

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CONTEMPORARY STYLES:  
A TAXONOMY OF NOVEL ACTIONS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2017

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## Acknowledgements

The tough thing about finishing a dissertation on style and action is the realization there is no style adequate to the action of acknowledging your many influences. The sincerest gratitude, abundant, will finally have to be expressed outside these pages, abundantly. But here let me at least name some names.

There's the University of Chicago, for starters, and the Department of English and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality that have provided my constant intellectual homes. In the case of the latter, this is also literal: I owe incalculably much to the Center for providing me an office—and therefore a space for thought—in which much of this dissertation was written. I am deeply thankful to Lauren Berlant, Tate Brazas, Frances Ferguson, Elaine Hadley, Renaissance McIntyre, Lex Nalley, Deborah Nelson, Gina Olson, Kristen Schilt, Sarah Tuohey, and Linda Zerilli for institutional support and nurturance.

I am especially thankful to have been part of an outstanding cohort of students in the English program, each of whom has taught me both generosity and rigor: Rowan Bayne, Katia Fowler, Sarah Kunjummen, Peter McDonald, Eric Powell, Lauren Schachter, Allison Turner, and David Womble. Sophie Withers has one of the most fascinating minds I've ever encountered, and it's been both flattering and productive that she takes the time each week to let me put mine in proximity to hers. I am also fortunate for conversations within the Neubauer Collegium's inter-disciplinary climate change project, especially with organizers Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, Benjamin Morgan, and Emily Osborn.

For comments on drafts of earlier chapters, I am thankful to members of the 20th and 21st Century Workshop at the University of Chicago, especially Rowan Bayne, Patrick Jagoda, Alison James, Françoise Meltzer, and Jean-Thomas Tremblay. Other fellows in the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, especially my officemates Amanda Blair, Annie Heffernan, and Katya Motyl, have been immeasurably impactful and (the value of this is far too underappreciated) just good company. I could not have completed this dissertation without their support.

This dissertation owes ceaselessly and most to my committee. Lauren Berlant has patiently had faith in this project, which she was the first to help me realize was a project, and she has equipped me both with the resources to follow my intuitions and with fiercely smart commentary to nudge them in other directions. Deborah Nelson has reliably snapped my arguments into focus, generously prodded the limits of my historical claims, and overseen my many attempts to architect the syntax of my intellectual priorities. Frances Ferguson, who always knows the logic of my thoughts before I even know they are thoughts, has persistently provided the right leads to thicken the threads that weave throughout my chapters. Individually, each mentor has inspired, challenged, encouraged, and advanced my thinking. Collectively, they model selfless intellectual promiscuity—an awesome ability to inhabit other people’s projects—and the profound possibilities afforded by a diverse ecology of theoretical orientations and methodological perspectives.

Finally, I have been influenced irreparably, fabulously, devastatingly by the style of Matthias Staisch, alongside whom I wrote this whole thing. He is my favorite action of all.

## Abstract

This dissertation argues for and practices a new theory of style that in turn produces a taxonomy of contemporary novels in America. At least since Nelson Goodman, stylistics has moved beyond the untenable distinction between content as *what* is said and style as *how* it is said by seeing style instead as a harmonization of form and content. In prose fiction, style coordinates different forms of words, sentences, and chapters with different themes and subjects. But if style always coordinates, I claim we should identify styles according to the action of coordination itself. I thus shift the terrain: content is what is *said* and style is what is *done*. In particular, drawing on both affect theory and analytic action philosophy, I argue what styles do is process transforming conditions of their contemporary world. Different styles—different coordinations of form and content—assemble groups of people who adapt to structural transformations in similar ways.

I develop this theory of style as action in my introductory Chapter One, engaging style theorists including Arthur Danto, D. A. Miller, and Mark McGurl; action theorists in the tradition of G. E. M. Anscombe; and affect theorists of the historical present such as Lauren Berlant. I then demonstrate how a number of consequences follow from this theory, two of which are immediately important. First, style becomes available for a cultural criticism without content, because it shows what people are doing regardless of what they may say they are feeling or thinking. To read style is to read how people adapt to their changing worlds, even when they may not be able to slow down the world long enough to represent it. Such a theory is particularly important when the period under study is the historical present; whereas narrative

representations of what life is like in transitional periods often lag behind the transitions themselves, style is synchronous with the present it acts within. Second, to read style as a mode of adaptation means liberating it from the particularly individualizing terms (e.g., Dickens style, Warhol style) or universally periodizing terms (e.g., Victorian style, Postmodern style) in which it is usually discussed. Rather, styles refer to new social groups that emerge in a contemporary situation through sharing actions. Because they come into being only through action, these style groups do not have to be primarily organized by demographic categories like class or institutions like the family; in fact, I argue the circulation of styles today shows us the loosening impact of these forms of organization. To enumerate the multiple styles at play in our world is to list what kinds of relations are budding when previous norms tying action to identities or institutions weaken.

In the remainder of the dissertation, I identify four contemporary styles by surveying American fiction from the past 30 years and observing repeated patterns of form/content coordination. Following the approach of my theory, I name each style as an action and then unfold the forms of social emergence incarnated in them. The first pair of styles I look at, detoxification and intoxication, use transforming environmental conditions in the age of manmade pollution or climate change as a resource for creating new forms of intimacy and domesticity; the second pair, invasion and evasion, intervene in an altered public sphere in ways that mirror new social and political movements like Occupy and Anonymous, respectively.

As I argue in Chapter Two, detoxification style coordinates anxieties about heterosexual domesticity, racial difference, and the natural environment from 1980 to the present. This is a style that I show lives at the level of sentences within a range of authors including Raymond

Carver, Tao Lin, and Mary Robison, each of whom use detoxification to produce domestic spaces carved out from a wider natural world. In each of these writers, I argue that environmental detoxification is also twinned with a project of racial purification. Along the way, I also show how detoxification style re-creates the outlines of a familiar canon of minimalism, but by referring minimalism to an action and thus a mode of adaption to a complex of social and environmental variables, detoxification is also able, I argue, to account for both a larger set of authors and a wider range of features within their writing than available theories of minimalism have allowed. In turn, I show that what we have thought of as minimalism is not just a retraction of words, as some scholars have indicated, but also a proliferation of smaller words; and it is best understood primarily in relation not to the institution of the university, as Mark McGurl has argued, but to the institution of the family.

Chapter Three turns to intoxication style, which inverts the logic of the previous chapter: here, intoxication is associated not with minimalism, but with maximalism. In particular, I show how intoxication produces the sentences of Don DeLillo, Joyce Carol Oates, Sergio de la Pava, Zadie Smith, and David Foster Wallace. Intoxication sentences are inhalation machines that bury their subjective anchors under stuff ranging from information to material substances. Whereas detoxification style sought to create spaces of intimacy by subtracting from the environment, intoxication style suggests what happens in a world in which no institution—say, the Sierra Club—can ever adequately mediate between subjects and their natural world. Without institutional mediation, subjects and world become conflated in these works. Thus, intoxication also theorizes a kind of agency particularly germane to the period we have come to know as the Anthropocene, in which human history becomes knotted with ecological history.

But whereas most work on the Anthropocene has pointed to a universal human species as an actor on a global scale, looking at intoxication as one style among many particularizes rather than universalizes experience. Therefore, the question for this chapter is not the scientific one of whether human agency is distributed and imbricated with a planet, but rather, culturally: for whom does agency feel that way, or under what social conditions is it desirable for people to intoxicate themselves and distribute their agency across the world at the same time that the world comes into them? My close readings suggest intoxication, or the Anthropocene's style of action, has affiliations that are particularly masculine and millennial.

If detoxification and intoxication are a pair concerned with the environment, then the next two styles I examine—invasion and evasion—are a pair concerned with public space. In particular, I argue that the unit of the chapter in these styles is acted upon to re-distribute public space and create new kinds of political collectives. In Chapter Four, I describe invasion as a style that administers what we have come to recognize as novels of interconnected short stories. Authors of the style including Jennifer Egan, Colum McCann, David Mitchell, and Elizabeth Strout are nostalgic for disciplinary techniques of cutting up a social world into distinct institutions with limited social roles, and breaking up a novel into autonomous stories is one way of re-asserting an ability to section a world and therefore compartmentalize psychology. The action of this style is best understood as invasion, I argue, because the novels try to fill up a discrete space with enough energy to convert it into a new kind of institution, dispensing new political subjectivities that arrest ongoing processes of modulation by re-asserting the boundaries of emerging political communities. As I tease out, invasion is then analogous to social movements like Occupy (turning a park into a political forum) and provides an object to test the

logic of invasion (of which occupation is a species) as a public action. In particular, I show how invasion excludes queerness as a background condition.

Whereas invasion style incarnates a social action of invasion structurally kin to movements like Occupy, evasion style, as I argue in Chapter Five, produces sociality through a common bypass of surveillance, analogous to hacktivist collectives like Anonymous. Whereas invasion reconstructs novels into many stories, evasion reduces the novel entire to being just one chapter of a larger story: evasion style is manifest in transmedia narrative in which a novel-book participates as one networked node. What becomes interesting in this style is what gets pushed out of the novel, evading its surveillance, and I show how evasions in the novels of Barbara Browning, Mark Danielewski, and Chris Ware are consistently explained by an attempt of the authors to make themselves anonymous. Evasion style in turn imagines a social space—the space of the novel—as clustering around and forming on top of a personal absence. But as in the previous chapter, I do not see evasion novels as mere exemplifications of social experiments; rather, I show how novels feel out in their actions for social forms capacious and complicated in their logic that in turn provide lessons for thinking through what is at stake in collectives like Anonymous. When these novels begin to query the sustainability of the collectives they form through evasion, they also provide warnings and lessons for other anonymous forms of sociality, especially ones queer theory and theories of stranger intimacy have celebrated and taught us about in the past generation.

## Chapter One Style as Action: An Introduction

### I. What Are Styles?

This dissertation argues for and practices a new theory of style that in turn produces a taxonomy of contemporary novels in America. At least since Nelson Goodman's "The Status of Style," first presented as a lecture in 1974, stylistics has had to give up the easy distinction between *what* and *how* it had formerly relied upon to pick out its object of study: "What is said, how it is said," wrote Goodman, "what is expressed, and how it is expressed are all intimately interrelated and involved in style."<sup>1</sup> In cutting thus across form and content, Goodman suggested style was neither to be identified with one pole of any dichotomy, nor even to be seen as some external, autonomous third term,<sup>2</sup> but rather to be understood as mediating between them: coordinating content and form by picking out elements in each. In prose fiction, for instance, style coordinates different forms of words, sentences, and chapters with different themes and subjects. But if style always coordinates, I claim we should identify styles according to the action of coordination itself. I thus shift the terrain: content is what is *said* and style is what is *done*. In particular, drawing on both affect theory and analytic action philosophy in the sections to follow, I will argue what styles do is process transforming conditions of their contemporary world. Different styles—different coordinations of form and content—assemble groups of people who adapt to structural transformations in similar ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman, "The Status of Style," 803.

<sup>2</sup> In passing, Goodman refers to his theory as a "tripartite taxonomy," but this suggests a third term that participates in, rather than stands outside of, an economy of other parts. *Ibid.*, 806.

Others before me have pointed to a relation between style and action, whether in Jenefer Robinson's argument that style is "a way of *doing* certain things" or in Stephanie Ross's suggestion, building on the aesthetic theory of Sircello, that "we might suppose ... style inheres not in the finished object (this already begs some questions concerning contemporary art), but in the artistic acts that created that work."<sup>3</sup> What I mean by action is both more abstract and more specific than these accounts: like Ross, I refer style to the production of a work, but I am interested in what a work of art shows us about the reflexes operating in an artist at the scene of production—how form and content were brought together in a certain way. Thus, the action of style is not just the action of production itself, but socially circulated strategies within the production process. Moreover, I read these reflexive "ways of doing" as providing lessons on other ways of doing in an artist's lifeworld, what we might call the actions of genres of *lifestyles*. A strategy for bringing form and content together in a work of art speaks to other habits circulated in a contemporary atmosphere for managing the forms and contents of the wider world.

To read style is, in other words, to read how people adapt to their changing worlds even when they cannot slow down the world long enough to represent it. Such a theory is particularly important when the period under study is the historical present; whereas narrative representations of what life is like in transitional periods often lag behind the transitions themselves, style is synchronous with the present it acts within. With style as our object, I argue, we are thus equipped to perform a cultural criticism "without content": style shows what people

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<sup>3</sup> Robinson, "Style and Personality in the Literary Work," 227. Ross, "Style in Art," 237. See also Sircello, *New Theory of Beauty*.

are doing regardless of what they may say they are feeling or thinking. Sometimes people act without forming a plan. Sometimes people surprise themselves with their actions and only after they have done something ask: why did I do that? What was I trying to accomplish just then without even knowing? And if I was trying to accomplish something, what fantasies or desires were constellated in that *something*? What do my actions know about me and about my world that I must now find the words to explain? The actions of style pose questions such as these.

My argument is not just that style gives us actions to study for a cultural criticism, however. Rather, it goes both ways: if styles are actions, then actions identify styles. Just how exactly to define style has been the underlying problem animating so much luxuriant work in the field of stylistics for over half a century; it is style's slipperiness, the difficulty of reducing it to any one thing or of locating it in any one place, that has made it a vehicle for carrying any number of political, social, and psychological dynamics. Is style the "signature" of an individual (think: Austen style or Warhol style or Hemingway style)? Is it the effect of a school or some other name for a collection of like-minded individuals (Pop or Minimalism or the San Francisco Renaissance)? Or is it the name of a concept more or less periodizing (like Rococo or Postmodernism and its substitutes)?

The problem has unfortunately been exacerbated by some of the most astute formulations we have of style, including Goodman's. After showing how style cuts across form and content and after outlining the positive function of coordination it performs along the way, Goodman nonetheless fell back upon a rather traditional description of style as authorial signature: style is "those features of the symbolic functioning of a work that are characteristic of author, period,

place, or school.”<sup>4</sup> For Goodman, style is finally an ensemble of items that refers a given work to its origins, working backwards from its manifest appearance, structure, and theme to the biographical and historical conditions that are seen to have determined them, through the intermediary of the author herself. Stylistics in this vein has proceeded to emphasize the singularity of the signature and then to build taxonomies for different levels of style according to their proximity to artistic presence. Even Roland Barthes called style “a self-sufficient language” that “has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology.”<sup>5</sup> Exemplarily and influentially, Richard Wollheim distinguished between “general” and “individual” style: whereas the former, which he further broke down into universal, historical, and school styles, picks out features of a work that submit it to classification greater than any person or work, the latter picks out those elements that are primarily psychological, expressing an individual artist’s interests and motives.<sup>6</sup> General styles are objective and stand apart from the works that belong to them or from the subjects that deploy them; they are therefore objects with which an artist can have a distanced relationship. An individual style—and note the singular—is too subjective either for an artist to stand apart from if it is her own or for an artist to belong to if not her own. As Stephanie Ross glosses Wollheim, “general style can be learned, but individual style must be formed.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Goodman, “The Status of Style,” 808. I borrow the language of “signature” from Judith Genova, who indicts Goodman among others for the view of “style as the artistic way of signing one’s name, the dress of the ego rustling itself into history.” Genova, “The Significance of Style,” 315.

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*.

<sup>6</sup> See Wollheim, “Pictorial Style: Two Views.”

<sup>7</sup> Ross, *What Gardens Mean*, 81.

I like these ways of approaching style through a multiplicity of items, so that style coordinates elements of form and content without reducing to them. But I am skeptical of the stylistic taxonomies that map concentric circles around an artist; this reduces stylistics, it seems to me, to hunting down features to attach to an individual. Style becomes the mere repository for the alleged uniqueness of human beings. But if style is, indeed, a *coordination* of form and content, then perhaps a more elegant way of identifying style is by naming what type of coordination it is, rather than putting together a complex set of formal and thematic elements whose coherence is only provisionally afforded by the proper name of an artist. Style is doing something with its content; it is doing something with its form; and at every level, what matters, I argue, is precisely this *doing*. Sometimes, of course, people do exactly what they say; in art, that happens when style mirrors content. But often times, the art of being human is one of embodying contradictions between behaviors and beliefs, consciousness and unconsciousness, reality and fantasy, intention and desire. In these cases, style is all the more fascinating to track because it shows how people keep moving, keep living on in the world, even when they could not venture a narrative as to what they are doing.

As a preview of the work I see this kind of stylistics to be called upon to do, consider these two passages, each climactic in the short stories from which they are taken:

The young gentleman looked at the stream discolored by the melting snow. "I know," he said, "we'll get some *piombo* and fish tomorrow." (Ernest Hemingway, "Out of Season")

He says something else. But I don't need to listen. I can't hear a thing with so much water going. (Raymond Carver, "So Much Water So Close to Home")

Each of these stories were important to their authors; it was while writing “Out of Season” that Hemingway says he discovered his style, and Carver’s “So Much Water So Close to Home,” first published in *Furious Seasons* (1977), was ultimately immortalized in the 1981 collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. The stories are also thematically similar: in both, fishing provides a homosocial scene that alternately provides relief from and contrast to a heterosexual marriage that is under stress. And the sentences, too, are similar syntactically: they are simple and usually declarative. But the styles that coordinate syntax with theme, or sentence with word, are doing different things in these works. In Hemingway’s sentence, human speech is directed toward the natural world, which is itself the focus of description when speech is not; while in Carver’s sentence, the fact of speech is described even when speech is not being provided, as if doubling an attention to the human in order to avert away from natural. These are, in turn, two different strategies for curating intimacy: for Hemingway, the environment is a resource that must be conserved in order to nourish human feeling, while for Carver, the environment is a threat that must be cleared in order to make room for domestic space. Because these are strategies which more people than Hemingway and Carver practice, they are not unique to these authors; indeed, as I will argue in the following chapter, Carver participates in an entire social genre of coordinating environment and intimacy that includes many other authors of which he may be exemplary but not an original. In the following few pages, however, I stick close to these two stories in particular to preview the different environmental logics—the different actions that mediate between nature and domesticity—alive in the respective styles to which they belong.

Hemingway’s story is set one afternoon in a bucolic Italian town in which a vacationing American couple—whom we know only as Signor and Signora—are supposed to go fishing with

a local guide named Peduzzi. It is a “wonderful day for trout fishing,” but as the title suggests, it is not actually fishing season and therefore the activity is legally forbidden. From its title to its conclusion, “Out of Season” figures the synchronization of natural and human weather. Peduzzi is “mysterious” in the beginning—we are provided this adjective twice—just as the day, too, is indecisive: “a windy day with the sun coming out from behind clouds and then going under in sprinkles of rain” (135). At first, in a rather elementary way, Hemingway’s sun analogizes human mood. But it is not just an expressive transfer that Hemingway establishes between internal and environmental meteorologies. By the end of the story, when it is just Peduzzi, drunk, and Signor, without wife, we get these three pithy sentences: “The sun came out. It was warm and pleasant. The young gentleman felt relieved” (138). And then, after Peduzzi drinks the wine they have brought: “The sun shone while he drank. It was wonderful. This was a great day, after all” (139). In both cases, the appearance of the sun precedes the feeling of relief or wonder; more precisely, it affects and seems to produce the feeling.

When the young man “looked at the stream discolored by the melting snow,” he similarly directs out attention to a natural figure while saying something he will not do: they will not be going fishing together. For Peduzzi, this story has been about a migration from the hotel garden in which he works—“breaking up frozen manure with a dung fork”—to the great outdoors of the river where “[l]ife was opening out” (139). The young gentleman’s declining to fish the next day—therefore declining to provide Peduzzi another escape from the garden to the river—is not only a disappointment at the level of failing to get an experience he had desired or a job he needs; it is also a deadening of feeling altogether. Without the river to provide a space for feeling induced by nature, Peduzzi will be without feeling, will be, in a sense, already dead. Hemingway

described the writing style of “Out of Season” and stories like it thus: “If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them.”<sup>8</sup> In this story, what Hemingway “omits” is that Peduzzi, after losing his job, will kill himself; but the “feeling” of suicide is figured in the prospect of removing an environment that has stood in for human life and feeling altogether.

Hemingway turned to a now famous ecological metaphor when figuring his style of omission: “The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.”<sup>9</sup> It is fitting that Hemingway turned to an iceberg to symbolize his style: what he is doing here is not just redacting human story, but also presentating natural proxies. When Hemingway affirmed in “The Art of the Short Story” that “[i]f you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened,” he immediately provided two examples: in his story “Big Two-Hearted River,” “the war, all mention of the war, anything about the war, is omitted,” even though it is the background condition of the story, and in “A Sea Change,” “I left the story out.”<sup>10</sup> In these stories that have lost their story, what remains is their title, and then: a river, a sea. What emerges to tower over and absorb human narrative are natural environments: we orient to the river, not the war; to the sea, not the broken marriage.

Hemingway’s investment in natural environments is clearly evidenced not only here but also in the titles of his major works, almost all of which are populated by geographic or climatic figures; to list but a few, in the chronological order of their publication: *The Torrents ...* (1928), *The Sun*

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<sup>8</sup> Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Hemingway, “The Art of the Short Story,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

... (1926), “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936), ... *the River ... the Trees* (1950), ... *the Sea* (1952), and *Islands in the Stream* (1970).<sup>11</sup> There is a preference for aquatic figures, but Hemingway’s titles evidence an attraction to the natural environment in general. In each case, a natural figure becomes the primary object of narration. Human stories are invested in them, offered up to the environment for safekeeping. Hemingway’s style is thus a coordination of simple sentences and environmental imagery; it could be described as an action of conservation.

That is not what is going on in the style of Carver’s sentences—or, as I will argue in the following chapter, in the sentences of many other contemporary authors including Mary Robison, Ann Beattie, and Tao Lin. “So Much Water So Close To Home” may share syntax with Hemingway, but the simple sentences here do not take environmental content and in fact are deeply allergic to such content; that is what makes the style distinctive. The story begins how Hemingway’s ends: a fishing trip without women. The fathers in an American neighborhood take a trip to the mountains each summer, “before visiting relatives can get in the way” (80). The trip, in other words, is a seasonal performance of freedom from domestic obligation. But it is also the performance of a different kind of domesticity: “So Much Water” opens with the mother and wife Claire in her household kitchen, cleaning the dishes, but on the fishing trip, it is the men such as her husband who “took their cooking things and eating things back down to the river and washed them ...” (81). The narration, which began by propping up and repeating the fact of their maleness—“decent men, family men, men who take care of their jobs”—now suggests the fishing trip provides them an escape from their maleness or the normative

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<sup>11</sup> The sun is perhaps a less convincing example, as it is extra-terrestrial, but as a natural, rather than artificial source of light, it speaks to the same theme.

masculinity they had previously inhabited (80-81). There is a queerness to these homosocial mountains in which the men perform the domestic responsibilities they had previously allotted to their wives.

Because the mountain is coded as already other to their otherwise normative heterosexual lives, it is not a surprise that other perceived threats to domesticity and heterosexuality also begin to show up there. On this particular trip, the looming threat is given corporeal figuration: in the river where they are to fish, before they set up camp, they find the body of a girl, dead and naked, “wedged into some branches that stuck out over the water” (81). The narrative’s persistence in referring to the body as a “girl,” therefore picking out her youth as well as her gender, echoes the “sons and daughters” the men had left behind to go on their trip (81). Abandonment of traditional masculine and fatherly roles becomes blended with the death of this woman, whom we learn was killed by a man. The river becomes both the space in which these men take a break from fatherhood and in which other men leave their murdered intimates; the river is where heterosexual sex is either forfeited or goes violently wrong. One of the fathers—Claire wonders if it was her husband, Stuart—“took her by the fingers and pulled her into shore. He got some nylon cord and tied it to her wrist and then looped the rest around a tree” (81). The hybrid material of nylon—a synthetic material originally manufactured to replace natural silk—provides a route for metaphoric crossover between the body and the tree, or between the manmade production of violence and the natural figures that begin to provide an anchor for its consequences. As the story progresses, the natural scene—with the trees and the water—becomes contaminated with violence.

Indeed, in the fantasy logic of the story, it soon begins to seem it is not men who are responsible for domestic abandonment or domestic violence, but the river. “Why did you have to go miles away,” Claire asks Stuart regarding the choice of their fishing location, when there are creeks and a large pond in their own town: “So much water so close to home” (83). Claire’s question suggests she is more concerned about the discovery of the violence in the river than about the violence itself; what is terrible to her is not that the girl was killed, but that her husband had to bring the image and memory of the outdoors back “home.” Stuart’s mistake was his choice of water: the water out there is toxic because it is where dead girls show up, whereas the water closer to home is somehow safer.

That Claire is more concerned with Stuart’s choice in water than in the death of the girl is confirmed by the extent to which Claire even seems to take for granted that women will often meet violence by men. Violence is not just the particular tragedy of the girl in the river, but generically endemic to the heterosexuality that Claire and Stuart inhabit, as suggested throughout the story by Stuart’s refrain of discursive prohibitions—“I won’t have you passing judgment,” he says to Claire (80)—and the latent threat of violence that might manifest should these prohibitions not be met. “Don’t rile me” is Stuart’s immediate response to Claire’s question about the choice of fishing location. “You’re going to get me riled” (83); “[y]ou’re getting me more riled by the minute” (84). This is a relationship where, to use the aquatic metaphor, there always seems to be just beneath the surface the risk of some explosive outbreak. Claire, too, seems to have been trained to expect that a violent end to heterosexuality is, not exotic, but common. She recalls, as a girl, the murder of another girl, also thrown into a river. The most recent river murder helps her imagine her own: “I look at the creek. I’m right in it,

eyes open, face down, staring at the moss on the bottom, dead” (83). But when she tells Stuart about this genealogy of violence by men against women, a genealogy in which she cannot help but imagine herself to one day belong as just another instance, all he can tell her is not to get him riled. Violence is one of the prohibited topics, and so to talk about violence will only produce it.

Whereas Stuart’s solution to violence is a discursive ban, hoping that a prohibition on speaking will arrest the cycle of violence (never mind that to prohibit speech is itself a form of violence), Claire’s solution becomes a ban on water: if only she could get rid of rivers, then she will have gotten rid of the places in which murdered girls show up, therefore perhaps have prevented murder, hers included. For Claire, the task in turn becomes the creation of domestic spaces that, away from the violent waters of the great outdoors, can provide more tranquil modes of inhabiting heterosexuality. At home, their backyard comes to bear much of the work of producing a different domestic space by subtracting a wider environmental scene, especially aquatic. The yard is outside the house but still belongs to it, or rather it is a portion of the outdoors that the presence of the house has tamed, enclosed, and repurposed. When Claire decides to attend the funeral of the woman her husband and his friends discovered, and therefore to leave her child, Dean, unattended for an afternoon, it is the yard to which she entrusts him in a note: “Honey, Mommy has things to do this afternoon, but will be back later. You stay in or be in the backyard until one of us comes home” (85). The word “backyard” then gives her pause: “Is it one word or two?” (85). The stumble over the word suggests the space it names has become as much symbolic as actual for her and therefore difficult to re-enter into language. At this moment in which she is leaving her home to confront the violence that has disturbed it, she dwells for an extra moment in thinking of the yard and the safety it fantastically affords.

Yet this fantasy is hard to sustain. When Claire returns home from the funeral, she finds Stuart drinking in their kitchen. Dean, we learn, is in the backyard playing, safely. But Claire is about to learn the problem with having a safe space is that it has a space—a finite location—and you cannot be there all the time: Stuart comes at her menacingly, claiming a right to her body by telling her, “I think I know what you need,” and proceeding to unbutton her jacket and blouse (87). Instead of resisting Stuart’s advances, Claire responds by undoing the remainder of the buttons herself. The last words of the story are her telling him, “Before Dean comes. Hurry” (88). Claire seems to consent to Stuart’s advances as a means of warding off the violence she has feared he is capable of. That violence—not just in memory, having just come from the girl’s funeral, but also viscerally and personally immanent violence—is on Claire’s mind is confirmed not only explicitly by her at first worrying “something’s happened to Dean” (87), and not only metonymically by her realizing he is outside in the safe space where she is not, but also metaphorically and most tellingly by the appearance of “so much water” drowning out whatever Stuart is saying. It is unclear what, precisely, this water is; because we are inside, we might expect it to be a faucet, but no faucet has been mentioned. In any case, the water—its violence—has come home. Claire has been unable to permanently dry out the space of her domesticity, and the environmental contagion of violence appears after all.

Although Carver is often seen as an echo of Hemingway (David Foster Wallace, writing to complain about the popularity of the minimalisms of the 1980s, said Carver had simply “resurrected” the techniques of the modernist<sup>12</sup>), there is a different coordination of form and content in his writing. If in Hemingway’s iceberg stories, nature figures human feeling and even

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<sup>12</sup> McCaffery, “A Conversation with David Foster Wallace.”

relieves humans of having to say their stories, in Carver's stories, nature is more often figured as a threat to human flourishing.<sup>13</sup> Carver's style is one of detoxification: removing sentences of natural cues to support the fantasy that heterosexual intimacy can survive in the world. As I will develop in Chapter Two, what Wallace denigrated as minimalism and referred back to Hemingway is actually a new set of techniques for draining out sentences of environmental cues in order to orient to human bodies and relations fantasized as subtractable from the natural world.

Detoxification is a coordination of form and content that tries to remove sentences of nature in order to purify space for human intimacy. In the chapters that follow, I look at three other styles as well: intoxication, which stuffs sentences full of the world in order to alternately evacuate or reconfigure the conditions of human agency; invasion, which colonizes chapters with fragments of a subject as part of an archipelago of discrete publics; and evasion, which sees the novel as itself just a chapter in a larger narrative and ejects authorial presence from its pages in

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<sup>13</sup> In this respect, Carver departs not only from Hemingway—for whom the river in “Out of Season” absorbed and induced human feeling instead of figuring a threat to human flourishing—but also intermediary mid-century writers of suburban domesticity like John Cheever. The protagonist of one of Cheever's most anthologized short stories, “The Swimmer” (1964), decides one midsummer afternoon to “reach his home by water,” by which he means jump from swimming pool to swimming pool on the way from his friend's house to his own eight miles south. Cheever, *The Stories of John Cheever*, 726. The satire is that this is only possible because every house has a swimming pool; his cross-county trip is afforded by the architectural conformity of the suburbs. But even as the river of swimming pools highlights the unnaturalness of suburban life, the story itself synchronizes natural climate with the protagonist's mood; as he approaches home and it becomes clear that he has fallen from grace in the neighborhood, losing friends as well as his family, the season becomes autumnal; the temperature falls; it storms. Cheever's swimming pools may seem at first cut off from a natural world, but like in Hemingway, the natural world still serves to mirror and absorb human emotion. Nature feels out for the emotions the protagonist swims into. For Carver's Claire, in contrast, nature must be left behind.

order to fashion publics on top of anonymity. The formal units I look at are sentences and chapters, which I think of as two different levels of syntax: sentences structure language and chapters structure narrative space. In the novels under review, these units take content we could variously describe as domestic, intimate, sexual, environmental, public, social, and political. The names of styles are the names of actions that put these pieces together.

It is possible there are as many styles as there are ways of coordinating form and content, or, from another angle, there are as many styles as there are actions, since every action is itself an instance of form and content coming together: a movement of the body and an intention incarnated in it. My task in the following pages, however, will be to argue that these four styles—detoxification, intoxication, invasion, and evasion—are of special importance to the historical present. They each arise as a palpable category in the past couple generations, or roughly 1980 to the present, and they do so, I argue, because of their deep intimacy with the conditions of the contemporary world we inhabit and adapt to as the world adapts itself. But before addressing these styles themselves, these specific actions, we need to discuss action itself a bit further, in order to understand fully what is at stake in accounting for style as action in the following chapters.

## II. What Is an Action?

So: style is action—but: what exactly is an action? In her germinal re-configuration of the analytic philosophy of action, the 1957 *Intention*, G. E. M. Anscombe wrote to dispute a picture of action, most persistently philosophized by Donald Davidson, that thought an action

could be distinguished from other events a body undergoes according to its causal history.<sup>14</sup> For Davidson, an intentional action is so because it is anteceded by mental states that bring it about: if you are doing something instead of merely undergoing it, then you have had psychological conditions that have caused it. But this pacing out of cause and effect had the weird result of removing actors from the event of action itself, relegating them to the supervision of a mental process that precedes it and detaching them from the body during the activity itself, which is spontaneously produced literally as an afterthought. Looking at the causal history of action ignores the more important and intimate relation actors have with their bodies *while* they are acting, and an action cannot be decomposed to produce causes estranged from them.

Anscombe's most important legacy for the philosophy of action was to articulate not only the inadequacy of a causal scheme for describing action as it is performed, however, but also the inadequacy of any psychological view that constructs a mental apparatus somehow apart from the action it is supposed to oversee: the radical error, in Davidsonian accounts, is beginning with psychology, which in turn necessitates a causational account in order to hook up with bodily movements.<sup>15</sup> In *Intention*, Anscombe writes against this "mad account" that formulates action according to elements that can be directly observed by the actor, especially her bodily sensations, movements, beliefs, and desires.<sup>16</sup> This account in turn creates a predictive view of action, like a

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<sup>14</sup> See Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*. Many thanks to Candace Vogler for conversations that have brought out for me this distinction between Davidson and Anscombe.

<sup>15</sup> Another way of seeing the problem with a causational scheme is to consider how overdetermined a given action might be. At the same time, if an action were simply the effect of some causational apparatus of belief and desire, then we would expect the action to always follow every time the belief and desire exist, but often these supposed causes fail to effect an action; the psychological apparatus seems to be a necessary but not sufficient cause of the action.

<sup>16</sup> Anscombe, *Intention*, §29, 52.

scientist's, that taken to its logical conclusion arrests the actor in a contemplative task of merely prophesying an action she is as if independent from: because I desire to write a dissertation, and because I believe fetching a certain book from the shelf and opening my laptop are means toward this end, it is likely I will fetch a book and open my laptop. The significant and, for Anscombe, irreparable flaw in this line of thinking is that the end that the speculative theorist sets for her action cannot itself be observed in the same way that the desires, beliefs, and sensations that aim for it are said to be provided. If I say I am writing a dissertation, there is no dissertation yet: the dissertation belongs to a future state that, nonsensically, motivates my present behavior, not only providing an item in the active formula that cannot be viewed with observation, but also allowing the future to motor the present.

In order to understand action, Anscombe argues on the contrary, there has to be knowledge that, without observation, still provides the ends of an action. Whereas theoretical knowledge predicts phenomena in the objective world and considers human actions as a species of these events, therefore as propositions logically derived from a syllogistic calculus of observed beliefs, desires, and bodily states, Anscombe advocates for a practical knowledge that, following Thomas Aquinas, is the "cause of what it understands," that is, a knowledge whose syllogisms are ends-oriented and conclude in action.<sup>17</sup> This knowledge Anscombe formulates as knowledge-in-intention; it is the rationality that is incarnated in intentional actions themselves. If you ask an actor *why* they are doing something, the reason she provides will take the form of a part-whole or means-end relationship—"Why are you opening your laptop?" "Because I'm writing a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., §48, 87.

dissertation”—that, rather than reducing an action to its psychological components, explains an action by considering larger processes in which it takes part.

Anscombe’s practical knowledge therefore begins with actions themselves, which are picked out by being accountable to this *why?* question, and undertakes to understand the calculative structure actions manifest; psychological components do not precede the action, but are filled in afterwards to answer the *why?* that sets them apart. A number of consequences follow from framing the scene of possible intentional action with an interrogation, where each act one might perform is pestered with this recurring *why?* that picks out the essentially intentional actions from the background of merely physical noise. For one, an intention implicitly becomes a mediation between the interior of an actor and the public that bears witness to it, even if she acts in solitude and this public is just an abstracted double of herself; that is, the criterion of reasonableness assumed by the *why?* is simultaneously a criterion that an actor make herself intelligible to the interrogator by marshaling herself into a form that is recognizable. “A man’s intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing,” says Anscombe, “that he has absolute authority in saying what it is—as he has absolute authority in saying what he dreamt”: Anscombe imagines a back-and-forth between an actor and her interrogator, negotiating over the content of an intention that can make the form of an action sound.<sup>18</sup> Intention is that essential attribute of an action that makes an action accountable to itself, and intentional action becomes a scene in which actors confront the historicity of their acting, where what may seem most one’s own (“*I* intended to do X for Y”) really expresses what is most impersonal about acting (the capaciousness of descriptive formalisms to assimilate *any* X or Y): the articulation of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., §22, 36.

personal intention also indexes the genericity of actions by requiring they be structurally sound and reasonably intelligible.

This is in part a roundabout way of saying that practical knowledge is still *knowledge*: unlike a psychological view that might attribute to action radical subjectivism, practical knowledge remains sufficiently impersonal to be publicly known. Importantly, this distinguishes practical knowledge not by the subject matter it covers, but by the form it takes. Whereas theoretical knowledge predicts what will happen, practical knowledge describes what should happen through explaining the means that work toward an end or the parts that help compose a whole. It is not simply that practical knowledge is knowledge about actions, but more directly that practical knowledge, as the knowledge incarnated in actions, takes on a special form of description. The interrogative scene, and the implicit negotiation that could go into settling the answer as to why an action was performed, further entails that the meaning of actions must be highly contingent; if it is the form of description rather than some fact about the actions themselves that makes them intelligible as the private property of public actors, then each action might have several meanings depending on the description in which it is compiled. Intentions are, finally, like interpretations of action. They provide a lens through which actions can be seen, by linking them to possible grounds. The point that sets Anscombe apart from previous (analytic) theorists of action is that there may be any number of grounds that could be reasonably supplied to furnish an intentional action, and that these only come out in the interpretive scene initiated by the *why?* means that an intention might be epistemologically posterior to the action they are said, in previous accounts, ontologically to precede. It is as if an action is always trying to catch up with an interpretation in which its essential intentionality is made evident; orphaned

actions feel backwards for the descriptions that explain how they were born. Just as an intentional action becomes an interrogative scene in which an actor is asked to become accountable to herself, publicizing reasons and entertaining self-reflexivity in order to do so, so too is it an interpretive scene which, without a priori necessity, produces contingent coverings for its groundlessness.

Anscombe's *Intention* thus intervened in the theory of action by shifting the context of the debate, substituting for Davidson's metaphysical account of how mental states might cause bodily acts a descriptive account of how mind and body are collected in sentences that may or may not give the appearance of causation. The points to be taken in this shift are that descriptions themselves are the proper object of analytic discussion, that any causal apparatus is inimical to the form of the description and not to the real metaphysics of the scene it schematizes, and that the mind-body problem is therefore simply declined, at least on a first pass through the descriptive theory. In Anscombe's descriptive turn to form, a theory of action is to be a hermeneutic task of interpreting forms of description for their intentional value. Importantly, this extends the field of action into territory that philosophers who were merely interested in sealing off intentional actions from other events an actor undergoes would have been hesitant to explore, and it makes action theory available for the study of processes that may seem primarily affective or passionate.

One such territory is cultural production, as Arthur Danto discovered thirty years ago when bringing together his own dual interests in the philosophy of art and the philosophy of action. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto's seminal statement on the definition of art in the contemporary world, actually begins with the suggestion that "parallel structures are

discernible” in both of these philosophies,<sup>19</sup> because the problem of defining art is formally identical to the problem of defining action: what separates a mere object from an art object is identical to asking what separates a mere bodily movement from an action.<sup>20</sup> On this point, Danto has strayed already from Anscombe, for whom an action is not a bodily movement *plus* something extra, like intention, but is instead *essentially* intentional itself.<sup>21</sup> But Danto luckily does not decide to pursue this analogy between action and art beyond the introductory offering. Where action does come back into his theory of art is in his concluding remarks on style, which he proceeds to define as “what remains of a representation when we subtract its content.”<sup>22</sup> By this, Danto means the traces left in an artwork by the very event of its production, which refer back to the artist herself, her craft, and her tools. The stylistic qualities of a work, in other words, are those immediate to the artist, those that impact a work without any external mediation; style is “what is done without the mediation of art or knowledge.”<sup>23</sup> Because it refers to the spontaneous, immediate expression of an artist’s “particular way of seeing the world,”<sup>24</sup> Danto finally defines style as a *basic action*, something without a cause and performed “through the absence of mediating cognition and action.”<sup>25</sup> But the absence of mediation also means, for

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<sup>19</sup> Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see especially Ford, “Action and Generality.”

<sup>22</sup> Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 197.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. Although I contest Barthes’s extreme individualism, which seems to me to miss style’s social travel, he nonetheless provides useful language in conceptualizing style along these lines by considering it to be a reflex: “imagery, delivery, vocabulary, spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art.” Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*.

<sup>24</sup> Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 204.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. Elsewhere, Danto elaborates, “an individual does not cause his basic actions to happen. When an individual *M* performs a basic action *a*, there is no event distinct from *a* that

Danto, that style, which is so intimately the expression of an artist, cannot itself be known by its artist. Even though “the structure of a style is like the structure of a personality,” this style is only “for others to see,” because the “presence of knowledge or art presupposes that externalization which is inconsistent with them being [her] style.”<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Danto elaborates that style cannot be known by the artist in part because style develops over the course of a career that exceeds any given artwork: those features which, in retrospect, appear as stylistic must first have been spontaneous.<sup>27</sup> This provides another reason why, in Danto’s understanding, style is to be understood as a basic action: if style cannot be known, it cannot be intended, and therefore it cannot be a nonbasic action. Noël Carroll paraphrases Danto’s argument: “insofar as stylistic features only emerge gradually in the course of an oeuvre ..., intention does not explain style, rather style often helps isolate the consolidation of artistic intention.”<sup>28</sup>

Although Danto seems to have read Anscombe (he at least cites *Intention* in his opening analogy between the philosophy of action and the philosophy of art), it is when he begins to talk about supposed actions without intentions that he would benefit from a more sustained engagement with Anscombe’s thinking: style’s inaccessibility to its bearer—or what Leonard Meyer might call style’s “tacit knowledge”<sup>29</sup>—might, after all, be understood as a form of

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both stands to *a* as cause to effect *and* is an action performed by *M*.” Danto, “Basic Actions,” 142.

<sup>26</sup> Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 207.

<sup>27</sup> Danto, “Narrative and Style,” 208.

<sup>28</sup> Carroll, “Danto, Style, and Intention,” 254. Carroll goes on to clarify that this does not mean intentions are irrelevant in artistic production, only that at first the artist must have intended something non-stylistic, and then these intentions for something else get caught up, over time, in style’s congealment.

<sup>29</sup> For Meyer, style “is a matter of habits properly acquired (internalized) and appropriately brought into play. Even when a composer invents a new rule, or more commonly, discovers a

practical knowledge defined as knowledge without observation. Fortunately, philosophers who have inherited Anscombian accounts of action have also, more recently, theorized the “basic action” that Danto defined style as. Whereas Danto defined basic actions negatively, as non-intentional, Anscombian theorists for whom all action is essentially intentional turn to a more positive account of basic action and, by extension, of style. Most recently, William Small has argued forcefully for basic actions not as the irreducible and simplest of actions from which more complicated ones are built up, but as themselves the products of a skill. The kinds of actions that seem most instinctive and unconscious, the ones you “just do” without planning them, are in fact the operations of a skill that has been sufficiently mastered to be exercised without intentional planning. But these skills are themselves the effect of earlier intentional actions through rehearsing, coaching, and maintaining them.<sup>30</sup> A basic action may look spontaneous and without rational components when isolated, but the skill that makes this spontaneity possible—the skill that a basic action might be said to manifest or express—provides a continual fund of rational activity that is incarnated in it.

What Small usefully illuminates in the “life-cycle of a skill”—its acquisition through doing, its maintenance through practicing, and its expansion through teaching—is a skill’s social generality. Whereas Davidsonian accounts of action, which construct intentions as psychological complexes that involve belief, have an action provide a source of reflective knowledge, that is, a self-knowledge of the beliefs an action carries with it, Anscombian accounts, which prioritize the

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novel strategy for realizing some existing rule, his invention or discovery may be largely tacit. He finds a relationship that ‘works’ but might be unable to explain *why* it does so—how it is related to other features and other constraints of the style.” Meyer, *Style and Music*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Small, “Two Kinds of Practical Knowledge,” 184.

action itself over the psychology that could be said retroactively to cause it, help pick out the social knowledge of an action through the publicity of actions and through the genericity that makes them intelligible to others. Similarly, Small's skills refer small-scale components of action to a social circulation that that has produced it. Most importantly, Small provides a way of elaborating Danto's account by giving a positive definition to basic action. Whereas Danto can only see basic action by what it is not—it is *not* caused by any other action—Small conceptualizes basic action positively, as the product of a skill. And if style is to be understood as a basic action, and therefore as the product of a skill, then Danto's extreme psychologism must also be revised, loosening the monogamous intimacy between artist and style in order to see a larger and more social life-cycle through which a skill has travelled, before the production of style.

Through Danto, Small also directs our attention to the importance of style as a site for exploring kinds of seemingly automatic behavior that are actually the product of kinds of social belonging. The basic action of style speaks to a social genre, not quite a habitus, but still a way of doing in the world; a style is the marker of a social group that makes itself manifest in the work of an individual. Through Danto, we understand style as a basic action; through Small, we understand basic actions as the exercise of a socially circulated skill; and through Anscombe, upon whom Small ultimately draws, we understand that actions are also the form of psychological content. This suggests that the kind of social circulation that skills experience does not have to be grounded in empirical institutions; they may also be, like affects, atmospheric, picked up from the air as shared practices of inhabiting a similar historical moment and place. Affect theory, like action theory, has taught us to be skeptical of the intentions we can make for the future: we are always caught up in ongoing processes we cannot arrest long enough to totally

cognize what the future will be. But action theory does not ask us to then give up on rational thought; instead, it asks us to look for the logic and rationality presented in the form of action, even when not provided prior to it. An action, as action, includes beliefs about and desires for the future, but as the content of a form rather than the cause of an effect. The task for the cultural theorist then becomes to unpack the form of an action—and in turn the form of a style—in order to see what vision of the future it has.

In turn, style also provides a literary method for affect theory, which in recent years has provided the best resources for both analyzing and synthesizing the conditions of the contemporary and has taught us how to track processes as they unfold without wrapping them up in pre-given narratives. It is affect theory, as I hope to bring out in this dissertation, that has trained us to describe the loose structuration of everyday life, attending more to atmospheres than to rigid orders. But understanding style as action also reshuffles the ground of affect theory by prioritizing action and form.<sup>31</sup> Action, I argue in the remainder of this section, is the central, though often elided, term in affect theory—in fact the center that coordinates many affect theoretical concepts.

Consider Benjamin Libet's 1980s experiments on volitional actions, often cited as evidence of the separability of conscious and unconscious activity, or by extension of cognition and affect, granting ontological priority to the latter. In the experiments, subjects were

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<sup>31</sup> Within affect theory, a call to form has been made most forcefully by Eugenie Brinkema. But unlike Brinkema, who reads affects as “structures that work through formal means [and] consisting in their formal dimensions,” thereby displacing a conception of affect as “expression, communication, address, spectatorship, experience, or sensation,” my view is that actions are structures in which affective materials are embedded. Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 37, 36. Actions, more than affects, are the proper formal concept.

instructed to look at a clock and, at a moment of their choosing, flex their right fingers or wrists. On average, subjects reported forming an intention to do the action about .2 seconds before they did it, but EEG recordings showed that brain activity actually began to increase a full half second before the action, or a further .3 seconds before the cognitive appraisal. This pre-intentional brain activity therefore seems to support an account of affects, not cognitive states, as the proper causes of action, and intentions themselves become only an awareness of this process unfolding, converted into a fantasy of control in relation to it: the subject's cognition defends against its apparently passive participation in this larger process by retroactively implementing its own mental events as the beginning of the action proper.<sup>32</sup>

This interpretation of the experiment is continuous with, and is often seen explicitly to support, Baruch Spinoza's original definition of affects as "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained."<sup>33</sup> Readings of Spinoza beginning with Gilles Deleuze and popularized by Brian Massumi have tended to read this oft-quoted definition as recommending affects as a relational space that facilitates the emergence of action.<sup>34</sup> An affect becomes especially a sort of pre-personal or impersonal intensity that provides a field in which the human emerges: bodies cannot help but be caught in a continually unfolding matrix of encounters in which they are shaped and compelled by being affected and in which each impact and its resultant consequences must merely punctuate a causal chain that exceeds the local incident. But this narration of the affective experience—which considers virtual

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<sup>32</sup> Libet et al., "Time of Conscious Intention to Act," 640. See also Libet, "Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action."

<sup>33</sup> Spinoza, "Ethics," IIIId3, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, "What Can a Body Do?" See also Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, esp. chap. 1.

relationality ontologically prior to any action, and which therefore manages to isolate affects as events despite an avowed investment in the interconnected complexity in which bodies are always contingently embedded—also tends to overlook the importance Spinoza gives to acting as an epistemologically prior means of picking out affects from other concepts of affection. An action is not just evidence of affects, but intimately part of their definition, enveloping them in a form in which they become recognizable for the first time: we see an action, and in order to explain it, we retroactively posit an affective situation that can be seen to ground it. For Spinoza, affects stabilize actions by providing the necessary supplementary materials for a coherent narrative in which they can participate.

Libet's conclusions have been contested and even dismissed both within the neuroscientific community and, more recently, in evaluations of the work of humanistic affect theorists who have used Libet to support their accounts. Ruth Leys, for instance, criticizes Massumi for seeing in Libet's experiment evidence supporting the reduction of mental states to a monistic theory of the material brain; Massumi's theory, for Leys, is rather a reversal of a dualistic hierarchy than its collapse, keeping mind and body separate but granting the body ontological priority in directing the intentions of the mind.<sup>35</sup> Leys is worried that affect theorists too easily leave intentional states behind in viewing cognition as separate from and often submitted to affective relations, a leaving behind that would also evacuate cultural analysis from any ground on which it could argue over meaning or ideology.<sup>36</sup> But here Leys seems to reproduce the separation she contests, allowing Massumi to define affects as non-cognitive states

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<sup>35</sup> Leys, "The Turn to Affect," 455.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

instead of disputing this understanding of affect itself. Spinoza's broad definition of the affects, for one, would seem to accommodate both neural activity and conscious intentional states as simultaneously involved in changing a body's or a mind's power to act. Indeed, the intervention of Spinoza's parallelism of mind and body was to dismiss any direct relations between them, in order to see how phenomena in separate fields are correlated rather than caused. A view of an intentional idea as the expression of a neural activity is consistent with Spinoza, without requiring a theory that prioritizes one over another or that puts them into a causal narrative. Rather, the basic point to be taken from Spinoza, and one consistent with Libet's design at the same time it is opposed to his conclusion, is that affects are to be found only in the actions that evidence them. An action provides a scene in which affects are registered, picked out, and put into explanations. Indeed, the inseparability of affect and action within a narrative economy that deploys affects as the necessary conditions of actions was presumed by Libet in the design of his experiment, but forgotten in his explanation of its results: Libet's intuition was that, to test affective activity, you have to provide an action in which it can appear and unfold, here the flexing of a wrist; his error was that, having found this activity, he turned the scenic quality of an action into a posterior event. And even this event, which Libet selects as the volitional action to be analyzed, is only one among a range of actions the experiment instructed subjects to perform: a subject was to "fix [her] gaze on the center of the clock"; when primed by a "get-ready" tone, she was to relax her muscles and blink; thereafter, she was to refrain from blinking; and only then was she to flex her hand and record the time of her intention.<sup>37</sup> All these explicitly instructed

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<sup>37</sup> Libet et al., "Time of Conscious Intention to Act," 625. I use the feminine pronoun even though Libet does not, because the majority of his subjects were, indeed, female-identified.

actions might also be seen as embedded in a larger intentional action of, say, “doing an experiment.” Why does Libet then only isolate and select one action as the effect to be studied? The design of Libet’s experiment seems to suggest, instead, that actions cannot help but get constellated with or implanted in other actions, recommending action more as a messy context than a bounded thing. In turn, affects cannot be separated from actions in order to take up a temporally distinct position as their cause; at least in Spinoza’s schema, actions are essentially understood as scenes, rather than events, and affects are better understood as players on the stage.

I have been arguing Anscombe continues Spinoza’s scenic understanding of action, re-organizing affect theory by foregrounding action.<sup>38</sup> Lauren Berlant also implicitly recommends such a move toward the end of her national sentimentality trilogy, which has tracked the migration of American politics from a public sphere relation of citizen and state to a “affectsphere” that provides the citizen a performative sense of belonging to the nation-state

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<sup>38</sup> I think a move to action in order to re-shuffle the ground of affect theory was anticipated already in the late work of that central affect theorist, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Her important concept of the “periperformative,” first defined in *Touching Feeling* and then developed in a conference paper on C. P. Cavafy definitively collected in the posthumously published *The Weather in Proust*, especially speaks to the relation of affect and action. For Sedgwick, periperformative utterances, which refer to performative utterances but do not have the force or effect of them, carve out a space that is in the shadow of an action: “By the light of explicit performative utterance, what I *feel* or even *intend* is conclusively subordinated to what, performatively, I *do*. The periperformative, by contrast, is the grammar in which affect and subjectivity can be explicitly brought into relation with issues of performative force.” Sedgwick, “Cavafy, Proust, and the Queer Little Gods,” 58. Here Sedgwick seems to suggest affective materials are clustered contingently around an action, which oversees the domain of subjective, affective life. This gives to action the ontological priority that I have tried to bring out in similar ways in this section by way of an alternate intellectual genealogy.

without providing active means for her reciprocal participation.<sup>39</sup> In the conclusion to that trilogy, *The Female Complaint*, Berlant feels out for ways of detaching from “world-making passivity,” and she tentatively invests in the possibilities of worlds and publics opened up by the singularity of gesture, in which an action not yet understood or assimilated into “the project of universalizing transcendence in pop homogeneity, compassionate self-performance, and celebratory nationalist historicizing” produces rather than manages affect, performing for an emerging political public that is not yet and cannot be official politics.<sup>40</sup> The collective and radical political task, for Berlant, becomes one of searching for different kinds of action, underappreciated and non-evental on the national scale, and of attending to the communal process of them, in order to cultivate intimate publics that are less toxic to the flourishing of those participating in their orbit.

If action in this light is the ultimate end of affective inquiry, and if affect theory is invested in its current objects in part out of a desire to theorize how actions can be made possible, then affect theory might also attend to theories of action in order to complicate and modify its understanding of the contingency and endurance of the present. A theory of style as action suggests one way of doing so while also providing a new object of analysis: style, as a sort of instinctive, immediate action, is on the precipice of a future and gives form to the searching out that transitional moments organize.

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<sup>39</sup> See., e.g., Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, x–xi, 10–13. For the concept of the “intimate public sphere,” see Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 1–24. The trilogy is completed by Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*.

<sup>40</sup> Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 276, 277.

### III. What's Up With Style Today?

In sum: I am asking us to identify styles according to what they do and then to unfold the forms of intimate, social, and political emergence incarnated in them. But how to historicize style's feeling for a radical present? When Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick queried Fredric Jameson's dictum to historicize ("*Always* historicize? What could have less to do with historicizing than the commanding atemporal adverb 'always?'), she was implicitly asking for method and object to come into congruence: for a method to be plural in relation to the plurality of historical periods in which it was applied.<sup>41</sup> But there does not have to be a contradiction between a general method of historicizing and the particular contexts in which that historicizing work will flesh out situations for understanding its objects. This is the view I adopt in relation to the historicity of my theoretical claims here. From the perspective of action philosophy, style is *always* a basic action. But the kinds of action that style becomes are different in the contemporary period. A style learned by rote, for instance, in a previous disciplinary society, incarnates actions that are mimetic to the institutions that have administered them; thus a style might perform an action of learning that it has learned in an institution of learning. To examine the actions of style in such a society does not get us much leverage on understanding the groups of people to which it is ascribed; at most, it demonstrates that there were people who were so grouped. But in a historical period of institutional decay—as I argue in this section our contemporary period is—styles are remarkably fertile fields for social analysis because of their misfit or distance from any particular institution; they refer not backwards in easy reference but forwards to futures that are being figured out and improvised. Style is *always* a basic action; but it is in a period when

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<sup>41</sup> Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 125.

actions cannot be claimed by institutions that an understanding of style as action becomes provocative and indispensable.

Compare an account of style as action with two influential ways in which literary style has been talked about in the past generation. The first is Mark McGurl on minimalism, paradigmatically that of Raymond Carver, whom I discussed above:

For the postwar student venturing into the hazardous space of the creative writing workshop, the minimalist aestheticization of “Dick-and-Jane prose” is a re-performance, in a more elevated setting, of the original acquisition of the verbal self-control for which the children’s primer was the program. ... The very shortness of the short forms associated with minimalism (and with creative writing instruction in general) puts “mastery of form,” a solid sense of completion, within visible reach of the student.<sup>42</sup>

The second is D. A. Miller, thinking through Jane Austen:

Behind the glory of style’s willed evacuation of substance lies the ignominy of a subject’s hopelessly insufficient social realization, just as behind style’s ahistorical impersonality lies the historical impasse of someone whose social representation doubles for social humiliation.<sup>43</sup>

For Miller, style manages a personal ambivalence toward social types: in style is lived the drama of an abjection turned into a fantasy of omnipotent rejection. Style is then, for Miller, the recourse and prerogative of those who participate in modes of life outside a normative social narrative that grants intelligibility only to a limited and, especially, heterosexual few; it is the domain of both the gay reader and, like Austen, the unmarried woman who could never really appear as a character in any of her novels because not emplotted in the will toward reproductive futurity. For Miller’s Austen, style is paradigmatically free indirect style, which simultaneously mimes and distances the narrator’s “way of saying ... from ... the character’s way of seeing”; style

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<sup>42</sup> McGurl, *The Program Era*, 294.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Jane Austen*, 28 (emphasis removed).

brings the narrator and a socially typical character into “ostentatiously close quarters,” testing the thin boundary between the two and allowing the narrator to get as intimate as possible with a social type while still performing a decided detachment from it, that is, a disavowal of wanting to actually inhabit it.<sup>44</sup> For McGurl, style is a similar drama of humiliation translated into craft, with masterful sentences substituting for the feeling of having first been mastered by a social apparatus out of authorial control, although McGurl’s antagonist is not a heteronormative symbolic order but a specific institution of expertise: the University. And whereas Miller points to style as a flirtation with impersonality—getting close, but not too close, to impersonal social types—McGurl instead points to style as impersonality itself, first as a strategy of clearing personal shame by evacuating personality altogether and therefore removing any anchor for shame to attach to, but also second, and more importantly, as a generalized and classed mode of inhabiting the institution in which the shame was born. That is, as authors write themselves into a style that belongs, not to them individually, but to the group of them, they begin to identify with the institution itself.

What Miller and McGurl have in common is a departure from earlier understandings of style as “signature” à la Goodman. In turning instead to the social mediation of style, they also share a belief in the foundational work of shame. Miller is more interested in how this gets induced by a relation to a total symbolic order and the forms of normativity it affords, whereas McGurl locates himself more narrowly, and historic-specifically, in the relations afforded by particular institutions. Although it is true that these diverging directions—toward wider social normativity, on the one hand, and toward finite interpersonal institutions on the other—are part

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

of the tension within style itself, as a management of, in Miller's words, "ahistorical impersonality" and "historical impasse," the two approaches to style are also informed by the different historical periods to which they are applied.<sup>45</sup> Miller, writing about Austen, has in mind a disciplinary society, modeled after Foucault, in which regimes of normalization compel individuals to monitor and realize themselves in a certain way. McGurl, writing about the postwar period, has in mind a close kin of disciplinary society, what mid-century American sociologists called the "organized society." In 1959, for instance, C. Wright Mills described life in America as a "series of traps"—itemized as the "close-up scenes of job, family, [and] neighborhood" among others—and thereby theorized society as a chain of enclosures.<sup>46</sup> In particular, Mills thought life was a cycle of "playing ... roles within specific institutions. To understand the biography of an individual, we must understand the significance and meaning of the roles he has played and does play; to understand these roles we must understand the institutions of which they are a part."<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, Mills had already theorized that "a person is composed of an internalization of organized social roles" and that institutions, which administer these roles to the persons who come within their borders, were the primary unit of social structures.<sup>48</sup> Mill's view of a society in which persons are always preceded by the institutions in which they are "trapped" was a strong corrective to the American frontier mentality he dismissed from previous eras. The paradigmatic space of America life was not the unbounded frontier, but

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>46</sup> Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>48</sup> Gerth and Mills, *Character and Social Structure*, 83, 23.

the bounded office: Mills thought we were in “the beginning of the office-machine age.”<sup>49</sup> In this age, every institution starts to look like an office—“families as well as factories, leisure as well as work, neighborhoods as well as states”—because increasingly organized by the same principles of rationalization.<sup>50</sup> Rationality finally oversaw a “functionally rational totality”—an “organized society”—in which each institutional space was hermetically enclosed, with its own set of roles, but integrated into a larger social order, which for Mills was ultimately the political state.<sup>51</sup>

Discursive normalization for disciplinary society, and therefore Miller; institutional roles for organized society, and therefore McGurl. But for both, an impersonal mechanism administers knowable social types with knowable ways of being and doing in the world, and it is the work of style to manage proximity to them. These powerful accounts of style do not get as much leverage on cultural work from the past couple generations, however, which have seen a steady erosion both of the kind of disciplinarity Miller understood to be the interlocutor of style and of the institutions McGurl thought to be style’s background condition. The erosion I have in mind is well dramatized in Tony Kushner’s persistently insightful *Angels in America*, two plays first written in the late eighties and revised in the following decades as a continuing index of geopolitical and social anxieties from the most recent generations. The title of the first play—

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<sup>49</sup> Mills, *White Collar*, 195.

<sup>50</sup> Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 169.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 169, 135. Karl Mannheim’s distinction between two kinds of rationality—a “substantial” rationality of personal intelligence and a “functional” rationality organized toward a goal—remains useful here. For Mannheim, industrialization brings more functional rationality, but not substantial rationality, because most individuals are no longer setting their own goals. See Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, 52–58. Mills adapts this insight when he writes, “Rationally organized social arrangements are not necessarily a means of increased freedom—for the individual or for the society. In fact, often they are a means of tyranny and manipulation, a means of expropriating the very chance to reason, the very capacity to act as a free man.” Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 169.

“Millennium Approaches,” where we are talking not only about “the year two thousand, but the capital-M Millennium” (289)—captures the sense of impending transition and rupture that I take as the background condition of the contemporary. Its pair of prophetic figures—the underemployed Prior, whose AIDS-driven hallucinations bring biting clarity to the contradictions of American sociality; and the self-described “mentally deranged sex-starved pill-popping housewife” Harper, who is neglected by her closeted Mormon husband and who, through Valium, inhabits a different world that nonetheless throws our own into sharp relief—also fill out what these ruptures are (36). Here is Harper meditating on what brings to people like Prior and herself a prophetic sense: “People who are lonely, people left alone, sit talking nonsense to the air, imagining ... beautiful systems dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart” (16). She thinks immediately of the hole in the ozone layer, which she considers a safety net gifted to the earth by God as a “crowning touch to the creation of the world,” but there are other safety nets, more or less metaphorical, that are also dissipating: “everywhere, things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way” (16). In Harper’s generalized immunological imagination, concentric spheres of containment are being breached: planetary, national, and bodily; these are each “systems” whose circulatory ecologies are being perturbed (“People are like planets, you need a thick skin” [17]). For others in the play, the sense of disruption can sometimes play out on primarily one plane of experience; for the lawyer Roy Cohn, who prosecuted the Rosenbergs and sent them to their deaths, the system he seems most disturbed to see withering away is not his own immune system, progressively weakened by AIDS, but the binary geopolitical order of the Cold War, which granted an elegant us-versus-them code of sorting out enemies (152); perhaps one reason he dies in the play is that he belongs to a period

that is dead itself (“I don’t know the world anymore,” he says in one of his final scenes [210]). But for Harper, the generalized condition of systemic disrepair is to be understood as operating on multiple scales all at once; the work of her language is to coordinate and conflate the personal, national, and global so that words like “system,” “order,” and “defense” begin to operate multiply and simultaneously. It is no wonder that another social outcaste in the play—an unidentified “homeless woman”—joins the prophesy by claiming, “In the new century I think we will all be insane” (111): without systems to stabilize roles or even bodies for people to inhabit, we cannot help but become disorganized ourselves.

And yet this apocalyptic bent to “Millennium Approaches” is revised in the second play of *Angels in America*, “Perestroika,” which seems to realize disruption can be as much a beginning as an ending. Harper, who has the last words of the play before the epilogue, returns to her ozone theme but in an opposite direction, no longer tracking downwards from planetary disrepair to bodily disintegration, but instead working up from the bodies of the dead to the atmospheric: “the souls of the[] departed joined hands, clasped ankles, and formed a web, a great net of souls, and the souls were three-atom oxygen molecules, of the stuff of ozone, and the outer rim absorbed them, and was repaired” (285). Harper imagines a suturing through loss, where the common condition of loss is universalized to create a different whole. Prior, for his part, begins to see his death sentence as the condition for an imagination of different kinds of life: “Because, because I do believe that, that over and over, I’ve seen the end of things. And having seen, I’m going blind, as prophets do” (176). He is visited by an Angel, who explains that angels can *do* anything but cannot imagine or invent or create anything, because designed only for the adoration of God (166); it was men who were then created to supplement angelic power for

action with a power for imagination, unleashing “Eternal Creation’s Potential for Change” (169). It is this change that becomes the proper object of “Perestroika”: no longer a melancholy for lost orders, but an imagination of future ones. In the epilogue to *Angels in America*, Prior’s friends are discussing the fall of the Berlin Wall and the destabilization of a world order, but he mutes their geopolitical chatter to address the audience and direct them away from the world as it is to the way the world could be. He gets the last words of the play entire: “The Great Work Begins” (290), where the title-case borrows from the style of the Angel and suggests Prior’s ascendancy to divine possibility (160). Prior—and therefore the play—nonetheless decline to say what this work is or by whom it is to be done or what, precisely, it will produce. This is a prophesy of the form of change but not its content; this is a play that ends hopefully but non-prescriptively.

As *Angels in America* underlines, this is a period of disorganization on multiple scales more than systemic organization, and we need a theory of style adaptable enough to account less for an anchoring in institutions that are given and more for a future that is only emerging. Style as action gets us this sort of versatility. Put in another way: *Angels of America* shows us, thematically, the disorganization of our contemporary society, which it sees as an opening for new and exciting forms to emerge, and the styles I look at in this dissertation enact these emergences themselves, as people move into the future. But by looking at pairs of style—detoxification *and* intoxication; invasion *and* evasion—I also hope to proliferate and complicate the affective registers that can accompany such a movement. Some of the styles I look at in this dissertation are optimistic about the sense of ending-as-beginning that a work like *Angels* supplies, but others are more cautious in approaching the unknown. They have a skepticism that is figured well in the content of another narrative informed, although more obliquely, by the

AIDS epidemic: Todd Hayne's 1995 film *Safe*. Giving her a surname that marks her non-exceptionality, the film follows Carol White, a homemaker in the San Fernando Valley of the late 1980s. Carol stumbles to identify herself as such: "I'm a house ... I'm a homemaker," she introduces herself at one point, where the difficulty of transitioning herself from the passive status of "wife" to the more active category of "maker" pinpoints much of her struggle as a character. In many ways, she fails to show up in her world, to be intelligible as an agent not to mention a person, and this is presented not only through Julianne Moore's expert skill at embodying subjective evacuation, but also through the film's formal framing of her body and speech. Visually, she is dwarfed by expansive shots that seem to suggest her teal furniture is more interesting than her face, and sonically, her speech is often drowned out by the various tracks playing in the background. In the lockerroom of her aerobics class, the track is her friends repeating the argument of a neoliberal self-help book ("emotional maintenance ... stress management ... it's about how to own your own life"); in the car between stops for errands, it is talk radio going on about Christian fundamentalism and the American presidency; in her house, the television is on late into the night with infomercials on new age psychology ("deep ecology goes beyond the traditional scientific framework to incorporate a greater spiritual awareness of the planet"). This spoken word soundtrack samples the anxieties—political, social, personal—of her contemporary American moment, but it also indicates how these anxieties tamper with and distress the spaces they begin to fill up. The idiom of emotional self-repair distorts the gymnastic space where Carol is supposed to appear as a subject of health (her friends note she never sweats, cueing how out of place her body is in the space); religion and politics exceed the spaces of the church and the White House and appear when she is alone just trying to pick up

some dry cleaning; and deep ecology pushes out a focus on the role of homemaker she professes (when she corrects her stepson that she did not “forget” his soccer practice but only got it “mixed up,” she affirms that she is living in a geography where spaces overlap and her responsibilities in each one come into conflict). When she goes into therapy, she does not even know how to be a subject of psychiatry; the psychiatrist keeps wanting to hear more about “you,” but she cannot find the words to inhabit the person he wants her to be. What Leo Bersani sees as Carol’s drowning out by sound and sight in the long shots and piling on of discursive noise in the film, I see as the winnowing of a self no longer provisioned by disciplinary spaces and institutions.<sup>52</sup> Disciplinary spaces from the institution of health to the institution of the family find themselves mixed up by the intrusion of discursive atmospheres, and Carol is increasingly less of a subject because there are increasingly fewer spaces that can stably tell her how to act, how to be a maker.

Yet there are moments when Carol’s voice—or rather, a sound she makes—does compete with the background noise: when she is coughing in a parking lot she has taken refuge in from a polluted world or when she cannot breathe at a baby shower, her choking sounds silencing the reproductive chatter and ultimately requiring those in the room to reorient around her, Carol, who has no biological child of her own. Carol, it turns out, has multiple chemical sensitivity, a controversial medical diagnosis that means she is increasingly allergic to the everyday world others easily inhabit. There is no cure for her condition, only management. At a seminar she attends, we learn she needs to “clear” her system, which requires first and foremost “creat[ing] an oasis in which to live. Your oasis is your safe place.” The idiom of “safe place” is not metaphoric here; what is being prescribed to her is the allocation of actual physical space she can call her

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<sup>52</sup> Bersani, “Illegitimacy.”

own, for instance a room in her house. This affirms the underlying drama of her condition and of her challenge to be a person: she is disturbed as a person because of a disturbance in the spaces that were supposed to tell her how to be one. Thus, when she wakes up one morning after her diagnosis, delirious, she asks her husband not *who* she is, but *where* she is: she is looking for a space to provision her a role to fill up, and if she knows “where” she is, “who” will follow.

The space to which Carol ultimately retreats is Wrenwood, a complex of cabins in the desert where she and others with weakened immune systems find refuge from the toxins of urbanized civilization. Much has been made of Wrenwood as a neoliberal space, supervised by the cultish leader of Peter, whose lesson is that people create their own illness by not loving themselves enough: if you change your relationship to yourself, your world (and your immune system) will follow. But what is fascinating about Wrenwood is how it combines many different kinds of space; it may express a neoliberal reduction of structural agency to personal fantasy, but it is not continuous with, for instance, the post-Taylorist modes of production of late capitalism with which neoliberalism is often twinned. With its hierarchy and a sense of communal cooking as tenant farming, it is more a feudal than a capitalist society.<sup>53</sup> What Wrenwood then seems to figure is, more than a space completely saturated by a strong and identifiable ideology, a space

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<sup>53</sup> I am borrowing here from the taxonomy of economically coded spaces provided by the “diverse economies” approach taken up recently by geographers inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s call for reparative readings. See esp. Carnegie, “Development Prospects in Eastern Indonesia,” 357. I would call this body of work “reparative geography”; trying to make sense of a contemporary geopolitical world ostensibly dominated by capitalist logics, reparative geography attempts to feel out for spaces that cannot be so easily explained by totalizing economic narratives, worried that to submit geographic spaces in advance to these narratives risks strongly tautologizing and perpetuating precisely those logics which such studies seek to critique. That is, reparative geography seeks to map the world in such a way that spaces are not always already captured by paranoid structures. See Gibson-Graham, “Diverse Economies.”

that is, rather, totally unclassifiable: both feudal and late capitalist, both communal and individualistic. This is exactly the kind of space that someone like Carol, who does not seem to inhabit roles belonging to any given world, would come, because her incoherence finds belonging in the space's incoherence. But it is also because she belongs to no single, present world that Carol also begins to look, at the end of the film, like she belongs to a future world. In the final scene, she has retreated into her own bubble and tells herself in the mirror, vacantly but not ironically: "I love you. I love you." But we cannot know who this "I" or the "you" is anymore, and as Bersani has commented, "it is Carol's stammering words of self-love at the end of the film that signal the shedding of a person who might be loved."<sup>54</sup> The film "[t]ransforms a social outcast into a barely existent body. It is up to us to decide ... if that body harbors some as yet unnamed passion."<sup>55</sup> *Angels in America* ends on a similar note as well, with Harper's mother-in-law—who has left the institution of the Mormon church that provisioned so much of her worldview and now, implicitly, is forming new views from the bottom-up—tells us: "You can't live in the world without an idea of the world, but it's living that makes the ideas" (289). At the ends of both *Angels in America* and *Safe*, characters are living on in the world without a plan or a role or a name for their bodies; they must feel out for more and different modes of life in a period drawn out, its institutions distressed. This period after institutions is a period after organized society and after disciplinarity. Sociologists of law have used the phrase "post-disciplinary society" to describe contemporary developments in governmental penology and the management of crime;<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Bersani, "Illegitimacy," 35.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>56</sup> Simon, *Poor Discipline*, 38. Simon does not use the phrase "post-disciplinary society" per se, but for an elaboration of his argument that does use it (although nonetheless ultimately

I will be using it here to describe a general period in which institutions of all sorts are no longer guaranteeing social types and codes of behaviors.

To get a better handle on the plethora of converging conditions that distort institutional types in post-disciplinary society, I depart from Miller and McGurl in my understanding of style. This dissertation's understanding of the contemporary is instead informed by political scientists like John Mearsheimer, who in 1989 was interested in how the end of a bipolar Cold War order disoriented received geopolitical heuristics;<sup>57</sup> by cultural anthropologists like Mary Douglas, whose 1960s work on pollution and 1980s work on risk conceptualized environmentalism as cohering transnational political subjects;<sup>58</sup> by historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, who in the new millennium have demonstrated how global ecological crisis, and especially climate change, distresses both the boundaries of academic disciplines and of nation-state governance;<sup>59</sup> and by sociologists in a Habermasian tradition who have tracked the mutation of public institutions under diverging regimes of modern rationalization.<sup>60</sup> This dissertation draws from each of these writers—and many others in their respective disciplines—to give texture to a contemporary moment characterized by instability and transformation within the modes and types of life afforded within it. At the same time, I am less apocalyptic than

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indifferent to the phrase and seeming to prefer “advanced liberal government”), see Rose, “Government and Control.” For another entry into the debate in political science generally, see also the discussion of “post-panopticism” (contra “post-disciplinary” more generally) in Gane, “The Governmentalities of Neoliberalism.”

<sup>57</sup> Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future.” See also Koslowski and Kratochwil, “Understanding Change in International Politics.”

<sup>58</sup> Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*. See also Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

<sup>59</sup> Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History.” See also Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto.’”

<sup>60</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

many scholars who write about the ends of eras, like the ending of a disciplinary or organized society, because I see transitional moments like ours as ones of more agnostic opportunity, in which something is opened up that we cannot name in advance but hope to track as it unfolds. In this respect, my dissertation is decidedly “weak” in the theoretical way advocated by the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart; I am not trying to provide a total theory of society, in part because I believe such a theory could only do reductive harm to the multiplicity of unfoldings the contemporary affords, and because I think it is much more interesting to describe the present as an empirically dense “situation” too incoherent to easily colonize the future.<sup>61</sup>

More recently, Rita Felski has similarly called upon critics to “place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible” rather than “looking behind the text [...] for its hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motive.” Like Felski, I aim here to “amplify [the] reality” of texts by looking at what kinds of world they bring into the world. But unlike Felski, this does not require, for me, leaving behind forms of critique that describe how texts participate in toxic structures that reduce human flourishing. Sometimes what texts “make possible” is harm, or more harm; to say so is not a paranoid anchoring of the text in its past, but an acknowledgement that the future is not always, all the time, on the other side of a rupture. This dissertation describes a time of instability and loss of structuration, but it does not locate watershed events that can provide an epochal time of death, because the disturbances of the contemporary do not collect into neat crystals. What we need are critical accounts thick enough to demonstrate how texts both amplify a reality that exists and make

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<sup>61</sup> Stewart, “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World.” For a gloss on “situation” as I am using it here, see Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 11. 12/185

emerge possibilities that seem discontinuous with the past even if not necessarily in a good way. This is also to say that while we need methodologies trained to encounter and remain present with surprise, this is not because we commit to an ethics that says surprise is always a good thing; the unknown future could be dystopia as well as utopia, and what is exciting about critical work is our inability to know in advance.

#### IV. Four Styles of the Contemporary

The following chapters identify four contemporary styles by surveying American fiction from the past 30 years and observing repeated patterns of form/content coordination. Following the approach of my theory, I name each style as an action and then unfold the forms of social emergence incarnated in them; for reference, I have supplied a table at the end of this chapter. The first two styles I look at—detoxification and intoxication—operate on the level of the sentence, and the second pair of styles—invasion and evasion—operate more on the level of the chapter, or discrete units of narrative organization. While I finally decline to argue that these four styles are the most important or essential for the contemporary, I note throughout both their relative ascendancy in the past thirty years and their deep intimacy with key elements of the transitional period I am calling post-disciplinary society. In turn, this dissertation leans upon the novels it examines in order to theorize transitions out of the disciplinarity of discrete institutional spaces and stable social roles. Through the novels, I will argue these transitions should be understood as induced and coordinated by two other crises that also characterize the historical present: one ecological and the other public. Disciplinary and organized society relied upon institutions being able to secure places to administer their roles; in turn, it was premised on their

being able to differentiate themselves from a sort of neutral background space that mediated between the institutions that appeared on it: space that is “natural” or “public.” I am interested in what happens when these background spaces are thrown into crisis: when natural space becomes coded as alternatively threatening (with the “toxic discourse” that ascends in America in the 1970s and 1980s) or under threat (with the apocalyptic discourse of global warming that ascends in the 1990s); or when public space is increasingly winnowed (with the discourses of neoliberal privatization from the 1980s onwards) or displaced (with the rise of a global Internet citizenship in the 1990s and 2000s). How do institutional spaces that were originally placed on these backgrounds adapt or transform when the background is perturbed? And how are forms of life previously administered by these institutions pushed out, distressed, or elaborated?

Detoxification, intoxication, invasion, and evasion are each projects in giving form, precisely, to these disturbances. Each style is an action that indexes a specific transformation of disciplinarity—a movement into a new, post-disciplinary form—brought on by a disturbance in natural or public background space. Detoxification begins to define especially domestic institutions not positively as placed on top of a natural background, but negatively as a subtraction from this space, temporarily removed from a polluted environment; intoxication, faced with a global climate problem which no institution could contain or redress, sees subjectivities extended and distressed across space; invasion fragments the public sphere into multiple counterpublics that do not quite add up to a whole world but provide the fantasy of belonging to it; and evasion builds publics on top of anonymity, but finds its subjectless project difficult so sustain. Given their intimacy with environmental and public disturbance, it is not a surprise, within the logic of this dissertation, that each of these styles, though not original in

post-disciplinary society, ascends to a special prominence at distinct moments in it. Part of my argument in the following chapters works by showing how the set of authors overseen by a particular style lines up with conventional accounts we have of other established aesthetic categories: I show that detoxification, for instance, re-creates the canon of minimalism just as intoxication captures maximalism. The minimalist novel, a species of detoxification, monopolized literary reviews in the 1980s (most of them critical, as Frederick Barthelme wrote in the *New York Times* in 1988: “one can’t read a book review these days without encountering the obligatory attack on ‘minimalist’ prose (even in USA Today)”;<sup>62</sup> discussing the maximalist novel, a species of intoxication, in 2000, James Wood wrote that “[a] genre is hardening”;<sup>63</sup> similarly, in 2013, Ted Gioia influentially wrote about the “rise of the fragmented novel,” with a style of evasion that has been a “mainstay” of recent “mainstream literary fiction”;<sup>64</sup> and when Jessica Pressman sat down to write about Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, the paradigmatic novel of evasion style, she thought it exemplified “a way for the print novel to remain ‘novel’ in the digital age.”<sup>65</sup>

By exploring these four styles, I therefore also provide a taxonomy of contemporary literary production in America. What I want to register for now is how the taxonomy I offer departs from the taxonomies of style we have otherwise inherited—from individual to general—because what is at stake in this analysis are not levels of proximity to an author, but the size of units (sentences, chapters) and what is being done with them. One consequence of viewing style

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<sup>62</sup> Barthelme, “On Being Wrong.”

<sup>63</sup> Wood, “Human, All Too Inhuman.”

<sup>64</sup> Gioia, “The Rise of the Fragmented Novel.”

<sup>65</sup> Pressman, “House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel,” 109.

as action is that it no longer makes sense to refer style to individuals: lots of people can perform the same kind of action, even though they may do it in different places and at different times and with different means. What styles index is a shared habit of adapting to the world as people participate in budding conventions of living on within it. In the age of manmade pollution and climate change, some people use the environment as a resource for curating intimacy through detoxification, others through intoxication; in the age of a transforming or simply decimated public sphere, some people invade and re-purpose space to create mini-publics while others evade physical space altogether and go virtual. Detoxification, intoxication, invasion, and evasion: these styles are not owned by an individual, but rather belong to emerging communities of practice. At the same time, the pluralism of styles today shows us there is no one way to adapt to the contemporary. A style cannot be the grand label for a historical period; rather, the multiple styles afforded by a period enumerate social groups within that period who share a mode of adaptation to it.

The first mode of adaptation I look at, in Chapter Two, is detoxification. I show how the style coordinates anxieties about heterosexual domesticity, racial difference, and the natural environment from 1980 to the present. This is a style that I show lives at the level of sentences within a range of authors including Raymond Carver, Tao Lin, and Mary Robison, each of whom use detoxification to produce domestic spaces carved out from a wider natural world. In each of these writers, I argue that environmental detoxification is also twinned with a project of racial purification. Along the way, I also show how detoxification style re-creates the outlines of a familiar canon of minimalism, but by referring minimalism to an action and thus a mode of adaption to a complex of social and environmental variables, detoxification is also able, I argue,

to account for both a larger set of authors and a wider range of features within their writing than available theories of minimalism have allowed. In turn, I show that what we have thought of as minimalism is not just a retraction of words, as some scholars have indicated, but also a proliferation of smaller words; and it is best understood primarily in relation not to the institution of the university, as Mark McGurl has argued, but to the institution of the family.

Chapter Three turns to intoxication style, which inverts the logic of the previous chapter: here, intoxication is associated not with minimalism, but with maximalism. In particular, I show how intoxication produces the sentences of Don DeLillo, Joyce Carol Oates, Sergio de la Pava, Zadie Smith, and David Foster Wallace. Intoxication sentences are inhalation machines that bury their subjective anchors under stuff ranging from information to material substances. Whereas detoxification style sought to create spaces of intimacy by subtracting from the environment, intoxication style suggests what happens in a world in which no institution—say, the Sierra Club—can ever adequately mediate between subjects and their natural world. Without institutional mediation, subjects and world become conflated in these works. Thus, intoxication also theorizes a kind of agency particularly germane to the period we have come to know as the Anthropocene, in which human history becomes knotted with ecological history. But whereas most work on the Anthropocene has pointed to a universal human species as an actor on a global scale, looking at intoxication as one style among many particularizes rather than universalizes experience. Therefore, the question for this chapter is not the scientific one of whether human agency is distributed and imbricated with a planet, but rather, culturally: for whom does agency feel that way, or under what social conditions is it desirable for people to intoxicate themselves and distribute their agency across the world at the same time that the world

comes into them? My close readings suggest intoxication, or the Anthropocene's style of action, has affiliations that are particularly masculine and millennial.

As these chapter previews suggest—if the names I have given to the styles did not already—I view detoxification and intoxication as poles of a dialectic that lines up on an axis of environmental distress. I play with this dialectic in a short coda chapter that explores each style in a different medium and a single artist: Richard Serra's sculptures. Considering Serra's works from his detoxifying 1960s work like *One-Ton Prop* to his more recent intoxicating installations like *East-West/West-East* in the Qatari desert brings out affinities between the two styles as each interacts with its environment. To see his works as both detoxification and intoxication suggests the extent to which the two styles do not have to be contradictory, but exist on a spectrum of actions the react to and move into a world of increasing ecological concern.

If detoxification and intoxication are a dialectical pair concerned with environment, then the next two chapters I examine—invasion and evasion—are a pair concerned with public space. Relatedly, my postscript to that pair will examine how their actions also describe recent developments in urban planning: invasion figuring a mode of converting previously disciplinary and institutional spaces in cities into more diffuse and less regimented communities cohered by common taste rather than common labor; and evasion figuring “instant cities” built from scratch like the Yellow Sea's Songdo International Business District, which overlaps disciplinary spaces in a networked, smart-technology palimpsest.

Invasion and evasion are styles that act upon the unit of the chapter to re-distribute public space and create new kinds of political collectives. In Chapter Four, I describe invasion as a style that administers what we have come to recognize as novels of interconnected short stories.

Authors of the style including Jennifer Egan, Colum McCann, David Mitchell, and Elizabeth Strout are nostalgic for disciplinary techniques of cutting up a social world into distinct institutions with limited social roles, and breaking up a novel into autonomous stories is one way of re-asserting an ability to section a world and therefore compartmentalize psychology. The action of this style is best understood as invasion, I argue, because the novels try to fill up a discrete space with enough energy to convert it into a new kind of institution, dispensing new political subjectivities that arrest ongoing processes of modulation by re-asserting the boundaries of emerging political communities. As I tease out, invasion is then analogous to social movements like Occupy (turning a park into a political forum) and provides an object to test the logic of invasion (of which occupation is a species) as a public action. In particular, I show how invasion excludes queerness as a background condition.

Whereas invasion style incarnates a social action of invasion structurally kin to movements like Occupy, evasion style, as I argue in Chapter Five, produces sociality through a common bypass of surveillance, analogous to hacktivist collectives like Anonymous. Whereas invasion reconstructs novels into many stories, evasion reduces the novel entire to being just one chapter of a larger story: evasion style is manifest in transmedia narrative in which a novel-book participates as one networked node. What becomes interesting in this style is what gets pushed out of the novel, evading its surveillance, and I show how evasions in the novels of Barbara Browning, Mark Danielewski, and Chris Ware are consistently explained by an attempt of the authors to make themselves anonymous. Evasion style in turn imagines a social space—the space of the novel—as clustering around and forming on top of a personal absence. But as in the previous chapter, I do not see evasion novels as mere exemplifications of social experiments;

rather, I show how novels feel out in their actions for social forms capacious and complicated in their logic that in turn provide lessons for thinking through what is at stake in collectives like Anonymous. When these novels begin to query the sustainability of the collectives they form through evasion, they also provide warnings and lessons for other anonymous forms of sociality, especially ones queer theory and theories of stranger intimacy have celebrated and taught us about in the past generation.

Table 1. Four Styles of Novel Adaptation in the Contemporary

Style (background analog)	Exemplary Texts
Detoxification (environmental and racial pollution)	<i>Will You Please Be Quiet, Please</i> (Raymond Carver, 1976); <i>Chilly Scenes of Winter</i> (Beattie, 1976); <i>Oh!</i> (Mary Robison, 1981); <i>Second Marriage</i> (Frederick Barthelme, 1984); <i>Less Than Zero</i> (Bret Easton Ellis, 1985); <i>In Country</i> (Bobbie Ann Mason, 1985); <i>Eat When You Feel Sad</i> (Zachary German, 2010); <i>Richard Yates</i> (Tao Lin, 2010); <i>Collected Stories, Vol 1.</i> (Scott McClanahan, 2012); <i>what purpose did i serve in your life</i> (Marie Calloway, 2013)
Intoxication (climate change)	<i>Under the Volcano</i> (Malcolm Lowry, 1947); <i>Recognitions</i> (William Gaddis, 1955); <i>them</i> (Joyce Carol Oates, 1969); <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> (Thomas Pynchon, 1973); <i>You Bright and Risen Angels</i> (William Vollman, 1987); <i>Infinite Jest</i> (David Foster Wallace, 1996); <i>Underworld</i> (Don DeLillo, 1997); <i>White Teeth</i> (Zadie Smith, 2000); <i>Everything is Illuminated</i> (Jonathan Safran Foer, 2002); <i>A Naked Singularity</i> (Sergio de la Pava, 2008); <i>The Pale King</i> (Wallace, 2011); <i>Taipei</i> (Lin, 2013)
Invasion (Occupy and conversions of fragmented public space)	<i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> (Sherwood Anderson, 1919); <i>The Unvanquished</i> (William Faulkner, 1938); <i>Go Down, Moses</i> (Faulkner, 1942); <i>Mixed Man</i> (A. E. van Vogt, 1952); <i>Last Exit to Brooklyn</i> (Hubert Selby, Jr., 1964); <i>Life: A User's Manual</i> (Georges Perec, 1978); <i>Love Medicine</i> (Louise Eldrich, 1984); <i>The Things They Carried</i> (Tim O'Brien, 1990); <i>Handbook for Drowning</i> (David Shields, 1991); <i>A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain</i> (Robert Olen Butler, 1992); <i>Jesus's Son</i> (Denis Johnson, 1992); <i>Trainspotting</i> (Irvine Welsh, 1993); <i>Ghostwritten</i> (David Mitchell, 1999); <i>Feast of Love</i> (Charles Baxter, 2001); <i>Nowhere Man</i> (Aleksandr Hemon, 2002); <i>Cloud Atlas</i> (Mitchell, 2004); <i>Nancy Culpepper</i> (Bobbie Ann mason, 2006); <i>If You Eat You Never Die</i> (Tony Romano, 2008); <i>Olive Kitteridge</i> (Elizabeth Strout, 2008); <i>Let the Great World Spin</i> (Colum McCann, 2009); <i>A Visit From the Goon Squad</i> (Jennifer Egan, 2010); <i>The Imperfectionists</i> (Tom Rachman, 2010); <i>Gods Without Men</i> (Hari Kunzru, 2011); <i>Love, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish</i> (David Rakoff, 2013)
Evasion (Anonymous and impersonal publics)	<i>Myst</i> (Robyn Miller and Rand and David Wingrove, 1993); <i>House of Leaves</i> (Mark Danielewski, 2000); <i>Cathy's Book</i> (Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman, 2006); <i>I'm Trying to Reach You</i> (Barbara Browning, 2012); <i>Building Stories</i> (Chris Ware, 2012)

Part I  
Environmental Styles

Chapter Two  
Detoxification Style: Raymond Carver, Tao Lin, Mary Robison

I. From Minimalism to Detoxification

Mary Robison's first novel, the 1981 *Oh!*, has been called a forerunner in the canon of minimalism. But her sentences are not always minimalist, or at least very short. Rather, what we have come to call minimalist style is something slipped into or triggered by particular narrative conditions. This, for instance, is how *Oh!* begins, in prose that embellishes rather than strips the experience of Maureen being woken from sleeping in a field behind her father's house:

A thunderous noise shook the ground and jolted Maureen from her dream. She shoved herself up onto her elbows in grass clippings that whirled like gnat swarms, and looked into the skis of a helicopter bobbing, nose down, yards above her own nose. Noise pressed on the bulb of her skull. She rolled out of her sleeping bag, stood too fast for balance, flumped to her knees. Above her the machine swung like something on the end of a derrick. The man in the Plexiglas bubble wore a headset, had the lenses of his black glasses trained right on her. She scrambled for the patio. The helicopter dipped and chased her, the wash that shot from its blades beating against a rode of hedges. She went under the patio's slatted roof. The helicopter, hovering, gave off a siren sound that never got going, pleading meant just for her.<sup>1</sup>

At first, the prose here is rapid and long. Both the trailing collection of dependent clauses to describe the skis of the helicopter and the asyndeton in naming the actions they induce in Maureen add a chaos to the writing that seems to identify with the helicopter itself, or at least the helicopter seems to be setting the pace for the writing. The helicopter also seems to blur the setting—the peculiar simile of grass like gnats, using a natural image to describe another natural image, seems to put all of nature into one chaotic heap—and then immediately to claim a manmade prerogative: machine, derrick, Plexiglas. But as the passage progresses, and as

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<sup>1</sup> Robison, *Oh!*, 5. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Maureen approaches the house, the sentences begin to get shorter; numerically, the second half of the passage's sentences take up only a third of its space, and so the writing slows down, punctuated, by a factor of more than half. This is the relief the patio seems to provide: short, declarative sentences that protect against the discombobulation of an outside world. Once we are under the patio's roof, the narration is even able to stop identifying with the helicopter and to identify with Maureen: now, the helicopter's sounds are given meaning "just for her." Outside: long, compounding sentences and a general, threatening disorganization; inside: shorter sentences that render Maureen's consciousness. In this opening passage, minimalism is something attained and correlated with protective enclosure.

In its larger narrative, *Ob!* codes the environment as toxic: as I elaborate in the following section, it is where wasps can sting your children and kill them; it is where tornadoes come to kill your family (the 1989 film *Twister* is based on the novel); and, in the fantasy logic of the novel, it is where domestic violence can come to kill you. The novel synchronizes environmental disaster with domestic violence—a former batterer of the protagonist is described as coming back and “dragging a tornado with him” (104)—and fantasizes that getting the environment out of the house will get violence out of domesticity. The sentences of the novel like at the end of its opening passage repeat this dynamic from the content within the novel's style: get the toxic environment out, to protect the characters within. In this chapter, I argue that the style of Robison and a number of other authors we have come to think of as minimalist, classically Raymond Carver and more recently Tao Lin, should thus be understood as detoxification. Like Robison at the beginning of *Ob!*, these writers are not always minimalist, and so to describe them as such misses important tensions in their writing. But as I demonstrate in the following

sections, these writers are consistently interested in developing strategies for getting environments out of their sentences, and that is the aim for what their style *does*. Indeed, it is what this style does even when narratives do not explicitly figure environmental danger as domestic threat: across many different scenes, detoxification names a steady draining of sentences of environmental cues, aiming for a simplicity associated with domesticity and space for the flourishing of heterosexual intimacy.

I first thicken this account of detoxification in the following section by reading an important Carver story, “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” There, I lay out part of what I see as the formula of detoxification: sentences that simultaneously evacuate environments and imbibe detoxicants in order to orient space to hermetic intimacies. I then elaborate my reading of Carver through readings of Robert Altman’s film *Short Cuts*, based on Carver’s stories, and of novels by other authors of the 1980s who have been called minimalist, especially Robison, to claim that this detoxification is also about a racial purification. The domestic spaces detoxification produces are not only fantasized as free of environmental toxicity, but also free of racial otherness. In the third section, I argue that this understanding of detoxification—where detoxification is about the production of intimate spaces through the pushing out of an environment that has absorbed social and racial anxieties—better explains more recent literary production by writers who look minimalist, including Tao Lin, than does the institutional account of minimalism influentially proposed by Mark McGurl. The Internet, rather than academic affiliation, mediates many of the writers associated with Tao Lin; however, their writing joins a tradition including Carver and Robison because it, too, is about the production of fantastic violence-free zones of intimacy through a racialized project of detoxification. For all

these writers, style is not only an aesthetic but a way of doing, an action that interacts with its environment in order to produce fantasies of intimate belonging.

## II. Race and Detoxification

*Will you please be quiet, please?* seems to be a favorite phrase of Raymond Carver: he gave it to the title of the short story in which it first appeared, often seen as a foundational text of minimalism, and again to the title of the 1975 book in which the story was first compiled, Carver's first major-press collection of fiction.<sup>2</sup> The heart of the sentence, *quiet*, is often described as minimalism's aim; by providing "shells of a story, fragile containers of compressed meaning," minimalism has often been seen to require readers to construct events it does not speak, filling in the larger narrative around the moments a story has excerpted from it.<sup>3</sup> Minimalism's interpellative function, reducing what it says in order to increase what its audience reads, requires them to join the enterprise of constructing a world by filling in lacunas in what is narrated.<sup>4</sup> In turn, its sparseness of style has been seen as a "strategy for leading the reader to a deeper emotional response."<sup>5</sup> This has become so much a commonplace of minimalism criticism that Fredric Jameson simply assumes it as an aside in a larger account of realism's management of

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<sup>2</sup> Carver, "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," 250. All citations to this story are from the 1992 Viking edition and will be provided parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Hallett, "Minimalism and the Short Story," 488.

<sup>4</sup> "The minimalist writer, a writer shaped by the society she lives in, asks the reader to do her part, to make connections, bring insight and resolution, provide the reasoning, question, revise, accept; and especially, the writer, it seems to me, asks the reader to care, simply to care about the characters and their predicaments." Henning, "Minimalism and the American Dream," 698.

<sup>5</sup> Bellamy, "A Downpour of Literary Republicanism," 16.

affect: the *quiet* of minimalism articulates more affective content than verbal language ever could.<sup>6</sup>

But while these accounts can talk about the *quiet* in Carver, they have not attended to the *please, please* that seems to cluster around and indeed to override it. To think of Carver's writing as quiet—or even, in a popular line of commentary, as an abstention from words that might be described as “anorexic”<sup>7</sup>—only gets at part of the formula of *will you please be quiet, please?*, which also imbibes little words and populates its pages with them. In this section, I argue the best way of accounting for this seeming contradiction in Carver's writing—drawn both toward silence and toward monosyllabic profusion—is to understand the style not as minimalism, but as an action, and more specifically an action of detoxification. In this particular story, the aim of style is not so much quiet per se, but a certain kind of shutting up: pushing out of the story the toxic noises of environmental danger, domestic violence, and racial threat that have shown up in its content. Carver's sentences want, more than quiet, a domestic space that can calmly support a fantasy of human intimacy, and *please, please* is one of the props they use to produce this space.

In “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?,” the concentration of little words is at first aimed not only to flank quietude, but also to push out unwanted knowledge: this is a story about Ralph's coming to know that his wife, Marian, had drunken sex with another man “three or four

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Anderson, for instance, sees minimalism as a disciplinary performance of “control” that compensates for modernist art's loss of control over the world; identifying text and body, Anderson's minimalist writers starve their narratives in order to control the worlds they reference. Anderson, “Anorexia and Modernism, or How I Learned to Diet in All Directions,” 36. For Michael Trussler, an “attitude of ascetic denial” is what connects minimalism across multiple media, in turn emphasizing the limitations of media as well. Trussler, “The Narrowed Voice,” 24n.

years ago” (232). As Ralph confronts Marian about the incident—she has confessed to being kissed by the man but has not yet described any other events—*know* itself becomes one of these short, repeated words that dances around the content it declines to articulate: “he knew there was more and knew he had always known” (235). As *please* did with the title sentence, *know* and its conjugates—*knew* and *known*—overtakes this sentence without ever signifying its object. The language compounds as if anxious of the knowledge it harbors, or as if the condition of the world that is known can be changed if only it can be stalled by the fact of knowing itself.

But after Ralph knows Marian has had sex with another man, and he goes out of their house in search of drink and then a game of cards, it is not just this knowledge that the proliferation of little words in Carver’s style protects against. On his way home, he is confronted by “[a] small Negro in a leather jacket” who “stepped out in front of him and said, ‘Just a minute there, man.’ Ralph tried to move around. The man said, ‘Christ, baby, that’s my feet you’re steppin on!’” (247). The man then hits Ralph in the stomach, nose, and cheek, but the principal disturbance he brings to the narrative is verbal and idiomatic. These are the first words of their kind in the story, and some of the only words spoken since Marian’s confession; the only two other dialogues have been a pleasant exchange in which a bartender asks Ralph what he wants to drink (“Should I draw one, Mr. Wyman?” [239]) and then the banter around the table of cards, with men unmarked by race and whose favored expletive is consistently “for Christ’s sake” instead of “Christ, baby” (245, 246). Furthermore, unlike the man who hits Ralph—who we are reminded three times within only four sentences is “a Negro”—these other interlocutors would also have said “those are my feet” and “stepping”: even when deliriously drunk, no one else in the story shows any g-dropping. Ralph’s encounter with violence in the story is also registered as

violence to language: the story casts Ralph's attacker as also an attacker of standard English, where linguistic difference exacerbates the distance between Ralph's white domestic life and the streets to which, with the fantasy of that prior life threatened, Ralph has retreated.

This is the point brought home by the specter of Dr. Maxwell, an English professor in Ralph's third year of college whom he credits with giving him direction in life to become a teacher himself and whom Ralph remembers immediately before his confrontation with "a Negro." The confrontation occurs on a pier, because as Ralph returns home after his night out, "he thought he'd like to see the water with the lights reflected on it" (247). On the pier, he tries to imagine how the professor—previously described as a "graceful man ... with exquisite manners and with just the trace of the South in his voice" (228)—would act, concluding "Dr. Maxwell would sit handsomely at the water's edge" (247). Ralph is on his way to the water's edge and can already hear the waves beneath the pier when he is attacked. In this scene, Dr. Maxwell figures as a representation of a multiplicity of fantasies Ralph perceives to be under threat: as an English professor, a certain version of standardized language; as a Southern man, a set of behaviors that are culturally white elite but in supremacist fashion coded universally as "good manners"; and then, as the exemplar of seaside conduct, the availability of aesthetic appreciation of nature. For Ralph, the exemplarity of natural aesthetics seems to absorb the others—sitting at the water's edge conflates the aspects of the white, classed gentlemanliness toward which Ralph aspires—and the attack is more than an attack on his person a disruption of his pursuit of this vision. Dr. Maxwell's kind of masculinity seems inhabitable here: it is both out of time and out of place, because racial encounter bars Ralph from the seaside.

It is immediately after this scene, when Ralph returns home and locks himself into a bathroom, that the barrage of *please* reaches its peak, first as Marian asks to see him and inspect his wounds (“Ralph, let me in, please, darling. Ralph? Please let me in, darling. I want to see you. Ralph? Please!” [250]) and then as Ralph asks to be left alone in the words the title of the story has scripted for him. But the repetitions—especially of *darling*, *please*, and Ralph’s name—not only fill up rather than prepare quiet, they also are designed to support and sustain the domesticity of the scene, as if to push out the memory of the outside world from which Ralph has just come. It is therefore especially fitting Ralph speaks these words from the bathroom, in which he is trying to clean up: the twitch of pleasantries here, and their compounding of politeness, seek to purify him of the dialect that has been directed at him, which he mistakes for violence itself, by attempting to restore a linguistic order in which he is not *man*, but *darling*; not a pejorative *baby*, but *Ralph*. Because piers have long organized spaces of men cruising for sex with men, and because a hint of homoeroticism remains sustained both by the man calling Ralph “baby” and by Ralph remembering Dr. Maxwell as “handsome[,]” Ralph may also be trying to erase not only racial otherness, but queerness.<sup>8</sup> The two projects converge in Ralph’s attempt to create now a domesticity that shuts off the outside in order to produce a white heterosexual domesticity. Within his locked bathroom, Ralph hopes to purify the water of what he perceives as a racial and queer contagion, soaking in water distilled from the sea he no longer trusts. His aim for linguistic order seeks to curate a domestic space detoxified from an aquatic environment in which human violence and racial otherness have been encoded.

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<sup>8</sup> For one classic evocation of cruising on the pier, see the first chapter of White, *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*.

This thematic correspondence of environment and race is made explicit in *Short Cuts*, Robert Altman's 1993 adaptation of a selection of Carver stories including "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?"<sup>9</sup> The film begins and ends with two scenes of environmental danger that provide a common condition for each of its characters, whose stories have been re-set in Los Angeles. In the end, the universalizing event is a 7.4 earthquake ("It's not the Big One," the characters separately repeat, suggesting a generic Los Angeles psyche primed for some truly catastrophic event on the horizon<sup>10</sup>), which although failing to harm any of the film's multiple protagonists, nonetheless temporally synchronizes all the plotlines regardless of how interconnected particular ones have been. At the beginning, however, it is not an event but a situation that coheres the Los Angeles population: they are in the middle of a medfly infestation, which has mobilized a massive aerial pesticide campaign, and with it, a motley of attendant fears regarding the pollution of ground, air, and water (figs. 1 and 2). Also mobilized are a number of wartime metaphors; the opening words of the film are a television commentator's: "The time has come to go to war again. Not with Iraq, international terrorists, or what was once Yugoslavia, but with the medfly."<sup>11</sup> Later, the only character directly involved in the dissemination of pesticides, a pilot of one of the planes spraying the city, will refer to his job "flying nights, bombin' the dirty medflies."<sup>12</sup> Through the metaphoric transfers allowed by the wartime analogies, the medfly seems to bring home to Los Angeles, at least to the white residents featured in the film, a

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<sup>9</sup> I am thankful to Lauren Berlant for first directing me to the echo of this correspondence in the film. A similar point has since been made in Jameson, *The Ancients and the Postmoderns*, chap. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Altman and Barhydt, *Short Cuts*, 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Unfortunately, the commentator's editorial is not provided in the published manuscript.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

number of international fears: war was something waged in Iraq or the former Yugoslavia, but the medfly has made war, and all the foreignness it indexes, domestic. Bombing, too, is something that, at least in American history, happens *over there*, in foreign countries, and, increasingly in the period under review, in countries populated by people of color. This is how “dirty” also manages to racialize the pest, projecting onto it language first fostered by a xenophobia not of invasive species but of migrant workers. Foucault has described how, in the age of biopower, racism gets inscribed into state sovereignty as the only justification for its “murderous function,” absorbing the rhetoric and historical logic of war.<sup>13</sup> In the beginning of *Short Cuts*, natural threats like the medfly mediate this metaphoric transfer, conflating the defense of domesticity with a kind of racial purity.

As the camera tracks the flight of the pesticide-spraying helicopters, each of the characters of the film is introduced. The very last to appear for the first time are Honey and Bill, an adaptation of the Millers from Carver’s “Neighbors” (1971), also collected in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*. They are at a jazz club with the couple who lives next door, Harriet and Jim Stone, who will be going on vacation for an indefinite period of time beginning the next day. Honey agrees on behalf of her and Bill to watch the Stone apartment while they are away, which



Fig. 1. Opening shot of Los Angeles plagued by medflies (0:35).



Fig. 2. A squad of helicopters sprays pesticides over Los Angeles (0:42).

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256.



Fig. 3. Harriet Stone instructs Honey in the care of their fish; Jim Stone, on the other side of the aquarium tells Harriet to hurry up (21:42). That we see Jim only through the aquarium is fitting.



Fig. 4. Jim Stone rushing out of town, leaving Bill, in his bathrobe, to take over his apartment (22:06).

includes foremost the task of feeding the fish they keep in their aquarium (fig. 3). The Stones thereby provide the first echo of the analogy the opening television commentator used to describe how pesticides work: “It’s like fishing. We use bait.”<sup>14</sup> Having become associated with the medfly, it is therefore also fitting that they are on their way out of Los Angeles, in fact in somewhat great haste (fig. 4). But the meaning of their migration further echoes a central component of the medfly discourse: the Stones are the only fully named black characters in the film, or, for that matter, the only named characters of any color whatsoever. That they are leaving Los Angeles is, in some way, what the fantasy that undergirds the militarization of pesticides desires: get rid of the racialized pest.

With the Stones gone, Honey and Bill take over their apartment and begin to live a number of fantasies within it. The presence of room opened up by the absence of the Stones facilitates, in other words, different kinds of life for them, because they are able to steal the lives the Stones had had. This appropriation through abjection of raced materials was already at play

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<sup>14</sup> Other echoes: later, a customer at a diner will sexually harass Honey’s mother, a waitress, by making a fishing gesture as if to reel in “that ass” when she leans over in a short skirt to get him some butter; and then there is the entire fishing plot of the story adapted from Carver’s story, “So Much Water So Close to Home.” Altman and Barhydt, *Short Cuts*, 36.

in the jazz club in which we first met the couples. Although the jazz club will continue to be one of the only places in the film in which bodies of color show up, its space is notably overseen by a white singer, Tess Trainer (in real life the Scottish singer Annie Ross), whose voice provides much of the movie's soundtrack, bleeding over, across, and into plotlines in which she does not participate. Her prominence here and throughout is not only another instance of the familiar appropriation of jazz by white culture, although it is also this. Because, as soundtrack, her voice provides affective coherence across plot lines, it also suggests that the multiplicity of life in Los Angeles can finally be cohered, in the absence of "the Big One" 8.0 earthquake, through the abjection of blackness.

This, finally, is what explains the incredible disappearance of the medfly or anxiety over pesticides almost immediately once the film gets underway, or precisely when the Stones depart. In the opening scenes in which we are introduced to the characters, the whirring of helicopter blades was their common soundtrack, and the fly infestation was their common condition. They were each in this way brought together in experience, despite their varied professional and familial backgrounds: the fear of pollution performed labor to connect the stories together and to give them a common denominator. But once the Stones, and with them the entirety of racial otherness in the film's cultural imaginary, go away, the need for this labor of coherence seems suddenly to be lowered: what everyone finally has in common, effortlessly, is whiteness.

*Short Cuts*, in turn, exemplifies what Mel Chen has diagnosed as a racialization of toxicity, particularizing a universal condition of exposure so as to distribute humanity to a select

elite.<sup>15</sup> The film embodies an aversion to blackness by synchronizing its appearance with the drama of insects and pesticides and removing both from the narrative at the same time. The only substantial re-appearance of a black body, toward the end of the film, further confirms this aversion, or the immunological risk blackness seems to pose to whiteness: in a hospital in which the Finnigans have waited for most of the film for their white child, Casey, to wake up from a coma, we suddenly learn that the child in the room next door—"the Negro boy in 111"<sup>16</sup>—has recovered from an unnamed surgery and will be put out of intensive care; promptly, Casey opens his eyes and immediately dies. The immediacy of this synchronization—black life, white death—is the logic that supports the entirety of the film's varied narrative arcs: only once bodies of color, concentrated otherwise entirely in the Stones, have left the film's diegesis can the stories of the white protagonists unfold, indeed, can the white characters become protagonists at all, each becoming the center of a plot organized around them.

*Short Cuts* thus visualizes a general formula in Carver's writing, where racial otherness and environmental danger are conflated and where the work of the story becomes premised upon expunging both, or detoxifying environment as a proxy for racial purification. What *Short Cuts* brings to the fore is that this detoxification of non-whiteness is even the condition of narration itself, clearing the field of polluted bodies—whether entomologic, ichthyologic, or anthropologic—in order for the story of white people to proceed. But what *Short Cuts* lives in its narrative economy, figuring bodies and their disappearance, Carver's stories also live in their style, in the economy of words themselves: detoxifying language through both subtracting dialect

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<sup>15</sup> Chen, "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections," 270–71. See also Chen, "Racialized Toxins and Sovereign Fantasies."

<sup>16</sup> Altman and Barhydt, *Short Cuts*, 103.

and adding signifiers that keep afloat the space of a domesticity sealed off from a threatening environment. This safe zone of domesticity is always a fantasy, of course, because violence always returns, but it is the fantasy that detoxification produces. To return to the final scene of “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”, it is not just quiet that Ralph wants: technically he had that on the pier, where he did not say anything to his attacker and where, when left alone after the man left, he might still have enjoyed only the sound of “the waves splashing under the pier” (250). If it was only quiet he wanted, Ralph could have stayed there; but by quiet, Ralph really means a kind of cleansing of noise and a purification of space. The seaside, which he has racialized, must be detoxified, and this requires not only a subtraction of words, but also the addition of ones that can induce the setting in which he wants to be: *please, please, darling*. In this story, Ralph’s speech patterns aim not for reticence, but for purity.

“Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” is a story that registers the contradictions of contemporary domestic life at the same time that it tries to create a new domesticity through its fantastic actions of detoxification. The story is of the same species as so-called minimalist novels of the 1980s that also and categorically stage a threat to heterosexual sex and especially reproductive heterosexuality. In other works, this threat is often figured in not only bodies of color, but also queer bodies; with breathtaking punctuality, almost every canonical minimalist novel of the period has at its heart an explicit gay panic. The protagonist of Anne Beattie’s *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976) enjoys a party “until he began to sense strange looks, until he figured out that Audrey thought he and Sam were queer”;<sup>17</sup> in Frederick Barthelme’s first novel *Second Marriage* (1984)—a novel in which simply learning strangers are getting married can

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<sup>17</sup> Beattie, *Chilly Scenes of Winter*, 47.

make people “feel a lot better”—the protagonist’s step-daughter is worried about her mother looking “[l]ike a dyke,” to which the mother replies, “These young people today ... [she’s already] familiar with the concept of homosexuality—what do you make of that?”<sup>18</sup> and the childless characters of Bobbie Ann Mason’s 1985 *In Country* keep having to explain that, just because they do not fit into the standard heteronormative narrative for their age group (“Emmett, don’t you want to do get married and have a family like other people? Don’t you want to do something with your life?”), at least they are not gay (“he’s not gay either, so don’t think that”).<sup>19</sup> Each of these works are anxious about administering familial roles, and they are anxious because their characters do not seem to have domestic spaces in which they could show up in the roles they ought to be inhabiting. Domestic space needs to be recreated in these works in order for reproductive heterosexuality to be distributed, and the persistence of homophobic panics shows how much this work must be continually repeated.

As in Carver, these novels often code the queer threat to domesticity as an environmental toxin. In Mason’s *In Country*, for instance, a Vietnam War veteran experiences remarkable adult acne whose etiology is suggested to be Agent Orange, the defoliant that was used by the United States military in its herbicidal warfare in the 1960s and that caused much more severe health effects in generations of Vietnamese citizens. In this novel, acne provides a physiological analog to the character’s diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder, figuring how violence gets channeled through environmental toxicity in order to leave its marks continually on bodies that have returned “home,” where home, too, becomes disturbed as a category. The synchronization of the

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<sup>18</sup> Barthelme, *Second Marriage*, 10, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Mason, *In Country*, 225, 170.

problem of toxicity and the problem of domesticity is made explicit when the novel's protagonist later refers to childbirth as being "[not] much different than popping a pimple":<sup>20</sup> here, reproductive heterosexuality is coded as the elimination of a symptom of environmental toxicity brought by war, or reproduction occurs through a metaphoric detoxification of environmental damage. *In Country* thereby participates in what Lawrence Buell calls its contemporary "toxic discourse," which "may invoke a sense of place to call a localized collectivity into being or, if it is already self-consciously there, to raise it to a higher degree of self-consciousness."<sup>21</sup> As Buell has documented, toxic discourse—and the attendant fear of ever-present toxicity—is omnipresent in the second half of the twentieth century,<sup>22</sup> and very often, writing associated with minimalism participates in this discourse directly by thematizing or diegetically narrating environmental toxicity. But even when environmental contagion is not explicitly staged, the style of detoxification still participates in toxic discourse in its sentences, which work relentlessly to expunge environmental otherness. Style works, in these novels of the 1980s, to curate a domestic space that aims for the securing of the heterosexuality the content of these novels signal as under racial, queer, and environmental threat.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>21</sup> Buell, "Toxic Discourse," 653. For Buell, "toxic discourse calls for a way of imagining physical environments that fuses a social constructivist with an environmental restorationist perspective." Ibid., 656.

<sup>22</sup> Although he acknowledges that "toxic fear was invoked rather than invented by [Rachel] Carson" (pointing to the precedent of the "Malthusian anxiety over the world's resources being ruined by overexploitation"), Buell takes her 1962 *Silent Spring* as paradigmatic of a contemporary "toxic discourse." Buell, "Toxic Discourse," 656. Toxic discourse proliferates in the sixties and seventies, hardening not only as discursive genre but as a general affective disposition by the minimalism of the late seventies and eighties.

That is what “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” powerfully brings out: how Ralph’s project has become Carver’s style. It is not just Ralph who is trying to subtract his world of dialect; in the third-person narration of the story, it is also Carver’s writing that has expunged dialect as a condition of the story even being told. So, too, might we remember that the earlier dance of *know*, *knew*, and *known* belonged not even to a free indirect discourse that comingled narrator and character voices, but to the narrator entirely. Detoxification becomes the condition of narration in these stories: clean up language, and then characters can start to show up in it. Carver’s characters, in the *content* of his story, show an allergy to natural environments coded as dangerous and racially threatening, but this allergy is also manifest in Carver’s *style*, in its will to shut up environmental and racial noise. In these two stories, the content and the style of detoxification are transparent to each other.

Certainly many writers who do not write detoxifying sentences are also obsessed with “toxic discourse,” as in the “Airborne Toxic Event” of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* or the meditations on intoxication (by alcohol, marijuana, and television) in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*; and certainly many authors who do write in this style, like Bret Easton Ellis, are less obsessed with representing toxicity. But what is special about detoxification as a style is its persistent use of figurative toxicity over and above its occasional representations of toxicity; Ellis’s frequently noted profusion of brand names throughout his writing, for instance, is another version of Carver’s *please, please* that keeps a natural environment at bay by orienting language to manmade objects and the intimacies they monitor.<sup>23</sup> Sentences of detoxification always offer themselves as a protocol for recreating domestic space even when domesticity is not a narrative

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<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory*, 150.

trope: coding the environment as toxic provides a constant fund of occasions for creating a narrative space coded as detoxified.

Other works of the 1980s adopt a protocol of cleansing similar to Carver's—detoxify an environment coded as black and other in order to produce a fantasy of safe intimacy—but also expand the range of techniques afforded by the style. Mary Robison's oeuvre, for instance, both employs and elaborates the *please, please* of Carver and also makes it available for later authors of detoxification decades later. Her *Ob!*, with which I opened this chapter, is about a single mother, Maureen, who lives with her brother in their father's house, which is too unwieldy of a place to administer anyone the roles they are, heteronormatively, supposed to be inhabiting. Instead, the novel delegates the responsibilities of especially parenting to the house's black cook and maid, Lola, who is always having to remind Maureen and her father what she thinks they ought to be doing, and often doing it herself when they are not. That a person of color is taxed, by necessity of her economic precarity, to facilitate white heterosexual domesticity, is one of the queasy components of the novel's racial politics, although we might say the novel is merely holding itself accountable to the reality of caregiving labor in America. The other queasy component, however, belongs to the novel itself and is its representation of people of East Asian descent, for instance the doctor who attends to Maureen's daughter, Violet, after she has an allergic reaction to wasp stings. This is the doctor explaining why Violet went into shock: "Has arrelgy of insect poison... Arrelgy, okay?" (168); and this is his explaining to Maureen how to administer an epinephrine pen to her "dotta": "The poison of wasp build up, okay? Cumurative? ... And so within immediately thirty minute is sting you give this? Prease? Her rungs corrapse if you don't okay?"(168). Maureen keeps trying to correct or translate his speech—"She—has—

an—allergy?” and “My daughter” and “Is cumulative?”—foregrounding their cultural difference rather than the labor he is performing to keep her white family alive. Maureen’s allergy to how he speaks English is then more complicated than Ralph’s allergy to dialect in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?”: here, Maureen’s disciplining of language, retaking each of the doctor’s words into her own dialect, is also a way of erasing the labor that bodies of color have performed for her and her family. Both Lola and the doctor have provided a model for her functioning as the mother she in turn aspires to be, but she must disavow this reliance, claiming her knowledge and behavior to be original. Lacan would call this extimacy (*extimité*), an “intimate exteriority” that folds exteriority into its inside.<sup>24</sup> In Jacques-Alain Miller’s widely cited gloss, which rhymes well with the insecticide imaginary of both *Short Cuts* and *Oh!*, “extimacy says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite.”<sup>25</sup> What the style of detoxification projects as being its toxic outside—a violent environment coded as racially other—is also what is most intimate: domestic violence, for instance, is internal to the domesticity that fantasizes itself capable of subtracting from violence so long as it remains actively detoxifying. This exterior violence is always already interior. So, too, the racialized pedagogies of Lola and the doctor are, although officially projected as other, deeply internalized and appropriated. Race becomes a part of her domestic unconscious, but this means precisely that it must stay there, without a voice of its own.

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<sup>24</sup> Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 139.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, “Extimité,” 75. For a geographic reading of extimacy in line with this chapter’s interest in the intimacies carved out of environmental space, see Kingsbury, “The Extimacy of Space.” On the racial distribution of space see also the psychoanalytic reading in Nast, “Mapping the ‘Unconscious.’” Gila Aloni also provides a literary reading of extimacy and space in Chaucer, although she sometimes risks reducing extimacy to mean the simple deconstruction of inner/outer and private/public binaries. See Aloni, “Extimacy in the Miller’s Tale.”

The corollary of these extimate environments is that environmental danger also becomes, for Maureen and her family, a resource for the task of re-inhabiting interior and disciplinary roles (here, “mother”). On the one hand, this is a dynamic dramatized in the plot of the novel: in the cathexis of tornado and domestic violence, for instance, rebuilding a house after the tornado seems, fantastically, to solve the problem of domestic violence it has absorbed; the tornado becomes a resource for the family because it provides something to repair. The wasps, too, become an environmental threat that is instrumentalized by providing an external condition that domesticity, and especially the physical boundaries of a house, can protect against; they become a resource because they provide a need for boundary itself. In both of these narrative situations, the environment becomes something to be negated, and environmental negativity becomes domestic positivity: the acts of getting tornados and wasps out of their space is how the family creates domestic space altogether, or their domesticity becomes the project of so many environmental negations. But, as in “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?,” the dynamic of domesticity through detoxification, through the continual creation of a boundary and the designation of a threatening environment to be pushed out, is more viscerally lived in the style of *Oh!*

Consider this scene in which Lola and Maureen’s brother are driving into town to buy Lola’s cleaning supplies. The telos, metaphorically and literally, is a clean home. But on the way, they take a “shortcut down a graveled road” (20), leaving the paved paths that have civilized natural land and venturing into spaces that remind Maureen’s brother of the landscapes his mother used to paint: “there were no people in them!” (21). At this point, in a land without people, the style begins to act in such a way to push out an apparent anxiety about being in

nature such as this. First, this scene, one of the only ones in the novel that takes place outside, away from the family home, is rendered almost completely in dialogue full of exclamation marks indicating the apparent screaming he and Lola must do to hear each other over the noisy gravel path. Human speech is trying to conquer the space, pushing out environmental sound in order to occupy the entirety of the narration. It is vying for narrative attention in order to distract from the features of the landscape that might have been described but which, instead, are appropriated into some other vague, and importantly still manmade, image of a painting. But it does not seem enough for the prose to render a bucolic drive almost entirely in dialogue that declines to be bucolic. As if eager to bury the natural surroundings even more, the narration hyper-attributes speech—"Lola screamed ... Lola screamed ... Lola screamed ... Lola screamed" (20-21). For only nineteen lines of dialogue, the narration provides an astounding eleven speech tags. Functionally, these tags are hardly necessary: this is a conversation between only two people, after all, and easy enough to follow as a back-and-forth; and because the narration is almost entirely dialogue, never breaking to describe, for instance, the scenery, we never lose track of who is talking when or have to be reminded after some pause. Furthermore, because almost all of the tags are identical (someone screamed), and the only tonal information they provide is already doubled in the exclamation marks, they seem not invested in providing something positive to the narration. Instead, their function is primarily negative, as another strategy of drowning out the environment, filling up more space with language that orients the world to human bodies instead of the settings in which they are placed. Like the *please, please* of "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," the *screamed, screamed* of *Oh!* creates a space of human encounter contingent upon and

produced through pushing out environmental cues, here landscape, in order for the encounter to be sustainable.

The hyper-attribution of speech is a consistent characteristic of the style of Robison's later novels. In *Why Did I Ever* (2001), where most of the conversation is dialogue between two easily identifiable people, almost every line is still prefaced or postfaced with *he said, she said*; but Robison goes even further and frequently breaks up a single line of dialogue from a single person over two lines so as to provide another opportunity to tag: " 'They're replaying *The English Patient*,' says the Deaf Lady. / She says, 'Which I have to confess I like.' " <sup>26</sup> The use of speech attribution to pace the speech itself, filling in its pauses with more language oriented toward it, keeps the space of the dialogue sealed off from whatever else could have come in to fill its gaps. The style constantly performs human activity and keeps itself moving by its own devices in order to keep everything else out.

This strategy takes on particular importance in Robison's next novel, *One D.O.A., One on the Way* (2009), in which she returns to *Ob*'s trope of disaster narrative and domestic disruption, this time set in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The protagonist of *One D.O.A., One on the Way* is Eve, who is self-conscious of her biblical placement (much to her chagrin, her husband's name is Adam) but finds she is in, not paradise, but the post-apocalypse. Eve is a location scout, and the novel narrates her driving around looking for settings to film various television commercials or short films. Her job requires her to encounter the devastation of New Orleans in the wake of the hurricane, and much of the novel reads as a series of facts about the slowness with which the city is being rebuilt, or not being rebuilt at all. But the real disaster

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<sup>26</sup> Robison, *Why Did I Ever*, 29.

zone, from her perspective, finally seems to be the family home of her husband, not because it suffered physical damage from the hurricane (it seems relatively unscathed), but because it is a space of complicated domestic dispute, passive aggressive animosity, and latent tension that threatens to erupt, and finally does, into violence (giving the novel its title). It is remarkable how much this book about a city in the aftermath of environmental disaster manages not to dwell too long on natural scenes. Dialogue persists to carry the story along without having to tap into background: it is as if, so long as its troubled characters can keep talking, and talking about each other to each other, the narration can be saved from having to attend to all that is not speakable, to all the trouble that lives independent of conversation. Because the characters who populate dialogue are economically privileged, relatively sealed off from the conditions of widespread depravity that preexisted but were exacerbated by the hurricane, they also push out the general population of survivors in New Orleans: for a novel set in a city with a majority black population, there is a surprising failure for black bodies to show up and be named in the diegesis—ever, at all. Race gets pushed, along with natural disaster, into a background that can be obscured or covered over so long as folks in the foreground keep talking and the narrative style can continue to rehearse that people are indeed talking.

At one point in the novel, Eve explains to her husband the value of her job by describing the importance, to film, of the backgrounds she scouts: “If [a film] doesn’t involve special effects, or isn’t a musical, or action with cattle stampeding, but just shows conversations and walking around and the like, there must be something to entertain the eyes.”<sup>27</sup> *One D.O.A., One on the Way* is, though not a film, a novel that “just shows conversations and walking around and the

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<sup>27</sup> Robison, *One D.O.A., One on the Way*, 124.

like,” but it is one, too, that retracts background, as if to say: do not be entertained, do not be distracted, by this. It is a novel that has internalized the habits of detoxification, assuming a background structured by an unstable natural world and by a violent racial imaginary and then working, exhaustively, to keep it at bay, to keep it from appearing within the narration of a story in such a world.

### III. Detoxification on the Internet

Robison and Carver have developed a style that curates the fantasy of future domesticity through an action of detoxification that carries with it a project of racial purification. My reading of their style moves beyond the affective terms in which minimalism is often understood and, as I further elaborate in this section, provides a more coherent account of the many features that get collected under minimalism’s name. I therefore depart from, for instance, Mark McGurl’s influential account of postwar fiction, in which minimalism participates, with maximalism, in an affective dialectic of shame and pride. Both Raymond Carver and Joyce Carol Oates, McGurl’s exemplars of minimalism and maximalism, respectively, are writers of what he calls “lower middle class modernism,” which names the rise of personal narratives about the social dislocation of the lower middle class, especially as irritated by the popular incorporation of multiple demographic groups into the postwar and formerly elite American University.<sup>28</sup> Bearing the residual “wounds of low-status employment,” minimalist fiction a la Carver incarnates, for McGurl, the vulnerability of shame, stripping language as a strategy of retracting the self, while the abundant output of a writer like Oates points to a “verbal pride” that

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<sup>28</sup> McGurl, *The Program Era*, 286.

subjectively saturates an ongoing present.<sup>29</sup> Whereas an Oates aims for creativity and maximal expression, minimalism disciplines the writer through submission to her craft. The formal replicability of Carver's stories—his “discourse of beautiful shame” becomes a centerpiece of creative writing programs in the 1980s onwards—then indexes the crystallization of a particular affective response to the conditions of literary production as labor in the postwar cultural economy.<sup>30</sup> As a sociological description of the conditions under which literary minimalism is produced, McGurl's account confirms certain received narratives about Carver's and other minimalists' antagonism to the elitism of, for instance, postmodern fiction, providing instead a “downpour of literary republicanism.”<sup>31</sup>

But whereas McGurl understands minimalism as a product of the inhabitation of an increasingly prevalent institution, the American University, my reading of Carver and Robison has foregrounded its anxiety about the relative instability of a different institution, the nuclear family. In particular, what we have called minimalist fiction of the 1980s continually seeks to secure domestic space in order to reconstruct the boundaries of the family, protected from threats it perceives literally and figuratively in the environment, so that those who enter the space can be administered the proper social types: mother, father, child. This fiction incarnates in its style more persistently than an affect of shame an action of detoxification: purifying domestic space by draining out the toxins of environment and the racial and violent anxieties the environment has

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 296, 301.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 319. Of course, as McGurl elaborates in the continual turning of the affective dialectic, memories of shameful labor become pride in the craft of writing, and a redaction of the self within language becomes a strategy for garnering more status for the writing itself; the self may be winnowed in the work, but only to widen the work's audience, therefore returning upon the author the praise her writing had seemed to decline.

<sup>31</sup> Bellamy, “A Downpour of Literary Republicanism.”

collected in its figuration as toxic. Shame, as McGurl also argues, is a capacious category that bleeds into its dialectical opposite, pride, and, by being both itself and its opposite, has difficulty placing the specificity of minimalism—certainly shame is an affect lived in many writers, but not every writer is minimalist. In addition to being perhaps too capacious a fund for the production of minimalism, however, shame also fails to capture all of its style. What McGurl calls minimalism is not only a redaction of words but also, as I have demonstrated in the previous section, a profusion of smaller words: *please, please* and *screamed, screamed*; this is a style that does not only subtract, but also adds and multiplies. Detoxification, as an action, better captures this tendency in the writing, including the ambivalent affective economy that lives within it: detoxification is about the creation of space through both the negativity opposed to environment and the positivity oriented to imbibing little words like so many detoxicants.

To see this writing as detoxification also helps explain its continued vitality outside of the creative writing program spaces McGurl examines. In most critical accounts, programmatic minimalism enters a sharp decline in the 1990s. Raymond Carver actually did die in 1988; Mary Robison reports having writer's block all through the 1990s (a decade exactly separates the publication of her second and third novels, in 1991 and 2001); and although some writers, like Fredrick Barthelme, published into the 1990s, the rapidity of their output suggests a desperation more than a vitality: Barthelme published a novel every other year in the 1990s, and many recycle plotlines from previous works (especially the trope of navigating the triangle of a married couple plus one). The decrease in minimalist output was foreshadowed already by 1989 when a roundtable of writers convened by the Summer Writer's Festival at Columbia collected their discussion of contemporary fiction under the heading "Throwing Dirt on the Grave of

Minimalism”: just as the 1990s were about to get underway, it was possible to think not only that minimalism was dying, but was already buried.<sup>32</sup> At the same time that major press publications of minimalist prose seem to have declined in America, however, a great variety of short, sparse prose began to populate another medium: the Internet. The Internet has in multiple capacities provided a laboratory for, if not the minimalization, at least the miniaturization of prose. This is in part through the formats it has made available for publication: the weblog, made widely available through the launch of websites like Blogger in 1999 (which was bought and its population of users expanded by Google in 2004), not only turned short-form writing into a digital genre, but also, through its generic conventions of dating, oriented much of this writing to slice-of-life autobiography similar to much detoxification short fiction of the previous decade; the microblog, which shortened the format of blogs even more to typically sentence-length passing thoughts excerpted from even the slices of life, grew rapidly in popularity with the creation of Tumblr in 2007 (later bought by Yahoo!); and finally Twitter, which took off at the 2007 South by Southwest Interactive Conference, miniaturized even the microblog by restricting its posts to 140 characters or less.

In addition to its preference for short formats—which users both freely produce and adapt themselves to—the Internet has also been a prime space for the development of language shorthands, another kind of redaction. As a factory of acronyms, Internet discourse has compressed graphic language. Yet subtraction of space is not all that acronyms accomplish: messages become populated with *lol* (for instance) whether or not someone is actually laughing out loud, as if *lol* is a habit at the end of a line. Like the *please ... please* of Raymond Carver or

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<sup>32</sup> Bell et al., “Throwing Dirt on the Grave of Minimalism.”

the *screamed ... screamed* of Mary Robison, the *lol ... lol* of Internet discourse participates in both a reduction and a proliferation of language, aiming not for a consistent aesthetic at the level of size, but for a rehearsal and curation of phatic intimacy. *Lol ... lol* secures a space for the discourse that it surrounds in the same way that *please ... please* tried to make a space for Ralph to become, not *baby*, but *darling*.

There are other reasons, too, beyond this linguistic habit, for seeing a genealogy from 1980s detoxification to much of Internet writing. If detoxification incarnates a certain allergy to the natural environment in an action of detoxification that uses the environment as a resource against which to carve out and produce spaces fantastically cleared of domestic violence or racial difference, then the Internet, an environment born artificial and unnatural, is a ready place for the production of detoxification writing. Born-digital writing, in other words, is one endpoint in a writerly trajectory that begins with a suspicion of natural environments; on the Internet, detoxification can revel in losing what Lawrence Buell might call its former “environmental unconscious” in the style of Hemingway, “a residual capacity (of individual humans, authors, texts, readers, communities) to awake to fuller apprehension of physical environment and one’s interdependence with it.”<sup>33</sup> As Buell clarifies in his glossary to the first two waves of environmental criticism, the environmental unconscious points to “the necessarily partial realization of one’s embeddedness in environment as a condition of personal and social being,” that is, the environment as a necessary condition of psychological and relational life.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 142. I also follow Buell in noting how a transition from first-wave to second-wave ecocriticism implies a transition in naively viewing “environment” as a “natural environment” that could be conceptualized independent of the

Internet, however, might be seen to provide a space in which to nurture the fantasy, at least for the duration of writing a post, that subjectivity and relationality might occur outside the conditioning of environmental belonging, that one might write or read, for a moment, extirpated from natural embedment.

To see the Internet as a prime space for detoxification style, pushing out environment to produce spaces of intimacy, complicates the ways in which Internet publication is often talked about. Much has been made of the Internet as a platform for the dissemination of literature that might have failed to find publication in the centralized business of publication, not to mention that business's fairly limited localization in geographic place (principally, almost exclusively, New York City). This is how the literature written and publication house founded by Tao Lin, my focus in this section, is often discussed: the Internet has popularized his writing and writing like his or endorsed by him by providing expanded channels of publicity, not to mention gossip; the Internet is not about writing, but about the exposure of writing.<sup>35</sup> What this misses, however, is the Internet as itself a medium for the production of writing, and what its various drives toward a style of detoxification does to shape the writing itself. Writers like Marie Calloway, Zachary German, Brandon Scott Gorrell, Tao Lin, and Scott McClanahan not only publish online and find each other online to form a community of writers, but have also learned how to write online: they have internalized the 140-character rule as a general maxim for brevity and have developed the standard detoxification habits: not only reduction of big words, but also an overuse of small

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human to viewing “[n]atural and built environments, [as] long since all mixed up.” *Ibid.*, 22. The point is not to fantasize the preservation of the natural world by divorcing its thought from human existence, but to describe ecologies in their full complexity and interdependence in order to more realistically assess the conditions of their sustainability.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Vilensky, “The Bullpen Is Mightier.”

ones. These are writers who are also self-conscious of their place in a detoxifying tradition: in *what purpose did I serve in your life?*, Marie Calloway reports her interest in Raymond Carver;<sup>36</sup> in *Richard Yates*, characters read Anne Beattie stories that allude to Hemingway and one reports “read[ing] Bobbie Ann Mason while shitting;”<sup>37</sup> *BOMB Magazine*’s interview with Lin is even titled “Shoplifting from Ann Beattie” (a play on his own 2009 novella *Shoplifting from American Apparel*) and Lin reports the author of *Chilly Scenes of Winter* as one whom he “cop[ies]”;<sup>38</sup> Beattie also shows up three times in Zachary German’s short novel *Eat When You Feel Sad*, and so does Raymond Carver;<sup>39</sup> in the afterword to Scott McClanahan’s first book, Sam Pink describes his style as “really smooth minimalism,” pointing to habits that recur in much of this writing, especially the population of sentences with words like “and,” “so,” and “just” coming in as just so much filler.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the first publications of these writers on the website of Tao Lin’s Muumuu House (where “muuumu” itself visualizes a detoxifying aesthetic of both reducing and repeating, a word with only two letters but stuffed full of them), which was established digitally in August 2008 and published its first print book in March 2009, were copied and pasted from other Internet media as reflected in their titles: a half dozen entitled, “Gmail chat,” and more than two dozen pieces titled in the form, “Selections from X’s Twitter.” The curation of Internet speech is a trope that repeats in many of the published works of these writers as well; Gmail chats take up a significant portion of both Lin’s *Shoplifting from American Apparel* and his 2010 *Richard Yates*,

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<sup>36</sup> Calloway, *What Purpose Did I Serve in Your Life*, 173.

<sup>37</sup> Lin, *Richard Yates*, 48, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Nonko, “Shoplifting from Ann Beattie: An Interview with Tao Lin.”

<sup>39</sup> German, *Eat When You Feel Sad*, 80, 82, 117, 75.

<sup>40</sup> McClanahan, *The Collected Works of Scott McClanahan Vol. 1*, 123.

and screenshots of Facebook chats populate the pages of Marie Calloay's *what purpose did I serve in your life?*. Here is one of the first Gmail chats published on Muumuu House, an exchange between Lin and Jamie Sterns:

GMAIL CHAT  
JAMIE STERNS & TAO LIN

11:58 PM **Jamie:** hi  
11:59 PM **me:** hi  
am i invisible right now?  
on gchat  
**Jamie:** um no  
you are not  
i meant to say hi to someone else  
**me:** oh i thought it said i was  
**Jamie:** sorry  
but  
hi  
i guess  
12:00 AM **me:** oh ok  
hi  
**Jamie:** ok  
**me:** i meant to be on invisible, i am going on  
invisible  
'good night'

There is a remarkable similarity between what the format of the Gmail chat does in these works and what the narration of dialogue does in works like those of Mary Robison. Because the technology of chat automatically attributes each line of speech, and attributes relentlessly, the *screamed ... screamed* of Robison is constantly encoded. At the same time, the choice not to interrupt the chat with other narration—what someone is doing while chatting, for instance, or some information on the context in which the chatting is being done—maintains a Robisonian commitment to letting dialogue saturate narration without distraction of background.

In the works of Muumuu House, even those that do not paste chats, dialogue abounds; it begins to carry background information and so pushes out the background's prerogative for description or setting. The first story published on its website, Noah Cicero's 846 word "A Cold Wind Blows Tonight," might have been about, among other things, the wind or the weather or being outdoors. In fact, the cold wind refers to the protagonist's involuntary abstinence—"My penis is lonely. A cold wind blows over my crotch"—to which the narration is constantly directed because the speech is full of discussion of it. Furthermore, little else is provided in the narration that is not speech. The story concludes with the protagonist's returning from a strip club, where he has failed to hire a sex worker, and making the following plan: "He decides that tomorrow he will rent five movies of considerable length, go home, order a large pizza that will last him the whole day, watch the movies and not leave the house, or pick up the phone." This is a character oriented to the enclosure of home, to a place where wind can only be a metaphor for human desire, and the style of the story seems to identify with him, rendering lines of speech allergic to description of an outdoors world.

Given the centrality of Internet discourse as a medium for both the production and dissemination of these forms of new detoxification writing, it is perhaps surprising that many of its authors seek print publication, whether through Muumuu House or more frequently, including in the case of much of Lin's writing, through the independent Brooklyn-based publisher Melville House (founded in 2001). Book publication arrests much of the protocols of reciprocity and exchange that Internet publication had sought to foster or facilitate, removing production from a circuit in which it could be directly engaged in, for instance, the comments section of a blog. But in many cases, this arresting of communication may have been precisely

the point, when Internet communication itself becomes hostile and unwelcoming through the aggressive and brutal “trolling” encouraged by the anonymity of Internet response.<sup>41</sup> This is the dynamic described in *what purpose did I serve in your life?*, a novelistic collection of prose written by Marie Calloway, who reports scouring the Internet after one of her stories was published online at Muumuu House for the hundreds of comments that, viciously, described her writing variously as “awful prose that’s borderline pornographic” (141), and Calloway herself as a “pathetic person” (142), “just not very bright” (146), “kind of a moron” (147), “a lazy boring writer” (148), and, most tellingly, a “slut” (149); one commenter wanted “her body to be cold in the morgue” (144). This Internet trolling was so intense and widespread that Calloway asked Lin to take her story off of the website; Lin responded by sending her a list of reasons “why I feel good about all of this,” which more or less reduced to some version of any publicity being good publicity (160). At stake in Lin’s response is a general unwillingness to see the damage done by exposure to an impersonal and toxic world of public discourse, an insensitivity I explore presently. But the move to print publication also provides one strategy for divorcing artistic output from an Internet culture of critique, distributing literature and its criticism to separate mediums.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the motivations for Internet literature to become print, books authored by new writers of detoxification like Lin and Calloway bear the marks of a language that has been circuited through the Internet. The styles of these authors register, for instance, what they have learned from the hyper-attribution of speech in digital chat and from the brevity of online

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<sup>41</sup> On Internet trolling, see also Phillips, *This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things*.

<sup>42</sup> Many thanks to Kristen Schilt for conversations that have helped elucidate this point for me.

platforms: detoxification has been routed through the Internet and re-appears, in the late 2000s, in books that present the digital adaptations of its stylistic habits. Exemplary of this style is Lin's *Richard Yates*, which, like much detoxification fiction of the 1980s, is thematically about the securing of spaces of intimacy subtracted from a toxic environment. But this novel also shows how an extension of that style might reproduce the violence it had abjected into the environment it subtracts from. Just as Lin's response to Calloway's fear of trolling expressed an unwillingness to understand the reality of emotional damage, *Richard Yates* both narrates and performs emotional damage precisely through its array of attempted detoxifications.

In content, *Richard Yates* narrates the relationship, at first virtual, of "Haley Joel Osment," a 22-year-old NYU graduate still living in the City, and "Dakota Fanning," a 16-year-old high school student who lives with her divorced mother and brother in New Jersey. One aim of these two characters, as it was for those in the narratives of Carver and Robison, is the production of a domestic space, although for these characters, the problem is not how to secure the space of a house, but how to secure spaces for their intimacy without private property. Haley Joel Osment is about to lose his lease in a three-bedroom apartment on Wall Street, and Dakota is dependent upon her mother to fund the house in which she lives. The threat to their intimacy and the need for domestic space is therefore pragmatic: they must find a space in which they can have sex. The responsibility for locating this space falls upon Dakota Fanning, whom Haley Joel Osment asks to find him an apartment in New Jersey. There is no pragmatic reason why she should take this responsibility (the work of researching apartments is conducted online and therefore does not require the person to be physically in New Jersey), but this is one of the ways in which the work of providing space for their relationship to exist is given disproportionately to her.

The other and more persistent way in which Dakota Fanning is called upon to make their intimacy habitable is ultimately structural. The positive task of finding space for their relationship is also the negative task of moving away from spaces occupied by their parents, and for Haley Joel Osment, this is a drama that is lived out in diet. Much of the novel is about going to Whole Foods and stealing and eating organic, especially vegan, food, which provides Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning a way of distinguishing themselves from others. When Haley Joel Osment visits the house in which Dakota Fanning lives and her mother serves him crab rangoon, which Haley Joel Osment learns is “[c]rab wrapped in cheese then fried,” he immediately gets on a train and returns to New York City (93). He tells her, “Your mom ate crab fried with cheese. She is fucked” (94). Later, when he visits his own mother’s house in Florida, he goes “almost every day to Whole Foods using her credit card to buy things to eat or mail to Dakota Fanning. He replaced some of his mother’s things with organic versions of the same thing” (138). For Haley Joel Osment, detoxifying his food of things that are “fucked” is a way of colonizing parental domestic space, providing a subtraction that becomes his own. He does this too during his time living with roommates in New York City; he drinks organic soy milk and says, “[w]hen I see the Edensoy box I feel alive and better than my roommate” (31), making his food choices not only a way of distinguishing himself from others, but even the condition of “feel[ing] alive”—appearing in the world at all. A purification of his food produces a space, for Haley Joel Osment, in which he even exists.

Because Haley Joel Osment’s technique of creating space for himself distinguished from others is through his eating habits, where detoxifying food of meat products and preservatives curates a space in which he can come into being, he also demands them from Dakota Fanning,

so that she can show up with him and they can participate in a space of intimacy together. He gives her these instructions: “Take vitamins in the morning. And green tea. ... Drink Edensoy instead of juice” (40). She begins to keep a log of everything she eats; whenever she eats something with, for instance, “some processed artificial shit,” he tells her, “I’m so sad” (159).

Whereas Dakota Fanning was first tasked with securing actual and permanent physical space for their relationship, she is now tasked to produce space through her constantly monitored, daily (really hourly) actions. In order to create a space in which she and Haley Joel Osment can continue to show up together, she must discipline her actions to the vision of detoxification he supplies. The general formula throughout much of the detoxifying work in the 1980s—subtract from the environment to produce space for intimacy—thereby persists, but in a modified form, in *Richard Yates*: whereas in previous works, detoxification was about securing the space of a house freed of the domestic violence and racial difference that was abjected onto a surrounding and dangerous natural environment, here detoxification becomes a mobile technique, beyond the boundaries of a house or any other institution, and practiced constantly in order to perpetually reproduce miniature, movable spaces of intimacy. Whether on the train, in a restaurant, in a parent’s house, or walking the streets of New York, Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning can detoxify and therefore create a space that immediately surrounds them and separates them from a world whose toxicity goes on beyond it.

Notably, as in Carver and Robison, this toxicity is coded as racially other. One of the only times a black body shows up in *Richard Yates* is when Haley Joel Osment is stealing his organic food from Whole Foods and reports that “an obese black cop followed me around a little but I escaped” (37), aligning blackness with obesity and the non-organic. As an authority figure

empowered to prevent Haley Joel Osment from shoplifting his detoxifying foods, the police officer cannot participate in the same detoxifying project with him; the intimacy Haley Joel Osment carves out for himself and for Dakota Fanning is not one in which a black body is meant to show up as well. Indeed, the whole project of moving from Internet to print production may be understood as trying to leave behind certain markers of race. Roopika Risam has described how a culture of critique like the one Marie Calloway may have been trying to arrest by removing herself from an Internet economy often gets encoded as “toxic” when the critics are women of color; to detoxify Internet speech is then, in a white cultural imaginary, to eliminate the voice of color.<sup>43</sup> Lin’s print literature seeks to detoxify space as a means for the production of intimacy, and his protagonist has developed a technique for constantly making detoxified space through a mechanism that also bars bodies of color from entering the intimate scene.

In addition to schematizing how the production of space through detoxification can be made mobile, *Richard Yates* also dramatizes what happens when detoxification becomes an interpersonal project. In Carver and in Robison, detox was a personal project: it was about other people, and especially about the violence of other people, but it was a project undertaken by individuals in order to imagine a safe space for themselves, in order to imagine that there might be some place within an otherwise toxic world in which they could flourish by receiving the correct roles. In *Richard Yates*, the demand that Dakota Fanning participate in the project with Haley Joel Osment changes its dynamic. In particular, whereas in previous works, detoxification was about the fantastic elimination of violence, here detoxification becomes itself a form of violence: in the constant vigilance required of Dakota Fanning, where her appetite and body

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<sup>43</sup> Risam, “Toxic Femininity 4.0.”

must be controlled in order for space to be produced for it to show up as part of a couple—a control that will ultimately result in cycles of binging and purging—she suffers both emotional and physical damage. This is the “cruel optimism” of their relationship: she believes that disciplining her body and self will produce a space for her and Haley Joel Osment to have a “happy and healthy relationship” (109), but the means to that deferred end actively produces unhappiness and unhealthiness.<sup>44</sup>

Although all this dramatization of the work and violence that detoxification does occurs internal to the narrative, it provides a pedagogy for what Tao Lin is doing with the style of detoxification in which the narrative is packaged. *Richard Yates* is an autobiographical novel: it is a re-telling of the relationship Tao Lin had with Ellen Kennedy, when he was indeed a 22-year-old in New York City and Ellen was a 16-year-old, albeit not in New Jersey but in Pennsylvania (Ellen now goes by E. R. and identifies as a man). The age dynamic seems to have troubled Lin, although in a way that also became humorous for him. In an 2007 interview while finishing work on the manuscript of what would become *Richard Yates*, he described the project thus: “My next novel is called *Statutory Rape*. The main characters are Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning.”<sup>45</sup> The effortless move from this provocative title to the multisyllabic names of its characters seems to assimilate its referential content—abuse across a differential power dynamic structured by both gender and age—to mere gimmick. These are the names not only of child actors, but also of child actors strongly associated with whiteness; no wonder Haley Joel Osment

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3. For Berlant’s discussion of cruel optimism in a similar situation of girls’ eating habits in relation to violent intimacies, see her chapter. Berlant, “Two Girls, Fat and Thin.”

<sup>45</sup> Vizzini, “An Interview With Tao Lin.”

sets himself against the black cop who stands for everything he is trying to push out: color, corporeality, imagined toxicity. To cast Lin and Ellen as Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning is to transpose them into a white space that, because racially purified and detoxified, carries the fantasy of being detoxified of the violence that really existed between them. This is much of the work done by the names throughout the novel, where they always appear in full and frequently function to provide obliquity to violence. Halfway through the novel, for instance, we learn that Dakota Fanning was also raped as a child, by the father of one of her friends:

“He looked like he raped you or something,” said Haley Joel Osment.

“He did,” said Dakota Fanning and made a strange facial expression.

“Oh,” said Haley Joel Osment.

“No he didn’t,” he said after about ten seconds.

“Yes he did,” said Dakota Fanning.

“He really raped you?”

“Yes,” said Dakota Fanning. (101)

The hyper-attribution of speech in a dialogue between only two people is classic detoxification à la Robison, but here the style is even more embellished by an almost universal insistence not to turn proper names into pronouns. In a simply referential way, the names borrowed from people known as child actors already obscures the dynamic between the two, putting them both into vulnerable positions and covering up the disproportional amount of vulnerability that fell to a younger, transgendered person; but even after the referential impact of the names has been worn down by their repetition, the sheer persistence of their presence as language, large and multisyllabic, pushes out not only the surrounding environment (notably, they are on their way to a carnival where the narration will focus on the making of funnel cakes, which must then be pushed out of the narration in order to create their detoxified space), but also the violence that is

being retold within it. In this novel, violence, passing through the filter of detoxification style, comes out white and organic and therefore, fantastically, as not violent at all.

The displacement of violence through an aesthetics of detoxification is omnipresent in *Richard Yates* and is hinted at as well in Lin's apparent inability to see the violence in his real relationship with Kennedy as anything other than "statutory," that is, a neutral and legalistic fact of their ages and not an ongoing dynamic of psychological control that he constantly administered, a dynamic that Kennedy has publicly identified on Twitter as "rape"—period, unqualified.<sup>46</sup> (Similarly, Lin's anxiety, reported in *what purpose did I serve in your life?*, that he comes off in interviews "as like I'm trying to prey on young girls," misses the point that abuse can occur outside the archetypes of pedophilic predator.<sup>47</sup>) Not only does Lin filter this dynamic through a whiteness policed by food, names, and the tagging of speech; he also sanitizes Kennedy's speech itself even as he plagiarizes it. Kennedy reports that most of the dialogue in *Richard Yates* is lifted from Gmail chats and other digital communications from their relationship, but Lin also standardized Kennedy's prose, akin to Carver's and Robison's purging of dialect. Notably, all the Gmail chats show up in standard, grammatical language, and typos are corrected and expunged from the speech itself (among others, Marie Calloway has also reported that Tao Lin offered to publish her writing only on the condition that "you make the capitalization normal" [155]). Through this action of detoxification, now appropriated to sanitize and censor, a novel about an abusive relationship displaces the real abuse that inspired it. *Richard Yates* is a resonant coda to the detoxification of the 1980s, providing a familiar discursive

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<sup>46</sup> See Ryan, "Alt-Lit Icon Tao Lin Accused of Statutory Rape and Abuse." Jones, "Alt-Lit Icon Accused of Statutory Rape as Hipster Scene Falls Apart."

<sup>47</sup> Calloway, *What Purpose Did I Serve in Your Life*, 157.

economy—“Haley Joel Osment said ... Haley Joel Osment said”; “said Dakota Fanning ... said Dakota Fanning”; the standardization of Internet speech—in which the real experience of violence can show up stripped of violence.

Tao Lin and other writers he has published or endorsed do not share the institutional positioning that McGurl has argued was fundamental to the production of minimalism through the mediating affects of shame. They do, however, share with Carver, Robison, and other detoxification writers of the previous generation a style that is an action: their sentences are a technique of producing intimate space through the expunging of an environment that has been coded as a threat to heterosexuality, either through violence or through racial otherness. In the end, detoxification style in this novel produces violence in its own detoxifications of experience, in its own purification of the violence from which it was born.

Lin, in other words, provides a coda to the extimacy of violence that has obsessed detoxifications’s curation of domestic spaces. The detoxified suburbs of Carver and Robison sought to keep a queer and black specter of violence outside its domestic enclaves by imagining its space as detoxified of the toxins it had coded as black and queer. To participate in the project of detoxification was to identify with a suburban whiteness that was supposed to offer safety and security for a middle-class and reproductive heterosexuality to flourish. But as in Carver and Robison, the violence projected onto the toxic exterior was also internal to the logic of this heterosexuality itself, and the ultimate futility of the detoxifying project was the resurrection of this repressed potential for damage. In Lin, suburban culture has become mobile, and the project of securing safe space has moved from the enclaves of neighborhoods to the enclaves of personal bubbles: detoxifying the immediate environment of your intimacy whether on the train,

in the restaurant, or walking through the city. But as the space becomes more mobile, so, too, does the violence that returns again and again within it: in Lin, detoxification carries its heterosexual crises everywhere it goes.

Chapter Three  
Intoxication Style: Joyce Carol Oates, Zadie Smith, and David Foster Wallace

I. The Environments of Big Sentences

Joyce Carol Oates thinks *them*, winner of the National Book Award in 1970, is one of the two books she will “be most remembered for.”<sup>1</sup> In the artifice of the novel’s metafictional preface, “Oates” tells us that the germs of the novel were letters she received from a troubled student she had failed early in her teaching career, and about two thirds of the way into the novel, we get to read these letters directly. They begin: “Dear Miss Oates, / Years ago I was a student of yours, you don’t remember me. I am writing this letter knowing you won’t remember me.”<sup>2</sup> They continue: “I think I am writing to you because I could see, past your talking and your control and the way you took notes carefully in your books while you taught, writing down your own words as you said them, something that is like myself. My name is Maureen Wendall ... Is it an insult to say that I am writing to you because there is something like me, in you?”<sup>3</sup> It may not be surprising that, in these lines of a subject struggling to come into being, to become intelligible to another, the very subject of the sentences becomes slippery. First, we have the comma splice between “I was a student of yours” and “you don’t remember me”: these almost perfectly symmetrical clauses enfold grammatical subjects into the objects of the other, leaving the ultimate agency of the sentence an unsettled competition. As the letter progresses, subjects

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<sup>1</sup> Burns, “Off the Page: Joyce Carol Oates.” The other is her historical novel on Marilyn Monroe, *Blonde* (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Oates, *Them*, 344.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 344–45.

become distressed and distributed across a wider array of objects; in the imperfect parallelism of “your talking and your control and the way you took notes carefully in your books while you taught,” the student projects her teacher onto a set of actions that always seem to be stumbling ahead of her. This is an effect of the polysyndeton, too, which disrupts a logic of the list so we cannot know which “and” will introduce the final item; and even the final item (taking notes) gets wrapped up in another one that provides its larger context (teaching). But what is even more fascinating about this sentence is that just as Oates is trying to catch up with her verbs, Maureen is in parallel also trying to catch up with “Oates” in order to present herself; it is after she writes about seeing “something like myself” that we finally get her name. By the end of the letter, in line with the overall syntactic logic of symmetric reversibility that has structured the sentences throughout, it is nonetheless “something like me” that is implanted in the “you” of Oates. What to make of the whiplash of subject and object, which maps a set of correspondences between “I” and “you” and “me” and “myself” and, finally, “something”? What is the thingness of this repeated something? It is pointing to something more abstract than the list of behaviors (“your talking”) and objects (“notes ... in your books”), but is finally arresting because it is called a thing at all, some object upon which the listing and proliferation in these sentences converge. This “something” is like a drug to Maureen; it slows down the world long enough to collect its objects while at the same time she returns to it again and again looking for it to create some hallucinogenic sense of herself. “Me” and “you” finally follow from “something like,” “something like.”

Something like this is also happening in the sentences of Oates’s perhaps most well-read novel of the 1990s, *We Were the Mulvaneys*, which was adapted into an Emmy-nominated TV

movie and was later selected, in 2001, for Oprah’s Book Club (the same year another novelist who writes similar sentences and to whom I will return in the following sections, Jonathan Franzen, notoriously expressed his ambivalence for also being selected.) “We were the Mulvaney, remember us?” the novel begins, repeating the comma splice of agency around which the question of subjective intelligibility to others hinges.<sup>4</sup> As in *them*, the question of remembrance is also narcissistic: like Maureen searching for the something she is like, this novel’s protagonist does not quite remember the family of which he is the youngest. Judd remembers being the baby of the family, but this is a memory of being distributed across names in the way Maureen distributed her teacher across actions and objects: “I couldn’t seem to figure out who I was, if I had an actual name or many names, all of them affectionate and many of them teasing, like ‘Dimple,’ ‘Pretty Boy,’ or, alternately, ‘Sourpuss’ or ‘Ranger’—my favorite.”<sup>5</sup> Judd considers that all a family is, “after all,” is its memories, but Judd’s problem is that he was not there, because unborn or too young, for the foundational memories that give the family its meaning. He recalls one of the much-discussed memories, of his father’s friend almost crashing his plane into a pasture: “And when in subsequent years they would speak of the incident, recalling the way the wind buffeted the little plane when Wally Parks, my Dad’s friend, took Dad up for a brief flight, I was positive I’d been there, I could recall how excited I was, how excited we all were, Mike, Patrick, Marianne and me, and of course Mom, watching as the Piper Club [airplane] rose higher and higher shuddering in the wind, grew smaller and smaller with distance until it was no larger than a sparrow hawk, high above the Valley, looking as if a single

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<sup>4</sup> Oates, *We Were the Mulvaney*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

strong gust of wind could bring it down.”<sup>6</sup> There is the usual splitting of subjective agency in this sentence, first “they” then “I” then “we”; the stumble from “and me” to “and of course Mom” underlines the writing’s refusal to end, its will to pick up others along the way. And here, like with Maureen’s “something,” this array of pronouns gets finally delivered to the image of the plane; the plane does not quite become a subject in the sentence, but taking up more than half of its space, it still comes to crowd out or absorb the subjects that came before it. By the end of the sentence, however, the plane removes itself from the scene, becoming metaphor (“a sparrow hawk”) and then becoming only the site of contemplation for something ultimately invisible (the wind), which was actually the sentence’s first object of contemplation. Here, the wind starts to look “something like” what Judd needs in order to access his family’s unconscious and thus himself. The family keeps returning to this scene in its collective memory, and it is strangely the weather that is the object of their addiction.

The queer sublimation of family into weather is not just this sentence’s doing; it recurs, tellingly, at the novel’s conclusion, after the family has gone through the tragedies after-shadowed in the novel’s first line but reunites for a camping trip. Here are some of the last sentences of *We Were the Mulvaneys*:

And look, Patrick said, pleasure in his voice, at this pocket-sized weather radio that provided up-to-the-minute bulletins twenty-four hours a day from the National Weather Service. As if a demonstration were necessary, Patrick switched on the radio and at once a man’s voice intoned through pulses of static, “—prevailing winds out of the north-northeast from Saskatchewan, twenty to twenty-five miles an hour, at the airport in Billings, Montana temperature sixty-four degrees Fahrenheit and barometer steady at—” and there was Patrick smiling happily, squatting in his nylon tent showing his kid brother a pocket-sized weather radio that was in fact a miracle of technology, what relief in having access to detailed weather facts twenty-four hours a day 365 days a year, you

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5.

have only to switch on a tiny button to hear so solemn and incantatory a recitation of simple unassailable facts beyond all human subjectivity, will, yearning.<sup>7</sup>

The memory Judd had earlier desired here becomes the objective “fact”; perhaps this was even always the reason the family remembered the wind more than the plane in their “speak[ing] of the incident”: a need for their unconscious to be lodged in the objective stuff of the world. “As if a demonstration were necessary,” Judd writes, indicating the performance of the machine, the knowledge of weather that fills up the space of the camp and certainly the majority of the space of the sentence, is not for reasons primarily pragmatic, but for reasons primarily symbolic and affective. After the deluge of weather-speech, we get Patrick “smiling happily”; but more tellingly, we also get Patrick talking to his “kid brother,” as if we need to be reminded, after 450 pages of narration about the family, that Judd is Patrick’s younger brother. “Kid brother” is an identity that gets as much produced by the talk of the weather as Patrick’s happiness; the weather is being used as a resource here for the production of subjective types. Again, the syntactic movement is like the taking of a drug; notice how the speech of the radio is set off in dashes and quotation marks whereas Patrick’s earlier “And look” was not, at first sealing off the speech from subjective discourse as an alien object but then imbibed, as a thing like a pill, in order for these subjects to be distorted, hallucinated into other selves: for instance, “something like” a brother.

These sentences are intoxicating. I do not just mean they are exhilarating; I mean they are collecting objects from the world and stuffing them into subjects in order to hallucinate them, a phenomenon that is lived at the level of their syntax: their tipsy wavering between comma splices (too-few conjunctions) and elongated lists of “and ... and ... and” (too-many

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 454.

conjunctions); their Mobius strip of subjects and objects, where personal pronouns become impersonal and vice versa; their distribution of people across environments until environments start to stand in for the people themselves. Style is *doing* something here, over and above what is being done in the novels' narratives: the habits of these sentences are coordinated in a larger action of intoxication. But this is not an action that is represented in the novels: no one is actually taking hallucinogens. Nor do the characters in the novels hold cognizable plans about what they are trying to take into themselves or what they are trying to become through environmental intoxication: no one has a conversation about how Judd comes into himself and his family because the weather was first coded as familial and the family is now coded by weather. Instead, this understanding of environmental and subjective interchange is lived within the style of his narration rather than its content. This is what intoxication affords here: an index of a familial unconscious; a dramatization of the insecurities of contemporary domestic and familial institutions; and a presentation of how environmental imagery can become subjective because of the intoxicating interchange between background and foreground.

This chapter is about sentences like Oates's in a range of contemporary novelists, but especially David Foster Wallace and Zadie Smith. Sometimes, these sentences have been called "maximalist"; other times, they have been called "encyclopedic," borrowing a term from the genre of novel in which they often appear. I am calling them sentences of intoxication not only because the action describes the specific way in which form and content come together in this style, but also to draw attention away from the semantics of size that has dominated so much criticism of the novels I review. Just as detoxification in the previous chapter showed that what we have come to call minimalist sentences are not simply short nor necessarily appear in novels

that are themselves short, intoxicating sentences have an ambivalent economy of language that does not have to show up in novels that are simply long. As an instance of one persistent dynamic in Oates: there is *both* a drive toward extra language through polysyndeton and a drive toward less language through asyndeton. And although Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is surely long in pages, Smith's *White Teeth* is not even half as long, paling in comparison even to, say, *Gravity's Rainbow*. Important modernist precedents like Gertrude Stein and Ford Maddox Ford wrote long books but also shorter ones; so, too, did the nearer, later century precedent William Gass. For his part, Gass frequently argued it was the sentence—more than the paragraph or the whole book—that was the most important unit of language. It was “only sentences” Gass would write when he started to write,<sup>8</sup> and it is the sentence that consistently anchors his linguistic and literary ruminations in later essays, which treat the sentence as a form of consciousness and proceed to diagram its “energy, drive, direction, purpose,” as well as “desire.”<sup>9</sup> Gass speaks of the “aesthetically interesting sentence” in which “every materiality of language is employed to build a body for the meaning that will realize the union of thought and thing that paradise apparently forgot to promise us, and give consciousness the solid presence it constantly yearns for and will never quite realize.”<sup>10</sup> Gass's examples of this type of sentence transcend period or subject-matter—he meditates on single sentences by Daniel Defoe, George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Malcolm Lowry, and Ford Maddox Ford—but they are always intoxicating.<sup>11</sup> This chapter follows up on Gass in method (a deep description of single sentences) and

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<sup>8</sup> Gass and LeClair, “William Gass, The Art of Fiction No. 65.”

<sup>9</sup> Gass, “Finding a Form,” 40.

<sup>10</sup> Gass, “The Aesthetic Structure of the Sentence,” 341.

<sup>11</sup> Gass, “Narrative Sentences.”

somewhat in content (attending to the thought/thing convergence intoxicating sentences oversee) to consider what is going on in the intoxicating style of contemporary authors including Oates, Wallace, and Smith.

The big processing machines that their sentences are provide a dialectical other, if not opposite, to the detoxification sentences I discussed in the previous chapter, as they inhale world and environmental space and bloat subjectivity. Whereas detoxification sought to create spaces of intimacy by subtracting from the environment, intoxication suggests what happens when worlds and subjects, or backgrounds and foregrounds, start to mix. As I will argue in the following sections, that makes them particularly fertile scenes for unfolding conditions of, not manmade toxicity, but manmade climate change. Oates, Wallace, and Smith are already theorizing, in their intoxicating styles, a kind of agency germane to the period geologists have called the Anthropocene, in which human history becomes knotted with ecological history and the human species arises as an actor on a global scale. In making this connection, I will argue that the style also helps to refine Anthropocene theory. Much of this important body of theory has posed the Anthropocene as an epistemological problem, because it involves scales of history and assemblages of things on much more massive scales than we have traditionally had to consider. In contrast, intoxication answers instead to an affective problem that asks what the Anthropocene feels like. Importantly, this chapter hopes to bring out that the world does not feel like the Anthropocene to everyone: by identifying intoxication as the style of the Anthropocene, we can begin to qualify the universalism entertained in many epistemologies of the Anthropocene, in which an entire species is held responsible for ecological transformation. Perhaps everyone is subject to climate change, but not everyone practices intoxication.

Therefore, the question for this chapter is not the scientific one of whether human agency is distributed and imbricated with a planet, but rather: for whom does agency feel that way, or under what social conditions is it desirable for people to intoxicate themselves and distribute their agency across the world at the same time that the world comes into them?

I begin, in the second section, with Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, which suggests a protocol for building multi-clausal sentences as a way of evacuating personal subjectivity. After showing the sentence's attraction to themes or representations of intoxication, I proceed to see how intoxication is a style that transcends thematic context, in part by surveying a number of other works. In conversation with theorists of the Anthropocene, especially Elizabeth Povinelli, I argue that the action of intoxication in these sentences is also a figuration of a subjective agency bloated with objectivity and begin to track where anthropogenic agency is felt in a subset of contemporary literature. That is, having argued for intoxication as the style of the Anthropocene, I proceed to use intoxication to qualify the Anthropocene as a social and agential phenomenon rather than a geological one. In particular, I make two connections and therefore two interventions into thinking about the Anthropocene culturally. First, in section three, I take seriously the ways in which intoxicating literature has been seen as masculinist and then tease out, in a reading of Sergio de la Pava's *A Naked Singularity*, what is gendered about intoxicating *style* (as opposed to simply encyclopedic content). I thereby show how gender is at play in the ways in which we conceptualize the "anthropo" of the Anthropocene. Second, in section four, I take seriously the "hysteria" part of James Wood's famous critique of Smith's and Wallace's "hysterical realism" and show how the intoxication of their style—irruptions of background into foreground—helps to periodize the Anthropocene as an affective, rather than geological,

phenomenon. Throughout the chapter, intoxication is what maps and constellates these points from gender theory, psychoanalysis, and ecocriticism.

## II. Infinite Agency

Just as Mary Robison's *Oh!* does not begin with short sentences, as I discussed in the previous chapter, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* does not begin with long ones. What style asks us to track, however, is how a tendency in some of the sentences comes to predominate over and organize the others, in line with what Leonard Meyer calls for when he recommends stylistics decline to define its objects by picking out the "deviant" qualities of a work and instead explain the global structure in which both the banal and the remarkable elements are constellated.<sup>12</sup> In *Infinite Jest*, the task becomes understanding where and why the intoxicating sentences emerge, to what anxieties in the text they respond, and how they finally participate in the novel's narrative ecology.

What is fascinating about the novel is that intoxicating sentences cluster, and they cluster around themes of intoxication: if you run each of the novel's chapters through a syntactic analyzer like the one programmed by Xiaofei Lei, which uses code developed by computer scientists at Stanford to parse the text into parts of speech it then organizes into syntactic trees,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Meyer, *Style and Music*, 27.

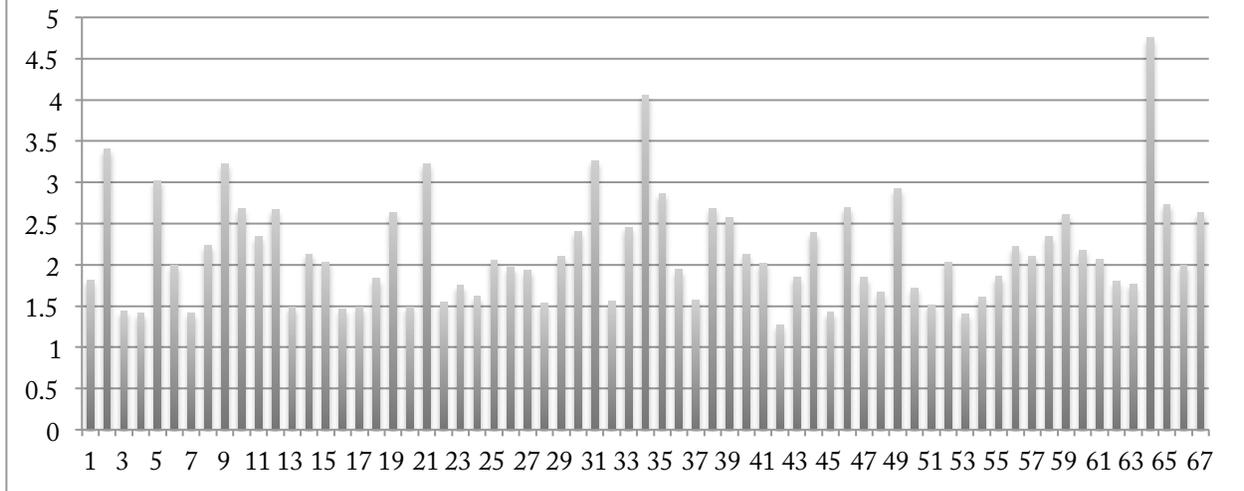
<sup>13</sup> Lu, "Automatic Analysis of Syntactic Complexity in Second Language Writing." For the Stanford parser, see Klein and Manning, "Accurate Unlexicalized Parsing."

the longest and most complicated sentences—the ones with the highest clause-to-sentence ratio—show up in chapters thirty-four and sixty-four:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This sort of automatic text processing has been advocated for the “distant reading” of archives comprising thousands of texts or more than a single humanist could reasonably be expected to read. In this sometimes paranoid approach to literary criticism, scholars are anxious to catch up with an archive they can never master. See, e.g., Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. In turning to a syntactic analysis of *Infinite Jest*, however, I suggest that methods of distant reading may be more useful at smaller scales of reading such as a novel that, however long, is hardly impossible to finish. If, as David Letzler has suggested, the proliferation of “cruft” in long novels like Wallace’s—a term he borrows from computer science, where it refers to leftover or redundant, functionally unnecessary code—predisposes even the most careful reader to skim, then one of the benefits of an inhuman textual analyzer is that it actually does read every single word in a text (unless explicitly instructed not to). See Letzler, “Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft of Fiction.” Distant reading a single text, in other words, may defamiliarize a relation to it, pointing to patterns that call out for more explanation or interpretation; its digital analog would be, rather than a model of an archive in place of reading, a search function for highlighting parts of a text that require more reading. Richard So and Hoyt Long have attempted a similar project of stylistic identification in a convergence of close reading, historicism, and computational approaches to language they call “literary pattern recognition.” Taking the modernist, English-language haiku as an example, the computational for them seems to provide mediation between the prior two methods by providing “a mode of reading more fine-grained than cultural history but expansive in ways that allow for a definition of textual pattern looser than the one close reading offers—a mode that does not treat the text as a nexus of individual aesthetic effects or an object of discourse but as a set of generic features shared across hundreds of instances.” But the algorithm with which they train computers to intuitively distinguish between haiku and non-haiku poems ultimately reduces to a “bag of words” approach that picks out haikus based on the diction and word-length (actually, syllable count) most frequently associated with them. Declining to tag parts of speech, for instance, this algorithm not only cannot sort out “spring” as noun from “spring” as verb, but also does not make any claims about style based on syntax or other organizational units larger than the word. Long and So, “Literary Pattern Recognition,” 254. In contrast, I have been using syntax as the key to style in this chapter and the one succeeding; and I now look for the distribution of style within a single text instead of using a pattern as an abstraction that mediates between a text and its class. In other words, in a simple inversion, I am looking at how a style participates within a work instead of how a work participates in a style. Interestingly, in a separate essay written for a popular magazine (and therefore presented without details of the algorithm used), So and Andrew Piper “tak[e] syntax as a measure of style” in trying to see if an algorithm can sort MFA writing from non-MFA writing and find that, in fact, an MFA does not reliably predict syntactic habits. In other words, there is no distinct class of writing collected by the Program Era. See So and Piper, “How Has the MFA Changed the Contemporary Novel?”

### Chart 1. Clauses/Sentence Ratio vs. Chapter



These two chapters are about, in content, intoxication: the former about an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting and the latter about a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. In chapter thirty-four, we find the longest sentence of the entire novel, providing the contours of the genre of stories told at AA meetings in Boston. These stories are a genre, the narrator insists, because, if you are an alcoholic, it “isn’t very hard” to empathize and “identify” with the storyteller, recognizing yourself in the first-person narration. The first-person becomes generic because it is in a sense already impersonal. The sentence begins, “Because if you sit up front and listen hard, all the speakers’ stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like your own”; and then, after a colon, it begins to list the standard narrative events in the genre, in second person, beginning with “fun with the Substance, then very gradually less fun, then significantly less fun because of like blackouts you suddenly come out of on the highway going 145 kph with companions you do not know” and steadily declining into longer and longer bouts of memory loss (345). That the sentence begins with a conjunction and therefore shaped as a fragment

means that however many actions and events get attached to the unnamed “you,” it is still a sentence feeling out for a subject, looking for a main clause in which an actor and action can be brought into synchronicity. Given the genericity of the “you,” this search for a subject is also a search for a particularity to descend upon, like a proper name to claim the actions attributed to its type. As if offering a possibility, the sentence frequently breaks off its list to provide the testimony of John L., visiting from the Concord AA group, who instantiates, for instance, the generic “litany of what Boston AA calls Losses” by narrating he lost his job to drinking and then the “domestic strife [and] eventual domestic losses” by narrating he lost his wife (345). The sentence thus knots an impersonal form—the standard account of an AA story—with a personal confession. But instead of transferring the agency of a “you” to “John L.,” the impersonal thread of the sentence starts to lose even its pronoun once John L. enters, and it lists not even actions or events, but scenes and situations: “vocational ultimatums, unemployability, financial ruin, pancreatitis, overwhelming guilt, bloody vomiting, cirrhotic neuralgia, incontinence, neuropathy, nephritis, black depressions, searing pain” (346). As in Oates, the body here gets distributed across its conditions and the spaces it temporarily populates, failing even to be a subject to its own addiction. The “you” gets spread out and interrupted, or starts to look as if it is the puppet of an array of mostly visceral forces.

The “you” re-appears toward the end of the sentence, but having gone through this transition and travel through the scenic, it no longer looks to claim a subject that can provide it coherence. First, the “you” becomes “two yous,” split into an objective and a subjective part that allegorizes the battle between “the Substance” and whatever psychological will could have, at one point, existed apart from it. But this split internal to the “you,” making “you” only a container

for a conflict over the status of “you,” inevitably functions only to mediate the conversion of whatever non-Substance part of the “you” existed into the Substance altogether. The sentence ends thus:

the Substance has devoured or replaced and become you, and the puke-drool-and Substance-crust T-shirt you’ve both worn for weeks now gets torn off and you stand there looking and in the root-white chest where your heart (given away to It) should be beating, in its exposed chest’s center and center-less eyes is just a lightless hole, more teeth, and a beckoning taloned hand dangling something irresistible, and now you see you’ve been had, screwed royal, stripped and fucked and tossed to the side like some stuffed toy to lie for all time in the posture you land in. (347)

The osmosis of substance into person becomes here a conversion machine that translates personal into objective pronouns—“you” becomes “It”—that then folds back on itself so that alien heart becomes another body, creaturely and animated in place of the agency of “you.” The last “you” of the sentence is an object of possession rather than a subject. But the agency has been buried by more than the Substance; it has been buried as well by the sentence, which flanks “you” with an assemblage of details and entities that vie for subject-position and compete with “you” for it in each clause. The syntax mirrors the sentence’s contents by staging the collapse of a distinction between these agencies. Here, the style of intoxication narrates intoxication.

It is not surprising that sentences like Wallace’s show up in many other novels of the twentieth century that are, thematically, *about* intoxication, whether in the “mad” dances of Jack Kerouac’s prose and the writings of other drug-inspired Beat writers; in Hubert Selby, Jr.’s novels of addiction, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964) and *Requiem for a Dream* (1978); or more substantially, and earlier, in Malcolm Lowry’s mid-century monument to alcoholism, *Under the Volcano* (1947). In each of these novels, intoxication is figured as a spreading of the self across space, and their intoxicating sentences perform this in their elongation and burial of personal pronouns. In

*Under the Volcano*, we learn that “portentous drinkers” are also “portentous walkers,” distributing bodies and memories across large expanses of land; and then it is not a surprise that the land itself, or the air, starts to bear the charge of human affection, so that atmospheres, too, have “a kind of fever.”<sup>15</sup> In the narratively introductory but chronologically concluding chapter, M. Jacques Laruelle, drunk on Anis, remembers the couple that the novel will proceed to destroy:

A car was passing and as he waited, face averted, for the dust to subside, he recalled that time motoring with Yvonne and the Consul along the Mexican lake-bed, itself once the crater of a huge volcano, and saw again the horizon softened by dust, the buses whizzing past through the whirling dust, the shuddering boys standing on the backs of the lorries holding on for grim death, their faces bandaged against the dust (and there was a magnificence about this, he always felt, some symbolism for the future, for which such truly great preparation had been made by a heroic people, since all over Mexico one could see those thundering lorries with those young builders in them, standing erect, their trousers flapping hard, legs planted wide, firm) and in the sunlight, on the round hill, the lone section of dust advancing.<sup>16</sup>

Here a single moment—a car passing quickly by—becomes bloated first with a longer scene and then cosmic symbolism, only to be finally delivered, or summed up, in the image of dust.

Technically, Laruelle is the subject of this sentence, and the “buses,” “boys,” “faces,” and “section of dust” are just anchors for clauses adjoined to him, but they also stuff up his pronoun and thereby so thoroughly distress it that he cannot, at the end, claim to own the dust into which he is sublimated. Although Laruelle is drunk in this sentence, the sentence is not *about* his drinking; rather, it is an action of intoxication that is parallel and homologous *with* his drinking. In this intoxicating sentence is tracked the migration of a background condition (dusty) into a foreground subject (dust), with a human figure only serving as the medium of its traversal.

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<sup>15</sup> Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, 18–19, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

A similar dynamic is at play in Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), for instance in this sentence with a character named Charlie running across New York with the valuable homerun baseball that connects many of the other characters in the novel:

He double-timed it across Madison to the Men's Bar at the Biltmore, where he massively inhaled a Cutty on the rocks and was out the door in half a shake and skating across the vast main level of Grand Central, the Bobby Thomson baseball jammed into the pocket of his topcoat—a Burberry all-weather that he loved like a brother and that went especially well with the suit he was wearing, a slate gray whipcord made for Charlie by a guy who did laps for organized crime—because he'd decided the ball was no longer safe in his office and he wanted his son to have it, for better or worse, love or money, real or fake, but please Chuckie do not abuse my trust, I could fall down dead passing the stuffed mushrooms at dinner and this is the one thing I want you to take and keep and care for, and he went striding through the gate just in time to make his train, which was the evolutionary climax of the whole human endeavor, and he bucketed up to the bar car, filled with people who more or less resembled Charlie, give or take a few years and a few gray hairs and the details of their vilest dreams.<sup>17</sup>

This is a sentence that starts off about intoxication—the downing of some whiskey one of the first of its narrated actions—but soon the sentence becomes itself an intoxication as Charlie is distributed across the city into an array of objects. The sentence becomes a negotiation between his subjectivity and his objectivity, with his voice vying to take over the language about halfway through (“please Chuckie do not abuse my trust”) only to be finally buried under the impersonality of the collective “whole human endeavor” and then the assimilation into “people who more or less resembled Charlie.” Chuckie gets filled up with stuff until he is general. The penultimate and intoxicating sentence of the novel repeats this even without the provocation of narrative intoxication to get it going; here an impersonal “you” is distributed across a “weedy lawn,” “the glimmerless sky,” through to “the yellow of the yellow of pencils.”<sup>18</sup> This is a

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<sup>17</sup> DeLillo, *Underworld*, 534–35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 827.

sentence feeling out for the breadth of an entire world, and there is no “you” in which to finitely locate or collect it after the extensive collecting it has done.

That these complicated sentences are attracted to scenes of intoxication makes sense when the sentences themselves are understood simply *as* intoxication; these authors slip into the intoxicating sentence in moments of adequacy between style and content. But as I have been suggesting in this dissertation, the action within the style exists independent of the actions within the content. After all, *Infinite Jest*, to return to our original example, hardly begins with a scene of intoxication; it begins in a college admissions interview with three sentences that replicate an elementary formula of subject followed by a conjugation of “to be”: “I am seated in an office .... My posture is .... This is ....” (3). And then the second paragraph, composed of a single sentence, reads simply: “I am in here” (3). Because this last sentence repeats later in the chapter (13), we eventually know “here” refers not to the office in which the current narrator, Hal Incandenza, is seated, but to something more immediate to Hal: his body, his mind, or the abstract “self” that contains him and is available for public viewership. Hal is someone who regularly experiences “panic at being misperceived” (8). But early on in this first scene, the instability or inaccessibility of a referent for “here” only aggravates the difficulty of locating “I,” placing the subjective anchor of the narration somewhere uncharted.<sup>19</sup> The sentence thus names the central conflict as the scene unfolds, where the assembled administrators of the University of Arizona interrogate Hal on accusations of having plagiarized his admissions essays (for instance, one titled “The Implications of Post-Fourier Transformations for a Holographically Mimetic Cinema” [8]) and having received doctored grades at a private tennis academy at which his uncle

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<sup>19</sup> See also the discussion of “I am here” in McGurl, “The Institution of Nothing,” 36–37.

is an authority (“[m]ost institutions do not even *have* grades of A with multiple pluses after it” [6]). The administrators want Hal to explain the red flags on his application, but his uncle, who is present for the beginning of the interview, keeps answering questions for him, and with increasing verbosity. The responses begin to pick up more words after Hal is asked—after “compos[ing] what I project will be seen as a smile” but which is instead read as a “grimace”—whether he is all right:

“Hal’s right as rain,” smiles my uncle, soothing the air with a casual hand. “Just a bit of a let’s call it maybe a facial tic, slightly, at all the adrenaline of being here on your impressive campus, justifying his seed so far without dropping a set, receiving that official written offer of not only waivers but a living allowance from Coach White here, on Pac 10 letterhead, being ready in all probability to sign a National Letter of Intent right here and now this very day, he’s indicated to me.” (5)

The second sentence unfolds as so many attempts to find a subject. At first, it wants to establish a second person plural that can come to consensus on what Hal’s facial expression is and means, but this aspiration for a *we*—the distance between consensus and reality—is already betrayed by the form in which it is supplied: a pleading imperative, *let’s*. The sudden appearance of *slightly*, provided after the noun it modifies, signals much of the anxiety of this aspiration, which then bleeds into a series of clauses that try to narrow the distance, providing reasons for why the facial expression should be consensually agreed to be the thing Hal’s uncle claims it to be. It feels out for facts—*Pac 10 letterhead*—that, although irrelevant to the description of a facial expression, are still fact and therefore seem materials able to support a claim that the description of the facial expression is just another fact like it. Then, surprisingly, Hal returns as the subject at the end of the sentence, anchoring what has come before. The entire sentence is recast as the repeated thought, if not speech, of Hal, as if it has given up on trying to establish plural consensus and has

settled for attributing it to a single body in the room. But even though the *we* condescends to *he*, the sentence fails as much to provide real subjective anchor in Hal as it did in trying to get everyone to agree on what Hal's facial expression is. Hal is an afterthought to the facts that precede him, appearing only as a place in which impersonal materials can finally congregate. This sentence's playful search for a subject has gone from *we* to *he* through a series of clauses that has evacuated a place for either.

Compare this with the sentences Hal imagines himself to be providing after his uncle has been asked to leave the room: "My application's not bought ... I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experience and feelings. I'm complex" (11). When speaking for himself, Hal returns to the simple formula of "I am here." Subjects are clearly foregrounded, provided first in the sentence, and the rest of the sentence refers back to them in clear, predicative fashion. But these are not the sentences his interrogators hear. Instead, they hear a shrieking variously described as "[s]ubanimalistic" (14), "marginally *mammalian*" (15), both like a "goat drowning in something viscous" and "a strangled series of bleats" (14). The others in the room are terrified by Hal's incomprehensible speech. He notices "[t]he disorder I've caused revolves all around," where "disorder" takes up location in the environment and not in his psychology or body (13); this is a scene in which a world mimes the chaos of "I" failing to line up with "here." But the point is that when Hal is trying to explain himself, he naturally turns to simple declarations. It is only when his uncle is trying to obscure a subject—and now we understand why he was trying to—that language takes on a cascade of information, as if a subject could be erased in the same way a pronoun's antecedent can be buried by clauses.

The novel opens where, chronologically, it ends. Hal's complete inhabitation of incomprehensibility to others concludes a trajectory of progressive subtraction from discursively intelligible publicity that began either with an accidental childhood ingestion of mold or with cannabis withdrawal or with the traumatic stress of his father's suicide; the possible overdetermination of his symptom through the underdetermining vagueness of its etiology points to the narrative's larger disinterest in causation. But the scene's double bookending of the novel—literally first, conceptually last—also nominates it to help characterize larger tendencies in the novel. Here, we have actually witnessed a competition between two styles. Hal, when self-narrating, is really detoxifying, trying to cut off the threatening world of other people and other substances in order to come into a protected sense of self. But his uncle practices intoxication: when the anxiety of subjective presence becomes too great, his strategy is to put enough layers of stuff over it to reduce its singularity. The intoxicating sentence does not emerge because of a narration of intoxication, but because of a desire to distribute a subject across a space in order for the space, rather than a personality, to hold it up. But the style is not about the erasure of the subject; the point is for the space, for the world of stuff, to come back and collect in the place of the subject, holding up a person that is a complex of objective agency rather than an expression of a subjective experience.

This, then, is the characteristic ambivalence of the style: the intoxicating sentence is a contradiction in human agency, on the one hand presenting actions that seem to get away from their actors while at the same time trying to ground an array of actions in a particular place, called a person. It is this contradiction in intoxication that has led Elizabeth Povinelli to

recommend the figure of the Addict for theorizing the knotting of human and environmental agency in the Anthropocene. Here is the Addict reflecting on different scales of intoxication:

I always think of fracking as a form of extreme heroin addiction. The veins have collapsed. The joy is long gone. The addict is simply trying to hold off the severe pain about to overtake her body. But this analogy is wrong. The addict gave up the illusion long ago that an ontological gap separates her vein and the needle, cold blood and hot liquid.<sup>20</sup>

The Addict thereby suggests that addiction might be a prime scene for understanding not the illusions that cover over the reality of human and natural convergence, but for laying bare the reality: the Addict has long internalized in her own ontology that the dualisms overhauled by the Anthropocene—between man and nature, subject and object—were not tenable. This is not a cognitive issue for her, but an understanding incarnated in each of her actions, which belong not really to her but to the complex of substance, needle, and body. Such a view is available not only to addicts, but to anyone who breathes: “Why do we desperately insist that life is that which is able to compartmentalize itself, both functionally and structurally, from its surrounding environment when it’s not hard to notice what everyone has noticed ... namely that the air is the clearest sign that something is wrong with this model? And still we hold onto this distinction—life/nonlife.”<sup>21</sup> Like Jane Bennett, who elsewhere reminds us that “[w]e are Earthlings both in the sense that we need a host of other bodies (‘the planet’) to live and in the sense that ‘we’ are made of the same elements as is the planet,”<sup>22</sup> Povinelli sees the exchange of air between body and world as an experience of the intermingling of substance, and therefore the simultaneous

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<sup>20</sup> Povinelli et al., “Breathing In, Breathing Out,” 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, “Earthling, Now and Forever?”

expansion of human agency into the world while at the same time allowing the world to enter into the human.

Through the intake of breath and drug, Povinelli points to a kind of anthropogenic agency understood as intoxication, where bodies become intoxicated with earth at the same time that they toxify it with fossil fuels and other pollutants. This is what is going on in the style of *Infinite Jest* even when it is not narrating addiction to television or marijuana or alcohol. Wallace—or for that matter, Oates from the previous section, or Smith, to whom I turn in the following—is not explicitly interested in global warming or a planetary environmental consciousness, but his style constructs an exchange of background and foreground, a composition of distributed agency, that is analogous to it. Bruno Latour might call the style of intoxication, approvingly, “compositionist,” constructing a “continuity of agents in space and time” though “from discontinuous pieces.”<sup>23</sup> The style’s sentences present the insight that, in today’s world, “consequences overwhelm their causes, and this overflow has to be respected everywhere, in every domain, in every discipline, and for every type of entity.” But as the competition between detoxification and intoxication suggests in *Infinite Jest*, the world may not feel that way to everyone, or more precisely: some people, like Hal’s uncle, may embrace a spreading of subjects across the world, while others, like Hal himself, may want to seal themselves hermetically off from the world. In the following section, I explore the social dimensions of the Anthropocene in more detail. Intoxication is the style of the Anthropocene—a style of objects and subjects

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<sup>23</sup> Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” 484. Similarly, Srivinas Aravamudan calls for theorist to make “systems and assemblages that collocate subjects and objects.” Aravamudan, “The Catachronism of Climate Change,” 25. What Aravamudan allocates to theorists, however, *Infinite Jest* already presents in its style, because that is what intoxication does.

folding into one another—but whose style is it? Or: if the Anthropocene is the condition of the earth, for whom is it also embraced as a style of acting in the world?

### III. Intoxication and the Anthropocene Novel

In this section, I argue that the style of intoxication helps to identify a species of novel we might call the “Anthropocene novel,” departing from a line of literary criticism that has trained identification of the genre on thematic representations. To approach the Anthropocene stylistically, I will show, makes available more immediate cultural accounts of what and who is involved in the kinds of agency scientists of the Anthropocene have posited as universal. But I begin with reflections on the novel as a genre and climate change as a global condition by perhaps the foremost contemporary kin of intoxication writers: David Foster Wallace’s friend, Jonathan Franzen. In the April 6, 2015 issue of *The New Yorker*, Franzen criticized the National Audubon Society for issuing a statement earlier that year asserting climate change was the greatest danger to America’s birds: Franzen thought the statement was “the opposite of controversial.”<sup>24</sup> By this he meant that everyone agrees climate change is a problem, whereas most people do not agree that other manmade deaths of birds, for instance the nearly a billion each year through collision with glass windows and walls, are really anything to worry over. Franzen did not dispute the seriousness of climate change, nor did he deny that it was likely to affect birds like all other species (although, he pointed out, it is possible birds might be able to adapt to whatever changes are brought to the climate, therefore be affected without necessarily

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<sup>24</sup> Franzen, “Carbon Capture,” 58. For Franzen’s account of his friendship with Wallace, see also his *New Yorker* article from 2011. Franzen, “Farther Away.”

being harmed). A bird lover himself, Franzen's larger complaint was that an organization with a specific and limited mission would take on the massive problem that climate change is, a problem that was "transnational, unpredictably disruptive, self-compounding, and inescapable."<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the birds that the Audobon Society should be trying to save faced problems that were more local, and conservation efforts had to attend to the regions to which particular species were confined. In taking on climate change, the Audobon Society looked to Franzen like it was trying to jump on a seriousness bandwagon that disavowed the very specific, and for Franzen very important, task it was designed to accomplish, "seduced" by a planetary crisis that, however much also important, stretched its missive too thin.

What Franzen was seeing in the Audobon Society—a disruption of conservation efforts anchored in place by a global crisis whose cause and effect are everywhere—can be seen in a number of other environmental groups as they evolved in the twentieth century, for instance the Sierra Club.<sup>26</sup> One of the oldest and widely respected in the United States, the Sierra Club began in the late nineteenth century as part of an effort to get the United States government to preserve specific parts of wild land in the Sierra Nevada as, in the words of their president John Muir, "temples [and] places for people to grow in, recreation grounds for soul and body."<sup>27</sup> This sort of disciplinary logic—where Nature could be conceived as having specific places, like Yosemite National Park; and where specific agencies, like the National park Service, could be

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<sup>25</sup> Franzen, "Carbon Capture," 61.

<sup>26</sup> My discussion of the Sierra Club draws from the meeting minutes of their Board of Directors, which were digitized by the Online Archive of California and are available online at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/hb9290139g/>. For the history of another twentieth century environmental group, see Zelko, *Make It a Green Peace!*

<sup>27</sup> Circular 17, 1909

trusted to preserve it—was eventually distressed, however, by the threat of nuclear disaster, either by war or by the explosion of reactors. In the 1970s, discussion items about what sort of resolutions the Club should adopt in relation to nuclear specters went many days, overrunning the time allotted to them; the membership of the Club began to challenge its Board for setting its priorities too narrowly. Yet however much the nuclear threat changed some of the disciplinary logics of the Club, it did not change its focus on the federal government as object of political address: it was the government who had to stop testing weapons or to monitor the reactors that were built on its soil. However apocalyptic the imagination of the Club’s membership was, there still remained a certain cleanness to it: even with a global problem, there were people and agencies that could clearly be held accountable. But a decade later, after the end of the Cold War made nuclear war lose much of its organizing apocalypticism, a new global problem arose that lacked even this cleanness. “The nuclear threat endangers all of the natural wonders” became, in 1995, “Every other problem the Sierra Club cares about is linked to the global warming problem.”<sup>28</sup> Like nuclear disaster, global warming was a problem for the entire planet. But unlike nuclear disaster, organized by a bipolar regime of states warring coolly, global warming has no clearly locatable responsible agent.<sup>29</sup> In ecological crisis, humanity as a collective whole is responsible, and no individual action—say, recycling—can be commensurate in scale

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<sup>28</sup> Item 81, 1995; Item 144, 1 November 1985

<sup>29</sup> In setting out “Criteria for International Campaigns” in 1982, Sierra Club’s executive director suggested that Club initiatives should have “clear and discrete goals,” as well as causes that were neither “too exotic nor overly technical”; but as Joshua Howe has argued in his own discussion of the Sierra Club, “the problem of climate change was none of these things.” Howe, *Behind the Curve*, 93.

with it.<sup>30</sup> Frances Ferguson has called this the “ecological sublime”: whereas nuclear disaster was sometimes pleasant to theorize because it provided a personal reprieve from the claustrophobia of belonging to a society with other individuals, therefore affording imaginations of a human agency that is wholly one’s own and unconditioned by others, the sublime of climate change—of thinking a world rendered dead by global warming—is about the elimination of individual agency altogether.<sup>31</sup>

One way of talking about intoxication, which I have argued is a blurring of background and foreground, subject and object, is as an experience of non-mediation: environments and subjects become immediate to one another. That is the experience of the ecological sublime during a time in which no institution—for instance the Audobon Society or the Sierra Club—seems capable of mediating between “soul” and world. Without institutional mediation, what was formerly being mediating collapse into one another. That is why I have been arguing intoxication is the style of the Anthropocene, because it registers this collapse, or more accurately, takes it as a premise of the world it continues to live on within. When Franzen distinguished the work he thought the Audobon Society should be doing from that collected under the name of climate change, he claimed that “[c]onservation work ... is novelistic. No

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<sup>30</sup> As Lance Newman bitinglly puts, it “when ecocritics suggest that if enough people will just read *Walden* or *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, then Earth’s fever will break, it’s a little like telling people to buy umbrellas to ward off Katrina. It reveals a profound ignorance of the total environments in which the world’s workers and poor struggle to survive.” Newman, “Global Warming, Globalization, and Environmental Literary History.” Newman is especially allergic to what he calls “Natural Capitalism,” the complex of beliefs that capitalism could actually solve climate crisis through entrepreneurial sustainability, when (of course) capitalism is principally responsible for establishing the conditions of ecological disaster itself.

<sup>31</sup> Ferguson, “Climate Change and Us,” 37. Karen Pinkus also reminds us that, whereas total nuclear war never took place, climate change already has. Pinkus, “From The Editor,” 3.

two places are alike, and no narrative is simple.”<sup>32</sup> Franzen thereby suggested that novels might not be especially good sites for exploring the kinds of global risk implicated in global climate change, not to mention the imagination of nuclear disaster before it. But in limiting the scope of an individual novel to a particular place, Franzen was disqualifying the genre from global imagination only in content. I am arguing, instead, that it is in novels like those of Oates and Wallace that we can explore the complexes of agency scholars of the Anthropocene have called on us to theorize, regardless what conservationist content is thematized in the novels as well.

If intoxication is the style of the Anthropocene, then what I am also arguing for here is a way of identifying what we might call the “novel of the Anthropocene” stylistically. Literary criticism of the past five years has more conventionally designated novelistic explorations of the Anthropocene by way of thematic rather than formal or stylistic identification. Thus for Ian Baucom, *Cloud Atlas* (to which I return in the following chapter) is eminently an Anthropocene novel because of its humanoid character Somni-451, through whom “we gain access to a form of ‘experiencing’ the nondisjunctive plurality of human life across those multiple forms of existence collectively constituting the situation and the problem of being in our times”; through Somni-451, we also “gain access to a new conception of justice for, within, and against the looming ‘inevitability’ of the Anthropocene future.”<sup>33</sup> For Baucom, the relevance of a novel to the Anthropocene is thus to be measured by its characterological figuration of climate change’s man/nature muddling through a convergence of multiple subjective fields. In contrast, for Kate Marshall, a novel is Anthropogenic to the extent it “positions itself within a different kind of

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<sup>32</sup> Franzen, “Carbon Capture,” 61.

<sup>33</sup> Baucom, “Moving Centers,” 156.

historical time,” aware that its “postterrestrial” contemporary is situated in a new geological era;<sup>34</sup> for her, the paradigmatic Anthropocene novels are then Rachel Kushner’s *Flamethrowers* (2012) and Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* (2011). Where Baucom prioritized the Anthropocene’s reorganization of matter and agency, Marshall prioritizes its reorganization of temporality. Both are at stake in Gabrielle Dürbeck’s more detailed classification of what she calls “Anthropocene literature” by way of Max Frisch’s *Man in the Holocene* (1979) and Ilija Trojanow’s *EisTau* (2011).<sup>35</sup> But in every case, it is content above all else that has picked out which novels are primary to the project of envisioning or enacting life in the Anthropocene.

In contrast, I have been arguing that we might identify something anthropogenic in novels at the level of their sentence style, and in particular, the style of intoxication is the style of the Anthropocene: globally distressed and atmospherically mixed. This makes novels available for climate criticism regardless of their avowed political commitments or visible representations. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that one hindrance for addressing climate change is that (as the name Anthropocene suggests), we are responsible for global disaster as a species, but we experience ourselves as individuals: “We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it

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<sup>34</sup> Marshall, “What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?,” 533.

<sup>35</sup> Dürbeck, “Ambivalent Characters and Fragmented Poetics in Anthropocene Literature Max Frisch and Ilija Trojanow,” 119. Dürbeck isolates seven elements that identify works of Anthropocene literature: these works thematize large scale geologic scale; they take place on seemingly remote places on Earth that turn out not to be; they synchronize internal and external catastrophe; their protagonists observe disaster with sensitivity; at the same time, their protagonists are erased from the narrative; the protagonists are instead inscribed into the narrative of the earth; the narrator, too, tends to vanish; and the entire work is told in a fragmentary poetics that invites readers to identify not with the vanishing protagonist but with the “disintegrating lifeworld” itself.

as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species.”<sup>36</sup> As Ursula Heise has pointed out, there are good reasons to be skeptical of this final prohibition on the simple *possibility* for a species phenomenology: certainly it has been possible in recent centuries for people to experience themselves as other kinds of trans-individual collective—for instance as a nation or as a gender—and perhaps the question is not whether a species consciousness could be cultivated, but how. But whereas Heise looks to cultural representations in order to afford this consciousness, for instance in novels, usually science fiction she classes under “species fictions,” I have been suggesting that style may provide a more immediate arena for feeling out for distributed human agency.<sup>37</sup> Cultural representations often lag behind the political phenomena they seek to induce, which is to say the appearance of endangered species (for instance) in a novel’s content often responds to an author’s political commitments even as it seeks to develop those commitments in others. A critical method trained on elaborating the politics and forms of consciousness made available by cultural representations in turn becomes a passive one, waiting for cultural producers to make the adequate objects for progressive ecocriticism to digest. In contrast, style—which does not require the cognitive apparatus of intentional representation and in any case is in excess to representation itself—lives out forms of consciousness without having to describe them.

To read the style of the intoxication, I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, is also to read conditions of the Anthropocene that may have yet to be metabolized into thematic representations. In the following section, I show how Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* helps to periodize the Anthropocene as an affective, rather than geological, phenomenon: when did

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<sup>36</sup> Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 220.

<sup>37</sup> Heise, “Species Fictions.” For her argument with Chakrabarty, see *Imagining Extinction*, 244.

groups of people start to feel like their agency was distributed across the world, regardless of the facts of species-level interventions in ecology? What I mean to suggest in what follows is that a kind of agency the Anthropocene has called on us to understand is also being practiced by groups of people within the Anthropocene, which is to say, at a phenomenological level, it belongs to groups of people more than to a universal metaphysics. This is the sort of leverage intoxication gets for us in thinking about the Anthropocene, because the style picks up other points of reference along its social and aesthetic travel.

As one instance, I argue in the remainder of this section that intoxication, by way of Sergio de la Pava's *The Naked Singularity*, helps us to gender the Anthropocene. The climactic—as well as ultimate and ambiguous—moment of *The Naked Singularity* sees its protagonist, the public defender Casi, re-encounter a man who earlier had been the sole guard of a large sum of drug-deal cash Casi and his colleague had, Robin Hood-like, sought to steal. It is not from negligence the man—who is called The Whale or alternatively, in Spanish, La Bellena—was the only one “entrusted with providing security for all the money”: he is massive and brutal and, as Casi puts it, “I didn’t know they made humans that big.”<sup>38</sup> Casi takes the logic of the sentence further by refusing to grant humanity to the man, calling him “it” and relishing in his animality; at the end of the novel, as he approaches The Whale again, “the beast continued to grow before me until even the slightest detail of its face could be discerned. The eyes didn’t line up, the chin seemed almost serrated, and the teeth were more like fangs.”<sup>39</sup> Paradoxically, magnification of

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<sup>38</sup> Pava, *A Naked Singularity*, 431, 512.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

the face makes it more faceless, as if the “details” cannot compensate for the sheer bigness of it; the face gets blown up and lost in its own size. Then there is this intoxicating sentence:

At that instant in Time, from that location in Space, I heard the beginnings of a menacing noise off to the margins of where we stood, like the score of cosmic locomotives loosed and gathering in the distance, a low rumble that swelled with the passing seconds but otherwise remained the same, and the sky managed to darken with the sun brighter than ever; I saw the horizons rise as if to merge directly above us while the ground beneath our feet began to sink; jagged swaths of earth along with the structures and people atop were disappearing concentrically as if into a drain and countless humans whistled by making sounds that were either pleas for mercy or yelps of celebration; I saw events and deeds displaced from their proper setting and from notions like past or future and I stared, through regret, at all the ill I’d wrought.<sup>40</sup>

The sentence does syntactically what the image of *The Whale* as magnified and therefore erased did immediately before: *Casi* becomes extended across Time and Space and so interweaved into its stuff—concrete and abstract alike—that the “I” which insists on re-anchoring each wave of observation after a semicolon cannot help but be left behind by them. Indeed, the clause that begins with “jagged swaths” temporarily—and, because alone in its subjecthood, perhaps accidentally—forfeits *Casi* into the earth that abounds him, absorbing his agency. But the re-appearance of the final “I” does ultimately suggest that the earth comes back into the subjectivity that observes it, inflating it and intoxicating it. In the vital back-and-forth of the sentence’s ambivalence, there is a distribution of subjectivity into a world and a collection of the world into a subject.

There are more obvious things to say about this sentence than that its style is one of intoxication. For starters, the sentence is simply melodramatic. It is part of the hubris of *Casi*—and, I think, of *de la Pava*—that this man gets to be the center of the world, omniscient and even

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

omni-physical. It is a commonplace of criticism of the encyclopedic novel (which *A Naked Singularity* also is) that they are written almost always by men and usually for men, with little to no presentation of female subjectivity. *The Naked Singularity* clearly identifies with this tradition (giving one of its characters the name “The Whale” is, among other things, an anxious invitation by the novel to be considered alongside *Moby Dick*), and there are barely even any female characters in it. It is interesting to note that translating whale into Spanish forces the man to become not the “it” Casi calls him, but a “she”: *La Bellena*; but that the most important female gendered character is so gendered by accident is perhaps the best way of highlighting the novel’s overall feminine lack. Among other things, this is perhaps a disavowal of the dependency of a male writer on women supports (for instance, originally rejected by hundreds of agents, *The Naked Singularity* only found a wider audience after de la Pava’s wife diligently took on the task of being its publicist).<sup>41</sup> But what is masculinist about the *style* of this sentence, independent of its representational content? And, more importantly, what is masculinity?

A long tradition of thinking about novels that are simply long—regardless of the length of their sentences—holds that they are masculine because of their content. When Edward Mendelson sat down to define his phrase “encyclopedic narrative” in 1976, he was not surprised the only seven exemplars he could find of the genre (Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Goethe, Melville, Joyce, and Pynchon) were all men, because he thought encyclopedism was primarily masculine, by which he meant “imperial” (for Mendelson, a good thing): these works have a “grander” scope than “love or the family,” stretching beyond the private and apparently feminine

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<sup>41</sup> Ruby, “Of Loopholes and Black Holes.”

home to the global spaces of empire.<sup>42</sup> In 1983, Frederick Karl called these works, beginning with *The Recognitions* and forged in the American spirit of expanding frontiers of knowledge (for Karl, a good thing), “mega-novels”; he further identified paradigmatically in Pynchon a “cellular method” of accretion and modification, expanding into different forms by way of constant flow and collection.<sup>43</sup> In the late 1980s, Tom LeClair praised such works as “systems novels” that achieve “mastery of the world” (for LeClair, a good thing) through processing a range of information other novels would ignore and then framing that data for reader use.<sup>44</sup> Whatever the term applied to these novels, their ambition is similar and expressed in terms of aggression. But while the ambition of these novels was global, it understood the global in geopolitical terms; *Gravity’s Rainbow*, after all, was about international war. In contrast, the novels I look at in this chapter, including *A Naked Singularity*, are both more intimate, by imagining the conditions of disordered subjectivity at smaller scales, and more expansive, by understanding globality as a planetary environmental condition that respects no political boundaries. This is the work done by their sentences, regardless of the geopolitical content they inhale.

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<sup>42</sup> Mendelson, “Encyclopedic Narrative,” 1267. Intoxication in this vein might be seen to be a form of “wandering” that Sarah Jane Cervenak has demonstrated to be the method and limit of Enlightenment rationality: a form of discovery that is the condition of rationality’s possibility but that, because motored by a non-teleological desire, also fails to make itself available for discursive intelligibility. For Cervenak, wandering’s capacity to lead its subjects off the map of rational oversight recommends itself for projects of racial and sexual freedom— “[a]s a mode of resistance, wandering is a philosophical performance that becomes itself outside of surveillance, outside the four-block restrictions of others’ visions”—but encyclopedism also indicates a kinship between wandering and an imperial drive toward totality: aimlessness and obsessive openness to the world also look like a masculinist assumption that the world is always waiting for the wanderer’s entrance. Cervenak, *Wandering*, 58, 172.

<sup>43</sup> Karl, *American Fictions, 1940-1980*, 451. Notably, for Karl, not just encyclopedic writers, but all American writers owe to a “masculine tradition” of anti-intellectuality. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> LeClair, *The Art of Excess*, 15. LeClair’s original example is the work of Don DeLillo: see LeClair, *In the Loop*.

To think about the masculinity of these sentences regardless of their content requires us to think of gender as more of a process and less of a representation, a move somewhat afforded by Lacan's influential formulae of "sexuation." When Lacan proposed his formulae for masculine and feminine sexuation, his intent was to elaborate two styles of being and doing in relation to a symbolic order without necessarily submitting them to an essentialist account of gender. You could take up a masculine position in the symbolic order today, and a feminine one tomorrow. This was not because Lacan thought gender, per se, was fluid; but subjective relations to a symbolic order, at least, are. In Lacan's rendering, masculine sexuation in particular is the convergence of two contradictory formulas in relation to a subject's necessary sacrifice of wholeness and self-sufficient totality through entrance into a symbolic field: on the one hand, all who enter this field must be subject to this subtracting forfeiture, but on the other hand, there remains a belief that there exists one subject who has eluded symbolic castration.<sup>45</sup> That is, under conditions of universal loss, there seems to be an exception to the rule; indeed, it is this fantastic exception that creates the rule, for only the fantasy that there is someone who always has more produces the condition of having less: if only I had a bigger car, a bigger job, or a partner with bigger sex organs. In turn, masculine subjects are always trying to catch up with a pleasure that seems to them possible by the fantasy of the exception, but which is defined

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<sup>45</sup> For the masculine subject, these formulae are  $\forall x\phi x$  and  $\exists x\sim\phi x$ , that is, "all are subject to the phallic function" and "there exists one who is not subject to the phallic function." The first is fact; the second is a fantasy that enacts the fact: the fantastic belief there is one who escapes is what makes all others actually imprisoned. Lacan, *Encore*, 80. Joan Copjec provides perhaps the clearest elucidation of Lacan's formulae of sexuation, seeing his prefigured by Kant's mathematical and dynamical antinomies and concluding that he "defines man as the prohibition against constructing a universe and woman as the impossibility of doing so." Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 235.

precisely by being impossible; masculinity is an endless activity, or better: an addiction to activity. This is what is happening in the restless sentences of de la Pava, an addiction to movement that I have been calling intoxication. Understanding the style of de la Pava's novel (for instance) as intoxication thereby helps specify what its relation to gender is in an immediate and non-representational way: there is something masculine about intoxication, about an endless imbibing of the world that is also about an infinite extension of the self into the world.<sup>46</sup>

It has become commonplace, in more humanistically inclined discussions of the Anthropocene, to critique the universalizing bent of the "anthropo," which seems to hold all of humanity accountable for world-systems changes that were, in fact, primarily the effect of developed countries who use the majority of fossil fuels.<sup>47</sup> The "Capitalocene" has been offered as one alternative with increasing traction, because it seems to highlight that the driving force of atmospheric and ecological change is not people per se, but a certain mode of people relating to the world through constant expropriation under capitalism.<sup>48</sup> While sympathetic to the general move of this argument, I would suggest it smoothes over quite a bit of nuance, not least of which is the great devastation of nature under the failed communist regimes and "successful" capitalist regimes of the twentieth century alike. The masculinization of intoxication suggests, instead, a primarily gendered as opposed to primarily economic driver of natural appropriation, or more precisely a particularly masculinist mode of relating to the world as a fund of self-affecting drugs.

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<sup>46</sup> Amy Hungerford argues, similarly, for a sort of masculinity in David Foster Wallace's writing because of his self-avowed will to overwhelm and abuse his reader. See Hungerford, *Making Literature Now*, chap. 6. The abusiveness of intoxication can also be seen, I think, in the environmental damage it has created.

<sup>47</sup> Malm, *Fossil Capital*.

<sup>48</sup> Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*.

Intoxication, as the style of the Anthropocene, mediates between the ecological fact and its cultural conditions, here specifying its relation to gender. In the following section, I continue this work of specification by turning to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and considering the question of history in relation to anthropogenic agency as a felt and practiced phenomenon.

#### IV. Intoxication and When People Started to Feel Anthropogenic

*White Teeth* begins at a limit case of human intentionality. Archie Jones has parked his car in the northwest of London and made all the necessary preparations to suffocate himself inside. This “decided-upon suicide,” we are told, was a New Year’s resolution (it is the first day of 1975) that Archie reached upon flipping a coin (3). But in the space between this decision and the indifference to the means arriving at it—handing over agency to the outcome of a toss—Archie fails to present a psychology that could explain how one comes to be open to the option of death. The novel opens with a scene in which human action is attributed not to the workings of a character’s desires or motives, but to the determination of a symbol of value; an allegorical reading of the scene might describe the substitution and sublimation of human intentionality in the reified world of monetary exchange, but Archie himself seems to have intended the loss of intention, entertaining a masochistic fantasy that he can exempt himself from the burden of being a deciding human being. As I argue in this section, however, the fantasy of action without psychology belongs primarily to the narration, whose stylized, intoxicating sentences preempt the appearance of deep psychology altogether.

In its long concatenation of objective details—not just a car, but a “Cavalier Musketer Estate,” not just Archie but “Alfred Archibald Jones”—and in the eccentricity with which they

are often provided or doubled—the scene is set not only “[e]arly in the morning,” but also “[a]t 0627 hours”—the narration’s style continually crowds out Archie’s subjectivity (3). Immediately after we are informed this is an attempt at suicide, the narration shifts to describe the area and the impersonal objects that literally tower over the human drama—“[s]queezed between an almighty concrete cinema complex at one end and a giant intersection at the other”—and to hypothesize the chain of people who will be affected should the suicide be successful: the policeman, the journalist, the next-of-kin. This move to an imagined posthumous sociality—as Archie’s body circulates first as information among occupations designed to process it and then as property to be inherited—is a further depersonalization of Archie himself, removing us from the scene of his decision in order to track his distribution among variously separate producers. When some allowance is finally given to Archie’s responsibility in the event—the coin may have determined *that* he die, but he at least had to decide *how*—we are simply told that he “wasn’t the type to make elaborate plans ... wasn’t the type for anything fancy,” where Archie’s submission to a “type” is again a depersonalization, as if his style of dying objectively followed from a taxonomic placement that could be known, instead of from a textured psychology that remained somehow inaccessible or unconscious (4). It is as if Archie’s interiority is already dead or deadened, pushed aside by an accumulation of objects and knowledges that exist apart from it.

And then, suddenly, Archie’s suicide is prevented, but again human intention or responsibility for the obstruction is hard to place. Implicating the event in chaos theory’s famous example of a “tiger moth’s diaphanous wings in Central Africa,” we are simply told “[s]omewhere, somehow, by somebody, it had been decided that he would live” (4). But this loose collection of a “somebody” and a “decision” only returns the desubjectivization of action in

which Archie's suicide was originally framed, alluding to an intentional person without providing a description of her. Instead, the narration takes a section break to describe the professional habits and mottos of Mo Hussein-Ishmael, in whose Halal butchery's loading zone Archie has parked his car. Mo is trying to get rid of the pigeons that congregate and shit around his shop ("The shit is *not* the shit," is his mantra; "the *pigeon* is the shit" [4]), and he thinks the best way to do so is to take a butcher knife to them: "[i]t was cricket, basically—the Englishman's game adapted by the immigrant, and six was the most pigeons you could get at one swipe" (5). Amidst his swinging knife and the vulgar orders to his kitchen staff ("Get-your-fat-Ganesh-Hindu-backside-up-there-Elephant-Boy-and-bring-some-of-that-mashed-pigeon-stuff-with-you" [5]), Mo nonetheless feels "very Zen ... very goodwill-to-all-men" (5). The sharp juxtaposition of Mo's violent actions and words with his inner tranquility seems, like Archie's coin toss, to empty out his interiority, as if to recommend it disingenuous because incongruous with his behavior. Mo turns himself instead into a spectacle, not only in concretizing immigrant stereotypes, but also by giving his body over to the humorous atmosphere that increasingly pervades the scene as it becomes progressively "all covered in shit" (5). Just as the event of Archie's coin toss obscured whatever suffering may have motivated it by depersonalizing his actions, Mo's unprofessional butchering alludes to but ironizes displaced difficulties: his labor, his status as an immigrant, and his acceptance in the community ("One day, so Mo believed, Cricklewood and its residents would have cause to thank him for his daily massacre; one day no man, woman, or child on the Broadway would ever again have to mix one part detergent to four parts vinegar to clean up the crap that falls on the world" [5]). The literally scatological compounding of contents in these

sentences turns insides into outsides, rendering Mo, as was done with Archie, as surface, and projecting what might otherwise be described as human pain onto ridiculous objects.

Archie's suicide is prevented when Mo notices the car, sends his son to inspect, and then pulls down Archie's window, not to stop the suicide per se, but to inform Archie "We're not licensed for suicides around here. This place halal. Kosher, understand? If you're going to die round here, my friend, I'm afraid you've got to be thoroughly bled first" (6). Mo echoes Archie's earlier concern about being out of place and provides an idiom of distribution to thicken it: Archie, white, is in a place distributed to a different ethnicity, and the reference to a license suggests the role of governmental administration in the continued segregation of metropolitan space. But most importantly, the fact of attempted suicide fails to register as really anything other than grounds for a joke. At the same time that Mo again confirms stereotype (in his hypervigilance to bureaucracy) and critiques social system (in his jab at the ethnic distribution of space), he wraps up political and personal seriousness with exaggeration. Instead of providing a sentimental scene of redemption for the empathetic encounter of strangers, Archie's suicide becomes part of the spectacle of "shit." Psychology becomes continuous with the digestive systems of birds.

Archie's "decision" to stop with the suffocation is, accordingly, attributed not to human agency but again to something more abstract. His story is first of all generic: "he had a kind of epiphany"; and then, instead of choosing life over death, "Life had said Yes to Archie Jones" (6). It would be frivolous of the narration to explain why the sudden change of intention, when it had declined to explain why Archie wanted death in the first place. Instead, the narration embellishes its claim: "Not simply an 'OK' or 'You-might-as-well-carry-on-since-you've-started,'

but a resounding affirmative. Life wanted Archie. She had jealously grabbed him from the jaws of death, back to her bosom” (6). The narration’s lingering on its simple claim about how events changed takes on a certain anxiety as it elongates, its continued modifications desperately seeking to hold up the nonhumanity of the change being rendered; the exaggerated narration of an abstraction keeps Archie’s psychology and its attendant human needs and qualities at bay by expanding the space of superficial and metaphoric description until it finally becomes human instead, as a woman with a bosom. As long as the narration can relish in this ironic melodrama, it will not have to attend to Archie himself; and when it does attend to Archie, it will continue to feel out for more and more characters, like Mo, who can provide relief from attending too long or too deeply. Thus, already in this first chapter, Archie will go on from his attempted suicide to stumble into a New Year’s party at a commune, which provides more materials for a scatological vision (“[d]etritus of every variety—animal, mineral, vegetable—lined the floor” [17]) and for farcical sociality (“[t]wo black guys, a topless Chinese girl, and a white woman wearing a toga were sitting around on wooden kitchen chairs, playing rummy” [18]). There, Archie is again “transformed; and not due to any particular effort on his part, but by means of the entirely random, adventitious collision of one person with another” (19): he meets Clara Bowden, and “[s]ix weeks later they were married” (21). The quickness of intimacies of this chapter (“Archie could not remember a time in his life when he had not known Clive and Leo, Wan-Si and Petronia, intimately,” although they will never be mentioned again [18]), like the frequency of epiphanies, is easy enough when not premised on the affective work of attachment but more on the physical coincidence of bodies, and when characters begin to look less like the complex confluence of desires and experiences and more like ornamentation. Whereas Alex Woloch has

tracked in the nineteenth century novel the play of flattening minor characters in order to round out protagonists,<sup>49</sup> Smith's twenty-first century novel proliferates characters in order to keep everyone flattened; major characters may take up more space in the novel but remain essentially minoritized in their psychological incompleteness. Even more, in a novel where shit and "detritus of every variety" takes over much of the space of sentences, psychologies become blended into an assemblage of non-psychological materials.

*White Teeth* unfolds as so many moves of exaggeration and fragmentation with sentences that collocate, to use Srivinas Aravamudan's word, subjects and objects as a mechanism of displacing subjects' subjectivity.<sup>50</sup> What begins with cutting from a focus on Archie right as he is about to kill himself or cutting from the scene with Mo right as they might have had a moment of emotional exchange becomes a general tendency in the novel, breaking off sections right as a character might have become too close or too deeply accessible. Just as the intoxication of sentences with details and sidebar information objectivizes the conditions and feelings of its characters, the shifting of scenes or decades or points of view is *White Teeth's* structural strategy of managing a system in which no character gets too intimate, keeping actions sufficiently unanchored in narrations of human cause to be freed into a more artificial space of play. Thus, each of the novel's sections ends with a moment when something more about interiority might have been on offer, and the following section's shift of decade or country preempts the confessional mode. At the end of the first section, Alsana "stops to check with Clara if she could speak her mind further without causing offense or unnecessary pain," but Clara's eyes are closed

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<sup>49</sup> Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Aravamudan, "The Catachronism of Climate Change."

and the section closes, too (69); at the end of the second section, Samad argues that a man will be driven to murder if his family is “threatened, his beliefs attacked, his way of life destroyed, his whole world coming to an end,” but generalizing the claim with “A man is a man is a man,” the placement of this anger is displaced and the chapter closes so as not to dwell (216-7); and the final section of the novel is similarly preceded by a transnational embrace between Irie and her grandmother Hortense that, almost ashamed of its own sentimentality, is quickly obscured by Hortense’s melodramatic tears: “I live dis century wid all its troubles and vexations. And tanks to you, Lord, I’m gwan a feel a rumble at both ends” (339). In each case, at the height of an emotion’s progress, the novel shifts its focus in order to limit its expression or the divulgence of an interiority that could claim it. *White Teeth*’s sectioning has learned from its intoxicating sentences how to bury subjectivity by feeling out for more and more details and stuff.

It is for its dismissal of possible attachments to human anchors that James Wood famously and disparagingly raised up *White Teeth* as paradigmatic of what he calls “hysterical realism,” a novel that “knows a thousand things but does not know a single human being.”<sup>51</sup> What Wood argues is *White Teeth*’s deficiency may, however, appear its accomplishment from another perspective. Although Wood views Smith’s high-speed cycling of character and “a thousand things” as a perversion of realism, Fredric Jameson has considered a similar mode of impersonality to be, not absent from the canonical realism of the nineteenth century, but even its peculiar accomplishment, especially in the novels of George Eliot. Of note, both Jameson and Wood use the language of “perpetual motion” to describe their respective phenomena—for

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<sup>51</sup> Wood, “Tell Me How Does It Feel?” For Smith’s response to Wood’s critique—that it is hard to talk about feeling in a televised world, but still feeling can be wrested away to secure a balance between “brain and heart”—see Smith, “This Is How It Feels to Me.”

Wood, a bad thing, and for Jameson a good.<sup>52</sup> In Jameson's view, the novel's "most fundamental impulse," lodged in the lived experience of subjectivity (so that, in Lukacs's early formulation, the "outward form of the novel is essentially biographical"<sup>53</sup>), has predisposed it to be inadequate to the representation of radical otherness.<sup>54</sup> Such a representation would require the novel's subjective anchors to get outside of themselves, transcending ego to become other-identified, or else to radically "interioriz[e] ... an external judgment."<sup>55</sup> In consequence, impersonality would be, rather than a threatening annoyance into which novelists might lazily descend, something that they would have to aspire toward achieving, and Jameson thinks Eliot was especially successful at rising to meet the challenge. Her technique, discovered in *Romola* (1862-3) and mastered in *Middlemarch* (1871-2), was psychologically to overdetermine the actions of her protagonists and then let them play their proliferated options for motive off of one another. Rather than considering a potential motive as an occasion or object of introspection and increased self-awareness, Eliot's protagonists cycle through their motives, often mutually contradictorily, with a speed that declines depth and instead propels them outwards, eventually outside of themselves.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 134. Cf. Wood, "Hysterical Realism," 178.

<sup>53</sup> Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies Of Realism*, 188. Jameson's term for radical otherness is "evil," and part of the majesty of his chapter on Eliot is thereby to join her to a tradition with Nietzsche and prototypical of Sartre. For Jameson, the perpetual motion of Eliot is a kind of bad faith, propelling its characters into externalized views of themselves, or more precisely allowing them to interiorize these external views. Although I find Jameson convincing on this genealogy, my engagement with Eliot declines philosophical contextualization and it is sufficient for my purposes to consider Eliot's management, not of evil so-called, but of otherness more generally presented.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

The hallmark formula of hysterical realism—an impersonality born of speed—is then already present in Eliot; from this historical perspective, someone like Zadie Smith might be seen to be, not bastardizing realism, but rehabilitating a technique pioneered by one of its patron saints. At the same time, Smith adapts and elaborates the technique in her style. Whereas for Jameson, Eliot’s novels achieve impersonality through a cycling of human perspectives, Smith’s novel also drains out subjectivity through its “thousand things,” or the matrix of materials and information that become mixed with subjects so as to stretch their psychologies into a wide and shallow field. In turn, Jameson might recommend we take the “hysteria” of Smith’s hysterical realism—the removal of subjective anchors in her sentences—more seriously. This is what Deleuze sought to accomplish when musing over hysteria in his book on Francis Bacon, in whose paintings of disfigured flesh Deleuze saw a description of hysteria as “[t]he body attempts to escape from itself *through* one of its organs in order to rejoin the field or material structure.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 16. I would recommend we read *Francis Bacon* as an answer to a thought experiment: what if Deleuze and Guattari had collected *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, their account of contemporary political-economic life, under the project name not of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* but of *Capitalism and Hysteria*? Early on in their first volume, and briefly, Deleuze and Guattari suggest hysteria is simply too archaic a term, by which they do not mean that it belongs to, say, the nineteenth century in which its discourse ascended, but to a society organized by a completely different mode of production: “Capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field. Is it correct to say that in this sense schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine, as manic-depression and paranoia are the product of the despotic machine, and hysteria the product of the territorial machine?” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 33. For Deleuze and Guattari, hysteria belongs to a “savage” time in which society is organized around the branding of bodies according to filiation; as corporeal disruption, hysteria is therefore at the limit of a structure that codes bodies according to genealogy. But what if this sentence—the only one in *Anti-Oedipus* in which hysteria makes a substantive appearance—really were a genuine question to which an available answer was negation, opening up the possibility either of multiplying the limits of capitalism—

Such a definition of hysteria as the body's becoming material in excess of its discipline dramatically rejects any understanding of hysteria's corporeal manifestations as the signs of a latent trauma or repressed fantasy; for Deleuze, it was important to see hysteria as tracing an autonomous corporeal circuit liberated from psychic, therefore psychoanalytical, determination. An anti-psychological hysteria in turn facilitated an understanding of hysteria in aesthetic terms, producing in particular an equation between hysteria and painting, which is also about the making present of a materiality that precedes sensation, or the releasing of "presences beneath representation, beyond representation."<sup>58</sup> This move from object to medium is even part of hysteria's function: "[t]here is little difference between the hysteric, the 'hystericized,' and the 'hystericizer,'" because, for Deleuze, "[t]he hysteric is at the same time someone who imposes his or her presence, but also someone for whom things and beings are present, *too* present, and who attributes to every thing and communicates to every being this excessive presence."<sup>59</sup> Here, Deleuze not only references the conventional interpellative function of hysteria—which marshals all in its orbit into its own theatre and thereby makes an object, its representation, and the one who puts it into representation equally hysterical—but also defines this contagion not as identity

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not only a schizophrenic limit, but also a paranoid or manic-depressive or hysteric limit—or of electing a different category as capitalism's avatar?

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. For an elaboration of Deleuze's argument, see Geyskens, "Painting as Hysteria." For Geyskens, Deleuze's formula of painting as hysteria not only corrects a psychoanalytic account of an unconscious etiology for hysteria, but also corrects the methodology of approaching hysteria through narrative; it is the art of painting, and not literature, that can be hysterical, because it does not pace out the parts of its protocol but instead provides in a single image the presence that irrupts into the representation. I disagree by pointing to literature's style rather than its represented content.

but as irruption; hysteria constellates not a world of similarity, but of constant disruption, where the background is always coming into the foreground.

The irruption of background into foreground occurs both in theories of the Anthropocene and in the intoxicating sentences of Wallace, Smith, and others. It was implicit in Povinelli's *Addict*—for whom there is no ontological gap between body and substance—and is made explicit in accounts of how climate change problematizes weather; Timothy Morton, for instance, has discussed how “in an age of global warming, there is no background, and thus there is no foreground.”<sup>60</sup> In my account, what intoxication makes available is how the background/foreground problem is not only epistemologically relevant, but is also felt and registered within subjects distressed across objects, which is to say how the Anthropocene gets registered not only within worlds, but within humans. The critical literature over the Anthropocene has become obsessed, in recent years, with dating the geological epoch, especially with establishing the right measures by which we could say humans have definitely emerged as actors on a geological scale.<sup>61</sup> The consensus seems to be veering toward 1950, with the postwar period ushering in a “great acceleration” of population growth and carbon emissions,<sup>62</sup> although there are is also mobilization around setting the date at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution or even as early as 1610 as a result of the so-called Columbian Exchange that radically re-shuffled the distribution of fauna and flora across the globe.<sup>63</sup> The puzzle these debates are trying to solve is how to synchronize human causes with geological effects: surely the

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<sup>60</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 99.

<sup>61</sup> For a review, see Zalasiewicz et al., “When Did the Anthropocene Begin?”

<sup>62</sup> Steffen et al., “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene.”

<sup>63</sup> Lewis and Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene.”

rise in carbon emissions by humans begins in the Industrial Revolution, but perhaps the geological record does not begin to bear significant enough markers to establish the boundary of a new era until the mid-twentieth century. A literary account of Anthropocene style does not answer to these questions but instead queries when human causes of disturbed global agency begin to have human effects, or more precisely when behavioral patterns of managing agency start to look palpable as a category. This is what the style of intoxication, or as the action of hysteria, starts to periodize. Certainly, intoxicating sentences are not original to recent history, but when Wood said “a genre is hardening” around hysterical realism, he was highlighting an exponential rise in this kind of stylistic tendency, or what we might call a literary-born “great acceleration” of its own. Beginning in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, hysterical intoxication registers a new, socially distributed obsession with people melting into their backgrounds, or the background seeming to exert agency in the foreground. The novels of Wallace, Smith, and de la Pava suggest that around the turn of the millennium a style had emerged that was moving people into a future in which this condition of agential fungibility was a given condition.

This future movement is especially at play in the final chapter of *White Teeth*. “It’s just like on TV!” the chapter begins, converging its connected plotlines in the scene of a press conference (431). Archie’s friend Samad—whom he met in the final days of World War II and endeared for life by capturing and claiming to kill a Nazi doctor—has had identical twins in London, Magid and Millat, in his arranged marriage (“Samad had caught children like a disease” [105]). Ashamed he has failed to maintain adherence to his Muslim faith and respect for his Bangladeshi roots (he tried to trade vices with God, but “[h]is God was not *like* that charming white-bearded bungler of the Anglican, Methodist, or Catholic Churches” [117]), he has sent

Magid to be raised in Bangladesh from the age of 10, only to see him become an atheist and scientist; Mallat, still in London and increasingly alienated by the English treatment of their religion, has joined an extremist group called Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation (KEVIN) (“[t]hey are aware they have an acronym problem” [250]). In the course of one fateful night, they have separately slept with the only child of Archie and Clara, the smart and self-consciously “big” Irie (222), who thought she “deserved” love but becomes pregnant instead (381-2). The event that brings them all together again is the exhibition of FutureMouse, a project claiming to have controlled cancer in mice that was created by geneticist Marcus Chalfen, who along with his wife and horticulturist Joyce (“they’re such *nice* people—*intellectuals*” [111]) has liberally housed and believed themselves to have nurtured Magid, Millat, and Irie at various times in their childhoods, perhaps at the expense of their own child, Joshua (“the Cyrano de Bergerac of taking insults” [247]), who has joined a militant animal rights group acronymed FATE. Magid has become Marcus’s research assistant, but both FATE’s Joshua and KEVIN’s Millat, along with Irie’s grandmother (Clara’s mother) Hortense, a Jehovah’s Witness (“large, albeit eccentric, company” [27]), are opposed to FutureMouse on principled grounds and have come either to protest or (in the case of Millat) to kill Marcus.

Formally, the chapter is a condensed version of the structure of the novel entire, and its TV analog would be channel surfing: cut up into nine sections over only twice as many pages, the chapter pops around to survey its characters. But the televisual emphasis on what can be seen maintains the novel’s larger preoccupation with surface over interior and with action over psychology; the scene of a press conference, too, frames the articulation of public expressions that may or may not align with beliefs, feelings, and motives held alone to oneself. This is a

discursive atmosphere in which people do not quite appear as persons but as placeholders for action. So, too, do we begin to think the people have been programmed, hysterically, by other people, as Smith uses the TV idiom to leverage demographics in thinking about which scenes in the final chapter would want to be viewed by which viewers:

The same focus group who picked out the colour of this room, the carpet, the font for the posters, the height of the table, would no doubt tick the box that asks to see all these things played to their finish ... and there is surely a demographic pattern to all those who wish to see the eyewitness statements that identified Magid as many times as Millat, the confusing transcripts, the videotape of un-cooperating victim and families, a court case so impossible the judge gave in and issued four hundred hours community service to both twins, which they served, naturally, as gardeners in Joyce's new project, a huge millennial park by the banks of the Thames ... (448)

This intoxicating sentence figures each of the agencies I have taken to be at play in intoxication. It is hysterical, because we begin to think behaviors are the effects of roles laid out for people from outside them. It is masculinist not only because it orients the world around male characters but also because it ceaselessly feels out for more activity, declining rest: this is the effect of using ellipses instead of periods to section the moments, collecting everything into one sentence instead of distributing across multiple. Throughout, it is intoxicating because there is a constant transit between background and foreground, so that settings are always artificially created by people, but people are always being conditioned by their settings. And what this intoxication finally delivers us to, collecting these threads along the way, is the figure of curated land, man-made nature. The unnaturalness of this "millennial park" is highlighted by Magid and Millat "naturally" being there, which in turn doubles the genetically engineered "FutureMouse" that they had also sought to protest. "Future" has become "millennial" and "mouse" has become "park." Here, a provocative transition from a loose temporality that goes on forever into a finite

period that also names a generation—time is sectioned and given to a demographic group—is mediated by a hybrid object becoming a hybrid space. Perhaps this is what characterizes the millennial generation: an intoxication that has become general, atmospheric, and “natural.”

Postscript 1  
Detoxification and Intoxication in Richard Serra's Sculpture

Perhaps no sculptor has more explicitly articulated the connection between action and style that I argue for in this dissertation than Richard Serra, whose celebrated 1967-68 *Verb List* laid out an itinerary for sculptural production by collecting transitives—beginning with *to roll, to crease, to fold, to store*—that could be applied to various media, most frequently for Serra iron and steel. For instance, one of Serra's most famous early works, *One-Ton Prop (House of Cards)*, took one of these verbs—to prop—and applied it to four plates of iron by positioning them not quite precariously but at least contingently, leaning upon each other for support. In this translation of a verb into a noun, from propping iron to the iron as prop, Serra seems to present sculptures that are not simply results of actions, but actions themselves: the house of cards is the continued performance of the action of propping. In turn, Serra sometimes invites interpretations that would assimilate his sculpture to the project of what Harold Rosenberg earlier in the 1950s famously dubbed action painting, works that were a “gesturing with materials” paradigmatically represented by Jackson Pollock: for these painters, to pretend painting was anything other than painting—to say it was, for instance, representing or depicting something else in the world—was a farce, and it was important to attend to painting as nothing more than the action of painting.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps Serra's most important commentator, Douglas Crimp, refused such an invitation. In 1981, it was important to Crimp to defend Serra's works from an obsession with process, which he thought betrayed a critical nostalgia for the genius, or at least interiority, of the artist,

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters.”

so that sculpture could be seen finally as an expression of the soul who created it. This subordination of art to the artist, in Crimp's estimation, was not only a perversion of what the work was, and what sort of experiences it afforded beyond a hermeneutic calculus that would try to tame it; it was foremost a violence against the whole style of sculpture in which Serra participated, which was minimalism.<sup>2</sup> In sculpture as in painting, minimalism meant to transfer the focus from the artist to the spectator, because the minimal object called out for completion by those who beheld it. On this point, both detractors and defenders of minimalism agreed: when Michael Fried famously called minimalism "theatrical" because not art without an audience, he thought he was attacking it, but his words would have sounded to many others as a good account of why minimalist art was new and vital.<sup>3</sup> For both practitioners and admirers, minimalist art advertised its own incompleteness as an invitation for participation by others. To make this art about the artist, by way of the actions the artwork incarnated, was to try desperately to resuscitate a sovereignty that had been willingly abdicated; worse, if the art precisely was the abdication of this sovereignty, it was to fail to see the art at all.

In Serra's own account of his career, minimalism was a phase he only went through while young, with works including *One-Ton Prop*. "After I built the prop pieces in the late '60s," he says, "I decided to open up the continuum of space. I wanted to remove the work from the limitations of the object, or the definition of the specific object, as articulated by Donald Judd and Minimalism, which remains predicated on a gestalt reading."<sup>4</sup> By gestalt reading, Serra means the capacity to take in the entire object all at once: however heavy the prop may be, it was

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<sup>2</sup> Crimp, "Richard Serra," 71.

<sup>3</sup> Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 153.

<sup>4</sup> Peyser, "Declaring, Defining, Dividing Space," 29.

still contained in a small enough space that you could look at it as totally as one would a painting on a wall. In contrast, Serra's later works occupy space at such large proportions that they refuse to be accommodated from a single perspective. With pieces of metal hundreds of feet long or dozens of feet high, they are attacks on both institutional spaces like the museum that would try to contain them and on the viewer who would feign some omniscience in being able to appraise them. If the earlier minimalist works were meant to focus space by providing something that sight could contain and center upon, then these works fragment and distort space—"[d]eclaring, defining, and dividing the space became the principle," he says—and it would perhaps be fitting to call them minimalist's inverse: maximalist. But however massive in sheer physical size, and however stubbornly they refuse miniaturization from any perspective that tries to behold them, these works remain minimalist in at least one essential way. It is not just their simplicity of geometric form or the singularity of their media, single lines of simple steel; they are minimalist more radically because, in the line of thinking from Fried to Crimp, they are all about the beholder. When Serra talks about declaring, defining, and dividing space, he seems to be making a new verb list, which takes space rather than materials as its object, and therefore seems to revive a sort of action account in which he is the actor; but these actions are ultimately transferred, through the mediation of the artwork, onto those who come into the space the work has worked over. "You get implicated in their speed and their movement," Serra remarks.<sup>5</sup> Experiencing the artwork, for Serra, is ultimately about moving through space and thereby recreating it as one goes. When Crimp attacked those who obsessed over the process of Serra's works, he did not go so far as to reject that art might be an action of a certain sort: he rejected

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 35.

only the commonsensical account of who the actor of the action was. For Serra, the actor is finally the beholder.

And yet, the artist's response to the notorious *Tilted Arc* controversy would seem to renege on such a view by suggesting that the destruction of Richard Serra's art is an attack on Richard Serra the artist. *Tilted Arc* was 120 feet of curved, 12-foot tall steel embedded in 1981 in the concrete of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building plaza in Manhattan, commissioned by the United States General Services Administration (GSA) on recommendation by the National Endowment for the Arts. The sculpture, as imagined by Serra, was not just the steel, but the entire range of movements it enabled and impeded in the plaza. But soon after its installation, it came under attack precisely because it impeded easy access to the building. Stationed in the building adjacent, the Chief Judge of the United States Court of International Trade, Edward D. Re, found it sufficiently disruptive of his daily routine to demand its removal. In 1985, the GSA appointed a panel of five to decide the fate of the sculpture, which it viewed as its private property according to the contract they had signed with Serra. Even though more than two thirds of the 180 people who testified at the hearing were in favor of keeping the sculpture, the panel voted to destroy it.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the public panel, like so many of the arguments against the sculpture, was more a farce of publicness than a forum for it. Those who wanted to remove the sculpture argued it impinged on the uses of public space, but as at least one commentator has since pointed out, "[w]hen we consider that in the seventeen years of the plaza's existence prior to *Tilted Arc* there were fewer than twenty public events, that other than the steps into the buildings there was no public seating except, of course, for the lip of the fountain because the

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<sup>6</sup> See Serra, *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*.

fountain was usually dry, that the plaza is a notoriously windy site, we can see that [their] dream [of a festive, multiuse space] was blocked not by the sculpture but by the space itself.”<sup>7</sup> In any case, the show trial having affirmed a government decision reached ahead of the public process, and Serra having lost all subsequent appeals, *Tilted Arc* was removed from the plaza in 1989. Arguing against the property terms in which the debate had been cast—whether or not the government had a right to destroy property it had purchased for the public—Serra simply remarked that the “government by destroying *Tilted Arc* violated my right to free speech.”<sup>8</sup>

It may seem ironic, even contradictory, for Serra to claim some right to the sculpture, as if re-iterating his property over the work at the same time as he criticizes the United States “government’s commitment to private property” such that “[t]he right to property supersedes all other rights.”<sup>9</sup> But Serra’s framing of *Tilted Arc*’s right to exist in terms of his individual right to free speech instead of the right of a public to access the sculpture only appears contradictory if we do not think of Serra as himself a member of the public. Indeed, Serra’s larger complaint in the *Tilted Arc* was over the exclusionary moves that constructed a public as a universal, consensual thing, a move that most notably was censoring the work of gay artists like Robert Mapplethorpe as if gays were not also part of the public sphere. Just as the government tries to delete gays from its public, it was trying to delete Serra; instead of viewing the public as a sphere that is fragmented and characterized by difference and disagreement, the government tried to remove sources of dissent in order to maintain its fantasy of consensus. The radical import of *Tilted Arc*,

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<sup>7</sup> Horowitz, “Public Art/Public Space,” 10.

<sup>8</sup> Serra, “Art and Censorship,” 578.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

according to Crimp, is that it thus exposed the fundamental myth of a harmonious society, “redefin[ing] the site of the work of art as the site of political struggle.”<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, defending the artwork on the basis of his membership in a public, however divided, meant that Serra was not only defending his rights as a creator of art but also his rights as a beholder of art. Even though this is also implicit in Crimp’s narration of Serra’s “placing his aesthetics over the needs of others”—where aesthetics names the perspective of one considering the artwork—it has more often been obscured by the binary terms in which the artist and beholder debate have been cast in the minimalist discourse.<sup>11</sup> What both Fried and Crimp miss when they argue over the primacy of the artist versus the primacy of the spectator is that the artist, too, becomes a spectator. When Serra talks about his freedom of speech for *Tilted Arc*, and for other works, he is in part talking about his right to declare, divide, and define space for himself, where the sculpture is a gift to himself of experiencing space in a certain way. The government did not only violate his right to free speech by destroying a work he had created, as if the work was the speech itself; it also violated his free speech by denying him access to the experience of space in a certain way, where that experience is itself a kind of speech. Or if to view experience as such stretches the constitutional argument too far, then the experience is at least a kind of action: the moment of action, for Serra, is not to be found in the production of the artwork, nor really in any specific moment altogether. The artwork is continually an action, but not because it is the expression of an action, propping becoming prop. Rather, the artwork is an

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<sup>10</sup> Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, 179.

<sup>11</sup> Crimp, “Richard Serra,” 179.

action because it is constantly curating a kind of space that the artist, now as a beholder, would like to inhabit.

This is the dynamic at play in one of Serra's most recent and remarked upon works, the *East-West/West-East* sculpture placed in 2014 in the Qatari desert, about an hour's drive west from the capital city of Doha. The sculpture consists of four steel plates each 13 feet in width and ranging in 48 to 55 feet in height, spaced at irregular intervals along a single line of latitude. Covering nearly a half mile of space from the first to the last plate, it is Serra's most geographically expansive work to date. The plates are designed and placed so that their tops are even with one another; Hal Foster, in his review of the piece, points out they are also relatively even with northern and southern plateaus that flank them and indeed the desert.<sup>12</sup> The plates then absorb twice over the topography of the region, which they in turn measure and map: the subtle changes in elevation moving east to west or west to east, and the more abrupt elevations one encounters moving south to north or north to south. To travel along the plates is to travel along the entire desert in miniature. The plates will also be a measure of the passage of time, because the steel will oxidize and change colors from gray to orange to brown to amber. This is not new to Serra's work—it is the same steel he used on his tallest piece to date, also in Qatar, the septet of 80-foot steel plates that tower across from I. M. Pei's Museum of Islamic Art—but in the desert the metal will oxidize faster. In the empty expanse of desert, which constantly renews by sweeping sand over and over itself, *East-West/West-East* will rapidly age before becoming, like the desert, simply ancient, perhaps timeless. The sculpture, therefore, finally

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<sup>12</sup> Foster, "Serra in the Desert," 321. For other details on the construction of the sculpture, see Niarchos, "Richard Serra in the Qatari Desert."

captures a profound tension: on the one hand it seeks epistemologically to master its space by displaying knowledge of the terrain, while at the same time it expects to be mastered, resigned to rapidly rust.

In an early and influential essay on the progress of sculpture in the late twentieth century and its multiple possible futures—all of which had left behind the function of predecessor monuments, which sat in a particular place and spoke a “symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place”—Rosalind Krauss placed Serra’s works in the category of “axiomatic structures,” which undertook the “process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience—the abstract conditions of openness and closure—onto the reality of a given space.”<sup>13</sup> In *East-West/West-East*, the logic is taken further, not only mapping abstraction onto reality, but also involving reality in abstraction, so that the desert itself becomes part of questions of openness. On the one hand, the desert is closed down because its dimensions can be mapped by a line traversing only part of it: through the sculpture, the desert turns into itself, part standing for whole. On the other hand, the desert is opened up, its lack of boundary emphasized by the ultimate and necessary deterioration of the sculpture: the desert will persist with or without its steel implant. In turn, the sculpture, though not a monument in the classical sense, does designate a certain “meaning or use” for the place: the desert becomes a place for experiencing the contradiction of being simultaneously enclosed and exposed and the ambivalence of attempting to orient a vast expanse while being in awe of its persistent disorientation.

This is not to say that *East-West/West-East*, not least in its very name, does not invite attempts at orienting one’s self in the desert. This is indeed what its minimalism accomplishes in

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<sup>13</sup> Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 33, 41.

the surety of its line and in the paths it makes available for its beholder. The sculpture provides a means for orienting yourself in a disoriented land. It suggests that a certain violence can be tamed, not only because the brutally hot and windy violence of the desert did indeed have to be overcome in order for the steel to be placed there originally, but also because it obstinately insists that order can continue to be brought to the desert however hot or windy it gets again. The maneuver the sculpture both did and is—carving into a violent space in order to carve out some order from it—does not apply only to the desert, however. Foster and others have worried that *East-West/West-East* and other Western artworks commissioned by the infinitely wealthy Qatari government—its Museum Authority operates a \$1 billion annual budget, in large part used to fight a “prestige war” with its competing oil baron neighbor, the United Arab Emirates—both ignore and make it easier for others to ignore the economic and social rifts within the country: “[o]n the one hand, *East-West/West-East* addresses its physical setting eloquently; on the other hand, it is silent on the social, economic, and political environment around it.”<sup>14</sup> Yet the anxiety these other environments bring to Serra’s work are addressed, or expressed, precisely by not being expressed. It is as if Serra brings order to the desert—that most unruly of places—as a way to get absorbed into a project that is subtracted from the social, economic, and political ones. Somehow, taming the desert is easier than taming the government, and so long as Serra can be there, orienting himself, then the other problems can be held at bay.

It is for a similar reason that Carter Ratcliff, writing about Serra’s works a decade earlier, argued they be viewed as “representational” in a certain way, because they facilitated transfer from actual to metaphoric experience. Moving between the curved walls of *Intersection II* (1992-

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<sup>14</sup> Foster, “Serra in the Desert,” 325, 326.

93) or *Band* (2006), the person experiencing the space becomes disoriented, without stable points of reference to know definitively the perpendicular direction of “up.” Then, struggling and finally managing to stand up, “orienting yourself literally you orient yourself figuratively as well—not in real space, but in imagination, as you come to see or to sense that the structure of the piece represents a larger interior as it might be shaped by its inhabitant’s effort of self-orientation.”<sup>15</sup>

The transfer from the literal to the figurative is what is at play in *East-West/West-East*: by orienting yourself in the desert, you imagine yourself orienting yourself in a political world as well. The desert absorbs the problems of these other spheres, and so to experience order there is to feel one’s self, so long as you walk along the ordered line of the sculpture, subtracted from them as well. Just as the sculpture miniaturizes the topography of the desert, the desert too miniaturizes by metaphorizing the political landscape of the nation; to bring order to this is to bring order, fantastically, to that. And yet the sculpture, we remember, is bound for rapid aging, even for obsolescence, highlighting the contingency of this ordering effort. Just as the desert will leave behind the sculpture, Serra and other beholders must leave behind the sculpture. It provisions temporary order, metaphorically expansive in reach, but only so long as you walk along its space.

In its complex attempt at order, *East-West/West-East* can be understood not only as minimalist in the sense central to the art history of sculpture—minimalist because projecting anxieties onto the beholder employed to participate in it—but also as detoxification in the sense I have argued for, by way of fiction, in Chapter Two: the style of the sculpture is an action of detoxifying an environment that has come to figure extra-environmental violence, in order to

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<sup>15</sup> Ratcliff, “The Fictive Spaces of Richard Serra,” 122.

make temporarily habitable a space that seems sealed off from the problems of the wider world. This is what is detoxifying about Serra's massive plates of metal: they intervene upon a space in order to subtract it from the systems that would seek to use them for the perpetuation of their own systemic violence. That *Tilted Arc* was placed in front of a courtyard made the political resonance of this intervention loud enough that it had to be politically silenced, but *East-West/West-East* makes clear the function of this work of detoxification in any space: subtraction through the provision of opportunities of ordering yourself as if ordering the world around you.

But if detoxification can be seen here, it is not to deny its massiveness, too, or even—and as I argued in Chapter Three, this is a different thing—its intoxication. Serra's sculptures are detoxification in their intervention upon space, but they are also intoxication in their anarchic incorporation of space and in their mixing with other spatial materials. When he plants steel and iron plates in concrete foundations beneath the ground, Serra makes the ground itself permanently part of the sculpture. Krauss has noted the importance, in the sculpture before the twentieth century she recognizes as monuments, of pedestals, which “mediate[] between actual site and representational sign.”<sup>16</sup> Serra's pedestals, though, are in the ground itself, so that the mediator between site and sign becomes itself both sculpture and space: more precisely, sculpture and space become immediate to one another. It is in this way that Serra's sculptures are not only site-specific, as one popular line of criticism would have it, but are also about the collaborative re-creation of the site altogether. As Kevin Melchionne has argued, the discourse of site-specific sculpture too often over-states the specialty of sculpture, when really almost every work of art

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<sup>16</sup> Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 33.

anticipates and incorporates the space it will inhabit or adorn as part of its design.<sup>17</sup> What is special about at least Serra's sculpture, however, is that it is designed not only with regard to site, nor even just to "hold its site hostage,"<sup>18</sup> but so as to become the site in order to transform it: Serra's work is not just the steel put on the site, but the steel and the site together. This is what is truly at stake in transitioning from the artist to the beholder, because for the beholder the experience is of a complex of space and sculpture, or more precisely, the space the sculpture becomes. In *East-West/West-East*, steel is planted in desert and becomes desert and then it becomes unbounded. The action of this sort of style is one of ingesting the environment, marshaling a space without limit, or without clear limits, into the work itself, so that the agency of the work comes to look like a composition of widespread forces and materials and not inherent in the steel itself. The sculpture accrues space and sees its agency as an image of bloating: *East-West/West-East* becomes an action of intoxication. The sculpture, just as it can be understood as detoxification according to the terms I argued in the Chapter Two, is for this reason also intelligible as intoxication according to the terms I elaborated in Chapter Three.

In Serra, detoxification and intoxication operate in a dialectical pair. In fact, it could not be otherwise, for each style provides solutions to the problems and anxieties of the other; they form an ambivalent economy that is circular rather than oppositional. This brings into relief the possibility that detoxifying and intoxicating sentences might appear in the same novel and appear even as corrections to each other; in the following chapters, I suggest ways in which, when style is understood to be operating at the level of the chapter, detoxifying sentences and intoxicating

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<sup>17</sup> Melchionne, "Rethinking Site-Specificity."

<sup>18</sup> Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 179.

sentences show up together to do interesting interactional work within other styles. In the meantime, the lesson I take from Serra is that taxonomical categories are not mutually exclusive, for works of art, and the complex of styles they call upon, can be contradictory just like we are.

Part II  
Public Styles

## Chapter Four

Invasion Style: Jennifer Egan, Colum McCann, David Mitchell, Elizabeth Strout

### I. The Style of Invasion

Here are the first sentences of the first several chapters of Elizabeth Strout's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Olive Kitteridge* (2008):

For many years Henry Kitteridge was a pharmacist in the next town over, driving every morning on snowy roads, or rainy roads, or summer-time roads, when the wild raspberries shot their new growth in brambles along the last section of town before he turned off to where the wider road led to the pharmacy. (4)

The boy had small whitecaps and the tide was coming in, so the smaller rocks could be heard moving as the water shifted them. (30)

Four nights a week Angela O'Meara played the piano in the cocktail lounge at the Warehouse Bar and Grill. (48)

Three hours ago, while the sun was shining full tile through the trees and across the black lawn, the local podiatrist, a middle-aged man named Christopher Kitteridge, was married to a woman from out of town named Suzanne. (61)

At the marina on Sunday morning, Harmon had to work not to stare at the young couple. (75)

An awful thing happened to the Kitteridges on a chilly night in June. (104)

In the dark of the car, his wife, Jane, sat with her nice black coat buttoned up all the way—the coat they'd bought together last year, going through all those stores. (125)

This is a novel in which each chapter is a short story, focusing on some character or other, but usually a Kitteridge, in the small town of Crosby, Maine, and these first sentences bear many of the tendencies Elif Batuman identified and attacked in the contemporary American short story after she read, cover to cover, the 2004 and 2005 anthologies of *Best American Short Stories*. Most of them promiscuously acquire proper names as a shortcut for stuffing specificity into limited

linguistic space; Batuman might call them “specific to the point of arbitrariness; one expects to discover that they are all acrostics, or don’t contain a single letter e.” They all begin aggressively in medias res; Batuman might say the sentences are “like a confidence man who rushes up and claps you on the shoulder, trying to make you think you already know him.”<sup>1</sup> The effect of reading these stories within the same novel, so that one is jumping again and again into the middle of another specificity, can be jarring, although the larger quietness of the novel’s tone, its almost brooding survey of a small town, helps to suture the transitions. Yet something else is happening here precisely because the stories are part of a larger novel; these first sentences do not quite seek specificity for specificity’s sake, nor do they seek exactitude and concision simply because they are, generically, *short* stories. As chapters, these stories are also vying for novelistic space. They are not only trying to orient a story around a character, but a novel around a scene; they are trying to carve out part of a larger world—the total social network subtended by the novel entire—and turn it into the scene, sometimes intimate, of a selected few. Moreover, because the characters foregrounded in each story will re-appear as minor characters in other stories, where they will be filtered through the perspective of *that* story’s centering consciousness, each chapter is also trying to carve out from the complexity of its characters a specific role they perform in a specific context; they excerpt part of a character’s life so that they show up not as Angela O’Meara in toto, but Angela the piano player; not Christopher completely, but Christopher, the husband; Jane, the wife.

This chapter is about novels like Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge*, composed of thematically resonant or dialectically interrelated short stories, or in other words, novels that nominate

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<sup>1</sup> Batuman, “Short Story & Novel.”

autonomous and self-contained stories as their chapter unit. What the novels I look at here bring out is a particular style of distributing novelistic narrative into parts, a distribution that is my focus in this chapter and the next. To understand this sectioning of narrative as principally a matter of style follows up on a suggestion made by Frances Ferguson that the novelistic unit of the chapter should be understood as exemplarily stylistic in its functioning, like punctuation, as a “formal marker[] of the units of thought.”<sup>2</sup> But as is the case throughout this dissertation, I think of styles of narrative organization as matters of action more than matters of thought, and I explore what the stylistic distribution of narrative does. In this chapter and the next, I move away from the actions that I explored in sentence-level styles in the previous two chapters—detoxification and intoxication—and argue that the action lived in chapter-level styles are best understood as collective. Whereas detoxification is about an individual subject curating a domestic space and intoxication is about the distressing of individual subjectivity by

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<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, “Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form,” 159n5. For Ferguson, style must be distinguished from form, which unlike style is objectively present whether or not you personally recognize it: a form can “regularly be found, pointed out, or returned to, and the sense of its availability would not rest on agreements about its meaning” (160). According to this definition, the novel has made only one formal contribution to literature as far as Ferguson can see, free indirect style, which despite its name is formal rather than stylistic because it exists independent of its interpretation; you might not realize, at first, that a novel has slipped into free indirect style, but you would not disagree when someone showed you that it had. But a chapter unit is not, for Ferguson, formal in this way, because the organizational scheme of a novel is more conceptual, or produced through interpretation rather than given independently as a form. Her definition is finally succinct: “Style exploits the allusive capacities of the novel or any other verbal medium and its ability to place itself in various genealogical relations with other novels, plays, and poems; style involves all of the things about a novel that prompt literary interpretation and that sometimes approach the palpability of form” (159). I agree with the second half of this definition but am not committed to the first, which seems to me to retain traces of a “signature” thesis of style à la Goodman, whom I discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. Nonetheless, to the extent that the styles I discuss in this chapter and the next collect an archive of novels, or seek to categorize them, I do remain interested in the “genealogical,” even if it is a genealogy more lateral than hereditary.

environmental crisis, the styles I now consider operate more on social groups than on the members who populate them. This is in large part what looking at the chapter as a unit of stylistic analysis affords: because many characters show up within a chapter, it raises questions about how people are mediated, especially what forms of belonging are intermediate to their belonging to a chapter and their belonging to the novel entire. As I will argue, tracing the developments of chapter style provides lessons in the development of social, and especially political public, life throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

In the sections that follow, I argue more specifically that the style of works like *Olive Kitteridge*—the style of other contemporary novels of short stories—is best understood as a kind of invasion: each chapter is trying to take over part of its world in order to intensify a part of the characters within it the space it controls. This is the tension within the style: its will both toward taking up maximal space and toward using minimal resources of characters, reducing subjects to a part of their subjectivity and dilating the part to a whole. But to better appreciate the historical relevance of this contemporary technique of correlating space and subjectivity, I begin in the following section by laying out the style's transformation over the course of the past century. The style is not original to the period in which I examine it (the preface to David Shields's 1991 *Handbook for Drowning*, a contemporary manifestation of the invasion style there called the "novel-in-stories," cites a genealogy including *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron*<sup>3</sup>), but it achieves its most recent ascendance to a palpable category in America with local color fiction in the late nineteenth century, which William Faulkner and other modernists then complicated and advanced. Its popularity, I claim, then explodes exponentially in the new millennium. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Shields, *Handbook for Drowning*, i.

following section, I read the writers who made this explosion possible by developing stylistic techniques for relating novel form and social space, and more specifically for developing style as a kind of social action. By tracking the development of invasion throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I also track the changing conditions of the public sphere to which contemporary invasion fiction responds.

When delivered to the desks of writers later in the century, this tradition becomes available as a repertoire of techniques for invading public spaces and turning them into new spaces that administer different types of subjectivity. Whereas in a disciplinary society, these social spaces would have been institutions like a factory or hospital, invasion writers of the past generation invade their chapters with spaces aligned not with institutions but with groupings more like communities. I turn to two exemplary novels to explore this transition: Jennifer Egan's *Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2003). Egan has learned from Faulkner and from Burroughs how to cut up a novel into relatively discrete spaces of social interaction, so that characters present only part of their subjectivity according to the expectations of the particular space, or in this case the particular chapter, in which they presently show up. But the invasion style in *Goon Squad* also demonstrates the increasing difficulty of invasion as a means toward heightening part of a character, as chapters, like social spaces, start to get fuzzy and anxious for expansion at their borders. Mitchell also explores this dynamic in his novel, which I show is nostalgic for disciplinary techniques of cutting up the totality of social space into confined, autonomous areas of invasion. The chapter units of both Egan and Mitchell try to keep the form of institutionalism alive, even as they repurpose institutional functionalism into a kind of communitarianism. In their enduring attachment to the form if not the content of

disciplinary society, invasion style also provides resistance, I argue by comparison with the film adaptation of *Cloud Atlas*, to the more continuous and non-compartmentalized mode of life in contemporary society.

In the final section of this chapter, I make the logics of invasion I have tracked through these novels available for thinking through analogous social movements “in real life.” Invasion style’s action of turning a chapter into a limited, neo-institutional space is manifest in a number of other contemporary cultural phenomena, including Krzysztof Wodiczko’s public projections (turning a monument into a screen), Olafur Eliasson’s museum installations (a hall into an environment), three-dimensional street art (a thoroughfare into a world), and “flash mobs” (a public space into a dancehall). But it has a special political analog, I argue, in the movement of Occupy Wall Street and its sisters. Like the invasion novel, the Occupy movement has sought to invade a certain space and turn it into a new institution, administering new political subjectivities that arrest the ongoing processes of modulation by re-asserting the boundaries of emerging political communities. But as the styles of the novels surveyed in the previous section suggest, this project of institutionalization through invasion relies on certain exclusions. In particular, these novels and the social movements they analogize demonstrate a queer remainder that must be pushed outside of the invaded spaces in order for them to foster the subjectivities they desire. The style of invasion, of which occupation is a species, therefore models and provides pedagogies for movements that are also place-specific, raising up tendencies within them, here queer disavowal, that may not be as readily visible within the movements themselves.

## II. Invasion Style: A Short Pre-History

The genre with which invasion style is most consistently twinned today—the novel of short stories—is not original to the contemporary period, but in the past generation, the style has continued to develop the genre to respond to transforming conditions of a social world. Some of this transformation can be hinted at by considering *Olive Kitteridge*, with which I opened this chapter because it is, of other examples of recent invasion fiction, thematically most similar to the novels of short stories that ascended, in America, during the late nineteenth century. Local colorists like Sarah Orne Jewett had sought in the 1870s through 1890s to present the regional dialects and customs of rural New England communities as part of a movement that was prolific enough to obsess critical editors of periodicals like *Harper's* and *The Atlantic* but short-lived enough to be promptly dismissed by ultimately more influential authors like Edith Wharton, who rejected how colorists had seen “the derelict mountain villages of New England” through “rose-coloured spectacles.”<sup>4</sup> Wharton’s complaint with the colorists, whom Donna Campbell has demonstrated she satirized in her own early short story “Mrs. Manstey’s View,” was that they provided too limited a picture of local life: a selective “View” that could only belong to one self-indulgent character and not to a general community.<sup>5</sup> Although Jewett was also a novelist, the preferred form of most of this fiction was the single short story, which perhaps also indicated the limited surveillance of their project.<sup>6</sup> But many writers in this period turned forcefully to the

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<sup>4</sup> Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 293.

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, “Edith Wharton and the ‘Authoresses,’” 173.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Pacht’s monographic treatment of the short story cycle sees collections like Jewett’s *Deephaven* (1877) continuous with later works of what I am calling invasion fiction, including *Go Down, Moses*, although the earlier work leaned on a strong narrative frame to connect the stories whereas later works provided more organic connections through crossover details and characters.

short story collection precisely as a means of getting to a wider social view, especially in what Sandra Zagarell has influentially called the “narrative of community,” in which what we call the self is “part of the interdependent network of the community rather than ... an individualistic unit.”<sup>7</sup> As Zagarell has argued, episodic narrative, paradigmatically in novelistic collections of short stories, was one technique early regionalist writers deployed to subordinate the individual to an interdependent social network.<sup>8</sup>

Early criticism on collections of interrelated short stories debated what to call them: for instance a “cycle” or a “sequence.”<sup>9</sup> More recent criticism has debated what to emphasize in talking about the space between the stories: whether to attend to how they form a unity that speaks to community cohesion or to a disunity that affords multicultural play; more nuanced accounts, of course, show the “paradoxical semblance of community in [a] structural dynamic of connection and disconnection” that unfolds the complexity of communities as a process of simultaneously respecting, sublating, and disavowing internal differences.<sup>10</sup> But in all these works, there is a sense that stories are parts belonging to a larger whole; whether you call it a cycle or sequence, the point is that there is a larger form in which the form of the story is

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But it is precisely because *Deephaven*'s cohesion is premised in part by the consistency of its narrative view (as Pacht puts it, “each of the text's stories is filtered through the mind and pen of Helen, the narrator who interprets as she writes”) that it remains far apart from the kind of sublimation of subjectivity to place that I am tracking here. Pacht, *The Subversive Storyteller*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Zagarell, “Narrative of Community,” 499.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

<sup>9</sup> For “cycle,” see Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. For “sequence,” see Luscher, “The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book.” An excellent taxonomy of short story collections is available in Mann, *The Short Story Cycle*. For a review of the literature, see Gerald Kennedy's introduction to the collected essays in Kennedy, *Modern American Short Story Sequences*.

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy, “From Anderson's Winesburg to Carver's Cathedral: The Short Story Sequence and the Semblance of Community,” 195.

embedded, and whether you call it unity or fragmentation, the point is there is a larger social entity that can be so described. Novelistic collections of short stories are not only about the subordination of individuals to a community, but are also allegorical for the form of community itself: the simultaneous collection and fragmentation that characterizes social grouping.

*Olive Kitteridge* is thematically similar to the regionalist fiction of the previous century: it is, after all, about a single place in a single rural area in Maine. There are, to be sure, some important variations in how the picture of a community is written in the novel; as I will bring out more in the following sections, whereas local color fiction primarily put the weight of its regionalism on the sentence-level style of dialect, twentieth century invasion fiction relies on a chapter-level style of community geography.<sup>11</sup> But the greatest departure from previous “narratives of community” is signaled by the title of the novel, which is given to an individual. In this work, it is not just a community that is distributed and re-collected, but also individuals.

Consider the sentence from the first chapter, which insists so insistently on giving us Henry as a

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<sup>11</sup> Critical literature on local color fiction has tended to center on whether works support or subvert a homogenizing nationalist project. Influentially, Richard Brodhead and Amy Kaplan have argued the former, for instance pointing to how regionalism encourages reader identification with a “non-ethnic status” by “produc[ing] the foreign only to master it in imaginary terms.” Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 137. See also Kaplan, “Nation, Region, Empire.” More recently, Nathaniel Cadle has explained local color as a globalizing strategy for American literature to make claims to world literature in an increasingly transnational world. Cadle, *The Mediating Nation*, 60. But against a view of local color fiction as complicit in emerging modernist regimes of capitalism and nationalism, Josephine Donovan has instead argued the work of late nineteenth century colorists, paradigmatically Jewett, be understood as anti-modern, by which she means anti-colonial: resisting the reductive totalizing of a colonial project by intensifying the modes of speech and life minoritized within it. Donovan, “Local Color Literature and Modernity.” See also Renza, “*A White Heron*” and the Question of Minor Literature. That regionalist fiction was written primarily by women, and is irregardless coded as feminine in many literary histories, also invites discussion of regionalism’s relation to subverting not just nationalist projects, but also heteropatriarchal ones. On this, see Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing out of Place*.

pharmacist, and pharmacist only, that it subordinates an incredible expanse of space and time to the cause. The sentence gives us winter, spring, and summer; it gives us a drive both bucolic (“wild raspberries”) and civilized; and it contains all this imagery between the bookends of “pharmacist” and “pharmacy”: the entire calendar and the entire space of the novel literally “le[ad] to the pharmacy.” Of course, Henry is other things during this time and within this space. He is a husband; he is a father; a citizen; a church-goer. His life traverses myriad institutional contexts, so that he is a subject of the institution of marriage; of the family; of religion; the institutions of the state. Many of these institutions are entangled, especially in a small town, so that religion will come to bear on his childrearing and the state will come to bear upon his labor. But the sentence begins with the premise that one institution, one role, one part of his life can be intensified to such a point that the others are minoritized to it or embedded within it.

If regionalist short story sequences initiated a subordination of individuals to communities whose totality was allegorical to the sequence itself, then *Olive Kitteridge* marks an adaptation in two ways: if previously the question was how diverse individuals fit into a cohesive group, here, the question is how a society is divided into difference institutions like the hospital or the church or the family; and it is these institutions to which individuals are immediately subordinated, with an individual institution pervading an entire chapter and picking out or intensifying the relevant traits within the individuals that come into its narrative space.

Institutions have come to mediate between characters and a social totality—the community that was the total world of previous works—and to instruct their subjects more narrowly in how to behave. It is in this way that the style of *Olive Kitteridge* is invasion: an institution takes up the

entire space of a chapter and monitors and directs the subjects within it. Seen in this way, *Olive Kitteridge* and other novels of invasion culminate the literary history of the novel of short stories over the course of the twentieth century. What local colorists discovered as a technique for the creation of communities through the genre of the short story collection was then taken up by later ruralist writers in the following generation, most influentially Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Although Anderson's book has had the greater impact on later writers, and although Anderson even thought he had "invented a new genre" in writing it, the book is, stylistically, of a piece with the short story sequences generated by Jewett and others before.<sup>12</sup> But a major development in this kind of work did occur roughly twenty years late in the works of William Faulkner, whose publication and reception history laid out lines of generic development for succeeding generations.

Early Faulkner critics were divided over whether to classify each of his two works, *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses*, as a collection of separable short stories or as an indivisible single novel, therefore whether to call the divisional unit of the book a story or a chapter.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the units had certainly begun as independent stories—six of the seven sections of *The*

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<sup>12</sup> Harde, *Narratives of Community*, 3. As commentators from Zagarell to Harde have noted, this brings out the gendered origins of the genre. For Zagarell, what distinguishes women writers of the genre like Jewett from men writers like Anderson is in part the attention to individuality: in *Winesburg, Ohio*, there is a sense that every character has a story to tell, whereas in Jewett, it is more a sense that the individual participates in the story of a place. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community," 513.

<sup>13</sup> Most concluded that regardless of whatever narrative unity exists at the level of related characters, the stories are coherently unified by theme. See, e.g., Tick, "The Unity of *Go Down, Moses*." Hochberg, "The Unity of *Go Down, Moses*." One of the perhaps more nuanced commentaries reads the failure of one story to be fully integrated into *Go Down, Moses* not only as proof that the work must be a collection only and not a novel also, but also as an allegory for the failure of racially integrated interpretive communities through the persistence of outside voices; see Limon, "The Integration of Faulkner's 'Go Down, Moses.'"

*Unvanquished*, for instance, were published separately from 1934–1936 either in *The Saturday Evening Post* or in *Scribner's*—and in letters referring to the stories before they were collected in a book, Faulkner often refers to them as a “series.”<sup>14</sup> But when they were grouped together, they were not collected as independent objects; Faulkner planned to “rewrite them, to an extent; some additional material might invent itself in the process.”<sup>15</sup> Following Forrest Ingram’s taxonomy, *The Unvanquished* is then a “completed” story cycle: not a “composed” one that began with a vision of the whole, not an “arranged” one that intentionally collects unintentionally related items, but a cycle that began with independent stories, at some point discovered they were in some way related, and then proceeded to round itself out with an informed idea of elaborating a unified whole.<sup>16</sup> That is, the act of collecting stories converts them into chapters and in the process revises them.<sup>17</sup> Both revised and recontextualized, the stories become a new object, and one that Faulkner insisted was “indeed a novel”: he protested when his publisher at Random

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 80, 84. For Thomas C. Foster, the embedding of stories into a novelistic frame, thereby requiring a story to feel out for a context that can clarify it, is only one scale of Faulkner’s formal tendency in *Go Down, Moses*, where sentences, like the stories, begin simply but are quickly “inundated by clauses and phrases that modify, reduce, expand, clarify, or subvert the initial meaning as the past rushes in on that meaning.” Foster, “History, Private Consciousness, and Narrative Form in *Go Down, Moses*,” 61. For the purposes of this chapter, I look only at the organizational level, and leave aside discussion of his sentences (which I would argue belong to the tradition of intoxication).

<sup>15</sup> Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. See also Gerlach, “Faulkner’s *Unvanquished* and Welty’s *Golden Apples*.”

<sup>17</sup> Critical literature on Faulkner generally agrees that his practices of revision and collection always include amplification, reducing the autonomy of the short story in order to embellish and elaborate it within a wider narrative context. Joanne Creighton’s monograph treatment of the subject observes that Faulkner’s revision is flexible, but always moves from parts to whole, from simplicity to complexity, and from comic to serious. Creighton, *William Faulkner’s Craft of Revision*, 156. For commentaries on the different effects of reading individual short stories as autonomous wholes or as parts of a novel, see also Holsti, “William Faulkner’s ‘The Unvanquished.’” Selzer, “‘Go Down, Moses’ and ‘Go Down, Moses.’”

House released *Go Down, Moses* under the title *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories*, because this misrepresented the novelistic character of the book, with an “integrated form of its own.”<sup>18</sup>

The distinction, for Faulkner, was not just aesthetic, but economic.<sup>19</sup> The question of stories versus novel was first of all a question about publication medium—magazine or book—and then about the levels of economic mediation between himself, his work, and his audience.<sup>20</sup> This was the point brought home by the different publication histories of his two short story sequences: whereas *The Unvanquished* began as a series of stories that discovered resonances inducing a novel, *Go Down, Moses* seems to have been conceived as a novel from the beginning. Throughout the period of the late 1930s and early 1940s in which Faulkner was writing and

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<sup>18</sup> Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 284, 273.

<sup>19</sup> For a bibliographic account of the “productive synergies of aesthetics and economics” in the revision and publication history of *Go Down, Moses*, see Caster, “Go Down, Moses [and Other Stories].”

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to his agent Morty Goldman in February 1938, he clarified that while Goldman was to sell his stories, Faulkner himself was responsible for his novels: “I understood this to mean you were to sell and resell any material I sent to you as often and to what market you could, and take your commission until I should recall such material from circulation, my only reason for recalling it naturally being either to rewrite it or collect it into a volume[. I]n the first case, that of rewriting it to make it more salable to a market other than my publisher, upon returning it to you it would have become a new material. In the second case, that of collection for book publication, it would cease to be a matter between you and me and become one between the publisher and myself under [the] contract I had with him.” Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 103–4. Whereas with his stories Faulkner accepted a level of mediation between himself and publishers because he did not wish to navigate the myriad periodicals in which his stories would appear, with his novels Faulkner wanted ultimate control in dealing with a publisher directly. The primary difference, for Faulkner, between his stories and the novel in which they would become chapters was then one of a relation to copyright: his novels were more proximately his own intellectual property, rather than an object he allowed to be sold by others on his behalf. Because his novels were less economically mediated, they were also more immediately presented to a reading public, and Faulkner’s transition from the magazine to the book medium sets up a correlation in which the increasing control of his property becomes increasing immediacy with his consumers.

revising the stories and chapters that would become the two novels, he felt himself especially economically precarious and without the luxury of making aesthetic choices for the sake of aesthetics. Rather, he had to break up his novel into sections in order to have salable units that could sustain him until the novel was ready. Thinking about *Go Down, Moses*, he writes to his publisher in 1940, “I have another in mind in method similar to THE UNVANQUISHED, but since the chapters which I have written and tried to sell as short stories have not sold, I haven’t the time to continue with it.”<sup>21</sup> In writing *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner discovered a “method” he sought to practice again, this time more intentionally, by writing *Go Down, Moses*; whereas in the earlier work the economic conditions determined the design of the book (Faulkner wrote stories to make a living, and then discovered they were a novel), in the latter the economic conditions intervened only on the realization of that design (Faulkner planned to write a novel, and sent off its parts as they became available in order to make a living).

Because of their different relations to economic necessity and intentional design, *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses* vary remarkably in the contents that their styles organize, even though they are each a collection of seven stories rendered as chapters. In particular, they adopt different ranges of setting and the characters that populate them:<sup>22</sup>

	The Unvanquished (1938)			Go Down, Moses (1942)		
	<i>Publication</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Point of View</i>	<i>Publication</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Point of View</i>
<i>Ch. 1</i>	SEP, Sep. 1934	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1862	Bayard Sartoris	1942*	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1859	McCaslin Edmonds via Isaac

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>22</sup> I draw my references from Fagnoli, Golay, and Hamblin, *Critical Companion to William Faulkner*.

	The Unvanquished (1938)			Go Down, Moses (1942)		
<i>Ch. 2</i>	<i>SEP</i> , Oct. 1934	Memphis, TN, 1863	Bayard Sartoris	<i>Collier's</i> , / <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> , June/Nov. 1940†	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1940s	Lucas Beauchamp
<i>Ch. 3</i>	<i>SEP</i> , Nov. 1934	Hawkhurst, AL, 1863	Bayard Sartoris	<i>Harper's</i> , Oct. 1940	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1940s	Rider
<i>Ch. 4</i>	<i>SEP</i> , Nov. 1936	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1864	Bayard Sartoris	<i>Harper's</i> , Sep. 1940	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, early 1900s	Isaac McCaslin and McCaslin Edmonds
<i>Ch. 5</i>	<i>SEP</i> , Dec. 1936	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1865	Bayard Sartoris	<i>SEP</i> , May 1942	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, early 1900s	Isaac McCaslin
<i>Ch. 6</i>	<i>Scribner's</i> , Apr. 1935	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1865	Bayard Sartoris	<i>Story</i> , May 1942	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, early 1940	Isaac McCaslin
<i>Ch. 7</i>	1938*	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1872	Bayard Sartoris	<i>Collier's</i> , Jan. 1941	Yoknapatawpha County, MS, 1940	Gavin Stevens

\* denotes chapters previously unpublished before the novel publication.  
† "The Fire and the Hearth" (ch. 2 of *Go Down, Moses*) reworks two previously published stories, "A Point of Law" (*Collier's*, June 1940) and "Gold is Not Always" (*Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 1940).

Because *The Unvanquished* is composed almost entirely of stories that were published in one periodical on a roughly monthly basis in the order that they were then collected in the book, it is best understood in the tradition of the great serialized novelists of the nineteenth century, including Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, and Trollope.<sup>23</sup> As in many serialized novels, the

<sup>23</sup> The literature on serial publication in Victorian England is vast, but see especially Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*. Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*. Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*. Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form*. Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines*. Payne, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction*.

progression of the story is synchronized with the progression of publication, moving forward in time at pace with the time that passes between the issues. *Go Down, Moses*, on the other hand, is jumpier: it straddles a century of narrative and declines to move through it chronologically, nor is the order of its chapters the same as the order in which they were published. The latter novel thereby severs the temporal intimacy between publication history and novelistic organization, and a number of permutations result: whereas *The Unvanquished* was stabilized temporally and subjectively, with only one narrative point of view, and this stabilization mediated an exploration of a wider range of places as the subjective anchor of Bayard Sartoris carries us beyond Yoknapatawpha County, *Go Down, Moses* shifts points of view as often as it shifts publications, but by declining to leave Yoknapatawpha County, its stability of place mediates among the subjective differences. In fact, the shifting points of view work to produce Yoknapatawpha as a tapestry of so many accounts of it: whereas *The Unvanquished* was ultimately the story of a character, *Go Down, Moses* is the story of a place.

On this point, *Go Down, Moses* continues local colorist fiction and works like *Winesburg, Ohio*, just as it also anticipates future work including Eudora Welty's *Golden Apples* (1949). In all of these works, characters are subordinated to place, sublimating the agency of their possible lives into the story of the spaces to which they belong. But the formula is complicated in *Go Down, Moses* because of the social travel of its stories, and more particularly, their mediation and routing through different periodicals. The stories that become the chapters of the novel do not just mediate between character and place, but between the aesthetic place of the novel and the larger social places in which the novel is being read. Distributed across its range of periodicals, the stories that became *Go Down, Moses* had distinct, sometimes disjoint, readerships. *The Saturday*

*Evening Post*, in which almost all of *The Unvanquished* had been published and in which what became the fifth chapter of *Go Down, Moses* appeared, was based in Indianapolis and, having discovered Norman Rockwell and John Philip Falter and having commissioned them for many of their covers, curated artifacts of Americana, especially with a Midwestern feel. In contrast, one of the *Post's* prominent rivals, *Collier's*, was published in Ohio and aimed for both a more cosmopolitan aesthetic (for instance publishing the British orientalism of the Fu Manchu serials for much of the first half of the twentieth century) and a more political register (having first built a reputation for investigative journalism and then, in the 1930s immediately before Faulkner was writing, commissioning regular articles from the likes of Winston Churchill). Distinct from both *Collier's* and the *Post*, both *Story* and *Harper's* were New York City magazines, but they themselves were also quite different from each other: whereas *Harper's* had a century-old reputation (today it is the second-longest running American monthly magazine) and, like *Collier's*, aspired toward a wide mix of politics and culture, *Story* had only been founded in 1931, was originally from Vienna and retained a European flair, and throughout its first two decades made a reputation for its short fiction (as the name of the periodical itself suggested was its priority). Finally, *The Atlantic Monthly* was similar to *Harper's* in its long duration, but founded in Boston, it catered to a New England, as opposed to New York, aesthetic. To distribute the parts of *Go Down, Moses* across these periodicals was therefore to distribute it across regions (Midwestern, New Yorker, New English), across different intensities of internationalism (nationalist, cosmopolitan) and across a mix of discursive contexts (political, literary, journalistic). In turn, *Go Down, Moses* as a book presented itself to a sum of multiple audiences, each of its parts referring to a part of a national sociality that was collected by the form of the book itself.

*Go Down, Moses* thereby makes a fascinating correlation between a social project internal to the book (producing space through the subordination of protagonists) and a production history external to it (distributing narrative across multiple readerships), where both the distributive vision and the laboring production of the novel are collections of social space: in Faulkner, the social effects of his works are twinned with the conditions of their production, their putative causes. In the language of political economy, production and distribution become, in Faulkner, formally identical.<sup>24</sup> It is not just that the characters within the novel have become subordinated to the fictional place created by the novel. It is also that the wider distribution of the novel among non-fictional places of readership in America becomes subordinated to the production of the novel as a singular unit. The novel, as product, does not just collect different characters, but different places and the communities of taste and labor to which they refer. Or, better: the different characters of the novel who become interchangeable protagonists do not just map the space of a fictional community; the stories also map the social space of a nation.

What Faulkner called the “method” of the invasion novel, and in turn the correlation between the production of a multi-part novel and the mapping of a distributed social world, experienced two afterlives in the postwar period after *Go Down, Moses*, one relating more directly

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<sup>24</sup> As Marx clarified in the third volume of *Capital*, distribution both follows production in the sense that products are distributed among a social populace and precedes production in the sense that people are distributed to classes according to which their kind of labor is delegated, but this only means that distribution is actually a part of the moment of production itself, conditioning its possibility and contextualizing its materiality. In turn, “the historical character of the[] relations of distribution is the historical character of the relations of production, and they simply express one side of these.” Marx, *Capital*, 3:1023. In particular, distribution figures the social aspect of production and the management of populations involved in it. It is in distribution that the organization of a society, understood as the delegation and arrangement of its working populace, finds expression within the productive cycle, or in other words, distribution is production’s sociospatial attribute.

to the formula of production and the other to sociological mediation. First, the creation of novels from collecting and re-working previously written short fiction took on special importance for genre fiction, especially science fiction, in the 1950s, as its primary medium shifted from magazines to the novel; the Hugo Award-winning *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* credits A. E. van Vogt for coining the term “fixup” to describe the works created by science fiction writers during this transitional period.<sup>25</sup> Both Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1951) were early, prominent examples of the fixup, and the works throughout the 1950s and 1960s not only by van Vogt but also by Brian D. Aldiss, James Blish, James Gunn, and Eric Frank Russell contributed to an exploding body of science fiction novels that repurposed previously published materials. Like *Go Down, Moses*, these novels carry in their structure their publication history, and the becoming-novel of magazine stories cites the historical moment of a genre ascending in the literary market.<sup>26</sup>

Later in the twentieth century saw more novels that were intended as episodic before their episodes were published. Like *Go Down, Moses*, these novels deployed a style of invasion in order to explore and round out the description of a particular place or population. Hubert Selby, Jr.’s *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964) was an early and influential example, and other narratives that explored drug use followed suit, including Denis Johnson’s *Jesus’s Son* (1992) and Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993), which, as one critic put it, might as well have been titled *Last Exit to Leith*,

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<sup>25</sup> Langford and Clute, “Fixup.”

<sup>26</sup> Relatedly but in a different context, James Nagel has also commented upon the style of invasion as a technique of managing the realities of publication, with short story production providing authors with enough credentials to earn book publication. See Nagel, *The Ethnic Resonance of Genre*, 256.

*Edinburgh*.<sup>27</sup> The 1980s and 1990s also saw the publication of works like Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), documenting 60 years of life among the Ojibwe people in the North Dakota Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, and Robert Olen Butler's *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992), tracking the experiences of a group of Vietnamese immigrants in Louisiana. Like Tim O'Brien's treatment of Vietnam War veterans in *The Things They Carried* (1990), the invasion style in each of these works attended to a group psychology and sociality, marking the emergence of social groups cohered by common experiences.<sup>28</sup> James Nagel, writing about many of these novels, has commented on invasion novels as twinned with a multicultural moment in America, in which writers both wish to express the complex formation of identity and reader wish to consume identity narratives; it is because this style is so attractive to contemporary ethnic writers that it reaches a sort of renaissance, according to Nagel, in 1980s and 1990s America when ethnicity is both popularly produced and consumed.<sup>29</sup> If for the Virginia Woolf of the earlier twentieth century, we are led into stories in pursuit of a character, in the fiction of postwar America, we are led into novels of invasion in pursuit of a cultural group.<sup>30</sup> Deleuze and Guattari have shown how all "minor literature" is a language of the group instead of the individual—so that even the speech of a singular character is an intervention on behalf of a marginalized people into a dominant culture by reorganizing its linguistic priorities and therefore prophesizing a

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<sup>27</sup> Bell, "Last Exit to Leith."

<sup>28</sup> For critical literature on the style at play in these works, see Ruppert, "Meditation and Multiple Narrative in *Love Medicine*." Silkü, "Challenging Narratives." Wutz, "The Politics of (Post)Modern Form." Luscher, "(Re)Closure in the Short Story Sequence." O'Gorman, "The Things They Carried as Composite Novel."

<sup>29</sup> Nagel, *The Ethnic Resonance of Genre*, 17. To somewhat debunk the American priority of the genre, see the discussion of Canadian short story sequences in Lynch, *The One and the Many*.

<sup>30</sup> Woolf, "Character in Fiction."

collective to come—but invasive fiction stages a more dialectical process for this sublimation of utterances into a collective fabric.<sup>31</sup> They not only anticipate a coming collective, but literally stage it by submitting the interchangeable majorness of characters into the majority of the group.

In addition to the precedents set by genre and subcultural or multicultural fiction, the 1960s also saw another fund of stylistic work that is important for the style of invasion: the intentionally fragmentary work popularized by William Burroughs in his *Nova* trilogy—*The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964)—whose style was systematized in what he called the “cut-up method.” Collaborating with the painter Brion Gysin (who had famously been expelled from the Parisian Surrealist Group by André Breton in 1936), Burroughs created these novels by splicing fragments of his own writing with fragments of found writing, producing a new work that was sometimes described as collage.<sup>32</sup> While critical histories of Burroughs have thereby tended to see the *Nova* trilogy in relation to a history of visual production, in *The Third Mind* (1978), a manifesto and how-to guide for the cut-up method, Burroughs and Gysin cited a literary precedent as well, Comte de Lautréamont, who in 1860 wrote, “Poetry should be made by all, not by one.”<sup>33</sup> What the cutup style was meant to accomplish, then, was an expansive outsourcing of creative production to a wider social field, whose texts supply the novel’s raw materials. Burroughs was trying to accomplish something different from what some of the standard narratives of postmodernism in which he is often contained would lay out for him; the *Nova* trilogy was not quite a resignation to the end of

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> For accounts situating Burroughs in the European art history of avant garde collage, see Cran, “Everything Is Permitted.” Gefin, “Collage Theory, Reception, and the Cutups of William Burroughs.”

<sup>33</sup> Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, 6.

creativity in a time when all artists can do is repurpose preexisting narratives or aesthetic materials,<sup>34</sup> because the point was to replace the figure of the artist with a collective which, no longer egoistic, declined the anxieties of “genius.”<sup>35</sup> What the “third mind” referred to, for Burroughs and Gysin, was the totally different creative force that was born of collaboration, not only between Burroughs and Gysin, but between Burroughs and whomever else had written the fragments he cut up and mixed in with his own. It is therefore also wrong to suggest, as the only monographic treatment of this style to date does, that “[t]he fragmentary nature of the narrative .... reflect[s] the way the memory functions, jumping from one thought or recollection to the next on the impulse of random triggers.”<sup>36</sup> Besides the surprise of encountering, in an account that otherwise tries to situate Burroughs in a postmodern project, the re-appearance of a decidedly modernist ambition to render the workings of individual psychology, as if Burroughs had re-discovered stream of consciousness by other means, such an account is also misleading to suggest that the “individual” is the proper unit of mediation, if Burroughs was instead invested in collaborative processes that exceeded memory.

The individualistic, negative terms in which the cutup is often described—as anti-subjective or anti-creative—misses the essentially positive nature of the style, namely its creation of sociality: this is a style to be understood, in other words, as a positive collection of social materials, rather than an individual’s disavowal of subjective experience. This is not to deny that

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<sup>34</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism or: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

<sup>35</sup> Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Shift Linguals*, 47. Although I disagree with Robinson’s account of the theory of cut-up style, I am indebted to his archive of cut-up writers who succeeded Burroughs, especially Kathy Acker, John Giorno, Anthony Hitchin, Stewart Home, Lee Kwo, Claude Pelieu, Graham Rawle, Kenji Siratori, Phillippe Vasset, and Carl Weissner.

cutups do exercise negativity, by literally and violently rending apart cultural materials, but rather to suggest that this negativity is bound up with a project that is ultimately more productive than destructive. Cutups simultaneously fragment and collect, indexing a social space at the same time that they reconstruct and therefore distort it; they foreground the irreducibility of a social aesthetic to individual experience, suggesting instead an aesthetic that is a concatenation of distributed experiences, a conjunction of otherwise disjunct parts. The cutup style manages and presents a trans-subjective array of idioms, thereby mapping out a social space by citation to its differentiated circulating discourses. Because the fragments bear the residual traces of the social contexts from which they come, the cutup style that coordinates them is a taxonomizing force that performs an action of social mapping. They therefore repeat, formally, the distributive vision we saw in Faulkner's chapters in *Go Down, Moses*, collecting in one place a diversity of places referenced by original publication.

This is furthermore to say that the disorientations of Burrough's novels belong less to the novels and more to the society they are indexing; the cut-up is the style of a cut-up, or fragmented, social world. At the base of Burrough's project is the question of whether the collected materials of this world can add up to something more, for instance to something like a public that can mediate among the varied parts. Dramatized in the style of his novels is what Habermas might call the death of the public sphere, where through the loss of geographic structuration, the loss of a consensual rationality, or a ceding of public discourse to technological encroachment. Geographically, an increasingly globalized world has exposed the tenuous and unsustainable dependency of classically theorized public spheres on national boundaries and systems. Although, as Craig Calhoun glosses, the public sphere carves out a space that lines up

neatly neither with the state nor with society—it is a political community that cuts across lines provided by nationality and identity and “represents the potential for the people organized in civil society to alter their own conditions of existence by means of rational-critical discourse”—it has nonetheless tended to be rendered as a space that takes national governments as both its ground and object.<sup>37</sup> This has supported both paranoid readings of the public sphere as a fantasy that attaches people to an indifferent and autopoietic political machine as well as reparative readings of how public spheres can show up in unlikely places if governments are able to provide institutional support.<sup>38</sup> In either case, it has been difficult to think of the public sphere outside of a national frame, even in critical accounts, like Nancy Fraser’s famous and early assessment of Habermas’s exclusion of counterpublic demographics including women, that seek to expand the space of publicity. In a more recent return to Habermas and to her early critique of him, Fraser locates the primacy of Westphalian geography in both his and her project—with a “conception of publicity [that] had a national subtext”—and argues that this subtext can no longer be maintained in an transnational world where information, commodities, and identities flow and cut across territorial lines.<sup>39</sup>

Even before publicity expanded beyond national boundaries, its mediation was also in crisis. Habermas’s public spheres need a consensual regime of rationality on which a various

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<sup>37</sup> Calhoun, “Civil Society and the Public Sphere,” 279. Calhoun continues, “of course the public sphere represents only *potential*, because its agreements must be brought to fruition, or at least brought into struggle, in a world of practical affairs where power still matters.”

<sup>38</sup> Building on his ethnographic research in urban poor settings in Brazil, Gianpaolo Baiocchi, for instance, shows that even if Habermas’s classic public sphere definition is used, it can be found in places typically excluded from rational deliberation, especially with state support of institutions of public discussion. See Baiocchi, “Emergent Public Spheres.” See also discussion of Baiocchi in Fung, “Survey Article.”

<sup>39</sup> Fraser, “Special Section,” 10.

citizenry can converge, but Habermas himself already thought this was a problem in modernity. His emphasis on rationality has frequently been described as insufficient for explaining the emergent modes of relation and publicity afforded by the contemporary,<sup>40</sup> but the project of Habermas's more mature statement on publics in *Theory of Communicative Action*, which postdates *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by 20 years, was to understand rationality as already fragmented, in turn fragmenting the social and personal spaces it grounds, and therefore to explain modernity not as an arrangement of public reasoning, but as a complicated competition among different modes of reasoning. In Habermas's plainest definition, "[w]e call a person rational who interprets the nature of his desires and feelings in the light of culturally established standards of value, but especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted."<sup>41</sup> Rationality therefore becomes,

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<sup>40</sup> The Habermasian eighteenth century salon, providing the paradigmatic space in which discourse abstracted from the private self achieves an autonomy that, because sufficiently impersonal, can assemble a wide range of (male) persons, may not adequately model, for instance, the ambivalence that subjects may have to their de-corporealized representation, an ambivalence which Michael Warner has understood as the simultaneity of identification and alienation. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 182. The tenuous demarcation of such an ideological public sphere separate from domestic spaces apparently understood as containers of highly personalized feelings and desires furthermore misses how, in Lauren Berlant's understanding, so-called private practices are enfolded into understandings of and aspirations toward publicness, either when particularly moralized forms of intimacy are sanctioned by the state as gatekeepers to full membership in national citizenship, or when erotic acts arrest the ongoing reproduction of normativity by inviting and organizing a sociality that endures precisely by fudging the border between public and private space and therefore accessing and negotiating the resources of each. Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 5, 199. From this perspective, Habermas's attention to the rational grounds of a discursively mediated sociality in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* would seem ill-equipped to process the further transformations a public sphere takes in a contemporary period that understands publics as plural and preeminently felt, with the work of feeling cutting across any bifurcation of space a theory of spheres might propose.

<sup>41</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1985, 1:20.

in Habermas's understanding, not a de-personalized sphere of ideas, but a reflexive interpretation that attaches a person's behaviors to a de-centered understanding of culture; rationality is a circuit through which a person gets out of herself in order to describe herself, substituting the ongoing protocol of her desires with an explanation that can marshal them into an event that looks to her like an action. The difficulty of modernity, however, is the proliferation of competing rational regimes that could be offered to grant this coherency; science, art, and law each provide modes of explanation, converting phenomena into rational actions, but an action can never be reduced to just one. Any attempt to do so shifts the incoherency of rationality—its simultaneity of multiple discourses that fragment it from within—onto individuals, a costly transferral that manifests “in different guises, ranging from clinically treated mental illnesses through neuroses, phenomena of addiction, psychosomatic disturbances, educational and motivational problems, to the protest actions of aesthetically inspired countercultures, religious youth sects, and marginal criminal groups.”<sup>42</sup> Far from securing a consensual public sphere, rationality splits up discursive space into a number of locations to which an action can be referred, and subjects who identify with their actions in turn identify with a fragmentation they internalize and begin to bear as embodiment. I have been arguing that the same can be said of Burroughs's cut-up novels, with a fragmentation of narrative indexing a fragmentation of social space from which the novel's materials are drawn.

This ceding of public space to the various regimes of rationality speaks finally to a third instability in classic public sphere theory: its increasing encroachment by technical and private regimes. In more recent years, this is a drama that has unfolded in critical debates over the

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<sup>42</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1985, 2:369.

democratic function of Internet communication.<sup>43</sup> Pessimists have tended to see the rise of networked communications as a privatization of political speech, delegating it to spaces where it fails either to address government or to cohere political community.<sup>44</sup> Optimists have tended to see the Internet as a global medium that, for the very first time, provides universal access to spaces of discussion and deliberation.<sup>45</sup> The most compelling accounts have found their ambivalence over the Internet more habitable. For Eugenia Siapera, for instance, participation on the web might be conceived neither as the cure for nor the end of politics, but as “pre-political,” a space between deliberative democracy and multiculturalism that fails to solve their tensions: Internet discourse contests the deliberative model of democracy by proliferating differences that refuse to be smoothed over by the universality of formal equality before being submitted to discussion.<sup>46</sup> Habermas himself saw electronic communication as both promising and problematic: “[w]hereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an intersubjectively shared world and to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions

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<sup>43</sup> For an adaptation of a public sphere model for the Internet—analagizing traditional encounters, events, and mass media to e-mails, discussion boards, and search engines, respectively—see Gerhards and Schäfer, “Is the Internet a Better Public Sphere?”

<sup>44</sup> The most pessimistic critic of Internet democracy, which she calls “communicative capitalism,” is probably Jodi Dean. See esp. her *Blog Theory*. For more on the internet as a neoliberal “fantasy of global unity,” see also Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> See Friedland, Hove, and Rojas, “The Networked Public Sphere,” 19. For another simply salvational account, see Castells, “The New Public Sphere,” 90.

<sup>46</sup> Siapera, “Minority Activism on the Web,” 504.

from which political public spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating and acting subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented.”<sup>47</sup>

Each of these conditions of the death of the public sphere—geographic transcendence, hyper-mediation, and technological encroachment—is assumed in the styles of cut-up and invasion novels, even as they seek to repair a public by other means. Consider this opening passage from the penultimate chapter of *The Soft Machine*, important for its explicit invitation to reader participation in the collaborative project of the series:

Glad to have you aboard reader, but remember there is only one captain of this subway—Do not thrust your cock out the train window or beckon lewdly with thy piles nor flush thy beat benny down the drain—(Benny is overcoat in antiquated Times Square argot)—It is forbidden to use the signal rope for frivolous hangings or to burn Nigras in the washroom before the other passengers have made their toilet—

Do not offend the office manager—He is subject to take back the keys of the shithouse—Always keep it locked so no sinister stranger sneak a shit and give all the kinds in the office some horrible condition—And Mr. Anker from accounting, his arms scarred like a junky from countless Wassermans, sprays plastic over it before he travails there—I stand on the Fifth Amendment, will not anser the question of the Senator from Wisconsin: “Are you or have you ever been a member of the male sex?”—They can’t make Dicky whimper on the boys—know how I take care of crooners?—Just listen to them—A word to the wise guy—I mean you gotta be careful of politics these days—Some old department get physical with you, kick him right in his coordinator—“Come see me tonight in my apartment under the school privy—Show you something interesting,” said the janitor drooling green coca juice—<sup>48</sup>

The passage begins by invoking a ground train (reminiscent of “all aboard”) but then offers a series of revisions: “captain” invokes not train but ship, and then we are finally delivered to the “subway.” After the first dash, it is unclear if the train is still subterranean or above ground—the possibility of sticking something outside a window suggests the latter but does not foreclose the former—but it is at least clear that the discursive, if not physical, location has changed with the

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<sup>47</sup> Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, 167–68.

intentional archaism of “thy,” an archaism that, in the following fragment, is projected onto “benny,” which translates into “overcoat” and therefore suggests not the psychoactive drug benzodiazepine, as it would more commonly refer to, but a condom. Yet there is something that remains archaic about the translation, where “antiquated” and “argot” suggest a higher register of diction at the same time that “overcoat” condescends to gay slang. The movement backwards in time seems to continue in the following and concluding fragment of the first paragraph, when the “signal rope,” already an outmoded means of alerting danger on a railway, is put into the service of racial lynching, but this only reminds us that to consider lynching archaic is itself a fantasy, with the continued Jim Crow violence of the early 1960s in which Burroughs wrote. Already in the first paragraph, the locomotive takes us across multiple spaces, and the whiplash of travel continues into the second paragraph, even without locomotive. Each fragment references a specific space—now we go through an office, a Senate committee meeting with Joseph McCarthy, and a school—and each of these spaces, despite their disorienting differences, are notably public: there is an allergy to private spaces or spaces not potentially open for others to come into. Even “Mr. Anker from accounting,” whom we learn is scarred from frequent blood tests for syphilis—an outmoded test named after the bacteriologist August Paul von Wasserman—bears his sexual wounds in public (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might say, “We know ‘[Mr. Anker] suffers in private’ because [Mr. Anker] suffers in private in public”<sup>49</sup>): this toilet is a public toilet and we encounter his sexuality while cruising it. Throughout these paragraphs, we are invited to travel across multiple scenes of publicity, collecting along the way a geography of differentiated social space: professional, public erotic, transitive, subcultural. But just as the

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<sup>49</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 115–16.

passage invites an overlay of these spaces, it is also careful to section them off, the dashes marking boundaries between them. The social space is not just dialogic in Bakhtin's sense of words born from and presenting social difference, but also a map of difference, putting each space in its proper place.<sup>50</sup> Burroughs's project thus responds to the three forces driving Habermas's decline of the public sphere: geographically, it substitutes communities of discourse (for instance, gay subcultural) for nation-states; rationally, it revels in a dissensus over the grounds of action, or substitutes affect for reason; and technologically, it insists on the novel as a technique of collecting other media rather than competing directly with them.

The general formula of sectioning off social spaces, which in Burroughs's cut-up novel is lived at the level of clauses internal to sentences, is expanded in novels of invasion of the later twentieth century, where the formula is lived at the level of chapters internal to the novel entire. These novels have learned from Burroughs's sentences how to adapt Faulkner's organization of short stories to a project of social pluralism, that is, presenting a multiplicity of social spaces that are held, by the boundaries of the chapter, relatively discrete. In the remainder of this chapter, I attend to two novels exemplary of this style to see the work they do in describing and assessing contemporary social organizations of subjectivity: Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, which is invested in fragmenting subjectivities according to the social spaces in which they are organized, and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, in which this dynamic is further developed.

### III. Repairing Novels, Repairing Publics

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<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. On the "cognitive mapping" of the city, see also Jameson, *Postmodernism or: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

What the history of stylistic experiments in organization and fragmentation from Faulkner to Burroughs brings out is a certain intimacy between the novel form and the public sphere. Over the twentieth century, novels of invasion steadily adapt to a pluralized condition of the public sphere, with a distributed narrative mirroring the distributed public from whose parts the novel has collected its materials. One way of characterizing these novels is as panoptic: Faulkner was interested in monitoring the entirety of a given social space by providing multiple perspectives of it, just as later Burroughs would provide a knitted social picture in which no part of society seems omitted. But this panoptic vision of the novel misses the other central ambition of these works, performed by the chapter unit, of not simply exhausting a society but sectioning it, mapping or taxonomizing a totality into discrete and bordered parts. These novels react to the pluralizing of a public sphere—a seeming fragmentation of a whole into parts—by elaborating each part into its own sense of wholeness, so that a part of the public comes to look like a public of its own. Melanie Klein might call this work of elaborating parts into smaller wholes, while declining the work of suturing the prior whole altogether, a work of “obsessive” reparation. The outpouring of recent literary critical work on “reparative reading,” inspired by Klein by way of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s germinal essay, has overlooked how the psychoanalyst’s account of reparation originally included two modes through which an ego can fantasize it is repairing an object without actually repairing.<sup>51</sup> In the first, the anxiety of having an object under threat is alleviated by a manic defense through which the subject assumes an omnipotence that disparages that object’s importance, pretending as if she does not really love or need it, pretending even that

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<sup>51</sup> Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.” For a review of cultural theory’s uptake of Sedgwick’s reading, see Wiegman, “The Times We’re in.”

she has only contempt for and a sense of triumph over it in a fantasy of mastery and control; the manic defense is primarily a mode of denial, which fantastically reverses the real relation of dependency on the object. In the second, the anxiety of performing the great labor of reparation is displaced through an obsessive defense that finds smaller objects that are easier to repair, pretending this is all along the repair of the larger threat that animates the subject altogether. While the manic pretends to a great omnipotence that is farcical and therefore cannot be long sustained, the obsessive enacts a small omnipotence that is actual, but still not on the level where the great drama of object threat and repair is played out, therefore still incapable of accomplishing the work of reparation proper. For this reason is it obsessive, forever repeating the small task it has mastered, forever knowing a larger threat remains.<sup>52</sup>

Invasive novels can be understood as obsessive in this vein, returning to the smaller project of the short story again and again to practice omnipotent mini-reparations that neatly seal off spheres of autonomy. In the following chapter, I look at a style that might be understood to perform the other kind of defensive reparation Klein theorized: not obsessively writing smaller parts of a novel, but manically rejecting an attachment to the novel altogether by making it a smaller part of a larger process, with narrative distributed across media and platforms. In both cases, what the project of novelistic repair demonstrates is also a certain repair of publics. For some critics, the invasive collection of narratives from across planetary space presents a “multivocal, democratic text” that de-centers American nationalist claims to occupy the totality

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<sup>52</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis provide these definitions of manic and obsessive defenses to reparation: “To the extent that their operation is defective, mechanisms of reparation may come to resemble sometimes maniac defenses (feeling of omnipotence), and sometimes obsessional ones (compulsive repetition of reparatory acts).” Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 388.

of world-historical mattering after 9/11,<sup>53</sup> allowing the novel to be a global, rather than national, imagining: a “montage technique” of “cosmopolitanism representation.”<sup>54</sup> But these novels are also anti-cosmopolitan, or want the whole world to be cut up into enough fragments that its social spaces can give subjectivity some intelligibility. The point is that these spaces are no longer the same institutional spaces that they once were—they are not quite the factory, the school, the hospital, or the family, although there is a tropism toward these in *Cloud Atlas*, as I will explore in the following section—but spaces that are still slices of sociality in which partial subjectivity can show up. The style of these novels tries to adapt a disciplinary logic of partial presentation from the eroded spaces of institutions into the partial spaces of social life. It seeks to create communities that can be self-containing and autonomous, but it must, obsessively, keep returning again and again to creation in order to seal them off.

This is the organizational principle of the invasive style of Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. The novel begins with the story of Sasha on a date with a man named Alex, whom she met through an online dating website. The date is going poorly until Sasha, who is in therapy for kleptomania (the dialogue from a session with her therapist is interspersed throughout the chapter), is energized by stealing a purse left on the counter of the bathroom of the hotel bar they are dining at: “Postwallet . . ., the scene tingled with mirthful possibility. Sasha felt the waiters eyeing her as she sidled back to the table holding her handbag with its secret weight. She sat down and took a sip of her Melon Madness Martini and cocked her head at Alex. She smiled her yes/no smile” (5). For Sasha, having a “secret” allows her to come more

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<sup>53</sup> Flannery, “Internationalizing 9/11,” 315.

<sup>54</sup> Schoene, “Tour Du Monde,” 45.

fully into herself: “her yes/no smile” registers a trademark form that she can finally slip into, in public, because of her private act and knowledge. Submitting to her urge to steal brings Sasha closer to her sense of herself, but at the same time, this sense registers a certain distance from herself: the recognition of a signature performance piece suggests she stands outside herself for a moment, observing the relation between her specific disposition at this moment and a genre of dispositions she recognizes beyond the moment. This is in part because Sasha’s relation to herself is mediated not only by her “secret” but by the publicness in which she can recognize her prize as indeed a secret, something shielded from the eyes of the waiters and of Alex. It is not that the stealing of the wallet immediately provides Sasha with a change in disposition; rather, the action is routed through the “scene” of the restaurant, which, significantly, is what holds the “mirthful possibility” rather than herself, and her disposition becomes derivative of the scene in which she appears. In the dialectical relation between scene and self ultimately posited by the chapter—Sasha, submitting to an urge, changes the air of the scene, which in turn changes herself—its protagonist is presented as an ambivalent subject of publicness: on the one hand, secretive and withdrawn from the public, but on other hand, intimately a part of the construction of the public atmosphere.

The ambivalence that clusters around Sasha’s theft doubles the split she has already created between an online and an “in person” presentation of herself, a split she also notices characterizes Alex but in a different way. “On e-mail he’d been fanciful, almost goofy, but in person he seemed simultaneously anxious and bored” (6). As for Sasha, who is thirty five but “worked out daily and avoided the sun”: “[h]er online profiles all listed her as twenty-eight” (6). Whereas Sasha therefore conforms her online presence to what she passes as offline, seeking to

bring them into a harmony that is anchored in the sense of youth she is able to create in person, Alex's online and offline dispositions are discontinuous. In turn, whereas Sasha's youthfulness online is derivative of her behavior offline, Alex is only able to create a youthfulness online because his words there can be freed from his offline behavior, as if his words can be spritely if only they shed the weight of his bodily comportment and the anxiety and boredom his gestures seem to convey. For both, however, the underlying premise is that online and offline interactions are different social scenes, and one could show up differently in one than in the other. The tethering of performance to scene suggests, for both Sasha and Alex, a proliferation of self-fashionings contingent upon a proliferation of scenes: there may be as many ways of inhabiting the self as there are scenes in which the self shows up.

If an implicit conflict between selves is then presented in the content of the chapter through the anxiety regarding continuity between online and offline performance, scenic competition is also dramatized in the form of the chapter through the interjection of the dating scene with the scene of Sasha's therapy. Whereas in therapy, Sasha is the subject of a compulsion, on the date, she is the subject of heterosexuality, and the difficulty is erecting the proper boundaries between the two, so that the subject of heterosexuality is not also contaminated by the subject of compulsion. Even though, in the competition between these two particular scenes, the therapeutic one ascends—not only because she submits to her compulsion but also because the submission makes the entire date into just another case she can confess at her next therapy session—Sasha makes so many attempts to keep the parts of her self discrete and compartmentalized. Significantly, she steals the purse while in the bathroom, a gender-segregated space from which Alex is barred and in which the heterosexual love plot is suspended

long enough for her to show up in her compulsion. But the chapter is important for playing out the contingency of these efforts to secure discrete spaces for discrete performances of the self, and by the end, when Sasha invites Alex into her apartment for sex and he discovers her stash of stolen objects, the artifacts of her compulsion finally show up within the scene of their sexuality. “Watching Alex move his eyes over the pile of objects stirred something in Sasha,” and after she kisses him and begins taking off his pants, “Alex tried to lead her toward the other room, where they could lie down on the sofa bed, but Sasha dropped to her knees beside the tables and pulled him down ...” (15). Alex motions for them to change scenes—the bedroom—in order for them to transition into showing up together as sexual partners, but Sasha insists on the scene that indexes her thefts. Afterwards, he takes a packet of bath salts from the pile of stolen goods and makes them a bath, fully incorporating her other self into the scene of their hookup. The two scenes, and thus Sasha’s two selves, converge.

Each chapter of *Goon Squad* seek to provision a scene excerpted from the life of a character, presenting a part of their self that is temporally and geographically confined: what a character is like at a particular time and place. This is to say that the chapters themselves are techniques of compartmentalization, providing one part of the character they focalize, or if not presenting only one part, at least cutting off a certain number of others. Even though the first chapter presents and mixes Sasha’s kleptomaniacal and sexual parts, in part by eroticizing the former, it is notably not about, for instance, Sasha as a subject of employment. In later chapters, we will see Sasha as a former runaway bohemian in Naples, an older student at New York University, and as a future mother in the Californian desert, and these are parts at times radically different, collected only under a common proper name that insists on their continuity. The

spacing of the chapters that provide information on Sasha, in other words, function in part to show Sasha at the height of particular moments in her life, rather than in the transitional periods that bridge them. Like “her yes/no smile,” these chapters present genres of Sasha, time periods carefully sectioned off and bordered so that Sasha could be able to recognize them as discrete phases rather than overlapping histories. But the work of keeping temporality contained and therefore parts of a self hermetic is, like the ultimately unsustainable division of selves in the first chapter with Alex, continually disturbed at the same time it is aspired toward. At times, the chapters rebel against their own projects, longing for more temporal breadth at precisely the moments they claim to want temporal confinement.

Consider the final paragraph of the first chapter, after Sasha has just detailed the Alex story to her therapist: “They sat in silence, the longest silence that ever had passed between them. Sasha looked at the windowpane, rinsed continually with rain, smearing lights in the falling dark. She lay with her body tensed, claiming the couch, her spot in their room, her view of the window and the walls, the faint hum that was always there when she listened, and these minutes of [her therapist’s] time: another, then another, then one more” (18). At first, the silence marks an uncertainty in how to proceed; Sasha has just asked her therapist not to ask her “how I feel,” but that precisely is the role laid out for them by the contract of their therapy, where he asks her questions and she confesses affective states. The uncertainty in how to inhabit the room when the roles laid out for them are declined propels Sasha to re-examine the room itself and then the world beyond it. Observing the rain outside, Sasha considers for a moment the disorder of spaces in which the role of therapeutic client is not laid out for her. But ultimately, she reaffirms her commitment to the room itself, and especially to the figure of the psychoanalytic couch,

which, as “her spot in the room,” places her back in the role she had for a moment disturbed. The passage speeds up in this last sentence as she reclaims her place, falling into a list of observations that cascade out from the place, centering her there more firmly and building up a space around her, and then the count of her therapist’s minutes similarly extends time from a point that begins with her. The flow of this sentence is unique in the chapter; never before have we encountered the rolling cadence afforded by the syntax of lists, extending into an unnamed future where unmarked minutes continue to expire. In turn, we can see a peculiar anxiety at this moment when the chapter is supposed to conclude, sealing off Sasha in the scene of her compulsion: at this moment when ending is supposed to happen, the ultimate sentence rebels, feeling out for a future it extends into. Like Sasha’s own difficulties in sustainably compartmentalizing her life, the ambivalence of the final sentence—concluding the chapter but resisting finality, elaborating a continuity that unfolds indefinitely—speaks to a tension internal to the project of cutting experience into scenes that can provision partial, and only partial, subjectivity.

Because Egan’s chapters first presume that parts of one’s life can be compartmentalized—so that the subject of therapy is distinct from the subject of heterosexuality—they also enact a drama of one part of one’s life taking over the other, or monopolizing all of one’s life. But this drama is primarily enacted as a competition over the spaces in which the separate subjects show up; the first chapter of *Goon Squad* plays out as one space—the space of therapy—steadily invading the other spaces of Sasha’s life, especially the space of her romance. Spaces become jealous of the subjects they monitor and seek to secure their characters as totally subordinate to them. It is in this sense that the style can be understood as an action of invasion: taking over the

space of a chapter in order to subjectivize characters in a limited way. But the point, too, is that invasions are always local: there is an occupation of a space, but there cannot be the occupation of an entire world, and it is from this anxiety to make total or generalizable the feat of capturing, for a moment, a subject that induces so much temporal anxiety at the conclusion of each of the chapters.

The permutation of temporality at the conclusion of this chapter, therefore the tension between the temporal confinement and subjective excerption aimed for and the drive for bloating the confines with an excess that pushes at the boundaries, repeats in the following chapter, though with a difference. This chapter narrates an afternoon in the life of Sasha's boss and record producer Bennie Salazar, who picks up his son from school and then takes him to see a musical sister-duo whom he is thinking of signing. In the previous chapter, we learned in an aside that Bennie sprinkles gold flakes in his coffee and sprays his armpits with pesticide, two eccentricities of a minor character in the first chapter which are now explained in a chapter where Bennie is the protagonist: he eats gold because he has read it will regain him the sex drive he has lost, and he sprays his armpits with pesticides because he feels responsible for the one time his son got lice.<sup>55</sup> This participates in the general protocol for linking the stories together throughout the book: a detail from one story becomes the occasion for another, or, from the

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<sup>55</sup> As Jennifer Egan has explained in interviews, this mimics her writing process as well: "[In the first story,] there was a mention of the wallet-thief's boss, Bennie Salazar. I write pretty instinctively, so it's not like I was thinking about it much, but at the time I intended it as a humorous sketch about a neurotic record producer, who sprays pesticide under his arms and sprinkles gold flakes in his coffee as an aphrodisiac. You know, these decadent rock-and-roll habits. But then I found myself thinking who is Bennie Salazar? Why does he do that stuff? Which prompted me to write the next chapter. And the same thing happened again: a minor character would catch my eye, and I'd want to crack them open." Michod, "The Rumpus Interview with Jennifer Egan."

opposite perspective, the entire situation of one story becomes background noise when nested in another. Cumulatively, the stories feel out for others, constellating a larger social network in which everyone is connected by however few degrees of separation, but singularly, each story is also protective of its borders, not wanting too much into it that would pervert the particular section and the particular partial subjects administered therein. A chapter forbids other occupiers into the space it has invaded. As in the first chapter, the second chapter registers this tension in the change in pacing that occurs as the chapter reaches its necessary end. Bennie, dropping off Sasha at her home, makes a move on her, which she graciously declines.

Then she was out of the car. She waved to him through the window and said something he didn't catch. Bennie lunged fixedly across the empty seat, his face near the glass, staring fixedly as she said it again. Still, he missed it. As he struggled to open the door, Sasha said it once more, mouthing the words extra slowly.

“See. You. Tomorrow.” (38)

As in the first chapter, a man is forcing the convergence of two scenes and two different sets of roles Bennie and Sasha could inhabit, here professional and sexual. Sasha's declining Bennie's advance reasserts the professional scene, eliminating the other. Then, having reaffirmed the scene, the chapter seems to want to stay with it. The passage hoards its—and the chapter's—final words, building up to them by having them said twice without being heard before finally delivering them, as if stalling through deferment, trying to stay longer with the scene before being finally cut off. The syntax, too, develops in ways original to the end of the chapter; the shorter sentences, reaching an apex in Sasha's punctuated sentence (“See. You. Tomorrow.”), slow down the chapter, halting its finish. Whereas in the previous chapter, the final sentence rushed forward, as if eager to continue to fill up the future, here the sentence wants to slow

down, pacing out words to savor each one, declining the future it speaks of (“Tomorrow”). In both cases, however, the temporal disturbance afforded by the final prose—sped up for Sasha’s chapter, slowed down for Bennie’s—registers some of the difficulty of ending itself, of putting up a border between the different slices of life, and different subjective roles, that each chapter presents. The endings of chapters in Colum McCann’s invasive *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) bear a similar form. In a novel not characterized by minimalism, the last sentences of these chapters are remarkably slower, more plodding, more repetitive: “Oh, she said, his forehead’s cold. His forehead’s very cold”; “Come, she says, come. Let’s go see Joshua’s room”; “There is, I think, a fear of love. There is a fear of love.”<sup>56</sup> There is something almost formulaic about these slow-down sentences, their hoarding of a couple simple words in order to stall off the closure they also bring about. Toward the borders of the units of this multi-cast novel, the syntax of sentences firms up the walls, keeping subjects in the confined space in which they were produced.

This longed-for productivity of fragmentation is at play as well in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*. Like *Goon Squad*, *Cloud Atlas* divides space and psychology into parts, but it also demonstrates the unsustainability and contingency of maintaining a project of division in a world in which borders of all types are increasingly crossed and overlapped and in which, therefore, the discreteness of spaces is constantly challenged. The novel organizes six nested stories or, as the novel phrases it in one philosophical digression that could describe the novel entire, nested shells of time: “an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments, each ‘shell’ (the present) encased inside a nest of ‘shells’ (previous presents)” (393). “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”

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<sup>56</sup> McCann, *Let the Great World Spin*, 72, 114, 156.

concerns its eponymous notary's mid-19<sup>th</sup> century voyage home to San Francisco from New Zealand while he is being progressively poisoned by a man he mistakes as his friend and doctor; in "Letters from Zedelghem," a young and disowned composer named Robert Frobisher finds employment as an amanuensis to an accomplished composer who is dying in 1930s Belgium; in "Half Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery," the title character investigates the safety of a nuclear power plant, whose actual danger is being concealed at pain of murder, in the southern California of the 1970s; in the new millennium, Timothy Cavendish flees British gangsters only to end up against his will admitted to a nursing home for the senile in "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish"; approximately a century later, in "An Orison of Somni-451," the liberated but now condemned clone Somni-451 is interviewed by an official "archivist" about a failed plot to overthrow the government of a future East Asian state; and finally, "Sloosha's Crossin' An' Ev'rythin' After" skips forward even further, to the 3000s, as Zachry Bailey narrates the tribal warfare that has caused him to flee the Big Island of Hawaii, itself in a post-apocalyptic and primitive state after the collapse of previous civilized society. The thematic scope of *Cloud Atlas* is therefore greater than *A Visit From the Good Squad*, just as its character list is longer. But many of the stylistic features of Egan's novel characterize Mitchell's as well. As in *Goon Squad*, each of the stories in *Cloud Atlas* seeks connection with the others while simultaneously attempting a sort of closure that guards its characters within a matrix the story can administer. The novel thematizes these closures by presenting each story as a space of confinement—the ship for Adam Ewing; the house for Frobisher; the factory for Luisa; the nursing home for Timothy; the carceral interrogation room for Somni-451, and the island for Zachry—while at the same time

opening up these spaces, hesitantly, by offering a vision of escape in their final pages.<sup>57</sup> The escape is literal in the case of, for instance, Timothy, as he and a group of seniors plan and execute an escape from the nursing home into the wider world; it is imaginative in the case of Somni-451, who believes her story may still inspire some “future revolution” of clones even as she must expire within the prison’s walls (349). But in each case, the endings express an ambivalence on the part of the work of sectioning itself: giving each story its space of confinement provisions its characters with intelligibility to and for each other until a desire for further connection opens up the space, but because the story is premised on the space, it must end once its boundaries have been permeated. Peter Brooks might say that this is each story’s death drive, completing itself by contradicting its conditions of intelligibility; it is only that this contradiction is itself an erotic movement for connection beyond the space of confinement, so that death and connection are twinned.<sup>58</sup>

Importantly, each of the stories, from the ultimate perspective, is a fiction. Ewing’s journals are read by Frobisher, whose letters appear in Luisa’s story; but Luisa’s story, we learn, is a fiction manuscript being edited by Timothy Cavendish; and then Timothy’s story turns out to be a movie once watched by Somni-451, whose final message was indeed received by future

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<sup>57</sup> David Selisker also draws attention to these spaces of confinement: “Despite its global (though heavily circum-Pacific) traffic, the novel takes a curious interest in hermetically sealed spaces. The episodes are all structured around heterotopias, such as the ship at sea, the recluse’s mansion, the madhouse, and a lone island that has escaped a global apocalypse. That focus on the closure of communication makes these spaces seem all the more like discrete worlds within worlds, appropriate for the inverted Russian-doll structure of the novel.” Selisker, “The Cult and the World System,” 454. But whereas Selisker reads these as figurations of what he calls the space of the “cult,” I will argue in the paragraphs to follow that they are better understood, more simply, as spaces of disciplinary society.

<sup>58</sup> Brooks would call this “desire *for* the end.” Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 52.

generations as evidenced by her appearance in Zachry's story; but then, too, Zachry's son ponders whether his father's story really happened: "Most yarnin's got a bit o' true, some yarnin's got some true, an' a few yarnin's got a lot o' true" (309). The potential fictionality of each story in turn directs attention to their storytelling itself, and especially to the genres and media of story that they present: the journal for Adam, the letter for Frobisher, the novel for Luisa, the film for Timothy, the interview for Somni-451, and the oral performance for Zachry. *Cloud Atlas* thereby allegorizes a media economy, collecting into its novel form a plurality of forms. It is not surprising, too, that the novel form gets a special position within the novel; Luisa's story is the only one to be told in third person, for instance, granting the novel a sort of omniscience that the other media are denied. But this omniscience is a sort of impersonality, too, less immediately anchored to particular subjectivities and more wandering in its narrative and descriptive range. As this story monitors a wider, though still closed, social field, it escapes the confessional mode of all the others. In turn, it also provides in miniature a model of *Cloud Atlas* entire: the story of Luisa jumps around to different places and different characters, breaking off into sections to attend to events happening where Luisa is not, just as *Cloud Atlas* traverses stories in order to tell how they converge.

Because *Cloud Atlas* is invested in allegories of media, and because it stages, in the absorption of Luisa's story into Timothy's, the succession of the novel by film, it invites special comparison between itself and its film adaptation, released in 2012 under the novelistic title by the directorial team of Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski, and Lana Wachowski. The film, too, is conscious of a media economy, but it inverts some of the media investments of the novel. In the film, for instance, we are introduced to Timothy Cavendish at a typewriter. But most

importantly, the film exploits a tendency that the novel had rejected or at least disavowed. In the novel, Timothy Cavenidsh, editing the Luisa Rey manuscript, decides that “[o]ne or two things will have to go: the insinuation that Luisa Rey is this Robert Frobisher chap reincarnated, for example. Far too hippie-druggy-new age” (357). But in the film, the reincarnation theme is picked up by casting many of the characters in the separate stories with the same actor: thus Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, Hugo Weaving, and Jim Sturgess each play a separate character in each of the stories. This will to overlap is also repeated formally in the film by having each story told in parallel, cutting back and forth among them, instead of sectioning them off so that each story can run for an extended, continuous time as they do in the novel. The film does not section off the stories in the way that the novel does.

That the film departs from the invasion style of the novel can be explained in part by diverging investments in sociality and framing that the two media have demonstrated in their respective histories, which Deleuze has usefully brought out in his two volumes on *Cinema*. For Deleuze, cinema is radically changed by the Second World War, which shatters the dialectic of situation and action that had characterized early film: now, a situation that has become global has too weakened an intimacy with individual action to monitor it, and on the other hand, no individual action can now reliably register as an event on a world-historical stage, the American dream of an individual’s mastery over his situation now defeated. Cinema henceforth disperses across a multitude of situations. In America, this dispersal finds expression paradigmatically, for Deleuze, in Robert Altman’s *Nashville* (1975), which (like Altman’s later *Short Cuts* as I described it in Chapter Two) “no longer refers to a situation which is globalizing or synthetic, but rather to one which is dispersive. The characters are multiple, with weak interferences, and

become principal or revert to being secondary.”<sup>59</sup> Although Deleuze is therefore generally careful to synchronize a transformation in cinema with transformations in the social, political, and economic conditions of the postwar period, he also sometimes suggests surprisingly prewar precedents for cinematic innovation in the genre of the novel. He writes often of a “corresponding novel” for a cinematic innovation, especially those of Melville, Gide, and Proust.<sup>60</sup> He writes, too, of a “novelistic element” in cinema, usually in reference simply to a film’s story, but also more productively and technically in reference to the tendency toward polyvocality Bakhtin thought endemic to the novel and which Deleuze now sees in not only Altman but especially Godard (in whom cinema “becomes the most ‘novelesque’”).<sup>61</sup> It is then as if postwar cinema realizes in its medium—for the first time and because of specific historical transformations, especially of global sociality—what all novels had always, by definition, overseen.<sup>62</sup> But if the novel is particularly well suited for the “dispersive situation” of the global contemporary, why does it, and not cinema, ascend as the contemporary’s primary form? Or, relatedly, if transformations in the global contemporary require transformations in film, why not also in the novel, which seems somehow outside the history whose conditions it is nonetheless, at a particular moment, well equipped to curate?

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<sup>59</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 207.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 212, 72, 77, 82.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 187.

<sup>62</sup> This is a particularly surprising connection to make given the negative correlation more standardly provisioned between the rise of film and the decline of the novel; Stanley Cavell, for instance, has written of cinema’s “moving into the modernist environment inhabited for generations by the other major arts, within which each art has had to fight for its survival, to justify its own existence in its own way.” Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 60.

One point of entry for thickening Deleuze's account of "novelesque" film is by spending more time around his quick declaration that Altman's films are definitely not "a succession of short stories, since [their characters] are all caught in the same reality which disperse them," even though in the case of *Short Cuts*, this dispersion is premised precisely on a short story collection.<sup>63</sup> The filmic analog for a short story collection would be what is called an "anthology" or "omnibus" film, broken into contained chapters.<sup>64</sup> Many early anthology films were indeed based off of collections of short stories, for instance *Quarter* (1948), *Trio* (1950), and *Encore* (1951), each based on stories by W. Somerset Maugham; or *O. Henry's Full House* (1952), based on five stories by the author; or the adaptations of *Decameron Nights* (1953) and *The Canterbury Tales* (1972). Anthology films have had a consistent presence in the film industry throughout the twentieth century, but unlike Raymond Carver's short story collections and unlike invasive novels such as *Goon Squad* and *Cloud Atlas*, they have almost always relied upon a strongly articulated framing mechanism to mediate among their sections. Most frequently, anthology films interrogate a specific place—such as the hotel of *Four Rooms* (1995) or the cities of *New York Stories* (1989), *Montreal Stories* (1991), *Istanbul Tales* (2005), and *Paris, Je T'aime* (2006) and its spin-offs, *New York, I Love You* (2008), *Shanghai, I Love You* (2013), and *Rio, I Love You* (2014)—or track the progress of a mediating object across a motley cast—such as the piece of currency in *Twenty Bucks* (1993) or the instrument in *Red Violin* (1998). Anthology films, in other words, have been less interested in the international and intergenerational range of novels

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<sup>63</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> The distinction between anthology and omnibus films is sometimes made by the singularity or multiplicity of directors, respectively. See, e.g., Diffrient, *Omnibus Films*, 14–16. For my purposes, they can be considered the same formal style.

of invasion. The task of tracking networked intimacies and linked multiple narratives has instead fallen to what Alissa Quart has dubbed “hyperlink cinema” with such films as *Crash* (2004), *Traffic* (2000), *Nine Lives* (2005), Alejandro González’s Inárritu’s “Death Trilogy” comprising *Amores Perros* (2000), *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2006), and finally the film adaptation of *Cloud Atlas*.<sup>65</sup> The film and the novel have thus seen different trajectories in the twentieth century, as the novelistic and filmic versions of *Cloud Atlas* make clear: whereas the postwar conditions Deleuze identifies have mobilized filmic explorations that cycle through parallel narratives and quickly move among them, the novel of invasion has instead responded by sectioning off into distinct stories that retain their separate spaces.

James Chandler has demonstrated one continuity between the novelistic and the cinematic in seeing the tradition of classical Hollywood narration as a “technological incarnation” of an earlier sentimental tradition that was principally literary: both traditions are about the generation of affect through the fungibility of perspectives.<sup>66</sup> But in the transition from the novel of invasion to hyperlink cinema is less incarnation and more technological intervention; the technology of film distresses and manipulates the boundaries novels had fashioned to partition its social space and compartmentalize its psychological roles. The play of sympathetic imagination has then become so palimpsestic in film as to lose the social and psychic differences that had founded the distinguishing of perspectives to begin with (a point dramatized forcefully in *Cloud Atlas*, again, by having multiple characters played by a single actor). The invasive novel and the hyperlink film in turn have divergent relations to the contemporary societies they represent, for it

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<sup>65</sup> Quart, “Happy Endings: The Post-Nuclear Family According to Don Ross.”

<sup>66</sup> Chandler, “The Affection-Image and the Movement-Image,” 236.

is when filmic narratives exceed their bounds, modulating to fit into others, that they seem to speak the language of Deleuze's society of control, shifting emphasis between stories in such a way as to deteriorate the borders between them. Hyperlink films steadily erode the confined space of their stories. In contrast, the invasive novel, by invading sites of confinement—especially in wanting, however ambivalently, for its stories to have borders—seems to offer a tenuous resistance to control society through a sort of stubbornness not to adapt, not to open up its narratives. If, in the control society, we are constantly being modulated and opened up for more flexible use, then the old confining formalisms of a disciplinary society start to look like a form of resistance by putting objects and subjects into proper places and putting up defensive barriers to shut down modulatory capital's access to them. Disciplinarity, in other words, starts to look like one of the “weapons” Deleuze calls for in closing down an omniscient will to modulation, and the novel of invasion, older than hyperlink cinema's drive toward openness, tries to seal off characters in spaces that are their own.<sup>67</sup>

These resistive disciplinary residues find partial expression in *Cloud Atlas's* peculiar will to archaism. In the futuristic society of Somni-451, for instance, clones are recycled—killed in order to become food for more clones in a “perfect food cycle” (343)—on an assembly line labeled “industrialized evil” (344). But it is strange to see a 22<sup>nd</sup> century society founded upon a Fordist mode of production that was already being replaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, betraying *Cloud Atlas's* investments in older social organizations. This, too, is finally at the heart of the novel's administration of space, for each story, it turns out, is confined to a paradigmatic disciplinary institution: Adam's ship is a hospital; Frobisher is confined to a familial house, Luisa to a factory,

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<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies,” 182.

Timothy to a mental institution that doubles the space of the hospital, and Somni-451 to a prison. Zachry is in a space with fewer walls than the others, but he, too, occupies the space of the family, which again is the audience for the story he tells. In each story, *Cloud Atlas* the novel tries to situate its characters within an institutional space, which provides relief from the more frenetic play of subjectivities presented in *Cloud Atlas* the film.

It is in this sense that the project of *Cloud Atlas* repeats the formal logic of *Goon Squad*, incarnating an action of invasion: each chapter tries to overtake a certain space and confine its characters to them so as to totally administer their subjectivity, but at the same time, the locality of this project, and its ultimate inability to take over the entire world, poses problems for its project. Or, more literally, the entire novel is betrayed by the inevitable appearance of characters in other chapters, subjects of other institutions. *Cloud Atlas*'s style invades spaces but also, in order to keep the space of invasion strong enough to claim its subjects, must put up borders around them to prevent being stretched too far. This is why the logic of both this novel and *Goon Squad* is discontinuous: there is a network of discrete invasions across time and place, and therefore a jumping from one time and place to another, but no continuous narrative that sutures them in the way the film adaptation does. In order for the project of institutional guarantors of subjectivity to work, there can be no smooth transition, but instead an archipelago of different spaces and the different subjects they monitor.

#### IV. Occupy Institutionalism

In *Goon Squad* and *Cloud Atlas*, invasion style is an experiment in trying to section off public space in order to activate and intensify a latent role in a character. The gambit is to curate

a disciplined space in which a character can show up in a narrow way, more fully inhabiting a part of her. Informing such a gambit is, I argued in the previous section, a larger social condition of decreased intimacy between a public and a character, so that erecting new spaces of collective subjectivity comes to function as well as a repair of a fragmented, multi-part public sphere.<sup>68</sup> The political analog to this project would be, in the early twenty-first century, the work and activism of the Occupy movements. Like invasive novels, each Occupy movement, tethered to a particular city that filled in its name, was about turning a specific space into a space that administered a particular subjectivity. Declining the institutions of a former political generation—working outside the spaces of, for instance, Congress or the voting booth or even the town hall—and in turn declining the subjectivities afforded by them—for instance, Republican or Democratic or even conservative or liberal as political institutions had described them—the Occupy movements sought, at base, to curate spaces that would in turn curate unnamed political roles.

Bernard Harcourt has called Occupy's refusal of older institutions of politics a genuinely new form of protest he names "political disobedience," because it does not accept the legitimacy of any given political structure and instead stands entirely outside them. The point of occupying public space was not to advocate for a given political platform but to reject the available options altogether and to hold out for unspecified political alternatives. It is because the occupiers were not bonded by a common ideology that it was also important they be understood precisely in the

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<sup>68</sup> Note this is almost, but not quite, a neat inversion of the "invasion" of public concerns into the private realm as Deborah Nelson has tracked throughout the mid-century in *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. Here, public space is being invaded, but with a fragmented self that can never completely reference or cohere the entirety of the "private."

literalness of their name and the specificity of their place, which is all they did have in common in the end: “you can’t ‘occupy’ while sitting at your computer, publishing an editorial, or writing an essay on Occupy,” Harcourt writes. “You cannot ‘occupy’ at a distance from an Occupy site.”<sup>69</sup> If a feminist like Virginia Woolf earlier in the century pointed to the importance of having a room of one’s own—where walls protected a body from other bodies as a condition for intellectual and artistic freedom—then the Occupy movement was calling for a public space held not by one but by the commons. As Betty Bayer has put it in her essay on Occupy, “[t]o demand a hearing on how to dwell is a provocative act.”<sup>70</sup> But when Harcourt talks about the site-specificity of Occupy, he also brings out the other feature of an invasive novel: not just a confinement of space, but a multiplicity of confinements. There is the occupation of a space, but also a network of occupations: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Oakland, Occupy London, etc.

In the light of recent political movements, the collective action of the invasive novel might be called occupying. The novels I have surveyed are experiments in invading a particular space for a particular time, to see what can be intensified in a subject not by an institution but by the co-presence of bodies together. The action of this style is collective invasion, but without an assigned telos; it is about invasion as a means to an unnamed end. One Deleuzian commentator has called Occupy “actual revolutionary deterritorialization” opposed to theories of “actuality”

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<sup>69</sup> Harcourt, “Political Disobedience,” 55.

<sup>70</sup> Bayer, “Enchantment in an Age of Occupy,” 38. I follow Andrea Mubi Brighenti in seeing the public and the common as, though subtly distinct, hardly opposed; they are “better imagined as two points of view on social life” or as “emergent properties of social encounters and their ensuing territorializations.” In particular, Brighenti thinks that a common but primitively invisible issue is what facilitates the instantiation of the public as a regime of visibility, but it is the public’s “making visible of an issue” that also facilitates the production of a community. The common is the background condition of the public that institutionalizes it. Brighenti, “The Public and the Common,” 312, 328, 325.

that have obsessed over the conditions of revolutionary change rather than its actual unfolding; here, “concrete political agents and objects break free from existing modes of political representation by creating a prefigurative alternative composition within and alongside older ones.”<sup>71</sup> But whereas such an account of non-political representation tends to deaden itself by ending with Occupy’s engendering of new kinds of subjectivity—for instance, the “occupier”—what is more interesting about the Occupy phenomenon is its presumption that collective subjectivities cannot be fixed like identities have been. This is the point I take from Lee Edelman’s critique of Occupy’s appropriation of Melville’s *Bartleby*, who was meant to figure not merely a preference not to participate in political life, but a preference not to participate in any form of social life at all; by figuring itself as *Bartleby*, Edelman thinks Occupy has tried to tame *Bartleby*’s radical negativity through “multiple negations of the queer *as* negation,”<sup>72</sup> which is to say queer is not only a remainder excluded from incorporation into the activist body, but is in fact the symbol of non-incorporation itself, an anti-sociality that affirms only its negativity and declines to cluster a sociality of comrades around it.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> On the “ontological turn” in leftist critique, and its over-emphasis on the ideality instead of actuality of revolution, see Nail, “Deleuze, Occupy, and the Actuality of Revolution.” More broadly, Nail draws especially from Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*.

<sup>72</sup> Edelman, “Occupy Wall Street,” 112. For one example of literary criticism affirmative of a *Bartleby* account of Occupy, “reading analogically in an effort to locate similarities between a sphere of books and criticism and a world in crisis,” see Castronovo, “Occupy *Bartleby*,” 268.

<sup>73</sup> Agamben’s concepts of the “whatever” being—neither particular nor general but instead produced in the interstices between “potentiality [and] act”—and of the “coming community” populated by it—a radically negative community that “rejects all identity and every condition of belonging”—would seem to be useful for describing the kind of collectivity actualized in Occupy by means other than state regimes of incorporating identities. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 20, 87.

On this point, novels of invasion are useful as pedagogies in the relation of queerness and social action, because they model these actions without passing through the ideological filter of, say, actually *representing* an Occupy movement. To see a formal analogy between the invasive style of certain novels and the occupational habits of certain social movements, as I have suggested, is not to recommend one as the simple exemplification of the other. Rather, I suggest that novels might be a particularly prime location to understand some of the formal logic of the social movements they analogize because they present themselves as an object; their closure as objects with an internal logic, in other words, provides pedagogies in understanding the ongoing openness of the social world. This is similar to a point Fredric Jameson has made in his early recommendation of formalism for Marxism: “inasmuch as the cultural is far less complex than the economy, it may serve as a useful introduction to the real on a reduced, simplified scale.”<sup>74</sup> In my understanding, the action of invasion style is analogous to actions of Occupy movements and at the same time introduce us to their complexities. In particular, the invasions of these novels tease out and elaborate the tension between forms of emerging institutionalism and subjectivity, as Harcourt has described, and the queer remainders that form the background conditions of exclusion for new institutions, as Edelman has gestured toward. As my return to *Goon Squad* and *Cloud Atlas* will demonstrate in this section, the neo-disciplinarity of developing institutions that can saturate characters to administer particular subjectivities also requires certain entrance fees of stripping them of qualities that might distress or winnow institutional discreteness.

A general rebellion I noted internal to the style of *Goon Squad*'s organization of its first two chapters—slicing off, but then pushing out from inside—repeats throughout the others,

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<sup>74</sup> Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 10.

most often in a tendency to overshare or overforeshadow the futures of the characters narrated. The third chapter shifts us to 1980s Kenya, giving us a glimpse into the family life of another record producer, Bennie's mentor Lou, as he vacations with his two children, Charlie and Rolph, and his younger girlfriend, Mindy, on a safari. But the chapter is impatient with letting this glimpse stand on its own; again towards the end, it unloads a sort of postscript:

As they move together, Rolph feels his self-consciousness miraculously fade, as if he is grown up right there on the dance floor, becoming a boy who dances with girls like his sister. Charlie feels it, too. In fact, this particular memory is one she'll return to again and again, for the rest of her life, long after Rolph has shot himself in the head in their father's house at twenty-eight: her brother as a boy, hair slicked flat, eyes sparkling, shyly learning to dance. But the woman who remembers won't be Charlie; after Rolph dies, she'll revert to her real name—Charlene, unlatching herself forever from the girl who danced with her brother in Africa. Charlene will cut her hair short and go to law school. When she gives birth to a son she'll want to name him Rolph, but her parents will still be too shattered. So she'll call him that privately, just in her mind, and years later, she'll stand with her mother among a crowd of cheering parents beside a field, watching him play, a dreamy look on his face as he glances at the sky. (83)<sup>75</sup>

Charlie's concept of Rolph is located within a moment of his coming into heterosexuality, leaving behind a homosocial bond he has had with his father and learning to interact physically with women. Charlie, in other words, wants to seal Rolph off into a moment from his life, declining to see that moment's participation in a larger narrative that would collect other moments that could also define him. Although Charlie seems to escape definition by this moment—becoming “Charlene,” going to law school—the passage notably concludes by positioning her in mature heterosexuality, opposite a Rolph proxy. It is not a question if Charlie gives birth to a child, but “when,” suggesting that whatever contingency her change of name and

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<sup>75</sup> Earlier, we also learn the future of a warrior whom they meet on the safari: “Thirty-five years from now, in 2008, this warrior will be caught in the tribal violence between the Kikuyu and the Luo and will die in a fire” (61).

pursuit of career introduced into the repronormative narrative, she never strays from its defining forms, reproducing the signal major life events that make her future, unlike Rolph's, intelligible within the frame of this story of heterosexual awakening. At the same time that the story jumps forward for other spaces in which its characters can show up—especially the field of whatever game Charlene's son plays—it is jealous of keeping its characters the same: Rolph is killed in order to preserve the memory of this moment, and Charlie becomes Charlene only to realize the nascent heterosexuality the scene figures. Here, the space of the chapter pushes out for more spaces in order to colonize them, mediated by a heterosexuality that stabilizes the roles characters play across time.

The sort of “reproductive futurism” that picks out childrearing as the notable event in Charlie's life repeats in another chapter in which Sasha appears as a minor character, a runaway in Naples pursued by her uncle, Ted Hollander.<sup>76</sup> He eventually finds her; she steals his wallet; he tracks her down again in a minuscule apartment where she is paying rent as a custodian and treats him bitterly; and then the narration jumps ahead a generation:

On another day more than twenty years after this one, after Sasha had gone to college and settled in New York; after she'd reconnected on Facebook with her college boyfriend and married late (when [her mother] had nearly given up hope) and had two children, one of whom was slightly autistic; when she was like anyone, with a life that worried and electrified and overwhelmed her, Ted, long divorced—a grandfather—would visit Sasha at home in the California desert. He would step through a living room strewn with the flotsam of her young kids and watch the western sun blaze through a sliding glass door. And for an instant he would remember Naples: sitting with Sasha in her tiny room; the jolt of surprise and delight he'd felt when the sun finally dropped into the center of her window and was captured inside her circle of wine. (233)

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<sup>76</sup> Edelman, *No Future*.

Unlike in the jump-ahead with Charlie's becoming Charlene, maturing continuously into a normative role, this chapter stages a discontinuity, converting Sasha from a role outside a family scene to a role within one that secures her status as being "like anyone." The violence of such a phrase—where people who do not populate a living room with their biological offspring somehow fail to register as any "one"—suggests a sort of coercion of Sasha into normative motherhood: in the logic of this passage, Sasha's temporary space between families must be by definition temporary, because no one sustainably inhabits a role off the heteronormative radar. Whereas the chapter with Charlie colonized the future through continuity, here the future colonizes the chapter with Sasha in order to reclaim her for a reproductive project. But at the same time that the presumption of heterosexuality secures for Sasha a future in which her uncle Ted, too, can show up in a genealogical position, it also helps to carve off the space and time of Naples as one in which she shows up radically different. Although bordered by the family she was born into on one side and by the family she will create on the other, it is precisely because these borders exist that the space of the chapter becomes available for different purposes. The pursuit of Sasha has taken Ted away from his family, too, and he enjoys while in Naples a life that is structured by art instead of domestic obligation. Here, both Ted and Sasha can become radically different, and it is as if the eagerness to jump ahead to a time when they re-appear in proper heterosexual form speaks to the anxiety the chapter has about its space's radical capacity. Having realized its power to section off a space and time where an otherwise hidden part of a subject dominates over the others, it disavows its power, distributing its characters across other spaces freed of its monopoly.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In interviews, Egan explains the "montage" technique of jumping ahead thus: "I'd wanted for

As in *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, this contradiction is managed in *Cloud Atlas* partly by a hetero-reproductive logic that transcends, and then unites, each of the stories; or more precisely, reproduction is what facilitates the drive for connection that makes each story end. Adam Ewing's journal, we learn in footnotes (21, 501), has been collected and published by his daughter; the letters that comprise Frobisher's story are collected by his lover's niece in Luisa Rey's story; Timothy's story is transmitted to us because Somni-451 tells of it in her message to future generations of clones and humans, including Zachry; and Zachry's story, too, is postfaced by the memory of Zachry's son, who sustains the telling of the story even after his death. The crucial role of children in mediating between the stories enacts at a formal level what Frobisher hints at when he writes, in his own story, that "a half-read book is a half-finished love affair" (64), thus aligning erotic narrative with narrative itself: as each story reads its previous story, it writes its own love story to be read by the next story. The love story both makes reading possible, by producing children who can preserve it, and is the story of reading itself.

It is because a hetero-reproductive love sutures the spaces of both the novels that queer characters in *Goon Squad* and *Cloud Atlas* come to bear the burden of the novel's stylistic contradiction. Just as the chapters of *A Visit From the Goon Squad* simultaneously seek to contain its characters in spaces that can partialize their subjectivity, the stories of *Cloud Atlas* reach out for connections and legacies at the same time that they try to protect disciplinary spaces from

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quite a while to write a piece in which we keep leaping into the future and then returning to the present. I was curious about how that kind of foreknowledge would reverberate in the present-day action. ... In a sense, that technique replicates, on a miniature scale, the structural idea behind *Goon Squad* as a whole—the reader knows more about the characters than they do about themselves, or each other, which (hopefully) adds a kind of resonance and poignance—and sometimes irony—to their stories." Wambold, "A Visit From Jennifer Egan: Texas Book Festival Interview."

intrusion. In both novels, the tension manifests poignantly in the fate of its queer characters, who reside in disciplinary institutions but, by evading disciplinary identification, trouble the project of containment. In *Goon Squad*, queerness is concentrated in a character named Rob, who forms attachments to Sasha and performs a relationship with her but also desires their friend Drew. The story is the only one in *Goon Squad* rendered in second person: “If you could see Drew naked even just once, it would ease a deep, awful pressure inside you” (199). This “pressure” is, notably, non-linguistic: it is not that Rob has an idea of coming out as, say, gay or bisexual, but rather that there is something “awful” and therefore ineffable that he feels in proximity to Drew. At the end of the chapter, Rob does see Drew naked, as they jump into the East River, but as if afraid of the release of Rob’s pent-up pressure—as if afraid that this queer energy will infect the rest of the book—the novel quickly kills him off, as he gets carried away in a tide and drowns. The novel brings us to the limit case of a disciplinary subjectivity, someone we cannot immediately classify into a social, sexual, or familial role, and then must eliminate the problem it discovers there in order to be able to return, in the following stories, to the project of providing spaces for the partial intelligibility of other characters. So, too, does the one explicitly queer character in *Cloud Atlas* have to die: Frobisher, too, is difficult to place in a sexual identity, writing letters to his “love” Rufus while sleeping with his employer’s wife. He in turn will be the only protagonist of the novel’s stories who commits suicide, allowing his queerness to be re-written: in future stories, his relationship with Rufus will be euphemized as “friendship” (435), freeing Rufus to take up a position in a heterosexual genealogical matrix that propagates both of their stories. Frobisher “has to be killed” in order for the disciplinary project of the novel to

progress, and yet the novel remains attached to him;<sup>78</sup> “Cloud Atlas” is after all the title Frobisher gives to his composition, and the novel’s adoption of it for its own title raises up its enduring interest in sources of queerness that exceed or transcend the confines of its individual stories, even as it disavows such an attachment by requiring Frobisher, and only Frobisher, commit suicide.<sup>79</sup> In both *Goon Squad* and *Cloud Atlas*, the presentation and then murder of queer bodies dramatizes the invasive novel’s simultaneous investment in confinement and transcendence, or in disciplinary borders that it also wants to frustrate.

These are novels that, in distinction from the extrojective novel to which I turn in the following chapter, give ontological priority to space when it considers the dialectic of space and subject: for the novel of invasion, subjects are formed by the spaces that precede them, and show up in the only partial way in which these spaces provide them. But this narrative is always frustrated by the excess of subjectivity that a space is haunted by, an excess that is always threatening to show up uninvited. Novels of invasion suggest a technique of coping with a world that is always trying to open up this excess, to make it on offer at any time in any place, but it also shows how difficult and perhaps unsustainable this technique is to practice.

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<sup>78</sup> I am borrowing the language of describing narrative productions as authorial defenses from Rancière, “Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed.” Like Emma Bovary, Frobisher was not, within the novel, murdered; he committed suicide. But he was, like Emma, killed by an author who decided he would write a novel in which he would die, for reasons as much the effect of authorial politics as narrative cohesion.

<sup>79</sup> Somni-451 also dies in *Cloud Atlas*, and one could argue that this is a condition of her legacy as martyred revolutionary. I would also argue that Somni-451, as non-reproductive clone who is reproduced through technology instead of a love plot, is also a source of queerness in the novel, and for this reason she dies with Frobisher.

Chapter Five  
Evasion Style: Barbara Browning, Mark Danielewski, Chris Ware

I. Evasion and Anonymous Community

On May 29, 2011, LulzSec—short for Lulz Security, an offshoot of the larger hacker collective of Anonymous—announced on Twitter they had “decided to sail our Lulz Boat over to the PBS servers for further ... perusing.”<sup>1</sup> They proceeded to post personal information—mostly website logins, e-mails, and passwords—of Public Broadcasting Company employees and station staff. The act itself was typical of the goals laid out by the group’s name—they did it both “for the lulz,” or Internet-mediated amusement, and to expose security flaws in the PBS digital infrastructure—and was in line with the larger political vision that both LulzSec and Anonymous had adopted for themselves: they were attacking PBS because of its recently aired, hour-long Frontline special *WikiSecrets*, which members of LulzSec thought had reduced the important political work of WikiLeaks, a champion of government transparency, to a sensationalist account of its most visible whistleblower and contributor, Chelsea Manning (who at the time went by Bradley). The documentary had spent more than ten minutes discussing, not Manning’s dissident activities or resulting imprisonment, but her family life: how she had been teased as a boy by other classmates for appearing too feminine or how she had been, according to her interviewed father, “spoiled rotten by his mother.”<sup>2</sup> It is no wonder that LulzSec, in its allegiance

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<sup>1</sup> Poulsen, “Hacktivists Scorch PBS in Retaliation for WikiLeaks Documentary.” I am indebted here and throughout to the only substantial ethnography of Anonymous and its offshoots, by Gabriella Coleman. On the PBS episode, see esp. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, 264–67.

<sup>2</sup> Gaviria, “WikiSecrets.”

to the project of WikiLeaks and in its support of Manning, was upset with the documentary's emphasis. But its hack of PBS nonetheless seemed, at first, different from other attacks associated with Anonymous, because it targeted the media rather than, say, a government agency; the attack, framed as retaliation on behalf of Manning, seemed more personal than political-strategic.

In fact, hacktivist collectives beginning with Anonymus have tended to be obsessed with the personal, or more precisely, with managing the distribution of personality in a population. The PBS affair was neither the first time LulzSec nor other hacktivist groups associated with Anonymous had hacked a non-governmental organization. Earlier that month, LulzSec had taken as its first target the databases of the television music competition show X-Factor, in retaliation for a correspondent of Fox (which owns X-Factor) calling the rapper Common "vile"; the personal details of over 70,000 contestants were leaked. Anonymous, too, got its start not by exposing government secrets, but by trying to take down the Church of Scientology, which they saw as dangerous more for being pseudo-scientific than for being pseudo-religious.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to locate a coherent politics that could simultaneously account not only for a defense of Manning but also for taste in a certain celebrity rapper and distaste in a celebrity religion. Both Anonymous and LulzSec lack codified ideological commitments. One distant reading of 2600: *The Hacker Quarterly*, a significant hacker publication founded by Emmanuel Goldstein in 1984, has noted that "the language of liberalism is pervasive in descriptions of the hacker ethic, as

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<sup>3</sup> In their first "Call to Action," posted to YouTube in 2008, Anonymous explained: "We want you to be aware of the very real dangers of Scientology. We want you to know about the gross human rights violations committed by this cult." ChurchOfScientology, *Call to Action*.

shown by its emphasis on personal autonomy, free speech, [and] privacy.”<sup>4</sup> David Golumbia has called this “cyberlibertarianism.”<sup>5</sup> Luke Goode, in contrast, resists viewing Anonymous as either neatly cyberlibertarian or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, monstrously and rhizomatically anarchic, because both miss Anonymous’s emotional in addition to political valences.<sup>6</sup> The emotional work of Anonymous seems to be what others have in mind when they talk about its mobilization of affect, “inspir[ing] a social/radical imaginary” in such a way that the group seems to be “less about ‘hacking’ and more about raising or developing ‘critical thought’ and/or provoking political debates.”<sup>7</sup> But these attempts to stabilize a politics for hacktivist groups, or even to delay their political work by pointing to the precipitation of future “political debates,” misses what is more common to them, which is their essential work *as a collective*. What is most basic to—and also most striking about—these groups is their production of a virtual sociality defined through a common commitment to remaining unidentified, to remain impersonal at the same time that they work to over-identify and expose others.

The fundamental crime PBS had committed, in the eyes of LulzSec, was making things personal: neoliberally, it had made anonymous political activity into an individual psychological symptom. In retaliation for their dwelling too long on Manning’s personality—for reversing any condition of anonymity by elaborating an Oedipal narrative that in turn made sexuality, rather

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<sup>4</sup> Steinmetz and Gerber, “It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way,” 45.

<sup>5</sup> Golumbia, “Cyberlibertarians’ Digital Deletion of the Left.”

<sup>6</sup> Goode, “Anonymous and the Political Ethos of Hacktivism,” 74.

<sup>7</sup> Ferrada Stoeckel and Lindgren, “For the Lulz,” 247. In a related vein, Tiffany Marie Knapp has hoped to defend hacktivism as civil disobedience by reforming the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act to take account of activist motives; but I think her account of hacktivism is too essentialist, granting it a different category and form of hacking from what would not be simple civil disobedience, e.g. cyberterrorism. See Knapp, “Hacktivism - Political Dissent in the Final Frontier.”

than political commitment, the truth of a person—LulzSec had exposed the personal information of its perceived antagonists. Anonymity, it seemed to be saying, was the right of its own members; those who made things personal deserved to have their own persons put up on public offer. Regardless of its target, the management of anonymity is the logic behind almost every hacktivist action of “doxing,” or the publication of personal identifying documents (abbreviated to “dox”); these actions re-distribute anonymity, producing a group (whether LulzSec or Anonymous) defined as those who remain unidentified. Anonymous groups produce themselves through an exposure they evade. To borrow the language of systems theorist Niklas Luhmann, the “form” of an anonymous group is its monitoring of the difference between anonymous and non-anonymous, making a decision over who gets to be anonymous from within anonymity.<sup>8</sup>

The distribution of anonymity was also at play in seemingly less essential parts of the PBS attack. In addition to dumping personal information, LulzSec also posted a hoax news article on the PBS website with the headline “Tupac Still Alive in New Zealand,” another rap-affirmative gimmick whose author said was thrown together “for the lulz” in a matter of minutes

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<sup>8</sup> I briefly return to Luhmann in my discussion of *House of Leaves*, below. For now, I mean only to point to Luhmann’s account of how a system’s maintenance is always a struggle over its autonomy, with the most enduring systems being the ones that can turn this struggle into the autonomy itself. That is to say systems may operate in such a way to make the contingency of their environments the condition of their own necessity. A system does this by orienting its operations toward the production and reproduction of a fundamental structure that “codes” its environment, where a code is a way of reading the environment in such a way as to reduce it to a binary position along an axis of the system’s choosing. A legal system, for instance, reads everything through the binary code of legal/illegal; the science system sees everything as only true/false; the political system splits the environment into government/opposition; and the economic system codes payment/nonpayment. Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Volume 1*, 132–37. For a quick gloss, see also *Art as a Social System*, 185–86. For the system of anonymity, I imagine a code of anonymous/identified.

halfway through the hour-long hacking operation. The spontaneity of the article's writing suggests its content might index LulzSec instincts more immediately than the carefully planned operation itself. The article, putatively about the discovery of an artist who wishes to remain dead to the world, is also an exploitation and mockery of modes of intimacy: as Gabriella Coleman has pointed out, the "proposed source of information [that Tupac is alive]—a hand-written diary—[is] absurdly quaint by today's standards"; the diary writer's girlfriend, Penny, shares a name with the president of HBGary, who had falsely claimed to have infiltrated Anonymous earlier that year; and meanwhile, the pseudonyms of LulzSec hackers who undertook the attack are encoded in an anagram line that readers of the diary claim to have been "so far unable to comprehend."<sup>9</sup> While mocking a handwritten document of one's secrets and showing up knowledge of an antagonist's intimates, LulzSec keeps itself "incomprehensible," indeed seems to produce itself as that group of people exempt from its own practice of making others visible. The production of collectivity out of an evasion of personality echoes the slogan of Anonymous—"We are Anonymous. We are Legion"—where the move from "anonymous" to "legion," or from evasion of identification to shared multiplicity, signals the production of a collective rather than a retreat from sociality. As Anonymous put it in their "Code of Conduct" posted to YouTube ahead of their first public, real-life protest: "Anonymous is legion. Never be alone."<sup>10</sup> This is not just a rule, but what Anonymous at base is: a being-together through being-unknown.

This chapter is not about Anonymous per se—or LulzSec or AntiSec or any other hacktivist collective—but about how this general form of sociality through anonymity is essential

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<sup>9</sup> Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, 265. The anagram—for Topiary, Sabu, Jayla, and Avunit—is "yank up as vital obituary."

<sup>10</sup> ChurchOfScientology, *Code of Conduct*.

to a stylistic development in the novel that I call evasion. If the novel of invasion obsesses about novelistic and public form by returning again and again to the smaller units of the short story, which it proceeds to network, then an evasive narrative manically turns the novel itself into a smaller unit by implanting it in a larger media network of storytelling. And if invasive style incarnates a social action of invasion structurally kin to movements like Occupy—ideally filling up a discrete space as a means of administering different disciplinary roles—then evasion produces a sociality through a common bypass of surveillance, whether disciplinary or otherwise. But as in the previous chapter, my intent here is not to recommend the novel as merely exemplifying a social process inaugurated outside the novel, in the virtual spheres of Anonymous or other hacktivist collectives. Indeed, although one of the novels I focus on in this chapter, Barbara Browning’s *I’m Trying To Reach You* (2012), is explicitly interested in Internet-mediated sociality, the other, Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000), was written largely before the rise of the Internet (and Danielewski has proudly remarked he wrote his typographically complicated novel not on a computer but “entire[ly]” in pencil<sup>11</sup>). Moreover, in what follows I suggest the best theorists for thinking through the development of community through anonymity are not new media theorists, but theorists of social action like Hannah Arendt, theorists of community in the tradition of Georges Bataille, and especially queer theorists associated with the often misunderstood antisocial thesis, which I reread as intimately about the production of anonymous communities. In this chapter, I will continue to make reference to capital-A Anonymous through discussions of the evasive novel, and will allow evasion as a style to mediate between my archive of theorists on the one hand and the practices of hacktivist

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<sup>11</sup> McCaffery and Gregory, “Haunted House—An Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski,” 117.

collectives on the other, but I finally argue that it is because the novel is a form whose borders are more readily known and consciously erected that it is a useful object for study of larger social processes. As in the previous chapter, I show how the novel has felt out in advance for forms of social organization they can now be seen to analogize, and they provide important spaces for understanding the logics and difficulties of organization precisely because of their capacity for crystallization.

In this chapter, I begin with Danielewski's *House of Leaves* to identify certain key characteristics of what I am calling evasion style. In particular, I show that the novel's ejections of materials to other media are consistently explained by an attempt to anonymize its author. Evasive novels in turn imagine a social space—the space of the novel—as clustering around and forming on top off a personal absence, that is, the negativity of a foundational impersonality. This kind of sociality is played out in surprisingly complex ways in both this novel and Browning's *I'm Trying to Reach You*, to which I turn in the following section; both novels are, I demonstrate, in turn more faithful enactments of the sort of collectivity Anonymous has figured in recent years than other media that have taken Anonymous as their explicit object, because style provides a field of activity that allows a social logic to unfold in more complex ways than mere representation affords. The evasion style of *I'm Trying to Reach You*, in particular, teases out the difficulty of sustaining an anonymous collectivity; whereas the invasion novel was antagonistic to a queerness that perturbed its neo-disciplinary project of making institutions out of communities, the community envisioned by the evasion novel is instead kin to queer and ephemeral sociality, but it is precisely the ephemerality of this queerness that poses challenges to its ongoing accessibility.

## II. *House of Leaves* and the Evasion of Personality

Both Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Barbara Browning's *I'm Trying to Reach You* (2012) distribute their narratives across multiple media, even as they invest in the book-novel as the genre that collects and mediates among them. Scholars of these works have tended to emphasize the work of collection and mediation, but by calling them evasive novels, I hope to draw more emphasis to what these projects eject out of the novel form, or what the novel somehow remains incapable of digesting back into it: what evades novelistic capture. An evasive novel, which submits to a wider network of works as part of the co-construction of a narrative universe—a novel that as Jessica Pressman explains is “acutely aware of its location within the contemporary ‘discourse network’ and presents the ‘central node’ in a network of multimedia”—is thus related to but can be distinguished from the “multimodal novel” that has been accurately described by Wolfgang Hallett and Alison Gibbons.<sup>12</sup> The multimodal novel collects into one book a diversity of modes, or “semiotic resources” that are more abstract than and ontologically prior to the media in which they are incarnated.<sup>13</sup> In Gibbons's survey, the multimodal novel is

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<sup>12</sup> Pressman, “House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel,” 107. Pressman borrows the phrase “discourse network” from Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*.

<sup>13</sup> Hallett, “The Multimodality of Cultural Experience and Mental Model Constructions of Textual Worlds,” 240. The idiom of “multimodal” is borrowed in part from conceptual metaphor theory, where it usually refers to cognitive metaphors with source and target of different media. See, e.g., the collected essays in Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, *Multimodal Metaphor*. For a revision of the definition of multimodal metaphor through a study of four multimodal narratives, see Gibbons, “Multimodal Metaphors in Contemporary Experimental Literature.” Cognitive studies also undergird Wolfgang Hallett's understanding of multimodal narrative; in Hallett's “experiential” phenomenology of narratology, readers draw upon a “multimodal semiosis” in order to construct the concept of the whole world in which a fiction is set. See Hallett, “The Multimodality of Cultural Experience and Mental Model Constructions

thus anticipated by medieval illuminated transcripts, by the self-conscious materiality of *Tristram Shandy*, by Victorian illustrated books, and by the typographic experimentation of modernist writers.<sup>14</sup> For Hallett, the expansion and pervasiveness of multimodality in contemporary fiction “reinstalls the physicality and materiality of semiotic practices,” denaturalizing the primacy of verbal language in narration and interpellating readers not as decoders of language but as users of materials designed for the production of fictional space.<sup>15</sup> It is important to both Hallett and Gibbons, however, that this multiplicity of modes is collected in one book, between two covers. Both *House of Leaves* and *I’m Trying to Reach You* are multimodal when they present snapshots of other media—songs for *House of Leaves* and YouTube videos for *I’m Trying to Reach You*—within the book itself, but they more importantly eject modes out of the novel, into the songs and the YouTube videos themselves. They are better understood as multimedia projects than multimodal novels: the book-novel becomes a node in a multimedia network rather than a collection of multiple modes. This is because, most importantly, the repositories of ejected material like YouTube remain independent of the paper novel and are not fully captured by the narratives that it provides. This is the fundamental aspect I hope to draw out in the novel of evasion: the materials that evade novelistic capture, even as the novel forms around them. Novels of evasion develop around a grounding negativity.

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of Textual Worlds,” 237. See also Hallett, “The Rise of the Multimodal Novel: Generic Change and Its Narratological Implications.”

<sup>14</sup> Gibbons, “Multimodal Literature and Experimentation.”

<sup>15</sup> Hallett, “The Multimodal Novel: The Integration of Modes and Media in Novelistic Narration,” 146, 150. “Since the reader of the multimodal novel must be able to understand all of the ‘languages’ of which the narrative discourse consists, to integrate them in the construction of the storyworld, and to synthesize them into a coherent novelistic meaning, reading becomes a multi-literate act.” Hallett, “The Rise of the Multimodal Novel: Generic Change and Its Narratological Implications,” 168.

Importantly, in both *House of Leaves* and *I'm Trying to Reach You*, the novel formed on top of evasion is also an allegory for public space. Substantively and formally, *House of Leaves* is a meditation on public space and the space of the novel, and its most engaged consideration of space is in the space of the titular house itself. In *The Navidson Report*, the documentary film that provides the center of the novel, the Navidson family discovers their recently purchased Virginia house has internal measurements excessive of its external dimensions: it seems the house has more space inside than when viewed from the outside. As Will Navidson, a photojournalist, explores this phenomenon, more peculiarities show up in the house—a mysterious hallway that leads to a maze and even more space that can provision the ground for a tale now, not of domesticity, but of questing—and he installs cameras throughout the house to record any extraordinary disturbances.<sup>16</sup> The house thereby manages an ambivalent attachment to and departure from disciplinary tropes. On the one hand, the Navidsons had moved to the house in the hopes it would revive their family form, especially the marriage between Will and his wife Karen, and this combined with the historic conditions of the house (which was built in 1720) suggest a will toward inhabiting traditional institutions which can provision proper domestic roles; in turn, Will's various filmic attempts to turn his house into a sort of panopticon of vigilant and omnipresent surveillance is consistent with a disciplinary social model of self-management, and in fact makes literal what Foucault had merely described as figural (because Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon was never actually erected). But on the other hand, the house's

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<sup>16</sup> As Fuchs puts it, in *House of Leaves*, “gothic and frontier traditions merge, as not only the new Navidson home suddenly turns from secure and ‘homely’ to threatening and ‘unhomely,’ but a dark hallway emerges in the house that relocates the frontier experience into the middle of an American family home.” Fuchs, “The Black Hole at the Heart of America?,” 111.

introjection of the adventure tropes of a wider, greater outdoors, as if a whole world could exist within the house's penumbras, bloats the institutional space and disrupts its capacity to monitor the discretely domestic roles that the Navidsons had pursued: in the house's surplus spaces, Will becomes not only a family-less adventurer, but also, as filmographer, a laborer, and the house in turn facilitates not the securing of a particular role but the palimpsestic overlay of multiple roles.

At the same time that *House of Leaves* thereby allegorizes transitions in disciplinary spaces, it also reflects upon how this transition is mediated, or more precisely, it provides an allegory of media itself. This is not only in the layering of narratives that the novel collects—*The Navidson Report* is a film, commented upon by the writer Zampanò, whose notes have been collected and edited by Johnny Truant, whose manuscript has been further edited by some unnamed fourth—which, like *Cloud Atlas*, narrates how narratives are remediated in a wider discursive economy; that the book form emerges as the ultimate medium, both internal to the narrative of the novel and in the fact that *House of Leaves* itself is a paper book, suggests, as Mark Hansen has argued, how “the comparative superiority of print over technical recording informs the novel’s investment in the capacity of print to mimic and thereby subsume the operations of recording technologies like photography and film.”<sup>17</sup> But the space of the house, too, is an allegory of media. In particular, a house larger inside than outside, with an entire adventure space discoverable within its walls, invites readings of the house as a digital space:<sup>18</sup> *House of*

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<sup>17</sup> Hansen, “The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*,” 616.

<sup>18</sup> As one example of a passage that particularly invites this reading: “Unfortunately, the dichotomy between those who participate inside and those who view from the outside breaks down when considering the house, simply because no one ever sees that labyrinth in its entirety. Therefore the comprehension of its intricacies must always be derived from within” (114).

*Leaves* anticipates a situation in which, mediated by the Internet, you can explore the whole world from within your own house. In the emerging age of Web 2.0 with which the publication of *House of Leaves* is closely synchronized (the term itself was coined in 1999), digital space internal to the house also becomes space for production, allowing labor to come into the institution of the family, which is to say that Will Navidson, by doing his labor at home in filming the documentary that will bear his name, is a prototype for home-based Internet producers. This is not to deny, as Brianne Bilsky reminds us, that both the narrative and the writing of the *House of Leaves* predate the digital revolution of the early 2000s, and that the novel thereby lacks the consciousness to invest itself as an allegory for the internet.<sup>19</sup> But it is to say that *House of Leaves* models a general process of one institution becoming full of others and thereby distressed in its administration of roles, a process in which, in the succeeding decade, Web 2.0 will also participate.

If this means that no single institution can claim a given action, then *House of Leaves* begins to imagine instead how actions motor the production of new institutions, or at least new social spaces. Its project is analogous to how Anonymous has taken the condition of general institutional overlay and sought to create new spaces through their hacks. This is what McKenzie Wark has in mind when he says in *The Hacker Manifesto* that “[t]he slogan of the hacker class is not the workers of the world united, but the workings of the world united,” that is,

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<sup>19</sup> Bilsky, “(Im)possible Spaces,” 142. Bilsky argues that “the novel is not such much in dialogue with the Internet as a phenomenon of digital life as it is with the *technologies* that eventually made this phenomenon possible; that is, microelectronics and the personal computer.”

a class produced through a common process rather than through a common identity.<sup>20</sup> As Svetlana Nikitina has also elaborated, “[t]he hacking act is powered by curiosity, not commitment ... joy of the process, not an interest in social construction”: acts precede the communities that are maintained by them.<sup>21</sup> Nikitina points to how hackers cross borders in “space, rank, and age,” operating in “space beyond space,” but what hacking brings out as well is the increasing indeterminacy and even irrelevance of borders to begin with; “hackers”—a community of acts more than identifiable actors—live in a world where national and cultural borders are sufficiently blurred that the question has become not a crossing of them, but how to create altogether new spaces with their own borders.<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, after all, still invests in bordering, through its “practices of exclusive membership negotiations” or continued policing of an anonymous “us” versus a known and identified “them.”<sup>23</sup> It seeks to create bounded space through its hacking actions; it is in this sense what has been called a “Portmanteaupic space” of both panopticon and the masses, both surveillance and surveilled.<sup>24</sup>

Critics of *House of Leaves*, beginning with N. Katherine Hayles already in 2002, have emphasized the work of remediation internal to the novel. The novel’s inhalation of film in order to ascend superior to it, for instance, can be read in part as a “generational struggle”: Danielewski’s father was a filmmaker and it is as if the son is trying to “claim the right to his own

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<sup>20</sup> Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, § 006. To be sure, Wark has in mind not just hackers in the sense of anonymous computer hackers, but an entire class of those who hack with “hack” understood as the production of “new concepts, new perceptions, new sensations ... out of raw data,” thus, in addition to programmers, also authors, artists, chemists, philosophers, and others. See § 002.

<sup>21</sup> Nikitina, “Hackers as Tricksters of the Digital Age,” 149.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Dobusch and Schoeneborn, “Fluidity, Identity, and Organizationality,” 1029.

<sup>24</sup> Krauth, “Anonymous in Portmanteaupia,” 29.

voice by encapsulating the father's medium within his."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, *House of Leaves* began as a novella Danielewski called "Redwood," which absorbed his "conflicting emotions" as his father was dying of cancer in the early 1990s. Danielewski reports that his father's response to the manuscript was "unbelievable, full of rage": "[he] shredded me, going on to describe how useless art was."<sup>26</sup> Danielewski's own response was to literalize his father's figurative shredding, tearing up the manuscript "into hundreds of pieces [and flinging] them into a dumpster in the alley."<sup>27</sup> "Redwood" became, in other words, similar to how, in the frame narrative of *House of Leaves*, Johnny Truant describes the state in which he found Zampano's notes on *The Navidson Record*, a state of fragmented trash: "Endless snarls of words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all, frequently breaking apart, always branching off into other pieces I'd come across later—on old napkins, the tattered edges of an envelope, once even on the back of a postage stamp; everything and anything but empty; each fragment completely covered with the creep of yard and years of ink pronouncements; layered, crossed out, amended; handwritten, typed; legible, illegible; impenetrable, lucid; torn, stained, scotch taped; some bits crisp and clan, others faded, burnt or folded and refolded so many times the creases have obliterated whole passages of god knows what ..." (xvii). Johnny helps imagine the origin story of a manuscript out of pieces, with narrative pre-distributed across multiple paper media. In turn, Johnny rehearses the creation of *House of Leaves* as a whole, as the working through of a heap of trash that has been cut up and, in the process of being put back together, becomes more: just as "Redwood" will become the more expansive *House of Leaves*, Zampano's notes will also become

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<sup>25</sup> Hayles, "Saving the Subject," 794.

<sup>26</sup> McCaffery and Gregory, "Haunted House—An Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski," 104.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

an occasion for Johnny's story. The novel in turn imagines what Roland Barthes would call a dialectic between the "album" and the "book," terms he borrows from Mallarmé: the former a mass of fragments strung capriciously together, and the latter an architecture for synthesizing the totality of an author's psychology and world. An album is discontinuous, an "inventory of circumstances" that disperses its things without placing them in a premeditated structure.<sup>28</sup> Importantly, for Barthes, the difference between a book and an album has to do not with its fragmented contents (both Proust and Nietzsche, creators of books, wrote in fragments), but with the presence or absence of a design for arranging these fragments: a book supplies fragments with a unitary order, while an album leaves them in pluralist disorder.<sup>29</sup> Whereas Mallarmé distinguished the album from the book in order to disparage it, Barthes argues the two are more dialectically related and in the end the album is triumphant: a book is first an album, because unconnected thoughts provide the materials for a book's collection; and a book also returns to being an album because wholes are "destined to become debris."<sup>30</sup> Barthes thinks each book is bound to become re-fragmented because its parts, rather than its whole, will be memorialized and remembered across time as successive readers pick out quotations they attach to in particular.

Importantly, the first to help put back together "Redwoods," to convert it from album to book before becoming album again, was not Mark Danielewski, but his sister, Poe. Shortly after he had torn up the manuscript, Poe "presented me with a manila folder in which I discovered 'Redwoods'—intact. She had gathered up and taped together all the pieces. This rescue of what

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<sup>28</sup> Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 186.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

I had impulsively destroyed allowed me to see that I could keep writing. It was like a Greek goddess coming down to breathe fire into my lungs... .”<sup>31</sup> The peculiar doubling of some language in both Danielewski’s description of Poe’s intervention in his writing process and Johnny’s discovery of Zampano’s notes—the divine imagery, the taping of fragments—in addition to Danielewski’s positioning of Poe as a sort of muse who begins to inhabit him during the writing process itself, suggests a kind of multiple authorship of *House of Leaves*: just as the novel presents Johnny writing on Zampano writing on Navidon’s filming, Poe comes to participate in the writing project with her brother. Indeed, throughout Danielewski’s writing of the novel, Poe, a musician, worked on a parallel album ultimately released the same year as *House of Leaves*, called *Haunted*. Both have remarked on how their respective projects blended into and supported one another, and the novel incorporates lyrics from the album just as the album incorporates prose from the novel. In the liner notes released with the CD, Poe mapped out a set of correspondences between each of the album’s seventeen songs and pages in the novel. Each song collected a reference to a passages in each of the novel’s three discourses: Johnny Truant’s notes, Zampano’s writing on *The Navidson Report*, and letters Johnny’s mother sent him from the Whalestoe Institute, to which she was confined after her mental illness caused her to harm Johnny in his childhood. The references can be organized in the following table:

Song	Johnny Truant	Navidson Report	Whalestoe Letters
Exploration B	337	337	616 (6/6/86)
Haunted	337-8	73	629 (3/19/88)
Control	381	58	596 (3/15/84)
Terrible Thought	380	30	620 (5/8/87)

<sup>31</sup> McCaffery and Gregory, “Haunted House—An Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski,” 104.

Song	Johnny Truant	Navidson Report	Whalestoe Letters
Walk the Walk	180	467	613 (11/1/85)
Terrified Heart	325	101	637 (11/3/88)
Wild	78	16	559
5 1/2 Minute Hallway	517	60	624 (7/1/87)
Not a Virgin	262-3	367	634 (9/19/88)
Hey Pretty	87-9	63	640 (2/28/89)
Dear Johnny	296-300	hard cover end papers	638 (11/27/88)
Could've Gone Mad	507-507	417	604 (7/24/85)
Lemon Meringue	505	258	588 (11/7/82)
Spanish Doll	25	420-1	626 (12/26.87)
House of Leaves	503	563	627 (1/3/88)
Amazed	516 (tag. 518, 36-7, 21)	522	643 (5/5/89)
If You Were Here	518-9	528	709*

The form of the correspondence between each song and its respective passages in the novel is often straightforward and lyrically literal. For instance, the Johnny Truant passage for “Not a Virgin,” whose lyrics begin “I’m not a virgin anymore ... In fact I have been all over town,” contains “Lude’s List,” a catalog of the nineteen sexual encounters Johnny’s friend Lude has experienced in the month of November, and Johnny’s passage for “Could’ve Gone Mad” is indeed a moment of Johnny experiencing a mental breakdown. Similarly, in the *Navidson Report* passage for “Haunted,” Navidson asks his daughter Daisy what she would like to play, to which she responds, “Always.” He asks her what that means, but “[b]efore she can answer, he starts tickling her around the neck and Daisy dissolves into bursts of delight”; Zampano remarks on the passage by pointing out that *always* “slightly mispronounces” and “echoes” *hallways*, assimilating her unconventional answer to the architecture of the house with which the *Report* is obsessed while also suggesting that the hallway, too, goes on for always in its endless maze (73).

In the corresponding song, the rhyme of always and hallways recurs, leading ultimately to this stanza: “Hallways, always / I’ll always want you / I’ll always need you / I’ll always love you / And I will always miss you.” The song thereby inhabits the voice of the daughter whose speech had been “dissolved” in the novel by the father’s tickling, but at a later time when he is no longer present; the song extends the scene of the novel, providing an extra space for imagining how a rhyme can echo in the memory beyond the moment of its presentation.

Beyond the lyric echoes in the songs, however, *Haunted* does work on *House of Leaves* that might be described as structural: by providing a set of three correspondences for each song, the songs mediate among the three discourses of the novel, suggesting in turn correspondences not only between novel and album, but within the novel itself. *Haunted* does work, in other words, to organize the novel and map out possible ways of reading itself with and against itself—ways autobiographical rather than generic like the novel’s relation to haunted house stories more broadly. The lyrics for “5 ½ Minute Hallway” describe a “hallway that keeps growing,” figuring the hallways/always rhyme once more. But now this hallway collects and connects parts of the novel as well: in his passage, Johnny remembers the incident that precipitated his mother being admitted to the Whalestoe Institute (she had tried to strangle him) or rather remarks on his inability to remember: “Like a bad dream, the details of those five and a half minutes just went and left me to my future” (517); “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” is also the name given to the anomaly in the house that gives way to its inner maze (60); and in her passage, Johnny’s mother writes this of the experience of her illness: “I live at the end of some interminable corridor” (624) (the song’s lyrics echo this by beginning, “I live at the end of a five-and-a-half minute hallway”). In turn, the song facilitates a thematic transfer among the sections: the

mother's figuring of her illness as itself an always-hallway textures Johnny's own amnesia of his childhood, just as the house's anomalous hallway also comes to look like a sort of amnesia, an inner fact that its outsides have forgotten. Dialectically, Johnny's memory and his mother's illness also take on architectural significance, suggesting how psychic experience is conditioned by the spaces that bodies inhabit, with the house itself as a determining metaphor for psychology. Cumulatively, the song thus maps sections of the novel onto each other to bring out structural and metaphoric resonances, providing ways of traversing the novel and facilitating thematic coherence. But this mapping evades the novel itself; the novel has made invisible the principles organizing it.

*Haunted* could be understood as a sort of soundtrack to *House of Leaves*: not the kind of "literary soundtrack" that Austin Graham has defined as "written references to specific pieces of music that compel extra-literary responses in readers and thereby heighten, color, or otherwise comment upon the text that contains them,"<sup>32</sup> but a soundtrack in the sense of a mediator among a narratives' multiple parts, in the way that John Fawell describes the music in a film like *Rear Window*, in which the song of the composer who lives across from the film's protagonist "spreads throughout the entire film ..., weav[ing] together several stories."<sup>33</sup> In *Rear Window*, a song internal to the narrative structures the narrative, coordinating its many parts; so, too, does the music of *Haunted*, which is referenced from within the novel, do work to provide the novel with structural organization.<sup>34</sup> This perhaps explains why the music of the album does not *sound*

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<sup>32</sup> Graham, "The Literary Soundtrack," 519.

<sup>33</sup> Fawell, "The Sound of Loneliness."

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Knight and Pamela Robertson Wojcik have used Alan Rudolph's quip that "we are starting to think in soundtracks" as an occasion to read popular music's relation to film; I have

haunted, despite its name; rather than presenting rustling chains or creaking stairs or muffled screams, the songs participate more in the genre of alternative, lyric-driven rock when not, more simply, folk. “5 ½ Minute Hallway” is slow and almost plodding, with warm vocals placed on top of a guitar for most of the song, invoking an intimate confessional. That the lyrical organization of the novelistic parts is presented through such a personal mode is not surprising given the larger work of the album to absorb, as I will explain in more detail shortly, autobiographical aspects of the novel. It is like the album becomes a sort of unconscious to the novel, presenting what is most intimate to the novel at the same time that it is not made visible within it. The music album is the book’s unseen map, collecting its fragments into a whole.

This is not to say that *Haunted* stands apart from or only secondary to *House of Leaves*, as if the novel came first and the album came later to comment upon it. The album, too, gets absorbed into the novel. Sometimes this is explicit, for instance when Poe’s lyric “Don’t be scared” appears in the novel’s pages (480). Sometimes the absorption is more figural. Poe, for instance, seems to make a cameo in a passage where Navidson’s wife surveys academics and artists for interpretations of *The Navidson Record*; one of her interviewers is a poet, but the text deliberately, twice, renders her occupation as a name, with a space between the “e” and the “t”: “A Poe t. 21 years old. No tattoos. No piercings” (480). Beyond these brief references, the novel also imagines the entire project of trans-media resonance within its own narrative space when Johnny encounters a band playing songs that include the lyrics, “I live at the end of a Five and a Half Minute Hallway” (512). The band tells him they had come across a copy of Johnny’s

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been suggesting, with a different flavor, that soundtracks provide affective as well as cognitive mnemonics, and, in the case of Poe’s relation to *House of Leaves*, affective structure. See Wojcik and Knight, *Soundtrack Available*.

edition of Zampano's notes on *The Navidson Record* and had been inspired to incorporate it into their work (513). Danielewski's novel, then, imagines a novel that has become song, only to become part of a novel again. Niklas Luhmann would call this "re-entry of the form into the form."<sup>35</sup> For Luhmann, a system is a form, and all forms are a difference; in particular, a system "is the difference between system and environment,"<sup>36</sup> which is "everything else" that is not the system.<sup>37</sup> A system is therefore always reproducing itself only through its differentiation from the environment; if it were to cease making this difference, it would "cease to exist."<sup>38</sup> In turn, all systems are defined not by the components they have, but by the unending chain of procedures they autonomously necessitate: a system is not its parts, but its operations. Danielewski's novel seems to function as a system in this sense: the distinction between the novel and its environment—all non-novelistic media—re-enters into the novel itself, which operates and seals itself off by processing internal to itself the difference between itself and its environment.

But what is fascinating about the collaboration—even dual authorship—of *House of Leaves* and *Haunted* is what does not re-enter the novel from the album. Because the critical scholarship on the novel has focalized its voracious appetite for other media and its inhalation of both film and song, it has tended to obscure the work that the novel also does to eject certain

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<sup>35</sup> Luhmann, "System as Difference," 48.

<sup>36</sup> Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 181. "The environment is a system-relative situation. Every system removes itself from its environment. Therefore the environment of each system is different. And thus the unity of the environment is constituted by the system. 'The' environment is only a negative correlate of the system. It is not a unity capable of operations; it cannot perceive, have dealings with, or influence the system. Therefore, one can say that the system *totalizes* itself by referring to the environment and by leaving it undetermined. The environment is simply 'everything else.'"

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

materials from its form. *Haunted* helps make some of the novel's allergies particularly clear, because in addition to the three discourses Poe mines from *House of Leaves*, she also collects another source of discourse: tape recordings from their father that Poe discovered shortly after his death. Just as Danielewski recalls the importance of their father's death in the transition of "Redwood" into *House of Leaves*, Poe credits the eerie memory of their father for inspiring *Haunted*, and almost every song on the album either begins or ends with a sampling of his voice from the tapes she discovered. But although both the author and the musician take their father's death as a point of origin for their respective projects, only *Haunted* incorporates real materials into its art; Danielewski may metaphorically "encapsulate" his father's filmic medium in his novel, but Poe encapsulates documentary artifacts of his actual voice. The voice, in turn, provides grounding for the work of mediation that the album does in coordinating the parts of *House of Leaves*. The song "Lemon Meringue," for instance, begins with the father's voice saying, "I call this song 'Lemon Meringue,'" transparently allowing him to title the song and provide its recurring lyrics. In the citations that the notes to the song collect from *House of Leaves*, we learn that for each of the protagonists—Johnny, Will, and Johnny's mother—lemon meringue pie also symbolizes conventional familial happiness; as Johnny's mother writes to her son after he has transferred to a new foster home, "I knew you'd find a home. Are you happy now? Do they serve you hot chocolate and large slices of lemon meringue pie? Does your new mother tuck you in at night and read you stories full of opal and jade?" (588). But whereas Poe reveals that the source of this symbol is her father, Danielewski seems disinclined to avow how personal this symbol is for him, or how the symbolic work performed by lemon meringue pie

belongs not to a certain genre of cultural idiom (in the way that, for instance, apple pie might) but to his own and particular familial idiom.

For all of the work *House of Leaves* does to ingest other idioms and media, it therefore also ejects certain sources of personal idioms into other media. The music album, and not the novel, is where correspondences between sections are mapped out, on top of the extra and personal discursive source that undergirds them. In contrast, the novel is evasive: its style is an action of evasion that deletes authorial personality from appearing. In a novel as sprawling and multi-discursive as *House of Leaves*, it is surprising that no actual personal letters show up as materials, as if materials from the real world have to be kept outside the novel in order for its project to work. Danielewski's anxiety about re-asserting the status of the novel is accomplished not only through his encapsulation of his father's media, but also through his disavowal of his father's sonic traces, projecting documentary realism and his own personal history out of the novel. In this way, the novel as a form becomes protected, for Danielewski, by impersonalizing personal experience, converting it into allegory and fiction. The process of impersonalization is also how, finally, Danielewski can imagine novelistic space as public space: stripped of too personal of reference in order for its characters to accommodate multiple identifications that locate no person in particular.

A similar dynamic is at play even in evasive novels that eject their identifying materials onto media other than the sonic or televisual, for instance in Chris Ware's 2012 graphic project *Building Stories*. Containing fourteen graphic items delivered in a box reminiscent of a board game, *Building Stories* belongs to a tradition of experimental books Torsa Ghosal has called the "book-in-a-box," which she sees paradigmatically figured in B. S. Johnson's 1969 *The*

*Unfortunates*, a narrative strewn across twenty-seven physically separate objects packaged into a box.<sup>39</sup> But while previous books in boxes collected items of the same size and left it to readers to put together a novel, what is interesting about *Building Stories* is its variations on item size, so that some items look like books themselves while others look like pamphlets caught in their media orbit. In other words, this is not only a book in a box, but a box as a container of a narrative project that already includes discrete books that invite novelistic appraisals. It is possible, as the title of the project invites us to attempt, to build a story out of these items, so that each one is embedded in a larger narrative: the book and the non-book items participate together in narrative cohesion. But as the plural of the title also suggests, there is also a tension between the items, so that items pull away from each other into their own singular specialization. In this light, one might consider the distribution of narrative across items, or the patterning of experience and subjective engagement that each media form is called upon to afford, which I have summarized in the following table. I order the items in order of their stacking in the box, from top to bottom; this is the order in which you would read the items if you took them out one by one for the first time, and the order also roughly ascends from smallest to largest in size.

**Table 4. Items Included in *Building Stories***

#	Physical Description	Narrative Description
1	Booklet (52 narrow pages)	Wordless life of the protagonist raising her daughter at home
2	Pamphlet (8 fold-out sections)	The depressive thoughts of the protagonist, pre-child, walking the winter street
3	Pamphlet (8 fold-out sections)	Conversations about social pressures between the protagonist and her school-age daughter
4	Booklet (26 pages)	The domestic life and sexual anxieties of god-fearing Branford the Bee

<sup>39</sup> Ghosal, “Books with Bodies,” 79.

<b>#</b>	<b>Physical Description</b>	<b>Narrative Description</b>
5	Book (~A4, 32 pages)	A day in the life of the building's tenants, prefaced by the thoughts of the building itself
6	Magazine (16 pages)	The emotionally volatile relationship of a childless heterosexual couple
7	Magazine (16 pages)	The life of the now elderly landlady of the building
8	Magazine (20 pages)	The domestic life and sexual anxieties of the protagonist
9	Book (~A3, 52 pages)	The life of the protagonist interspersed with the musings of the building itself
10	Newspaper (tabloid, 2-sheet foldout)	More adventures of "Branford the Best Bee in the World"
11	Newspaper (tabloid, 1-sheet foldout)	College memories and continued sexual anxieties of the protagonist
12	Folded board (8 sections)	Blueprints to the building with characters mapped onto rooms
13	Newspaper (broadsheet, 20 pages)	Life experiences of the protagonist beyond childhood
14	Newspaper (broadsheet, 1-sheet foldout)	The future life of the protagonist

As the brief narrative descriptions begin to indicate, the fragments primarily feature an unnamed woman protagonist in Chicago who (chronologically) first experiences depression in the pervasiveness of her loneliness within the building, until she meets an architect, marries and has a child with him, and ultimately moves to a house in the western Oak Park. Different pieces take up different times in her life; other pieces take up the lives of others who also live in the original building, all of them lonely, both within marriages and without them. What mediates among the many lives is the building itself, which collects its characters and puts them into enough proximity that they must interact; the building supervises a loose sociality for which it also provides a location. But it is only within the book-objects of the project—within the two bound hardcovers (#5 and #9)—that the building itself becomes a character, with its own

thoughts, memories, and musings. In the books, a more panoptic view is given of the characters, in the sense of a general survey; but it is in the books that, because generalized and subject to the impersonality of the building itself, their interiority is also less on offer. We have to go outside the books to get the full stories of their lives, the motivations of their feelings, and the failed fantasies that are lodged within their behaviors. A little more than halfway through the first, smaller book, our protagonist is using the bathroom of her landlady while her own is in need of repairs and muses, “I stood for a second or two in this bathroom that was, for all intents and purposes, identical to mine, and wondered exactly what it was that made lives turn out the way they do.” Here, the building is cast as an undifferentiated background whose replicable spaces do not afford the specificity of human life. To get into how “lives turn out,” the project requires us to leave the building and in turn the book-items that have come to figure it.

At the end of the second, larger book, the building reflects (fig., next page), “Who *hasn't* tried, when passing by a building or a home at night, to peer past half-closed shades and blinds hoping to catch a glimpse into the private lives of its inhabitants?” The book provides us a full page view of the building, flaunting maximum access to the building itself, yet the curtains are drawn; it is dark; we cannot catch sight of inhabitants’ “private lives.” So, too, do the books withdraw access to inhabitants; we get “glimpses” but not deep histories. The building is the main social space of the novel: it is where all the characters come into contact with one another. The book, too, is the genre of item in which we get the maximum population of characters in close proximity, without splintering off into separate life trajectories. The book, like the building, holds its characters in contingent, ephemeral sociality through the mere co-presence of bodies, rather than, say, ideological commitments or biological affiliation. But this sociality is

also founded upon a withdrawal of the autobiographical. The distribution of access to personal backstories across the fourteen pieces of *Building Stories* thereby figures the formation of a sociality on top of an ejection of the more particular: individuals and their personal histories evade the social form of the book, and it is this evasion that also grounds contact among bodies.

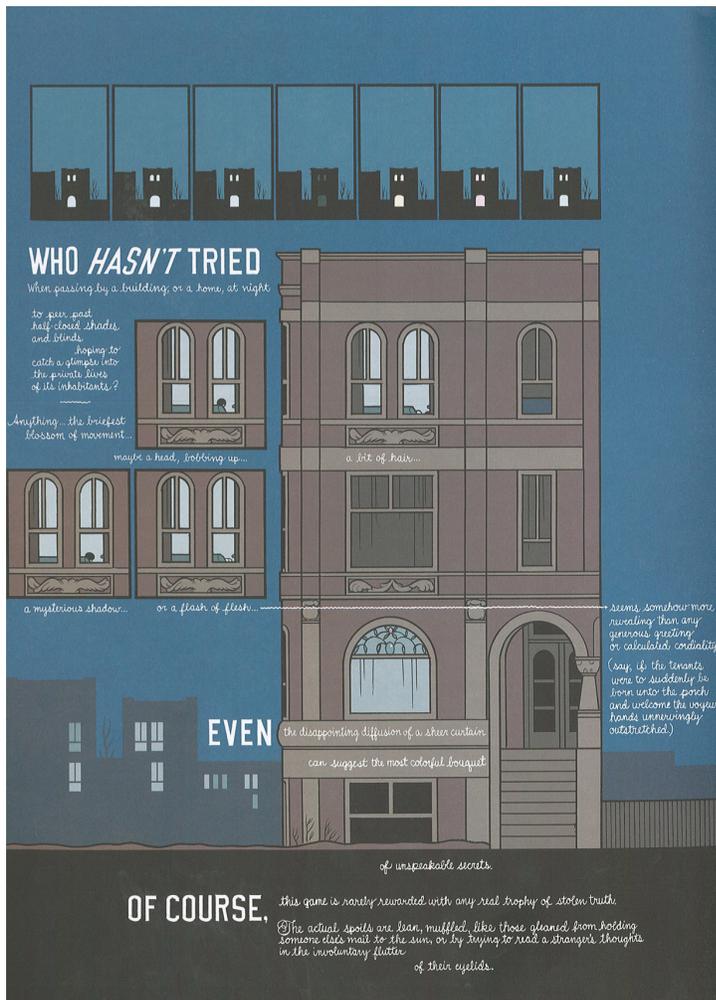


Fig. 5. Peering into the building of *Building Stories*.

Although it is not authorial presentness per se that Ware ejects from the book-items in his multi-form project, the evasion of personality recalls Danielewski's own ejection of personality in *House of Leaves*, his evasion of the novel he writes around his absence. Both

projects are also formally similar in process to what Marco Deseriis has in mind when he calls Anonymous an “improper name,” a name that “cannot be disambiguated and assigned a discrete referent and that therefore affords multiple “authorizing contexts” allowing Anonymous to refer simultaneously and divergently to a “swarm, collective, vigilante group, hive mind, movement, and network.”<sup>40</sup> Anonymous is a flexible nomination of grouping different practices and discourses. So, too, does Danielewski imagine a house that could refer to anyone, instead of his own family, and so does Ware present a building that is social rather than personal.

This is one of the things the critically acclaimed and otherwise enjoyable television series *Mr. Robot* perverts in its own depiction of a quasi-Anonymous collective of leftist hackers whose public symbol is a mask. Contrasting evasion style with *Mr. Robot* is illustrative because the show is perhaps the most ambitious attempt to date of representing, in fictional form, collectives modeled on Anonymous; it therefore brings into the focus the benefits of approaching anonymous collectivity through a non-representative approach, as in the stylistics I have been advocating here. In the show, a group of hackers hopes to liquidate all financial data, thus freeing the masses from debt and effectively redistributing wealth by eliminating any record of it. But *Mr. Robot*'s depiction of the hackers is surprisingly archaic, and not just because of the show's neo-Leninist fantasy that a techno-elite vanguard can induce global democratic revolt (whereas, historically, the hackers of Anonymous grew out of the mass protests of Occupy rather than the other way around). It is archaic more importantly because of its insistence that the small community of hackers be bonded in ways other than their acts: in the first season of *Mr.*

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<sup>40</sup> Deseriis, “Is Anonymous a New Form of Luddism?,” 44. See also Deseriis, *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous*.

*Robot*, in which the hack is actually being engineered, hackers committed to the project are not allowed to share personal information with each other and are only allowed to work on the project while in a physically located safe house (“the real world is our encryption,” it is explained, because you can work only here, and not in the real world beyond). Even more, it turns out that the two leading forces of the group are brother and sister, a fact forgotten by him (the title character) in the middle of a psychotic split but remembered about the time their hack goes online, so that anonymous activity starts to look like a means toward the production of a nuclear family. Indeed, almost all of the major characters of the show seem to be motivated on behalf of their parents, either because their parents were killed or humiliated, and in both cases the children seek revenge. Instead of a globally dispersed sociality of unidentified actors, the first season of *Mr. Robot* oversees a closed, Dickensian network of characters in which its central protagonists—the two engineers of the hack who reliably survive into the second season—are ultimately related. It is part of the show’s wider optimism about the continued availability of older forms of intimacy, manifested at other times when a collaboration between two hacker collectives is secured through a secret but still face-to-face meeting, demonstrating the show’s fantasy of real-world fixes to the difficulty of virtual anonymity; or when important characters meet each other on the subway, demonstrating a fantasy of functional public space for the mediation of strangeness. Although officially trying to depict an emerging form of sociality and its interventions in democratic life, *Mr. Robot* ultimately resuscitates the institution of the family and the space of the city as structuring forms, whereas the developing history of Anonymous suggests, instead, the necessity of theorizing community that takes institutional anarchism and personal opacity as conditions, rather than obstacles. Instead of a sliver of sociality opposed to

the “real world” and capable of being remedied by acts in it, Anonymous is a real part of the real world itself, and may even find the kind of in-person fixes advocated by *Mr. Robot*’s imaginary antagonistic rather than supportive of its project. As one of Gabriella Coleman’s informants explains in her ethnography of Anonymous, when certain individual hackers stopped subsuming their identities into the virtual collective of anonymity beginning in 2008, sometimes meeting in person with each other, “status-seeking behaviors reasserted themselves” and “individuals jockeyed and jostled for power,” sacrificing the earlier Anonymous ideal of “self-effacement.”<sup>41</sup>

*Mr. Robot* is not alone in its taming of Anonymous through structuring it according to older archetypal forms. Scholarly attention, too, has tried to understand Anonymous by way of previous models, most notably calling the hacker a modern-day trickster figure whose “special craft is boundary crossing”;<sup>42</sup> or calling Anonymous a modern-day form of Luddism because of its sabotage of “machines that restrict access to information and information technology.”<sup>43</sup> Both pick up on features of Anonymous but seem inadequate to the task of figuring it. If 19<sup>th</sup> century Luddism imagined itself to be protecting labor from its technological replacement, then it not only cannot quite describe how computer science combines technology and labor, it also misses how, to the extent Anonymous has a politics, it is one that aims for freedom *from* work rather than to it. And in addition to worrying about the appropriation of the trickster figure from specific, historically and geographically situated cultures to describe an actor who belongs to no culture or, worse, by coding as universal codes as white by extension, we might more fundamentally worry about the emphasis a trickster, as character, puts on the hacker, as

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<sup>41</sup> Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Nikitina, “Hackers as Tricksters of the Digital Age,” 139.

<sup>43</sup> Deseriis, “Is Anonymous a New Form of Luddism?,” 33.

individual, when the point of Anonymous is its production of impersonal sociality. In contrast to a show like *Mr. Robot*, which tries to inhale an emerging form of sociality into its content but can only digest it by assimilating the form to an older one, the style of a novel like *House of Leaves* does justice to the form by analogizing rather than representing it. Once again, style provides a fuller and more complicated picture of Anonymous than do representations of Anonymous within fictional media. Within the style of evasion is an action that is formally identical to the kinds of evasion named by anonymity; and the network of relations that forms around this evasion is formally identical to the kinds of collectivity named by Anonymous.

In *House of Leaves*, processes of sociality through evasion also inform the ejection and distribution of the letters Johnny's mother, Pelafina, has sent him from the Whalestoe Institute, 55 of which are collected in chronological order in "Appendix B" to *House of Leaves*. The letters track her progressive mental deterioration culminating in suicide and synched with typographic disturbances. A summary of these letters can be found in a table in my own appendix to this dissertation, tracking when text becomes slanted, perpendicular to itself, inverted upside-down, variable in size, overlay upon itself, or sectioned off into discrete shapes like concrete poetry. But, curiously, a further 11 letters, shaded gray in that table, do not show up in the novel's Appendix and were published instead as part of a complete, separate edition several months after the publication of *House of Leaves*. These 11 letters in *The Whalestoe Letters*, ejected from the novel proper, are, like the tapes of Danielewski's father that appear in Poe's album, suggestive of certain anxieties to monitor the material of the novel itself. Letters #21 and #53, for instance, more radically assimilate Pelafina to the Navidson plot by making explicit the transfer of architectural idioms to characterize her emotional state. In the first, she writes, "Woe upon woe.

Not enough room for I all and yet there is room. It makes rooms. Rooms upon room upon hundreds of rooms full of indistinguishable remains” (19). In the second, she asks Johnny to give her a description of “That Place, this place that I die in”: “How many chambers? How great the space of its hollows? How seldom the windows?” (55). Like the work of coordination that occurs in *Haunted* but remains only implicit in *House of Leaves*, these letters make too explicit the thematic transfer between the narratives and are ejected from the novel proper.

Perhaps more interesting than the 11 letters that are ejected from the novel, however, is the ejection of the narrative of their collection. *The Whalestoe Letters* comes with a foreword explaining how they were found by an “Information Specialist” employed at the Institute named Walden D. Wyrtha. In the foreword, Wyrtha explains that Pelafina befriended him when she “confessed how I had impressed her with my ‘outstanding patience’ in the face of Tourette victims who relied upon me to facilitate the discharging of their Caucasian guilt” (xii); later, they will discuss (or rather, she will tell him about) what she calls “the utter disgrace of race relations in this country” (xiv). Such explicit discussion of race never appears in *House of Leaves*, nor even do explicit mentions of character’s races. Almost laughably, six of the seven pointers associated with the header “race” in the novel’s self-supplied index refer to an action as children race during play or adults race from danger (32, 43, 246, 345, 350, 494); the remaining pointer is to a generic digression on “the human race” (378). That the ejected letters provide an occasion to introduce this theme suggests, too, the ejection of racial thematics from the novel itself, which, without the materials and speech of raced characters, codes as white. *House of Leaves* then gives striking figuration to an architectural metaphor Hortense Spillers has used to describe the distribution of humanity in the biopolitical spaces of American history when she locates the flesh of the slave in

the space of “cultural vestibularity”: the space of passage adjoined to the outside of an official culture monitored by a governmental apparatus.<sup>44</sup> It is in this space seemingly outside culture that Black flesh can be manipulated and tortured, but as the vestibule or entranceway into the house of culture (what Spillers calls a “pre-view” of the subjugation lived in the official cultures of North America), it is not so much even outside as it is the necessary procedure of barred and marked bodies that goes into culture and gives to culture the sense of enclosure it relishes as homeliness. It is this disavowal of a racially other humanity as a passage into a white humanity’s intelligibility that is figured as well in *House of Leaves*’s own white imaginary, its ejection of the racially other from the cultural space it encloses as domesticity.

Both *The Whalstoe Letters* and Poe’s *Haunted* highlight a tendency, actually an ambition of *House of Leaves*, to steadily eject perceived threats to universality from the novel as if feeling out for a new universal space in which anyone can be submitted. The *Letters* and the music album come to lodge the racial and autobiographical particularity that evades the novel proper, supporting the fantasy of a novelistic space that is radically impersonal, a public that belongs to no one in particular (but in fact belongs to whites). Whereas the D. A. Miller of *The Novel and the Police* was concerned with how nineteenth century novels subjected everyone to an impersonal public, in the novel of evasion, impersonality becomes the ground of a public. What Bakhtin saw as the novel’s propensity for absorption—devouring and digesting all other genres before it and all social idioms with which it comes into contact—Miller saw as the novel’s will to publicity: it keeps a public file on all types of people and all kinds of psychological condition and

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<sup>44</sup> Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67. For a similar biopolitical interpretation of Spillers—by way of translating her “vestibule” into Agamben’s “exterminatory camps”—see Pugliese, *State Violence and the Execution of Law*, 45.

sociological action.<sup>45</sup> For Miller, the publicity function of novels, and their investment in making everything of public worth, means that the paradigmatic form of the novel is the detective plot, which renders every detail potentially meaningful because anything could be a clue.<sup>46</sup> Because every novel renders meaningful what could have been trivial, every novel is essentially a detective. It thus would have been no surprise to Miller that the novels of evasion I discuss in this chapter essentially participate in the genre of mystery and detective fiction, with *House of Leaves* about the hidden and metaphysically impossible passageways of a haunted house and *I'm Trying to Reach You* about a conspiracy to kill off senior dancers so that a young dancer on YouTube can embrace the life of her craft. But these are also intentionally failed detective plots, with certain clues always evading detection and therefore certain actions failing to attach to the identifiable “types” of people Miller thought novels produced through discipline and held under surveillance.

Of course, Miller, too, thought all detective novels must fail, or are formed around the realization that every detective must eventually come to grips with places beyond her access, with secrets she cannot expose. But the evasive novel's exploitation of this fact, instead of merely compensating for it, again differentiates it from the paradigmatically disciplinary novels Miller surveyed. For Miller, a novel's strategy for confronting the impossibility of its will to total spatial mastery is to substitute a temporal project for the lack: instead of exhausting a synchronic world, the novel elaborates a diachronic project in which its narrative can collect the parts of the world it

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<sup>45</sup> Miller, *The Novel and The Police*, 21. For Miller's elaboration of how his view of panopticism coincides with Bakhtin's view of monologism, so that a multiplicity of voices is disciplined by the master voice of the narrator, see 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

holds into a causational scheme.<sup>47</sup> In the novel of invasion, an inability to present the entire world was substituted for returning again and again to scenes of origin, mini-narrative abundance compensating for world wholeness. In the novel of evasion, on the other hand, the very logic of causation is reversed, and it is not about eliminating a receding cause that is historically beyond the horizons of the novel's diegesis, but about imagining everything in the novel as itself a cause whose effects, its very world, are postponed and unknown. An invasive novel imagines causation between the community spaces it administers and the subjective parts that the spaces administer in turn, whereas the evasive novel nowhere presumes known spaces exist.

Both the invasive and evasive novel are about the relation of public space and action in a post-disciplinary society. The invasive novel enacted a transition from *institutional* public space, which had programmed subjective roles according to a function performed in a certain place at a certain time, to *community* public space, which heighten subjective belonging to a particular habitus. In both cases, a subject is split into so many parts, with each part overseen by a particular space that picks out from a subject certain ways of acting and doing. Community spaces repurpose institutional spaces without overhauling the institutional logic of a spatial administration of subjectivity. But in the evasive novel, the very logic of a spatial priority over actions is, if not eliminated, at least reversed. The world of the evasive novel is one in which spaces have become so overlapped and muddled that they lack the intimacy with specific subjective parts to induce or claim them. The palimpsestic public spaces looked at here cannot be disaggregated and rehabilitated in the way the novel of invasion attempted. But the evasive novel sees this as much as an opportunity as it does a crisis, because if action belongs to no space

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 26–27.

in particular, then it might be seen to be creating a new space that has not been named and that is in the process of emerging. The question of the evasive novel is not how can archaic institutional spaces be conjugated into public spaces to which actions can still be assigned, but what kinds of space are actions bringing into being for the first time, precisely because there is no nameable public space to which they could be assigned.

If the novel of invasion secured a link between subjects and spaces by fragmenting subjects into so many community memberships (instead of so many functional roles), the evasive novel's utopian orientation to a space not-yet is facilitated by expunging the subject altogether. That is, instead of cutting up subjects into so many parts that can be, obsessively, returned to again and again, the novel of evasion, manically, postpones the question of the subject altogether. Actions, rather than referencing a particular part of a subject, are desubjectified, impersonal instead of part of a person, or more precisely, extra-personal instead of intra-personal; and in turn, particularity, which was a resource for the invasive novel, is instead ejected. Although novels of evasion are often understood as giant absorption machines, coordinating a vast, multimedia economy, my reading of *House of Leaves* and *Building Stories* has argued that the multiple media that cluster around the novel of evasion are instead the result of trying to get certain things, and especially authorial personality, out of the novel, banishing its content to other places. The evasion style in this novel continues in another, to which I turn in the following section: Browning's *I'm Trying to Reach You*. But as the aspirational hedging of the title suggests—"trying" without guarantee of success—this later novel is more ambivalent about the project of sociality through evasion, and in turn reflects on the possibilities of sustaining an

anonymous collective. It meditates upon the project of personal banishment in order to expose the deep insecurities of its project.

### III. Impersonal Community through the Evasions of *I'm Trying to Reach You*

Like *House of Leaves*, Barbara Browning's *I'm Trying To Reach You* begins in metafiction:

I was in Zagreb the day that Michael Jackson died.

When I heard the news, the first thing I thought was, "That's it. That's the first line of my novel. 'I was in Zagreb the day that Michael Jackson died.'" It seemed exactly right—odd, bizarre even, incongruous, an appallingly sad event viewed from an eerie state of helpless remove. It encapsulated all the feelings I'd been wanting to get off my chest, without having any actual story to attach them to.<sup>48</sup>

An event of major importance to the novel's protagonist, Gray Adams, passes through a filter that sifts out materials for what is useful for a prospective novel: an event is about the production of lines, and the novel is the ultimate end of events in his world. But Gray also puts the novelistic digestion of world events in a position of "helpless remove," suggesting that omniscience comes at the price of lost agency and that viewing the world substitutes for an ability to act in it. Such a loss of agency is thematized within *I'm Trying to Reach You* by Gray himself, who continually finds himself struggling to act. By beginning with a merger of fictional memoir and the fiction that contains it, so that its first line also becomes the first line of some other novel, *I'm Trying to Reach You* might have gone on to be a self-involved story about its own writing, but it is more so about Gray's failure to write an academic book than it is about his success in writing a novel. A dance scholar on a one-year post-doctoral fellowship at New York University, he is supposed to be revising his dissertation into a book—and it is this book that we

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<sup>48</sup> Browning, *I'm Trying to Reach You*, 5. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

learn is to be titled *I'm Trying to Reach You* (11)—and because the obligations for the fellowship are relatively few (he has no teaching to do and is expected only to give one public lecture a semester), there should be ample time for the task. But the lack of structure to his days also seems to impinge on his ability to work, and it is not just work that he struggles to accomplish. A former dancer, he finds his exercise routines becoming less frequent, and so he joins the NYU gym. The gym is supposed to administer motivation by giving exercise a proper place and so giving him, when he goes there, the role of being a subject of fitness; when he is away from the gym—for instance on a brief trip down to Woodstock—the exercise stops. Other tasks and roles he would like to accomplish or inhabit cannot be given a place so easily. He does not have an office, of course, and so no regular place to designate for writing. Nor does he have a ready place to perform romantic domesticity: his boyfriend is in Sweden, and they communicate mostly through text message.

In the opening pages of *I'm Trying To Reach You*, Gray thus finds himself in a state of disciplinary disarray, without places to provision the roles he would like to inhabit, from writer to lover, just like the Navidsons found themselves in a *House* that overlapped labor, adventure, and family. This is what is finally captured by the phrase “helpless remove”: to be removed is to be in no particular location at all, but one defined negatively as away from the action, and indeed, “remove” itself is a verb that has been deadened into a noun with no action of its own. Gray’s disciplinary disarray is literalized as well in his professional discipline, performance studies, which he thinks “claims virtually everything as its object of study” and “tends to embrace its own failure” (6): spread so broadly, his discipline fails to designate standard methods, objects, or theories. The opening up of a discipline—or the emergence of a discipline born open—does not

have to be a problem, but it seems to be for someone like Gray, whose disciplinary tendencies render him seemingly archaic; his dissertation adopted a theoretical framework his advisor thought was “really pretty passé” (45). Gray seems to be struggling to keep up with his world, or at least to act within it in ways that could be recognizable and commensurate. He is, as he says himself, a person with feelings but without a story, someone who has a set of interior experiences that cannot find expression in actions or events and who can only, fleetingly, find in other events a glimpse of himself. Gray’s search for a story is also a search for a world in which he could show up as a character, someone who acts in ways that are meaningful and intelligible and impactful to others.

This is not to say that Gray is without agency in the world, but to say that he is constantly mistaking his agency or distributing it across a wide field, so that he sees himself in, for instance, the impersonal convergence of Michael Jackson’s death and the capital of Croatia. Gray identifies with impersonality to such an extent that the most impersonal of actions start to look to him like his own. Somehow, his luggage ends up on the wrong carousel at the airport in Zagreb: “It looked like a forlorn dog waiting for its owner. I have no idea how it got on that other carousel. I felt vaguely responsible even though it obviously wasn’t my fault” (6). The luggage is an object out of place, and Gray, in his “helpless remove” and feeling of placelessness himself, comes close to feeling he put it there. His feelings, looking for a story, find an option in the action of someone else, whoever it was who put the luggage out of place.

The space to which Gray usually retreats from this world of disordered places is the Internet, and more specifically: “I went to YouTube. This was, increasingly, my first resort in dealing with questions from the practical to the unfathomable. Of course the platform when it

first emerged was a terrific boon to those of us who research live performance, but as you know if you've spent any time on the site, which surely you have, there's all kinds of other useful information people share there" (9). Gray tries to defend his frequent visits to YouTube by first grounding them in disciplinary possibility—an aid to research—which carries over in his insistence on the utility of its "information." Absent from such an account, or disavowed, is the possibility of other uses, for instance entertainment. Most importantly, on the day Michael Jackson died, Gray goes to YouTube because no one in Zagreb "seemed to be registering the cataclysmic event" (9), suggesting he is in search of a community of people with whom he can commiserate. "Sometimes," Gray writes, "I'd find myself getting absorbed in the weird comments viewers would post on other people's videos" (9). In looking to the videos and their comments, Gray is looking for an alternative public than the one he could physically access at the time, for now a public of Michael Jackson fans, but at other times fans of other particular dancers as well. But this is a public space mediated by private acts; most of the videos on offer are of people moonwalking in their apartments or homes, and this in turn provides materials for people to comment on. Usually, Gray would be looking at the videos in his own home, offering a private consumption of publicity. Today, however, he uses the computer in the Zagreb hotel lobby, and it is perhaps the unusualness, for him, of consuming publicity in public that causes him to feel "a little self-conscious" when he notices someone is looking over his shoulder with an "evident disregard for my personal space" (13). As much as Gray wants community, he also wants enough distance from the public he accesses to have "personal space," a bit of buffer put up around him.

On the day of Michael Jackson's death, one particular YouTube video he stumbles upon lingers with him:

A woman in a black leotard, her dark hair pulled back, was dancing a subdued dance in an interior space — her living room? ... Her eyes were turned down throughout her little choreography, which was also quite peculiar—not balletic, exactly, though oddly proper ... Her gestures became more and more idiosyncratic, as though she were trying to communicate some information. .... It seemed to have some sort of secret code—the big mystery, of course, being what the hell it had to do with Michael Jackson.

Some of the references were pretty clear: the mudra-like hand gestures (“okay”), which morphed into antlers, and then something like a map of her ovaries; a little Charlie Chaplin walk, ending with a swat at her ankles; a delicate circling of her index finger over her head, as though it were a phonograph needle sounding the clunky little score. And then I saw it: looking down at her feet, she swiveled to the side, and discreetly moonwalked backwards across the floor. (11-12)

Like the novel's opening mash-up of genres—memoir, novel, dissertation—the dance Gray views combines elements from diverging and disparate traditions. What anchors them, however, is the reference to Jackson, and moonwalking comes to collect them all together. In the subsequent days, Gray begins to obsess over the video and its apparent “secret code.” Attending his panel at the conference that brought him to Zagreb, “I was replaying that weird video in my head. I don't think [my co-panelist] noticed. I was careful to maintain the appearance of rapt concentration” (19). The video splits Gray's public performance of himself, so that his actions do not line up with his thoughts and feelings, or more precisely, so that the physical space his body inhabits is not the digital space his mind accesses. It is this latter space that designates a public he would like to be in. He starts to consider the others with whom he might be in a community of viewers. “The [woman's] video was up to forty-three hits. Who was watching it?” (31). He becomes familiar with the two main commentators on the video, who also comment on

subsequent videos the woman posts, always of her dancing in her apartment, always eerily removed. But as much as Gray gets absorbed into this digital world, and as much as he goes there on this day as a substitute for the physical world he is in, he is not a commentator himself; he does not even have a YouTube account. He is a consumer of media, which provides for him a sense of belonging with others, even as he does not interact with them.

In essence, Gray is anonymous to the world he is accessing, just as the dancers, too, remain essentially unidentified except for their screennames. The question then becomes how belonging is mediated without recourse to identification or other technologies of organization. This is related to a question organizational theorists have asked about how Anonymous coheres as a collective at all, independent of political content, or how what has been called the “networked resistance” of Anonymous projects also starts to look and feel like communitarian solidarity.<sup>49</sup> Sociological accounts have tended to emphasize the means by which Anonymous achieves identity-related statuses, whether “organizational actorhood at least temporarily through carefully prepared and staged performances of identity claims”<sup>50</sup> or a “temporary collective identity” that is flexible enough “to meet the changing needs of participants.”<sup>51</sup> In these accounts, the difficult and interesting question is how a fluid social collective still operates with a relative degree of organizationality, without the traditional communicative and interpersonal organizational mediations. But to route flexible collectivity through identity in order to achieve

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<sup>49</sup> Cammaerts, “Networked Resistance.”

<sup>50</sup> Dobusch and Schoeneborn, “Fluidity, Identity, and Organizationality,” 1029. Unfortunately, this study only looked at publicly available communications, which is going to bias toward identity claims because they are intentionally aimed toward public performance.

<sup>51</sup> Leung, “Anonymity as Identity,” 175.

organizationality still misses the more fundamental question of how a group of people appears as a group precisely by declining identity claims.

As in *House of Leaves*—and as in *Anonymous*—an *evasion* of identities rather underlies the production of space in *I'm Trying To Reach You*. The novel's sociality through evasion also refines important theoretical accounts on the founding negativity of "community," most influentially articulated in the 1980s in conversations between Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot over the work of Georges Bataille.<sup>52</sup> For Bataille, it was important to understand community as the product of difference, not only the irresolvable difference of subjective others but also the difference that birth and death bring internal to a subject and that can only be thought by a community that bears witness to it (in Nancy's gloss: "what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself"); it was also important, for Bataille, to understand community as the preservation of this difference, rather than its taming into the similarity of, for instance, a singular but collectively held teleological goal.<sup>53</sup> This is why community "is to be understood in a different sense from Church or from order," where the latter terms provision a smoothing over of difference through a common and prescribed project.<sup>54</sup> What Nancy picked up from Bataille's refusal to let community sublimate or cohere the subjects it might otherwise seem to contain was the further realization that communities cannot be actively produced; they are the effect of difference, but they cannot be

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<sup>52</sup> For an introduction to the development of communitarian thought from Bataille through Nancy and Blanchot, see Nancy, "The Confronted Community." See also the introduction to the edited volume of essays on Bataille, Mitchell and Winfree, "Community and Communication."

<sup>53</sup> Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 24.

made by those subjects embedded in difference. Community is not made but “only exposed”; it “is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works, ... for community is simply their being suspended upon its limit.”<sup>55</sup> Blanchot, for his part, thought the radical purposelessness of community—it cannot be made to direct people toward a goal, because then it would negate the difference that it is defined by, and at the same time it cannot itself be a goal, because then it would be a subjective product instead of the condition of subjective experience—was also the proof of its ultimate negation of its own terms of intelligibility. If community presumes subjective opacity, it “has to know itself by ignoring itself,” and ultimately names only “a solitude lived in common.”<sup>56</sup> Whereas community for Nancy is “inoperative” because neither the means nor end of any human work, it is for Blanchot “unavowable,” because always withdrawn from any transparent access. The community anticipated by Browning’s novel dwells within these conditions—inoperative because without a teleological goal and unavowable because anonymous—at the same time that it tests their durability. Anonymous dancers seem to dance for the dance itself, but then their reaching out for reception attests to some desire for the dance to be also something more. The question for the novel becomes how communities, which are understood by Nancy and Blanchot as inoperative and unavowable, can develop the kind of organization necessary to exercise effects in the world, that is, how they can operate actions and avow intentions without negating the anonymous and radically creative difference that is their core.

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<sup>55</sup> Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxix, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, 25, 21.

As with anonymous hacking, the dances in *I'm Trying To Reach You* are about the creation of unknown public spheres more than they are the index of existing ones, and they require interpretations that begin with the action of the dance itself and only then move up to an account of the system in which they participate. Such an approach, beginning with action and developing sociality from it, is particularly useful in understanding one of the dances Gray watches, titled “iPod samba”:

She was back in that same old domestic setting ... She was wearing vaguely athletic clothes, and had on Converse sneakers, which slapped the floor as she danced. In fact, this slapping of her feet against the floor constituted the entire soundtrack of the video, though she herself appeared to be listening to something on the titular iPod hanging around her neck.

Her eyes were closed, but she was smiling a little, with an expression of what you might call sensual abandon. ... The slapping of her shoes created its own percussive pattern, broken sporadically by a pause, a moment's hesitation, a hovering over the beat. And then she's gamely grind her hips, and shuffle in a circle, that half-smile on her lips. ... She seemed to be enjoying herself so much. Eyes closed, earbuds in her ears. (61-2)

Barbara Browning, a dance scholar herself, wrote an academic book on samba almost twenty years before *I'm Trying to Reach You* entitled *Samba: Resistance in Motion*. There, she made explicit the kinds of connection she saw between dance and a community by reading samba as a “form that narrates a history of cultural contact between Africans, Europeans, and indigenous Brazilians.”<sup>57</sup> This narrative compression means that the dance has, on the one hand, a primarily indirect relation to the dancer, because it is about a collective history that precedes her. On the other hand, Browning thought that samba also carried significant “autoerotic potential,” where the dancer carries herself forward on her own sexuality expressed in the “self-sufficient whirlwind of the hips”; the liberating potential of foregrounding feminine sexuality as a force onto its own

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<sup>57</sup> Browning, *Samba*, xxiii.

was not, Browning was quick to point out, “the reality of the Brazilian underclass woman,” but it was “an idea expressed by her in the samba.”<sup>58</sup> The autoeroticism of the Samba is then a switchpoint in the dance’s sprawling temporality, mediating between a collective history of oppression and a utopian future. In both cases, however, the autoeroticism is then immediately inductive of a wider sociality that is either represented or imagined in the action of dancing itself.

But although the dance envisions a utopian space, it does not provide a means of getting there: the utopia is sustained in the dance, but the dance’s break from history was premised precisely on its ephemerality. The dance induces a public imaginary, but the public does not acquire an autonomous existence from the action, and in turn cannot induce other kinds of action to keep itself going. Gray experiences a similar problem as a viewer of the samba, and of the dance videos more generally, which make him feel a sense of publicness but do not instruct him how to act in relation to them or after them. The dancing of the woman in the YouTube videos presents an action without end, and it is the frustrating lack of an end that compels Gray to try to read the videos for a “secret message.” A great consumer of Hitchcock films, Gray is pre-disposed to mystery, and he is astonished to discover that the videos are released on YouTube synchronized with the deaths of eminent dancers whose styles they reference: first it was Michael Jackson, but then Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, and others. What is more, the comments on the videos make cryptic references to death that seem to suggest one of the viewers of the videos is killing these senior dancers as some homage to the young woman. Could it be that Gray has stumbled across a plot to kill off veteran dancers as a perverted means of liberating younger dancers to new life?

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 33–34.

Embedded in this conspiracy, *I'm Trying to Reach You* begins to read as a detective novel, with Gray looking for “clues” in the comments (89). He becomes prone to “sleuthing” (94). For D. A. Miller, such a detective plot would have secured for Gray an awareness of his own participation in panoptic systems of viewership, disciplining him to act and behave in a certain way, but YouTube fails to administer the disciplinary space in which Gray could recognize himself as such. “He could have been talking to me,” he thinks of one of the comments on the videos, but he cannot be directly interpellated because YouTube fails to provide the sort of arrangement in which he could recognize himself as under inspection (59). Speech comes to be disorganized, without being “directed” at anyone in particular, or ambiguous in whom it addresses (83). Without having an institution to contextualize the actions of the dancer or to sort responses to them, Gray does not know what is expected of him, or if he is even being addressed. Rather than programming his actions, the videos leave Gray even more action-less, progressively subtracted from the habits he had already found it difficult to perform: working, working out, and loving. He also does not quite know what actions are expected of him to keep the online space available in which he can see the dancer; he is a self-described “lurker,” a passive consumer, and the climactic moment of the novel, when he decides he has to leave a comment and registers on YouTube to do so, comes off as anti-climactic, the transition from passivity to activity so minor as to be almost melodramatic for being mentioned.

The novel thereby allegorizes a certain transition in the relation between space and action. Actions have indeed created a kind of space, and a space not premised on communication. The YouTube forum is, rather than a deliberative public sphere, more like the queer counterpublics that Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have described as involving “more

people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright.”<sup>59</sup> Attending to ephemeral sites of queer culture like “an after-hours club that survives on word of mouth and may be a major scene because it is only barely coherent as a scene” required, for Berlant and Warner, an attunement to non-institutional supports that evade a calculus of reproduction through representation: “queer culture constitutes itself in many ways other than through the official publics of opinion culture and the state, or through the privatized forms normally associated with sexuality.”<sup>60</sup> Unlike institutions such as the school or church, or typified social groupings like the family or neighborhood, the after-hours club here taken as an example lacks the stable geographic structuration, demographic entailment, or ideological sustenance to replicate itself; it is instantiated only and always temporarily when actions of a certain type show up in a certain place.<sup>61</sup> Notably, the ground of queer culture in this understanding is action and not the actor, because the persons involved in the project of queer world-making cannot be known in advance. The scene “survives on word of mouth,” a passing of language among unidentified persons that is always enacting the scene, keeping it alive. This is a scene produced not by an identified group, but by a loose collection of actions that provides a sense of space and then, when people recognize their actions participating in it, a sense of belonging.

As in the virtual spaces of *I'm Trying to Reach You*, this is a space that is not about people speaking from identities, but offering their erotic selves up for a different kind of order that does not exist yet; Gray is fond of quoting Merce Cunningham, and particularly relevant here is his

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<sup>59</sup> Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 558.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 558n22.

comment that, while dancing, dancers “are not pretending to be other than themselves ... They are, rather than being someone—doing something” (95): this is a participation not of essence but of action. It is, moreover, a community of strangers, again in line with a queer theoretical attunement to impersonal encounters. Against long-term intimacies that are supported by the apparently eternal endurance of institutions like marriage, queer theory in the tradition of Tim Dean and Leo Bersani has raised up the incidental or ephemeral intimacies of strangers in practices like gay male cruising, which are still endurable through the interchangeability of bodies and the persistence of rhythms that nonetheless fail to crystallize institutionally.<sup>62</sup> Even these accounts, however, required some sense of space for the projects to remain sustainable, whether Christopher Street for Berlant and Warner or the bathhouse for Dean and Bersani. In the migration of publics of strangers mediated by impersonal actions to the Internet, however, *I'm Trying To Reach You* allegorizes a problem when you do not have physical spaces as guarantors of the active project. Gray does not know how to act, how to keep the space going. The utopian promise of life outside of institutions reaches a limit point when asked how to sustain the utopian without institutional support.

Arendt seems to have had in mind a similar challenge when discussing the possibility of action and public space in *The Human Condition*. There, Arendt theorizes a pre-political community she calls the “space of appearance,” which is produced by people coming together in their “manner of speech and action” and only exists so long as they continue to act in concert; earlier, she defines appearance as “something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves” and therefore something that “constitutes reality,” thus the space of appearance is

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<sup>62</sup> Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*. See also Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising.”

where people come together to create reality for each other.<sup>63</sup> But the actions that fund this space are necessarily, for Arendt, personal. Actions “transcend mere productive activity” and therefore sustain a space held in common only so long as they also carry a “name”; actions “disclose the agent together with the act” by occurring within the public that grants it appearance and thereby reality.<sup>64</sup> The visceral power, for Arendt, of people in actual physical proximity, acting immortally through the disclosure of an apparent self, poses difficulty for virtual socialites founded, evasively, on anonymity. So, too, when Arendt demands that public space “cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only[, but] must transcend the life-span of mortal men,” she raises questions of sustainability for how a virtual and anonymous public is to endure without institutional guarantors.<sup>65</sup> To be sure, Arendt acknowledges the necessary contingency of the public realm by basing it on actions, therefore disallowing it to ever “lose its potential character”; but the question would remain, for Arendt, how actions can be made immortal by actualizing publics not suspended in potentiality.<sup>66</sup>

Importantly, this tension is not merely acted out in the novel’s plot, but is lived in the style of the novel itself, in its management of ejected materials. The YouTube videos Gray watches in the novel do not exist only in the world of the novel, but were also filmed by Barbara Browning and posted on the YouTube channel AhNethermostFun.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the dancer is Browning herself, and she dances in her own New York City apartment; the others who sometimes dance with her include her son, friends, and colleagues. In public readings of the

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<sup>63</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199, 50.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–81.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/AhNethermostFun>

novel, Browning has reflected that this joins *I'm Trying to Reach You* to a tradition of what she calls "transfiction," which includes works such as Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* (1997), whose mixing of personal memoir with fictional narrative led one critic to call it "a fusion of gossip and theory,"<sup>68</sup> and Paul Auster's *Leviathan* (1992), which another critic suggests "uses hints of the real world to anchor an otherwise implausible tale."<sup>69</sup> One of the main characters in *Leviathan* is based off of the French performance artist Sophie Calle, whose work has included the surveillance and reenactment of the behaviors of strangers and whom Auster, in his preface, credits with giving him "permission to mix fact with fiction."<sup>70</sup> In *I'm Trying to Reach You*, rather than Calle stalking strangers, it is Browning stalking herself, and the real-life material that she mixes with fiction is, although real, still created, therefore in a sense fabricated, literally choreographed. Because the YouTube videos feature her, they are also the ejected repository of herself, facilitating the disavowal of one type of authorship, filmic, for another, novelistic. Like Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, which ejected the most autobiographical of details to Poe's songs or indices of particularity to extra-novelistic companion pieces, *I'm Trying to Reach You* ejects its author to another medium at the same time that it cites her and that medium as the driving force of its plot.

To see *I'm Trying to Reach You* as distributing Browning across media might be to consider its performing a similar task as invasive fiction, fragmenting a subjectivity into parts and provisioning each part with a discrete sphere, except here the spheres are not individual chapters within a novel but media units including the novel entire. Evasion might, in other words, be

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<sup>68</sup> Intra, "A Fusion of Gossip and Theory."

<sup>69</sup> Danto, "All This Might Never Have Happened."

<sup>70</sup> Auster, *Leviathan*.

seen as a way of managing and coordinating the different communities to which Browning belongs: as dancer, as dance scholar, and as novelist. But even as the novel suggests Browning partially stalks herself by watching herself dance from the perspective of a dance scholar and novelist, it also suggests that evasion becomes a technique of opening up different kinds of community altogether. It is not for a dance community that Browning dances, after all, and not even for herself in a closed narcissistic loop, but for the project of the novel, which itself has no immediate teleological end beyond its publicity function: Browning dances not for a public, but for publicness itself. But it is a publicness that requires others to dance with her, and her YouTube videos, unlike the videos in the novel, have not yet collected any comments; or, in other words, Browning did not stage the comments that appear in the book, and they belong only to the fiction itself. That the community that the book imagines has not been ejected into the real world and exists only in its fictional world suggests its utopianism in all its ambivalent resonance: for now, no-place in the real world and unbound by any institution, even as impersonal actions try to feel out for its support.

Postscript 2  
Invasion and Evasion in Recent Urban Planning

Gage McWeeny's recent meditations on strangeness and intimacy in the novel were inspired by nineteenth century writers' reflections on the role of the city, which, as sociologists beginning with Georg Simmel have noted, is a factory of strangers: making bodies both abundant and generic.<sup>1</sup> McWeeny notes a dual relation between the novel and urban space: on the one hand, the novel is aimed toward social vastness, the description of a character network more expansive than the friendship networks real people might have in real life; but on the other hand, the novel is meant to be a retreat from actually living in such a vast world, a physical shield between the reader and her society while she travels by, say, omnibus. Imaginatively, the novel goes looking for a city's population in a big way; but it makes this imaginative bigness available to readers by screening them from it, for a moment, in reality.<sup>2</sup> In the previous two chapters, I have continued McWeeny's analogy between urban public space and the novel by considering contemporary novels and the modes of sociality they practice through the style: the intensification of part of a person to make a neo-institutional community in invasion, or the anonymization of a person to make a collective of unknown persons in evasion. In this postscript, I now pursue the analogy further by considering invasion and evasion within urban planning itself. But to situate this pursuit in the contemporary period rather than the nineteenth century, my point of entry is the great optimism recent critical theorists have had for cities as

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<sup>1</sup> See Simmel, "The Stranger."

<sup>2</sup> McWeeny, *The Comfort of Strangers*. In this sense, the novel, or at least the big social novel, has always been about what Mark Seltzer has called stranger intimacy, even as it is a material resource for getting away from strangers. See Seltzer, *Serial Killers*.

infrastructures for utopian futures.

When, in the final volume of their *Empire* trilogy, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri turn to formulate the possibilities of producing new conditions and spaces of holding the world in common, one figure upon which they choose to meditate is surprisingly modernist: the metropolis. In the twenty-first century, the “great European modernist literary representations of the metropolis” as well as the productive psychological disorientations of the city theorized by classical sociologists like Simmel have come to denote a global, if not universal, condition.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, Hardt and Negri think that frequent encounters across lines of difference are now a routine part of contemporary life anywhere in the world, and this makes it possible to imagine an emerging sociality that takes difference as its ground rather than its enemy; they likely would approve of Charles Jencks’s recommendation we theorize not the metropolis, but the heteropolis, where difference characterizes an increasingly inhabited urban life.<sup>4</sup> The movement from elevated urbanity to global socio-political alliance is not, however, in any way presumed. In figuring metropolitan life on a planetary scale, Hardt and Negri at least provide a less naïve view than the triumphalist accounts of others who have remarked upon the empirical fact that the majority of the world’s population does now live in cities (for instance, the economist Edward Glaeser’s popular press book on metropolitan life carries a subtitle claiming that cities “make[] us richer, smarter, greener, healthier, and happier”<sup>5</sup>). For Hardt and Negri, it is important to see the metropolis as both promise and challenge, on the one hand a “vast reservoir of common

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<sup>3</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 252. See also Simmel, “Metropolis and Mental Life.”

<sup>4</sup> Jencks, *Heteropolis*.

<sup>5</sup> Glaeser, *Triumph of the City*.

wealth” and on the other hand a “factory for the production of the common.”<sup>6</sup> The metropolis both deposits in and withdraws from a fund of interpenetrating cultural idioms, and it is important that these transactions find purpose beyond the capture of neoliberal capitalism. A politics is thus required to direct the possibilities of the metropolis to more felicitous encounters that could mediate an expanded and solidaristic sociality in advance of a segregationist organization of groups and classes of people.

But however transparent Hardt and Negri are in their ambivalence and however useful it is that they conceive of the metropolis as a political question and not a sociological answer, there remains something suspect in their reliance on modernist representations and theories of the urban, as if the cities that the majority of the world population now inhabit are the same as they were a century ago. Inevitably, the century that saw such explosive migration to cities, as well as the proliferation of new cities, also saw a transformation of the city itself, especially in terms of the spatial organization of difference and the management of encounter. The city of Chicago—the location for both the most influential work of city planning, the Daniel Burnham plan of 1909, and the birth of urban sociology in the form of the Chicago School—provides a good case study in some of these transformations. When Burnham and his co-author Edward H. Bennett set out to propose an integrated set of projects for the comprehensive re-development of Chicago a century ago, they were primarily interested in apportioning different spaces for different purposes. Production was to be the cornerstone of the city—“[t]he plan frankly takes into consideration the fact that the American city, and Chicago pre-eminently, is a center of industry

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<sup>6</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 153, 250.

and traffic”—but industry was to have its proper place.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there were to be proper places for experience segregated from labor; Grant Park, for instance, was to be the cultural center of the city, concentrating the region’s museums rather than distributing them throughout. The aim of breaking the city up into parts, and designating a purpose for each part, was encapsulated in a caption to one of the more magisterial of the *Plan’s* illustrations, which stated its vision of a city “as a complete organism in which all its functions are related one to another in such a manner that it will become a unit.” For the supporters of the Burnham Plan, a city was to be a functionally differentiated body.

The Burnham Plan, despite its wide influence, was of course prescriptive rather than descriptive; that it sought to envision a city not yet in existence rather than present a city as it already was is confirmed by its abundance of illustrations for future development and its almost complete lack of photographs of Chicago in its current state. But the view of a city spatially organized by function was repeated in descriptions of the city provided in the following decades by the Chicago School of sociology. In his contribution to the seminal 1925 volume *The City*, which did much to systematize and generalize the urban sociological theory of the time, Ernest Burgess divided Chicago into five concentric circles: a central business district, then a “transitional” zone that included factories, then workingmen’s homes, then a residential zone, and finally a commuter zone.<sup>8</sup> The point was that no one stayed in one zone all day—Burgess estimated more than “half a million people daily enter and leave Chicago’s loop,” the central business district—and in turn the different zones spatially mapped out the temporal progress of a

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<sup>7</sup> Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, *The City*, 50–51.

worker's day, as he travelled from home to work and then back again by way of a bar.<sup>9</sup> What Burgess was in turn describing was a city that distributed and located disciplinary spaces each associated with a particular role that a person was to play; the city was a geography of spaces of confinement understood as serving a certain purpose. Burgess's view on the division of labor in the city, where specific kinds of work and specific kinds of role were neatly allocated, was so strong that he even considered other forms of spatial differentiation, such as racial segregation, to be secondary to the primary distribution of occupational function; the reason why Chicago ended up with Irish, Greek, or Chinese neighborhoods was because "occupational selection has taken place by nationality, explainable ... by racial temperament," which naturally produced, for Burgess, "Irish policemen, Greek ice-cream parlors, Chinese laundries, Negro porters, Belgian janitors, etc."<sup>10</sup> Such a functional view was affirmed by Burgess's colleague Louis Wirth in his classic 1938 essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life"; for Wirth, a functional differentiation was even the mechanism of city growth, when "[t]he dominance of the city over the surrounding hinterland becomes explicable in terms of the division of labor which urban life occasions and promotes" and "[t]he different parts of the city thus acquire specialized functions. The city consequently tends to resemble a mosaic of social worlds in which the transition from one to the other is abrupt."<sup>11</sup>

If for the modernist planners and sociologists of Chicago, the city was to be understood as organized by functions, with the organization of social difference derivative of the division of labor, such a view no longer seemed sustainable a generation later. Part of the criticism, leveled

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>11</sup> Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," 15.

by sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s, was that a city organized by function no longer made sense in a post-Fordist economy in which a more flexible transgression of roles was required. This line of criticism has had the peculiar effect of making it seem less that the Chicago School of sociologists was wrong, and more that Chicago itself is an archaic city no longer of use for studies of the increasingly globalized and informationalized urban areas of the contemporary period; thus, for instance, a Los Angeles school of sociology was born and popularized not least by Edward Soja<sup>12</sup> and argued that the Californian, rather than Midwestern, city was the truly “paradigmatic city” of the present.<sup>13</sup> But Chicago, too, underwent spatial changes in the mid-century, partially in order to adapt to a more flexible economy, as earlier critics of the Burnham Plan and of the Chicago School described. In her classic 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs complained about Burnham’s “idea of sorting out certain cultural and public functions and decontaminating their relationship with the workaday city,”<sup>14</sup> a sorting out that in particular overlooked the increasingly non-functional organization of city neighborhoods (the same year, Lewis Mumford’s National Book Award-winning *The City in History* used more pointed language in describing the Burnham Plan as “baroque planning” in

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<sup>12</sup> See his 1989 *Postmodern Geographies*, esp. ch. 8. For a review of the literature of the crossover from Chicago to Los Angeles, see Scott and Storper, “The Nature of Cities.”

<sup>13</sup> For a critique of the sociological use of one city as paradigmatic of others, but which nonetheless argues Miami may be a good choice for conceptualizing cities in the twenty-first century, see Nijman, “The Paradigmatic City.” The critique of paradigmaticity remains relevant in my discussion of the ubiquitous city below; see, for instance, a call to foreground not smart cities built from scratch like Songdo but the implementation or retrofitting of smart technologies in cities like Pennsylvania in Shelton, Zook, and Wiig, “The ‘Actually Existing Smart City.’” For my purposes, I do not consider the question of whether cities are good choices for modeling others, precisely because I am more interesting in laying out a multiplicity rather than singularity of city designs and ambitions.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 25.

large part because it showed “no concern for the neighborhood as an integral unit”).<sup>15</sup> Jacobs pointed to Chicago’s Back-of-the-Yards district, which in the postwar period could no longer be identified with just its role in the city’s division of labor. The majority of the district’s residents no longer worked in the slaughterhouses; many did not work in the district at all. But the district had, in Jacobs’s account, increased its cohesion and stability because other institutions had come to organize the space as a community, over and above whatever cohesion could have been maintained by a simple commonality of occupation: “churches, P-T-A’s, businessmen’s associations, political clubs, local civic leagues, fundraising committees for health campaigns or other public causes, sons of such-and-such a village (common clubs among Puerto Ricans today, as they have been with Italians), property owners’ associations, block improvement associations, protesters against injustices, and so on, ad infinitum.”<sup>16</sup> Districts come to serve more than one function, and in turn a greater diversity of roles are practiced there, reflected most apparently in “the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules and are in the place for different purposes, but who are able to use many facilities in common.”<sup>17</sup> That a common space affords different work schedules suggests it has lost some of its disciplinary power to regiment and administer life or at least particular roles within a life. Instead, what the space administers is a kind of community, organizing people of similar tastes and values rather than of similar schedules and occupations.

Although Jacobs’s appraisal of this transition from a city organized into functions to a city organized into communities has been criticized in more recent literature—Richard Sennett

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<sup>15</sup> Mumford, *The City in History*.

<sup>16</sup> Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 133.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

thought she was too romantic in thinking of ethnic enclaves as necessarily stable and neighborly,<sup>18</sup> while David Harvey has targeted any work that suggests, as Jacobs seems to, that “community solidarity can provide the stability and power needed to control, manage and alleviate urban problems and that ‘community’ can substitute for public politics”<sup>19</sup>—the quarrel has been not with the transition itself, but with what politics it might provision. Indeed, it may be suspicious that, in the later twentieth century, a communitarian view transitioned from a bottom-up strategy of survival and solidarity in the city to a top-down governmental organization of the city, where the natural evolution Jacobs saw from spaces of discipline to spaces of culture also became a city planning principle. Again, it is Chicago that illustrates the adoption of the community rhetoric by city planners. In 1966, the Chicago Department of Development and Planning presented their *Comprehensive Plan of Chicago*, which formalized many of the principles that were presented for public discussion two years earlier by the *Basic Policies for the Comprehensive Plan of Chicago* and therefore had officially involved citizens in the planning process. At the same time, the *Comprehensive Plan* rejected citizens’ desires for a block-by-block city plan that would designate a purpose for each square of the Chicago grid, as had been offered a generation earlier in the last attempt at city-wide planning, the 1946 *Preliminary Comprehensive Plan*. In 1966, city officials worried such a “master plan” would be too sclerotic to accommodate adaptations to future unforeseeable conditions. Instead, they thought the way to “strengthen the logical order of the city’s structure to meet future needs” was to set out a group of

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<sup>18</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 152. The standard citation for the ethnic enclave view similar to Jacobs, of a city made of communities or “villages” that adapt nonurban institutions and cultures to the urban milieu, is Gans, *Urban Villagers*.

<sup>19</sup> Harvey, *Possible Urban Worlds*, 50.

general policy principles that could then guide and coordinate the more fine-grained changes whose responsibility to propose it delegated to fourteen smaller “Development Areas” whose boundaries were “drawn to provide a practical means of dividing up the city for planning purposes. The scale of the area permits discussion of detailed projects, which facilitates effective citizen participation.”<sup>20</sup> Cutting up the city into smaller areas, rather than larger functionally determined zones in the style of the earlier Chicago School of sociology, was thus meant to induce self-reflective communities whose discussion would produce “additional programs and projects” and help to identify “community social needs and ... alternative programs of facilities and activities.”<sup>21</sup> Implicitly, the *Comprehensive Plan* thus saw the city as composed of geographically located communities, each with their own lifestyles reflected in the types of activities and public places they required. Zones that had been cohered by a regimentation of schedule had been replaced by communities cohered not by discipline but by similarities in lifestyles.

Because the *Comprehensive Plan* deferred city planning by investing in the communities it constructed and tasked with the role of improving themselves, it is perhaps unsurprising that it was the last attempt at a systematic planning of the entire city. In the later twentieth century to the present, it is instead Chicago neighborhoods that have proposed plans for their own transformation. The most recent, accepted by the Chicago Plan Commission in December 2014, concerned the last remaining market district of the city, the Fulton Market District historically home to the city’s meatpacking industry. When the meatpacking industry dominated

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<sup>20</sup> Wetmore, *The Comprehensive Plan of Chicago*, 31, 116.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

the neighborhood, it organized a common set of routines according to the workday of the business and the flows of transportation in and out, but the new plan begins from the premises that, in the twenty-first century, “[m]arket districts across the United States possess a unique sense of place that often attracts other types of businesses,” and that these districts “are often the most unique and vibrant and economically active portions of U.S. cities.”<sup>22</sup> This “sense of place,” produced from a history of people working in proximity on similar tasks has now been liberated from the tasks and the schedules themselves. In turn, the Commission recommends guidelines for innovation that “strengthen the identity of the area and support existing uses while encouraging new, compatible development,” for instance by having new buildings be built in designs drawn “from existing examples within the district. For alterations, new elements, and new buildings, lessons can be learned from other buildings about the design of a building element and use of materials in a way that respects its neighbors.”<sup>23</sup> The simultaneous stabilization of a neighborhood identity with a diversification of its uses suggests that the units of a city have come to be associated not with kinds of labor and schedule, but with a style that can produce neighborliness through common taste and practice. In turn, the spatial organization of the city distributes not zones that could administer disciplinary roles like a father or a laborer of a certain sort, but cultural atmospheres that people of any role can traverse. What is activated by entrance into a neighborhood is not a set of appropriate actions or behaviors, but a belonging to a certain community of taste.

The Commission is trying to invade its neighborhood, saturating its space with a single

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<sup>22</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, “Fulton Market Innovation District,” 5, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

style. In its re-working of space away from its association with institutions like the family or the factory and toward a sense of community and style, the kind of city planning exemplified in Chicago thereby provides an analogy to the work of the invasive novel described in Chapter Four. What the novel of invasion helps figure, in its own segregation and organization of neighborhoods in the form of chapters, is how people travel across spaces of community, cycling not through a series of roles, but through a series of tastes and partial affiliations. When characters show up in the chapter-neighborhood of an invasive novel, they show up partially, which is to say with only the tastes and cultural memberships that that chapter makes sensible. Crucially, this is a re-working of disciplinary space rather than its overhaul—spaces of confinement and roles have been re-purposed as spaces of community and culture—and in turn the novel of invasion betrays a sort of nostalgia for disciplinary styles of organization, where each thing has its proper place. The form of the city remains similar, but what its parts contain or do have shifted: the thing that is placed is no longer part of a daily schedule, but a sliver of a lifestyle.

In contrast, the novel of evasion I discussed in Chapter Five is better analogized by cities that have been built from scratch, what in the past generation have been called “instant cities” that were planned totally in advance and built on unclaimed or reclaimed land where there are no disciplinary spaces to re-purpose but only a pure space to organize for the first time. Perhaps the most famous example, and one that has special kinship with the novel of evasion, is the Songdo International Business District built on 1,500 acres of land claimed near the Yellow Sea, about an hour southeast of Seoul. Led by the New York firm Gale International, it is the largest private real estate venture in the world, but most importantly it is also trying to be the

“smartest.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike smart city efforts that have tried to retrofit existing cities with improved technology and broadband connectivity, the benefit of building a city from scratch is that technology can be intimately part of the planning from the start. In Songdo, Gale International partnered with the world’s leading networking company, CISCO, to ensure that informational technology was part of every aspect of the city, that is, to make sure the network was “ubiquitous” (in turn garnering the name “ubiquitous city” for Songdo and cities like it). As the director of CISCO Services Korea explains in a promotional video for the city, “The network that we deploy here is actually connecting all of the components in the city. You know all of the residences, offices, schools everywhere, all of the buildings. In this networked community, residents will be able to control the functions of their homes remotely, and everyone will be able to interact through video from anywhere.”<sup>25</sup> As one group of scholars describes Songdo, “[e]very wall, room, and space is a potential conduit to a meeting, a separate building, a remote lab, or a distant hospital. The developers thus envision an interface-filled life propelled and organized by a new currency of human attention at its very nervous, or even molecular, level.”<sup>26</sup> Efforts are even underway to change the legal code of the city so that medical information can pass freely over the network and houses equipped with proper sensors and kits can allow residents to access medical

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<sup>24</sup> Many scholars of Songdo are especially suspicious of the private/public collapse induced by the creation of public cities through private technology. For instance: “Corporations are developing and selling the city of the future, limiting the public sector’s role to merely enacting regulations and providing incentives. Once the private sector completes and successfully sells the project, it moves on to a new adventure while leaving the often ill-prepared local government to run the new and high-maintenance project.” Shwayri, “A Model Korean Ubiquitous Eco-City?,” 44. For a discussion of interviews with the multiple stakeholders in Songdo—national government, local government, and technology specialists—see Shin, “Ubiquitous City.”

<sup>25</sup> CISCO, “City of the Future: Songdo, South Korea.”

<sup>26</sup> Halpern et al., “Test-Bed Urbanism,” 280.

care in their own homes, rather than in institutions like the hospital.<sup>27</sup>

Promotional materials for Songdo advertise the ubiquitous city as a place for “Business and Living All Together,” that is, where work and life no longer have discrete or segregated spaces, but overlap in every place at every time.<sup>28</sup> Saskia Sassen, in her commentary on Songdo, has thus pointed out how “the distinction between [home and the office] becomes increasingly fuzzy in a fully ‘sensored’ city.”<sup>29</sup> But in a city in which buildings and institutions are plugged into the network with special sensors, and in which almost anywhere in the city, people can also plug into the network to perform daily tasks that they otherwise would have had to do while physically in the building or institution they are wirelessly accessing, it is not just labor and domestic spheres that are overlapped. Every institution, and therefore the roles they might have discretely provisioned—laborer, parent, patient—become palimpsestic with every other. The ubiquitous city, because it is a city in which physical space is built on the model of digital space, is one in which the infinite avenues for movement and selection provided by the Internet are lived and practiced in embodied life.<sup>30</sup> “Once familiar locations, like the library, the travel agency, the flea market or the department store, lose their spatial reference points and dissolve into a diffuse data cloud,” writes one group of scholars of Songdo. “Long established boundaries, which were once all referenced by physical space, between home and work, the public and the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 286n5.

<sup>28</sup> Incheon Free Economic Zone Authority, “We Build Success,” 2.

<sup>29</sup> Sassen, “Urbanising Technology.”

<sup>30</sup> “[M]edia-based urbanization—for the first time enabling a real-time access to dynamically changing information—connects every interaction in the informational space with the physical space, and vice versa. Every digital interpretation of the physical space helps us to alter our surroundings by giving us the choice to adjust our behavior in reaction to real-time information.” Carvalho, “Smart Cities from Scratch?,” 117.

private, the commercial and the non-branded, or the urban and the rural, become increasingly blurry.”<sup>31</sup> It is for this reason that Richard Sennett calls Songdo a “stupefying smart city,” because the smart technologies repress “the inductive and deductive processes people use to make sense, for themselves, of the complex conditions in which they live.”<sup>32</sup> An earlier Chicago of zones, where the parts of a city designated specific roles people occupied and therefore specific parts of a daily schedule, made it possible not only to divide the city logically into discrete units, but also to see this spatial distribution of the city as a map of time, specifically one’s progress throughout the roles of a given day. But by distorting and eliminating disciplinary spaces, the ubiquitous city makes it difficult not only to map where specific places are—where, exactly, is the place of work, of the home, of the hospital, if the functions of each are distributed across the entire city?—but therefore nearly impossible to map spatially the parts of one’s life.<sup>33</sup>

This is a city of *evasions*: every role is always off the radar of place, while at the same time an urban sociality is mediated by no one ever being a private citizen at any given time, because personal roles are always displaced. But as I argued in the previous chapter, the disorientation of roles and space figured really in the ubiquitous city and explored in the novel of evasion is not always stupefying, or at least does not have to be. Destruction must always be part of a larger process of transformation in which it is coordinated with production as well. If disciplinary spaces are scrambled, then the actions people perform no longer belong to a particular institution—their actions evade institutions—but this also means that actions become available

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<sup>31</sup> Calvillo et al., “Skewing the City.”

<sup>32</sup> Sennett, “No One Likes a City That’s Too Smart.”

<sup>33</sup> For a similar account of how smart cities contribute to the “cyborgification” of life through a blurring of boundaries, see Sadowski and Pasquale, “The Spectrum of Control.”

for the production of new spaces, instead of the reproduction of traditional ones. When disciplinary spaces are overlapped and people's actions belong to no space in particular, their actions may be the ground of different spaces altogether. Actions are freed of the disciplinary calculus that reduces them to ways and modes of doing in a particular time and place.

Danielle Allen concludes her meditations on a culture of distrust in contemporary America and its poisoning of democracy by asking us to reject how the “traditional method of achieving political majority depends on a fear of strangers.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, Allen calls for members of a citizenry to engage strangers, which is also to make themselves available to strangers. This means Allen does not call for “an institutional solution” to crises in contemporary democracy, but for “new forms of citizenship” that can transform institutions or condition the creation of new ones.<sup>35</sup> Practicing friendly habits of co-existing with strangers grounds democratic worlds without referring them to institutions of identity that require the elimination of difference. The style of evasion relishes in this sort of causation and especially helps to imagine what kinds of social space, or community, are opened up by the evasion of disciplinarity and the migration of actions out of disciplinary spaces. Whereas the invasive novel, like the evolution of historic cities including Chicago in the twentieth century, reacts to the erosion of a partitioning of cities into function and institution by converting the partitions into communities, the evasive novel, like ubiquitous cities including Songdo, builds up to communities without having space to begin with. They require kinds of sociality in which, absent the geographic structuration of a neighborhood, everyone is always an evasive stranger to everyone else.

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<sup>34</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Allen, “Turning Strangers into Political Friends.”

Appendix  
Miscellaneous Tables

#	Title	Pub.	Pub. Date	Pgs.	Location	Time	Characters	Narr.
A1	Found Objects	New Yorker	December 2007	15	NYC	2000s	Sasha, Alex	Third person
A2	The Gold Cure	Granta	March 2010	20	NYC	2000s	Bennie, Chris, Sasha	Third person
A3	Ask Me If I Care	New Yorker	March 2010	20	CA	1979	Bennie/Alice/Scotty; Rhea/Lou/Jocelyn	Rhea
A4	Safari	New Yorker	January 2010	25	Kenya	1983	Lou/Charlie/Rolph; Mindy/Albert;	Third person
A5	You (Plural)	Tin House	Summer 2001	7	CA	2000	Jocelyn/Benny/Rhea/Lou	Jocelyn
A6	X's and O's	-	-	16	NYC		Bennie/Scotty	Scotty
B7	A to B	-	-	26	Crandale	2000s	Bennie/Stephanie	Third person
B8	Selling the General	This Is Not Chick Lit	August 2006	29	NYC—Africa	2000s	Dolly (Stephanie's boss), Kitty (assaulted by Jules, her brother), Lulu	Third person
B9	Forty Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens Up About Love, Fame, and Nixon!	Harper's	August 2010	19	NYC	1990s	Jules Jones/Kitty Jackson	Jules
B 10	Out of Body	Tin House	Spring 2010	21	NYC	1990s	Rob/Drew/Sasha	Rob (2nd person)
B 11	Good-bye, love	-	-	25	Naples	1980s	Ted Hollander/Sasha	Ted

**Table 5. Publication History and Summary of Chapters in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.**

#	Title	Pub.	Pub. Date	Pgs.	Location	Time	Characters	Narr.
B 12	Great Rock and Roll Pauses	-	-	75	CA	2020s	Sasha/Drew; Alison/Lincoln	Alison
B 13	Pure Language	-	-	31	NYC	2010s	Bennie/Alex; Lulu; Scotty	Alex

Table 6. Summary of <i>Whalestoe Letters</i> (new letters in shaded rows)									
#	Date	Content	Pgs.	Sl.	Pr.	In.	Var.	Ov.	Sec.
1	7/28/1982	Johnny's first foster family	0.5						
2	8/30/1982	Johnny's second foster family	0.5						
3	11/7/1982	Johnny's second foster family—settling in	0.5						
4	1/20/1983	Director advises Pelafina to write less	0.5						
5	2/14/1983	Johnny's third foster family after running away	1						
6	3/9/1983	"I can't see you. I don't remember you."	0.25	x					
7	4/17/1983	Director advises less writing—Johnny settling into home—Pelafina sends books and the Concise OED	1						
8	5/9/1983	Receipt of Johnny's first letter	0.5						
9	6/21/1983	Happy Birthday	0.25						
10	8/19/1983	Dream of Johnny strong and praised	0.75						
11	9/29/1983	Receipt of Johnny's second letter re: schoolfight—"Do what you must but realize greater strength lies in self-control"	1						
12	10/15/1983	Praise for Johnny's writing	0.5						
13	12/24/1983	Johnny's continued fighting and moving to another school	0.5						
14	3/15/1984	Johnny's hospitalization—Pelafina's attempted escape from Whalestoe	1.5						
15	4/22/1984	Johnny's recovery—request for more information about the event	0.5						
16	6/3/1984	Apologies for requesting disclosure—acceptance of Johnny's silence	0.5						
17	6/24/1984	Apologies for missing Johnny's birthday—promise to send a tale worthy of him	0.5						
18	6/26/1984	Praise for Johnny's writing	0.75						
19	9/7/1984	Johnny's continued fighting—"Do not rely on your fists ... Rely instead on the abilities of your mind"	1.5						
20	10/14/1984	Johnny's applying to boarding schools	0.5						
21	11/6/1984	Pelafina's nightmare leaving her with a woeful	1						

Table 6. Summary of <i>Whalestoe Letters</i> (new letters in shaded rows)									
#	Date	Content	Pgs.	Sl.	Pr.	In.	Var.	Ov.	Sec.
		idea that "makes rooms. Rooms upon room upon hundreds of rooms full of indistinguishable remains"							
22	3/7/1985	Pelafina's hallucinations have prevented her from reading Johnny's letters	0.75						
23	4/13/1985	Johnny's acceptance to boarding school	0.25						
24	5/11/1985	Pelafina awaits Johnny's visit	0.5						
25	7/24/1985	Pelafina remembers and misses Johnny's visit—a new director has been appointed at Whalestoe	2						
26	8/23/1985	Pelafina feels neglected by the new director	0.5						
27	9/5/1985	Pelafina tries to block out the world by using candle was as earbuds	1						
28	9/14/1985	Pelafina feels embarrassed by her previous letters	1.25						
29	9/9/1985	Pelafina, suspicious of Whalestoe staff, tries to communicate with Johnny through an attendant	1						
30	9/30/1985	Pelafina plans an escape from Whalestoe	1						
31	10/4/1985	Pelafina's plans have been found out—the new director suggests Pelafina writes Johnny too often	1						
32	10/10/1985	Pelafina misses Johnny's correspondence	0.5						
33	10/12/1985	Pelafina thinks the new director is hoarding the letters Johnny has written her	0.5						
34	11/1/1985	Pelafina apologizes for narcissism	0.75						
35	11/9/1985	Pelafina reports dreams of Johnny in Spain dressed in red—"Damn the New Director. Damn those intruding gods"	2.5			x			
36	3/17/1986	Johnny has asked for a "girl" for his birthday	1						
37	4/5/1986	Pelafina theorizes how Whalestoe conspired to control her	2						
38	5/31/1986	Pelafina complains about Johnny's two-word letter	0.75						
39	7/6/1986	Pelafina does not recall Johnny's alleged visit to her	1						
40	9/18/1986	Pelafina has attacked the new director	0.5						

Table 6. Summary of <i>Whalestoe Letters</i> (new letters in shaded rows)									
#	Date	Content	Pgs.	Sl.	Pr.	In.	Var.	Ov.	Sec.
41	12/6/1986	Johnny has been expelled for fighting	0.5						
42	1/6/1987	"I really am very out of sorts right now"	1	x	x		x		
43	4/25/1987	Pelafina learns Johnny has been placed in a new school—"These pages are my only flight. At least they escape."	0.5						
44	4/27/1987	A cipher for decoding a subsequent letter	0.25						
45	5/8/1987	An encoded message which, decoded, includes "They have found a way to break me, rape a fifty-six year old bag of bones. ... I've learned not to scream. Screaming gave me hope, and unanswered hope is shattered hope."	3.25						
46	6/23/1987	Pelafina misses Johnny	0.5						
47	7/31/1987	"I live at the end of some interminable corridor"	0.5		x				
48	8/13/1987	Pelafina misses Johnny	0.25			x			
49	9/24/1987	Pelafine feels she is in mortal danger	1				x	x	
50	12/26/1987	Lost Christmas present	1	x			x		
51	1/3/1988	"Forgive me ... I never meant to burn you. I never meant to mark you. You were only four and I was terrible in the kitchen."	1	x			x	x	
52	1/11/1988	"an only child is the only chance to end this wicked curse"	1	x			x		
53	2/14/1988	Pelafina requests a description of "this place that I die in"—"How many chambers?"	1				x		x
54	2/23/1988	"This heart's a thousand flaws"	1		x	x	x		x
55	3/18/1988	variations on "lie"	1	x					x
56	3/19/1988	Memories of childhood with Johnny	2						x
57	4/12/1988	Limerrick with "truant"	1	x			x		
58	9/19/1988	"Johnny" repeated 51 times	3						
59	11/1/1988	Dreams and hallucinations have prevented Pelafina from seeing Johnny	1						
60	11/3/1988	Pelafina remembers her own mother	1.25						
61	11/27/1988	Dreams about Johnny dying—wild fluctuations in mood	1.5						

**Table 6. Summary of *Whalestoe Letters* (new letters in shaded rows)**

#	Date	Content	Pgs.	Sl.	Pr.	In.	Var.	Ov.	Sec.
62	12/23/1988	Pelafina wants to help Johnny but has nothing to offer—"I know little else to say. Little else to do. I have nothing. I am nothing"	1						
63	12/24/1988	"I think you get this way of mine. Do you? I hope so. But if you don't it's no matter"	1						
64	2/28/1989	Pelafina feels "normal," plans to travel	1						
65	3/31/1989	Pelafina asks Johnny why he does not mention her plans to travel	1						
66	5/3/1989	Pelafina plans to leave even without help—"I cannot tired myself on the feelings of the world"							

<b>Title</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Dance</b>	<b>Cast</b>	<b>Outfit</b>	<b>Filters</b>
1) modéré (gnossienne 5)	Erik Satie [piano and toy piano]	eclectic; moonwalking; pinch/sprinkle hands	BB	black dance pants and shirt	color, slightly darkened
2) harvest moon	Lord William of Kent	four sided; some hip shake	BB + musician offscreen [hand shows in bathroom door]	All white	color
3) lent (gnossienne 4)	Erik Satie [piano]	like 1 but without moonwalking; pinching body	BB	gray (?) leotard	green
4) ipod samba	n/a	samba	BB	black dance pants, dark pink shirt	color, slightly darkened
5) avec conviction et une tristesse rigoureuse (gnossienne 6)	Erik Satie [piano]	clock hands [A seated, B standing]	BB + Pelligrini	black shear dress / gray top	Faded color with vignetting
6) natural woman	Carole King [electric and bass guitars]	slow flail	BB	bell bottoms and free-spirit white top	B+W with grain
7) lent (gnossienne 3)	Erik Satie [electric guitar and toy piano]	slow ballet	BB	white, with gossamer skirt	Faded color with vignetting
8) celebrate the body electric	Ponytail [recording]	general flair	BB + son	jean skirt + tanktop / jeans + shirtless	BW + grain
9) avec étonnement (gnossienne 2)	Erik Satie [bass and guitar]	slow acid trip	BB + dad?	jeans + Tshirt / trousers + collared shirt	Faded color with vignetting

Title	Music	Dance	Cast	Outfit	Filters
10) elephant	Pattern is Movement [recording]	lyrics slow dance	BB	short shorts and tank top	Faded color with vignetting
11) lent (gnossienne 1	Erik Satie [voiced words of BB, toy piano]	lyrics slow dance	BB	dance pants, tank top, tennis shoes	faded, over bright color
12) The Girl from Ipanema	Tom Jobim	Mostly playing instruments	"featuring: leo lynx, james metalarc, caetano veloso, ann pellegrini, viva deconcini, mary feaster, barbara browning, lord william of kent, and the elegant older gentleman."	Assorted costume/period; with naked son and BB in all white	ultra white

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