take on the plausibility of fiction. So while it might be formally correct to define racecraft as the social construction of race, the point of the racecraft concept is to shift abstract, formalistic thinking about race into concrete, case-specific thinking. The theoretical exigency of Fields and Fields's argument lies in the way it holds together what Ron Mallon identifies as the often opposed positions of "racial skepticism" and "racial constructivism,"[11] and does so while pursuing a normative-political argument about how race is used as a social reification determined by the capitalist mode of production rather than a metaphysical argument about what race is.[12]

This chapter argues that *Banjo* exemplifies a specifically aesthetic form of racecraft because McKay identifies the novel's plausibility as an artwork with the plausibility of race. Thus, while Fields and Fields use "fiction" to refer to the plausibility of everyday speech acts

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[10] Fields and Fields, 19. They are quoting W.E.H. Lecky, "a British scholar of Europe's past who, looking back from the nineteenth century, tried to understand how very smart people managed for a very long time to believe in witchcraft" (19).

[11] Ron Mallon, "'Race': Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic," *Ethics* 116, no. 3 (2006): 525–26.

[12] See Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, no. I/181 (June 1, 1990): 95–118.

that take for granted the existence of races, this chapter draws the concept of racecraft into the realm of writerly craft and modernist aesthetics.[13] We have seen, albeit only partially, how McKay makes racecraft integral to the aesthetic purpose of *Banjo*. For McKay's figurative alignment of racial identification with jazzing to rag-time in the Café African is, beyond its local evocativeness, actually McKay's way of using the idea of race to rationalize the logic of synecdoche—figured throughout the novel in the musical and ultimately tauromachic figure of the "rag"—through which *Banjo* asserts its medium-specific plausibility as a whole. Thus, what distinguishes racecraft in general from what I will call *aesthetic racecraft* is not just apt stylization. Beyond finely wrought verbal form, aesthetic racecraft is a matter of formal totalization: the relation of part to whole. So if racecraft is the historically contingent conventionalization of race's plausibility, McKay's aesthetic racecraft is his conventionalization of how, within the novelistic terms of *Banjo*, he figures the synecdochic logic of race to make it plausible.[14] The "Story without a Plot" subtitle of *Banjo* will prove crucial in this respect because

[13] Madhu Dubey argues that "the racecraft approach is immensely generative for formal analyses of literary racial representation insofar as the whole impetus behind the coinage racecraft is to bracket the truth-lie distinction and instead to examine how fiction exerts power, how an imagined thing assumes a quasi-material reality." However, Dubey brackets the full force of Fields and Fields's argument by bracketing their account of how racecraft mystifies political-economic matters of class and inequality. Dubey, "Racecraft in American Fiction," *Novel* 50, no. 3 (November 1, 2017): 368.

[14] Here, Stanley Cavell's identification of the logic of aesthetic judgments with that of judgments of "what we say" in ordinary language philosophy raises the question of how, in the context of racist ideology, a subjective, Kantian domain of the aesthetic relates to an absolute, Hegelian domain of the aesthetic. This chapter attempts to pose this question in terms pertinent to modernism's relation to the market and to answer it in a way that accounts for the historically contingent ways that novels may assert aesthetic autonomy, fail to do so, or be disinterested in doing so. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge UP, 2002), 86-96.

McKay turns the novelistic, part-whole problem of plot to the ends of racecraft, and does so, I suggest, as an exemplarily incomplete modernist assertion of autonomy. Aesthetic racecraft is, in short, McKay's means of constructing a formal architecture that at once capitulates to market demand and, through the idea of race, attempts to transcend it.

If chapter one explores how the art of genre fiction internalizes the product-differentiating logic of market genres to assert aesthetic autonomy, this chapter explores how *Banjo* tries to internalize the logic of racial particularity as itself a kind of aesthetic autonomy. I suggest that in doing so, *Banjo* prefigures an aporetic tendency in African American studies to theorize the autonomy of racial identity from capitalist social relations in aesthetic terms. Thus, throughout this chapter, I build on recent readings of *Banjo*—which has seen something of a twenty-first century critical renaissance—by critiquing this conflation of aesthetic autonomy and racial particularity. This conflation has a complicated history. Mark Christian Thompson, for example, explores Amiri Baraka's Adorno-influenced account of a specifically black aesthetic autonomy in the 1960s and, more recently, Stephen Best and Fred Moten variably identify notions of blackness with an autonomous ontology of the artwork that is also a form of social life.[15] So while this chapter's historical focus is limited to the mid-to-late 1920s, its argument is that this conflation of racial particularity and aesthetic autonomy is always a mistake. For the immanent purposiveness of the modernist artwork resists the logic of the market but race, as an

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[15] Mark Christian Thompson, *Phenomenal Blackness: Black Power, Philosophy, and Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 65-97; Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218; Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2018), 29-62.

ideology of ascriptive difference, legitimizes the logic of the market by naturalizing the inequality it produces. Yet *Banjo* and much of its recent criticism understand racial identification to constitute a plausible assertion of autonomy from the market. In other words, while Marxist explanation identifies the reifying logic of race with that of the commodity, both *Banjo* and its dominant literary-critical reception today understand race to work against the commodity. McKay and his critics, that is, claim that *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft does the work of market architecture; at once immanent to the commodity form yet achieving autonomy from it through aesthetic means, *Banjo* appears, in its dominant reception, to identify aesthetic racecraft with market-subsumed modernist craft. I argue that this conflation of asserting racial particularity with asserting aesthetic autonomy is, in short, racecraft: false yet persistently rationalized because the ascriptive ideology of race stabilizes the capitalist social order out of and against which aesthetic autonomy emerges as a regulative principle of modernism. This chapter analyzes the novelistic logic of aesthetic racecraft in the mid-to-late 1920s—perhaps the apex of racist ideology in the U.S.—to bring into sharper view the aesthetic logic of modernist fiction's market architecture, over and against racist tendencies to reify it.

This chapter reads *Banjo* alongside Ernest Hemingway's 1926 debut *The Sun Also Rises* because these novels not only exemplify, in interrelated formal terms, the aesthetic racecraft of the Jazz Age novel but also let us see, in a kind of parallax view, how it can foreclose or capacitate a modernist assertion of aesthetic autonomy. Focalizing opposite sides of the Jim Crow color line to narrate American expatriate revelry in Europe, these mass-market *roman-à-clefs* each make the logic of race structural to their meaning as novels and each culminates in an

intricately metaphorical scene of bullfighting. Thus, the parallax view that these novels afford might be understood in terms of the difference between white modernism and black modernism; but such an approach would capitulate to literary-critical racecraft—precisely the reifying tendency this chapter critiques. The stereoscopic depth afforded by this kind of black-white comparison is an illusion, producing myopic immediacy rather than analytic clarity. Instead, I argue that this McKay-Hemingway intertextuality affords a parallax view onto the form of the bullfight that actually clarifies the difference between aesthetic racecraft and modernism.

Both McKay and Hemingway are intent on grappling with the market heteronomy of their novels and invoke bullfighting to make the aesthetic legibility of their novels a matter of racial distinction. But Hemingway's modernist commitment to self-legislating form, while thoroughly racist, lets us see what *Banjo* obscures: the difference between the mystified autonomy of race and the perspicacious autonomy of art; the difference, that is, between the reified synecdoche of race and the dialectical architecture of the modernist artwork within which such synecdoche can play an integral but relativized role.[16] First, I show how McKay's approach to innovating the form of the novel aporetically identifies the part-whole problem of racial ascription with the part-whole problem of plot. Then, I show how although Hemingway's approach to formal innovation likewise relies on racial ascription, it produces an aesthetic whole

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[16] While it might be pithier to distinguish between the false synecdoche of race and the true synecdoche of the artwork, the point of specifying the dialectical character of the artwork's synecdochic logic is to grasp how, over against a positivist truth claim, the autonomous artwork makes a dialectical claim that grasps the ironic, contributory relation between the true and the false. For a concise account of the dialectical logic of synecdoche integral to the artwork and the broader rhetorical ensemble of which it is necessarily a part, see Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," in *A Grammar of Motives* (U of California Press, 1969), 508, 513.

that, in its internal coherence, lets us see the tension between racial ascription and determinate aesthetic judgment: the tension, that is, between what can be coherently explained and what cannot. Where McKay produces a novelistic aporia about race, Hemingway produces a novelistic contradiction about race. Thus, I suggest that while both McKay and Hemingway approach the aesthetic in indeterminate and subjective terms adequate to the plausibility of race, Hemingway relativizes the former approach as only one part of a determinate and absolute aesthetic that is adequate to the plausibility of the modernist artwork. This chapter's argument about race, modernism, and the market therefore has a reflexive dimension that clarifies the stakes of the concept of the aesthetic that orients this dissertation's overarching argument about aesthetic autonomy.

I. The Diversionary Autonomy of Race

McKay structures *Banjo* around a primitivist characterization of the novel's vagabond characters of African descent. The structural aspect here is McKay's novelistic gambit to tell a "Story without a Plot," a paradoxical form that McKay pursues as a way to narrate how these characters' hedonistic, improvisational, and, for McKay, specifically black sensibility eludes what he calls "the grand mechanical march of civilization"(324) and therefore embodies a racially-premised notion of autonomy from the market culture of the 1920s. A late passage in the novel epitomizes this notion:

> That this primitive child, this kinky-headed, big-laughing black boy of the world did not go down and disappear under the serried crush of trampling white feet; that he managed to remain on the scene, not worldly-wise, not "getting there," yet not machine-made, nor

> poor-in-spirit like the regimented creatures of civilization, was baffling to civilized understanding. Before the grim, pale rider-down of souls he went his careless way with a primitive hoofing and a grin. (314)

The characterological and, in turn, sociological meaning of this vagabond is non-instrumental—he is "not 'getting there'"—and sensual-affective rather than propositional—that is, rooted in the lyricism of McKay's descriptions of improvised music and of his rendering of vernacular dialogue. Thus, Kant's "purposiveness without purpose," the logical core of the aesthetic in capitalist modernity,[17] seems to find a novelistic and distinctly racist analogue in *Banjo*, where McKay uses a thematics of "jazzing" to generalize the sociological condition of its characters to a "plotless" principle of novelistic composition.

At the same time, however, McKay's novelistic depiction of the "vagabond black" (202) is premised on an unprecedented demand for such racist primitivism in the literary marketplace of the late 1920s. So while "the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race" (324) appears within *Banjo* as an atavistic characterological essence meant to elude the instrumentalizing and quantifying dictates of the market, the novel also exhibits a subtle awareness that precisely this kind of racist thematization of autonomy from the market is an in-demand commodity. A primitivist commitment to the category of race therefore produces a contradiction in *Banjo* because its thematization of autonomy from the market raises the possibility that it is merely a response to a bull market for racist primitivism. This contradiction animates McKay's specifically aesthetic form of racecraft in *Banjo*, the logic of which this

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[17] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge UP, 2000). §§ 10, 15, 42.

section analyzes within an integral moment of this logic's narrative elaboration and which the next section deepens through an analysis of *Banjo*'s political-economic context.

Returning to the Café African in the opening paragraphs of the "Jelly Roll" chapter with which we began, the next two paragraphs further elaborate the aesthetic logic of McKay's racecraft in *Banjo*. First, McKay shifts into a less sensuous register to explain why it is significant that "all the Negroes of Marseille" are "indiscriminate" in their "jazzing:"

> For the Negro-Negroid population of the town divides sharply into groups. The Martiniquans and Guadeloupans, regarding themselves as constituting the dark flower of all Marianne's blacks, make a little aristocracy of themselves. The Madagascans with their cousins from the little dots of islands around their big island and the North African Negroes, whom the pure Arabs despise, fall somewhere between the Martiniquans and the Senegalese, who are the savages. Senegalese is the geographically inaccurate term generally used to designate all the Negroes from the different parts of French West Africa. (45)

Invidious status distinctions divide people of African descent in Marseille. Nonetheless, McKay doubles down on the racial unity of these people with the deductive phrase "For the Negro-Negroid population," which recasts the first paragraph's processual description of racial identification into a static category of racial grouphood that is bolstered, via a hyphen, by the language of scientific racism. With the characteristic circularity of racecraft, the rhetorical force of this phrase supervenes upon McKay's description of these "intra-racial" divisions.

Then, the chapter's third paragraph returns to the Café African with a thematic shift that casts the prior two paragraphs' racial ascription in a new light while integrating their respective registers of the evocative and the explanatory:

> The magic thing had brought all shades and grades of Negroes together. Money. A Senegalese had emigrated to the United States, and after some years had returned with a

> few thousand dollars. And he had bought a café on the quay. It was a big café, the first that any Negro in the town ever owned. (45)

While the infectious rag “Shake That Thing!” first appears as the sensuous medium that, in its alchemy of concrete leisure activity and abstract ascription, seems to imbue the category of race with a life of its own, now “the magic thing” appears to be money. The racial identification integral to the cafe’s revelrous atmosphere now appears, that is, in terms of what Marx calls commodity fetishism. For Marx, the fetish character of the commodity consists in “the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”[18] Accordingly, the “magic” of money lies in how the Senegalese cafe owner’s “few thousand dollars” itself appears to conjure an ensemble of “things” for consumption—drink, dance, music—whose “fantastic form” is twofold. On one hand, the commodities available for consumption at the Café African appear to be “the magic thing” only insofar as their appearance of intrinsic value displaces the concrete process of capital accumulation—that is, the “definite social relation between men”—through which this Senegalese petit bourgeois made his money in the U.S.[19] On the other hand, the “magic” of money at Café African consists not only in its ostensibly intrinsic pecuniary value but also in the way that McKay represents how the leisure activities this money capacitates “brought all shades and grades of Negroes together.” This is the “magic” of racecraft, yet rendered here in a thematic

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[18] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. I (New York: Penguin, 1976), 165.

[19] In his autobiography, McKay notes that the Senegalese bar owner “got a job such as the average Negro works at and at the same time he ran a rooming house for Africans and Negroid Moslems in New York” (*A Long Way from Home,* 278).

solution that suspends the categorial plausibility of race between pop music's concrete sensuality and the abstraction of the commodity form.

In this integral moment in *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft, McKay aligns two forms of social reification—commodity fetishism and racecraft—to stage how both, like "magic," displace the concrete processes of capital accumulation and marketization that are their condition of possibility. Relevant here is Aarthi Vadde's argument that these three opening paragraphs of the "Jelly Roll" chapter crystallize a logic of "diversion," which she takes to be the fundamental narrative logic—the modular unit, even—of *Banjo*'s "plotless" experiment in novelistic form:

> The major diversion in this passage is executed through a bait-and-switch of jazz for money, made possible by the ambiguity of the phrase "the magic thing." Yet there are minor diversions as well: the presence of a second paragraph, which slows the movement from jazz to money, and, within that paragraph, a meeting up of inconsistent sensibilities.… Layering diversion upon diversion, *Banjo* makes music of narrative, and narrative of music. Its blending of mediums reveals primitivism to be an artifact of modernity and black "vitality" to be an expression of the felt mortality of a precarious existence in a commerce-driven world.[20]

Vadde's insight is that this passage's diversionary logic is a microcosm of Banjo's "plotless" whole. Yet her claim that McKay's racist primitivism is "an artifact of modernity… an expression of the felt mortality of a precarious existence in a commerce-driven world" takes for granted the displacement, or diversion of attention, that, in this passage, McKay stages in terms of both commodity fetishism and racecraft. That is, Vadde's reading is incomplete because the abstraction of her phrases "artifact of modernity" and "commerce-driven world" elides how this passage's "bait-and-switch" stages the way that racist primitivism is itself an in-demand

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[20] Aarthi Vadde, *Chimeras of Form: Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe, 1914–2016* (Columbia UP, 2016), 127-128.

commodity in McKay's 1920s milieu at the same time as this passage displaces this fact, via aesthetic modulations we are drawing into focus, within the *roman-à-clef* world of *Banjo*.[21]

We get a fuller picture of how a logic of diversion structures this scene by attending to focalization. If this passage were focalized through the café owner rather than its vagabond patrons, its "bait-and-switch" between jazz-embedded racecraft and fetishized forms of pecuniary value would not make sense because, from the café owner's class standpoint, these two forms of social reification would not be what Vadde calls "inconsistent sensibilities." Feelings of group cohesion premised on an idea of race are instrumental to the café owner's return on investment; together, these sensibilities constitute the "magic" of his petit-bourgeois capital. But from the vagabond standpoint of his patrons, this "bait-and-switch" makes sense as a focalizational device because, as McKay goes on to narrate, "the magic had brought them all together to shake that thing and drink red wine, white wine, sweet wine" (46). The extra-economic significance of these vagabonds' leisure activity is paramount, and racecraft can effect the requisite diversion. Accordingly, the novel's paradigmatic vagabond figure, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, known as Banjo, is the musician playing "Shake That Thing!," and he "would not think of collecting sous" in the café. Instead, Banjo accepts "plenty of red wine and white wine" because

[21] The incompleteness of Vadde's analysis informs her affirmation of *Banjo*'s logic of diversion. Cooper offers a usefully counterpointed account of the novel's logic of evasion: that "*Banjo* contained, in effect, a rich mix of images, impressions, and messages that often tended to undermine, if not overwhelm, McKay's continuing insistence that the primitive, 'natural' response to life of a man like Banjo revealed the essence of black life. Life for blacks was obviously more complicated, more varied, more rigorously challenging, and more problematic than Banjo could comprehend or cope with. To a considerable degree, his happy jazzing involved an individualistic evasion of hard problems that he, in fact, simply could not face. McKay nonetheless considered him the personification of blackness and black culture" (256-67).

the “spirit of that all-Negro-atmosphere of the bar” is, in McKay’s vagabond-focalized narration, antithetical to commodification: “he did not want to collect sous from a crowd of fellows just like himself” (46). Aesthetic racecraft in *Banjo* consists of such representational strategies of displacing or diverting attention away from the commercial dictates of the market and onto feelings of extra-economic group cohesion. McKay’s novelistic orchestration of these strategies is his way of focalizing the historical experience of the “vagabond black” in late-1920s Marseille.

While *Banjo*’s “Story without a Plot” subtitle highlights the significance of episodic contingency to the novel’s form, it should not be taken literally. By punning “plot” as developmental narrative progression with “plot” as the social-assimilative space or ground of the home or nation, this subtitle is McKay’s shorthand for the organizing aesthetic concept of *Banjo*: a narrative form whose anecdotal—even reportorial—fragmentation represents the day-to-day rhythms of the “vagabond black” as a form of autonomy premised on diversion. That is, McKay is intent on making *Banjo*’s fragmentary plot a sensuously intelligible formal correlate for his primitivist characterization of vagabond men of African descent. By posing the improvisational contingency of “jazzing,” panhandling, and informal work as a racially characteristic diversion from the social-assimilative logic of *Bildung* plot development, in which an individual’s self-cultivation follows a path of social mobility through market-embedded modern institutions, McKay’s aesthetic racecraft transmutes the precarious class position of the vagabond and their consequent inability or refusal to self-cultivate and assimilative themselves within capitalist relations of production and social reproduction into an essential, racially-specific alterity to these

social relations. The autonomy of McKay's "vagabond black" is a racist naturalization of economic heteronomy: lumpen-proletarian precarity redescribed and legitimated as distinctly black, improvisational freedom.

The novel's paradigmatic vagabond character, Banjo, is an African American musician from the American South who has orchestrated his own deportation, landed a position on a "dirty overworked 'broad'" (12), and sailed around the world to finally reach Marseille, "the seaman's dream port" (11). Bound to neither the social-reproductive stability of the home nor the rights-based stability of the nation, he is "without a Plot" but possesses a predilection for music, dance, and drinking. Thus, to return to the broad literary-historical backdrop of modernist fiction's market architecture, McKay's "plotless" novel—like James's "house of fiction" and Woolf's "watch"—asserts autonomy from the social-reproductive logic of domestic architecture that is integral to the novel's emergence under capitalism. Yet *Banjo* asserts autonomy as such not through its self-legislating form but through the way its narrative form embodies the illusory synecdoche of racial ascription. Accordingly, Banjo is the musician playing "Shake that Thing" in the Café African, and chapters in *Banjo* take the form of anecdotal diversions in which vernacular dialogue punctuated by rag-time lyrics and descriptions of "jazzing" and ploys to obtain cash, food, and wine displace immediately apparent patterns of plot development. Thus, the overall effect of *Banjo* is that of a collection of anecdotes, each of which stands for an elusive whole. What holds its parts together is not an internal logic of plot development but what Vadde calls a "negative structural grammar for organizing the sprawl of the African diaspora" that "foregrounds *lack* as the common ground of an international collectivity characterized by its

dispersal and deterritorialization” (119). How lack of common ground can be common ground is not a problem for Vadde because she takes the novel’s accretive ascription of racial particularity at face value—already “cashed out,” as it were, in an aporetic yet rousing notion of black “international collectivity” (119). In the same way that rag-time in the Café African is a participatory art form that, in McKay’s narration, makes race appear described rather than ascribed, *Banjo*’s parts cohere around an absent center that only its reader can provide: a conviction that a black race with a primitive propensity for improvisational sensuality exists. The novel’s aesthetic plausibility is ultimately the plausibility of race: an ultimately subjective synecdoche.

II. The Political Economy of “Plotless” *Bildung*

However, McKay mitigates the contingency of *Banjo*’s chapter-level diversions by retaining forms of developmental patterning, like the shadow of a conventional plot, at the level of the novel’s whole, tripartite structure. Thus, to the extent that *Banjo*’s aesthetic racecraft does not assert the immanent purposiveness of market architecture, its narrative form registers the historical forces that orient McKay toward a modernist aesthetic of autonomous form while also, it seems, foreclosing his substantive engagement with this aesthetic. For the novel is loosely structured into three parts that, across twenty-five chapters, trace the formation and dissolution of the group of “beach boys” who, attracted by Banjo’s charisma, orbit him in Marseille. The consequential way that McKay narrates the dissolution of the “beach boys” will prove important. But thus far, we have focused on the novel’s first part, which follows Banjo as he tries to

assemble a jazz orchestra upon arriving in Marseille. Market-oriented confidence is the tonal ground of this first part and exuded as such by Banjo, whom McKay focalizes through a free-indirect rendering of dialect: "The American darky is the performing fool of the world today. He's demanded everywhere. If I c'n only git some a these heah panhandling fellahs together, we'll show them some real nigger music. Then I'd be setting pretty in this heah sweet dump without worrying ovah mah wants" (14). Banjo's plan to organize the drifters around him into a rag-time orchestra follows from his sense that African American cultural expression that is "real," or claims racial authenticity, is an in-demand market genre.

Yet this perceived market demand is never met. Banjo's orchestra never materializes within a *Bildung* trajectory of plot development because, as we have seen, McKay's primitivist characterization of the "vagabond black" opposes his racial identity to commercial instrumentality. *Banjo* at once acknowledges that race is a commodity and consistently poses race as an antithesis to the commodity. The novel's "great vagabond host of jungle-like Negroes trying to scrape a temporary existence from the macadamized surface of this great Provençal port" (68) is, for McKay, sensuously intelligible evidence of a primitive "Negro" essence rather than a pragmatic consequence of a conjuncture of political-economic forces. However, even as the novel's aesthetic racecraft consistently makes the plausibility of Banjo's vagabondage consist in the plausibility of his racial identity, McKay's novelistic attention to concrete detail cannot help but to draw more material causes into view. For example, when Banjo first arrives in Marseille, he is paid in francs so that "after changing a deck of dollars that he had saved in America," he initially "possessed twelve thousand five hundred and twenty-five francs and some

sous" (12-13). This is a significant sum for a sailor. Indeed, during McKay's 1926 summer in Marseille, Banjo would have cashed out his American dollars just as they are reaching their 1920s peak against the French franc.[22] More broadly, while postwar inflation in France between 1922 and 1926 leads to capital flight and heavy losses for *rentiers*, it casuses real incomes among workers to rise between 9 and 26 percent, primarily via the stimulus lent by currency devaluation to the external trade coursing through port cities like Marseille.[23] It is key, as it were, that McKay's *roman-à-clef* introduces us to Banjo at precisely the moment this wave of export-oriented prosperity among workers in France crests in the summer of 1926, when the July election of the conservative Poincaré government stabilizes expectations among capitalists who had held little confidence in the left-wing *Cartel de gauches* that has ruled since 1924.[24] Thus, while McKay notes in his autobiography that in 1926 "Negroes had hard industrial problems to face in Marseilles" like racist exclusion from unions (279), relatively loose labor markets during this export boom would have allowed workers of African descent in Marseille's port (a group exhibiting a range of internal status differentiation and proletarianization dependent on factors like citizenship and language) to partake in some of this boom's spoils, whether in the form of wages, panhandling, or—a recurrent motif in *Banjo*—revelrous generosity. In short, someone is always picking up the tab: exceptionally bullish political-economic expectations from below are

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[22] Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (U.S.), *Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1914-1941* (1943): 670. https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/38/item/6408/toc/334470, accessed on November 18, 2023.

[23] Roger Price, *A Concise History of France* (Cambridge UP, 2014), 263.

[24] Price, 263-4.

a key yet consistently displaced condition of possibility for *Banjo*'s view-from-below narration of vagabond diversions in the *vieux port*.

However, French political economy and the global postwar rise of U.S. financial hegemony, backed by the Great Bull Market of the 1920s, are far from the minds of McKay's vagabond characters. In a splurge that becomes a recurrent motif in the novel, Banjo burns through his freshly exchanged francs until he is left with only his musical instrument and an improvisational, hedonistic sensibility: "light of everything: light of pocket… light of head, feeling and seeing everything lightly… Oh his head was a circus where everything went circling round and round" (13). Abstract political-economic processes necessarily filter, in *Banjo*, through characters' sensuously freewheeling experiences of vagabondage. At one point, for example, McKay aligns the unpredictability of racism in Marseille restaurants and clubs with fluctuations in stock prices: "Prejudices like the stock market—curtailed, diminishing, increasing, changing chameleon-like, according to place and time, like the color of the white man's soul, controlled by the exigencies of the white man's business" (193). Just as the contingency of market expectations appear here in the necessarily indeterminate form of expectations that individuals will act in accordance with their racial "soul," political-economic processes tend to congeal in *Banjo* within the subjective, indeterminate immediacy of racial ascription.

It is at this level of subjective immediacy that a kind of *Bildung* does structure *Banjo,* rather than at a chapter-to-chapter level of conventional plot development. For the novel's second and third parts increasingly filter the novel's free indirect narration through the perspective of

Ray, a Haitian expatriate writer who stands as an author-proxy for McKay. As Ray falls in with Banjo and his “beach boys,” McKay increasingly punctuates the novel’s meandering, anecdotal action with abstract and often didactic representations of Ray’s thoughts on matters of race, nation, and civilization. So while the freewheeling vagabond sensibility of Banjo’s picaresque dominates the novel’s first part and much of its second, Ray’s novel of ideas, as it were, emerges from within it and predominates by the novel’s third part. McKay uses this general shift in focalization away from Banjo and toward Ray, his author-proxy in the novel, to represent how his own education in the ways of the “beach boys” constitutes a kind of *Bildung* trajectory that, without the developmental patterning of plot, unfolds independently of the market-oriented institutions—like commercially successful orchestras—that, within *Banjo*, constitute social-assimilative “plots” or plans.

Ray’s “plot”-avoidant and therefore predominantly subjective *Bildung* unfolds through his ambivalent reflections on his status as an African American intellectual in the time of Jim Crow:

> Ray wanted to hold on to his intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts… black gifts of laughter and melody and simple sensuous feelings and responses… a black man, even though educated, was in closer biological kinship to the swell of primitive earth life… The more Ray mixed in the rude anarchy of the lives of the black boys—loafing, singing, bumming, playing, dancing, loving, working—and came to a realization of how close-linked he was to them in spirit, the more he felt that they represented more than he or the cultured minority the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race. (323-24)

Ray sees in Banjo and his “black boys” the embodiment of a primitivist racial archetype that exposes the racial inauthenticity of the African American intelligentsia—a class stratum that has,

Ray believes, assimilated itself to the essentially white norms of capitalist modernity. In the context of 1920s African American literary production, then, *Banjo* and its bestselling predecessor *Home to Harlem* were highly contentious subversions of the dominant sensibility and strategic outlook of the African American intelligentsia that orchestrated the "New Negro" movement, now known as the Harlem Renaissance. As Wayne Cooper argues, "To those who believed in decorum and restraint and also to those whose first concern was always to project black grievances on to the national stage, *Home to Harlem* seemed a betrayal of racial trust and solidarity" (242), and, with *Banjo*, "many in the Afro-American press… believed that [McKay] was simply pandering to vile white prejudices" (258). *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft can be understood, in this context, as an artistic doubling-down on the anecdotal form and racist primitivism that, in *Home to Harlem,* sold remarkably well but provoked vitriol in many quarters of the African American literary establishment. The predominantly social-assimilative strategy of the "New Negro" movement is, in other words, one "plot" McKay aims to assert autonomy from in *Banjo*. But in doing so, McKay finds himself in a double bind. For one particularly cutting 1920s line of criticism against both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* concerns McKay's commercial motives. Exemplified by W.E.B. DuBois's 1928 review of the first novel in *Crisis* (Cooper, 244), McKay's racist primitivism is, in this view, not only politically irresponsible but commercially opportunistic because it panders to the primitivist tastes of a predominantly white literary marketplace. We might say, then, that McKay writes *Banjo* at precisely the moment that, as the first bestselling African American author, he is thrown from the frying pan of the "New Negro" movement into the fire of the culture industry.

At this historical conjuncture, the art versus propaganda problematic of the "New Negro" movement becomes inseparable, for McKay, from the art versus commodity problematic of the literary marketplace. With this political-economic backdrop in view, the details of McKay's market exposure at this conjuncture will prove crucial as we turn, in the next section, to how the constraints of the Jim Crow era determine McKay's relation to literary modernism. Immediately, McKay's first two novels—as novels—embody a 1920s shift in his writing away from the restricted-field circulation of poetry and toward the mass-market circulation of fiction. Abandoning the Jamaican dialect poetry that won him early but racially-tokenized renown in the emergent "New Negro" movement and in broader, predominantly white literary circles,[25] McKay writes *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* in close succession between 1926 and 1928, near the middle of his decade-long European sojourn. And this burst of novel-writing is bound up with a new, patron-mediated relation to the literary marketplace.[26] Since a serious bout of illness in the winter of 1924, McKay depends on the patronage of left-wing activist and journalist Louise Bryant Bullitt, widow of John Reed and, during the 1920s, wife of the wealthy diplomat and writer William C. Bullitt. Louise Bullitt pays for McKay's medical care and finances his first trip to Marseille as a period of convalescence. Then, in the summer of 1926, McKay's *Banjo*-

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[25] Michael North describes how McKay's dialect poetry was repeatedly met with "astonishment that poetry could be produced where white ancestry did not exist… He was introduced over and over as a phenomenon, a human oxymoron, bringing raw nature into the cultured realm of poetry." McKay, North argues, thus found himself "in an impossible bind, for the more conventional his poetry was the more astonishment it raised, thus confirming the notion that, under it all, he was still some sort of savage." North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford, 1994), 103.

[26] North suggests that "each of McKay's major changes in literary direction coincided with a change of place and thus of patron" (103).

originating return to Marseille coincides with not only a cresting exchange rate and a bullish economic outlook for export-oriented workers, but also, for McKay, with a moment in his writerly reorientation toward fiction that is frustratingly dependent on the contingencies of Bullitt's patronage. In a June 24 letter to Bullitt, he confides that he has "just reached the end of my rope" and, leaving behind poetry "altogether," has "decided to try to write or starve" by turning to fiction with the hope that he could "get in on the Negro Vogue" among New York publishers (qtd. in Cooper, 229). McKay spends the summer of 1926 anxiously awaiting long-overdue word from Bullitt on the marketability of the short story manuscripts he had sent her in the spring (Cooper 229). Notably, the considerable financial hardship that McKay, even with Bullitt's support, faces in Marseille this summer permeates his correspondence, but finds no mention in his autobiography, written eleven years later.[27] The romanticized autobiographical view of this summer that results seems consistent with its ludic, diversionary refraction through *Banjo* and, in turn, seems consequent upon the news that McKay receives, as the summer of 1926 wanes, that Bullitt has secured William Aspenwall Bradley, literary agent to most of the Lost Generation writers in Paris, as McKay's manager. Bradley convinces McKay to turn from the short story form to the more lucrative form of the novel, and guides him to mass-market success with *Home to Harlem.* "By the spring of 1928," Cooper suggests, "interest in black writing, art, and music had peaked in the United States, especially in New York, and *Home to Harlem*, assisted by a fair amount of publicity, began to sell at a rate far beyond everyone's

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[27] McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 281-82. In September of 1926, McKay writes to Bullitt: "I am in the tightest corner, believe me, that I've ever been in since I came to Europe and I've been in very tight ones!" (qtd. in Cooper, 231).

expectations… Its success spurred McKay to finish *Banjo*" (236-37). Thus, the "motley-making Marseilles" that, in 1926, McKay finds "swarming, scrambling and scraping sustenance from the bodies of ships and crews" (*A Long Way From Home*, 277) is an encounter with cultural vitality that verges, for McKay, on racist revery not only because it is subtended by the conjunction of exceptional economic vitality in Marseille and McKay's own posture of desperate, literary-commercial calculation; but also because McKay, writing *Banjo* between 1927 and 1928 in Marseille and Barcelona, views this summer through the rose-tinted lens of his debut novel's unexpected success amid a bull market for African American cultural production in the U.S. and Europe.

III. McKay's Rag

While the term "black modernism" has long oriented research into the role that formal innovation plays in literature written by people of African descent under capitalist modernity, its meaning varies widely and always risks a reliance on racecraft. Recent criticism of *Banjo* bears this out because it relies on a concept of modernism and, more generally, the aesthetic that is reified by racecraft but nonetheless integral to *Banjo*'s racecraft. For example, aiming to "contribute to ongoing discussions of black literary modernism," Anthony Reed argues that *Banjo*,

> at the level of its form… creates the disorienting effect it ascribes to music, pursuing diverse generic and ideological commitments, and using formal innovation to rearticulate race and imagine possibilities for black writing beyond the "indexical" and the "instrumental" functions that Kenneth Warren argues define African American literature

> in this period… The [novel's] episodic, serialized present is a primary means through which *Banjo* creates the effect of improvisation.[28]

Reed's point is that a specific "formal innovation" in *Banjo*—one meant to produce both a "disorienting effect" and "the effect of improvisation"—can premise the novel's identification as "black writing." In contrast, Warren argues that African American literature is not constituted "by textual properties… but rather by a politico-historical relation," that is, by the conditions of legally sanctioned racial discrimination under Jim Crow that make the ascription of "Negro," "African American," or "black" to a literary work produced under these conditions the plausible performance of "a relation between the doings or expressions of some black Americans and the situation of black Americans in general."[29] For Warren, the *de jure* subordination of African Americans under Jim Crow was the sociological condition of possibility for a distinct African American literature's emergence around two intertwined imperatives: an "indexical" imperative to represent African Americans and an "instrumental" imperative to benefit them materially. Of Jim Crow, Warren argues that

> [n]o writer of this period could operate indifferently either to the expectations that African American literature ought to contribute demonstrably to some social end or to the belief that novels, poems, or plays constituted proxies for the statuses or the nature of the race as a whole. Writers could, and did, insist that their works be judged without respect to their identities and without reference to the political or social status of the black race, but the mere insistence was an acknowledgement of the pressure of those expectations.[30]

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[28] Anthony Reed, "'A Woman is a Conjunction': The Ends of Improvisation in Claude McKay's *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*," *Callaloo* 36, no. 3 (2013): 759, 762.

[29] Kenneth W. Warren, "A Reply to My Critics," *PMLA* 128, no. 2 (2013): 404-5.

[30] Kenneth W. Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*, The W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 13.

Warren's periodization does not rely on racecraft because it premises its account of a distinct African American literature on the sociological criterion of African Americans' *de jure* subordination as second-class citizens under Jim Crow and the way this condition tended to subject their writing to the external ends of racial representation and political usefulness. The point of arguing that *Banjo* is "black writing" that exceeds these parameters of Warren's periodization is, for Reed, to identify what makes *Banjo* black with the "formal innovation" through which the novel goes "beyond" the determination of its sociological context. Thus, Reed's claim that *Banjo* is black in a sense that goes "beyond" the historically-contingent pressures of Jim Crow necessarily relies on racecraft at the same time as it seems intent on mitigating its essentialism by couching itself in the extra-sociological terms of aesthetic autonomy. In short, what we have analyzed as *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft, Reed understands as the novel's distinctly black modernism: an approach to formal innovation through which McKay produces an "episodic, serialized present" with an effect of "disorienting" "improvisation" that Reed claims is black—but black in a particular, aesthetic sense.

Banjo's formal logic does, in fact, bear out Reed's literary-critical racecraft. For the illusory logic of racial synecdoche that McKay makes a narrative principle in *Banjo*—each part standing for an elusive whole—produces what Reed calls an "episodic, serialized present" because the purpose of the novel's aesthetic racecraft is, as we have seen, to reify historical process into racial essences such that effects of political-economic precarity become evidence of black "improvisation." However, late in *Banjo,* McKay sums up the novel with a metaphor for

bullfighting that ends up dramatizing an internal limit to its formal logic that ultimately distinguishes its aesthetic racecraft from modernism.

This bullfight metaphor is the culminating moment of *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft because it crystallizes the formal logic of "plotless" vagabond diversion we have traced thus far, and does so as a *dénouement* that attempts to resolve, in ultimately racist terms, the imminent plight of Banjo and his "beach boys." Across the novel's late chapters, McKay increasingly narrates this plight through Ray's attempts to theorize "those things that were threatening to destroy [the beach boys'] aristocratic way of life:"

> as a psychological turn sometimes foreshadows a material change, or *vice versa*, even in obscure isolated cases, the boys felt that something was happening and realized that it was becoming very difficult for them to gain their unmoral bohemian subsistence as before.
>
> They did not know that the Radical government had fallen, that a National-Union government had come into power, and that the franc had been arrested in its spectacular fall and was being stabilized. They knew very little about governments, and cared less. But they knew that suddenly francs were getting scarce in their world, meals were dearer in the eating-sheds and in the bistros, and more sous were necessary to obtain the desirable red wine and white, so indispensable to their existence.
>
> However, some of them had an imperfect commonsense knowledge of some of the things that were taking place in the important centers of the world… Great Britain's black boys, for example. They observed that colored crews on British ships west of Suez were becoming something a phenomenon. Even the colored crews on the Mediterranean coal ships, of which they had a monopoly in the past, were being replaced by white crews. The beach boys felt the change, for the white crews would not feed them left-over food. (222-23)

Ray grasps the moderation of postwar inflation after 1926 and concomitant shifts in maritime labor markets as factors in the vagabond group's gradual dissolution. "The hectic post-war period when there was more work than men to do it was passing now" (230) and, with more stringent enforcement of citizenship requirements for work, the novel's third part finds the Marseille

police beating vagabond men of African descent with increasing impunity. Yet Ray's internal monologue—foregrounded in the novel's final chapter to a point of encompassing, didactic omniscience—grasps this development as not only a matter of prejudicial law enforcement determined by specific political-economic conditions but as the expression of a more fundamental racial antagonism. That is, "the police inspector said to Ray that the strong arm of the law was against Negroes because they were all criminals," but Ray senses, "What [this police inspector] unconsciously meant was that the police were strong-armed against the happy irresponsibility of the Negro in the face of civilization" (313). Ray continues:

> Thus [the Negro] became a challenge to the clubbers of the helpless vagabonds—to the despised, underpaid protectors of property and its high personages. He was a challenge of civilization itself. He was the red rag to the mighty-bellowing, all-trampling civilized bull.
>
> Looking down in a bull ring, you are fascinated by the gay rag. You may even forget the man watching the bull go after the elusive color that makes him mad. The rag seems more than the man. If the bull win it [sic], he horns it, tramples it, sniffs it, paws it—baffled.
>
> As the rag is to the bull, so is the composite voice of the Negro—speech, song, and laughter—to a bawdy world. More exasperating, indeed, than the Negro's being himself is his primitive color in a world where everything is being reduced to a familiar formula, this remains strange and elusive. (314)

Ray generalizes the specific antagonism between the Marseille police and vagabond men of African descent into what he takes to be a more fundamental antagonism between "civilization" and the black race and likens the latter to the spectacular violence of a bull charging a matador's cape. The sweeping terms and layered intricacy of this metaphor suggest that as McKay puts finishing touches on *Banjo* in Barcelona in the summer of 1928 and, while there, attends his first *corrida*, he turns to bullfighting to reflect on his novel's imminent exposure to a mass-market

audience and, in turn, its purpose as a work of art.[31] This metaphor's allusion to Ernest Hemingway will prove crucial but immediately it is key that McKay, with an extra-diegetic shift into the present tense, addresses his reader as a bullfight spectator: "Looking down in a bull ring, you are fascinated by the gay rag." By aligning his reader's gaze with the bull's perspective rather than the matador's, McKay makes this metaphor stand for *Banjo* as a whole and constructs this synecdoche around an antagonistic model of spectatorship that ranges in disposition from fascination to exasperation and instinctive violence.

Conjuring a spectacular scene of aesthetic judgment, this metaphor identifies a matador's cape with the putative object of *Banjo*'s episodic and vernacular-driven narrative form: "the composite voice of the Negro—speech, song, and laughter." Accordingly, McKay is the matador and *Banjo* is his "gay rag." And by punning "gay rag," McKay aligns a matador's cape and, in turn, his novel's "plotless" form with not only popular dance music but also bawdy journalism and jokes. For the reportorial fragmentation of *Banjo* evokes the register of a lowbrow

[31] In his autobiography McKay recounts, with a notable alignment of racialized sport with the *corrida*, how the "magnificent spectacle of the sporting spirit of the Spaniards captured my senses and made me an *aficionado* of Spain… Whether it was boxing between a white and a black or a duel between man and beast in the arena, or a football match between a Spanish and a foreign team, the Spaniards' main interest lay in the technical excellencies of the sport and the best opponent winning" (*A Long Way from Home,* 227). However, it is not clear whether McKay is aware of the difference between the *capote* and *muleta*—the former is the cape used in the first stage of a bullfight while the latter is the cape used in the third and final stage that conceals the sword used to kill the bull. And, just as it would be evocative if McKay meant "rag" to refer to *muleta*—implying that the black subject's "challenge" to civilization bears yet conceals the possibility of civilization's "death"—it is a matter of potentially heightened metaphorical complexity whether or not McKay is aware that bulls cannot see the color red, which in the *corrida* is meant to conceal blood. It seems likely, however, that McKay would not have been aware of these nuances as he wrote *Banjo*.

newspaper—a form that shifts definitively in value over the course of the novel. In *Banjo*'s second part, Ray is "swept by a brainstorm" and excoriates Goosey, one of the beach boys: "we —you—the race—can't get beyond the nigger newspaper in the printed word," Ray exclaims, "[t]hat's why an intelligent man reads it only for the comic—the joke that it is. You talk about niggerism. Good Lord! You're a perfect example of niggerism" (183). Yet by the novel's concluding pages, Ray has changed his mind: "He loved their tricks of language, loved to pick up and feel and taste new words from their rich reservoir of niggerisms… he admired the black boys' unconscious artistic capacity for eliminating the rotten-dead stock words of the proletariat and replacing them with startling new ones" (321). Ray's "plotless" *Bildung* is his initiation in the "rag," whose primary metaphorical valence in McKay's pun is rag-time music. It is crucial that by the 1920s this musical form has achieved significant popularity as a mass-market genre but, as we have seen, appears throughout *Banjo* as a form whose commercial purpose is acknowledged but subordinated in the narrative to the ostensibly non-instrumental, diversionary purpose of facilitating racial group feeling: "the happy irresponsibility of the Negro in the face of civilization."[32] The force of McKay's emphasis on civilization over and against the primitive lies

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[32] The musical form of the "rag" in *Banjo* is McKay's figuration of a genre that is popular in a conflictual, twofold sense: in the modern sense of mass-market circulation among atomized consumers and in the anachronistic sense of the "organic" expression of a people—in this case, a race. McKay's "gay rag" is at once of culture-industrial ubiquity and the indigenous particularity of a folk tradition. And it is the category of race, that, for McKay, renders the latter, "organic" form of the popular plausible throughout *Banjo* because the ascription of essential group cohesion to people of African descent displaces the atomizing and formally equalizing logic of the former modern, market-mediated form of popularity. The "primitive color" of McKay's "rag" thus appears not as revealed consumer preference but as an essential racial quality that is irreducible to the quantifying and instrumental rationality of the market. On this twofold sense of the "popular," see Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 19-20.

in the way this opposition foregrounds a distinction between black culture and white civilization that, while rhetorically striking, displaces more complex, subtending matters of political economy. As the novel's decisive displacement of the political-economic dimensions of the beach boys' plight, this bullfight metaphor crystallizes the logic of *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft, according to which a primitivist commitment to the category of race leads McKay to reframe *Banjo*'s market heteronomy and instances of market heteronomy within the novel as an antagonism between black and white races, understood as black culture and white civilization, the primitive and all that which, for McKay, seems to antagonize it under the sign of commercialism, the market, the bourgeois, etc. Indeed, a bull market for McKay's sequel amid a broader 1920s bull market for primitivist depictions of people of African descent, together with McKay's persistent economic precarity—marked by racist exclusion from well-paying, stable work and his consequent reliance on the patronage of Louisa Bullitt—inexorably inflect the meaning of McKay's metaphorical antagonist, the "mighty-bellowing, all-trampling civilized bull." The exposure of the "gay rag" to this bull is McKay's market exposure: a metaphorical condensation of the two bull markets that envelop *Banjo*: the labor market in Marseille and the literary marketplace—replete with the genre-fictional threat of "being reduced to a familiar formula."

McKay's only other reference to bullfighting in *Banjo* brings the meaning of this culminating bullfight metaphor into sharper focus because it inverts the racial and perspectival logic of the latter but works the same way. Earlier, in *Banjo*'s second part, Ray is harbor-side with Banjo and the "beach boys:"

> Over above them all, poised high up on the funnel of the great liner, was the brazen white sign of the dollar. It was some dockers pausing, pointing and spitting at it, that drew Ray's attention as he stood at one side with his companions. And immediately, too, a reaction of disgust registered in him. He could understand the men's gesture and apprehend why that mighty $ stood out like a red challenge in the face of the obstreperous French bull. Even though the name of the man who bossed the line was Dollar, thought Ray, it was at least bad taste for him to be sending that sign touring round the world in this new era of world finance. An idea flashed upon Ray, and for a moment he wondered if he could capitalize it by patenting a plan of giving the dollar lessons in diplomacy" (153-54)

Here, the "red challenge" of a bullfighter's cape that McKay ultimately compares to "the composite voice of the Negro" is a metaphor for the "brazen white sign of the dollar" emblazoned on a luxury steamship. This metaphor's focalization is not, like that of the later metaphor, aligned extra-diegetically with *Banjo*'s bull-market audience but intra-diegetically with Ray, the beach boys, and a personification of the bullish labor market in Marseille: "some dockers pausing, pointing and spitting at it." In short, this bullfight metaphor also dramatizes a relation of market heteronomy. For while an inflationary franc might be driving an "obstreperous" bull market in exports, these dockers know that in "this new era of world finance" their class position renders them dependent on the fluctuating value of the dollar. Yet for Ray the problem is not the supremacy of the dollar but the "brazen" whiteness of it. The solution, in turn, is Ray's plan to "capitalize" on "giving the dollar lessons in diplomacy."[33] Thus,

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[33] However, Ray's idea of market diplomacy is "immediately driven from his mind by the charming voice of a young lady calling from the deck: 'Boy! boy!'"—a "tall fair girl" on the steamer is hailing the beach boys, and asks one of them, Bugsy, to get her "a paper—an American paper" (154). The scene that then unfolds seems to enact, in caricatural miniature, of one of McKay's patronage relationships, Ray looks on as the beach boys Ray sets off into the city and returns Crucially, then, even as McKay's sequel writing of *Banjo* culminates his 1920s reorientation toward mass-market circulation, his reliance on the patronage of Bullitt and others seems to produce a kind of misrecognition of his market heteronomy

while this bullfight metaphor points inward at *Banjo*'s representation of Marseille's labor market rather than reflexively outward, like the later bullfight metaphor, at the novel's relation to the literary marketplace, both metaphors exemplify how McKay's racist primitivism short-circuits *Banjo*'s capacity to embody substantive forms of antagonism to the market.

Indeed, *Banjo*'s culminating bullfight metaphor stages how McKay problematizes racial prejudice within and exclusion from the market rather than the commodity logic of the market itself and ends up posing the indeterminate, racist terms of this problem as a kind of solution. For McKay doubles down on the police inspector's claim that "Negroes… are all criminals" by shifting the affective register of this ascribed racial essence into an affirmation of the "happy irresponsibility of the Negro." Relying on the cop's racist misrecognition to produce the "rag" as what it is, McKay insists that it possesses a "primitive color" that is also an "elusive color." Thus, at the same time as McKay acknowledges the heteronomy of the "rag"— its dependence on the misrecognition of the bull, the cop, and McKay's mass-market audience—he also gestures toward a form of autonomy rooted in the indeterminacy that results. In a chromatic relation of appearance to essence, the "elusive" and "primitive" color of the "rag" appears to embody "the Negro's being himself," and McKay abstracts this racial disposition into a quality of perceptual indeterminacy that, like a matador's cape, is prosthetic: "You may even forget the man watching the bull go after the elusive color that makes him mad. The rag seems more than the man." Thus, even as McKay seems to introduce a difference between the rag's prosthetic "primitive color" and the "Negro's being himself" by describing the color as "More exasperating," the pronominal ambiguity of the metaphor's final clause, "this remains strange and elusive," actually stages, in a

flourish of expressively ungrammatical form, the paradoxical but nonetheless significant notion that McKay is metaphorically triangulating between color, "rag," and race. That is, McKay makes the phrase "this remains strange and elusive" refer pronominally to both the rag's "primitive color" and the "Negro's being himself" to imply how the black subject's appearance and essence are distinct yet identical in the same way that the matador's cape is what he uses rather than who he is—even as this distinction between use and essence collapses within the instinctive perception of the "all-trampling civilized bull." This finely-wrought ambiguity is how McKay represents, within the synecdochic terms of this metaphor, the empirical incoherence of color prejudice and, in turn, its capacitation of seemingly instinctive violence, while at the same time retaining the essentialist notion of "the Negro's being himself" as a racist criterion that is less superficial than color but nonetheless bound to it in practice by the instinctive perception of the "civilized bull."

McKay's bullfight metaphor seems, in this way, to crystallize the "disorienting" "effect of improvisation" that Reed ascribes to *Banjo* as a whole, and on which Reed premises his claim about the novel's "black literary modernism." And, in a reading of *Banjo* that influences both Reed and Vadde, Brent Hayes Edwards argues that McKay's bullfight metaphor exemplifies a distinctly performative and therefore anti-essentialist black aesthetic rooted in indeterminacy.[34] Influenced by the enthusiastic reception of *Banjo*'s racist primitivism in the 1930s among the

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[34] Reed argues, for example, that McKay frames primitivist tropes in *Banjo* like "African rhythm of life" in terms of musical improvisation rather than rehearsal such that "characters' racial origin may determine, ambiguously, their musical ability, but that ability, disarticulated from definite national space and argument, becomes an activity and an obligation… At this ideal level, there is no permanent community, only the formation and reformation of community from episode to

French West African students in France who would go on to found the *Négritude* movement, Edwards analyzes *Banjo* and its Afro-French reception as "practices of diaspora" that consist in what he calls "*décalage.*"[35] With this multivalent term, Edwards refers to a "changing core of difference; it is the work of 'differences within unity,' an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed" and through which "diaspora can be discursively propped up (*calé*) into an artificially 'even' or 'balanced' state of 'racial' belonging. But such props, of rhetoric, strategy, or organization, are always articulations of unity or globalism, ones that can be 'mobilized' for a variety of purposes but can never be definitive: they are always prosthetic" (13-14). This aporetic concept leads Edwards to argue, of McKay's bullfight metaphor, that

> The rag is not the man who holds it, obviously: so-called primitive black culture is not the sign of some essential black identity. But it is the colorful expression of resistance and evasion in the face of an onslaught of trampling force. The use of 'elusive' here is reminiscent of James Weldon Johnson's use of the term in his prefaces to the *Book of American Negro Spirituals*. This [McKay's] passage evokes an autonomous system, a 'composite voice,' at the fringes of modernity: irrepressible, goading, infuriating the civilization that would crush it—and yet elusive, somehow of a different order, of a different logic, one that civilization wants desperately to reject and obliterate as a social possibility. (225)

Immediately, Edwards's claim that McKay's racist primitivism is performative and therefore not essentialist is incoherent yet pragmatic. As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue, this kind of "uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist argumentation… reflects the

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episode" ("A Woman is a Conjunction," 755-56). And Vadde agrees with Edwards that *Banjo* exemplifies how the "spiritual dimensions" of music are a "transcendental resting place beyond the strictures of institutionalized group membership" with "an alternative logic of autonomy derived from an African diasporic cultural reservoir" (*Chimeras of Form,* 125-26, 143).

[35] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Harvard UP, 2009), 13-15.

tension between the constructivist language that is required by academic correctness and the foundationalist or essentialist message that is required if appeals to 'identity' are to be effective in practice."[36] Whether, in the substantive version of racist explanation, you do what you do because of your race or, in the performative inverse, you are of a race because of what you do, the category of race cannot be anything but prosthetic, instrumental, performative, and essentialist. Edwards's account of McKay's black "practice of diaspora" may theoretically leverage some of these terms against others, but it does not produce an anti-essentialist account of race; Edwards just gets more theoretically elaborate about the essentialist logic of race. The force of Edwards's claim therefore lies in its immanence to the aesthetic racecraft of McKay's metaphor, which, as we have seen, couches its essentialism in finely-wrought ambiguity meant to acknowledge yet ultimately displace the constitutive, historically-specific relation between how McKay constructs the categorial plausibility of race and the forms of political and economic heteronomy he faces.[37] But where McKay's racecraft takes recourse to ambiguity at the level of literary form, Edwards's racecraft takes recourse to ambiguity at the level of theoretical elaboration. For the "autonomous system, 'a composite voice,' at the fringes of modernity" that Edwards takes to be this metaphor's referent is an instance of racially-premised autonomy from capitalist social relations that is only legible according to the terms of a certain theory of

[36] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 6. Also see Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 1–19.

[37] For example, Edwards argues that *Banjo* countervails its primitivism with a "characteristically modern admiration for waste in the world" exemplified by Ray's sense that "That there was something sublime about waste. It was the grand gesture that made life awesome and wonderful. There was a magical intelligence in it that stirred his poetic mind. Perhaps more waste would

aesthetic autonomy—that is, a theory of something musical and colorful thus sensuous, but "of a different order, of a different logic" than the space of "social possibility" proscribed by "civilization" and therefore, in Edwards's account, ultimately indeterminate. Understanding the aesthetic as a domain of sensuous indeterminacy is essential to *Banjo*'s aesthetic racecraft and to the theoretical racecraft integral to many twenty-first-century critics' understanding of the novel—whether as an instance of "black literary modernism" or a "practice of diaspora."

IV. Hemingway's Cape-Work

This specifically indeterminate and subjective aesthetic dimension of McKay's bullfight metaphor comes into sharper focus once we grasp how McKay is alluding to perhaps the paradigmatic bullring in canonical Anglo-American literary modernism—that of Ernest Hemingway's 1926 debut novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Although Gary Holcomb argues that "McKay's most vivid citation of Hemingway saturates his first novel"[38]—that is, saturates *Home*

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diminish stupidity, which was to him the most intolerable thing about human existence" (*Banjo*, 260 qtd. in Edwards 223-24). But Edwards does not note the line immediately prior to these where Ray confides that he "always loved to read of millionaires spending generously." In this light, it is less clear that Ray's attraction to waste renders his primitivism "critical" and only contingently bound up with racism, and that McKay's "sublime something" and "magical intelligence" of consumerist excess "eludes or exceeds the logic of capitalist civilization," as Edwards claims. Rather, absent a more concrete account of how McKay uses the language of primitivism to refer to what Edwards calls a "another ethical system, one exterior to the crushing logic of 'civilization,'" such a romanticization of waste is merely conspicuous consumption, and the valorization of difference that Edwards highlights in Ray's "primitive sense of comparative values" is merely racial pluralism—altogether the logic of the emergent consumer capitalism and its specific form of racism in the American cosmopolitan milieu of McKay's 1920s.

[38] Gary Edward Holcomb, "The Sun Also Rises in Queer Black Harlem: Hemingway and McKay's Modernist Intertext," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 4 (2007): 68.

to Harlem—this bullfight metaphor in *Banjo* may, in fact, be the paradigmatic instance of McKay-Hemingway intertextuality.[39] For the sweeping abstraction of McKay's bullfight not only stands as a thematic culmination to the sequel-pair of novels commenced by *Home to Harlem*; grasped in relation to Hemingway, it also presents a more formally nuanced condensation of McKay's relation to aesthetic modernism than the primarily thematic allusions that may, as Holcomb suggests, connect several aspects of McKay's debut novel to Hemingway's.[40]

In *Banjo* and *The Sun Also Rises*, metaphors comparing writing to bullfighting embody reflexive claims about prose fiction as an artistic medium. And Hemingway, like McKay, orients

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[39] The Spanish context and overall positive cast of McKay's experience of bullfighting means that although he held D.H. Lawrence to be the "modern writer [he] preferred above any," it must be Hemingway's bullfight in *The Sun Also Rises* rather than Lawrence's bullfight in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) that backgrounds this metaphor in *Banjo.* McKay also notes that while it was "impossible for [him] to think seriously of Lawrence as a social thinker," it is Hemingway that "most excellently quickened and enlargened my experience of social life" (*A Long Way from Home*, 247, 252).

[40] Gary Edward Holcomb, "Hemingway and McKay, Race and Nation," in *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance*, ed. Charles Scruggs and Gary Edward Holcomb (Ohio State UP, 2012), 133-76. Holcomb argues that *Home to Harlem* "perform[s] the authenticity of the New Negro" as a locus of primitive sensuality that white writers like Hemingway can only approximate through variously dissimulated forms of what Holcomb calls the "white modernist blackface minstrel literary act" (138). McKay's debut is, for Holcomb, a kind of racial-sexual inverse of Hemingway's. For where *The Sun Also Rises* centers on Jake Barnes, a white, professional-managerial expatriate man rendered impotent by a war injury, *Home to Harlem* splits its attention between Ray, the declassé and impotent Haitian intellectual who is also at the center of *Banjo*, and Jake Brown, the African-American proletarian Harlemite whose potent, masculine heterosexuality fascinates Ray and who himself briefly reappears briefly near the end of *Banjo*. Taking the the doubled Jakes to be foils, Holcomb's point is that McKay appropriates and inverts Hemingway's "modernist angst" in terms of class position and racial identity. This analytically weak account of modernism as "angst" cashes out in a dismissal of Hemingway's racism and an uncritical affirmation of McKay's, which entails an ambiguous recuperation of *Banjo*'s primitivism as "strategic" (139).

his fiction toward mass-market demand. When Hemingway writes in 1928 to his editor Maxwell Perkins that “[t]his bull market in beautiful letters isn’t going to last forever and I do not want to always be one who is supposed to have made large sums and hasn’t and doesn’t,”[41] he is presciently noting the transience of an early-twentieth-century cohort of Anglo-American publishers whose commitment to formal experimentation opens a mass-market horizon for the otherwise limited circulation of much canonical Anglo-American modernist fiction.[42] Hemingway, of course, does not couch his formal innovation in the kind of experimental prose with which James Joyce, William Faulkner, or Gertrude Stein antagonize mass-market publishers in the 1920s. Rather, in ambivalently parodic relation to “Steinese” and freshly under the influence of Perkins’s editorial pen and marketing expertise, *The Sun Also Rises* draws aspects of Stein’s disorientingly anaphoric, restricted-field poetics into the domain of mass-market fiction. Indeed, Hemingway writes the novella *The Torrents of Spring,* his literary lampoon of Sherwood Anderson and Stein, as a weeklong respite from writing *The Sun Also Rises* in 1925, and the

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[41] Ernest Hemingway, *Ernest Hemingway Selected Letters 1917-1961* (Simon and Schuster, 2003), 278.

[42] Andrew Goldstone, “The Short Life of Publishing Tradition,” *Arcade*, June 6, 2012, https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/short-life-publishing-tradition. For a more targeted sociological account of Conrad, Joyce, and Lawrence’s relationships to this dynamic within the publishing industry, see Joyce Piell Wexler’s *Who Paid for Modernism?: Art, Money, and Fiction of Conrad, Joyce, and Lawrence* (University of Arkansas Press, 1997).

novella's rejection by Hemingway's publisher at the time gives him the grounds to sever his contract and complete his debut novel with Perkins.[43]

Metaphorical figurations of the bullring as a theatrical space of aesthetic judgment are integral to Hemingway and McKay's formal engagement with their fiction's market heteronomy, which each author routes through structures of aesthetic racecraft. And while their respective bullfight metaphors ultimately embody divergent visions of the relationship between race and art, these metaphors at first seem congruent in terms of how, in synecdochic relation to their novelistic wholes, they relate racial ascription to aesthetic judgment. When *The Sun Also Rises*'s protagonist Jake Barnes describes how the bullfighter Romero has absolute control over techniques that, without ornamental gesture or precautionary deception, incite the bull to charge within inches of his body, he is ascribing both aesthetic value and a race-like essence. Below, we will attend closely to how Hemingway narrates these techniques to produce a determinate market architecture—thus not only aesthetic value but also (and inextricably) aesthetic meaning—that *Banjo*'s form is proximate to but ultimately eludes. But immediately, it is key that Jake senses Romero's mastery is a matter of inheritance rather than acquisition: "[Romero] knew everything when he started. The others can't ever learn what he was born with."[44] And while bullfighting action in *The Sun Also Rises* is not immediately apparent as metaphor like it is in McKay, many

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[43] Daniel Pollack-Pelzner suggests that Hemingway's broad parody of Anderson and Stein in *The Torrents of Spring* was a marketing pitch meant to differentiate Hemingway's work from that of his targets. Pollack-Pelzner, "Swiping Stein: The Ambivalence of Hemingway Parodies," *The Hemingway Review* 30, no. 1 (2010): 69–82.

[44] Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 172.

critics argue that Romero's bullfighting stands for Hemingway's own writing. Richard Godden exemplarily contends that

> Romero's cape work is like a course in the Hemingway sentence: it is as simple as primary nouns and operator verbs, resisting decoration as Hemingway resists the abstract term; its moves are successive as plain syntax, with its links as apparent as a repeated conjunction or preposition, and above all it too exists to maximize intensity. On the face of it, content and form comply to actualize a style of fighting and a style of writing. If this is fair, events in the ring at Pamplona are a metaphor for the event on the page.[45]

But insofar as Hemingway's reflexive thematization of his prose style in Romero's bullfighting identifies aesthetic judgment with racial ascription, it seems to diffuse how "content and form comply" into the indeterminacy of racecraft. Indeed, bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises* is inextricable from *aficion*, a category that, in its ascriptive logic, works like race. "Aficion," Jake confides, "means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights" (136), and in contrast to Romero's graceful action, this ascriptive practice is mired in subjectivity: "When they saw that I had *aficion*," Jake narrates, "there was no password, no set of questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions always a little on the defensive and never apparent" (137). The aficionado, like McKay's "vagabond black," presumes an essence that, while referred to in practice, is immune to analytical elaboration—indeed, an essence that, in Edwards's apt phrasing, is "an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed." *Aficion* is also what distinguishes "good bull-fighters" from "commercial bull-fighters" (136). Thus racial particularity and aesthetic quality—inextricable here from aesthetic receptivity— appear to congeal within Hemingway's

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[45] Richard Godden, *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer* (Cambridge UP, 2008), 50, 261n44.

representation of *aficion* as a sensuous embodiment of tauromachic authenticity that exceeds the dictates of the market.

Accordingly, Walter Benn Michaels argues that *aficion* in *The Sun Also Rises* is a "racial discourse" that hangs together with Hemingway's formal commitment to phenomenological authenticity. In Michaels's account of the novel, writing the real thing means writing the racially authentic thing, and an ensemble of formal strategies make the category of race structural to *The Sun Also Rises*—rendering, Michaels argues, Hemingway's modernism structurally consistent with 1920s racist discourses of nativism and pluralism.[46] One such formal strategy is how Hemingway textures his prose with untranslated French and Spanish phrases or bizarrely literal translations of such phrases to produce what Michaels calls a "semiotic parallel" between untranslatable words and the experiences narrated such that the "meaning of these signs is understood as essentially linked to the particular form of their signifiers" (73). Michaels contends that this literalism is integral to not only Hemingway's modernism but also his racism—indeed, for Michaels, modernism in the 1920s is ultimately a form of racism—because this literalism approaches reality as incommensurable subjective experience. For Michaels, Hemingway consequently approaches aesthetic judgment not in terms of interpretation but in terms of essentialized capacities of aesthetic receptivity. Romero's bullfight epitomizes for Michaels how "reality is called *aficion*" and "in writing, it is the vocabulary of experience, of words which serve not to represent the experience but to testify to its authenticity" (73)—testify, that is, to

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[46] Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Duke UP, 1995), 13, 28.

distinctions between the presumed racial capacities of individuals, particularly between Jake and the novel's Jewish character, Robert Cohn:

> the claim of authenticity for the writer's experience asserts at the same time the primacy of the sign's materiality. This movement recapitulates two familiar (if often opposed) accounts of modernism, one emphasizing the primacy of experience, the other the primacy of language. But my point here is not just to emphasize the compatibility of the commitments to experience and to the materiality of the sign. For in Hemingway, both these commitments are put to work in the effort to separate the "imitation" from the "real," Cohn from Jake. "There is no Spanish word for bull-fight," Jake remarks, which is to say that the aesthetic of sincerity embodied in the bullfight is simultaneously an aesthetic of untranslatability. What we call a bullfight cannot properly be translated into Spanish, and what Spaniards call what we call a bullfight is not properly translated by "bullfight"… names are like bullfights: there are no words for them in other languages. (73-74)

Any similarities between Jake and Cohn "are definitely disrupted" and replaced with racial distinctions, Michaels argues, "by the taxonomies of the bullfight and by the 'oral spiritual examination' Jake has to pass to prove that he has *aficion*" (27-28). Thus, in this account, the "social point of Hemingway's prose style" and, by extension, the bullfighting he depicts, is "relentlessly to enforce such distinctions… Racial inferiority is reproduced here as aesthetic failure" (27). For Michaels, the plausibility of aesthetic judgments in *The Sun Also Rises* supervenes upon the plausibility of race. And if Hemingway reflexively figures Romero's bullfight—the primary scene of aesthetic judgment and therefore racial ascription in the novel—as a synecdochic metaphor for aesthetic success in prose fiction, then the aesthetic plausibility of Hemingway's novel ultimately relies on the plausibility of race. Michaels identifies Hemingway's modernism with aesthetic racecraft.

Banjo and *The Sun Also Rises* seem, in this respect, to be formally congruent even as their narratives of expatriate adventure focalize characters in disparate class positions and on opposite sides of the Jim Crow color line. Indeed, *The Sun Also Rises*'s pattern of untranslatable literalism reaches a crescendo of sorts in the form of jazz lyrics—precisely the form that textures *Banjo* and, as we have seen, which McKay generalizes into the "plotless" novelistic principle of the "rag." As Jake dances with his love interest Brett Ashley in Zelli's, a Paris cabaret, he is tortured by the fact that he can neither sleep with Brett (a war injury has rendered him impotent) nor marry her (she is betrothed to a wealthy Scott). Upon entering the cabaret, the band's drummer exudes familiarity with Brett and Jake lashes out subjectively. As if focalizing the bull to McKay's rag, Hemingway narrates Jake reducing the "nigger drummer" to a racial caricature, "all teeth and lips" (69). Then, as Jake and Brett dance, the drummer sings a version of the 1923 song "Aggravatin' Papa (Don't You Try to Two Time Me)" by Roy Turk and J. Russel Robinson:[47]

> We danced. It was crowded and close.
> "Oh darling," Brett said, "I'm so miserable."
> I had that feeling of going through something that has all happened before. "You were happy a minute ago"
> The drummer shouted: "You can't two time——"
> "It's all gone."
> "What's the matter?"
> "I don't know. I just feel terribly."
> ". . . . . ." the drummer chanted. Then turned to his sticks.
> "Want to go?"

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[47] Frederic Svoboda identifies the drummer as Eugene Bullard and follows Jim Hinkle in identifying the song in "Who Was That Black Man?: A Note on Eugene Bullard and 'The Sun Also Rises,'" *Hemingway Review* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1998):105-6.

> I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again.
>
> “. . . . . .” the drummer sang softly. (70-71).

Hemingway cuts off the drummer’s lyrical shout “You can’t two time” with a dash that immediately indicates an interruption in dialogue as Brett tries to explain to Jake why she feels “so miserable.” But this dash bears a valence of meaning beyond punctuation because Jake realizes that Brett may have had an affair with drummer. He not only feels two-timed or cheated on by Brett but feels, “as in a nightmare,” that everything in the cabaret is recapitulating his sexual and—to his mind—racial impotence. In a crescendo of subjective projection, this dash and subsequent ellipses literalize the irrelevance of the rag’s lyrics beyond the phrase “You can’t two time” because Jake feels as if everything in the cabaret means what he feels: his impotence. This musical rag stages the principle of phenomenological authenticity that Hemingway has, in Michaels’s account, expressed up to this point through patterns of translational literalism. But here, Jake’s despondent, bigoted fury occasions a formal escalation of this literalism. His experience of the drummer’s performance of racial authenticity and sexual superiority appears not only untranslatable but literally illegible. The logic of focalization in *The Sun Also Rises* dovetails here with that of *Banjo* as we encounter, through Jake, rag-time lyrics that are as “strange and elusive” as McKay’s “rag:” “the composite voice of the Negro.”

This scene exemplifies how *The Sun Also Rises*, like *Banjo*, structures its aesthetic racecraft around a multivalent sense of prose fiction as a “rag,” which evokes not only the participatory sensuousness of popular dance music and the violent spectacle of a matador’s cape but also the vulgarity of a lowbrow, mass-circulation newspaper. For while Hemingway does not

use the word "rag" to articulate dance music, bullfighting, and bawdy journalism as McKay does, an articulation of these forms is nonetheless structural to *The Sun Also Rises.* The jazz drummer's blanked-out lyrics were likely cut by Perkins to avoid, as Frederic Svoboda suggests, "any scandalous-in-1926 suggestion of an interracial affair between the drummer and Brett."[48] This editorial decision heightens the effect of untranslatability that might otherwise have been conveyed by these lyrics' vernacular phrasing, and Brett's anguished statement "It's all gone" seems to stage a metafictional acknowledgement of this editorial decision's compositional aptness. More generally, prior to the editorial influence of Perkins, Hemingway began to develop the pared-down perspicuity of his prose style as a journalist and as a poet and writer of experimental short fiction under the early-1920s mentorship of Stein. And while McKay is better known for his early dialect poetry than his early journalism, *Banjo*'s "rag" form can be understood as a novelistic and distinctly racist synthesis of these forms. Hemingway, however, produces a more aesthetically nuanced form of novelistic "rag" because unlike *Banjo*, *The Sun Also Rises* sublates aesthetic racecraft within a modernist assertion of immanent purposiveness.

The Sun Also Rises embodies a more complex and ambivalent understanding of the aesthetic than Michaels suggests because Hemingway's novel is ultimately about the tension between the indeterminacy of racist ideology and the determinacy of a modernist artwork. Hemingway's modernism emerges through his bullfight metaphor, which holds the racist culture of bullfighting and the artistry of bullfighting in tense proximity, yet does not conflate them, as

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[48] Svoboda, 106. On how McKay successfully avoided most editorial interventions in *Banjo*, see Cooper, 253-54.

Michaels claims. Rather, across Romero's three bullfights, Hemingway separates out the logic of race and the logic of the autonomous artwork, ultimately relativizing the indeterminacy of the former within the determinate architecture of the latter. This sublation unfolds as Hemingway's plot pares away the love triangle—centered on Brett—that provokes Jake's sexual anxiety and exacerbates his racism. While this love triangle includes Jake in the Paris cabaret, the novel's exodus to Pamplona in northern Spain for the bullfights of the Feast of San Férmin ups the ante by introducing Brett's fiancé Mike alongside Cohn, who has "followed Brett around like a bloody steer" after spending a week with her in San Sebastian (146). Jake is "blind, unforgivingly jealous" (104), and his experience of the bullring becomes inextricable from his sexual alienation. Just as with the vagabond's social-reproductive and economic alienation in *Banjo,* racism effects the requisite diversion.[49] But Hemingway, through a crescendo of focalized bullfighting action, ultimately renders the racist ideological entailments of Jake's alienation internal to Romero's artistry: the synecdochic core of the novel's self-legislating form. The narrative metaphor of bullfighting that results reflexively embodies the modernist dialectic of Hemingway's debut: a formal architecture that ironizes not only the constraints of the "bull market in beautiful letters" toward which Hemingway orients his debut novel but also the saturating racism of the 1920s.

Romero's first bullfight embodies a conflation of racial ascription and aesthetic judgment because Hemingway, as if focalizing Jake's distraction, does not actually narrate it. Brett sits

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[49] In fact, both novels thematize sexual alienation in relation to economic alienation. On sexual alienation in *Banjo*, see Reed, "A Woman is a Conjunction." On economic alienation in *The Sun Also Rises*, see Godden, 39-77.

apart from Jake, in a love triangle between her fiancé Mike and the enamored Cohn. Accordingly, Hemingway replaces any narration of bullfighting action with Jake's terse judgment "It was a good bull-fight" and his subsequent judgment of Cohn, Mike, and Brett: "Several times during the bull-fight I looked up a Mike and Brett and Cohn, with the glasses. They seemed to be all right. Brett did not look upset. The only question Jake asks is "Does Cohn look bored?"—to which Jake's fried Bill responds, "That kike!" (168). The meaning of the first bullfight is, in short, irrelevant. Focalized through Jake, what counts is that Cohn does not have *aficion* because he is Jewish.

The immanence of Michaels's attention to the category of *aficion* and its rituals of "oral spiritual examination" generalizes the logic of this first bullfight to the entirety of *The Sun Also Rises* because it neglects a contrapuntal form of examination that emerges in Romero's second fight. Now, the love-triangle structure of Jake's distraction has been rearranged: "Brett sat between Mike and me at the barrera, and Bill and Cohn went up above" (171). With Brett beside Jake and his envious insecurity momentarily assuaged, he guides her in an examination, as it were, of Romero's artistry that premises its ascription of aesthetic value on interpretation:

> I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about. I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place the point of his pic so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of spectacle with unexplained horrors. I had her watch how Romero took the bull away from the fallen horse with his cape, and how he held him with the cape and turned him, smoothly and suavely, never wasting the bull. She saw how Romero avoided every brusque movement and saved his bulls for the last when he wanted them, not winded and discomposed but smoothly worn down. She saw how close Romero always worked to the bull, and I pointed out to her the tricks the other bull-fighters used to make it look as though they

> were working closely. She saw why she liked Romero's cape-work and why she did not like the others. (171-72)

What it means to have *aficion* is necessarily a matter of being ascribed it by aficionados and therefore only contingently a matter of correctly interpreting bullfighting.[50] Yet this passage stages the latter contingency to subsume what Michaels calls the "social point" of *aficion* within an aesthetic point about the tension between art and race—between that which can be explained and that which cannot. For if Romero is the novel's locus of *aficion* and "names are like bullfights: there are no words for them in other languages" (74), this passage's emphatic focalization ironizes the novel's commitment to phenomenological authenticity by modulating its pattern of untranslatable literalism into "hows" and "whys." Equally applicable to subject and object, these interrogative adverbs are the basic grammar of mediation: precisely what *aficion*'s criterion of authentic experience is immune to. So while no character in *The Sun Also Rises* can access the "how" or "why" of another character's *aficion* because the minds, souls, or spirits of these characters are, naturally, not available to them, this passage focalizes *aficion* and, in this way, isolates its rational core: the correct interpretation of bullfighting. In contrast to the immediacy of racial ascription and its criterion of authenticity, the immediate, sensuous-intuitive basis of aesthetic judgment begins to unfold here in an interpretation.

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[50] While the correct interpretation of bullfighting can be the basis for an ascription of *aficion*, once one is understood to be an aficionado, one cannot fail to have *aficion*. For *aficion,* like race or culture, works precisely through its slippage: not only producing identification as the idea of who you are confirms what you do, but also falling apart as the idea of who you are comes into conflict with what you do, which may be something that is not yours.

As Hemingway dilates this moment of aesthetic absorption, its terms embody a tension between racial ascription and interpretive aesthetic judgment:

> Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line… Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movement and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize their closeness. Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off… Romero had the old thing, the holding of purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing. (172)

By repeatedly figuring Romero's masterful technique as a matter of "purity of line" with an ultimate emphasis on "the old thing" "held through the maximum of exposure," Hemingway makes palpable a tension between an aesthetic commitment to an ascetic mastery of the prose "line," or sentence, and a racist commitment to an essence conferred by a "line" of inheritance. This second bullfight, that is, evokes a tension between medium-specific reflexivity and racist reference. The non-identity yet subtle "closeness" of Jake's racist anxiety about his impotence and Romero's mastery of tauromachic form is a tension between racism and modernism: between "line" as racial heteronomy and "line" as an aspect of self-legislating form.

In Romero's third and final bullfight, Hemingway figures the determinate negation of this tension as a horizon of genuine, compositional synecdoche that is immediately theatrical—Romero plays to the crowd—but ultimately self-legislating. Jake watches this third fight beside Brett, but now neither Cohn nor Mike is in the audience because, the night before, Romero sleeps with Brett and is badly beaten by Cohn, after which Mike drinks himself into a stupor

(214).[51] This conflagration of the love triangle from which Jake has been torturously alienated pares away his sexual-racial distraction and is the focalizational condition of possibility for Hemingway's longest and most lucid narration of bullfighting action in the novel. This bullfight is structured by two interrelated counterpoints: one that sets Romero's artful technique against that of matadors like Belmonte, whose "greatness… had been discounted and sold in advance" (218), and another that sets Romero's absorption in his art against the theatricality of the bullring and its demanding, often uncomprehending crowd. These contrapuntal relations intertwine when Romero adapts to a bull with poor eyesight. He makes the bull first charge his body and then his rag, and the "Biarritz crowd did not like it. They thought Romero was afraid, and that was why he gave that little sidestep each time as he transferred the bull's charge from his own body to the flannel. They preferred Belmonte's imitation of himself or Marcial's imitation of Belmonte" (220). Hemingway's brief narration of Romero's "awkwardly delicate working of the bull that could not see well" emphasizes precisely the perspectival alignment that structures McKay's metaphor: the bull's perspective, "watching dully," becomes that of the crowd, which is likewise "offended" by Romero's "cape-work" because it does not understand it (220-21). Thus, as Romero "giv[es] the bull the red cloth to follow with that little, almost almost imperceptible, jerk that so offended the critical judgment of the Biarritz bull-fight experts" (221), Hemingway is, like McKay, identifying the theatricality of the bull ring with the theatricality of his writing's mass-market reception. But unlike McKay's "strange and elusive" "rag," Hemingway's "cape-

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[51] The last substantive thing Mike says before sleeping through the bullfight sums up the situation: "Brett's got a bullfighter… But her Jew has gone away" (213).

work" turns aside this theatricality by turning the crowd's demands to his own ends. As Romero prepares to finish his next bull, "the crowd made him go on" and he acquiesces, but "All the passes linked up, all completed, templed and smooth. There were no tricks and no mystifications" (222). Through the finely wrought, literalist authenticities and ramifying machismo, social alienation, and bigotry of Hemingway's aesthetic racecraft emerges the structure—as theatrical yet ultimately self-sufficient as Romero's "cape-work"—of the *The Sun Also Rise*'s market architecture.

Thus, in Jake's focalized experience of the third bullfight, the racial-aesthetic figure of the "line" that permeates the second bullfight cedes to a figure of the whole of which it is a part. Superseding the racial-aesthetic ambivalence of "purity of line" are figural variations on formal unity:

> Each time he let the bull pass so close that the man and the bull and the cape that filled and pivoted ahead of the bull were one *sharply etched mass*. It was all so slow and controlled.
> […]
> The bull charged as Romero charged. Romero's left hand dropped the muleta over the bull's muzzle to blind him, his left shoulder went forward between the horns as the sword went in, and for just an instant *he and the bull were one*.
> […]
> The bull charged and Romero waited for the charge, the muleta held low, sighting along the blade, his feet firm. Then without taking a step forward, *he became one with the bull*, the sword was in high between the shoulders, the bull had followed the low-slung flannel, that disappeared as Romero lurched clear to the left, and it was over. (219, 221, 222; italics mine)

Romero is "one" with the bull not only at the climactic moment of its killing but also with each of the bull's deadly passes. Again and again, he achieves "one sharply etched mass." Thus, while *Banjo* valorizes the evocation of instinctive perception, the rag's incitement of the bull, *The Sun*

Also Rises ultimately valorizes Romero's "cape-work," which subsumes not only the bull's instinctive perception and movement but also the commercial theatricality and racist immediacy of bullfighting culture into the immanently purposive structure of action that is the *corrida*—an aesthetic form that may, in a sense, be untranslatable because it is self-legislating, but which is nonetheless always interpretable. This is how Romero's bullfighting embodies a more nuanced concept of the aesthetic than that which, via *aficion* and its ultimately subjective register of phenomenological authenticity, props up the plausibility of race in *The Sun Also Rises*. To return to Godden's point, common in Hemingway criticism: "content and form comply to actualize a style of fighting and a style of writing." The writerly reflexivity of Hemingway's bullfight metaphor asserts this unity of content and form by subsuming aesthetic racecraft within a modernist assertion of immanent purposiveness.

McKay and Hemingway both make the spectacular violence of bullfighting central to their aesthetic racecraft. But where McKay's bullfight ultimately identifies the medium-specific sensuousness of the aesthetic with subjective indeterminacy, Hemingway's bullfight narrates the prevalence of this subjective aesthetic—not only in the racist culture of bullfighting but also more broadly in the 1920s expatriate milieu of his characters—yet ultimately relativizes it within an aesthetic committed to the determinacy of self-legislating form. Hemingway's bullfight, that is, gestures toward the parameters of an absolute aesthetic. An absolute domain of the aesthetic is determinate not because it flips the subjective into the objective but because, like the interrogative adverbs "how" and "why," it obviates any such abstract opposition between mind and the matter in hand by demanding interpretation of what a work means on its own terms.

While the difference between a subjective and an absolute aesthetic is, in adequately nuanced philosophical terms, beyond the scope of this chapter, it corresponds broadly to the difference between Immanuel Kant's aesthetic and the aesthetic entailed by G.W.F. Hegel's account of fine art.[52]

Yet the aim of this chapter has been to grasp the difference between McKay and Hemingway's approaches to the aesthetic not in terms of philosophical correspondence but in terms of their historically situated artistic practices. That *The Sun Also Rises* lets us see the tension between modernism and aesthetic racecraft that *Banjo* obscures is, in part, a consequence of the historically-specific constraints that Hemingway and McKay face as writers. For Hemingway's bullfight metaphor may identify author and matador, but not in a way that imbues the charging bull with the kind of violence it bears for McKay. The violence of bullfighting may be the raw material of Hemingway's prose—an invigorating wellspring of aesthetic experience removed from the etiolated market culture of the metropole—but as such it is entirely an object of aesthetic contemplation. In *Banjo,* however, the violence of bullfighting is a metaphorical vehicle—albeit one decisively mystified by racecraft—for the police brutality that McKay witnesses firsthand and, despite his U.S. citizenship and political connections, is himself vulnerable to. As an African American writer among vagabonds in the time of Jim Crow, McKay is "in" the bullring in a way that Hemingway, a white writer touring Europe among wealthy

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[52] On the subjectivism of the Kantian aesthetic in relation to Hegel's account of fine art, see Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 9-17. See note 14 in this chapter and note 40 in the introduction.

expatriates, simply is not. In this sense, McKay's relation to the genuinely market-antagonistic, modernist aesthetic of self-legislating form that Hemingway asserts in his debut seems constrained by McKay's subjection to the intertwining indexical and instrumental imperatives that, in Warren's account, constitute African American literature under Jim Crow. Hemingway is obviously not subject to such imperatives, even as their racial-pluralist underpinnings saturate the Anglo-American cultural field of the 1920s and inflect his writing. But beyond this contextual distinction, a sociological-biographical explanation of why McKay does not plausibly assert the autonomy of *Banjo*'s form would miss the point—which is that *Banjo* understands itself, in nuanced yet ultimately indeterminate formal terms, as a black novel. The work is thoroughly committed to racial indexicality and tries to embody a racial authenticity that McKay understands there to be a market demand for—albeit a demand that is denounced by what he takes to be an elite, racially inauthentic intelligentsia's "civilized" prejudice against the primitive essence of a black race. *Banjo*, in this sense, does not assert autonomy from the market but from the pervasive prejudice of "civilization," and consequently couches itself in the subjective indeterminacy adequate to race: a pragmatically consequential but analytically erroneous category. Positing the plausibility of race as the basis of *Banjo*'s aesthetic plausibility, McKay intuits but illustratively misrecognizes the dialectical space of artistic possibility that Hemingway broaches as *The Sun Also Rises* asserts aesthetic autonomy through and against the market-stabilizing instrumentality of race's social construction. This space of artistic possibility is the market architecture of modernist fiction.

3. Concretizing 1968: The Neo-Avant-Garde Commodity

Figure 2. Cover of Mary Ellen Solt's *The Peoplemover,* 1978, with Timothy Mayer's photo of the work's first performance.

Mary Ellen Solt's *The Peoplemover: A Demonstration Poem* (1978) tries to make sense of the political turmoil and resistance unfolding across the U.S. in the spring and summer of 1968. Solt

first performs the work at Indiana University on August 7, 1968, as a "dadaesque" demonstration with participants wielding protest posters, and develops it over three performances in the next two years to include a libretto.[1] In 1978, West Coast Poetry Review publishes a full version of the work that draws this libretto together with stage directions and reproductions of Solt's protest posters.[2] In this final form, never to be fully performed,[3] *The Peoplemover* is a fictional protest: an illustrated performance script that juxtaposes concrete poetry's visual immediacy with a fragmentary arrangement of speechwriting and other political utterances quoted from across U.S. history. On a stage that suggests "a patriotic occasion or a political rally" and accompanied by a "tape of fragmented patriotic songs and marches," four speakers "weave a series of tapestries of American words" by quoting the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.[4] Demonstrators march around the stage and hold aloft Solt's protest posters, emblazoned with the typographical manipulations characteristic of

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[1] For the work's publication and performance history from 1968-1970, see Mary Ellen Solt, "About THE PEOPLEMOVER," in *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, ed. Antonio Sergio. Bessa, vol. 51 (Stockholm: OEI Magazine, 2010), 322–23. The only performance not mentioned in this editorial foreword is what seems to be its last, which was produced by Margaret Wolfson in 1975 at Sonora House in the Catskills. Wolfson did not work with Solt to develop this performance from a libretto, instead developing an accompaniment of music and projected historical photographs out of the design of the posters. For this performance, Judith Martin composed an interpretation of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Margaret Wolfson, phone conversation with author, July 11, 2021.

[2] Mary Ellen Solt, *The Peoplemover: A Demonstration Poem* (Reno: West Coast Poetry Review, 1978).

[3] Once Solt started developing the libretto the work was orally performed, sometimes beside a display of the posters. However, it has never been performed according to the stage directions of the 1978 publication. Susan Solt, phone conversation with author, July 6, 2021.

[4] Solt, "About THE PEOPLEMOVER." Solt does not give any further details about musical accompaniment.

concrete poetry. At certain points in the performance, these demonstrators flip their posters to reveal what Solt calls their "back-ideograms." These simple but arresting characters are painted extensions of the posters' wooden back-scaffolding and signify with its shape, as if attempting to cut through the poem's idiomatic haze of political speech with concrete picture-thinking.[5] Thus, *The Peoplemover* links concretist poetry with an avant-gardiste critique of aesthetic autonomy. The work dramatizes a question: are the posters' back-ideograms only the material support—literally the sign-handles—of the meaning expressed on their flip sides? Or are these scaffolded sign-handle extensions actually objects of passive contemplation, components of a work of art? *The Peoplemover* answers this question with a dialectical *yes*. The work does not merely transform what might otherwise be wall-hung or anthology-bound works of concrete poetry into tools for protest, it more fundamentally interrogates what such a transformation of art into activism means in 1968. Solt's "demonstration poem," as she calls it, is a revealing engagement with the modernist formal problematics of concretism and the historical contradictions concomitant with the rise of postmodernism and New Left protest politics in the U.S. Ultimately, *The Peoplemover* "demonstrates" the modernist artwork's dissolution into the mere commodity—but with an immanence to the political turmoil of 1968 that insists on the concrete, historical specificity of this dissolution.

Although *The Peoplemover* is the major work of one of concrete poetry's foremost

[5] Solt, *The Peoplemover*, 12. The posters reproduced in the book and in this chapter are not the original posters but silk-screen editions made in 1970 for exhibition purposes by Finial Press, Urbana, Illinois. The captioned descriptions of the posters found in the book and reproduced here refer to the materials of the original posters.

proponents, it has received scant critical attention.[6] Solt has more widely discussed concrete poems like her 1966 collection *Flowers in Concrete*, but her most well-known project is scholarly. Her 1968 anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View,* now considered the definitive English-language collection of concrete poetry, sorts poems and manifestos from the 1950s and 1960s by nationality and ensures that after originating in Europe and—most vigorously—in Brazil, concrete poetry ends up reaching its largest audience in the late-1960s and 1970s U.S.[7] *The Peoplemover* is an exceptional part of Solt's oeuvre not merely because it is her longest, most complex work and only performance. More importantly, it is Solt's aesthetic attempt at bringing together two of her primary scholarly interests: the ideographic form developed by the international concrete poetry movement and William Carlos Williams's elusive concept of the "American idiom." For *The Peoplemover* presents a dramatic interaction between a display of two-sided posters and the performance of a libretto; the work appears to be structured around a tension, developed through performance, between the ideogram developed in concrete poetry and the "American idiom" Solt theorizes in Williams. This chapter argues, however, that the work's more fundamental structuring tension is between two forms of experience: the absorptive experience of the modernist artwork and the theatrical experience of the political protest. Thus,

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[6] Out of print since 1978, the work's inaccessibility has probably contributed to this scholarly neglect. Only in 2010 did a scan of the work become available in a collection of Solt's poems, correspondences, and scholarship on William Carlos Williams published by OEI magazine: Antonio Sergio Bessa, ed., *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, vol. 51 (Stockholm: OEI Magazine, 2010).

[7] Claus Clüver, "From Imagism to Concrete Poetry: Breakthrough or Blind Alley?," in *Amerkanische Lyrik: Perspektiven und Interpretationen*, ed. Rudolph Haas (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1987), 113.

insofar as fiction is broadly construed here to encompass narrative poetry and performance as imaginative, verbal-representational narrative forms, *The Peoplemover* is a significant work in the history of modernist fiction because it is a transitional work, marking a historically and national-politically specific moment in which the theatrical and literalist pressures of postmodern performance art impinge on concretism's modernist problematic.

This chapter approaches Solt's work primarily through concretism and not through 1960s performance art, anti-war poetry, or protest fiction for two reasons. First, Solt's interests lie primarily in concretism. *The Peoplemover*'s performance and political elements are significant but do not appear intrinsically related to the rest of her career as an artist-scholar. And second, because concretism's modernist engagement with aesthetic autonomy is central to *The Peoplemover*'s engagement with social history. The work plays out the subsumption of concretism's (sometimes ambivalent) commitment to aesthetic autonomy by an emergent postmodernist cultural dominant that uncritically collapses art into life.[8] Indeed, it is at precisely this moment that Michael Fried, in "Art and Objecthood" (1967), criticizes the literalizing tendency in minimalist sculpture to privilege the spectator's experience of the work over an immanent formal coherence. According to Fried, while the modernist artwork attempts to hermeticize itself, demand interpretation, and thereby evoke conviction, minimalist sculpture

[8] Elise Archias investigates a strand of 1960s resistance to this anti-art tendency of performance in *The Concrete Body: Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016). Vito Acconci's career trajectory from concrete poet to performance artist is notable here, particularly in the way that the body seems to supersede the ideogram as the locus of the "concrete" in his work. The back-ideograms of Solt's posters, on the other hand, might be said to both hold the ideogram and the body apart and to locate the "concrete" in their intended meeting place: the material support of painted wood scaffolding.

refuses internal coherence and panders to the response of the spectator, giving rise to the anti-art quality of Friedian theatricality. So just as Fried is trying to pull the emergency brake on postmodernist theatricality in the abstract sphere minimalist art, Solt is working on the ground, as it were, making a mere political demonstration into something more: a "demonstration" of the changing life of art in 1968. Solt's work concretizes 1968 insofar as this postmodernist collapse of art into life appears to emerge in *The Peoplemover* through not only its engagement with concretism but also with the actual political events roiling the U.S. in the spring and summer of 1968.

Solt's fictional protest asserts a form of market architecture that diverges instructively from that of the works taken up thus far. For *The Peoplemover* does not internalize its own dependence on market circulation. Rather, through its "demonstration" form the work stages its own political circulation—projecting it beyond its necessarily ineffective, restricted-field context—as a form of circulation that it ultimately understands to work like the market. The slippage between political effectivity and market effectivity that ensues first emerges in Solt's foreword to *The Peoplemover*, which describes how Solt makes the work's posters in 1968 to express her anger, frustration, and sorrow—"part of a deep, national sorrow"—at the war in Vietnam, the Watts riots, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy's assassinations, and so on. However, while she connects *The Peoplemover* to the wave of demonstrations unfolding across the U.S. in which people "were exercising their democratic right to protest,"[9] she makes it clear that the work is not merely a protest poem. For Solt's

[9] Solt, "About THE PEOPLEMOVER."

immediately earnest provocation—with citizens exercising their right to peaceful demonstration, "Why not a demonstration poem?"—gets more complicated when, in the same foreword, she attributes her work's title to the "famous conveyance in Disneyland." In a passage that stands as a thesis of sorts for *The Peoplemover*, Solt writes:

> Day and night The Peoplemover transports hoards of fun-seeking Americans around a world of fantasy and fake history. In the real world of 1968, the peoplemover was the demonstration. Seeking its place in that world, the PEOPLEMOVER poem grew in response to the demands of particular performances. It was first performed by Donald Bell's experimental design class at Indiana University on 7 August 1968. ("About THE PEOPLEMOVER")

By modulating the capitalization of her work's title, Solt relates two objects—the Disneyland transportation infrastructure and the political performance poem—to indicate an aesthetic concept that applies to both. The enigmatic proposition, "In the real world of 1968, the peoplemover was the demonstration," stands in for this aesthetic concept and schematizes the intention behind *The Peoplemover*: Solt aims to make sensuously intelligible, through the "demonstration" form of her poem, how in 1968 protest art starts to bear a troubling resemblance to a Disneyland conveyance. *The Peoplemover* is not merely a protest poem because the formal architecture of its "demonstration" form ironizes the genre of protest art by aligning the theatricality of a train ride through Disneyland—an experience that is meaningless insofar as it demands no interpretation, only the basic arousal of interest or excitement—with the efficient information-transfer of protest poetry and propagandistic art more generally. Solt's fictional protest formally internalizes this alignment and grapples with the saturating theatricality of market culture in 1968 that is its condition of possibility. Thus, while the *The Peoplemover* is not

oriented toward mass-market circulation, it takes up the postmodernist status quo of art's reduction to a mere commodity as an inextricably artistic and political problem. The work produces a form of market architecture by "demonstrating" how the mass-cultural infrastructure of the political field toward which it is oriented appears inextricable from that of the culture industry. In Solt's fictional protest, politics starts to look like a market.

Solt's triangulation of her work between Dadaist anti-art, Disneyland infrastructure, and the restricted-field space of the experimental design class foregrounds the problem of commodification while associating Solt's work with the cultural formation of the neo-avant-garde. As Peter Bürger argues, this formation redeploys within the institution of art the techniques and materials that the historical avant-garde designed to abolish this institution.[10] The significance of *The Peoplemover* lies in how it produces a market-architectural "demonstration" of neo-avant-gardisme's dissolution of art into market-subsumed life. To grasp *The Peoplemover*'s neo-avant-gardisme in this way, this chapter interpolates close reading with contextualization, situating Solt's concretism first in relation to the Brazilian *Noigandres* group and then within the context of Solt's William Carlos Williams scholarship.

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[10] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 58. To be clear, this chapter understand the essentials of Bürger's critique of the neo-avant-garde to emerge unscathed, in an American context, from his numerous postmodernist critics; neo-avant-gardism's institutionalization of the anti-institutional discloses the etiolated, even reactionary, aesthetics and politics of an emergent postmodernism. See Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of 'Theory of the Avant-Garde,'" trans. Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 695–715; Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism."

I. The Concretist Moonshot

Concrete poetry displaces traditional poetic syntax and form in favor of compositions that foreground the visual aspects of words and their spatial organization on the page. Solt first encounters concretism in Brazil's concrete poetry movement, which emerges around the São Paulo-based *Noigandres* group, founded in 1952 by Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari.[11] *Noigandres*'s 1958 "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry" theorizes a concrete poem as on one hand "an object in and for itself, not an interpretation of exterior objects and/or sensations more or less subjective," and on the other hand a "poem-product: useful object."[12] This theory resonates with Constructivism's twofold commitment to the semantic autonomy of abstract, objective form and the political heteronomy of art as a use-value in a process of progressive—even socialist—industrialization.[13] Yet, part of what distinguishes *Noigandres* concretism from Constructivism is its claim to the aesthetic relevance of advertising and electronic mass culture.

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[11] Mary Ellen Solt, "Concrete Steps to an Anthology," in *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, 303.

[12] Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, "Pilot Plan for Concrete poetry," in Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958), 71–72.

[13] Antoine Pevsner and Naum Gabo's "Realistic Manifesto," in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 299. Against abstraction's implied generalization away from immediate sensory experience, Pevsner and Gabo emphasized the literal objecthood of the artwork as well as the mathematical and mechanistic objectivity of constructivism to assert the artwork's non-representational but immanently rule-bound and therefore autonomous status. They also asserted the embeddedness of art in the productive activity of industrial life. Max Bill was the most important transmission point between this kind of productivist commitment to use-value and Brazilian concretism. After a 1950 retrospective on Bill at the recently-founded Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, his *Gestalt* language of "formation," "the good form," and "isomorphism" became a significant theoretical resource for the Brazilian concretists. Bill, *Form, Function, Beauty = Gestalt*, trans. Pamela. Johnston, vol. 5 (London: Architectural Association, 2010).

This claim is explicit in Decio Pignatari's 1957 "anti-advertisement" (fig. 3).

drink coca cola
drool glue
drink coca(ine)
drool glue shard
shard
glue
cesspool

Figure 3. Decio Pignatari, "Beba Coca Cola," 1957.[14]

[14] Translated by Maria José de Queiroz and Mary Ellen Solt in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 108, 259.

And this claim is implicit in what the "Pilot Plan" calls the word's "*verbivocovisual*" ensemble of "sound, visual form, semantical charge" (72).[15] For the doubled connotation of obligation and electrical signal in "semantical charge [*carga semântica*]" suggests a tension between the interpretive burden that meaning, as a social act, necessarily entails and information theory's conceptualization of communication as frictionless signal transmission. With their billboard-ready inheritance of Ezra Pound's "ideogramic method," the *Noigandres* poets are generally intent on overcoming this tension by aligning their work with the instantaneous mechanics of electronic information technologies: "Control. Cybernetics. The poem as a mechanism regulating itself. Faster communication (problems of functionality and structure implied) endows the poem with a positive value and guides its own making" (72). Gravitating toward a sure-fire picture of meaning that calls for minimal or, ideally, no interpretation on the part of the reader, the *Noigandres* concretists are intent on achieving an identity of poetry and signal transmission.

Solt has read *Noigandres*'s "Pilot Plan" by 1963[16] and her 1964 poem "Moonshot

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[15] The term "verbivocovisual" was invented by Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake* and taken up by Ezra Pound, who was fascinated with Ernest Fenellosa's writing on the ideographic form of Chinese characters. Jamie Hilder suggests that the phrase "concrete poetry" first appeared in print in 1919 in Fenollosa and Pound's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.* On Fenollosa's ideographic form and its critiques, see Hilder, *Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2016), 6–7; Jennifer Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 135–40; Pedro R. Erber, *Breaching the Frame: The Rise of Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 139–41.

[16] Mary Ellen Solt, "Concrete Steps to an Anthology," in *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, 303. During her work on the *World View* anthology in the late 1960s, Solt developed an extensive correspondence with the *Noigandres* poets.

Sonnet" exemplifies not only their cybernetic interests but also their early-1960s tendency toward distilling the verbal aspects of concrete poetry into purely graphic form (fig. 4).

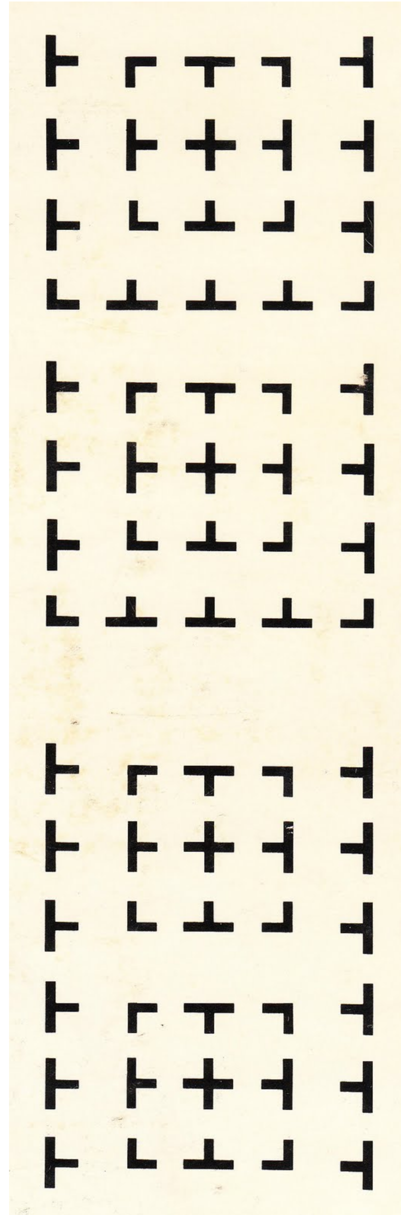

Figure 4. Mary Ellen Solt, "Moonshot Sonnet," 1964.

Building on Décio Pignatari and Wlademir Dias-Pino's "semiotic poems", which radicalized the non-representational and anti-expressive principles concrete poetry inherited from

Constructivism,[17] "Moonshot Sonnet" illustrates how theoretical claims like "Concrete poetry does not separate languages; it unites them; it combines them"[18] can lead in practice to the departure from language altogether. As we will see, this move from a verbal/visual problematic to the ostensible universality of the purely graphic is central to Solt's *Peoplemover* posters; her "Moonshot Sonnet" is a prefiguration of these posters' "back-ideograms." Its technophilic satire of the sonnet form links concrete poetry's tendency toward graphic universalism with the popular internationalism that accompanies the 1960s' mass-mediated race for a God's eye view of Earth from the moon. By arranging the diagrammatic symbols found in Ranger 7 images into the metric form of a Petrarchan sonnet, Solt's "poem" replaces the intentional phonetic composition of poetry with the mechanically-given centering lines of aerial photography (fig. 5). Ranger 7's images were meant to evaluate the suitability of the moon's surface for a spacecraft landing, so the centering lines facilitate measurement. By abstracting these lines from the photographic content they quantify, Solt distills them into the poetic equivalent of information transfer.[19] Indeed, the cybernetic information theory essential to *Noigandres*'s notion of poetic meaning is a "nonsemantic, mathematical theory of the capacity of communication channels to transmit data;"[20] in its cybernetic sense, "information" has nothing to do with meaning. Solt's

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[17] Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 71–74.

[18] Max Bense, "Concrete poetry," in *Concrete Poetry: A World View,* trans. Irène Montjoye Sinor, 73.

[19] Hilder notes that Solt does not mention in her anthology that "Moonshot Sonnet" was "designed—which most likely means typeset—by Edwin Morgan, the British poet who wrote a series of poems from the perspective of a computer, all of which end in glitch" (141).

[20] Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (MIT Press, 1992), 165.

Figure 5. Ranger 7 image of the Moon, 1964.[21]

"Moonshot Sonnet" makes this nonsemantic position into a compositional principle that it works out to its limit, achieving a concretion, as it were, of *Noigandres* concretism's fantasy of meaning as information transfer. By freeing the metric form of the sonnet from the idiomatic particularity of language, the work not only thematizes the "moonshot" aim of a surefire communication system on which concrete poetry stakes its internationalism but also dramatizes the semantic

[21] NASA/JPL-Caltech, *First Image of the Moon Taken by a U.S. Spacecraft*, July 31, 1964, https://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/imgcat/html/object_page/ra7_b001.html. Taken about 17 minutes before impact

emptiness entailed by this posture's reliance on information theory. And since "Moonshot Sonnet" is about this emptiness, its highly visual poetic form confronts us with the contradiction posed by concrete poetry's theoretical commitment to both the semantic plenitude of Pound's "ideogramic method" and the nonsemantic signal of information theory.[22]

Four years later in *The Peoplemover*, Solt's two-sided posters enact this concretist tendency toward purely graphic, literalist form, and like "Moonshot Sonnet," *The Peoplemover* posters relate this literalism to valences of meaning. The fictional protest is comprised of nine parts, each of which, except the first and last, uses a different poster as ideographic counterpoint to the libretto's "tapestry of American words" (1). Thus, a problematic concerning the relation of the literal, or merely material, to the semantic is built into *The Peoplemover*'s counterpoint of ideographic form and verbal performance and, as such, ramifies throughout the work's "demonstration" of the tumultuous events of 1968. Solt introduces this counterpoint in Part II of *The Peoplemover*, when a demonstrator carrying the "CIVIL RIGHTS" poster stands at the front of the stage and, at two points in the libretto (12), flips this poster to display its back-ideogram (fig. 6). The poster's front arranges the pun "CIV / ILL / RIOTS" on a monochromatic field that resembles both an upside-down "F"—for "failure" or "freedom"—and an aerial view of a street across which the syntax of the phrase's pronunciation maps a progression from civility, to social ill, to riots—and (red) blood spilled—in the streets. This composition faces the audience as

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[22] Since "Moonshot Sonnet" so clearly condenses the internationalist, cybernetic paradigm of the *Noigandres* ideogram, it is no surprise that the designers of Solt's 1968 anthology placed it on the book's dust jacket. On this publishing history, see Craig Saper, "Concrete poetry in America: A Story of Intermedia Performance, Publishing, and Pop Appeal," *Coldfront*, 2015.

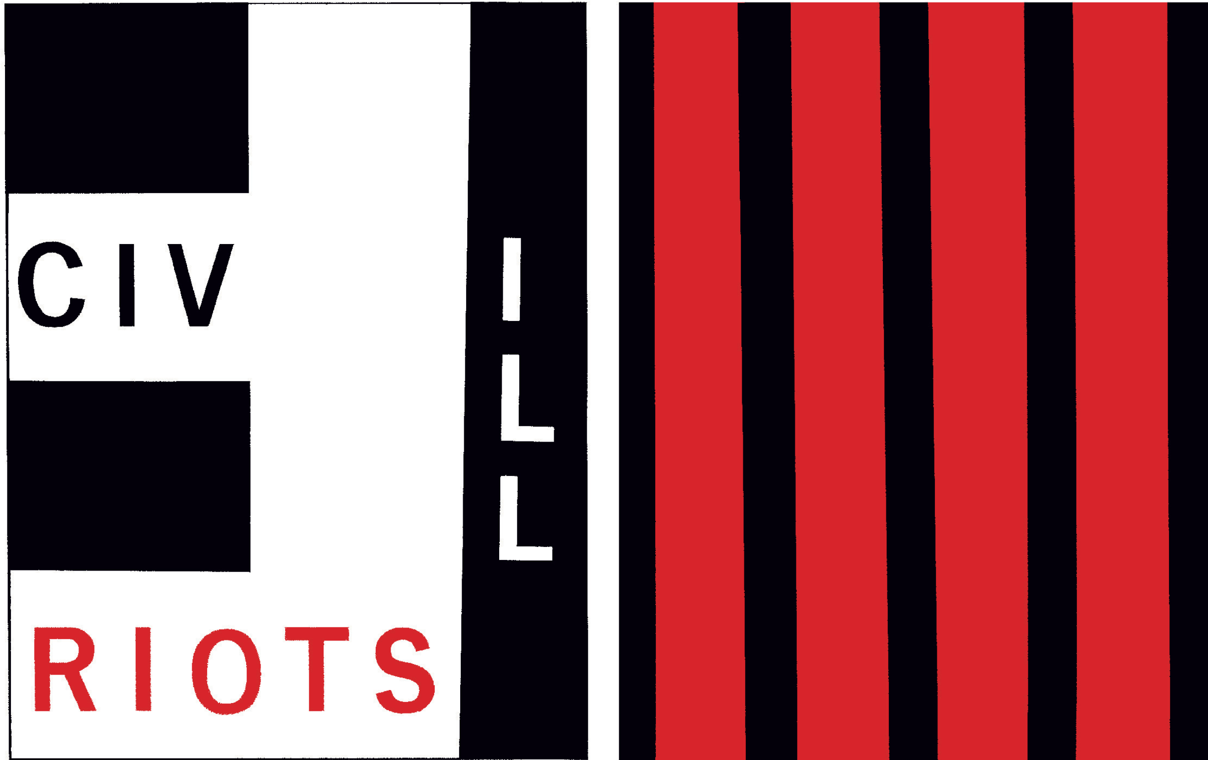

Figure 6. Mary Ellen Solt, "CIVIL RIGHTS" poster and "JAIL" back-ideogram in *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[23]

readers intersperse excerpts from anti-violence speeches by King and Lyndon Johnson with shouts of "BLACK POWER" and "Burn, baby, burn!"—the latter a catchphrase of participants in the Watts riots of 1965 (14–15). With this "verbivocovisual" ensemble, Solt takes up the political contradiction between the nonviolent, diplomatic strategy of the Civil Rights Movement and the violent, chaotic tactics of participants in the Watts riot in terms of the counterpoint between historical speech acts and ideographic posters that structures her "demonstration" form.

Solt develops this counterpoint and its variously ramified semantic/material problematic

[23] 40 1/4 x 27 in. Front: black, red and white plastic sign letters on black and white poster board. Back: lattice wood painted with black acrylic enamel on red poster board.

when a protester flips the "CIVIL RIGHTS" poster to reveal its back-ideogram and, in turn, the poster's two-sided structure (fig. 6). The back-ideogram's austere black stripes are, like all of the posters' back-ideograms, "designed as extensions of the lattice wood carrying sticks" and painted with acrylic enamel (12); these stripes are the poster's material support and literalize a relation of instrumental use. This back-ideogram's reveal coincides with a reader speaking the word "jail" and follows a recitation of Watts statistics, divided like an accounting table into two sections: the dead, injured, and jailed alongside the total cost of property damage (15–16). The poster's reversal thus extends the spatial and thematic progression of "CIV / ILL / RIOTS" to the brute materiality of a jail cell, as if to contain this de-civilizing declension behind the literal black bars of the ideogram that scaffolds it. And while the poster's front has a compositional logic that relates verbal and graphic form within an implied frame, the back-ideogram's blunt repetition of itself as a material support emphasizes its own materiality so that it seems to repel interpretation.[24] Like "Moonshot Sonnet," this austere and self-referential form enacts a shift from the semantic to the literal, as if to stage the *Noigandres* fantasy of meaning as information transfer, which is to say a fantasy of meaning as merely given, bracketed from the contestatory social process of interpretation.

Yet *The Peoplemover*'s posters push this "moonshot" literalism beyond the esoteric

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[24] An interesting point of comparison would be Daniel Buren's 1975 work, "Seven Ballets in Manhattan," in which performers carry posters with a similar motif of vertical stripes around various locations in New York City. Buren's stripes, however, are painted directly on canvas and less concretely thematized within his work. See https://danielburen.com/images/exhibit/217?year=all. On Buren's relation to the neo-avant-garde, see Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44, no. 1 (2005).

bounds of an ironic sonnet. They relativize this literalism as one part of dramatic whole because their back-ideograms only appear or disappear in relation to the historiographic—and explicitly political—content of the work's verbal performance. Depending on the moment of verbal performance that Solt pairs with the posters' front-to-back or back-to-front manipulation, the semantic/material problematic formalized by their two-sided structure takes on a different valence of concrete, political meaning. When a performer flips the "CIVIL RIGHTS" poster to its "JAIL" ideogram, graphic materiality corrodes the sociality of language and, in the context of the libretto's performance, the violent force of necessity embodied by a rabble corrodes the representational process of liberal-democratic politics—at the same time as this rabble is imprisoned by the economic structure that grounds this political regime. The picture-thinking of Solt's back-ideograms is analogical: Watts shadows the Civil Rights Movement just as theatricality shadows an art-institutional formal problematic that grapples with the literalism of a work's material support. As part of a dramatic whole, these posters inhabit the literalist paradigm of *Noigandres* information transfer to try to make meaning out of the political-economic contradictions—and the ominous sense of theatricality, or "Disneyland"—attendant to the New Left protest politics of 1968.

II. The American Idiom

Solt's posters, along with "Moonshot Sonnet" and her concretism anthology, at first appear to strike a marked contrast with *The Peoplemover*'s libretto and the other half of Solt's oeuvre: her scholarship on William Carlos Williams's notion of the "American idiom." The libretto is intent

on formalizing distinctly American speech in the spirit of this “idiom,” so the contrast seems to lie between its nationalist particularism and the internationalist universalism of concretism. However, this contrast is only apparent. For Solt arrives at *Noigandres* through Williams and arrives at *The Peoplemover* as an attempt to unify her grasp of each—ideogram and “idiom”—within an aesthetic whole. So before returning to *The Peoplemover* below, I connect an account of Solt’s Williams scholarship with an earlier, influential critique of Brazilian concretism. This connection clarifies the prosodic and more broadly aesthetic-ontological concerns that shape Solt’s composition of *The Peoplemover*.

Before and alongside Solt’s prolific correspondence with concrete poets around the world, she spends the 1960s cultivating a close intellectual friendship with William Carlos Williams and investigating his notion of the “American idiom.” Williams uses this enigmatic concept to describe his pursuit of a poetic form that breaks from the “sclerotic” conventions of English poetry and roots itself in authentic American speech patterns.[25] In a 1956 letter to Harold Norse, Williams presents the “idiom” as a prosody that has escaped the institutional capture of the academy:

> The idiom spoken in America is not taught in our schools but is the property of men and women, which though they do not know it, is one of the greatest modern languages waiting only for a genius of its intrinsic poetry to appear. The difference between it and the language taught to us in our schools is essentially a prosodic one which we have only as yet recognized by ear. The measure is what we refuse to recognize … It is in the measure of our speech, in its prosody, that our idiom is distinctive.[26]

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[25] William Carlos Williams, “An Approach to the Poem,” in *English Institute Essays, 1947*, ed. David Allan Robertson (New York: AMS Press, 1948), 57.

[26] William Carlos Williams and Harold Norse, *The American Idiom: A Correspondence*, ed. John J. Wilson, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Bright Tyger Press, 1990), 39–40.

In resentful opposition to the English departments that have ignored his poetry for much of his career, Williams praises what he sees as Norris's achievement of the "idiom" and concludes his letter on a bittersweet note: "Sometimes there appears to be a justice in literary history" (39). It is precisely this "justice" that Williams feels academia has denied his work. At the same time, however, Williams believes that he can only achieve literary-historical "justice" in his work through the "intrinsic poetry" of his "idiom," which rejects the Eliotic tradition and metrical structure advocated by New-Critical English departments at midcentury.

Williams's late-career friendship with Solt flourishes, in part, as an attempt to overcome his exclusion from academia.[27] With his approval and encouragement, Solt investigates the possibility of a systematic account of the "American idiom" across four works of criticism: "Poems in the American Idiom" (1960), "Idiom and Structure" (1962), "The American Idiom" (1983), and "Idiom as Cultural Icon" (written last and unpublished until 2010).[28] Solt's aim across these essays is to explain two interacting principles of composition in Williams's poetry, "relative measure" and "variable foot," which are supposed to allow the "exact" scansion of

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[27] Bessa, ed., *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, 133-34. Hereafter referred to in the text as TTCP.

[28] Mary Ellen Solt, "William Carlos Williams: Poems in the American Idiom," *Folio (Indiana University Department of English)* 25, no. 1 (1960): 3–28; Solt, "William Carlos Williams: Idiom and Structure," *The Massachusetts Review* 3, no. 2 (1962): 304; Solt, "William Carlos Williams: Idiom as Cultural Icon," in *Mary Ellen Solt: Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, 79–99; Solt, "William Carlos Williams: The American Idiom," *William Carlos Williams Review* 9, no. 1/2 (1983): 91.

poems like Williams's that deliberately elude an exact metrical line count.[29] Solt uses these concepts to try to show how Williams's poems are immanently shaped by a prosody arising from everyday American speech. She claims that this prosody, when handled by the poet, is "capable of achieving a theoretically perfect correspondence in the movement of language to the psychical nuances that give the poem its legitimacy, its truth, as a work of art" (TTCP 143). Solt's critical acuity draws her repeatedly, however, to the conclusion that Williams's "idiom" resists the exactitude of prosodic theory. She concludes her 1983 essay, for example, on a warmly ambivalent note when she recounts how Williams "was convinced that he had isolated for himself and for poets to come the 'radiant gist that / resists the final crystallization,' a structural principal that he called 'the American idiom'" (TTCP 155).

While an account of Solt's conceptual scheme of "relative measures" determined by "variable feet" is beyond the scope of this chapter, what Williams's "idiom" means for Solt in relation to *The Peoplemover* is actually better illuminated by her attention to the visual aspect of the "idiom," that is, how Williams invents line breaks to capture and heighten rhythmic events in idiomatic speech (TTCP 143–44). For Solt recounts in 1983 how her fascination with the

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[29] TTCP 151–52, 143. Solt explains: "Williams' 'relative measure' consists of countable stresses or pauses that control time as a sequence of quantitative blocks; and that the 'variable foot' as a separate entity makes possible a non-prescribed metric that permits the metrical unit (or foot) to contract to a counted pause or single stress or to expand to the number of syllables and timing stresses needed to accommodate the pace, emphasis, and distinctive rhythmic pattern required by the physical foundations of the poem. The variable foot is free to seek the organization it needs because a measure *relative to its needs* keeps it under musical control and thus heightens it expressive potential" (TTCP 151). The substance of Williams's "American idiom" would, then, seem to lie in the poem's "physical foundations" or the "musical" quality of the metrical control exercised in the "idiom"—both of which Solt leaves open to the determination of close reading.

"structural use of space" in Williams drew her to the visuality of concrete poetry (TTCP 155).[30] In an essay also published in 1983, Hugh Kenner notes this visual aspect of the "idiom" when he argues that for Williams, "the event is not the line, the event is the line break."[31] In short, Williams's inventive mediation of the verbal and visual makes his "idiom" a poetics rather than just a notation of speech patterns drawn from life. Williams's "favorite tension," Kenner continues, "is between the look of the poem and the sound of it." Thus, for both Solt and Kenner, Williams's "idiom" is a highly intuitive project committed to rendering the rhythms of American speech sensuously intelligible and therefore convincing as poetry. Both insist, in this vein, that Williams's distinctly visual poetic form articulates prosody with what Solt calls "structural use of space." But as the fascinating yet dry prosodic theory of Solt's criticism shows, Williams's poetic form both demands interpretation and remains irreducible to the propositional intelligibility of theoretical knowledge.

It is not only the visuality of the "American idiom" but also its theoretical difficulties that seem to lead Solt to the highly visual and rational form claimed by *Noigandres*. More generally,

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[30] In the same essay, Solt notes "the importance of the visual dimension in Williams' search for a new measure… Williams' innovations pointed the art of the poem in the direction of concrete poetry" (*Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry* 149).

[31] Hugh Kenner, "William Carlos Williams' Rhythm of Ideas," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/18/books/william-carlos-williams-s-rhythm-of-ideas.html. In a less generous mood, Kenner says that "Williams had no idea how to arrange and phrase what he wanted to say. Pound meant something like this when he called his old friend 'the most bloody inarticulate animal that ever gargled.' He was writing homemade philosophy, and floundered as grievously explaining the Imagination in the 1920s as he did explaining his other discovery, the Variable Foot, in the 1950s." Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 66.

the common thread here is Solt's concern with the ontology of the poem as a modernist artwork, that is, the poem's status as an object bearing a distinctly sensuous intelligibility that is irreducible to, yet necessarily bound up with, the historical development of theoretical knowledge. As we have seen, "Moonshot Sonnet" exemplifies Solt's attention to this dialectical relationship between the aesthetic and the theoretical. And by the time Solt discovers concretism, Férreira Gullar has penned his 1959 "Neo-Concrete Manifesto," a Brazilian critique of *Noigandres* that foreshadows and dramatizes these broader concerns about the ontology of artworks. Gullar rejects "concrete art taken to a dangerously rationalist exacerbation," and argues that

> rationalism robs art of its autonomy and substitutes notions of scientific objectivity for the non-transferable qualities of the artwork: thus the concepts of form, space, time, structure—which in the language of the arts are linked to an existential, emotive, affective meaning—are confounded with the theoretical application that science makes of them.[32]

Such concrete art, that is, tries to collapse into an identity the historically-contingent relation of artists' intuitive-sensory work to the theoretical-propositional work of the philosopher or the engineer. Gullar sets *Noigandres* in his sights when he denounces the "rationalist concrete poets who likewise pose the imitation of the machine as an artistic ideal" (274). As we have seen, this posture tries to evacuate the concretist poem of intuition and expression by understanding it on the model of the signal-transmitting machine, a "useful object" embedded in the commodified circuits of a capitalist mass culture. Gullar's contention, then, is that while theoretical

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[32] Ferreira Gullar, "Neo-Concrete Manifesto," in *Arte Construtiva No Brasil*, ed. Aracy A. Amaral (Dórea Books and Art, 1998), 270–75. Translation aided by Nicholas Brown.

commitments like those of *Noigandres* can lead to mechanistic and etiolated aesthetic production, they are secondary to the works themselves, which can overcome the "limits imposed by theory" by unifying form and content into a meaningful whole that evokes conviction independent of any external, theoretical criterion.[33]

The difference Gullar asserts in the "Neo-Concrete Manifesto" is, as Nicholas Brown argues, "the difference between the concretist understanding of art as a carrier of information, and the neo-concretist thematization of interpretation as an unavoidable entailment of aesthetic autonomy."[34] Thus Gullar's "Manifesto" confronts us in 1959 with a specifically concretist version of the line between art and objecthood that Fried draws in his 1967 critique of theatricality in minimalism.[35] And Fried's line between art and objecthood is more substantially the line between the autonomous artwork and the mere art commodity. Thus Gullar's and Fried's defenses of modernist formalism—in Brazilian neo-concretism and U.S. abstract expressionism, respectively—constitute a defense of the instrumentally useless immanent purposiveness that

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[33] Gullar makes this point in a phenomenological idiom influenced by Merleau-Ponty: "We conceive the work of art neither as 'machine' nor as 'object,' but as a quasi-corpus, that is, a being whose reality does not exhaust itself in the exterior relations of its elements: a being that, while decomposable into its parts by analysis, only fully gives itself to a direct, phenomenological approach. We believe that the work of art surpasses the material mechanism on which it rests, not by some extraterrestrial virtue, but by transcending precisely these mechanical relations (which their *Gestalt* makes objective) and by creating for itself a tacit signification (Merleau-Ponty) that emerges in it for the first time" (270–75). Translation aided by Nicholas Brown.

[34] Nicholas Brown, "Hélio Oiticica, Tropical Hyperion," *nonsite.org* 25 (October 2018), https://nonsite.org/article/helio-oiticica-tropical-hyperion.

[35] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72.

marks the work of art as the unemphatic other to a world of useful objects produced, above all, to sell on the market. Gullar's "Neo-Concrete" aesthetic is therefore less of a revolutionary break from concretism than it is a recognition of modernism's ontology of the self-legislating artwork.[36]

Returning now to *The Peoplemover,* Solt puts Williams's "idiom" to the test of aesthetic practice, rather than theoretical investigation, and in direct relation to concretist technique. She refers to Williams's "search for the American idiom" in her foreword and recalls composing the libretto with the conviction that "there must be an authentic, fragmented poem in the utterances of the people deeply involved in the events of 1968." Solt tries to achieve this "poem" by imposing a fragmentary prosodic and spatial arrangement onto speech acts quoted from across American history (e.g., fig. 7).

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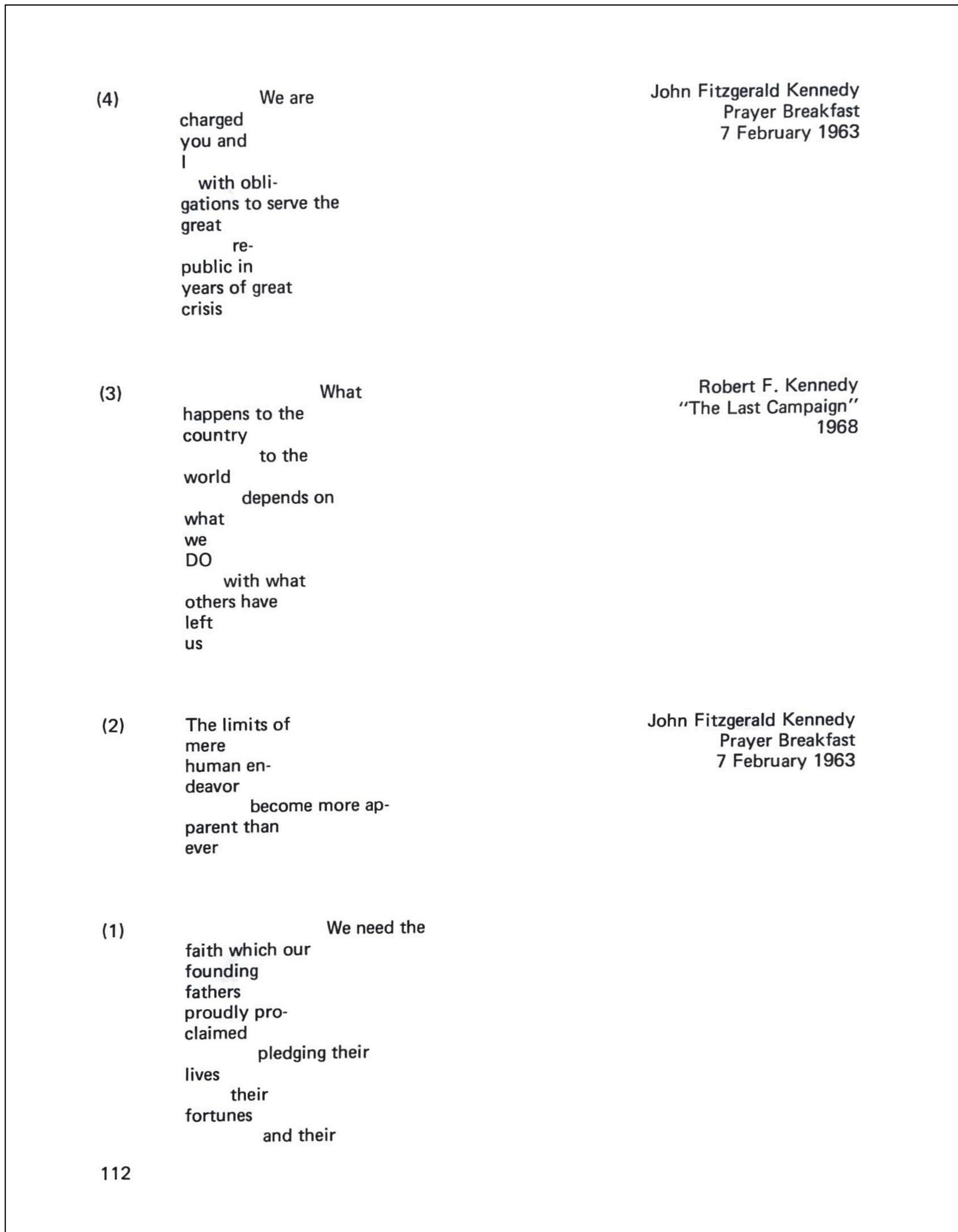
[36] There is, however, an important difference between the political-economic situations in which Gullar and Fried mount their defenses of the autonomous artwork. In both situations commodification is an implicit problem for the artwork, but each presents different conditions of class struggle. The key question is whether the class coalition shaping the ideological hegemony of a given national-political context can plausibly claim to stand for the universal interest and therefore constitute an essentially revolutionary rather than reactionary political formation. In the mid-to-late-twentieth century, in contrast to the capitalist core, pre-coup Brazil actually has a progressive political formation that includes anti-imperialist (because anti-competitive) factions of the bourgeoisie. So compared to the bourgeois audience for Fried's abstract expressionism, the bourgeois audience for Gullar's neo-concretism poses less of a problem. The overstated but intriguing claim here would be that while the bourgeois art of the capitalist core rejects its audience in the late-nineteenth century (and subsequently re-embraces its audience in revolutionary movements like that of Constructivism), the capitalist periphery produces progressive political hegemonies later into the twentieth century, which in turn produces forms of autonomy in which the relation of work to beholder proves more ambivalent. See Roberto Schwarz, "Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964-1969," in *Misplaced Ideas* (London: Verso, 1992), 126–59; Brown, "Lukács/Fried."



(4) We are
charged
you and
I
with obli-
gations to serve the
great
re-
public in
years of great
crisis

John Fitzgerald Kennedy
Prayer Breakfast
7 February 1963

(3) What
happens to the
country
to the
world
depends on
what
we
DO
with what
others have
left
us

Robert F. Kennedy
"The Last Campaign"
1968

(2) The limits of
mere
human en-
deavor
become more ap-
parent than
ever

John Fitzgerald Kennedy
Prayer Breakfast
7 February 1963

(1) We need the
faith which our
founding
fathers
proudly pro-
claimed
pledging their
lives
their
fortunes
and their

112

Figure 7. Mary Ellen Solt, page 112 of *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[37]

[37] Numbers on the left margin indicate the four speakers, identified in the performance notes as "(1) White Man," "(2) White Woman," "(3) Black Woman," and "(4) Black Man" (P, 3).

The libretto consists of short and occasionally indented lines which, like Williams's later poems that use indentation but do not conform to the triadic structure of the stepped-line,[38] seem intent on creating a visual form whose movement is, as Williams puts it, "distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises."[39] Solt's use of indentation seems to notate pauses that convey the oratorical intensity of the libretto's collage of political rhetoric. And while a detailed metrical analysis of the libretto might prove fruitful, its relation to *The Peoplemover*'s dramatic form as a whole actually makes the possibility of its poetic success fundamentally ambiguous. This is because while Williams's "idiom" consists in an inventive tension between the way a poem sounds (authentic American speech patterns) and the way a poem looks (the line break as the rhythmic event), the libretto's extensive stage directions demand a performance that pulls the text off the page. The libretto demands to be interpreted like a musical score but has no notative structure: despite Solt's aspiration to the distinctly visual poetics of Williams's "idiom," the libretto's appearance on the page only ambiguously suggests a relation to its ultimately non-visual meaning as a spoken part of the "demonstration poem."

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[38] Williams's "Two Pendants: For the Ears" (1949) and "Choral: The Pink Church" (1949) exemplify this more intuitive approach to the stepped-line. Solt describes how she arrived at concrete poetry through her study of this particular aspect of Williams' form in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 53–54.

[39] William Carlos Williams, "Introduction to The Wedge," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69410/introduction-to-the-wedge. Solt cites this 1949 essay in her account of how Williams departs from triadic structure in search of more intuitive form (*Toward a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, 144). It is also worth noting that Williams's account of the poem in this chapter resonates with Gullar's account of the artwork. Both Williams and Gullar, that is, are committed to the artwork's internally organized or intrinsic form and this form's irreducibility to external theoretical or metaphysical criteria.

Solt's posters pose a concretist solution to this ambiguity generated by the libretto because, within the dramatic whole of the work, they stand in for the libretto's visual aspect. Held aloft and manipulated by demonstrators milling around the stage, the posters simply are how the poem looks, but as such, they relate only to the libretto's historiographic content and not to its metrical form. So apart from its relation to the posters, *The Peoplemover*'s libretto is theatrical: without a coherent internal organization, it is a literalistic collage of American political discourse that does not convincingly hold on its own.[40] This means that Solt's attempt at the "American idiom" produces a redundancy that dramatizes the immanent purposiveness of the work's "demonstration" form while sewing theatricality within it. This theatrical aspect of *The Peoplemover* hangs together with the work's attempt to concretize the events of 1968: an attempt that proves intrinsically related to the pressure of commodification on the artwork's capacity to assert meaning.

III. The American Spectacle

Part III of *The Peoplemover* develops its "demonstration" form's relation to commodification by

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[40] The libretto ultimately approaches the "American idiom" in the spirit of musical transcription and, as a result, falls short of achieving a poetics on par with that of Williams's "idiom." Which is to say that Solt's found-poetry approach to the libretto produces a literalistic sense of transcription because its "structural use of space" is generally insufficient to transform political speechwriting and prose pulled from the archive into convincing poetry. Another reason for the libretto's transcriptive form may be Solt's predilection for music. In a phone conversation with the author on July 7, 2021, Susan Solt described how Mary Ellen Solt first developed a notion of signification from musical notation and trained as a pianist. It seems to follow that once Solt completed *The Peoplemover*, she made only one more work of concrete poetry, *Marriage: A Code Poem* (1976), before departing from words altogether and working on music.

taking up the Poor People's Campaign (PPC). A multiracial movement for economic justice organized by Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the PPC marches on Washington in 1968 and constructs a protest camp called "Resurrection City" on the National Mall. *The Peoplemover*'s turn to the PPC suggests a mediation of the political contradiction between force and diplomacy developed in Part II because, as King notes in 1967, the PPC is a "middle ground between riots on the one hand and timid supplications for justice on the other."[41] More than this, however, Part III marks a shift from an emphasis on aspects of the Civil Rights Movement that fight against discriminatory inequality to an emphasis on the PPC's fight against market-generated class inequality. For while the Civil Rights Movement's emphasis on desegregation, the right to vote, and affirmative action poses no immediate threat to liberal capitalism's reproduction of class-based inequality, the PPC's platform is rooted in a universalist principle of decommodification that fundamentally challenges the market.[42]

When *The Peoplemover* takes up the PPC, the historicity of its neo-avant-gardiste tension between art and anti-art—immanently purposive "demonstration" and theatrical demonstration—emerges with more clarity in relation to the commodity form. A performer recites a line from an eighteenth-century petition for fair taxes—"The poor inhabitants in / general / are / much op- /

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[41] Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Workshop on Civil Disobedience at SCLC staff retreat, 29 November 1967. See https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/poor-peoples-campaign.

[42] The PPC demanded an economic bill of rights with five planks: "A meaningful job at a living wage," "A secure and adequate income for all those unable to find or do a job," "Access to land" for economic uses, "Access to capital for poor people and minorities to promote their own businesses," and the "Ability for ordinary people to "play a truly significant role in the government." Amy Nathan Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign," PhD diss., (University of Texas, 2007), 195–96, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/3230.

press'd" (25) as a demonstrator flips the poster displayed throughout Part II to reveal its back-ideogram (fig. 8).

Figure 8. Mary Ellen Solt, "For MARTIN LUTHER KING" poster and "RESURRECTION CITY" back-ideogram in *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[43]

[43] 32 x 40 in. Front: wood type letters printed in black and white on rice paper pasted on green poster board. Back: Human handprints and footprints in red, black, yellow, and white on green poster board; lattice wood painted with black acrylic enamel.

This ideogram distills themes of poverty and class struggle into graphic form. Its superimposition of multi-colored—multiracial—handprints on black, rectilinear scaffolding depicts a blockage or distance between these hands and the square toward which they grasp. The green background evokes Resurrection City's location on the National Mall and footprints along the sides suggest passersby whose measured steps contrast with the hands' assembled urgency. Accordingly, the back-ideogram's display coincides with excerpts from a Robert Kennedy speech decrying public ambivalence and ignorance toward poverty (26).

As in all of *The Peoplemover* posters, an ideographic handling of back scaffolding produces a literal and instrumentalizing effect. Yet in the context of the thematic emergence of the market as *The Peoplemover* shifts from the Civil Rights Movement to the PPC, the back-scaffolding's literalism immediately appears here as an index of the commodity form's concrete dimension: use value. For at the same time as this is the most abstract of Solt's back-ideograms, it is also the most concrete: it is as if the hands grasp for a frame that frames at once nothing and everything. Solt thematizes the material support of her "demonstration" here not just in terms of the literal, merely given aspect of sign handles but in terms of the mute compulsion of market-mediated social necessity that animates class struggle. The black square of scaffolding that the hands reach for is the least depictive form to appear in any of the posters' back-ideograms because it represents the material supports for human life—the socially necessary use values—that the market's labor-abstracting absolutization of exchange value structurally forces the working poor to obtain by fighting among themselves or by organizing as a whole to fight capitalist exploitation. Indeed, this black square is not only the least depictive back ideogram in

The Peoplemover, it is also the only one to be set in direct pictorial relation to a depictive element: the grasping hands. Indeed, these hands' superimposition over and before the resolutely literal black square of scaffolding disrupts the two-sided structure—with back-ideograms composed entirely of scaffolding made from extensions of the posters' sign handles—that otherwise remains consistent throughout all of *The Peoplemover*.[44] Through this disruption of the semantic/material problematic that structures its "demonstration" form, *The Peoplemover* tries to express, within the terms it sets for itself, how the PPC poses a potential disruption to liberal capitalism's market-mediated reproduction of the commodity form.

The PPC, however, ends up disrupting very little. Life in Resurrection City is mostly a disorganized mess, and by late June of 1968, police evict its inhabitants and destroy their structures.[45] The Johnson administration can easily ignore the PPC's economic demands because the campaign wields little economic power. The PPC approaches the state as lobbyists with the symbolic power of prominent Civil Rights leaders and a protest camp. As if enacting the inevitable foreclosure of the PPC's radical intentions, the "RESURRECTION CITY" ideogram

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[44] In a phone conversation with the author on July 6th, 2021, Mary Ellen Solt's daughter Susan Solt recalled helping her mother make *The Peoplemover* posters. Susan described how on the back of the original "For MARTIN LUTHER KING" poster, handprints are not superimposed on the back-ideogram. According to Susan, it would have been physically difficult to place a hand-print over the painted wood scaffolding. There was little room for error in the making of this poster because the process of hand- and foot-printing was a one-shot effort choreographed by Mary Solt, who wanted to see the texture of hands and feet in the oil-based ink being used. This means that the superimposition of handprints over the back ideogram emerged later, when Solt made the 1970 silkscreen edition of the posters in close collaboration with Alvin Doyle Moore of Finial Press.

[45] Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business,'" 462-98.

is quickly turned away from the audience. With the front of the poster again visible, excerpts from King's rousing but less radical "I Have a Dream" speech—thematizing abstractions of "freedom" and "heaven" instead of concrete economic transformations—are read in the call-and-response manner of a sermon for the remainder of Part III (27–35). This dissolve of the PPC's fleeting Left-radicalism into struggles more removed from political-economic transformation continues throughout *The Peoplemover*'s next four parts (37–84), which incorporate themes concerning the Vietnam War, the 1968 presidential election, and the Robert Kennedy assassination into its "demonstration" form (e.g., figs. 9 and 10).

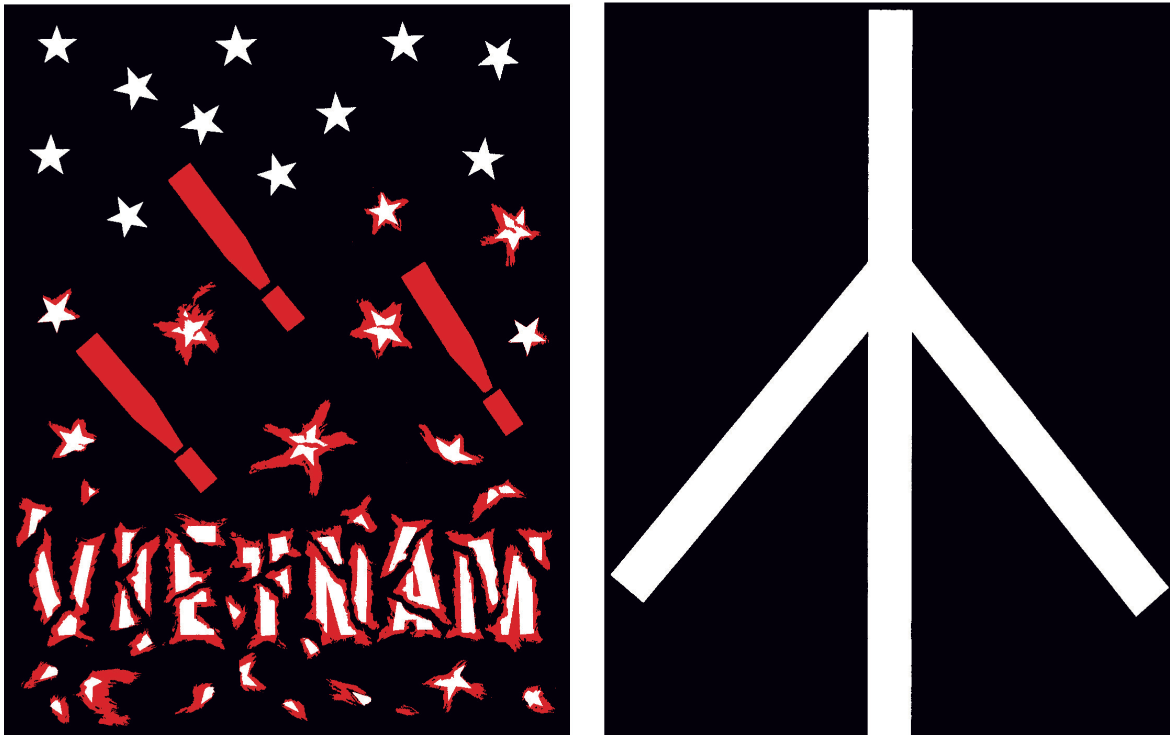

Figure 9. Mary Ellen Solt, "VIETNAM" poster and "JET PEACE" back-ideogram in *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[46]

[46] 40 x 32 1/2 in. Front: wood-type letters and exclamation marks printed in red and white on rice paper pasted on black poster board along with cut white-inked and torn red-inked rice paper. Back: lattice wood painted with white acrylic enamel on black poster board.

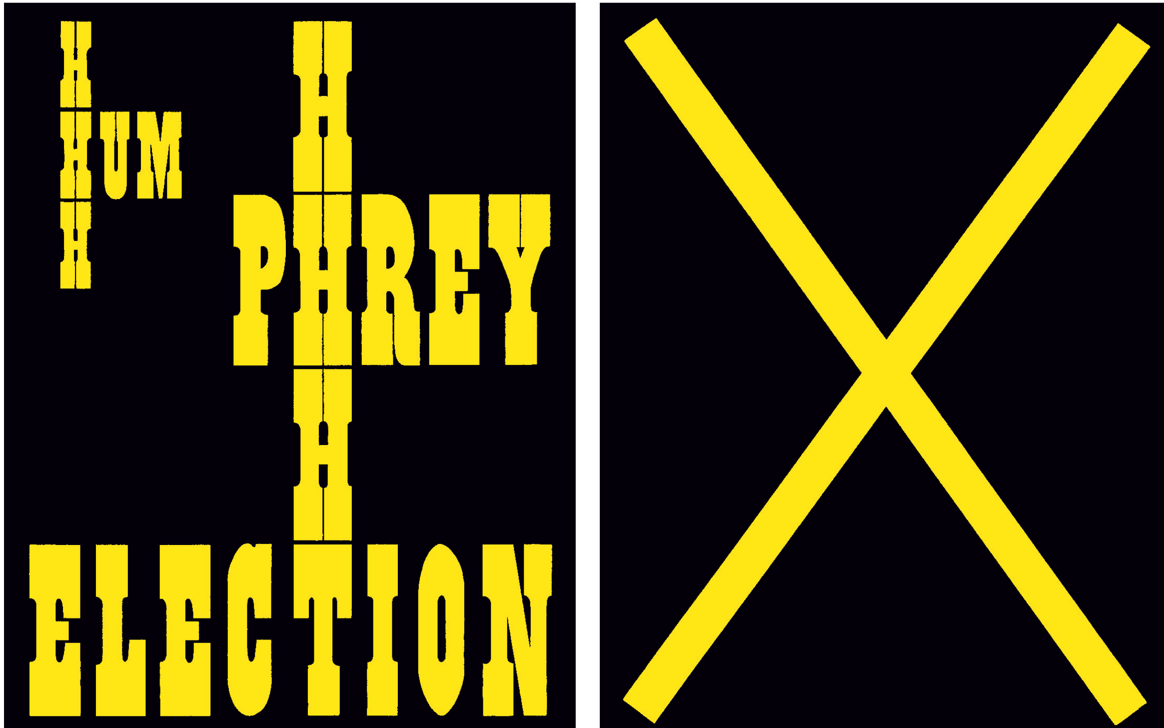

Figure 10. Mary Ellen Solt, "HUBERT HORATIO HUMPHREY" poster and "VOTER'S X" back-ideogram in *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[47]

A demonstrator reveals the "JET PEACE" back-ideogram, for example, after a Robert Kennedy speech declaring the "mis- / guided / policies" of the war to be "at / root a / question / of the / national / soul" (44). Moralistic symbolism continues as a Lincoln excerpt accompanies this ideogram and concludes Part IV with an invocation of "the / better / angels / of / our / nature" (45).

The penultimate part VIII presents a long excerpt from a speech Robert Kennedy gives the day after King's assassination (87-93). Kennedy means to placate riots erupting around the country, and the poster accompanying this speech excerpt uses typographical manipulations to

[47] 28 x 22 in. Front: wood-type letters printed in yellow on rice paper posted on black poster board. Back: lattice wood painted with yellow acrylic enamel on black poster board.

render explicit the triumph of liberal capitalism in 1968 (fig. 11).

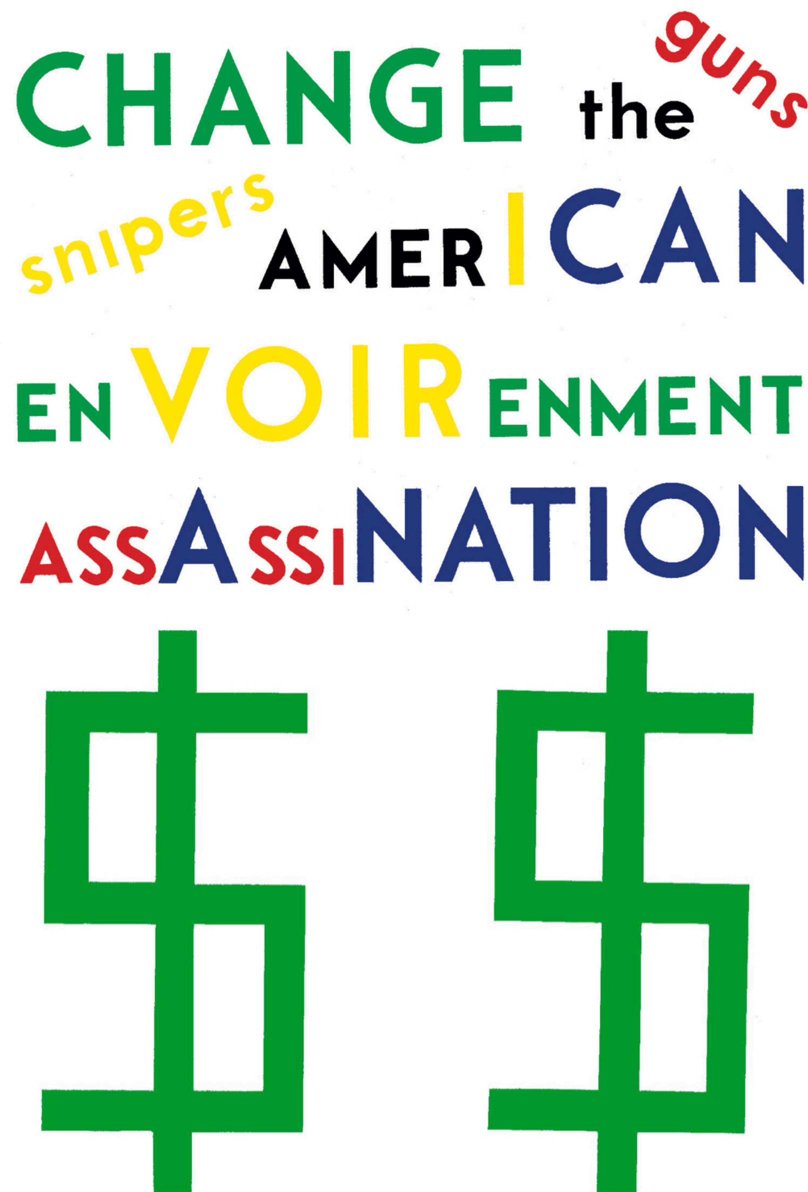

Figure 11. Mary Ellen Solt, "AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT" poster and "DOLLARS" back-ideogram in *The Peoplemover*, 1978.[48]

[48] 32 x 40 in. Front: Cardboard letters painted with green, red, yellow, black, and blue acrylic enamel on white poster board. Back: lattice wood painted with green acrylic enamel on white poster board.

By saturating the command “change the American environment” with colorful homonymic play about the assassinations of 1968 that, from King to Kennedy, likewise saturate mass media, this poster presents a pastiche—and set in Futura, something of a caricature—of *Noigandres* technique. Part VIII concludes when readers shout “CHANGE AMERICAN DOLLARS” in unison to pun the qualitative “change” on the poster’s front into the quantitative and monetary. At the same time, a demonstrator reverses the poster, and its “DOLLARS” back-ideogram draws us into the register of Guy Debord’s 1967 provocation that “spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes image.”[49] With this evocation of the work of art’s subsumption under the commodity form, the “AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT” marks the arrival of *The Peoplemover*’s immanent development at “the world of fantasy and fake history” surveyed by its namesake, the Disneyland conveyance. Part VIII, in other words, explicitly links *The Peoplemover* posters’ two-sided structure to the commodity form[50] and illuminates the aesthetic overlap between DeBordian spectacle and the information theory central to *Noigandres* concretism: both aim for the production of sure-fire or infallible effects—consumer titillation and signal reproduction from one point to another—that have nothing necessarily to do with meaning but instead, in a market-subsumed context, with quantitative concerns of efficiency and profit.

Gone are the grasping hands that, in “RESURRECTION CITY,” broke into the austere and formalistic fields of *The Peoplemover*’s back-ideograms. These hands only fleetingly inflect

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[49] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1994), 24.

[50] The 2010 edition of OEI Magazine includes color plates of the entire 1970 silkscreen edition of the *Peoplemover* posters. Remarkably, the OEI editors chose to bookend these plates with the front and back of the “AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT” poster, as if to subsume the rest of the work within its explicit reflection on the commodity form.

the posters' art-institutional problematic of semantic content and material support that, by this point, Solt has explicitly rendered immanent to the commodity form. Thus, one of the foremost means by which resistance to the market appears to gain popular and institutional momentum in 1968 registers as a blip—the desperately grasping hands of the PPC—in a narrative whose endpoint in Part VIII is an acknowledgement of the cultural field's heteronomy to the market. Indeed, retrospectively, Solt's depictive superimposition of these multi-colored hands over and before the resolutely literal black square of scaffolding allegorizes a political horizon of decommodification because it asserts that the square of scaffolding is not merely the non-depictive material support of the poster, and, in turn, that use-value is not merely the material support of exchange-value—as appears to be the case in Part VIII. Naturally, these hands are a thematization (depicted use-value) and not a literalization (actual use) of the historical avant-garde's project of dissolving the institution of art into a revolutionary social field because such a social field never emerges in the U.S. in 1968. Which is another way of stating the obvious: *The Peoplemover* is an experimental poem circulated within a field of restricted production and it is not—although it is about the idea of—a work of propaganda put to popular and revolutionary use in the streets. The political field in which *The Peoplemover* imagines itself circulating—the political field, that is, represented by its "demonstration" form—ultimately looks like the market.

The historicity of *The Peoplemover*'s peculiar form of market architecture lies in the way that its neo-avant-gardisme reflects on its own immanence to the commodity form and, for a moment—albeit a moment quickly foreclosed—tries to look beyond this immanence. For in the absence of a revolutionary social field and its concrete political alternatives to the neoliberal

marketization imminent in 1968, the avant-gardiste aim to merge art and life can only result in the theatricality of the commodity. We have seen how *The Peoplemover* tries to organize both this neo-avant-gardiste aim and a critical reflection on market heteronomy within the market architecture "demonstration" form. For not only does Solt's attempt at achieving the "American idiom" amount to little more than a graphically embellished recitation of political speechwriting; she also expresses a recognition of her neo-avant-gardiste work's immanence to the commodity form in her framing reference to Disneyland's Peoplemover conveyance: literally the material support for a capital-valorizing *Gesamptkunstwerk*.[51] Solt's "demonstration," then, entails a contradictory commitment to both the anti-art theatricality of political performance art and the art-institutional problematic of concretely mediating the visual and verbal within an immanently purposive work. *The Peoplemover* produces a critical standpoint on this neo-avant-gardiste contradiction because its "demonstration" form generates a meaning that is precisely about the pressure of commodity-theatricality—that is to say meaninglessness—on the cultural formation of the neo-avant-garde.

At a higher level of abstraction, we can link Solt's critical neo-avant-gardisme to the predicament of the New Left vis-à-vis institutions and the market. Many have told the story of this predicament, in which fragmentary New-Left protest politics emerge in the 60s largely as an accommodation rather than a challenge to neoliberalism's imminent onslaught of marketization.

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[51] Adorno and Max Horkheimer suggest that Wagner's *Gesamptkunstwerk* is the precursor to television's "alliance of word, image, and music," and identify this pursuit of aesthetic totality with the unification of technical processes that is the "triumph of invested capital." Disneyland, then, breaks this capitalist aesthetic through the fourth wall of the television screen. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 124.

The New Left's strategic leveling of liberal fights (for equality of opportunity in market-driven institutions) with social-democratic and ultimately socialist fights (for revolutionizing market-driven institutions according to principles of decommodification and redistribution) has, as illustrated by the unprecedented inequality and decimated union density of the early-twenty-first century, overseen the wholesale sacrifice of institutions to the market. Whether the weight of this story's analysis falls on the concrete history of agents engaged in class struggle,[52] on these agents' subjection to abstract involutions of the capitalist value form,[53] or on the macroeconomic articulation of these standpoints,[54] the market's absolutization of value as the external criterion for social life has largely emerged victorious over the immanent criteria of institutions. So, looking back on 1968 from 1978, *The Peoplemover* concretizes certain aspects of this consequential historical conjuncture in the medium-specific terms of its ambivalent relation to modernism, at once collapsing its immanent purposiveness into life—which in the absence of a revolutionary social field dissolves entails a dissolution into market heteronomy—and ambivalently recontaining this dissolution within a concretist problematic that self-consciously inhabits the commodity form. In this way, *The Peoplemover* asserts a moment of aesthetic autonomy from within its neo-avant-garde "demonstration" form, whose heteronomy to the market it momentarily acknowledges as intrinsic to its problematic, and thus attempts to sublate

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[52] Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[53] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); and Neil Larsen et al., *Marxism and the Critique of Value* (Chicago: MCM, 2014).

[54] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

in the unemphatic, formalist term of modernist fiction's market architecture.

By the final part IX, however, the architecture of Solt's fictional protest collapses because there is no graphic counterpoint to the libretto apart from four cubes on sticks that spell out "1968" (95). Solt's "American idiom," unsuccessful in itself but formally intrinsic, overwhelms her "demonstration" form as the longest arrangement of speech excerpts yet—collaging Eisenhower, Lincoln, Washington, King, and so on—burgeons with rhetoric about crisis, responsibility, and rejuvenation (95–113).[55] Demonstrators continue to march around the stage from which the readers perform this drawn-out recitation of phrases from great American politicians. As if reaching for a notion of American identity in over-accumulated political rhetoric while also, and perhaps inadvertently, staging the abstract emptiness of this identity, *The Peoplemover* concludes with a shout of "Let us move / PEOPLE" and the instruction to play "music suitable to the patriotic occasion" (113). As performers merge with the audience in an all-encompassing demonstration, the autonomy of Solt's "demonstration" cedes to the theatricality of her attempt at the "American idiom." Thus, while Solt's "demonstration" form critically

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[55] The 2013 project *WIR SPIELEN (WE PLAY)* exemplifies the theatricality of Solt's libretto by trying to produce a "demonstration poem" adequate to 2013. Described as "an experiment with an open outcome, a collective writing of a theater play in 5 acts," the work was developed and performed at The New Society of Visual Arts in Berlin and seems to be the only significant contemporary engagement with Solt's *Peoplemover* apart from OEI Magazine's 2010 issue on Solt. The work is a collectively-produced textual collage modeled on Solt's libretto, but without any posters. Solt's "demonstration" form, in other words, loses the dramatic visual dimension through which it courts theatricality and attempts to recontain it within a formal problematic. The epigraph of *WIR SPIELEN (WE PLAY)* is worth quoting: "What is 'we'? What would 'we' do? Is collective work still a political standpoint? A marketing strategy? A failed project? A necessity for our survival? How would a demonstration poem look like today?" "WIR SPIELEN (WE PLAY)," accessed June 28, 2021, https://wirspielen.tumblr.com/publication.

embodies the historical logic of certain mediations between art and politics in the 1968 U.S., the ultimate dissolution of its formal architecture is both an aesthetic shortcoming and an artifact of foreclosed political hope. That is, Solt's attempt at the "American idiom" does not hold on its own, and in the context of the early- to mid-1970s when Solt writes the libretto, it seems to be a naive reaction to the center-right patriotism of Nixon and his "Silent Majority."[56] Thus, in the absence of a revolutionary social field, *The Peoplemover* ultimately opens to the contingent responses of its milling beholders, "liberating" the complex senses of 1968 that emerge through its "demonstration" form just as the market "liberates" the consumer of commodified culture with calls to participate, make your voice heard, and demonstrate.

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[56] See Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle," in *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 125–66.

4. The Modernist Sequel: History as Product Iteration

> I won't join the collective / But I want to see you / I wanna tell you / About the memories
>
> Kim Gordon[1]

Jennifer Egan's 2022 sequel novel *The Candy House* opens in 2010 and follows Bix Bouton, the world-renowned founder of a social media corporation called Mandala, as he struggles to chart a new path for his empire of digital connectivity.[2] In Egan's 2010 predecessor to *The Candy House*, *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* Bix briefly appears as a PhD student in electrical engineering.[3] But now, in the sequel, Bix's "original Vision—that luminous sphere of interconnection" has become "the business of Mandala," and he senses a "suggestive edge in the middle distance of his mental landscape, beyond which his next vision lay in wait" (12-13). As Egan elaborates this image of a "suggestive edge" into a "blank curtain" and, in turn, an "Anti-Vision" whose "whiteness" is "not a substance but an absence," Bix's impasse comes to resemble the recalcitrant page, or screen, of writer's block. Bix's entrepreneurial predicament comes to resemble that of Egan's sequel writing.

What does this metafictional opening gambit mean? Like Bix's social media network, *Goon Squad* is a formidable achievement to follow up. Generally recognized as having broken new ground for the novel in an age of digital social media and the rampant commodification of

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[1] Kim Gordon, vocalist, "The Candy House," by Kim Gordon and Justin Raisen, track 2 in *The Collective*, Matador, 2024.

[2] Jennifer Egan, *The Candy House* (New York: Scribner, 2022), 6.

[3] Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 186.

literary production,[4] *Goon Squad* intricately collages short stories—each of which focalizes a different character or characters through distinct prose styles and, at points, through recognizably generic forms like a PowerPoint presentation. The result is a sweeping, non-linear novel about the culture industry's digital revolution, from the 1960s to the near-future of the 2020s. While Egan and her critics have likened *Goon Squad*'s form to a prog-rock concept album or a television series,[5] Lee Konstantinou argues that "Egan's stories mimic the form of an online social network, disbursed across time, reimagining the form of the novel as a sort of Facebook wall, indulging in the potent fantasy of rediscovering the lives of old, lost friends who are, it turns out, all connected to one another in delightfully unexpected ways" (260). Writing before the publication of *The Candy House*, Konstantinou intuits the "luminous sphere of interconnection" that will, in the sequel, loom retrospectively for Bix—and, metafictionally, for Egan—as both a condition of creative possibility and foreclosure of it. Indeed, while Konstantinou's sense of *Goon Squad*'s social-media allegory is suggestive, it is more concretely applicable to understanding how *The Candy House* works as its sequel. This chapter explores the

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[4] Brown, *Autonomy,* 103-14; David Cowart, "Thirteen Ways of Looking: Jennifer Egan's A Visit from the Goon Squad," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 56, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 241–54; Adam Kelly, "Jennifer Egan, New Sincerity, and the Genre Turn in Contemporary Fiction," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 15, no. 2 (July 1, 2021): 151–70; Lee Konstantinou, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 259-70; Ivan Kreilkamp, *A Visit from the Goon Squad Reread* (Columbia University Press, 2021), Alexander Moran, *Understanding Jennifer Egan* (U of South Carolina Press, 2021).

[5] James Warner, "Jennifer Egan and the Extraneous Center," *Berfrois* (blog), July 5, 2011, https://www.berfrois.com/2011/07/jennifer-egans-concept-album/; Michael Szalay, "The Author as Executive Producer," in *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, ed. Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 259.

literary-historical stakes of how Egan's sequel innovates on its predecessor by realizing the form nascent within it.

Konstantinou's punning of "dispersed across time" into "disbursed across time" aptly conflates fragmentary narrative expansion with value expansion. This conflation is central to how both *Goon Squad* and *The Candy House* make sense of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century culture-industrial processes, ideologies, modes of interpersonal experience, and forms of perception they narrate. For *The Candy House* broadly repeats its predecessor's approach to narrative collage by weaving its tightly composed fragments into *Goon Squad*'s historical ambit and slightly beyond it, up to the 2030s. One consequence of this formal repetition is that from the standpoint of a sociological critique of market culture, these novels may appear to be the same thing: a collection of eminently publishable or TV-transposable vignettes, each with finely wrought dialogue, clever flashes of social commentary, and a strong emotional payoff. *Goon Squad*'s principle of fragmentary narrative expansion may appear, that is, to be simply a principle of value expansion that *The Candy House* doubles down on: narrative dispersal as a means of commercial disbursal. It is from this sociological standpoint that Michael Szalay reads *Goon Squad* "as a version of 1990s management literature" opportunistically oriented toward an HBO remake (257). And, in comparably sociological but more interpretively nuanced terms, Konstantinou explores *Goon Squad*'s "equivocation about self-branding" (263) to argue that "Egan has turned the complexities of selling out, via the use of formerly stigmatized commodity forms, into the very form of her art" (26).

In contrast to Szalay and Konstantinou's diagnostic modes of sociological contextualization, Brown takes a more immanent approach to *Goon Squad.* Unfolding what Konstantinou calls "the very form of [Egan's] art" in terms that are primarily aesthetic and only secondarily sociological, Brown contends that *Goon Squad*'s artistic originality lies in how it draws the fragmented, commercial effectivity of its parts into the self-legislating whole of an autonomous artwork (104-14). Brown argues that it is only the novel as a whole that, while unavoidably a commodity, asserts aesthetic autonomy through the immanent purposiveness of its form. Brown suggests that "the disjunction between short story and novel" in *Goon Squad* "is mapped onto the distinction between art commodity and artwork: the former fulfills its commercial purpose, while the latter exceeds it" (105). In this light, a contemporary writer like Egan can not only embrace the reification of commercial forms but also—in a modernist move we first encountered in chapter one's analysis of the fin-de-siècle emergence of an art of genre fiction—relativize such market capitulation within a medium-specific dialectic that, if successful, demonstrates the difference between a work that satisfies the demands of the market and a work that achieves its own aesthetic ends within and against that market.

The Candy House dramatizes how Egan's assertion of aesthetic autonomy in *Goon Squad* —and, indeed, any such assertion by a novel today—necessarily undergoes a phase shift into mere market appeal once the problem of following up the work with a sequel confronts its maker as a site of audience demand. This phase shift is the predicament that Egan metafictionally routes through Bix at the outset of *The Candy* House: if *Goon Squad* convinces because it is not just a collection of short stories but a "luminous sphere of interconnection," Egan seems to

acknowledge at the outset that *The Candy House* must further convince us that it is not just a sequel pandering to demand for more *Goon Squad*. It is crucial, in this respect, that *The Candy House*'s sequel-relation to *Goon Squad* resembles the relation of novelistic whole to short story that structures the first novel. For *The Candy House* might expand *Goon Squad*'s fictional world by collaging more scintillating vignettes into an expanded narrative arc, but this repetition of what had been *Goon Squad*'s means of asserting aesthetic autonomy risks appearing in its sequel as merely a marketing ploy. Unless, that is, Egan can subordinate *The Candy House*'s necessary repetition to an overarching innovation on its predecessor and, in this way, produce a market-architectural unity that exceeds the commercial utility of sequel writing. Honing in on this problem, I argue that *The Candy House* exemplifies how the thoroughly commodified form of the sequel has emerged as a modernist medium for today's formally ambitious novelist.

When a work like *Goon Squad* carves out a market niche, the possibility of capitalizing on this niche's generic horizon of readerly expectation by *writing another one* is not only a path of least resistance in the literary marketplace but also, this chapter argues, a source of artistic constraint that can capacitate modernist formal innovation. At a historical conjuncture in which a saturating market culture shapes our experience of narrative form around brand-recognition feedback loops—a phenomenon typified by the marketing strategy of the expanded universe—*The Candy House* exemplifies how the form of the sequel and, in turn, the generic premise are commercial problems of brand-recognitive composition that can become artistic problematics of self-legislating form. Representing historical process as genre-bound yet aesthetically convincing

product iteration, Egan's *modernist sequel* is an exemplary form of the market architecture that undergirds the twenty-first-century persistence of modernist fiction.

I. The Modernist Sequel

In making this argument about *The Candy House*, this chapter aims to clarify aspects of current debates about the contemporaneity of modernist fiction and its horizon of aesthetic autonomy.[6] Thus, before turning to a reading of Egan's sequel, I establish the historical and formal dimensions of the modernist sequel as a concept.[7] Immediately, the sequel is at most anathema and at least incidental to the concerns of canonical modernism. This is because sequel writing under capitalism is a distinctly commercial mode of literary production; its principle of repetitive expansion consolidates a market niche by appealing to audience demand. Yet a field of restricted production often let the early-twentieth-century novels of the modernist canon reject outright the

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[6] See Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges, eds., *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[7] Following Gérard Genette, we can distinguish between the "autographic" sequel that expands on an earlier work by the same author and thereby consolidates a claim to authorial property, and the "allographic" sequel that, by imitating and expanding on the work of another author, can take a wider range of more or less commercial forms. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1997), 206-7. And beyond Genette, we might further distinguish, within the "autographic" category, between "born" sequels that are intended, from the start, to be part of a series, and "discovered" sequels whose commercial-artistic impetus emerges after the fact of their predecessor's writing. That the modernist potential of the sequel's "autographic" and "discovered" form is the focus of this chapter does not exclude the possibility that other forms of sequel writing can likewise be modernist endeavors. That said, "autographic" sequels may be more conducive to the metafictional and sometimes autofictional reflexivity through which many modernist novels assert aesthetic autonomy.

demands of the literary marketplace. Thus, the notion of sequels to canonized modernist novels like *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway* is absurd because the sociological conditions of writers like Joyce and Woolf facilitated aesthetic commitments that held the self-sufficiency of the autonomous art novel to be broadly incompatible with the external dependence of novelistic world-expansion oriented by brand recognition.[8] So while *Ulysses* may be Joyce's sequel to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, it would be a stretch to argue that the former's status as a sequel is integral to its assertion of aesthetic autonomy.

But if a concept of the modernist sequel novel is more adequate to our present than to canonical, restricted-field modernism's early-twentieth-century conjuncture, how does this concept grasp the cultural logic of postmodernism that, on Jameson's influential account, emerges when "aesthetic production… has become integrated into commodity production generally?"[9] In general agreement with Jameson's diagnosis of this "integration" of artwork and commodity but diverging from his account of aesthetic autonomy, this chapter explores how aesthetic modernism persists within the market-subsumed conditions that prompt Jameson's

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[8] Accounts of the sequel form in literary studies unsurprisingly tend to privilege sociological contextualization over immanent interpretation. See Paul Vincent Budra and Betty A. Schellenberg, eds., *Part Two: Reflections on the Sequel* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998). In a brief but insightful essay, Marjorie Garber criticizes how this anthology generally valorizes the sequel as a progressive cultural technology. Garber argues that sequels are an inferior cultural form because they pander—on the demand side, to nostalgic repetition and, on the supply side, to the profit motive. Garber, *Quotation Marks* (Routledge, 2016), 73-81.

[9] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), 4.

diagnosis of postmodernism.[10] It is worth dwelling on how Jameson elaborates the above claim about aesthetic production and commodity production; he continues: "the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (*Postmodernism*, 4-5). Jameson rather quickly conflates aesthetic innovation with marketing. In contrast, the concept of the modernist sequel elaborated here attends to how modernist aesthetic innovation can be objectively conflated with the "novel-seeming" logic of the culture commodity yet nonetheless assert its autonomy from it by achieving a self-legislating responsiveness to medium-specific interpretive attention. In *The Candy House*, medium-specific matters of focalization, plot, character, style, etc., take on meaning relative to each other only insofar as they reroute matters of the novel's historical content and context—like the generic and iterative pressures of the literary marketplace and novel reading's gradual supersession by social-media browsing—into a sensuously intelligible whole that works on its own terms. Thus, under conditions in which it is Jamesonian common sense that "aesthetic production… has become integrated into commodity

[10] When Jameson dismisses aesthetic autonomy as an anachronistic ideology, his object of critique is predominantly variations on Kantian aesthetic experience in twentieth-century modernist criticism rather than the Hegelian notion of fine art as the sensuous embodiment of determinate negativity. Yet, always the Hegelian, Jameson advocates a dialectical approach to aesthetic autonomy that refuses to abstract this modernist principle from broader social problematics of "culture" (*A Singular Modernity*, 176-78). Jameson's approach therefore resonates with that of this dissertation, even if he is skeptical of an affirmative reappraisal of aesthetic autonomy. On the relevance of Jameson's account of postmodernism yet the incompleteness of his apparent postmortem on the concept of aesthetic autonomy, see Nicholas Brown, "Late Postmodernism," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 22, no. 3 (2020): 12–13.

production generally," the market architecture of Egan's sequel novel—a Jamesian "candy house" of fiction, indeed—clues us in to one way that a modernist commitment to autonomous form can persist within the cultural logic of an ever-later capitalism.

If, as this dissertation argues at the outset, the emergence of modernism exhibits a historical complexity comparable to the emergence of capitalism as a mode of production, then it is illustrative rather than contradictory that at one possible, early-modern origin point of the novel, Miguel de Cervantes writes *Don Quixote,* part two. As William H. Hinrichs argues, the modern, distinctly commercial form of the sequel novel is there from the start.[11] But is it modernist? Cervantes banks on audience recognition in the emergent literary marketplace of his moment and inflects it into his sequel's diegesis, where the errant knight encounters characters who know him because they have read part one. Don Quixote's literary reputation, once merely Quixotic, becomes in this sequel the real grist for a metafictional mill through which Cervantes asserts his authorial property against proliferating forgeries. In this respect, *Don Quixote* stands as an early-modern forebear to the modernist sequel that interests us here. But, what sets a modernist sequel novel like Egan's apart from a proto-modernist novel like Cervantes's is analogous to what sets genre fiction apart from genre writing in general: market exposure. For under intensifying conditions of marketization, the artistic purpose of genre writing conflates with the commercial purpose of product differentiation. Likewise, the artistic purpose of sequel writing—which stretches back to the ancient form of the trilogy—conflates with the commercial

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[11] William H. Hinrichs, *The Invention of the Sequel: Expanding Prose Fiction in Early Modern Spain* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2011).

purpose of exploiting brand recognition. Thus, as the commodification of culture under capitalism renders genre writing and sequel writing commercially attractive enterprises, genre fiction emerges a tendency—more thoroughly structured by the brand-recognitive marketing logic of sequels—that increasingly fails to convince as art. Discerning readers sense that works of mere genre fiction and many sequels do not hold on their own, but depend excessively on something external to them: a horizon of consumer expectation carved out within a genre-bound market niche or, in the case of sequels, an author-bound market niche. This generic and iterative reification of literary production is not yet a force to be reckoned with at Cervantes's historical conjuncture. As we saw in chapter one, this force field of market heteronomy emerges in the fin-de-siècle period with the spread of a monopoly-capitalist sales effort in the field of culture, and, in what is known as the "genre turn" of contemporary literature, ascends to literary-cultural dominance.[12] Thus, while the proprietary irony of *Don Quixote*'s metafiction may intuit the modernist form of the sequel, it does so in bare outline—for it does not yet face a totalizing market for culture commodities. The ultimate point of sequel-iteration in *Don Quixote*'s meandering, picaresque narrative is the instrumental assertion of property rights, not the non-instrumental assertion of autonomous artistic form. The latter, aesthetic purpose of the sequel form will, I suggest, find its condition of possibility in the market-subsumed, sequel-proliferating conditions of the late-twentieth and twenty-first-century culture industry in neoliberal capitalism rather than in the nascent, early-modern literary marketplace or the small presses and magazines of canonical modernism's restricted field.

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[12] On the "genre turn," see note 53 in chapter one.

With this sketch of the modernist sequel's historical backdrop, we can now elaborate its formal dimensions with more precision. If the sweeping representation of historical process is more available to the novel as an artistic problem than to any other medium, and the modernist novel takes up this narrative-representational capaciousness with a commitment to asserting aesthetic autonomy through formal innovation, then the modernist sequel novel melds historiographic capacity and aesthetic innovation in the context of market exposure that exceeds that of canonical modernism and its field of restricted production. Today, the sprawling genre-fictional series of, for example, George R.R. Martin (not to mention the cinematic universes of blockbuster film and the essential seriality of streaming television) predominantly represent historical process as mere product iteration. These culture commodities are entertaining but generally unable to support immanent interpretation because their expansion of a fictional world is the consolidation of a market niche, a return on investment premised on consumer demand, rather than a modernist assertion of medium-specific immanent purposiveness. In contrast, the modernist sequel takes up iterative world expansion as an artistic problematic that is immanent but irreducible to a marketing strategy. The modernist sequel represents historical process as aesthetically convincing product iteration: in it, narrative expansion and value expansion sublate in sensuously intelligible form. Since the modernist sequel must produce aesthetic closure and self-sufficiency out of the open-ended instrumentality of product iteration, its criterion is a formal innovation novelistically derived out of an expansion on its predecessor.

This definition does not exclude the possibility of modernist sequels that innovate the form of the novel through non-linear narrative expansions; *The Candy House* includes several

chapters that function as prequels to storylines in *Goon Squad.* Nor does this definition exclude sequels whose narrative expansion appears disconnected from the broader unfolding of history. For example, neither Bret Eason Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005)—sequel to *American Psycho* (1991)—nor Rachel Cusk's *Transit* (2016)—sequel to *Outline* (2014)—exhibit the sweeping historiographic scope of Egan's novels. Rather, *Lunar Park* and *Transit* narrate their protagonists' intimate processes of individual and interpersonal development. In auto-fictional fashion, they scale down the novelistic representation of historical process to the level of each author's career trajectory. Thus, the inexorable flow of history still permeates these sequels, only in more indirect ways that nonetheless conflate narrative expansion and value expansion. While an adequate reading of these novels is beyond the scope of this chapter, as points of reference they bring the modernist sequel's space of artistic possibility into view.[13] We can begin to see, that is, how different social scales and, in turn, variable approaches to the historiographic capacity of the novel can shape how authors approach sequels' conflation of narrative expansion and value expansion. In *The Candy House*, Egan simultaneously repeats and transcends *Goon Squad* by means of a formal innovation that arises plausibly out of plot continuity. In this way,

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[13] To further sketch this space of artistic possibility: while Ellis's sequel holds on its own, Cusk's *Transit* and her third installment *Kudos* (2018) read as finely-wrought but ultimately derivative expansions of *Outline*. On one hand, *Lunar Park* innovates on *American Psycho*'s black-comedy allegory of consumerism by novelistically dissecting its own consumer demand as the latter's sequel. In short, *Lunar Park* ironically alloys the testimonial capacity of the mock-memoir with the cinematic soft-horror conventions of Stephen King to inhabit yet subvert *American Psycho*'s often vitriolic reception by recasting this external problem as an internal problem of narrative expansion. On the other hand, *Transit* and *Kudos* do not seem intent on innovating on *Outline*'s experiment in dialogically rendering its protagonist as a kind of negative space; across Cusk's two sequels, thematic variation tends to dress up mere formal repetition.

The Candy House exemplifies how the modernist sequel takes up the challenge of expanding a fictional world across discrete works as a distinctly market-subsumed problem of asserting medium-specific self-legislation.

To be clear, few—if any—canonical modernist novels are modernist sequels in the sense that interests us here. Series like Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-28), and Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy* (1947-50) are modernist novels insofar as they assert aesthetic autonomy through their innovation of novelistic form—but not insofar as they do so through the form of the sequel. The sequel form is incidental rather than integral to their novelistic modernism. John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-36), for example, comprises three sequential volumes, but the formal development that binds these volumes together consists solely in the unfolding of historical time along the horizontal axis of their plot and not in a concomitant development along the vertical axis, as it were, of their formal architecture as novels. So while the *U.S.A.* trilogy is a significant attempt to resuscitate the nineteenth-century form of the historical novel with canonical-modernist techniques like stream of consciousness and newspaper-clipping collage, it does not innovate, volume to volume, on the formal terms it sets itself. *The Candy House* takes on this formal challenge because—to an extent irrelevant to the more market-insulated novels of canonical modernism—it must convince us that it is not merely a sequel. That is, while *The Candy House* draws our attention to all that would make it succumb to being merely a sequel, it evokes conviction because at every moment that the commercial pressure of sequel writing is exerted, the novel subsumes this heteronomy within its self-legislating form.

The Candy House also thematizes its commitment to innovating novelistic form through an ironic pattern of reference to canonical modernism. In this respect, Egan seems to conform to what some critics have called "metamodernist" tendencies in contemporary art and literature.[14] However, the account of modernism's contemporaneity pursued here has more concretely interpretive priorities than the abstract schematizations of cultural production within which "metamodernism" is often deployed as a concept. That is, beyond cataloging instances of allusion or formal similarity to canonical modernism in works of contemporary fiction, the aim here is to interpret what these instances mean as formal aspects of these works and to clarify, in turn, some of the ways that the modernist horizon of aesthetic autonomy has been transformed by its market exposure within neoliberal capitalism.

II. A Frame, A Candy House of Fiction

Returning to the opening scene of *The Candy House* with which we started, Bix struggles to discern the "suggestive edge in the middle distance of his mental landscape, beyond which his

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[14] While "metamodernism" concepts vary in their criteria and coherence, they tend overall to be descriptive rather than explanatory let alone concretely interpretive. On one hand, for example, Timothy Vermeulen and Robin Van Den Akker use "metamodernism" as a periodizing term that, in reference to a wide range of theories and several artworks, relies on a claim that twenty-first-century artistic production oscillates between the totalizing seriousness of modernism and the ludic and fragmentary irreverence of postmodernism. Vermeulen and Van Den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, no. 1 (January 2010). On the other hand, David James and Urmila Seshagiri use "metamodernism" differently to describe how the early-twentieth-century modernist canon influences contemporary novel-writing and, in turn, to argue against the adoption of "modernism as a flexible posture rather than a fixed period." James and Seshagiri, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution," *PMLA* 129, no. 1 (2014): 90.

next vision lay in wait" (12-13). On a long walk through Manhattan, he finds a flyer for a discussion group at Columbia University and three weeks later, attends in disguise. The topic is "*Patterns of Affinity,*" a work of anthropology that proposes an algorithmic explanation of trust and influence, and Bix already knows all about it. It is this work's "Genome of Inclinations" that Bix infamously co-opted as the computational basis for Mandala, his social media corporation (9)—much as Egan, we can begin to see, appropriated the *New Yorker* vignette in *Goon Squad.* That is, where Bix has already changed the world by capitalizing on a social-scientific algorithm, Egan has already constructed the world of *Goon Squad* by orchestrating the finely-wrought clichés of the *New Yorker* yarn—algorithmic in their own way—within a novelistic whole that exceeds the sum of its parts. Bix and Egan have figured out how people work, only each has done so within a different frame: Bix, within a social network oriented toward virtual connectivity and profit; and Egan, within an ambitious novel oriented on one hand, toward the plausible representation of how history feels in its intersubjective unfolding and, on the other hand—and like Bix's product—oriented toward the market. A social network, a novel: each a "luminous sphere of interconnection."

The logic of *The Candy House* as a sequel emerges through the logic of its generic premise. Bix's discussion group at Columbia argues about the ethics of appropriating scientific discoveries for profit, and he listens with a sense of "nervous duplicity" (14). Then, an animal studies professor mentions that her lab has "begun to externalize animal consciousness." Stunned, Bix "tingle[s] with sudden alertness" and demands to know more (15). The professor explains: "We can upload an animal's perceptions… Using brain sensors. For example, I can

capture a portion of a cat's consciousness and then view it with a headset exactly as if I am the cat" (15). Mind uploading, or whole-brain emulation, is the new "Vision" Bix yearns for—and the stock sci-fi premise that seems to galvanize Egan's sequel writing. After leaving the discussion group in a daze, not quite able to grasp what he has discovered, Bix finds himself looking out over the East River at the place where a college friend's drowning marked the tragic climax of *Goon Squad*. Although Bix briefly encountered this friend just before his death, he cannot now remember this pivotal moment. He feels "the mystery of his own unconscious like a whale looming invisibly beneath a tiny swimmer. If he couldn't search or retrieve or view his own past, then it wasn't really his. It was lost. He stood up straight, as if he'd heard his name aloud. A connection quivered in his mind" (22). Bix can sense a new vision for Mandala, but can't quite grasp it. Exhausted, he confesses, "I'm afraid I can't do it again." (24), The challenge now, for Bix and Egan, is to do it again—to braid the past into the present—but make it new.

Bix transforms the world—again—with a sleek memory-externalization device branded "Own Your Unconscious." Hooked up to this device, users can relive the entirety of their past as a digital archive of "raw" consciousness. And if they upload this personal archive to the "Collective Consciousness," a kind of hyperbolic Facebook-Instagram social network, they can perform "gray-grabs" to inhabit and explore the externalized consciousness of other people who have traded the privacy (and finitude) of their memory for access to the minds of others. This premise of mind reduced to data—qualia quantified—ramifies throughout *The Candy House* as a multi-faceted, science-fictional meditation on the possibility of writing an artistically ambitious novel today, when digital social media places the worlds of others at our fingertips, in high

definition, and quantifies our behavior in order to sell, with algorithmic precision, the genres of our consumption back to us—often in the form of sequels. We will see that Egan aligns the perspectival architecture of her novel with the virtual architecture of this hyperbolic social network. This product not only transforms the fictional world of *Goon Squad* but also offers characters in *The Candy House* access to the externalized memories of *Goon Squad* characters. *The Candy House* therefore takes up the form of the sequel as if Mandala's Own Your Unconscious is the technological precondition for its novelistic world expansion. Much as the trove of letters—an epistolary social network—was the presupposed form of the novel when it emerged in the eighteenth century, the allegorically implied form of *The Candy House* is a cache of intertwining "gray-grabs" from the "Collective Consciousness."

The title of Egan's sequel indexes an organizing concept that refers immediately to the internet and, more subtly, to the form of the novel itself. This "candy house" concept emerged gradually for Egan as she composed the novel,[15] and first accretes around this term in its fifth chapter, "The Mystery of Our Mother." This chapter is a reminiscence narrated in the 2030s by Melora Kline, one of two daughters from a broken marriage between the anthropologist Miranda Kline—whose algorithms Bix monetize as the computational basis of Mandala and, eventually, Own Your Unconscious—and the music industry executive Lou Kline, around whom much of *Goon Squad* revolves. Melora reflects on how she and her sister Lana took the helm of Lou's record company and faced down the late-90s digital revolution in music consumption:

[15] Egan, personal communication with author, 24 Feb, 2023.

> we flailed for ways to end the "sharing" that was dismantling our father's business and our father. We contemplated a nationwide billboard campaign to remind people of that eternal law, *Nothing is free!* Only children expect otherwise, even as myths and fairy tales warn us: Rumpelstiltskin, King Midas, Hansel and Gretel. *Never trust a candy house!* It was only a matter of time before someone made them pay for what they thought they were getting for free. Why could nobody see this? (125)

Egan's titular "candy house" first appears as the epithet that Lana and Melora pitch against the notion of the internet as a "sharing economy." Thus, the term immediately refers to how Lana and Melora perceive the emergence of the platform economy: a form of capitalist accumulation that emerges around the platform as a new type of capitalist firm. The platform develops as a business strategy in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries because it relies on digital infrastructures that, by functioning as commercial intermediaries, allow for the efficient extraction, analysis, and monopolization of data as raw material to capitalize.[16] Lana and Melora inadvertently play a decisive role in the culture industry's adaptation to this new, data-centered form of capital accumulation. As the brick-and-mortar empire of vinyl, tapes, and CDs around which *Goon Squad* revolved enters free-fall, the sisters recognize the futility of their "*Never trust a candy house!*" PR campaign. In need of liquidity, they sell their mother's algorithms to Bix. These social-affinity algorithms become the technical basis for Mandala's formal subsumption of online "sharing" into the monetization of user data—the technical basis, that is, for the "candy house" of digital social media platforms. Thus, what Lana and Melora sense but cannot yet

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[16] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Polity, 2017), 36-50. The low interest rates and sparse investment opportunities attendant to secular stagnation have also, Srnicek suggest, been crucial to the emergence of a platform economy in the U.S. (9-36)—and, arguably, to the proliferation of sequels. With consumer demand baked-in, sequels exhibit a liquidity that is attractive in the context of debt-financed book, movie, or show contracts.

comprehend is that the logic of "sharing" that initially appears as socialism in the sphere of circulation will become grist for the mill of thoroughly capitalist, data-harvesting platforms. For under neoliberal capitalism, these platforms' transformation of social life necessarily follows the path of least resistance and conforms to the value-added logic of the market. The digital breadcrumb trails of social-media "sharing" lead not to roses but to value added in the capitalist cauldron. In this ironic turn of cultural-industrial history, the market logic of the music label in *Goon Squad* cedes to the market logic of the platform in *The Candy House.*

The next chapter, "What the Forest Remembers," takes the "candy house" notion that Lana and Melora contrive to make intuitive sense of this emergent culture-industrial revolution and elaborates it into the aesthetic concept that structures the whole of *The Candy House.* This "candy house" concept is aesthetic because it is medium-specific, thus only fully intelligible in its allegorical, narrative-perspectival embodiment in Egan's sequel. An initially decisive moment in Egan's elaboration of this aesthetic concept is when four men, hiking in northern California in 1965, reach their destination:

> they crest the hill and glimpse A-Frame, as the house is known. Tucked in a redwood clearing and built from the cleared redwood, A-Frame is the sort of whimsical wood-and-glass structure that will become a cliché of 1970s California architecture. But to these men, it looks like an apparition from a fairy tale: *Is it real? What kinds of people live here*? (135)

"A-Frame" is the literal house that will stand as a mythic origin point for the "candy house" of the platform economy and, in turn, for Egan's allegorical narration of this political-economic regime's emergence. Crucial in this respect is Egan's decision to refer to this house not as *an* A-frame but as "A-Frame," a proper noun. For this chapter, more than any other in the novel,

foregrounds its status as *a frame* narrative. One of the four men hiking to “A-Frame” is a young Lou Kline, the music industry executive around whom much of *Goon Squad* revolves. And, as in the previous chapter, his daughter Melora is the frame narrator—but more explicitly here because the chapter’s first line assumes the generic form of fairy-tale exposition: “Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was a forest. It’s gone now (burned), and the four men walking in it are gone, too, which is what makes it far away. Neither it nor they exist” (130). It soon becomes clear that Melora is not merely framing a fairy tale. “Neither it nor they exist” not because the men and the forest are, within the chapter, acknowledged as merely fictional, but because they are dead and Melora has pieced together this chapter from memories the men have uploaded to the Collective Consciousness (132). Melora is framing a series of gray-grabs where, in a haze of marijuana smoke at “A-Frame,” the “music and dancing provoke a riot of alarmed awareness” in Lou, who realizes (stoned for the first time in his life) that he “must catapult himself into a producer’s role” (140). The hippies jamming at “A-Frame” are the first band Lou signs to his label, and they become superstars. On the face of it, then, this chapter is a music-industry snow globe. A finely-wrought experiment in narrating square-meets-hippy kitsch, it is the “fairy tale” origin story of a record executive who cuts his teeth by folding counterculture into the mainstream. But, more subtly, this chapter’s explicit frame-narrative structure is a synecdoche of the implicit frame that structures the entire novel. Melora’s “A-Frame” fairy tale is, in other words, the reflexive part that first illuminates the aesthetic whole toward which the novel is unfolding: a narrative allegory in which the Own Your Unconscious platform appears as the

technological precondition for the novel's perspectival structure. *The Candy House* is "A-Frame."

The narrative collage that in *Goon Squad* was an extra-diegetic principle of composition becomes, in *The Candy House*, a diegetically-motivated framing device according to whose logic chapters are variously based on, or are generally implied to assume the form of, digitally-mediated plunges into troves of externalized memory. By rooting this social-media allegory of novelistic form in the tech-entrepreneurial content of her sci-fi premise, Egan innovates on the novelistic medium she develops in *Goon Squad* in a way that feels discovered rather than merely imposed by whim. That is, the form of her sequel emerges as if dictated by the inextricably historical and commercial logic of its narrative expansion on its predecessor.

Nonetheless, whole-brain emulation is a sci-fi cliché whose imposed quality Egan cannot simply dispense with. Critics of the novel like Mark Greif and Sarah Resnick are understandably quick to point out that Egan does not explicitly narrate characters grappling with the epistemological and ethical problems raised by mind uploading.[17] But these critics overlook how Egan restricts the narrative elaboration of her sci-fi premise's philosophical and social entailments to emphasize this premise's imposed quality as a generic construct. Egan's "novum" is thoroughly ironic. Mind uploading in *The Candy House* is not a figment of sci-fi speculation to be realistically detailed. Rather, mind uploading is an allegory of the market's generic reification of culture that, according to the novel's logic as a sequel, takes the prospective form of science

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[17] Greif, "The Goon Squad Gets Old;" and Sarah Resnick, "Types with Desires," *London Review of Books*, June 9, 2022, http://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v44/n11/sarah-resnick/types-with-desires.

fiction as its generic vehicle. Accordingly, we only glimpse the profound effects of Mandala's technology in, for example, a cursory paraphrase of a "PR campaign" meant to "remind the world of what miracles Own Your Unconscious had performed in its nineteen years of existence:"

> tens of thousands of crimes solved; child pornography all but eradicated; Alzheimer's and dementia sharply reduced by reinfusions of saved healthy consciousness; dying languages preserved and revived; a legion of missing persons found; and a global rise in empathy that accompanied a drastic decline in purist orthodoxies—which, people now knew, having roamed the odd, twisting corridors of one another's minds, had always been hypocritical. (309)

In Egan's hands, the sci-fi gimmickry of mind uploading embodies not only the ideological horizon of social media platform economies today but also the generic form of the "sharing"—and, ideally, "empathy"—that these platforms monetize. Science-fictional elaboration is, within the frame of *The Candy House,* an intra-diegetic press release. This ironic acknowledgment and subordination of generic convention shows how Egan is not concerned with appealing to a market niche for sci-fi; readers are far more likely to turn to *The Candy House* from *Goon Squad* than from a classic mind-uploading novel like William Gibson's *Neuromancer.* Which is to say that sequel writing—rather than the conventional sense of genre writing—is the marketing problem that *The Candy House* primarily transfigures into its artistic problematic. The generic convention of mind uploading is not Egan's device but that which motivates her device, which is the form of the novel itself: a sequel that attempts to work on its own terms.

The form of the sequel is integral rather than incidental to *The Candy House*'s assertion of aesthetic autonomy. And nowhere is the novel's modernist problematization of its sequel form

more explicit than in a late chapter, which takes the form of a sprawling email conversation. Through nepotism, nostalgia, and sheer charisma, this flurry of emails reassembles many of the main characters in *Goon Squad* for a highly lucrative reunion. Aging rock stars, publicists, record executives, and friends negotiate how a proposed combination of photo-op, interview, and recording session may align with and boost their idiosyncratic career trajectories. With comic serendipity, these emails cash out in a glossy magazine feature, an acoustic greatest hits album, a documentary, and a surge of popularity in the Collective Consciousness. In this idyll of sequel production, everyone makes a comeback. By inhabiting the form of the email thread, this chapter takes up the material support of *The Candy House* itself as a problem of genre-fictional composition. For the genre of this chapter is precisely the opportunistic email proliferation that props up any culture-industrial production. Like the material support of a frame or a page, these emails are the mass-market novel's literal condition of possibility. In this light, the chapter's title, "See Below," evokes not only the genre of the logistical email thread, with its branching patterns of replies, CCs, and forwarded messages, but also the hermeneutic depth of finding an artwork's specifically commercial material support, otherwise occluded, taken up within the work as a problem of form. "Tongue-in-cheek nostalgia… is not—let me be clear—our ultimate ambition," types record executive Bennie Salazar, "Tongue-in-cheek nostalgia is merely the portal, the candy house, if you will, through which we hope to lure in a new generation and bewitch them" (299). If, under conditions of high market exposure, sequel writing necessarily conflates artistic purpose with commercial purpose, the modernist sequel inhabits and tries to transcend this conflation as a problem of literary form.

III. Black Box, Grid, Stockblock

Within *The Candy House*'s overarching social-media allegory of novelistic form, Egan finds a modernist solution to the commercial problem of sequel writing that exemplifies two interrelated aspects of the modernist novel's persistence today: an aestheticization of genre fiction and an ironic repurposing of canonical modernism as a source of generic forms. No chapter in *The Candy House* melds the novel's sequel-bound, social-media allegory of novelistic form with genre-fictional composition more compellingly—and therefore seems more able to hold on its own prior to its relativization as part of the novel as a whole—than "Lulu the Spy, 2032," which builds a spy novella out of a stream of mental "uploads." Tweeted as such in a publicity stunt by *The New Yorker* in 2013,[18] this chapter is the most recognizably generic chapter in *The Candy House*. It follows Lulu, a minor character in *Goon Squad*, as she infiltrates a terrorist cell in the south of France for the U.S. government. Written in a terse, second-person indicative mood, each of the chapter's sentences is a mental entry that Lulu uploads to a cache of "Field Instructions" stored in a microchip "weevil" implanted in her skull (205). With this mental-upload form, Egan displaces narrative action onto description of an immediate past that Lulu registers by speaking instructions and didactic aphorisms addressed to "you" aloud in her head. At one point early in the chapter, Lulu "uploads" instructions for this practice of auto-dictation itself:

> For clearest results, mentally speak the thought aloud to yourself.
> Always filter your observations through the lens of their instructional value.
> Your training is ongoing; you must learn from each step you take.

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[18] Jennifer Egan, "Black Box," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2012, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box.

> When your mission is complete and the weevil removed, you may review its contents before adding your Field Instructions to your mission file. (204-5)

Here, the bite-sized form through which Twitter users "upload" their consciousness and through which the chapter is first serialized becomes a form of genre-fictional focalization that sets the action of the chapter's spy intrigue at an ironic distance from itself.

Essentially, Egan inhabits the form of the Tweet as a problem of generic composition.[19] The chapter's opening scene establishes this formal problem by establishing that Lulu's strategy for infiltrating the terrorist cell is seduction:

> People rarely look the way you expect them to, even when you've seen pictures. / The first thirty seconds in a person's presence are the most important. / If you're having trouble perceiving and projecting, focus on projecting. / Necessary ingredients of a successful projection: giggles; bare legs; shyness. / The goal is to be both irresistible and invisible. / When you succeed, a certain sharpness will go out of his eyes. (197)

Comprised of only six "uploads," this opening scene is fleeting but reflexively so. Read aloud—literally or, like Lulu, in one's head—it is approximately the "first thirty seconds" of the chapter. By aligning readerly time and diegetic time in this way, Egan's exposition aligns her prose's relation to its reader with Lulu's relation to her target. This temporal literalism dramatizes the duration of the action that Lulu's "uploads" obscure and only retrospectively imply. This narrative device for psychologically displacing the action of the chapter—insofar as we only read what Lulu "uploads" through mental dictation—crystallizes the problem of genre fiction in *The Candy House*: to "seduce" the reader into the generic certainties of, in this case, a spy novella,

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[19] Kelly briefly but suggestively hits on this point as a way of drawing out Egan's relation to modernism (164).

while at the same time ironizing this generic operation by orchestrating it within the novel's sequel-bound, social-media allegory of novelistic form.

As Lulu's "Field Instructions" psychologically displace the action of the chapter, they also continuously reframe this action as subject to a generic form of necessity. That is, since almost all of the "uploads" are instructions that indicate narrative events, Egan crystallizes the chapter's action through a circular logic of necessity according to which each event should occur because it has occurred. For example, when Lulu arrives at a villa on a remote island with the terrorist she has seduced, she uploads instructions like:

> An uncomprehending giggle is a beauty's most reliable tool for diffusing conflict. (213)
> If your vulnerability and helplessness have roused the interest of an enemy subject, accentuate them. (217)
> At the revelation of martial-arts expertise, a man who has perceived you as merely a beauty will recalculate your purpose. (222)
> Resume your beauty role while running: Smooth your hair and cover your bleeding wound with the sundress scrunched in your pocket. (223)

Lulu is following her training, and the chapter is not only following the rules, but narrating the rules. That is, by making its basic narrative unit the assertion of a rule, "Lulu the Spy" constructs an allegory of generic convention as the fulfillment of an empirical set of rules; Lulu's "Field Instructions" can be read as instructions for success in the commercial field of writing spy fiction, but focalized as such, at the level of the sentence, within a work of spy fiction. Egan thereby transforms an otherwise unremarkable spy plot into an experiment in allegorizing the circular logic of positivist approaches to genre. Long criticized in literary studies but nonetheless persistent—particularly in recent turns to quantitative methods—such approaches to genre produce abstract taxonomies that, in highly commercial contexts like that of contemporary

literature, are often indistinguishable from market segmentation analyses.[20] While such approaches can illuminate some of the sociological dynamics of contemporary fiction and offer broad historical insights into archived literary culture, they cannot grasp the contemporaneity of modernist fiction. For the immanent purposiveness of the modernist work—as a rule—asserts its autonomy through and against external rules. "Lulu the Spy" instantiates this principle of aesthetic autonomy by inhabiting and subverting the positivistic architecture of genre-as-product-differentiation that structures our market culture.

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[20] Jeremy Rosen notes, for example, that "[t]heorists have often pointed to the gap between individual works and generic norms as a way of accounting for the singularity of masterworks, as in the well-known 'horizon of expectations' posited by Hans Robert Jauss, but this gap is one that quantitative scholarship cannot see, let alone account for." Rosen, *Minor Characters Have Their Day: Genre and the Contemporary Literary Marketplace* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 14. To extend Rosen's point: genre criticism that employs quantitative methods approaches genres as relations within data to be measured and described rather than as historically specific compositional coordinates, or formal problematics, that artworks render significant in ways that must be immanently interpreted. So while a positivist concept of genre facilitates abstract taxonomies, a negative or dialectical concept of genre like that pursued here facilitates concrete interpretations of how authors produce artistic meaning within and against the complex of constraints that constitute their historical context. Rachel Scarborough King's argument for a positivist, rigidly definitional approach to the terms "form" and "genre" exemplifies how a positivist approach to genre, integral to quantitative studies of literature, can be generalized to literary studies as a whole via a positivist approach to form. King argues that "a form is an identifiable shape to be filled, a genre is a collection whose members are assembled and whose boundaries are always permeable;" accordingly, "naming a form is like knowing the answer on a quiz, while naming a genre is like making an argument in an essay." King, "The Scale of Genre," *New Literary History* 52, no. 2 (2021): 262, 264. While King provides a useful overview of positivism in literary studies, from the digital humanities to tendencies in the "New Formalism" (261-71), Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian's argument against such definitional rigor with respect to form remains generally dispositive as a clarification of positivist taxonomy's limited role in literary study, whether its object is form, genre, character, whatever. Kramnick and Nersessian, "Form and Explanation," *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 3 (March 2017): 650–69.

The story's original *New Yorker* title, "Black Box," is relevant to its allegory of genre as such. Thematically, Lulu's "physical person is our Black Box" because it holds a "record of what has transpired" (223). And formally, the chapter is itself this "record:" a narrative form in which Lulu's actions only appear as they are refracted through an encompassing second-person structure of address that frames these actions as generic without immediately compromising the sense of narrative necessity that produces the chapter's plausibility as fiction. While algorithms might detect any number of grounds for generic classification in "Lulu the Spy," Egan offers a playful rejoinder to this kind of positivist inquiry. When Lulu describes the "ping" system through which she can "indicate to loved ones that you are well," she advises, "Nuanced communication is too easily monitored by the enemy / Your Subcutaneous Pulse System issues pings so generic that detection would reveal neither source nor intent" (204). "Lulu the Spy" is a genre-fictional "black box" that attempts to render its meaning self-legislating and therefore irreducible to the external criteria whose market-segmentation logic is naturalized by positivist genre criticism.

Like snowflakes in a snow globe, kitschy references to Joyce's *Ulysses* and Piet Mondrian's geometric abstraction filter through *The Candy House.* Bix attends the Columbia discussion group in the first chapter carrying a copy of *Ulysses* as a "disguise element" whose "worn look derived more from the passage of years than rereading" and reminisces about how in graduate school his "combination of James Joyce and waist-length dreads provoked irresistible sexual desire" in his wife (17). Egan seems to present canonical modernism as a source of merely generic props: accessories that demand no interpretation, only brand recognition.

However, we will see that a more substantive Joycean allusion emerges late in the novel, and Egan's Mondrian allusions are thoroughly allegorical in their complexity. For when Chris Salazar, son of a central character in *Goon Squad*, quits his job at an entertainment startup, he founds "Mondrian," a San Francisco based nonprofit that eventually becomes Mandala's foremost corporate adversary (160). Mondrian helps individuals known as "eluders" go off-grid to avoid inclusion in Mandala's Collective Consciousness by providing them with "proxies," which are either "'hermit crab programs' that maintain the established patterns of an individual's online activity" or, at their "most sophisticated," "live professionals—usually fiction writers… who impersonate multiple identities at once" (79). Thus, "eluders" avoid having their life on view through the eyes of those around them who are externalizing their memory, and consequently avoid having their life quantified and sold to data-harvesting companies. Essentially, Mondrian replaces real individuals with generic, online versions of themselves to subvert the platform economy from within.

Egan's allusion to Piet Mondrian emerges with a self-aware superficiality as the right angles of Piet Mondrian's neoplasticism find an analogical correlate in the graph paper central to Chris's strategy for recruiting Mondrian's proxies: hosting Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) games at drug addiction recovery centers across the Bay Area. An addict, Molly, is learning how to recreate herself within D&D's grid of abstract qualities when she notices "Chris on his phone discussing *contracts*, *impersonation*, and *mimesis*" and hears him say, "The demand is overwhelming" and "She has an ear for dialogue" (148-49). Conducted on graph paper, this roleplaying game models the kind of characterization that Mondrian's "proxies" use to mimic the

online presence of their clients. "The Junkie Grid," Molly realizes, "is like a separate sheet of graph paper from the one where [she] is sitting, just as Mondrian's secret work is a separate sheet" (150). Just as Piet Mondrian's neoplasticist painting was widely received—and misunderstood—during the postwar period as "utilitarian" in the immediately decorative and architectural appearance of its grid-forms,[21] Egan's Mondrian puts on the utilitarian façade of a rehabilitation and job training program while constructing the possibility of a "grid" apart from the instrumentalizing architecture of the platform economy.

Chris arrives at Mondrian as a brand concept for his network of proxies because his life feels utterly generic. Like a character in an earlier chapter who screams in public to wring authentic reactions from strangers, Chris feels like everyone is just performing a bit. And this feeling was, once, part of his job description. Prior to founding Mondrian, Chris worked at a Bay Area entertainment startup where he cataloged stock plot elements—"stockblocks"—from movies and TV shows and translated them into an algebraic system that, his boss promised, would one day revolutionize the culture industry. In contrast, Chris builds Mondrian's proxying service into a means of maintaining an offline life in a world where being online increasingly means ceding the privacy of one's entire past to not only the perception of strangers but also to the measurement of data-mining companies that, like Chris's ex-employer, are intent on quantifying the entirety of human life for profit. Egan formalizes Chris's dawning understanding of this dystopic situation by interspersing the chapter about his escape from this "stockblock" job

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[21] On the theoretical development and reception of neoplasticism in relation architecture, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Mondrian and the Theory of Architecture," *Assemblage*, no. 4 (1987): 103–30.

with algebraic expressions of the chapter's action itself. At the urging of a mysterious, leather-clad coworker, Chris blows off his "algebraization" for a day (never to return), but senses that his transgression is really just an expression of "his own narrative function—*Enabling Sidekick*—which he'd become sheepishly aware of in his two years of stockblock codification" (162). As if foreshadowing the allegory of positivistic genre in "Lulu the Spy," the "correlations" Chris notices between the generic rigidities of "stockblocks" and actual events in his life have "the effect of turning the whole world into matching game" (162). Speeding down a highway on the back of his coworker's motorcycle, Chris realizes that "his predicament conformed perfectly to *Straight Arrow, Hijacked by Lawbreaker, Is Unexpectedly Exhilarated [2Pvii],* a stockblock firmly lodged in the realm of comedy" (166). Eventually, Chris ends up at his grandmother's house, where "candleholders, vases, umbrellas, tea trays, glasses, place mats, towels, throw pillows, framed posters, coffee-table books, and a needlepoint footstool" (172) are all Mondrian-patterned, and altogether an "impenetrable camouflage" (173). For amid this Mondrian kitsch, Chris's aunt has hung an entirely real—and entirely uninsured—Mondrian painting, purchased with her top-of-the-market Bitcoin liquidation. Here, in Egan's near-future Bay Area, the proximity of modernism's horizon of aesthetic autonomy to the kitsch, cliché, and financial flows of the culture industry is no longer an anomaly, as it was for Clement Greenberg.[22] Rather, the aesthetic autonomy of a market-subsumed medium like the sequel novel takes the form of a

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[22] For Greenberg, the "puzzling borderline cases" of formally ambitious yet popular writers are exceptions to the rule of a "tremendous interval that separates from each other two such simultaneous cultural phenomena as the avant-garde and kitsch." Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Beacon Press, 1971), 12, 15.

thoroughly commercial milieu of preconditions (vestiges of canonical modernism included) that must be orchestrated and ultimately transcended—just as this scene of neoplasticist kitsch inspires Chris to found Mondrian, whose proxies orchestrate generic online personas into an immanent "grid" of resistance to Mandala's all-encompassing social media platform.

IV. Modernist Allusion/Elusion

Alongside this ironic repurposing of Mondrian's "grid," Egan develops a more substantive Joycean allusion that asserts *The Candy House*'s simultaneous disjuncture from and continuity with canonical, restricted-field modernism. Egan introduces this allusion as part of a metafictional maneuver that, in *The Candy House*'s penultimate chapter, strikingly reorganizes its overarching sci-fi allegory. One consequence of this sequel-bound allegory—according to which Own Your Unconscious is the technological precondition for the novel's perspectival structure—is that Egan seems to only focalize characters who have uploaded their consciousnesses. However, this penultimate chapter inhabits the perspective of Bix's son, Gregory, a depressed writer who has renounced ever using Own Your Unconscious because he views its literal reproduction of consciousness as "an existential threat to fiction" (313). Thus, along with Chris's "stockblock" chapter, this penultimate chapter constitutes the exception that relativizes the rule of Egan's overarching sci-fi allegory within a larger whole. For Chris, like Gregory, is an "eluder." But where Chris founds Mondrian to subvert the platform economy's commodification of social life, Gregory writes fiction. Struggling to finish his novel and make sense of his estrangement from the recently deceased Bix, Gregory recalls viewing his father's

externalized memory of the night he conceived Own Your Unconscious. Gregory, that is, recalls "reading" the first chapter of *The Candy House*. While Bix had shared this memory to teach Gregory and his siblings a rather canned lesson—that "inspiration could come from any direction; that they should never give up" (314)—what now strikes Gregory is the writerliness of Bix's "Anti-Vision." While lying in Central Park and "staring up into a gray-white void" of falling snow, Gregory realizes: "The Anti-Vision had never been an absence—the opposite! It was a density of whirling particles. His father just hadn't gotten close enough. Gregory gazed, transfixed, as snow swarmed down upon him like space junk; like disarranged flocks of birds; like the universe emptying itself" (323). What had been the "bleak blank vista" of his father's "Anti-Vision" becomes, for Gregory, an appositive rush of poetic imagery. Moreover, while Bix—with his prop-copy of *Ulysses*—"hadn't gotten close enough" (323), Gregory's close reading, as it were, of Bix's "Anti-Vision" yields an allusion to the existential snowfall that concludes Joyce's short story "The Dead."

In this culminating moment of Joyce's 1914 debut short-story collection *Dubliners,* protagonist Gabriel Conroy's "soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and falling faintly, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."[23] And as Gregory lies in the snow and recalls, across the short-story collage of *The Candy House*, his experience of his father's externalized memory (that is, the novel's opening chapter), the "Anti-Vision" that had therein been a figure of Egan's sequel writing impasse becomes, for Gregory, a figure of literary imagination:

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[23] James Joyce, *Dubliners* (W.W. Norton, 2006), 194.

> [Gregory] knew what the vision meant: human lives past and present, around him, inside him. He opened his mouth and eyes and arms and drew them into himself, feeling a surge of discovery—of rapture—that seemed to lift him out of the snow. He wanted to laugh or shout. *Finish your book!* Here was his father's parting gift: a galaxy of human lives hurtling toward his curiosity. From a distance they faded into uniformity, but they were moving, each propelled by a singular force that was inexhaustible. The collective. He was feeling the collective without any machinery at all. And its stories, infinite and particular, would be his to tell. (323)

Joyce's lyrical, snow-bound conclusion to "The Dead" points from nineteenth-century realism to modernism—that is, points beyond the naturalistic short stories of *Dubliners* to the more experimental and hermetic formalism of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake.* And Egan's Joycean allusion points both referentially to canonical modernism, while also pointing reflexively inward—"*finish your book!*"—to the architecture of *The Candy House* as a space of modernist formal innovation that, immanent to yet transcending the highly commodified forms of both the short story collection and the form of the sequel, persists into our present.[24] Gregory discovers that the "Anti-Vision" of his father's entrepreneurial impasse—and, as we have seen, of Egan's sequel writing impasse—need not entail meaninglessness; rather, this "Anti-Vision" is the very condition of possibility for meaning. The "suggestive edge in the

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[24] Egan also concludes her 2007 novel *The Keep* with a version of this Joycean allusion. Indeed, as Teju Cole has noted, Joyce's snowfall is something of a literary-fictional set piece. Since *The Candy House* makes far more nuanced use of this allusion relative to *The Keep,* a relevant point of comparison to the former would be the concluding scene in Ellis's *Lunar Park.* Godden's reading of this scene is incisive but does not draw out the sequel-form problematic that undergirds its capacity to resolve the novel in relation to its predecessor. In the order of the preceding points, see Egan, *The Keep* (Knopf Doubleday, 2007), 254; Cole, "Teju Cole on the Wonder of Epiphanic Writing," Literary Hub (blog), October 26, 2021, https://lithub.com/teju-cole-on-the-wonder-of-epiphanic-writing/; Ellis, *Lunar Park* (Knopf Doubleday, 2005), 397-400; Godden, "Bret Easton Ellis, Lunar Park, and the Exquisite Corpse of Deficit Finance," *American Literary History* 25, no. 3 (2013): 588–606.

middle distance of [Bix's] mental landscape" (22) is nothing less than consciousness as the capacity to take up external determinations in irreducibly normative ways. And in the case of novel-writing—rather than mere thinking, the literal stuff of "gray grabs"—to posit meaning is necessarily to mediate "the collective," the intersubjective unfolding of history, in ways that demand interpretation of the novelistic terms such mediation sets for itself.

Here, *The Candy House* folds in on the terms of its own allegory. For Gregory, like Bix in the first chapter, emerges as a kind of author-proxy for Egan. We retrospectively grasp the free-indirect discourse of the novel's first, Bix-focalized chapter as his cache of externalized memory—one that Gregory, like us, has "read" and now, perhaps, has written into his novel. Fleetingly, *The Candy House* seems like Gregory's book. However, we have noted how not only Gregory's chapter but also Chris's chapter constitute allegorical gaps, exceptions to Egan's alignment of novelistic focalization with mind uploading; their represented thought is theirs alone—never uploaded—yet Egan still focalizes them.[25] Thus, the logic of Egan's allegory transforms where it appears to break. If Chris and Gregory are "eluders," then Egan is a "proxy," impersonating them within the social-media architecture of her novel. As the two "eluders" whom Egan nonetheless focalizes, Chris and Gregory's points of view each bring into focus the two interrelated formal problematics that animate *The Candy House.* Where the "stockblocks" impinging on Chris's

[25] An additional complexity: although Lulu uploads her consciousness, she does so to a top-secret U.S. military record that is presumably not, like the novel's other chapters, "accessible" through the Collective Unconscious. It seems implausible that Lulu, once she has her weevil removed after the completion of her mission, later uploads her top-secret memories to the Collective Unconscious because Lulu the veteran becomes an ardent eluder, consumed by paranoia that her weevil was never actually removed. Thus, "Lulu the Spy" remains a part apart—a "black box"—within Egan's overarching allegory.

world thematize *The Candy House*'s problematization of genre fiction, the entrepreneurial "Anti-Vision" that, via Bix, grips Gregory and inspires his newfound sense of the novel's capacity to mediate history, or "the collective," thematizes *The Candy House*'s modernist problematization of sequel writing: its aesthetically convincing representation of historical process as product iteration. Fittingly, in the novel's final chapter, an omniscient narrator reflects: "Thanks to Bix Bouton, that genius, all of this is in our reach. Even so, there are gaps: holes left by eluding separatists bent upon hoarding their memories and keeping their secrets. Only Gregory Bouton's machine—this one, fiction—lets us roam with absolute freedom through the human collective" (333). The force of this metafictional maneuver lies in how it transforms our immersion in Egan's overarching sci-fi allegory into an awareness of this allegory's internal limit—how both Gregory and Chris "elude" it—and, in turn, reasserts this allegory at a more encompassing level. For Egan, as the author of *The Candy House* and its social-media allegory of novelistic form, is necessarily the "proxy" for all the characters she focalizes. She invents them, and we encounter them, as if real, in the novel's "luminous sphere of interconnection" (12). But if Egan's characters are not all "eluding" the Collective Consciousness and its data-harvesting industry, what are they, all together as a novelistic whole, eluding? Ultimately, Egan's modernist sequel is committed to eluding the merely generic logic of the market. Such is the market-architectural art of the sequel novel and, more broadly, the art of genre fiction: the modernist fiction of our present.

Coda

This dissertation argues that works are modernist if they can be interpreted as plausibly asserting the aesthetic autonomy of their form. This kind of argument has significant precedent in literary studies, particularly among the New Critics and certain Marxist critics like Adorno. But the preceding chapters have demonstrated that such an approach to modernism need not dismiss mass-market culture as entirely a realm of reified, heteronomous aesthetics adequate only to sociological study. Nor must the modernist artwork's autonomy be modeled on an intentionless machine or an ultimately elusive space of negation. By analyzing a range of formal problematics that I constellate within a concept of market architecture, this dissertation defends an account of aesthetic autonomy that understands modernist artworks to assert conceptually determinate, medium-specific self-legislation through and against the pressures of market-driven social processes. I have sketched an expanded trajectory of Anglo-American modernist fiction beyond the twentieth-century, restricted-field contexts of its flourishing and eventual canonization by showing how modernism's domain of immanent purposiveness can be understood, on one hand, to emerge in fin-de-siècle and twentieth-century works that have conventionally been viewed as alien to modernism—or modernist only according to weak formal or thematic criteria—and, on the other hand, to extend into the market-saturated epoch of postmodernity.

Whether a significant part of postmodernist fiction will, upon closer analysis, appear committed to self-legislating form is a possibility that this dissertation takes seriously. The canonical conceptualization of postmodernism in the humanistic disciplines coincides, after all, with the hegemonic rise of an anti-intentionalist and often explicitly anti-interpretive

theoreticism rooted in philosophical and sociological frameworks—from Gilles Deleuze to Bourdieu—that, albeit with historically-specific polemical aims and certain analytical payoffs, have tended to etiolate literary studies' attention to the dialectical, medium-specific intentions embodied by modernist fiction. That formally ambitious fiction will internalize and manipulate its theoretical milieu is a given. But it is another question whether, under the market-saturated conditions of postmodernity, the aesthetic purposes of such fiction can be dissolved so easily into the indeterminate, textual free-play often ascribed to them from the empyrean heights of postmodern literary theory. Such a question is beyond the scope of this dissertation, to be sure, but squarely in its speculative sights.

The picture of Anglo-American modernist fiction that emerges across this dissertation is amenable to modernism's conventional segmentation across the twentieth century into classical-, high-, late-, neo-, etc.-modernist periods. Yet this picture's emphasis on immanent interpretation also aims to instill a wariness of the explanatory power of such literary-historical prefixes—or theoretical abstractions in general—with respect to modernism. For autonomous fictions do not merely exemplify. Nor are they sublime objects or heroic expressions of individual autonomy. They are a class of objects that demand to be inextricably felt and interpreted on their own terms. But they are—like any complex artifact—always open to misinterpretation. The offhand assimilation of modernist artworks' formal difficulty to ascriptions of mute incomprehensibility, ecstatic incoherence, or whatever flavor of meaninglessness is an unfortunate tendency in a twenty-first-century field of modernist studies that often uncritically embraces indeterminacy. And among the Marxist criticism that this dissertation draws on, all-too-quick identification of

the modernist artwork's hermeticism with commodity fetishism makes another version of this anti-interpretive mistake. Such conflations of artworks and mere commodities may be motivated by an understandable exasperation with aesthetic esoterism's incompatibility with political action. But where commodity fetishism and related social reifications like race ossify the dynamic interdependencies constitutive of social reality, modernist fiction is a domain where such dialectics hold sway and encompass such fetishism, albeit in the sensuous and often esoteric form that distinguishes modernist art's intelligibility from the communicative effectivity of propaganda or the propositional intelligibility of theory. Autonomous art produces new knowledge in a sensuous form that is keyed, in tense counterpoint, to the simultaneously world-shaping and meaning-dissolving logic of the market. Immanent interpretation is how we can make deictic sense of this specific mode of knowledge and elaborate its historical preconditions and entailments.

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