

A Desire Called America:
Biopolitics and Utopian Forms of Life in American Literature

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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December 2012

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Acknowledgements

I would like to by acknowledge some of the many debts that I have come to owe in writing my dissertation. First, I would like to thank the members of my committee. Over the years, the intellectual support and mentorship of Cesare Casarino has been indispensable. He has encouraged me not only to think rigorously but also inventively and, I would even say, artfully. I have had the pleasure of Phillip Wegner's comradery for nearly ten years. He has shaped my work in innumerable ways, perhaps most importantly by turning my eyes towards utopian horizons. Richard Leppert's advice regarding the smallest and largest aspects of research and the practical side of academic life has been invaluable. Tony C. Brown has always been remarkably generous with his time, reading drafts and providing much needed comments for several years. I would also like to thank Thomas Pepper, who has certainly had a hand in this project, especially in its early stages.

Next, I would like to thank a group of regulars at the Herkimer, with whom I have had the privilege of sharing many a laugh during my graduate school career. Tom Cannavino, Ricardo Rebolledo, Ben Stork, and Aly Pennuci have constantly reminded me that life isn't reducible to work. Indeed, active idleness has been the medium of my relationship to another friend, Robert St. Clair; our exchanges over drinks continue to invigorate my critical spirits, and this would not be the same dissertation without our many conversations. More generally, I would like to thank, collectively, all of the graduate students at the University of Minnesota whom I have had the pleasure of

encountering, especially Courtney Gildersleeve, Andrea Gyenge, Matthew Hadley, Brendan McGillicuddy, Keith Mikos, Sean Nye, Nathan Snaza, Matthew Stoddard, and François Vozel. While I realize the inadequacy of this gesture, I can only say that my sense of the common as a material reality and as a project has been sharpened by my interactions with these extraordinary colleagues. My family has always been amazingly supportive of my work. Some of my most fiery intellectual exchanges remain with my parents, John and Donna Haines. My sister Erica's confidence in my abilities has also been very important. Last, but certainly not least, Tracy Rutler and her daughter Beatrice have not only carried me through life during the writing of my dissertation but also lifted me up. They have made my life and my work so much more meaningful by translating Spinoza's abstract understanding of the inescapable connection between pleasure and thought into a visceral and wonderful reality.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother Nicoletta Bruno, who remains a forceful presence after all of these years.

Abstract

“A Desire Called America: Biopolitics and Utopian Forms of Life in American Literature” analyzes two periods of American literature – the American Renaissance and American literature following the 1960s – in terms of how specific literary texts return to and revise the founding of the U.S. as a political experiment. Historically speaking, these two periods stand at opposite ends of the arc of U.S. global hegemony: the American Renaissance as the U.S. rises to the status of global hegemon, and American literature after the 1960s in the midst of that hegemony’s unraveling. I argue that the precarious position of the U.S. in these two periods enables American literature to reactivate the utopian promise of the American Revolution. The texts I analyze treat the revolution as an archive of futures past, that is, they imagine futures that might have taken place but never did because of the betrayal of the revolutionary experiment. Put differently, my dissertation focuses on the tensions and contradictions between the U.S. – understood as a geographical and political entity – and America – understood as a utopian political desire. Furthermore, I show that one of the most important ways in which the reactivation of utopian political potential occurs is through figurations of the human body.

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Introduction:

The Impossibility of Being American

STILL, though the one I sing,
 (One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to
 Nation-
 ality,
 I leave in him Revolt, (O latent right of
 insurrection! O
 quenchless, indispensable fire!)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1871-2

O, yes,
 I say it plain,
 America never was America to me,
 And yet I swear this oath—
 America will be!

Langston Hughes, “Let America Be America
 Again”

I. Ambivalences

There is no redeeming America. There is no saving America from its exceptionalist trajectory, nor is there any rescuing it from the critiques that have made visible the multifold violences of the United States in its imperial adventures at home and abroad. Perhaps we are beyond hope. Perhaps hope – the hope of the New World, the providential pursuit of a new beginning, of a city on a hill – has always been illusory, mere wishful thinking or, worse, sheer ideology of the most dreadful kind. It would seem we would do better to abandon this name, “America,” to let the desire that has invested it

so intensely, gather dust on a shelf marked, “History.” We may not be able to do without America as a geographic and economic denominator, but we certainly could consign that desire called America, with all of its utopian promise, to the status of an object of criticism. To say America would, then, entail an immediate condemnation; it would imply America the imperial master, if not monster; America the declining hegemon; America the land of betrayed opportunities; America, the land where class struggle and a war on the poor is constantly disavowed only to be intensified. It would entail reducing “America” to the “United States,” and ridding ourselves, once and for all, of utopian investments. We would be able to bury our dead hopes and desires, accepting that America has never been more than another nation, that its dream of itself as the last chance to redeem mankind, has always been a dangerous illusion. There is no redeeming America, and, inversely, America is no redemption.

But what are we to do about the persistence of that desire called America, the way in which “America” still departs from the lips of citizens and non-citizens alike with an air of promise? How are we to reckon with the specter of the American Revolution as an event that repeatedly renews itself in its very betrayals? Writing in the midst of the first Gulf War, Adrienne Rich uses her language to inhabit “the old revolutionary road,” a path “that breaks off into the shadows/near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted/who disappeared into those shadows” (*Dark Fields* 3). “Old revolutionary road”: the temporal qualification engenders not a determinate and fixed origin but a haunting availability. Despite the numbers of those who have “disappeared into the shadows” – and we cannot ignore the ghosts of the Vietnam War, of which the Gulf War

is at once repetition and disavowal¹ - the event of revolution, the opening of America as a singular entity departing from the shadows of old Europe, is still effective. While the title of Rich's poem ("What Kind of Times Are These") speaks to disillusionment and decline, Rich nonetheless finds herself guarding the secret of "ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise": "I won't tell you where the place is [...] I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear" (Ibid.). We only feel betrayed when the promise remains flickering, a light shining on the horizon, however faintly. For a certain kind of critique, the negative is born of the positive, criticism being not the shadow but rather an attempt to dispel the shadow, to retrieve the light from those who would betray it: "And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you/anything?" (Ibid.). Rich refuses to settle the ghost of the revolution by identifying it with a resting place; she refuses to bury the revolution, promises to guard it, asserts a faith in what has fallen into disrepair, in "leafmold paradise." She persists in speaking of revolution, in speaking with it, despite its spectrality: "Because you still listen, because in times like these/to have you listen at all, it's necessary/ to talk about trees" (Ibid.). To have you listen at all "in times like these" – when "America" signifies imperial nightmare instead of republican dream – means learning to live with ghosts.

Rich's *Dark Fields of the Republic* (in which we find "What Kind of Times Are These") draws its title and epigraph from the last page of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. On that page, hope, futurity, "wonder," appears to abandon America, to recede from it into the distance of its almost completely forgotten origins. Rich quotes Fitzgerald: "He [Gatsby] had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must

have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.” Grasping at the American Dream, Gatsby misses it, or rather, he finds that he has necessarily missed it, that it had already come and gone. Preceding this narrative act of demystification, Nick Carraway remembers the promise of America “that flowered once for Dutch sailor’s eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder” (*Gatsby* 182). In these lines, America is not another nation but resolutely a desire, a planetary mission, to realize humanity. America names the adequation of the world not to what “man” *is* but to what he *might become*, to man as adventure, as advent of something new – something to “wonder” at.²

Yet I have already claimed that there is no redeeming America. There is no saving America, no messianic moment of rescue biding its time. I have no interest in a doomed attempt at reviving the old glory of America, nor will I be, with Nick Carraway, “brooding on the old, unknown world” (*Ibid.*). For that desire called America has been and is always already a seduction – or as Fitzgerald phrases it, a “transitory enchanted moment.” Let us, with Adrienne Rich, admit “that in times like these, it’s necessary to talk about trees.” That is, it is necessary, when living in the midst of an imperial nation

whose geopolitical and economic decline only makes it more dangerous, more convinced of its exceptional status/mission/place in the “New World Order,” to remark upon the extreme ambivalence of that desire called America, the way in which its promise (“a fresh, green breast of the new world”) is intimately entangled with its own betrayal; the way in which more than simply false, the seduction of the New World and the invitation of its virgin verdure is effective, productive, of a certain mode of desiring. A desire called America is tantamount to a violation of America. This violence is inscribed not only in the act of naming the continent but also in the erasure of names and peoples, and this violence is not merely primitive or originary – a disappearing fact – but repeated and continual, as evidenced in the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, the Vietnam War, the two Gulf Wars and the so-called War on Terror, each of which has involved the equation of liberation to a violence inflicted on a savage Other.³

If the American Revolution is a promise, it is a promise founded upon the betrayal of the New World, founded on the trees – which metonymically recall the indigenous peoples – that were cleared by conquest: “Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams. . . .” In this moment of prosopopoeia, we hear the “whispers” not only of a narcissistic, imperial projection but also of a disavowed other, of Native Americans reduced to the natural landscape, to a mere echo of colonial desire. Yet it is the central contention of *A Desire Called America* that, despite this violence, or because of it, there is no possibility of simply abandoning America. We cannot simply replace this name with another name, such as the “United States,”⁴ for there is no forgetting the dead – not

even dead desires. Simply demystifying the utopian impulse of America by tallying its sins and demanding that it confess that it has always pretended to be more than it ever was will not cleanse anyone, not even those oppositional critics who have so importantly excavated the body-filled catacombs of American history and culture. As intellectuals housed in institutions that are in many respects wedded to the American dream, to the imaginary *Bildung* of the individual as incarnation of American progress, there is no security in the desire Robyn Wiegman terms “American pursuits of global non-complicity,” that is, the desire to divorce ourselves from national violences through the repeated exorcism of complicity. The resurgence of xenophobic and nativist patriotism after “9/11,” to cite a significant example, suggests that the spectral afterlife of the desire called America is still quite powerful.⁵ Within the national political context, even the most prominent response to the reactionary, neoconservative administration of George W. Bush, namely, the electoral campaign and presidency of Barack Obama, was conducted in the name of America as a desire, as the persistent but malleable possibility of “hope” and “real change.” There would seem to be no escaping the ghost of the American dream: President Obama, like Gatsby, “believe[s] in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us”; and the desire for change, for a future that would not be a mere extension of the present, still finds itself travelling along Rich’s “old revolutionary road” with its belated promise of new beginnings: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (*Gatsby* 182).

To state the matter in a provocative manner: the nation still matters – but only if nationality includes an otherness that is not only in excess of it but that also calls it into

question and undermines it. In part, this is because while the nation-state may be becoming an increasingly residual political form given the contemporary realities of global capitalism, the national imaginary is still alive, if not quite well, living an afterlife of powerful fantasies and productive desires, which cross paths and sometimes combine with international, transnational, and local cultural/ideological formations but that are irreducible to them. Thus, while I agree with thinkers such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their diagnosis of an emergent global Empire, or a mode of governance possessing a relative autonomy in relation to nation-states, I would nonetheless propose that even global governance and the alter/anti-globalization movements that contest it involve national mediations in their production of political subjectivity.⁶ We might invert this point by recalling – along with the New Americanists, the transnational Americanists and the international Americanists – that “America” or the United States has *never* been a self-sufficient and self-enclosed entity. Thus, to name two notable examples, Donald Pease in *Visionary Compacts* and Lauren Berlant in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* show how what constitutes the American Renaissance as a historical and literary periodization is not cultural unity but rather the negotiation of a series of crises in which the fractures between local, regional, and national identity in the U.S. becomes so pronounced that “America,” or “American Literature,” is meaningful only insofar as it names a desire, the wish for a unity and cohesion. In a different but not unrelated register, Amy Kaplan’s *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* demonstrates that imperialism is not merely accidental in the creation of the U.S. and/or America but rather at the very core of it. Despite American exceptionalism’s blind assertion that America

distinguishes itself through its opposition to European imperialism, America constitutes itself through imperialist ventures, whether it be in 1848 (the Mexican-American War) or 2003 (the second Gulf War). However, to invert our angle of vision once more, even the transnational dynamics of American imperialism or American hegemony involve nationalist desires – desires for the nation, and desires for a nation.

Lauren Berlant and Donald Pease, I would argue, are right to insist upon the significance of fantasies regarding nationality that structure the desires of U.S. citizens (but also non-citizens) and frame political and symbolic struggles over what it means to occupy America.⁷ Berlant tends to assume that “the National Symbolic” (“the *political* space of the nation, which is not merely judicial, territorial [*jus soli*], genetic [*jus sanguinis*], linguistic, or experiential, but some tangled cluster of these”) in its utopian labor as “dominant patriotic index” sutures closed the fractures of the American social setting (*Anatomy* 5; 206). It makes “intimate” the allegiance of “national identity,” and in doing so, forecloses the space of critique and the positing of alternatives. Utopia, in this instance, means the end of history, the neutralization of politics, the bliss of fusion in national community; the desire called America is something like the repression of other desires (local desires, group desires, etc.) that refuse to pledge allegiance.⁸ Ending on a prescriptive note, Berlant suggests that the political subject, if she is to “avoid the melancholy insanity of the self-abstraction that is citizenship” “must develop tactics for refusing the interarticulation, now four hundred years old, between the United States and America, the nation and utopia” (217). However, in what follows, I show how the desire called America not only denies the possibility of other desires but also provokes them,

indeed, in some cases, even invokes and convokes them. For the desire called America is strikingly ambivalent. Berlant herself concludes with a “caveat”: “Thus there is no guarantee that Americans would rejoice if the historical nation, the United States, were to take off its utopian A- perhaps at the end of Empire” (Ibid.). Indeed, I would intensify this qualification by adding that such an abandonment or withdrawing of narcissistic libidinal energy can potentially produce its own “melancholy insanity.”⁹ While we should not surrender the tactic of refusing the U.S.-America nexus – any number of political organizations/movements, e.g. the Civil Rights movement, having deployed it to great effect – we also should not, or rather cannot, eliminate the coupling of America and utopia as a tactic in our critical arsenal. If the political complexities of the United States makes it impossible to *be* American, it is also impossible for many to completely refuse identification with America, to shed themselves of the promise that such an identification carries.

To repeat Berlant and Pease, but with a difference: not all national desires are the same; they do not all produce the same effects, nor are they all organized in an identical fashion. It is not only that American national desire depends on a differential systematicity negotiating the particularities of country, region, state, and locale. As I describe in more detail below, the very field of nationalist desire in the United States is irreducible to European nationalism, and though I cannot explore the matter in this project, I would also add that it is irreducible to Third World nationalism or anti-colonial nationalism. To desire a nation, and to desire something in/of the nation, signifies differently according to context. One of the striking peculiarities of American nationalism

is that the desire imbuing it is simultaneously a desire to raise the nation up to a level of transcendence, to make it more than just another nation-state, and a desire to abolish it, to subtract a spirit or body from it that is in excess of it, to liberate a New Man who is somehow free from its conditions of existence. One of my central contentions is that this peculiarity is itself bivalent, that in addition to its fundamentalist guise (the U.S. as neo-conservative world-redeemer), there is the potentiality of a radically utopian America, an America which cuts the knot tethering nationality to the disciplinary regimes of the state and of capital.

Instead of positing an opposition between the desire called America and its negation, we would do better to engage the multiplicity of that desire called America, the different forms it takes, as well as the sheer and extreme ambivalence of its vicissitudes. There is something in the name America, something national but in excess of what we usually mean by the term, that resists being abolished. As Susan Hegeman suggests, we might benefit from a “conscious and strategic deployment of [...] ‘America’,” one which recognizes the problematic character of the rhetorical field it designates but which renders this problematic character generative for analysis (“Culture, Patriotism” 457). Rather than trying to escape or avoid complicity, this entails that engagements with American studies, American literature, and American culture *begin from complicity* in order to survey the potentialities and the limits that are opened up by particular objects, concepts, and discourses. Such an approach can entail any number of pursuits, ranging from the complex interrogations of whiteness studies conducted by Richard Dyer, David Roediger, and George Lipsitz to the analysis of the ways in which canonical figures such

as Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thomas Pynchon enable and provoke the undoing of their own privilege or illuminate a horizon in which “America” (as a name which conditions the attribution of value to such “major figures in American literature”) is invoked and evoked only to abolish itself. The latter pursuit describes my own trajectory, but it is, of course, not the only one.

If my approach merits attention, it is because it reveals the generative non-identity between major American literary figures such as Emily Dickinson and William Burroughs and the canonical value ascribed to them, that is, the productivity of the texts that go under these authorial inscriptions is in excess of the conjunction of nation-state, capital, and literary value that conditions their scholarly reception. As I explain below, a minor chord traverses the texts of these figures, but what is distinctive is that this minor note is *not* the property of a minor identity/minority but rather the sound of American hegemony’s frayed edges. What I hope *A Desire Called America* makes audible are the ways in which the dismantling of American identity, or American exceptionalism, by those who would seem to embody it enables the invention of futures irreducible to the privilege of being American. Each of the textual bodies I examine in this project (writing by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, William S. Burroughs, and Thomas Pynchon) dramatizes *the impossibility of (not) being American*, that is, they stage the impossibility of sustaining a desire called America in the face of historical material realities, political challenges, poetic difficulties, and logical/conceptual inconsistencies, but they do so through a utopian insistence that that desire called America might transform so radically that what appears in the future is no longer something recognizably American. Reversing

this formula, we might say that in these figures the impossibility of not being American translates the impossibility of being American into the articulation of alternative cultural and political spaces: a becoming American otherwise.

To track this movement, *A Desire Called America* orients itself around a set of theses, which are less definitive propositions than the formulation of problems:

- 1) *The extreme ambivalence of that desire called America*: This desire is “ambivalent,” because it is subject to reversals, caught between different versions of apocalyptic, messianic, and utopian impulses. Neither simply Left, nor Right; liberal, nor conservative; it opens up the possibility of revolution but also allows for and enables reaction. The desire called America embodies Fredric Jameson’s dialectic between ideology and utopia, but with a twist, namely, that the utopian dimension itself becomes conflicted, split between the neutralization of rupture and its introduction.¹⁰ In particular, the desire called America is split between, on the one hand, an exceptionalist vision of America, in which the United States is a redeeming nation, a nation whose future is also the world’s future, a nation whose history is the teleology of an elect people achieving their proper essence, appropriating the world as their own; and, on the other hand, a singular America, the self-destruction of teleology through an encounter with the future as radical alterity, the dispossession of the self as the birth of a new self, a new Americanness.
- 2) *Surplus utopia, or singular America*: There is a tradition, or what we might also call following Michel Foucault and Lauren Berlant a “countermemory”¹¹, in which the desire called America is evoked and invoked only to explode the dialectic between ideology and utopia with surplus (non)sense. This non-dialectical surplus is utopia at the extreme point where the negative and positive become indistinguishable; it is utopia as the “no-place” – that which interrupts, exceeds, and undercuts the order of things, i.e. constitutive void – and as the intimation of that which cannot be named – futurity as radical alterity, i.e. surplus. Utopia becomes a *praxis*, in many cases a kind of sabotage, siphoning off the energies bound up in the desire called America to redirect them towards the horizon of a post-capitalist, post-national form of life. For reasons I explain

below, I term this *praxis* of utopian surplus “singular America.” Singular America is not the negation of that desire called America; instead, it is that surplus in the desire called America more than the desire. In psychoanalytic terms, a singular America obeys the logic of the drive. Rather than the instrumentality of movement towards a fixed object of desire, one finds a spiraling motion that does away with teleology, replacing the latter with a circular, pulsating motion around a void, or with, to paraphrase Jacques Lacan, an end which is no more than a means, an aim that has become the path itself.¹² In other words, if as psychoanalysis teaches subjectivity is an effect of desire (and not the reverse), then a singular America is that radical moment in which desire comes undone, becomes exposed to an alterity that undermines it and refits it into another mode of being.

- 3) *Biopolitics and Utopia*: The desire called America and singular America are biopolitical. Biopolitics, according to Foucault, names the threshold of modernity when the very fact of life, or “life itself,” becomes a political problem. But life itself is always embodied life, life delivered over to its facticity, its materiality. The question around which biopolitics revolves is that of *how* life comes to be embodied, in what forms and in what modes. One of the central claims of *A Desire Called America* is that the peculiar utopianism of America can only be understood biopolitically. What is utopian in America is less a space in and of itself (the New World) than the space considered as the birthplace of a new human being, a new form of life. In particular, this new form of life is a life perennially departing, taking its leave, from the law or the symbolic order. That is, biopolitics names the chiasmic crossing of language/law/the symbolic *and* the body/corporeality/flesh, or the point at which new forms of life arrive in the interval between one symbolic order and another, an interval whose quasi-presence is perhaps first felt in the aesthetic dimension.

Again, let me reiterate: these points are not solutions but problems; they are a series of diagonal traversals tracing the frayed and jagged edges of the desire called America. They are not closures but openings. More specifically, they open up the space of the excluded middle between American exceptionalism and the critique of American

exceptionalism, or between a simple affirmation of America *qua* utopia and its simple rejection. They open onto the thinking of a singular America: a utopian *praxis* in which the desire called America exceeds itself, becomes unnamable, a stranger to itself. For while there may be no redeeming America, no saving it from itself, there is also no abandoning it – at least not yet.

II. Taking Exception:

On the Critique of American Exceptionalism, and its Impasses

In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush gave voice to a promissory insistence that America is still great, still an exceptional nation. If “9/11” constitutes a national trauma, a wound to the American ego, it also “brought out the best in America”: “None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th. Yet after America was attacked, it was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history.” Ground Zero becomes a site at which to renew the national compact, a place where the founding of America is revisited, renewed, and, of course, revised. “Obligation” is effected by a look into the mirror, but the mirror reflects not ourselves but rather “our better selves,” that is, “our” essentially innocent, pure, and good selves – those selves who share in the nation as one body and one soul. This rhetoric makes the “war on terror” not only necessary (“Our war on terror is well begun,

but it is only begun...”) but also a trial: a test of American resolve, one whose answer is the renewal of American exceptionalism.¹³

If America is not a perfect synecdoche for the world, according to Bush’s logic it nonetheless functions as the vanguard – the positive articulation, anticipation, and leader – for what is essentially “right and true and unchanging”: “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.” In this address, Bush repeats, revises, and renews the centuries-old symbolic ritual of the Jeremiad. As elaborated by Sacvan Bercovitch, this ritual dates back to the seventeenth-century Puritan communities, and especially to the second-and third-generations of settlers for whom America was not simply a utopian destination but also an inheritance from which one might be dispossessed.¹⁴ The jeremiad asserts the utopian promise of America by warning of its potential loss; it produces consent (“covenant”) and invents a people through the warning that the promised land – America/the “New Israel” – will be lost, if “we” do not preserve and protect it. It is not difficult to trace this ritual through myriad instances of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Whether it be Abraham Lincoln’s call for a renewed union in the Gettysburg Address or Sarah Palin’s infamous call to a “real America,” what is at stake is the production of community in such a manner that the American nation is set apart from other nations in a movement of transcendence, but also rendered exemplary, a model nation at the forefront in liberty, equality, and virtue. In this discourse, Americans are the world’s “elect,” a chosen people whose political will is providential, a people for whom redemption is an exclusive future.

Although the standards of value it promotes differ in certain respects from those of Bush, John Winthrop's 1630 sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" – one of the founding texts of the genre of the Jeremiad, delivered aboard the *Arabella* on its voyage to New England – contains the seeds of this later moment of exceptionalism in the circuit it constructs between anticipatory, mimetic, and imperative modes of address.

We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory [so] that men shall say of succeeding plantations, 'The Lord make it like that of New England,' for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world; [...] we shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy [...] [W]e shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it. (65)

Winthrop's language convokes a people only by warning them of their potential failure; it creates a sense of collective endeavor or mission only insofar as it also threatens with the possibility of "shipwreck" (64). If the repeated use of "shall" seems to guarantee the future according to a providential logic, it also undercuts this guarantee by invoking the possibility of "shame" as a result of a failure to live up to the covenant with God. There is a reversibility involved in being a "city upon a hill," for if the rewards of being a model for the world are great, the price of failure is likewise intensified: "But if we shall neglect the observation of these articles [...] the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us, be revenged of such a perjured people, and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant" (Ibid.). The unity of the American people comes to be the effect of a double specular relationship: the spectacular image America projects to the world makes the

people cohere as model, while introspection, or self-monitoring, driven by an anxiety and shame regarding potential failure, knits the people together in fear. Shame and fear are the necessary complements of the providential promise the jeremiad encapsulates. But shame and fear are not quite enough to ensure the tight-knit identity of “the people,” as evidenced by the way in which Winthrop’s language relies on the supplementary rhetorical force of the command or imperative, e.g., “For this end, we *must* be knit together in this work as one man. We *must* entertain each other in brotherly affection; we *must* be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities...” (Ibid.; my emphasis). In the force of these prescriptions, we witness not only the welding together of a community through the evocation of external and internal threats but also, proleptically, the violent purging of heretics and witches, the expulsion of those surplus elements of transgression that form the constitutive outside of American exceptionalism.¹⁵ In this dialectic between providence and fallenness, pride and shame, hope and anxiety, it is, finally, the threat of becoming other, of being cast out and rendered subject to sovereign “wrath,” that makes the chosen people, the elect, cohere.

There is remarkable continuity between the exceptionalism of John Winthrop and George W. Bush, though not, of course, an identity.¹⁶ In both cases, “America” is the name of a future as much as a present or a past, and in both cases, the shape or content of this future is certain but threatened: threatened internally, by the potential failure to live up to the greatness of America or the temptation to deviate from the national compact; and externally, by those others who purportedly hate or are envious of our freedoms. (It is not difficult to hear echoes of Winthrop in the institutionalization of “Homeland

Security” and in the Patriot Acts.) Times like these, Bush reminds us, constitute a “time of testing,” a trial in which once again America will prove its “character.” But, as we have come to learn – or, rather, had already learned a number of times throughout U.S. history by way of red scares, laws against sedition, communist witch-hunts, illegal rendition, and other exceptional measures – such trials require the supplementary force of repressive and ideological state apparatuses in order to preserve “our” “security.” Indeed, Bush deploys the word “security” repeatedly in the 2002 State of the Union Address, using it to refer not only to national defense issues but also “economic security,” “health security,” “homeland security,” “retirement security,” and “Social Security.” In this rhetoric, as well as in the actual functioning of the Bush administration, one sees at work an entire biopolitical framework in which the individual life course is wholly subsumed by population management, and populations become objects/targets of preemptive measures designed to detect deviations from national allegiance before they even occur.¹⁷ For my purposes, the most important aspects of this recent moment of American exceptionalism are how the unity of the people (Bush’s “my fellow Americans”) is contingent upon a policing operation that engenders a continuity between economics, health, geopolitics, and national belonging and that monitors for/imputes signs of transgression; and how a preemptive logic of security functions as much to ward off the future (as otherness, as difference) as it does to guarantee it.

American exceptionalism, then, is utopian in that it projects a future, a no-place, that realizes the perfection of a particular nature or that fulfills the here and now in an immanent transcendence. This is utopia as, to quote Alexis de Tocqueville, “providential

fact” (*Democracy* 15). But American exceptionalism is also profoundly anti-utopian, for in its providential desire to realize America, to achieve what was always already potential, always already there for the taking, it renders the future unthinkable as anything but an extension of the present. In American exceptionalism, one aspect of the utopian impulse (the highest good, or *eutopia*), overwhelms the other aspect (the not/no, or *utopia*), which is to say that a given set of moral conventions neutralize the radical negativity of the utopian impulse. Additionally, we may say that the spatialization of the utopic impulse conquers the temporal dimension – what Ernst Bloch terms, the “not-yet” – consigning and confining the latter to the prison of an eternal present. This is America as always already post-historical, always already delivered over to an essence that purports to be both self-identical and universal. As William V. Spanos writes, this post-historical drive in American exceptionalism is “a pre-ordained ontological promise-fulfillment structure that always anticipated an end (the city on the hill) which never arrives, a relationship that renders America *always* exceptional” (“Exceptionalism” 41). This mode of messianic desire does not so much open the present to the future as pass the present off as futurity, all the while ensuring, as Spanos argues elsewhere, that specters of alterity/otherness are contained within the imperial circle of “over-sight” and “super-vision”.¹⁸ In other words, the only difference that difference makes for American exceptionalism is the extension and/or intensification of America’s status as imperial center – even, or especially, when the center no longer holds.

The desire called America, in its exceptionalist mode, is an ambivalent desire, caught between a utopian promise and the abolition of futurity as such. It is a desire that

secures the present only by invoking/evoking insecurity so as to ward off a future that would be truly other. Finally, it is a desire that constitutes subjects that are internally split between a sense of belonging to “the homeland,” or “promised land,” and a sense of always potentially failing to obey or live up to the American compact.

However, my interest in this section is not in American exceptionalism understood as a monolithic, unperturbed, or unassailable ideological inheritance but rather in the contestation of American exceptionalism. More specifically, I am interested in how American Studies as a discipline constitutes itself by *taking exception to the exception*. This constitution by way of critique is especially evident in the work of the group of critics who have come to be known as the “New Americanists” – scholars such as Donald Pease, Robyn Wiegman, John Carlos Rowe, and Amy Kaplan – whose work engenders a fissure in the discipline of American Studies between the multiplicity of political subjectivities that fall under the heading of “America” (or the “United States”) and American exceptionalism, the latter understood as the production of a proper liberal subject through the exclusion and/or assimilation of improper forms of life. Their work upsets the vision of American innocence found in classical Americanist scholarship (the “American Adam”) by analyzing the processes of disavowal and repression structuring American exceptionalism (i.e., the forgetting of state violences constitutive of the U.S.) and by excavating forms of subjectivity irreducible to any proper conception of Americanness. The practice of the New Americanists cannot, however, be conceived of solely in negative terms, for it also contains a quasi-utopian component. Although it might be easy to grasp the temporality of American Studies wholly in terms of the

retrieval of the past, such a survey would occlude the field's intense investment in (re)figuring the future. The utopian impulse of New Americanist practice consists in its interrupting American exceptionalism's exorcism of future alterity by showing how, in Donald Pease's words, "figures from disremembered pasts could be reassembled in the present as portents of things to come" ("9/11" 84).

Yet there is a limit to the practices of the New Americanists, namely, their constitutive disavowal and sometimes repression of ontology. Disavowal, in its precise psychoanalytic sense, differs from repression, for whereas the latter entails a removal of content from consciousness, the former takes the form of a refusal to believe what one sees: one knows very well that X is the case but, all the same, one refuses to accept its existence. In the case of the New Americanists, the disavowal of the ontological dimension – or, more specifically, the disavowal of how politics presupposes a particular conception of being – is an effect of their residual investment in liberalism. While many of these writers acutely criticize liberalism for its exclusionary and oppressive practices, especially its identification of personhood with whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality, they nevertheless tend to leave intact the fundamental ontological presuppositions of liberalism: the conflation of personhood and private property, the division between public and private spheres, the formalization of the political as an autonomous set of governmental institutions, and the fetishization of individualism/Emersonian "self-reliance" (over and against collectivity).

The New Americanists gesture towards these presuppositions, but, relying on a mode of ideology-critique in which the pernicious translates to the false, or in which what

is bad amounts to an illusion, they transfer the technologies of power involved in the functioning of liberalism out of the realm of ontology and into a dimension of contingency, accident, and mere appearance. Liberal subjectivity becomes false subjectivity, and the repressed others it conceals become the truth of American culture and politics. As it turns out, however, this truth is strikingly similar to the false mask that had been stripped away: truth becomes the assimilation of otherness to liberal personhood. Put differently, the critical impulse in New Americanist work tends to subsume the utopian impulse, and, in doing so, confines it to the limits of the very political terrain it seeks to escape. What results is not only an underestimation of the degree to which liberalism *produces* the very being of American social life but also a blindness to alternative conceptions of ontology, to modes of fabricating subjectivity otherwise. As I argue below, moving beyond this impasse requires *a biopolitical turn in American Studies*, a turn towards the specters of embodied forms of life different from and in excess of the liberal person.

The work of Donald Pease can serve as an exemplary, though not all-encompassing, instance of the New Americanist critical project. Pease is especially interesting, because he has written what effectively function as the constitutional origins of the New Americanists: a series of introductions (discussed below) that synthesize past critical endeavors into a relatively coherent and cogent disciplinary body and that shape the possibilities of future endeavors. These origins, however, are less solid foundations than counter-hegemonic interstices in which alternative futures flicker with promise. Put differently, the “revisionary” efforts of the New Americanists are aimed not at producing

a final draft of American Studies, or a stable institution securing once and for all the epistemic and political legitimacy of the field. Instead, as I explain below, their project is premised upon a state of permanent revision.

The “New Americanists” label originates in a critique of the New Americanists, an article by Frederick Crews, “Whose American Renaissance?” (1988), in which a number of texts (including Pease’s *Visionary Compacts*) are censured primarily for the haste with which they rush to uncover political positions within/behind pieces of literature. In “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon” (1990), Pease appropriates Crews’s condemnatory nomination, changing its import, first, by identifying and criticizing the ideological framework in which Crews writes and, second, by enacting a reversal whereby the very negative space designated by Crews becomes positive possibility. Pease does not criticize Crews as a member of the right or as a conservative but for his quintessentially liberal perspective (“the tacit assumptions of the liberal consensus”), which presupposes a division between an autonomous cultural sphere and a social sphere. This division enables the elevation of an ironic consciousness capable of recognizing aesthetic value without sully itself with political/social content. This distinction is significant insofar as it gestures towards a difference between, on the one hand, a liberal model of cultural and literary criticism valorizing tolerance, inclusion, and consensus and, on the other, a radical model valorizing contact/crossing, dissensus, and world-altering change.

For Pease, what defines the liberal subject of American Studies, above all, is the “imaginary separation between the cultural and the public sphere,” which “enables liberal

subjects to experience the otherwise threatening cultural contradictions released by the cold war consensus as the negative capability of a whole self” (Ibid.). The invocation of negative capability – coming from Crews by way of Lionel Trilling by way of Keats – indicates the possibility of dwelling in uncertainty without terror or fear of destruction. But in the specifically liberal context, it denotes a neutralizing function, an ironic mode of security whereby the threatening quality of otherness is negated through inclusion within a preexisting narrative that explains difference away and/or reduces it to identity. This particular form of negative capability constitutes what Pease terms a “field-Imaginary”: a “disciplinary unconscious,” “the field’s fundamental syntax – its tacit assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together”; the structural possibility of a “primal identity within the field” in which the terms of discourse become “self-evident principles” (11-12). In a brilliant act of synthesis, Pease locates the “primal scene” of classical American Studies in a meta-narrative that we might call the exceptionalist romance: “While these master-texts in American Studies provide slightly different meta-narratives with which Americanists define their practices, all of these titles presuppose a realm of pure possibility [...] where a whole self [...] can internalize the major contradictions at work in American history [...] in a language and in a set of actions and relations confirmative of the difference between a particular cultural location and the rest of the world [...]” (12). This meta-narrative forms an ideologeme – Fredric Jameson’s term for an amphibious entity that is half narrative, half philosophical concept¹⁹ – in which America preserves its uniqueness, separateness, and redemptive power (its status as global exception) by translating every

difference into an effect of the “pure possibility” of America and by repressing the trauma of American imperialism that threatens to taint the purity of this power/possibility.

Whereas the liberal Americanist inhabits a “realm of pure possibility” constructed through the repression of alterity, the New Americanist – according to Pease – calls into question the very structure of the disciplinary unconscious by effecting a relationship between “emergent disciplinary practices” and “emancipatory social or political movements” (17). The relatedness of the New Americanists with an emancipatory outside is supposed to interrupt the conversion of disciplinary practices into common sense reflections of the status quo (18-19). Instead of operating based on a set of naturalized, self-evident principles (the “field-Imaginary”), the New Americanists locate themselves in a permanent revolution, an ever-renewed state of instability in which the walls of the disciplinary formation are drilled through by encounters with radical social movements. This productive upheaval finds its roots in “the emancipatory politics of the sixties [which] desublimated the political energies the liberal imagination had previously held in check” (26). Pease notably refers to this desublimation as a “utopian romance”: an attempt to literalize the exceptionalist romance of America by tearing down the imaginary wall between culture and social reality (Ibid.). If the social movements of the sixties create the conditions of possibility for the New Americanists by conceiving of a mode of knowledge-production linked immediately to emancipatory social *praxis*, they nonetheless also neutralize in advance their own radical implications by containing them within the romance of American exceptionalism. Pease remains vague as to how the

social movements of the sixties can be reduced to a simple inversion of classical American Studies – taking American romance into the streets, instead of the streets into the romance – but, for the moment, what is important is the counter-hegemonic strategy this polemic embodies: in positioning the sixties as a failed radical break with American exceptionalism, Pease can position the New Americanists as the belated fulfillment of this earlier revolutionary moment. The New Americanists constitute a repetition of the sixties by other means; they embody a desire not for America's redemption but for its radical transformation beyond the liberal division between culture and politics.

The “new” in “New Americanists,” therefore, signifies in at least a three-fold manner. First, it gestures towards a new (anti-/non-)disciplinary location, on the border between academe and society at large in the form of “*liasons between* cultural and public realms” (31). Second, it indicates a new *praxis*, or method, in the form of a critical demystification of the American romance as a “field-Imaginary” and the articulation of alternative orders of thought and social practice. Finally, it signifies a desire not for redemption but for an America that would break with liberalism and imperialism by reckoning with and working through U.S. history. Seen in this light, the New Americanists constitute a certain kind of utopian figure. They are first of all utopian in their occupation of a non-place, a place without a place, within the geography of knowledge-production. As Pease's use of the term “*liaisons*” suggests, the New Americanists are a movement not only in the obvious sense of a break with the status quo but also in the more literal sense of a shuttling back and forth between places. They are defined by their movement – interdisciplinary (in the form of the strange place of

American Studies departments in academic institutions), politically active and socially committed (linked directly or through students to social movements that traverse, disrupt, or exist outside of the boundaries of the campus). This non-place of the New Americanists amounts less to a new institution than to a counter-hegemonic interruption of the university as an appendage (ideological apparatus) of the state and capital.²⁰

This counter-hegemonic interruption implies a second utopian dimension of the New Americanists, namely, the disruption of the homogenous, empty time of present consensus that views itself as the best of all possible worlds. The time of the New Americanists is a time of fracture and dissensus, the advent of a radically other future through the recovery of repressed pasts. The New Americanists locate a void (*u/a-topos*) in the present: the specter of oppressed/suppressed collectivities that the hegemonic social order must exorcize in order to secure its continued existence; the non-identity which the liberal person covers over and forgets in order to sanctify the imaginary resolution of real social contradictions. This void is the condition of possibility for the production of an alternative futurity, its non-identity with the present implying the existence of times exceeding yet immanent to the present. Foregrounding the virtual presence of other worlds returns the ethical dimension to the utopian, for it entails that utopia is not only no-place but also the good place. In the context of New Americanist practice, this means that ideology includes the imagination of alternatives to the consensus of the present. The “New” in “New Americanists,” thus, signs the anticipation of a new, better America.

In their quest for a radically other future, the New Americanists reduplicate the distinction made by the great twentieth-century philosopher of utopia Ernst Bloch between abstract and concrete utopia. As elaborated in Bloch's three-volume *The Principle of Hope*, this distinction revolves around the relations among subjectivity, desire, futurity, and material conditions. Abstract utopia involves the projection of a better future without regards for present material conditions; it is the effect of a wish-fulfillment assuming that what is wrong in this world might be reduced to the absence of a particular object. In Bloch's words, "[U]ndoubtedly the utopian function is only immaturely present in abstract utopianizing, i.e. still predominantly without solid subject behind it and without relation to the Real-Possible" (*Principle* 145). The "immaturity" of abstract utopia lies in the separation it presupposes between the here-and-now and the then-and-there, or, in other words, in its identification of radical temporal otherness with transcendence: utopia is no more than the magical or quasi-religious arrival of desire's fulfillment from out of nowhere. Against abstract utopianizing, Bloch proposes "that solely real realism which only is so because it is fully attuned to the tendency of what is actually real, to the objectively real possibility to which this tendency is assigned, and consequently to the properties of reality which are themselves utopian, i.e. contain future [or as Bloch also terms concrete futurity, the "not-yet"]" (*Ibid.*). In this conceptual reversal, "actually real" and "real realism" do not signify the pragmatism of denying otherworldly possibilities but rather a hopeful consciousness aware of the present's irreducibility to itself. The "Real-Possible" disrupts and overwhelms the present by exposing it to an immanent temporal difference which threatens/promises to fracture the

course of history. Bloch's philosophy does nothing less than *immanentize* utopia, or convert the thinking of utopia into the historical material problem of how the material conditions of the present contain the seeds of radically other futures.²¹

In line with Bloch, we might specify the utopian dimension of New Americanist practice further by pointing out how it operates as a corrective to a certain mode of utopian thought. The New Americanists abandon the project of sketching blueprints for a better world. They surrender the intellectual authority of the transcendent point of survey – the position of the intellectual as over-seer, as super-visor – in favor of the more modest role of a node in a network, or an operator inflecting the flows of thought and practice in cooperation with others. That being said, rather than implying the negation of utopia or the adoption of a purely pragmatic/reformist standpoint, this surrender of authority transfers the utopian impulse to the realm of subjectivity; it displaces utopia away from the search for the good place and towards the production of radically other subjectivities. What is at stake in New Americanist research is the (re)invention of America, or the American, through an experimental procedure of unveiling other forms of life.

Lest I be accused of making too much of a single article, I would like to briefly engage with three additional articles (all of which feature Donald Pease as author/co-author) confirming and extending the arguments of Pease's initial founding text. Indeed, there is an obsessive-compulsive – which is to say, neurotic – quality to the way in which Pease and other New Americanists return to the same questions of methodology again and again. It is as if, like their object of critique (American exceptionalism), they too were trying to ward off a specter. The question thus becomes: What is the specter

haunting the New Americanists? What do they flee from only to discover the uncanny fact of its living inside their very own practices? As I have already suggested, it is the ontological dimension and its calling into question of a mode of ideology critique founded upon a substantial difference between truth and falsity, reality and illusion, that functions as the stumbling block of New Americanist work. The New Americanists productively circulate around a void/surplus element in the symbolic order, what Jacques Lacan names “the Real,” that acts simultaneously as a source of productivity and a limit to their critical labors. More specifically, they stumble upon, and all too hastily over, the specters of non-liberal alternatives to American exceptionalism. For while the New Americanists obsessively seek to disentangle themselves from American exceptionalism’s teleological will to power, they also avoid acknowledging the ontological saturation of American social life by liberalism and the central implication of this fact, namely, that it is only in an inventive mode of inquiry, one irreducible to the presuppositions of ideology critique, that we can locate alternatives to American exceptionalism.²²

In “National Identities, Postmodern Artifacts, and Postnational Narratives” (1992) (a follow-up to “New Americanists,” also published in *boundary 2*), Pease frames his elaboration of the arguments in the earlier article through the admission of a failure: “I intended by way of this scenario a model of American Studies able to displace Crews as the field’s official representative. But as some critics of the volume and several members of the *boundary 2* collective have observed, I also thereby confirmed one of Crews’s central assumptions, that the field of American Studies was monolithic,

unidimensional, and monocultural” (2). Pease confesses to reenacting the very thing of which he accuses Crews, namely, the erection of a self-identical, homogenous order possessing an overarching, unilateral narrative. Perhaps the most problematic implication of this reversal would be the way it tends to render equivalent such qualitatively differing subjectivities as “African Americanists, feminist Americanists, Chicano Americanists, Asian Americanists, gay Americanists” (Ibid.). Minority Americans make up an America that is no more than the mirror-image of American exceptionalism, a minor America that is but the specular double/rival of majority America.

Pease, of course, does not confess to this conflation simply out of a desire for atonement. Instead, confession functions as a practice of self-correction, a self-admonishment enabling a reinvention of selfhood. The “postnational” names Pease’s solution to the problem of producing a minimal degree of political/cultural/(anti-)disciplinary unity and cohesion without positing a “monolithic, unidimensional, and monocultural” model. “The term *postnational*,” Pease writes, “indicates New Americanists’ multiple interpellations: their different identifications with the disciplinary apparatuses in the new American Studies, as well as with social movements comprised of the ‘disenfranchised groups already cited” (3). The use of the plural and the insistence on heterogeneity suggest that the subjectivity of “new American Studies” is not the property of *a* subject but the effect of a diverse set of undertakings dismantling the meta-narratives of American Studies. Pease weaves together a rainbow coalition of those who are either the dispossessed or their allies.

Central to Pease's conceptualization of this alliance is a reliance on negative definition. The New Americanists are *not* the (old, consensual, nationalist) Americanists, because they do *not* subscribe to the "national meta-narrative."²³ Even the positive delineation of the alternative takes the form of a contrastive sentence: "Whereas the national narrative resulted in the assimilation of differences to the self-sameness of ruling assumptions, whose universality was predicated upon their inapplicability for peoples construed as of 'another Nature,' the postnational narratives dismantle this opposition" (Ibid.) And: "Postnational forces understand every social category as the ongoing antagonism between internalized models [e.g., "idealized stereotypes of race and gender"] and external forces. As such, they are productive of an internal divide (the contamination of the excluded/external), whereby the structures underwriting the stability of the national narrative can undergo transformations" (5). "External" versus "internalized"; "national" versus "postnational"; "disenfranchised" versus "model" – the "New" of New Americanists seems to arise from the gap between a valorized term and a denigrated term, its futurity no more than the inversion of the positive and negative charges of a binary set.

However, Pease complicates the simplicity of this binary polemical strategy by insisting upon "internal divide[s]" and "contamination," which is to say by deconstructing the line between outside and inside, by unfolding the insides of preconstituted subjects in order to expose them to the disavowed and repressed possibilities of the outside. The "postnational" is not just the other side of the national, its beyond, but rather a "permanent instability, an endless antagonism" or a set of

“provisional strategies, subject to the ongoing revisions of movement politics” (6).

“Movement,” “instability,” “antagonism” and “provisionality”: the fixed space of subjectivity gives way to a fractured temporality whose being exists only in its becoming, or whose identity is wholly predicated on an unstable synthesis between heterogeneous differences that do not so much threaten as promise to unhinge and reconstellate. A final elaboration of this critical and quasi-utopian dynamic merits quotation:

But if a national identity recognizes the difference between the meta-social person with whom he had identified himself and what he discovers, in an intranational encounter with alternative social objectifications of national materials, he could have become, then this person – formerly gendered ‘male,’ now gendered ‘differently’ – discovers s/he is dislocated from his/her national identity and, in this surplus historicity, discovers alternative constructions. In order to achieve this discovery, New Americanists must understand themselves as multiply interpellated – within social movements as well as academic fields. (8)

The “surplus historicity” to which Pease alludes guides the sentence itself, the convolutions of which (in the form of proliferating clauses and parentheticals, as well as in the concertedly ambiguous pronomial usage) hollow out the content of identifications (i.e. “male”) and indicate concrete futures of alterity (“alternative constructions”). The “post” of “postnational” thus transforms into the “intra” of “intranational,” a productive confusion which, I would argue, does not collapse the future into the present but rather exposes the present to the concrete, radically other futures that dwell in it. Against American exceptionalism’s teleological drive and its fantasy of an “elect” who are the one and only true inheritors of America, this predication of the postnational on the intranational makes the temporality of Americanness an intensely political affair, an effect of the negotiation of differences in an explicitly polemical fashion.

Reframing my analysis of Pease's methodological statements in terms of *A Desire Called America*, the futurity with which Pease arms himself is a futurity not *after* that desire called America but caught up in its ambivalent vicissitudes, flickering into existence between the extremes of identity (American exceptionalism) and difference (the self-abolition of America). "Surplus historicity" gestures towards what I have termed "surplus utopia" (Thesis 2), the *not-yet* insofar as it denies the simple distinction between good and evil, positive and negative, insofar as it interrupts the exceptionalist mission and intimates the real possibility of an alternative order of things. It is, in other words, concrete utopia, a tarrying with Bloch's "Real-Possible." This critical utopian thrust of New Americanist work reiterates itself in two, more recent pieces, pieces by Pease, which, however, make clear the limits endemic to the circular logic of the New Americanists' permanent revolution. These essays – the first an introductory framing to a collection of essays that came out of the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute; the second a defense of the new American Studies against the post-9/11 conservative reaction – throw a backwards glance on the rise to prominence of the New Americanists, and, in doing so, suggest the possibility that the movement's innovative power has, at least to some degree, petrified. However, it is not so much that New Americanist practice has become ineffective as such but rather that, caught in the circle of its own presuppositions, its ideology-critique has potentially blocked itself off from the very futurity it promises and pursues.

The first piece, the introduction to *The Futures of American Studies* (ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, 2002), is entitled with suggestive simplicity, "Futures."

With the title's plural form, Pease and Wiegman acknowledge the multiple and potentially contradictory paths of New Americanist research and writing. They concretize this plurality by staging a polemic against classical American studies (or the "myth-symbol school of American studies"), according to which the latter is incapable of thinking futurity due to its collapsing of historical, political, and social differences into the meta-narrative of American progress. American exceptionalism always already excludes the coming into being of a radically other future, because it always already knows that any future, if it is an *American* future, fits within the symbols and myths of American exceptionalism. In contrast, Pease and Wiegman claim for New Americanists the "imperative to think the radical imaginary outside the already constituted categories within the institutional boundaries of the field-imaginary and to link this outside with the disruptive temporalities of the social movements traversing the fields" (22). They define the "radical imaginary" as that which "exploits the paradoxical sites in which the field-imaginary encounters the lack of closure in its system of signification, opening spaces for the emergence of futures that do not reproduce the field's contours and that cannot be reduced to its categories" (Ibid.). The radical imaginary implies an image of history as permanent revolution; it entails a historicity composed of discontinuities that interrupt the continuity of a discipline. It is *an-archic*, because it calls into question the very foundations (or *arche*) of the discipline by engendering openings to "unanticipated transformations and unpredicted rearrangements of the institutional order" (Ibid.). In this context, paradox ("paradoxical sites") designates that which in a given field-Imaginary can be recognized only as a void, a piece of the real that insists on its existence but

refuses to be incorporated within a “system of signification.” These paradoxes are what enable disciplinary paradigm-shifts, where such shifts are understood not merely as a reshuffling of research materials but as a fundamental renovation of a field’s operating terms. Connoisseurs of paradox, the New Americanists establish grounds built in such a manner that they crumble after an interval of use; they inject anti-disciplinarity into the (non-) discipline of American Studies, subordinating concerns for consistency to a quest for rupture.

We see the New Americanists’ paradox-driven quest for rupture reach fever-pitch in Donald Pease’s response to the post-9/11 conservative reaction. In “9/11: When Was ‘American Studies After the New Americanists?’” (2006), Donald Pease defends New Americanist work against the attacks of Alan Wolfe in the pages of the *New Republic* (cf. Wolfe, “Anti-American Studies”). In contrast to Wolfe – for whom the New Americanists, in their violation of the exceptionalist compact, display a “hatred for America” – Pease argues that the New Americanists embody “ways of becoming americanist otherwise” (90). He claims for their work the uncanny vitality of a future haunting the present: “Indeed, insofar as the concerns that Crews initially described as at the core of ‘New Americanist’ scholarship have figured a nonsynchronous dimension of American literary scholarship from its inception, perhaps we should have been called the specters of Americanism” (101). “Specters of Americanism” is a gripping phrase due to its ambivalence. It denotes, at one and the same time, the manner in which the New Americanists dredge up the repressed violence of American exceptionalism *and* the manner in which, in doing so, they threaten America with a future that is irreducible to it,

a temporal alterity that liberalism cannot subsume. It is in view of this radical alterity that Pease ends the article: “Given the uncanny anteriority of this project [...], and the fact that the struggle for justice is now more important than ever, however, such scholarship should no longer be called new americanist or pro-americanist or anti-americanist or un-american. It might instead be more accurately described as not yet not americanist” (Ibid.). Refusing to submit to the simplistic dichotomy of “for *or* against” America, Pease cleaves open a threshold in America/American Studies in which the future is a “surplus historicity,” or an excess of potentiality. “Not yet not americanist”: the New Americanists are doubly spectral – they not only conjure up repressed pasts but also enact visitations from a future inassimilable to the present. We might say they that theirs is a threshold existence, an in-between life squatting on the very border of utopia.

There is a great degree of repetition in the perpetual re(un-)grounding of New Americanist practice, leaving us with the sense that we have heard it all before. There is, arguably, nothing in these last two essays that could not have been extrapolated from Pease’s articles in *boundary 2*, which appeared a decade earlier. It as if approximately twenty years of research and writing by a diverse group of thinkers amounted to no more than repetition of the same. In this light, the New Americanist encounter with paradox risks becoming identical to the encounter with paradox of another set of “new” thinkers: the New Critics of the mid-twentieth century. For the New Critics, paradox, along with ambiguity and irony, functioned as a founding trope, grounding the literarity of a textual object not in the genius of an author or the ingenuity of a reader but in the complexity of a work’s formal relations.²⁴ Ideally, the work becomes a vacuum in which formal

relations operate without the friction of context, politics, social conditions, etc. Of course, through their recovery of this repressed content, the New Americanists define themselves in opposition to formalism, yet in the process of inverting the fetishization of the formal, they tend to replicate the very closure which they seek to ward off: they predicate innovation on a difference of/between contents, all the while assuming a general equivalence between these contents, an equivalence founded on the fundamental identity/continuity of a conception of history that is more or less chronological, more or less the homogenous, empty time they claim to challenge.²⁵

The difference of the “new” in “New Americanists” comes to be no more than the empty difference of a pure opposition, an arbitrary marker of the gap between one present and another without the implication of any qualitative historical shift. Indeed, in the article from which the New Americanists appropriated their name, Crews already warned of the likelihood of this specular doubling: “The truth is that for any works written before the last seventy years or so, the most influential academics get to decide who’s in and who’s out. And the New Americanists themselves seem destined to become the next establishment in their field. They will be right about the most important books and the most fruitful ways of studying them because, as they always knew in their leaner days, those who hold power are right by definition.” Although Crews’s words should be taken with a grain of salt, smacking as they do of *ressentiment*, they nonetheless indicate the profound difficulty involved in marking/making a difference without returning difference to the sameness of institutional equivalence. Generational succession subsumes radical change, and institutional change is but the cyclical march of a long Oedipal drama.

Reframing the matter in the interrogative mode: How can the New Americanists make a claim to newness when their methods have become the de facto standard of American Studies? How can they maintain an investment in *radical* difference, in difference that shakes foundations, when they have become the hegemonic guarantors of institutional foundations?

Taken to its extreme conclusion, the institutional hegemony of the New Americanists implies that they are, in fact, complicit with the American liberalism from which they seek to distance themselves. Indeed, this is the argument of a group of Americanists that have set themselves the project of “internationalizing” American Studies, that is, of disidentifying American Studies from what has been termed “American American Studies” (U.S.-based American Studies) in order to expand and multiply the perspectives from which the United States and Americanization (the American cultural inflection of globalization) are viewed.²⁶ Perhaps the most intense criticism has come from Djelal Kadir, who argues that the New Americanists not only fail to undermine the ideology of American exceptionalism but also that they represent another instance of it: “The designation *New American Studies* has its genesis in *would-be* dissent, and it is the product of an occasion not altogether free of critical self-assessment – that is to say, *yet another* tactical turn in the *predictable pattern* of chronic self-reconsolidation through self-disruption in American discourse” (“America” 18; my emphasis). Insofar as the “new” in “New American Studies” is predicated on the negativity of opposition, and insofar as this negativity is really only “would-be dissent,” the newness of the New Americanists is false or merely apparent; it is but the internalized

and always already contained self-criticism of American exceptionalism, a safety-valve through which society vents its discontents in order to maintain social equilibrium. Kadir terms this “totalized autolepsis” or “consolidating tautology,” phrases which not only speak to the falseness or ineffectivity of the New Americanists’ critical edge but also suggest a kind of narcissism, a self-gratificatory or self-congratulatory oneupmanship in which the negative is merely a status symbol (Ibid., 19).

Put differently, Kadir accuses the New Americanists of being closeted liberals: they may appear to challenge the consensual order of the American polity but their apparent challenges are always already caught up in a loop of self-justification. They are, in other words, liberals with a touch of neurosis. Kadir stages this polemic in order to demarcate a zone – the international – which would be beyond, or in his own vocabulary, “exogenous,” to the ideological domain of Americanism. In antagonism to the “perennial nationalist project of self-affirmation through self-differentiation,” Kadir declares the following imperatives (Ibid.):

For this to be achieved [“an exogenous discourse and critical discipline”], America has to be turned out of itself, certainly out of that foundational identity construct, territorial and human, that the ideology of a formative national apparatus at its moment of inception on 15 November 1777 interpellated into itself as ‘America’ through an exclusive and hegemonic nomination when it forged a ‘perpetual union [...] under the style of the United States of America,’ a unitary and unique self-projection into perpetuity still resonant in the ‘infinite justice’ [i.e. one of the first names assigned to the so-called War on Terror conducted by the U.S. after 9/11] sought by the infinite wisdom of the first twenty-first-century military campaign launched against insidious evil and world terrorism. (Ibid, 20)

This sentence attempts to perform the unfolding towards which it gestures (“America has to be turned out of itself”) by multiplying verbiage in such a way that the very content of the name “America” empties out: America goes from being a territorially-fixed place to being an idea, and from an idea to a mobile war machine terrorizing so-called evil everywhere. Indeed, “America” becomes a misnomer for the “United States of America,” or worse, functions as a sleight of hand through which a hegemonic nation-state naturalizes, in fact, deifies, its imperial tendencies. Yet I am struck by the resemblance of Kadir’s syntax to that of Pease, whom Kadir singles out as perhaps the most pernicious of the New Americanists. Both authors deploy a tortured prose style in order to hollow out the sedimented ideological content of “America”; we might even say they both attempt to introduce radical alterity into the narcissistic self-differentiation of American exceptionalism by breaking with the mythic tropology constitutive of American Studies as a discipline. In fact, when Kadir writes, “The predictable question might be, Is America not American? [...] Our answer would have to dislocate the essentialist grounding and naturalized reification by switching the question from ‘what’ to ‘where’ and ‘how,’” we find an apt description of the critical operations of the New Americanists, for whom, indeed, the question of “what” constitutes America translates to a “where” (in the sense not only of locale but also social position) and to a “how” (in the sense of the apparatuses or political technologies of subject-production) (Ibid, 21). It is tempting, then, to agree with Robyn Wiegman that the internationalist movement in American Studies is fundamentally continuous with the New Americanist movement, that instead of

breaking with the New Americanists, it simply repeats the desire to achieve “non-complicity,” to liberate oneself from American exceptionalism.²⁷

If I hesitate to agree with Wiegman, it is because she seems to assume that “non-complicity” is a fundamental necessity of critical work, that there is no circumventing the equation between critique and negation, or between political engagement and distance. In other words, Wiegman reinscribes the permanent revolution of New Americanist practice, its perpetual movement of paradoxical self-undercutting, into the very foundations of critical *praxis*. This point of view blinds itself to the *positive* potential inhering in the “internal difference” and “surplus historicity” that Pease ascribes to New Americanist work; it misses the ways in which the discrepant temporalities and discordant spatialities that the New Americanists have uncovered points towards a constructive, inventive mode of inquiry. This blindness is a blindness to ontology; it is a blindness that occurs when one all too hastily passes from the question of *what* America is to the questions of *where* it is and *how* it is. In relying on a negative mode of critique based on a practice of demystification/denaturalization – which itself presupposes a basic division between the true and the false, the real and illusory, essence and appearance – the New Americanists conceal from themselves the *plenitude* of the spectral void/interruption they discover haunting the fantasies of American exceptionalism. They stumble upon the possibility of radical alternatives to the liberal, exceptionalist American project only to reinscribe them into the ontological framework of liberalism by way of an insistence on emancipatory *identities*.

It is the very category of identity – or, as I will explain shortly, specular identity – that constitutes the limit of New Americanist thinking. For while the New Americanists call into question the predicates of liberal identity (white, heterosexual, male, etc.), they fail to call into question the category of identity underpinning liberalism. Identity, we might say, constitutes liberalism's "form of content, the basic informing of matter that precedes predication; it is that bare shell of existence, that $X=X$, according to which a person, or a human, stripped of every attribute, remains an individual. In liberalism, and more specifically, in American liberalism, this shell is not devoid of content but rather always already carries within itself the seeds of private property, the division between private and public spheres, the notion of tolerance (as a limited or minimal exposure to otherness), and the autonomization of politics as a separate domain of practice from the social. To put it differently, the form of content of liberalism implies a content of form. From this perspective, identity is not neutral, instead it is the first instance in which being is mapped, in which the possibilities of existence are not only opened up but also delimited, shaped in such a way as to define the range of the powers of existent beings.

As I have already pointed out, the entire critical apparatus of the New Americanists depends upon the disruption and interruption of the identity of American exceptionalism. But what they substitute for the identity of exceptionalism is generally no more than a plurality of identities, a set of subjectivities whose basic formation mirrors the exceptionalist mode of being American. The New Americanists fail to differentiate their arguments from the hegemonic apparatus of liberal pluralism, in which any and every personal identity is tolerated up to a point.²⁸ This complicity is most evident in

Pease's insistence on the "multiple interpellations" of New Americanist practitioners.

Pease perhaps intends to indicate how the plurality of New Americanist subjective identifications undercuts the liberal formation of the academy, but, in drawing on Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation, Pease inadvertently models his conception of resistance on the very thing (ideology) he seeks to resist. For although Althusser's concept of interpellation is resolutely positive in its articulation of the ideological function – avoiding simplistic notions of ideology as false consciousness, or as a simple lack of truth – it is nonetheless devoid of positive content in the sense of emancipation or resistance. Interpellation produces subjects, but only subjects of ideology, subjects that "misrecognize" their real conditions of existence and, in doing so, maintain the status quo. It is only "science" – "a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology" – that enables a rupture with a particular regime of ideological and repressive state apparatuses (*Lenin* 117). Furthermore, as Althusser's quoting of Pascal makes evident ("Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you shall believe"), these subjects are fabricated through an unthinking (or common sense) repetition of sameness (*Ibid.*, 114). Indeed, when Althusser goes on to elaborate his theory through the privileged example of Christian religious ideology, he highlights the sameness inherent in the concept of interpellation through the motif of the mirror: "We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individual as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *specular*, i.e. mirror-structure, and *doubly* specular: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning" (122). Althusser explains that the

doubleness in this specular relation consists in its not only producing a subjected subject, a subject who recognizes himself as a subject only insofar as he is the subject to an absolute Other, but also in “the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject,” the construction of the master through the very act of submission (Ibid.). What we have is nothing less than two mirrors placed so that they face each other, each one infinitely reflecting itself in the other, multiplying differences only on the basis of resemblance. There is perhaps no better image of liberalism than these facing mirrors, this doubly specular relationship in which difference always already presupposes its descent from sameness, and in which repetition traces its lineage to an unequivocal identity (God, the Nation, Exceptionalism).

What is missing in Pease and the New Americanists, then, is a positive conception of difference irreducible to ideology, a difference interrupting the circuit of mirror exchanges. Although the New Americanists strive to achieve the perpetually ungrounded state of a permanent revolution, they end up defaulting to a liberal practice of tolerance. That is, instead of anticipating a new order of things, they retrofit the old order of things by assimilating new identities into it. Indeed, when Pease and Wiegman resort to the notion of a “radical imaginary” in their coauthored introduction to *The Futures of American Studies*, they unwittingly make explicit what is already, arguably, implicit: the essential continuity between the critical practices of the New Americanists and the “field-Imaginary” (the “primal identity” of American Studies, its “self-evident principles”) from which they intend to break free. For while Pease draws on the Lacanian psychoanalytic vocabulary of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, he notably elides the category – if it can

be called that – of the Real: that non-identity which Lacan variously formulates as that which resists all symbolization, *or* that which in the operations of the Symbolic is paradoxically in excess of it, or that which shatters the specular wholeness/iteration of the Imaginary.²⁹ The Symbolic, in Lacan, is the machinic operation of language which structures subjective existence in terms of differences; it is that register in which subjectivity is an effect of the signifier. The Imaginary, on the other hand, is the specular domain of the mirror, the realm of images that suture together a semblance of wholeness out of the differential economy of the symbolic. Although it would be too time-consuming to outline the (non-)place of the Real in Lacan’s work, we should at least mention the fact that this term does *not* denote “reality” in the sense of some true or accurate vision of things. For Lacan, “reality” is a term reserved for the Imaginary, where it implies the way in which we tailor existence to fit an anthropomorphic mold, an image of reality that is also a narcissistic image of ourselves. Instead, the Real is that which makes the differential operations of the Symbolic order or the specular infinity of the Imaginary trip up, stutter, or stumble; it is always an “encounter,” something “unassimilable” that happens “*as if by chance*” (*Seminar XI* 54-55): “The Real may be represented by the accident, the noise, the small element of reality, which is evidence we are not dreaming” (*Ibid.*, 60). The Real is not an identity. In fact, it is not even something. Rather, we might say that the real *happens*, and, in so doing, introduces the radically other into what had been only a chain of equivalences or a series of more or less homogeneous differences.

The “radical imaginary” of the New Americanists constitutes a kind of compromise formation through which Pease, Wiegman, and others fantasize the arrival of radical alterity in a manner commensurable with the basic (symbolic) order of America. It signals an attempt to ameliorate the terrifying quality of the encounter with utopia, to calm the tremble that one feels before the possibility of radical change, by reducing the difference of futurity to a means towards the end of satisfying desire (i.e. abstract utopia).³⁰ For Lacan, however, the Real is “essentially the missed encounter”; it is “beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton” (Ibid., 54). In other words, it is the insistent repetition/return of that which is immanent to the symbolic order and yet not of it; it is not the satisfaction of desire but rather desire’s irreducibility to satisfaction. In the New Americanists, the Real that they cannot speak, but which they also cannot escape, is the “surplus historicity,” the “internal difference,” the “specter,” conjured up in the gaps between identities, in the place where difference exceeds predication or is inassimilable to the chain of equivalence (i.e. Pease’s “African Americanists, feminist Americanists, Chicano Americanists, Asian Americanists, gay Americanists” – his rainbow coalition). Irreducible to a politics of recognition, the specter of the Real is a “*souffrance*” (suspension, holding in abeyance, pending) that occurs in the “rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus [...], the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, between perception and consciousness” (*Seminar XI* 56).

There would seem to be a contradiction in Lacan's formulation of the Real, for while he claims that it constitutes a "non-temporal locus," he can only present this locus as a dilation of time, as a time in excess of the pleasure principle or the economy of specular sameness. Rather than as a contradiction, we should understand this troubling convergence of non-temporality and temporal excess, of void and plenitude, as one and the same (non-)thing seen from two points of view: From the point of view of the Symbolic, the Real collapses time, it tears open the homogeneous, empty time of the law/symbolic order, introducing a gap in the temporal continuum. However, from the point of view of the Real itself, it is pure eventality: the condensation of time into an instant in which anything and everything might happen, the suspension of linear time in the surprise of time's overwhelming force. In ontological terms, the Real is that which immanent to a given order of being is nonetheless the void of being, the sometimes terrifying, sometimes promising, unaccountable surplus of being. Lacan captures the paradoxicality of the Real, when comparing it to Democritus's *clinamen* – the swerve in matter that sets everything going – he describes it as follows: "*Nothing, perhaps? – not perhaps nothing, but not nothing*" (Ibid., 64).

A nothing that is not something but is also *not* nothing: we seem to have stumbled upon yet another conception of utopia, this one, however, refusing to be incorporated into the present order of things or into the order of things as presence.³¹ It is a resolutely *spectral* encounter with utopia, one which flashes up, in Lacan's words, as "another space, another scene, between perception and consciousness."³² If we find in this encounter with utopia the ontology that the New Americanists repress and/or disavow, it

is significantly not an ontology cut to fit the Western *logos*, that is, it is not a conception of ontology in which being is the being of speech/reason's (self-)presencing. To the contrary, it is rather an ontology that takes into account the unaccountable, that reckons with the spectral non-presences –the nothings that are not nothing – which fall into the gap between what we perceive and what we know.

With William V. Spanos, I would contend that the New Americanists, too caught up in discourses of representation and recognition, occlude this spectral dimension, except in the repetitive returns of neurotic symptoms (the stumbling, stuttering return of “surplus historicity,” or of difference irreducible to identity). Put differently, the New Americanists do not lack an ontology but rather lack an awareness of the ontology to which they unwittingly subscribe. They recapitulate the ontology of modernity that Martin Heidegger describes in “The Age of the World-Picture,” wherein the world is nothing but representation, and representation nothing but images of objects posited in such a way that they facilitate human mastery of the world. This conception of ontology lends itself all too well to modes of knowledge-production in which difference, singularity, or non-identity are either subsumed within objective forms that render them equivalent or consigned to the ineffable.³³ In contrast to the tacit ontology of the New Americanists, the conception of a singular America that I elaborate in what follows has a striking affinity to the project that Spanos discerns in the late fiction of Herman Melville: “It is this passively induced disclosure of the violence latent in the confidence of New World – exceptionalist – America and, even more important, this retrieval of potentialities of the nothing from the oblivion to which they have been relegated by the

custodians of the cultural memory of the nation, that renders Melville [...] proleptic of the poststructuralist or postmodern occasion” (*American Calling* 11). What is striking in this sentence is the conversion of a nothing not into some *thing* but into potentiality: the refusal of American exceptionalism receives positive articulation as the possibility of other forms of life.

It is perhaps this conversion of nothing into something, or of an encounter with the Real into the positive possibility of another life, that Lacan has in mind when he asserts, “The analyst’s desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference” (*Seminar XI* 276). The void of a symbolic order is nothing less than the potentiality of another order of being. If I preface the consideration of a biopolitical turn in American Studies with Lacan, rather than with the more obvious figures of Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, it is because I consider the latter to instantiate not so much a break with Lacanian analysis as an unpacking of its extreme implications. We might say that the thinking of biopolitics (re)grounds the desire for absolute difference in a pragmatic, yet still radical, concern for the potentialities of bodies. It makes explicit what was only implicit in Lacan, that for analysis to make a difference, it must contend with the positive articulations – the spectral bodies, the nothings that are not nothing – of forms of life in excess of the liberal, bourgeois, capitalist formations of subjectivity.

Biopolitics shifts the accent of analysis away from the deconstructive or critical concern for *les maladies* (neurosis, perversion, logocentrism, etc.) and towards the productive movements of desire. Indeed, this shift of accent is condensed with striking

acuity in Deleuze and Guattari's term "desiring-production." This term appears in *Anti-Oedipus*, a work that, along with Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, inaugurates biopolitics as a discourse, or as a contemporary manner of negotiating the nexus of language and power. Desiring-production implies a univocal conception of being, one in which the Symbolic and the Imaginary are not on different levels of being than the Real but rather are different instantiations of one and the same substance.³⁴ This is not to say that these terms do not indicate differences – the Imaginary continues to refer to the specular domain and the Symbolic to the differential operations of signs – yet these differences are not numerical or extensive differences (differences between discrete entities whose form is more or less fixed in advance) but rather modal or qualitative differences (differences of quality, or of relation). We find ourselves immersed in the ontology of Baruch Spinoza for whom Being ("God or Nature" [*Deus sive Natura*], in his well-known formulation) is nothing more, but also nothing less, than the sum of all its diverse and heterogeneous movements. Put differently, there is no transcendent point form which Being descends or emanates; Being is only insofar as it becomes – becomes itself, becomes other than itself – within its own powers (*potentia*). Rather than implying a circular or closed conception of ontology in which nothing truly new can ever come into existence – a common misinterpretation of Spinoza's philosophy³⁵ – this radically immanent approach predicates the possibility of the new, or utopian, on material encounters; it stakes the possibility of otherness on the constitutive surplus of becoming over mere being.

In historical terms, this biopolitical approach enables an inheritance of the sixties that runs counter to Donald Pease's claim that the sixties constitute a utopian romance in which revolt is confined to an attempt to realize American exceptionalism as the right of everyone. If the sixties can be understood in terms of a narrative of utopian desire, it would not be a story in the mold of romance. Instead, it would take the form of the stumbling, stuttering, noisy encounter with the Real; it would be an experiment with living otherwise, an experiment with otherness as constitutive of selfhood. The discourse of biopolitics is the legacy of the sixties understood as the desire for radical difference *in life*. The communes, the use of drugs, the consciousness raising practices, and the diverse radical organizations cannot be reduced to mere exercises in self-gratification. They were rather, each in their own way, attempts to reconstitute the very fabric of the social, to reinvent what it means to live as a social creature. In *A Desire Called America*, I try to take up this legacy by pointing to the way in which it enables us to read American literature not as a canonical instantiation or institutionalization of identity but as a series of encounters with the Real, a set of heterogeneous experiments with living otherwise. In this context, to read biopolitically is in a certain sense to read after the sixties, in the double meaning of the word "after": to read in its wake, in a manner conditioned by it; and to read in order to fulfill it, to exercise a certain fidelity towards that period of radical innovation.

In what follows, I suggest that rather than trying to simply free ourselves from complicity with American exceptionalism, we might wander the ambivalences and ambiguities of "America" in a different manner, taking the biopolitical construction of

American subjectivity as our primary point of reference. What is at stake, then, is not the rejection of the New Americanist movement; it is rather a matter of responding otherwise to the specters that they have conjured up.³⁶ In this biopolitical turn of American studies, utopia does not mean non-complicity, or ideological purity, but a mode of subjectivization, a process of embodiment, in which that desire called America gives way to a singular America – this America more than this America, an other America immanent to, yet against, American identity.

III. Genealogy and Utopia:

Biopolitics as Affirmative Mode of Inquiry

The question, then, is how are we to distinguish the advent of radical alterity from American exceptionalism's self-recuperative assimilation of otherness; how are we to register and articulate the moment when the dialectic intertwining the two extremes of that desire called America comes undone and gives way to what I have called a surplus utopia: an event in which the singularity of an American experience exceeds "America," takes on its own life, and becomes an autonomous field of possibility. Channeling Marx's well-known words from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, how are we to differentiate the farce of reform from the revolutionary poetry of the future? Any response to this question entails a reckoning with the immanence of utopia, with utopia as it emerges from concrete social situations and historical material conditions of possibility. From a biopolitical standpoint, it means analyzing how utopia not only comes *from* the body but

is also *of* the body. Utopia understood as utopian *praxis* inhabits the interval between a present subjectivization and a subjectivization to come; it marks the place of the *not-yet*, the place where the present buries its dead and the old gives way to the new.

Before directly discussing the concept of a singular America, I would like to consider biopolitics as a discourse and method, or as a theoretical approach with its own terminology. Biopolitics enables us to track the vicissitudes of that desire called America as lived and embodied. It is a term best known from Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, where it names "nothing less than the entry of life into history; that is the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques" (*HSI* 141-42). In this "era of 'biopower'" – which Foucault argues is coextensive with modernity – politics stretches its fabric between two poles, an "anatomy-politics of the human body" and a "biopolitics of the population," or between the disciplines which compose and administer individual bodies and the techniques which govern and regulate a species (*Ibid.*, 139-40). What has frequently gone unnoted is that these two poles do not constitute an exhaustive description of the political technologies of subject-production, and that in Foucault's writings both before and after this text, the political consists of a vast array of power relations and social techniques involving not only individuals and populations but also groups, classes, and institutions.³⁷ Indeed, rather than imagining that the division between these two poles describes the whole of the political, we would do better to conceive of biopolitics in terms of an indefinite series of heterogeneous processes of *individuation*, that is, processes through which singular social entities – be they social classes or liberal

persons – come to constitute themselves.³⁸ More generally, as Antonio Negri argues in reference to Foucault, the “space of biopolitics” is the space in which the social becomes political (*Insurgencies* 28).

Understood in this light, biopolitics is a matter not only of the control of individuals or the regulation of populations but also of the invention of new forms of life.³⁹ In other words, contrary to a certain reception of biopolitics, it is irreducible to a negative, or diagnostic, inquiry into that which holds back, destroys, or otherwise denies life. This is the reception associated most notably with the work of Giorgio Agamben, who in his well-known *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* narrates the history of politics in the West as the progressive intensification of life’s subordination to the calculations of the state. What is positive in this inflection of biopolitical discourse cannot be said to be affirmative, for what is produced, or put into play, is nothing but life’s reduction to mere being, to almost nothing.⁴⁰ In contrast, *A Desire Called America* highlights an affirmative tendency in biopolitics: the production of life as its proliferation, that is, as the non-teleological, complex, and inventive generation of forms of life. Agamben himself points to such an affirmative biopolitics with the term “form of life,” which signifies not the incarnation of life in a proper form but rather the overcoming of the form-content opposition (more specifically, the division between *bios* – life as social form – and *zoe* – life as bare biological being), or the intimation of a life whose potentiality/power is immanent to its material facticity.⁴¹ That being said, the affirmative bent of biopolitics is much better known through the work of Antonio Negri, who splits the field of biopolitics into two, opposing the emancipatory potential of

“biopolitics” to the oppressive control of “biopower.”⁴² However, Negri’s dualistic treatment of biopolitics risks sliding into the simplistic dimensions of a Manichaean logic according to which life itself would be a good posed against power understood as an oppressive/evil incarnation of death. In this light, affirmative biopolitics becomes simply a matter of affirming life, by unleashing it from the chains of power.

Negri, I would contend, manages to correct for the Manichaean impulse in his work by emphasizing that there is no mere/bare life but only life in all of its multiplicity, in its manifold incarnations. Yet I prefer to insist, along with Michel Foucault, on the inherent ambivalence of life itself, that is, on a conception of life that cannot be formulated in opposition to (bio)power but only as suffused with power, as, indeed, an effect of power relations. The question, thus, becomes not how do we unleash life from power but rather how do we rearticulate the relations between life and power according to individual or collective needs and desires. This perspective does not preclude biopolitics from possessing a utopian valence. To the contrary, if there is an eminently pragmatic tone to Foucault’s biopolitical analyses, an insistence on the complex and messy realities of the here and now, there is nevertheless also an insistence on the way in which the present contains the potentiality for radical otherness, for abrupt mutation.

Thus, in what can be described as a kind of utopian flight, Foucault prefaces the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* by saying that what drove him to write was not the desire to accurately describe what already exists but rather a desire to become otherwise: “As for what motivated me, it was quite simple [...]. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy:

not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free from oneself” (8). Foucault continues: “After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield from himself?” (Ibid.). Foucault’s curiosity suggests that biopolitics is not only a historical phenomenon but also a critical discourse and an ethos. It is a mode of research in which the inquirer admits complicity with her object in order to measure the possibilities for resistance, the potential for becoming otherwise, inhering in a specific historical existence. If it is utopian, it is so in the manner we have been tracing, that of a utopian *praxis* that is concrete and immanent, delivered over to worldliness and exposed to radical alterity; thus, one’s ability to “get free of oneself,” the knower’s power of “straying afield from himself,” is qualified by the material situation and, therefore, only ever “to the extent possible.”

In expanding the term biopolitics to encompass not only a specific historical phenomenon but also a discourse or mode of inquiry, we imply a connection between aspects of Foucault’s oeuvre which are typically treated as separate, specifically, his rather minimal explicit treatment of biopolitics and his much more extensive treatment of genealogy (including his various writings on disciplinary power, technologies of the subject, and governmentality). If the first phase of Foucault’s writing (from, approximately, *History of Madness* to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*) can be described as *archaeological*, the term indicating the mapping of the conditions of possibility of discursive regimes (or, in other words, the tracing of the contours of a particular

“episteme”), then the subsequent phase might be understood as *biopolitical and genealogical*, concerning itself less with discursive regimes in and of themselves and more with the conducts, the practices, and the modes of production of selfhood, or as Foucault puts it: “It is necessary to get rid of the subject itself by getting rid of the constituting subject, that is, to arrive at an analysis that would account for the constitution of the subject in the historical plot.”⁴³

Biopolitics implies a *genealogical* method, where method is not a fixed and rigid program but a manner of proceeding. This manner is defined by a concern not for absolute origins but for moments of divergence: the discontinuities in which new ways of being emerge through the unexpected and unanticipated interactions between heterogeneous elements. As Foucault writes, “the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics”; instead, “if he listens to history, he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (“Nietzsche,” 78). At the beginning of things is not identity but “dissension,” “disparity” – or, in our own terms, singularity (Ibid., 79). To think the bodies and populations of modernity in a “piecemeal fashion,” to think of social existence not as the expression of essences or of identities but as an endless refunctioning, as an indefinite and always incomplete recomposing of things – this is the genealogist’s task. It is a task, which Foucault makes clear, is inevitably biopolitical, for it concerns “the articulation of body and history” and involves “expos[ing] a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Ibid., 83). The body is not

merely written on by history, as one reading of “imprinted” might suggest; it is, rather, “totally imprinted,” the intensifying adjective indicating that there is no substrate, no ultimate ground, in which the body, history, and writing are not always already mutually implicated. The body of biopolitics is a body always already written and writing, a body inextricable not only from signification but also from the myriad operations of discourse, textuality, and literarity strewn throughout society.⁴⁴

The “destruction of the body” does not signify the abolition of the body but rather a corporeal transformation that can be called utopian because of the gap, the non-place of futurity, which marks its coming to pass. Foucault writes:

History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. “Effective” history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. (Ibid., 88)

The plurality towards which Foucault gestures in his language is a plurality not of or between already constituted individuals – i.e. liberal pluralism – but internal to them. Biopolitical research, or genealogy, “divides,” “dramatizes,” and “multiplies our body”; it conceives of society and history not in terms of being but in terms of becomings, that is, in terms of the unfinished, non-teleological, and self-divided processes through which one comes to exist. Its object is not actuality but potentiality. To be more precise, it is the potentiality inhering in actuality, that surplus existence which “enables one to get free from oneself.” In attending to the force of becoming, Foucault is led to insist on the

importance of chance or the aleatory, for “[t]he forces at play in history do not obey either destiny or mechanical causality but rather the chance of struggle. They do not manifest themselves as the successive forms of a primordial intention; nor do they take on the allure of a result. They always appear in the singular hazard [aléa singulier] of the event” (Ibid., 88; translation modified). The “pretended continuity” – where *prétendue continuité* means not simply an illusory continuity but a forced continuity, a continuity violently imposed (*prétendre*: to pretend but also to claim) –that Foucault associates with the vulgar historian is a practice of eliminating chance from the passage of history. Genealogy, on the other hand, understood as biopolitical practice and ethos, leverages the aleatory; it inserts itself in the excluded middle between mechanical causality and spiritual teleology, opening up a field of possibilities in which the potentiality for becoming other, for the emergence of new forms of life, is predicated on the acknowledgement of singular chance. In writing the biopolitical, we demonstrate how the historical necessity imbuing the practices, habits, and forms composing bodily existence is a necessity born of chance, the concatenation of singular encounters that have become a second nature.⁴⁵

Foucault’s genealogical inquiry translates Lacan’s notion of an encounter with the Real into a recognition of the mutability of the order of things. If Foucault supposes an ontology of the actual, or an historical ontology of the present, then it is because the present/actual is always fractured by the potential to become otherwise, by an immanent surplus of becoming over being. In the biopolitical context, utopia names the embodiment of this surplus of potentiality; it takes the form of a corporeal figure interrupting the

present by transforming the non-place/void of a field of power relations (and/or a discursive regime) into the harbinger of an alternative order. The utopian dimension of this biopolitical inquiry emerges most acutely and most explicitly in a short radio address Foucault delivered in 1966, entitled “The Utopian Body.” Foucault begins by contending that the body is the “contrary of utopia”: “It is irreparably here, never elsewhere” (9).⁴⁶ It is, in other words, the very epitome of the familiar, and, as such, the negation of the otherworldly. From this perspective, utopia becomes a way of avoiding the body, of “erasing the body” or of positing an “incorporeal body” (e.g., the soul, as “pure,” “white,” worldless conception of individual existence) (13; 12). Foucault would seem to suggest that in order to deal with the realities of bodily life, to contend with ontology in its actuality, we must forswear utopian dreams as so many attempts to take flight from the fleshiness of worldly existence.

Foucault, however, reverses course in a provocative conceptual maneuver in which he contends that if utopia is the contrary of the body, it is nonetheless immanent to the body: “All these utopias through which I was sidestepping [*esquivais*] my body, they had quite simply their model and first point of application, their place of origin, in my body itself. I was very wrong earlier to say that utopias were turned against the body and meant to efface it: they are born of the body itself and are perhaps subsequently turned against it” (14). Foucault elaborates the utopian potentiality of the body through a series of examples that include sacred vestments, tattooing, bodily possession, and the artistry of dance. What these examples have in common is the way in which they produce a crossing in which “[m]y body, in fact, it is *always* elsewhere, it is linked to all the

elsewheres of the world, and to tell the truth it is elsewhere than in the world” (17).

Through tattoos in which the cosmological order of the universe inscribes itself on the surface of the skin or through the dancer’s pirouette in which the body does not simply take flight but rather becomes absorbed in flight, the body comes to be transported outside of itself, comes to be not so much a static determination of matter as the threshold in which a perpetual oscillation between folding and unfolding takes place: the body folds the world into itself, and in doing so, renders the world otherwise, exposes the world to a singular difference in the very facticity of *this* body’s existence.

“The body,” Foucault writes, “is the degree zero of the world, there where paths and spaces cross the body is no where: it is, at the heart of the world, this little utopian core through which [*à partir duquel*] I dream, I speak, I put forward, I imagine, I perceive things in their place and I also deny them through the indefinite power of the utopias that I imagine” (18). In a similar vein to Merleau-Ponty’s late writings on the flesh and chiasmus, Foucault posits the body as the very possibility of the world’s appearance and disappearance.⁴⁷ The body is less a thing than a (non-)place, a site of convergence and divergence, in which and through which the topography of the world rewrites itself. To say that the body is “nowhere” (*nulle part*), but that, in being nowhere, it is also the heart of the world (*coeur du monde*) is to place the otherworldly in the world as simultaneously surplus and void, as that which in the world is more than the world but also less than it. Indeed, this productive confusion of the positive and negative, of excess and poverty, becomes evident in the way in which the body, understood as utopian, enables not only the positing of things in their place (“I dream, I speak, I put forward, I imagine, I perceive

things in their place”) but also their negation or suspension (“I also deny them”). Notably the “I,” in this sentence, is distinct from “the body,” as if the former – the self – were not master of the body as in the Cartesian imaginary but the opposite: the self, or subject, is an effect of the body’s mediation of the places of the world, an emission of the body’s powers. To conceive of *le corps utopique* means placing oneself in the interval between subjects, in the interstices between one self and another, in order to discover the “indefinite power” of a body to retrace the contours of the world, to (re)make the world and itself anew.

In short, the body is not utopia’s negation but rather its source, not its denial but rather the place in which the non-place springs to life. Such a conception means shifting the thinking of utopia away from a simplistic topography in which utopia is analogous to the heavens or to an Eden – a claim, in any case, which the genre of utopian literature has called into question for centuries⁴⁸ – and towards a consideration of utopia as bodily impulse, as incarnation of potentiality for/of radical difference. Connecting Foucault’s notion of the utopian body to his more concerted efforts in formulating a genealogical mode of philosophical inquiry, we can say that what is at stake in articulating a biopolitical *method* is the replacement of a hermeneutics of origins and a positivism of objects with an exploration of the potentials of bodies to become otherwise. This exploration has at least two dimensions: the estrangement of a body from the continuities and self-evident (or “natural”) exteriorities that appear to definite it (e.g., the body as mere material support of the citizen-subject, the body as bearer of labor-power); and the unfolding, or dilation, of the potentiality that emerges in the passage between one

contingent identity and another, the articulation of the body not as thing but as temporal surplus. Echoing Ernst Bloch's distinction between abstract and concrete utopia, Foucault suggests that if utopia stands in opposition to the body, it does so only when we operate in an abstract register, one in which the body is simply a "here," a self-evident topos devoid of otherness, and utopia merely a transcendent "elsewhere," a heaven of fulfilled essence. However, when we shift gears by recognizing the immanent otherness of the body to itself, we open onto a world of crossings, a world in which utopia weaves into existence as immanent surplus. Biopolitics, then, as mode of inquiry and as ethos, is like a dowsing rod directing us not to water but to the latent powers of existence, to the utopian potential in the here and now. The question to which we now turn is the concrete utopian powers that flair up in the bodies of American literature.

IV. Singular America:

On the Biopolitical Turn in American Studies

In what follows, I develop the concept of a singular America in order to think through "America" as a process of biopolitical experimentation. The phrase "singular America" designates "America" as a transitional zone, an interval that opens up between the capitalist, liberal nation-state (the U.S.) and a form of life whose time is *to come*. To put it differently, a singular America simultaneously anticipates and participates in the real process of the abolition of America not in a fulfillment or culmination but in a radical mutation: America becoming other than itself, becoming unrecognizable to itself. In

departing from American exceptionalism, or in tracking the vicissitudes of a desire called America to those points of intensity (singularities) where it opens to something beyond American *identity*, I am not proposing an alternative America or a countertradition, as if what were at stake was simply the recovery of some innocent America. Rather, as suggested by reliance on words such as “invention” and “experiment,” what we are concerned with is the *emergence* of another America in the midst of exceptional America, the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which the promise of America fulfills itself not in the realization of an essence but in the subversion of identity.

For the moment, I want to hazard a schematic outline of the concept of a singular America, sketching some basic contours: Singularity announces an event whereby something comes into being that did not exist before. There is no event without a certain novelty. But singularity is not “creation”; it does not arise *ex nihilo* but consists rather in the reconstellation of words and things, of discourses and practices. Singularity is not origin in the typical sense of genesis; it is, instead, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “an eddy in the stream of becoming.”⁴⁹ In the context of *A Desire Called America*, singularity is the moment when the dialectic between American exceptionalism and American liberalism, or between America as messianic desire and America as pragmatic reform, is interrupted by an encounter with alterity that is radical yet nonetheless immanent, or “native,” to America. This immanence implies that singularity is double. Twinning singularity as event, we find singularity as preindividual process. This process is relational. Singularity comes to designate points of relation, the genitive in this instance signifying both points defined *by* their relations (the connections through which they

affect and are affected, as Spinoza would say⁵⁰) and points which enact a change in a field of relations (the edges of entities, where being translates to becoming, and actuality blurs with potentiality). From this perspective, singularity is below the threshold of identity – the latter term designating self-consistency, permanence, and wholeness – but, at the same time, is more than identity; it is that otherness on which identity depends for its being, but it is also the possibility of an identity's abolition. American exceptionalism is such an identity. Its *prétendue continuité*, as Foucault might put it, disavows, represses, and suicidally attempts to eliminate the reality of singularities upon which it is built. And singularity, for its part, threatens/promises to deliver an event, an aleatory moment, in which America will not so much fail to live up to itself – as in the American jeremiad or the Gatsby/Carraway melancholy – but will rather become other than itself, will abolish itself in its own surplus of potentiality.

Anticipating the chapters which follow, let us examine three moments in which the singularity of America comes to exceed American exceptionalism. These moments are exemplifications, which is not to say that they capture the concept of a singular America in its totality. Instead, these moments *dramatize* a singular America, each in their own way. In each of these examples, the representation of America comes to be overwhelmed by the utopian desire of America. Let us begin with Whitman, whose work is often cited as a beginning, *Leaves of Grass* serving not merely as a canonical token establishing the value of American literature but also as a womb from which American letters flow and to which they return for nourishment.⁵¹ This is an unfortunate interpretation, for it simultaneously tends to deny the historical situatedness of

Whitman's work and to conflate Whitman's writing with the legacy of American exceptionalism. In becoming "our bard," Whitman is made to represent America; he is identified with the United States to such a degree that the singularities of his poetry escape notice. Take the following passage from the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, in which Whitman declares himself "an American":

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
Disorderly fleshy and sensual eating drinking and breeding,

No sentimentalist no stander above men and women or apart from
them no
more modest than immodest. [...]

Through me the afflatus surging and surging through me the current
and index.

I speak the password primeval I give the sign of democracy;
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on
the
same terms.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs,
And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs, and of the
fatherstuff,
And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,
Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung. (*LG 1855 29*).

It would be a simple matter to perceive a representational function at work, whereby Whitman would stand in for America and America would take the shape of Whitman's celebratory poetry. Yet a closer look shows that neither symbol, nor image, is adducible from the language, at least not with anything approaching consistency. The insistent force of the indefinite article dissociates "Walt Whitman" from the trope of synecdoche. As the

text states, he does not stand in for but rather among Americans: “[N]o stander above men and women or apart from them.” He is merely “one of” the multitude. If, as Whitman writes in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, the poet is a “free channel” in the sense of passing along the reality of America with “perfect candor,” then this is not a representational process but a process of expression, implying that the act of creation is always already ongoing and that the poet transcribes, rather than creates, the language of the nation. Taken to its endpoint, the axiom of equality on which *Leaves* rests involves each and every American becoming a poet in his or her own right, each and every American capable not of standing in for but of expressing America in its patchwork multiplicity.

In temporal terms, Whitman’s poetry is not oriented towards the past or the present but towards the future of America: “The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you” (Ibid., vi). As I explain in the chapter dealing with *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman’s poetry sets itself the task of “realizing” the American revolution, but realization does not imply teleological completion, nor a return to undistorted essence; instead, the “sign of democracy” is a sign that heralds something that is resolutely *to come*, something inassimilable to the terms of the past-present continuum. This surplus potentiality, this moment of utopian *praxis*, is evident in the syntactical decomposition of the text, the dropped commas and the run-together semantic units that are an effect of the “surging and surging” of material life, of “the current” that is not “index” of what *is* –

since such an index would certainly exclude politically and socially the motley crew of slaves, prostitutes, and thieves – but rather of what *might be*, of a singular America that constitutes an unauthorized, anarchic deviation from the exceptionalist trajectory. We find in Whitman a perfect instance of the “indefinite power” of utopia that Foucault ascribes to the body. That Whitman sometimes attempts to canonize himself as the proper authority guaranteeing – and, therefore, eliminating – the aleatory is certainly true. One of the points to which I return repeatedly in *A Desire Called America* is that the surplus of utopia always emerges from the ambivalence of a desire called America. As such, there is a tendency in a singular America to slide back into exceptionalism, to fall back into the liberal-capitalist order being contested. That being said, in immersing language in the “disorderly fleshy and sensual” life of the people, Whitman surrenders the powers of representation – the authority of the poet – to an egalitarian embrace of the transformative power of singularities in all their multiplicity.

Whitman, the genealogist: it is an intriguing proposition, though one that goes against the grain of his liberal canonization, according to which his value lies in his representing America’s ability to assimilate every difference into the hegemonic order.⁵² Yet as I argue in the chapter on Whitman, it is a reading that has much to commend itself, one which shows that America is *not* identical to itself, that it is a nation possessed of and sometimes possessed by singular forces that promise/threaten something entirely other than the capitalist, liberal nation-state. Of course, there is a liberal Whitman and an exceptionalist Whitman, the Whitman, for example, of *Democratic Vistas* for whom the traumatic event of the Civil War demands the reconstruction of America in terms of

essence and identity.⁵³ It is this Whitman against which Langston Hughes writes his poem, “I, Too.” This short poem riffs off on Whitman’s 1867 “I Hear America Singing,” a poem which, though speaking of “the varied carols” of America, notably lacks any consideration of race. Hughes’s poem is a response changing the very terms of becoming *an American*:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed –

I, too, sing America. (*Collected* 46)

Whereas, in Whitman, it is the indefinite article that marks America’s non-identity to itself (the many, incommensurable ways of being *an American*), in Hughes, it is the adverb “too” that signals a split, the force of which derives not from the all-encompassing “embrace” of Whitman’s sprawling free verse but, instead, from the punctual and interruptive insistence of a part without part. Written in a situation of inclusion, *Leaves of Grass* can unfold the borders of liberal America without a great deal of violence; it can

expose exceptional America to what it excludes (slaves, native Americans, women, etc.), assimilating or accommodating these others in an America *to come*. *Leaves* can blunt the antagonistic force of its utopian *praxis*, assuring the reader that it is but another instance of the American jeremiad, a scolding rather than a revolution. Hughes's poem, on the other hand, marshals the bluntness of its short lines to make poetry a weapon. Here, language becomes a knife that cuts across the rhetoric of American democracy, demystifying the supposed liberty of a black man in the era of Jim Crow. The present (stanza 2) is a time of exclusion and subordination, in which the skin hue of the "darker brother" blends seamlessly with the darkness of political invisibility: "They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes." However, a voice ("But I laugh") introduces a disjunction breaking open the dominant discursive regime and polemically gesturing towards another possibility. Where there was only exceptionalist America's division between white speech and black noise, now, with the sound of laughter, there is a singular America, blackness becoming "how beautiful."

Singular America arrives in the third stanza of the poem, with the shift into the future tense, but it is already present as potentiality in the previous stanzas. In the ambiguously signifying laughter, voice comes to embody a surplus of potentiality whose possibilities defy the exclusive disjunction that constitutes the American public. Voice anticipates the future visibility of the black man as an equal, as "company" (literally: one with whom one shares bread; one with whom one partakes of something on relatively equal terms). If the resolutely negative force of this poem lies in its marking the contradictions of American liberalism through a disjunctive "but," its positive, indeed,

utopian, force emerges through the conjunctive “and,” which indicates that political subordination and oppression do not necessarily imply weakness: “But I laugh,/And eat well,/And grow strong.” The futurity of the third stanza is already folded into the combination of affirmation and negation in the second stanza’s present; the present possesses the strength of Bloch’s “Real-Possible”; the future is immanent to the present, a pressing *not-yet*. This immanence does not imply that the future is the teleological fulfillment of the present. For the stark appearance in the third stanza of the temporal modifiers “Tomorrow” and “Then” on lines of their own remind us that while the future may be immanent, it is not the same as the present. The identity between the first and last lines of the poem is only apparent; in the interval composing this repetition, the identity of America falters, giving way to the alterity of a future that remains indefinite. “I, *too*, sing America”: the interruptive force of this line does not fade with the transition into the so-called post-Civil Rights moment. Against the mystification of the political implications of racial difference that is endemic to the contemporary “post-racial” consensus, this poem remains a political operator capable of marking the difference between this America and an other America – in between which flickers a singular America.

Our final literary incarnation of a singular America comes from Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a text whose encyclopedic breadth and Talmudic density I will not attempt to intimate, here. Instead, I would risk a brief description of a single stylistic trait of Pynchon’s fiction, namely, its attraction to what is low, to what is on the margins of society, *lumpen*, abject, without proper value. This attraction is apparent not

only in the kinds of characters Pynchon tends to create (a list of which would resemble Whitman's "many long dumb voices"), but also in the detailed and often lurid descriptions of corporeal life (from the sexual to the scatological, and everything in between); in the use of slang and colloquial speech patterns, instead of the bourgeoisie's standardized English; and in the comic, sometimes cartoonish, plot dynamics which tend to leave narrative threads hanging willy nilly. The following passage is a paean to lowness, reconstructing a singular America, from the nation's "nobodies" and "anybodies":

William Slothrop was a peculiar bird. He took off from Boston, heading West in true Imperial style, in 1634 or -5, sick and tired of the Winthrop machine, convinced he could preach as well as anybody in the hierarchy even if he hadn't been officially ordained. [...] He enjoyed the road, the mobility, the chance encounters of the day—Indians, trappers, wenches, hill people,—and most of all just being with those pigs ["he and his son John got a pig operation going"]. They were good company. Despite the folklore and the injunctions in his own bible, William came to love their nobility and personal freedom, their gift for finding comfort in the mud on a hot day—pigs out on the road, in company together, were everything Boston wasn't, and you can imagine what the rend of the journey, the weighing, slaughter and dreary pigless return back up into the hilld must've been like for William [...]

He wrote a long tract about it presently, called *On Preterition*. It had to be published in England, and is among the first books to've been not only banned but also ceremonially burned in Boston. Nobody wanted to hear about all the Preterite, the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation. William argued holiness for these "second Sheep," without whom there's be no elect. You can bet the Elect in Boston were pissed off about that. And it got worse. William felt that what Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot was for the Preterite. Everything in the Creation has its equal and opposite counterpart. How can Jesus be an exception? could we feel for him anything but horror in the face of the unnatural, the extracreation? Well, if he is the son of

man, and if what we feel is not horror but love, then we have to love Judas too. Right? [...]

Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? Suppose the Slothrop heresy had had the time to consolidate and prosper? [...] It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might be a route back—maybe that anarchist he met in Zürich was right, maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up.... (GR 564-66)

In a sense, *A Desire Called America* is nothing but a continuation of Slothrop's rumination, in which the question, "Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from?" becomes a refrain. By this claim, I do not mean that this project points towards a preordained end or carries in it some alternative essence of America. Nor does it suppose some ultimate subject of a true America, or of an American savior. There is no redeeming America, and Slothrop is not our messiah. If I occasionally make recourse to phrases qualified by the adjective "alternative" (e.g., "alternative America"), it is in order to survey the terrain of a singular America whose incarnations are multiple and heterogeneous.

William Slothrop, then, is not so much *the* incarnation of a singular America as an index of its multiplicitous potentiality. He is an eccentric in the precise sense, his wanderings lacking a common center with the circles of the Puritan heritage and American exceptionalism. His movements are anomalous; he strays from the teleological line of Providence, content to enmire himself in the mud of the roads and the flesh of his pig-companions: "He enjoyed the road, the mobility, the chance encounters of the day—Indians, trappers, wenches, hill people,—and most of all just being with those pigs."

Whereas in the theology of the “Winthrop machine” the descent into the low implies the immobility of damnation (i.e. assignment to a fixed place in the cosmological order; subordination, abjection), for Slothrop it involves an intensified mobility, a movement of escape intimately linked to a mode of belonging. Escape is a “just being with” unmediated by the hierarchy of the Puritan church order. It is the province of an “anybody” (“convinced he could preach as well as anybody in the hierarchy even if he hadn’t been officially ordained”) lacking “official” or formal authorization. Indeed, this unqualified mode of belonging – companionship without the reservations involved in maintaining the purity of an identity or the continuity of a heritage – plays itself out between text and reader in the use of the second-person, which generates a sense of chumminess, a friendly implication of the reader in imagining an America that has been lost to the “triumphs” of American exceptionalism. In other words, heretical deviation no longer signifies the dead-end of a broken line of descent, instead it traces another mode of history, a jagged series of lines linked by affiliation, rather than filiation, a comradeship or alternative mode of kinship on egalitarian terms – “just being with.”

Pynchon’s language matches a singular attention to lowly creatures with a sense of non-teleological futurity: Judas and the pigs are the missed opportunities of America, its roads not taken. The passage plays on the meanings of “preterite,” which means not only the passed over or passed by but also, in grammatical terms, a past action or state – or in Pynchon’s ventriloquizing of Winthrop/Slothrop, “the many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation.” The preterite are those who have been left out and left behind; those who have no place in the history of American progress. The text, however,

introduces an ambiguity into the binary partition between the elect and the preterite, for in the gaps of this Manichaeian vision of the saved and the damned, we find the passage of William Slothrop and his pigs, or the aimless wandering of an irreducible in-between. This is the same mode of spatial orientation that William's relation, Tyrone, identifies in "the Zone": "cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up." The "nobodies" and the "anybodies" on which this passage centers become the embodiment of another path for America; they become the "singular point" whereby America might recommence and become something radically other than its present incarnation. Pynchon's writing style suggests the shape of this America to come: while the style is essentially paratactic, a strewn together set of clauses and sentences whose accumulation amounts not so much to an exegesis or exposition as to a tentative drifting hither and thither, it nonetheless incorporates hypotactic elements (especially the rhetorical question, with its presumption of authority and its virtual recourse to logical validity); these hypotactic elements never settle, however, never deposit themselves into a fixed stratum of sediment but, instead, become empty shells, the flimsy supports of an experimental process in which America is no more than the play of its singular wanderings, pigs and all.

In each of my three examples, a singular America arises through a disidentification with American exceptionalism, through a gap that opens up in the midst of exceptional America and invokes an America to come. The utopian dimension of the *to come*, or the *not-yet*, is predicated upon an individuation of America that runs against

the grain of American exceptionalism. By individuation, I do not simply mean the positing of a subject. Whereas “the subject” tends to imply a *sub-jectum*, that is, a material/ideal substrate transcendent or foundational to history – and, therefore, exempt from the becoming of an event or a singularity – “individuation” comprehends the notion of the subject but also includes other modes of constituting individuality. From this perspective, individuality is thoroughly historical and material, for it does not consist of a given and/or fixed set of preexisting entities but is rather composed of heterogeneous processes in which individuals come into being through the productivity of preindividual relations.⁵⁴

In the context of *A Desire Called America*, against the metaphysical tradition of liberal America and liberal American studies – a tradition presupposing an ontological identification of Americanness with private property, individualism, representation, and, more generally, liberal democracy – I track those moments in American literature where a singular America emerges through the invention of alternative forms of life. These forms of life embody an America to come, a deviation from American exceptionalism immanent to American exceptionalism. The biopolitical turn in American Studies to which I allude in the subtitle of this section signifies a genealogical inquiry examining the multiple and heterogeneous individuations of American culture. It thickens the New Americanists’ concern for subjectivization by bringing to the fore “internal division,” “surplus historicity,” and the “intranational”/“postnational.” More specifically, it suggests an analysis in which the *embodiment* of Americanness is central, and where “Americanness” is *not* understood as unitary, homogenous, or self-identical. The

biopolitical turn shifts the question from what America is to the becoming of America and Americans. For if, as I suggested above, it is impossible to *be* American, it may nonetheless be imperative to learn new and other ways to *become* American.

The work of Gilles Deleuze is of special significance for conceiving of a biopolitical turn in the study of American literature, first, because Deleuze's writings, like those of Foucault, are foundational to any understanding of biopolitics as a discourse, and, second, because American literature constitutes for Deleuze a singular example of a utopian biopolitics. As I have already claimed, Deleuze (and his sometimes coauthor, Félix Guattari) sets the stage for a biopolitical mode of analysis through the philosophical reversal whereby thought becomes an effect of bodily life, a reversal captured in the notion of "desiring-production." More generally, Deleuze throughout his writing conceives of philosophy as an experimenting with and in life, as a practical exercise not only in thinking otherwise but also in living differently.⁵⁵ As Deleuze and Guattari explain in *What is Philosophy*, one way of experimenting with life/thought is through the intersection, or "interference," of philosophy and literature. Whereas philosophy (in their construction of it) concerns concepts, literature concerns affects, the latter term being understood in the broad, Spinozist sense of encounters between bodies that recompose existence on a preindividual or impersonal level.⁵⁶ To put it concisely, in experimenting with literature, philosophy opens up or disturbs the tentative closure of concepts, inviting thought to mutate through its encounters with affects. American literature, more than a canon, is for Deleuze one of the privileged realms in which thought recomposes itself.

American literature for Deleuze falls under the more general category of “Anglo-American literature,” a designation whose specificity is less geographic and historical – which is not to say that it is not conditioned by geography and history – and more conceptual. The traits qualifying this category include an orientation towards “escape” as a creative endeavor (not simply an escape from but a “faire fuir quelque chose” [“making something escape”] [*Dialogues* 47⁵⁷]); an attraction to rupture and breaks; a sense of writing as “experimentation,” or the “production of life programs” (“life programs are not manifestos, still less phantasms, but rather *means of locating in order to conduct an experiment that goes beyond our capacities of prediction*” [60] – phrasing which cannot help but strike a utopian note); the substitution of “and”/ET for “Is”/EST, or an insistence on conjunction instead of the copula (being is composed through the productivity of connection, rather than the givenness of predication [69]); and, finally, the pragmatic or empirical bent of America/England, which implies the exteriority of relations to their terms (what Deleuze repeatedly refers to as the “patchwork” quality of America [69]). This list of traits is not meant to be exhaustive, nor could it be, for Deleuze approaches America in a manner echoing his description of it: he does not try to define America, but, like Whitman, catalogues it in a non-systematic manner. Indeed, for Deleuze, America names less a nation than a singular mode of desiring, one which dismantles an Old World oedipal complex in order to release, to “make escape,” a New World “society of brothers” (*Essays* 84).

In Deleuze’s writings on American literature, America is utopian in a double sense: on the one hand, it indicates a void in the West, a positive limit on which Europe

touches in its westward expansion; on the other hand, it is the place from which emerges a “people to come,” a collective assemblage that stands in opposition not only to the nation-state but also (if ambiguously and ambivalently) to capitalism. Deleuze himself does not deploy the term “utopia,” however, preferring to speak of America as displaying a high-degree of “deterritorialization” (the conversion of actualities into potentialities; the translation of extensive limits into intensive thresholds). While at first glance this terminological difference would also seem to indicate a conceptual distance, further consideration suggests that it is more a matter of particular philosophical prejudices, specifically, the too simple conflation of utopia and transcendence. If, on the other hand, following our discussions of the New Americanists and Foucault, we acknowledge the power of an *immanent* conception of utopia, then Deleuze’s investment of his intellectual and libidinal energies in experimentation and escape become legible as another manner of articulating an immanent utopian *praxis*. As I hope to suggest below, though Deleuze’s thought may not necessitate reflection on the concept of utopia, utopia nonetheless dwells in his texts in the form of an investigation into the ways in which the potentialities of bodies are also the potentialities of other worlds.

Deleuze’s most concerted writing on American literature is included in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, the purpose of which is to consider “the problem of writing,” where writing is a “question of becoming,” “a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (lv; 1). From this vantage point, writing is inherently biopolitical, a matter of tracing the boundaries between what is lived and what might be lived; it concerns the potentiality that makes up a livelihood. Deleuze fashions America into a laboratory for

rewriting the livable, for uncovering new powers and new forms of life. This sense of America as biopolitical laboratory is most evident in Deleuze's essay, "Bartleby; or, The Formula," where Herman Melville's figure of passive resistance ("I would prefer not to") is understood as belonging to a "*Primary Nature*." While the beings of primary nature that Deleuze catalogues in Melville's texts may be demons (e.g., Ahab, Claggart, and Babo), they may also be "angels or saintly hypochondriacs, almost stupid, creatures of innocence and purity, stricken with a constitutive weakness but also with a strange beauty. Petrified by nature, they prefer ... no will at all, a nothingness of the will, rather than a will to nothingness [the latter characteristic constituting a trait of the demons]" (Ibid., 79-80). The "almost stupid" innocence of Melville's quasi-angelic creatures such as Bartleby and Billy Budd, as well as the "almost stupid" monstrosity of the demonic Ahab and Claggart, stands in opposition to the law not in the form of a transgression but as an overcoming or an exemption. Stupidity, in this instance, is not a lack of intelligence but rather a refusal of the hegemonic system of intelligibility. These figures are simultaneously below the law – creatures sunk into their own bodily existence, denying or subtracting from the workings of the symbolic/the law of the father – and above the law – a sometimes terrifying (Ahab), sometimes pathetic (Bartleby), excess of writing/signification above the coding of the symbolic, whether it be in: the sheer blankness and literality of Bartleby's refrain or the rhetorical bombast of Ahab's call to arms. What arises from this exemption/overcoming of the law is "the fraternal relation pure and simple," that is, a form of linkage unmediated by the hierarchy of the symbolic order: "To liberate man from the father function, to reunite the original and humanity by

constituting a society of brothers as a new universality. [...] *A* brother, *a* sister, all the more true for no longer being ‘his’ or ‘hers,’ since all ‘property,’ all ‘proprietorship,’ has disappeared” (Ibid., 84). Deleuze translates “America” into a space in which the human is no longer defined by its subordination to the signifier (or the symbolic) and where community no longer consists in the hierarchical ordering of relations (assignment to one’s proper place according to one’s inherent properties). As the indefinite article suggests, America becomes the home, or rather the non-place, of singular becomings. Being is no longer predicated on the assumption of a common foundation, essence, or identity but is rather the effect of a savage productivity outside the law.⁵⁸

There is something almost too utopian about the way in which Deleuze posits America as the outside of the law/symbolic, suggesting not the concrete utopian *praxis* with which we have been concerned but rather the abstract utopian compensation of a wish fantastically fulfilled. Indeed, America seems to become a site of transcendence, a place in which desire finds its final satisfaction. It is as if Deleuze did no more than reverse the terms of Hegel’s claim in the introduction to the *Philosophy of History* that “America is [...] the land of the future,” making this futurity depend not on reason/spirit’s progress (as Hegel does) but rather on the interruption of spirit (90). Where Hegel imagines “the natives gradually perish[ing] at the mere breath of European activity,” Deleuze imagines futurity to consist of a renewal of thought and the body through an encounter with savagery, the latter term implying less a *lack* of culture or civilization than an *escape* from it: pure flesh (Hegel 85). In the figures of American

literature, Deleuze appears to find the inversion of progress: a devolution that unravels the progress of spirit/mind (*Geist*) into the sheer potentiality of uncoded bodily existence.

If we were to treat this inversion of spirit as the end of the line, attributing to Deleuze a belated romanticism in which redemption is simply the defaulting of the dialectic, then we would be left with nothing but biopolitics as a quasi-mystical submission to the silent pulsations of the body. We would do better, however, to register a certain ambivalence in Deleuze concerning America, echoing the ambivalence of a desire called America in its oscillation between America as global redemption (American exceptionalism) and a singular America. For Deleuze, as for Hegel, America is the land of the future, but futurity is irreducible to an alternation between the poles of body and spirit. It is, instead, in the interval between these terms, in the (non-)place in which the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real collapse into a continuum – “desiring-production” – or in which the Symbolic is not so much negated or escaped as *turned inside out*, exposed to the surplus potentiality inhering in the bodies immanent to it.

The preceding point may turn Deleuze against himself in a certain respect, but if it does so, it is only in a way that intensifies and elaborates on the biopolitical method that runs throughout his oeuvre. For as Deleuze demonstrates most acutely in his books *The Logic of Sense* and *Foucault*, biopolitics does not leave language, or the Symbolic, behind. Instead, it operates a transformation of language in the form of a *chiasmus between bodies and language*. This is how I read Deleuze’s positing of what I consider the most basic biopolitical syntagm, “body/language”: this term designates the paradoxical point where corporeality (the fleshy, asignifying density of the body) and

writing (the literality of the signifier but also the meaningful promise of the signified) cross paths, intersecting only to depart from one another, but with a difference.⁵⁹ A text, whether literary or not, becomes the space of an event (or of the utopian impulse) when its language reconfigures the difference *qua* relation of body/language, when, that is, it changes how a body relates to itself and others through language but also when it changes how language serves as a prosthesis of the body. This folding of the text back on itself is very different from both the reflexivity of late modernist irony and the vision of reflexive play involved in a standardized/hegemonic postmodernism. Whereas those aesthetics rely, respectively, on a realm of pure spectatorship or on the basic permutative equivalence of every transformation, the biopolitical perspective treats the event “body/language” as an encounter with singularity in which subjectivity as such is at stake. “Body/language” designates a practice (textual or otherwise) in which one world encounters another through a transformation in the singular nexus between body and language (what Deleuze refers to as an “event of sense”). “Body/language” – the fundamental dimension of biopolitical literary criticism – signals the arrival not only of another body, a body *to come*, but also of another use of language. In short, then, Melville/Deleuze’s figures of “Primary Nature” are not so much outside the Symbolic as on a threshold internal to it, a point at which the hegemonic functioning of the law gives way or exposes itself to flesh as immanent outside.

To understand the intersection of biopolitics and utopia in Deleuze’s encounter with America and with American literature, we need to come to grips with Deleuze’s understanding of singularity (not least because it is central to my reading of America

more generally). Singularity is neither individual, nor personal, but rather impersonal potentiality.⁶⁰ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze defines singularity as follows: “A singularity is the point of departure for a series which extends over all the ordinary points of the system, as far as the region of another singularity which itself gives rise to another series which may either converge or diverge from the first” (278). Without attempting to unfold the entirety of Deleuze’s thought, I would suggest that we might think of singularities as switch-points between the potential/virtual and the actual, and between the preindividual and the individual. A singularity is the “point of departure for a series which extends over all the ordinary points of the system”: if a system is a series of relations between relations – or the manifold relatedness of actual series through which the world individuates itself into specific entities – then singularity is a point, a “difference in itself,” where the series of a system branch off and knot together. A singularity is always a limit-point, though not in the sense of being the boundary of an identity, for it does not function to delimit or consolidate a being’s self-identity. Instead, singularities expose beings to a potential to become otherwise; they occupy the threshold region between actuality and virtuality, between what a thing is and all of the possibilities for a thing to become other. As Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense*, “Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distributed in a ‘potential’ which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing itself, although the figures of this actualization do not at all resemble the realized potential” (103). Singularities lack the properties, or the propriety, of individuals and persons. They are not a chaos, but nor do they constitute an

order, at least if “order” is meant to suggest a strict delimitation between terms. Instead, singularities are, paradoxically, *specific indeterminations*, which is to say places where two worlds meet.⁶¹ At the most basic level, a singularity is a threshold where a world that is intersects with worlds that may become. With regards to the examples I drew from Whitman, Hughes, and Pynchon, in each case we saw how exceptional America stumbles onto a singular point, trips itself over the obstacle of an excess of potentiality – Whitman’s rude people, Hughes’s “dark” laughter, Pynchon’s lowly preterite – threatening, promising, another America, one without resemblance to the liberal, capitalist nation-state of the present.

There is, however, nothing inherently utopian about singularity. If the network of singularities Deleuze describes is the switchboard between the virtual and the actual, then singularities are not no-place but everywhere; they are the woof and the warp of actuality, the immersion of actuality in a potentiality proper to it, that which enables the translation between one actual form of being and another. That being said, there is a moment where singularity becomes utopian, namely, when the excess of potentiality over actuality intervenes in actuality as an explosive event. More precisely, singularity turns into utopia when the potentiality which comes to be included in a field of actual existence threatens/promises to reorder the very constitution of actuality, when it threatens/promises a *systematic change* in the relations and the nodes making up the structure of actual existence.⁶² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari map such transformations through the interplay of the terms “deterritorialization” and “territorialization.” These terms mark the difference between, on the one hand, a field of

actuality in which beings are reduced to exclusive and unitary identities, without the possibility of differing from themselves, and, on the other, a field of actuality in which beings are exposed to their own non-identity, to the potentiality to become otherwise which blurs the edges of a given individuality. We can say that an experience becomes utopian when it achieves a high-degree of deterritorialization, when it experiments with so much intensity that it reveals not only new forms of life but also a new world: “This is what it’s necessary to do: install oneself on a stratum, experiment with the chances it offers, search there for a favorable place, for some movements of deterritorialization for some possible lines of flight, test them, secure here and there some conjunctions of flux, try out segment by segment some continuums of intensity, have always a little piece of a new earth” (*Mille Plateaux* 199; translation mine). This sentence can serve as a provocative exposition of “utopian *praxis*.” Utopian experimentation, or deterritorialization, revolves around an embodied *praxis* connecting together thought and practice. If we can speak of utopia, or of a “new earth,” it is not because a subject finds transcendence but rather because subjectivity comes undone in an encounter with an outside, a zone of radical alterity, immanent to this world. Finally, as experiment, there is a tentativeness to utopian *praxis*, an essayistic quality according to which the process of inventing a life does not consist in the once and for all resolution of contradictions but rather in the *process* of changing the constitution of reality (beginning with forms of life).

Deleuze finds Bartleby and Ahab so fascinating, because they possess what he calls “originality,” a term that can be parsed quite precisely as indicating an experimental mode of existence, an existence that “leads its life without seeking salvation, when it

embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound” (*Essays* 87). Originality, here, has little to do with beginnings. Quite the contrary, it denotes an in-between space in which individuals emerge that are without instrumental relation. Repeating the American *mythos* of the road, Deleuze distinguishes what is “original” in America through reference to a democratic messianism without *telos*:

This is how [D.H.] Lawrence described the new messianism, or the *democratic* contribution of American literature,: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to complete itself. (87)

Against the secondary, or derivative, quality of a Europe defined in terms of its deep roots in law and custom, Deleuze (*via* Lawrence – whose thoughts, notably, Deleuze does not take pains to distinguish from his own) posits an America that is more idea than substance, more productive fantasy than description: as it did for another Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, America becomes the incarnation of a desire for democracy, the living possibility of a world in which freedom and equality would be in accords (rather than mutually exclusive) and in which existence would be an adventure on the open road, without fixed destination. It is difficult not to recall, in this context, de Tocqueville’s admission regarding the epistemological status of *Democracy in America*: “I confess that in America I have seen more than America itself; I have looked there for an image of the essence of democracy, its inclination, its personality, its prejudices, its passions; my wish

has been to know it if only to realize at least what we have to fear or hope from it” (23-4). Deleuze mutes de Tocqueville’s ambivalence but retains the tone of promise: America is not what it is but what it might become, what it promises for the world in terms of social possibilities. Yet Deleuze detaches this promise from any grounding in an essence. If he repeats de Tocqueville’s obsession with the delineation of character, he nonetheless severely modifies what counts as a character. Deleuze’s American character is, paradoxically, defined not in terms of being but rather of becoming. A creature of the open road, the American character not only belongs to that in-between space but also takes its shape: it is an individuality, or an individuation, without strict properties, without *telos* or purpose, without a fixed position in the symbolic order. In positive terms, Deleuze’s vision of American character consists of a brotherhood of perfect equality and freedom, a patchwork in which life gravitates towards the transformations involved in intense singular experiences of deterritorialization.

It would be easy to criticize Deleuze’s fantastic vision of America. There is undoubtedly a problematic fetishism operating in Deleuze’s writing on America, in the precise sense of a substitutive dimension marking the impact of a trauma: Deleuze finds in America a compensation for certain realities in France, a means of resolving an impasse in the revolutionary imagination post-’68, specifically the lack of political alternatives to party apparatuses and state institutions.⁶³ Nor do I doubt that such a fantasy of the United States might have negative implications in the form of aiding and abetting an American exceptionalism which has no problem with identifying “America” as an “original” specializing in that political commodity *par excellence*, democracy.

Deleuze runs the risk of collapsing a singular America into American exceptionalism by ignoring the ambivalence which constitutes a desire called America. This is evident, for example, in Deleuze's extremely one-sided portrait of Whitman – simply entitled “Whitman” – which while celebrating, in a rather Whitmanesque fashion, American literature's “spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary,” manages to neglect those fragments of Whitman's corpus that in their openly imperial fervor seek to assimilate the world's fragments into a transcendent oneness (see, for example, Whitman's “Passage to India”) (*Essays* 60). It would be reductive to impugn a critic's thought simply on the basis of an accidental or contingent blindness to an aspect of an author's work (especially when that critic is explicitly *not* interested in conceptual totalities such as oeuvre or work), but if that blindness is in some sense constitutive of a critic's thought, if, that is, Deleuze's fantasy of America hinges on the necessary exclusion/repression of the violences endemic to American exceptionalism, or on the collapsing together of singularity and exceptionality, then criticism is not only warranted but necessary, at least if we are to maintain a degree of non-complicity with American exceptionalism.

However, given the interest of *A Desire Called America* in registering the utopian dimension of American literature *immanently*, which is to say from *within* the ambivalences and ambiguities of American exceptionalism, it serves our purposes better to take into account the ambivalences that arise in Deleuze's writing, rather than simply condemning his thought. The question becomes: what space of play, what (to recall the New Americanists) “internal division” or “surplus historicity,” does Deleuze open up in

exceptional America? Indeed, I think that in the context of American Studies, Deleuze's literary criticism has the refreshing capability of reminding one that "America" is not identical with imperial violence, even if it is inextricable from it. Deleuze suggests this ambiguous and ambivalent positioning of America, when he writes that "The dangers of a 'society without fathers' [i.e. a democratic society]" consist in "the return of the father," and then proceeds to connect the American Revolution with the Soviet Revolution, emphasizing not their successes, however, but their failures:

In this respect, it is difficult to separate the failure of the two revolutions, the American and the Soviet, the pragmatic and the dialectical. Universal emigration was no more successful than universal proletarianization. The Civil War already sounded the knell, as would the liquidation of the Soviets later on. The birth of a nation, the restoration of the nation-state—and the monstrous fathers come galloping back in, while the sons without fathers start dying off again. Paper images—this is the fate of the American as well as the Proletarian. But just as many Bolsheviks could hear the diabolical powers knocking at the door in 1917, the pragmatists, like Melville before them, could see the masquerade that the society of brothers would lead to. Long before Lawrence, Melville and Thoreau were diagnosing the American evil, the new cement that would rebuild the wall: paternal authority and filthy charity. Bartleby therefore lets himself die in prison. In the beginning, it was Benjamin Franklin, the hypocritical *lightning-rod Merchant*, who instituted the magnetic American prison. (*Essays* 88)

Bracketing the question of the relationship between the American and Soviet Revolutions, what is so striking in this passage is the way it places the failure of the American Revolution in close proximity to its successes. If the revolutionary quality of America lies in its decomposition of paternal authority and its destruction of hierarchical filiation, the very act of ridding oneself of the father risks the return of the father in an even more monstrous form. Thus, already with the founding of America ("In the

beginning”), and with Benjamin Franklin as a founder, the revolution coexists side by side with “the magnetic American prison.” From the perspective of this original betrayal, the Civil War is not an accident in relation to the American Revolution, or a stray course leading away from it. It is, instead, part and parcel of the Revolution insofar as the latter, understood as an experiment, is necessarily entangled with that from which it wishes to liberate itself. Deleuze’s argument is different from the Freudian one, which sees the return of the father as the necessary outcome of the primal murder of the father and the guilty repression of this murder by the band of brothers/sons.⁶⁴ If this Freudian logic is present, it tells only half the story, the other half being that of a revolutionary, or utopian, project in which the new is not conceivable in terms of the old but demands its own style. The “American evil” – the return of the Father, the confluence of the utopian and the imperial, the exceptionalist impulse – can only be diagnosed by way of the singularity – the immanent potentiality of becoming other, the corporeal powers capable of doing away with capitalism and the state – that it betrays. Much akin to Foucault’s exposition of the utopian body, Deleuze makes the potentiality of utopian *praxis* ontologically prior to its betrayal, implying that betrayal is only possible given the existence of that potentiality.

Deleuze, therefore, does not abandon America or consign it to the dustbin of history, instead he cultivates its remains in terms of the possibilities they continue to promise, in terms, that is, of the surplus of potentiality over actuality. Deleuze avoids a simple reversal, whereby the utopian dimension of the United States would come to be criticized as always already complicit with the violence of oppression, in favor of a more

complicated viewpoint that acknowledges that practices of liberation necessarily begin from within the limits of the actual:

For even in the midst of its failure, the American Revolution continues to send out its fragments, always making something take flight on the horizon, even sending itself to the moon, always trying to break through the wall, to take up the experiment once again, to find a brotherhood in this enterprise, a sister in this becoming, a music in its stuttering language, a pure sound and unknown chords in language itself. [...] Even in his failure, the writer remains all the more the bearer of a collective enunciation, which no longer forms a part of literary history and preserves the rights of a people to come, or, of a human becoming. A schizophrenic vocation: even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all. (Ibid., 89)

This passage marks the irreducibility of the American Revolution, and of the revolution that America is in the cultural and political imaginary, to the simplicity of a necessary failure. “Even in the midst of failure”: this phrase describes the tenacious, persistent, and insistent qualities of that desire called America, the way that, for better or for worse, it survives its defeats, defaults, and disavowals as a surplus of promise and potentiality. Yet it also accepts the consequences of such failures. The utopian surplus that lives in the name “America” exists only in “fragments,” that is, only as a moment that flickers up in a text, practice, or discourse, signaling its excess over its own conditions, its real yet tenuous expression of the *to come* or the *not-yet*. This is the “schizophrenic vocation” to which Deleuze alludes, a vocation whose rhetorical signature in the preceding passage is the repetition of “even in”: even in his death, Bartleby signals another America; even in the midst of his imperial apologies, Whitman realizes the radical democracy of a nation of poets. The impossibility of being American – the impossibility of becoming what the

revolution, the experiment, demands – doubles itself in the possibility of new forms of life, forms of life that do not realize the revolution so much as multiply and mutate it.

It is the writer, in Deleuze's thinking, who serves as the conduit for this utopian surplus. Deleuze's definition of the writer does not consist in the expression of a personality, nor is it a set of easily identifiable formal traits that would add up to a style. The writer is both more and less than these descriptions: more, because Deleuze emphasizes the inherently collective nature of the writer, who is always part of an assemblage, or a heterogeneous set of social elements; less, because at no point is the activity of writing reducible to personal emotion or desire. "Literature," Deleuze writes, "exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of the impersonal—which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point"; and "The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life. To write for this people who are missing... ('for,' means less 'in the place of' than 'for the benefit of')" (Ibid., 3; 4). In a notable contrast to the representative function of the writer, Deleuze posits the writer as one who "write[s] for this people who are missing," who writes "for the benefit" of a people that is to come – in other words, the term "writer" is extremely paradoxical, for not only does it mark the sickness of the present ("Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America") but it also "set[s] free [...] the possibility of a life." Deleuze's notion of "the possibility of a life" is therefore twofold: on the one hand, it marks the place of a potentiality in the here and now that is foreclosed or condemned to the margins by the hegemonic order

(“this people who are missing”); on the other hand, it anticipates a radically other world in the form of an individuation that is to come (“a people to come”).

Yet in designating the writer a conduit, we imply too simple a notion of mediation, one which separates the present off from the future, rather than folds the latter into the former. Deleuze captures the immanence of the *to come* when he describes writing as a making foreign of one’s native/maternal language: “In order to write, it may perhaps be necessary for the maternal language to be odious, but only so that a syntactic creation can open up a kind of foreign language in it, and language as a whole can reveal its outside, beyond all syntax” (Ibid., 5-6). The paradox of a foreign language *within* a language is also that of a foreign people within a nation, a minor people as Deleuze calls them, or a people whose relation to the hegemonic functions of the nation-state is one of calling into question and undermining. This sense of minority constitutes a spatialization of futurity *cum* temporal radical otherness: the “outside” of a linguistic system, or the outside of a society, is not a simple negation but rather the set of singularities which promise/threaten otherness.⁶⁵ Indeed, in a gesture of provocation, Deleuze suggests that American English, as well as American literature, is the most minor of languages, for while it is a “hegemonic language,” even an “imperialist” one, it is nonetheless “all the more vulnerable to the subterranean work of languages [*langues*] or dialects that undermine/wear it away [*miner*] everywhere, and impose on it a vast play of corruptions and variations” (*Dialogues* 72). If we imagine the spread of English, of standardized American English, as the squid-like expansion of a creature whose tendrils grasp otherness in order to homogenize it, then we must also imagine the bi-directionality this

condition implies: to be worked on by American English, to be made vulnerable to it, is also to gain access to it for one's own purposes, to become not only entangled in it but also at play in it. Deleuze does not confine the productivity of "variation" and "corruption" to foreign soil; citing the special case of black American English, a language born of the tangle between slavery and emancipation, he gestures towards the existence of a singular America, a foreign nation within America, not an other nation but an otherness internal to this nation, this nation split off from itself in a moment promising the radically other.

The task of *A Desire Called America* is not the painting of broad strokes, or the reiteration of a simplistic series of binary oppositions. Instead, my concern is to examine, often with microscopic precision, those moments in a text when a transformation in the embodiment of America becomes visible. We witness such changes in Emily Dickinson's strange use of dashes as tactile forms of relation, as well as in William Burroughs's disruptions of linear narrative through digressions into instruction manual-like descriptions of bodily conduct. However, a biopolitical literary criticism cannot – and should not – avoid the historical-material task of *situating* texts. While the irruption of a singular America may signal the coming of a new world, if only in the realm of the virtual, its eventfulness cannot be fully grasped without considering its conditions of possibility. In the following section, I briefly situate the moments of a singular America that I explore in *A Desire Called America* in terms of the arc of American hegemony.

V. The Frayed Edges of American Hegemony:

Periodization, Repetition, Reactivation, Errancy

The two seemingly disparate periods with which *A Desire Called America* concerns itself – the American Renaissance and post-1973 American literature – may strike the reader as arbitrary selections. They are, however, strategic choices. These two periods stand at either end of the arc of American hegemony, the geopolitical and economic dominance of the United States that begins to take shape in the middle of the nineteenth century and culminates in the mid- to late twentieth century. It may seem strange to date the emergence of American hegemony to the middle of the nineteenth century, especially since as many historians and political economists have argued, the U.S.'s rise to power is closely linked to its fortunes during the two World Wars. However, American hegemony does not spring to life fully-formed, like Athena from Zeus's forehead. Instead, we might speak of an anticipatory development of the United States towards hegemony, a development that includes the transformations of the state, the economy, international relations and trade – all of which were necessary for the U.S. to function as global hegemon. Especially central to this transformation are the Civil War and the Reconstruction following it, for the abolition of slavery and concomitant industrialization of the South and the West (including the industrialization of agriculture through the introduction not only of machinery but also tenant systems and poor white and black labor), as well as the increasing powers of the federal government, positions the U.S. economically and politically to take over Great Britain's role as putative center of global capital. Indeed, the vertical integration that political economists such as

Giovanni Arrighi cite as a key component in America's rise to power pave the way for the birth of transnational corporations, one of the most defining features of contemporary capitalism.

On the other side of hegemony's arc, Arrighi, David Harvey, Immanuel Wallerstein, and many others mark the beginning of the decline of American hegemony in 1973, with the delinking of the dollar from the gold standard and the introduction of floating exchange-rates.⁶⁶ This change in the realm of currency regulation signals a more general decentralization of the world market, in the form of a proliferation of small but powerful money markets as well as in the increasing importance of the Bretton-Woods institutions (the IMF, the World Bank). The interests of global capital no longer appear identical to the interests of the U.S., though the connection between the two, of course, is not severed. However, a narrow focus on shifts in monetary policy and capital circulation misses a number of other aspects involved in the decline of American hegemony, most notably, "Vietnam Syndrome," or the sense of political impotence resulting from the defeat of the American military in Vietnam; the fracturing of the post-WWII bargain between capital and labor, which can be understood as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, in the realm of wages and the organization of production, and which has its most spectacular expression in a still ongoing war on organized labor; and, finally, the spread of neoliberalism, with its central strategies of privatizing the state and transferring public wealth into the possession of ever more concentrated capitals, as well as generalizing market logics to include every shred of existence.

All of the above aspects signify a “decline” because they mark the impossibility of assuming the centrality of the United States in the operations of global capital; the U.S. may still be central to global capitalism, but it is no longer *the* center. In addition, on a cultural level, they constitute the historical material conditions of a general sense of anxiety regarding the stalling out of American progress, the collapsing of the American dream. The punk slogan of the eighties, “No Future,” becomes emblematic of the entire period stretching between the seventies and the present. This anxiety, in turn, generates its own effects in the form of a resurgent nativism/xenophobia, the frantic and even hysterical recourse to financial austerity measures, and the repeated invocation of the American Jeremiad – especially in public speeches – to remind the American people of the greatness of the United States in the face of its material decline.

My interest, however, is not in plotting an objective narrative of the trajectory of American hegemony (an important task, which I leave to others) but rather in the way in which the changing situation of the U.S. transforms the coordinates of U.S. culture and literature. These coordinates are not extrinsic to individual texts but form the subtext, the soil, in which they are rooted. What is stake in my project is not the sociological knowledge of how material conditions engender the particularities of a given work, genre, or tradition. Such research is important, but it does not necessarily account for the intersection and interference between form and history, that is, what we might call the sociality of form. Instead, my focus is on the way in which texts bear the mark of their production in a specific time and place not as a mimetic image but as a response, a “socially symbolic act,” to their conditions. Rather than a simplistic division between text

and context, we should speak of a zone of indistinguishability between the two, a zone in which a text produces its own context, through a particular interpretation of the events, situations, etc. (the “history”) surrounding it. In other words, a text invents its own history, though not, of course, in conditions of its own choosing.⁶⁷ Periodization does not simply involve “dating” cultural objects, inserting them in their proper times and places. It also entails recognizing what Walter Benjamin terms the “after life” (*Nachleben*) of a work, the way in which its temporality is irreducible to a moment of genesis or, in positive terms, the way in which the time of a text is always also prospective/anticipatory.⁶⁸ To understand a textual object as a “socially symbolic act” means reckoning with the changing effects of this act as it passes from one situation to another. The poetry of Walt Whitman, for example, signifies very differently in the 1880s with his canonization as the gray-bearded bard than it does in the 2009 Levi’s Jean commercials which feature his poetry as the acoustic background to young flesh dancing in the ruins of post-Katrina New Orleans. The aim of *A Desire Called America* is less the fixing of works in their proper historical location and more the examination of how specific texts dislocate history, cutting across the limits of historically-sedimented situations in order to reveal immanent utopian potentials, the real possibilities of new times and new places.

Indeed, the dislocatedness of a text, or its enmeshment in non-synchronous temporalities, is central to this project not only in the utopian anticipation of alternative futures but also in terms of relations to the past. The texts I examine, each in their own way, repeat and reactivate the American Revolution, not in the sense of restoring it or

returning to it but in the sense of actualizing its latent possibilities. Slavoj Žižek's *In Defense of Lost Causes* concerns the afterlife of revolution, or the "underground spectral life of the ghosts of failed utopias which haunt the future generations, patiently awaiting their next resurrection" (207). These specters are not simply the abstract wishes of what might have happened but did not, instead they are the immanent mark of failure in the practice of revolution, the gap or non-identity between the desire of a revolution and its effects, without any recourse to transcendent standard or universal imperative. As Žižek explains in his Hegelian interpretation of the French Revolution, "What one should simply add is that the gap that separates the Idea from its actualization signals a gap within the Idea itself. This is why the spectral Idea that continues to haunt historical reality *signals the falsity of the new historical reality itself, its inadequacy to its own Notion*" (Ibid., 209). In our context, we can speak of the way the Idea of America – or, as I prefer, the desire called America – fails on its own terms, fails to deliver on the promises of equality, liberty, life, and happiness inscribing themselves not only in founding documents but also in the actions of the various insurgent groups making up the Revolution.⁶⁹ That desire called America is spectral insofar as the subjectivities and the texts embodying it are constitutively at odds with themselves, split between promise and results, potentiality and actuality. Yet, in contrast to Žižek's narration of the event in terms of the survival of the "Idea" – a word very difficult to extricate from some sense of transcendence or idealism – my own concern is the biopolitical articulation of the event's survival in terms of its *incorporation* in embodied forms of life. To say, then, that the desire called America is spectral is not to say that it is without a body but rather that its

corporeality consists of a dynamic and contradictory temporalization, one in which the future as real possibility is constitutively linked up to the present's being haunted by an unsettled past.

The failure of the American Revolution is a haunting conjuring up not only shame and guilt – liberalism's driving affects, along with national pride – but also that utopian affect *par excellence*, hope. The texts with which I deal are hopeful insofar as they suggest that we might repeat and reactivate the American Revolution, might make good on its promise, through a utopian exposure to that which in the American Revolution is more than its actualization. This treatment of the American Revolution is analogous to Žižek's treatment of Lenin's *praxis*:

[R]epeating Lenin does not mean a *return* to Lenin – to repeat Lenin is to accept that 'Lenin is dead', that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrously, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving. Repeating Lenin means that we have to distinguish between what Lenin actually did and the field of possibilities he opened up, the tension in Lenin between what he actually did and another dimension: what was "in Lenin more than Lenin himself". To repeat Lenin is to repeat not what Lenin *did*, but what he *failed to do*, his missed opportunities. (310)

Ventriloquizing Žižek, we might rewrite this passage as follows: to repeat the American Revolution does not mean returning to it; it does not mean being faithful to its actual practice of preserving the institution of slavery, justifying the genocide of American Indians, and excluding women from politics; it does not entail a mimetic repetition of the revolution's actions but a creative repetition of its desires, its hopes, and its "surplus historicity" – a difference in/of repetition.⁷⁰ To repeat the American Revolution is to begin not from its successes – as do the defenders of American exceptionalism – but from

its failures; it means locating these failures at the very origin of the revolution, not as mere aberrations but as central to it, as constitutive of it; it also means recognizing that this split works both ways, and that, as such, there is also something worth “saving” in the American Revolution. This creative repetition is not a redemption, for it implies no expiation, no absolution of guilt. Like Walter Benjamin’s notion of divine violence (on which Žižek draws), it implies the destruction of guilt as such; it renders guilt meaningless by changing the very conditions in which the American Revolution signifies. In speaking of the “missed opportunities” of the American Revolution, we expose American exceptionalism to a singular America, to that which in America is more than America.

The creative repetition of the American Revolution depends on a sense of inadequacy, or a sense that the revolution is in surplus to its actual realizations. Antonio Negri’s *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* describes the constitutive inadequacy of the American Revolution in terms of the blocked potentiality of its revolution of everyday life. Negri writes, “In fact the social revolution is within the American Revolution insofar as it constitutes its edge: it is included in the concept of political revolution because the concepts of sovereign people and constituent power are drawn on the continental space” (152). Negri pits a biopolitical interpretation of the American Revolution against Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of it as limited to the purely political (“the political,” in her sense, precluding the social).⁷¹ The political nature of the American Revolution inheres in the social transformations that are “its edge,” which is to say that it is political inasmuch as it exposes itself to its own limits, to that which in it is

more than it. It is revolutionary insofar as it promises to change the very structures of social existence. This surplus of potentiality is what Negri names “constituent power,” a concept which refers to an “originary productivity,” not merely the condition of political life but the power that produces politics and from which politics draws its life.

Constituent power is the subjective force, strength, or potential (*potentia*) of the political; it is the sociality of politics.

In Negri’s view, the American Revolution is shut down by a reactionary movement (exemplified by the writings and actions of the Federalists) reducing the American Revolution to its constitutional machinery: “The constitution has absorbed not only constituent power, but also the subject of constituent power” (167). Following its constitutionalization, the American Revolution puts on the mask of a unified governmental apparatus whose general division of power only serves to conceal its arrogation of direct democratic power. Yet the Civil War and the secession of the South attest to the incomplete nature of this absorption of constituent power into constituted power. Drawing on the political theory of John C. Calhoun – the drafter of the political and legal justification for nullification and secession – Negri highlights the persistence of constituent power as a specter haunting the reification of the revolution. The fracturing of America into two becomes a sign/effect of the surplus of constituent power over constituted power; it speaks to the failure of compromise to neutralize the rebellious dimension of the American revolutionary heritage. Negri repeatedly marks this surplus of constituent power over constituted power, the way in which the potentiality of the former

consists not merely in a withholding or subtraction from actuality but rather in an overloading of actuality by that which internal to it is nonetheless irreducible to it.

It would be easy to accuse Negri of utopian idealism: he seems to imagine that constituent power might substitute for the more difficult, more pragmatic, labor of fashioning and sustaining government. Negri's utopianism is, however, quite pragmatic and quite materialist in its methodical measurement of the actualities of the revolution not against the standard of abstract principles but against the real possibilities of social practice. Negri refers to this method as "disutopia," a term which indicates a zone of indistinction between the positive and negative, between the transformative power of revolution and the obstacles to revolution. Disutopia, or "constituent disutopia" as Negri also refers to it, names the process whereby constituent power strikes up against the limit of constituted power in a manner that is inventive, productive of new forms of life and constitutive of a genealogy (a "radical continuity of the discontinuous") in which the desire for "absolute democracy" exceeds its institutionalization: "The conditions of realization of constituent power are given, therefore, as space led back to time, as time led to strength, and as strength led to subject. [...] Here the utopian residue of constituent power is transformed into an operative and constitutive disutopia" (*Ibid.* 318). Echoing the experimental mode of utopianism we witnessed in Deleuze's writings, as well as Foucault's utopian body, Negri transfers the surplus temporality defining utopia to a practice of subjectivization in which the negative becomes positive: the spatialization of limits, the movement that strikes against the limit of a geometric line, is not the terminus of *praxis* but rather its starting point. This conversion of a limit into a starting point

depends upon a productive conception of contradiction. Instead of being a logical inconsistency, contradiction is a *temporalization*, the translation of a static order of divisions into a series of cumulative becomings or alterations. The “dis” in “disutopia” does not negate utopianism, then, but rather unleashes it from its confinement in a static spatial order; it transforms utopianism into a fractal pattern of social forms in which each enclosure breaks open to another enclosure, *ad infinitum*.

In Negri’s disutopic method, we might discover a way of doing not only political history but also literary history. A disutopic reading of American literature would trace the ways in which American literary texts reactualize the revolution. Rather than aspiring to chart the filiation of works (to compose, as it were, the family tree of American literature, with all of the exclusions that that would imply), it would diagram the diverse manners in which the inadequacy of the revolution to itself (the disjunction between constituent power and constituted power, or between immanent potentiality and actuality) haunts texts, and it would treat this haunting not as an occasion for nostalgia, nor even as grist for the deconstructive mill, but as the condition of possibility for the invention of new subjects, new bodies, new forms of life. *A Desire Called America* proceeds according to this method, or at least tries to. To proceed through American literature disutopically means touching up against the limits of texts, the contradictions that more than merely inhabiting them trouble them, fracture them, and in doing so, reinventing the Americanness (the sense of subjectivity) involved in reading and interpreting American literature. Rather than a logic of accumulation in which each work would enrich the capital fund of “American Literature,” *A Desire Called America* constantly begins again,

begins as if each work of American literature were a new, putting texts into conversation not in terms of influence or in terms of the continuity of a tradition but only insofar as their discontinuous recommencements speak to the “history of the present” (Foucault).

My argument is that the American Renaissance and American literature after 1973 are particularly fruitful periods for the repetition and reactivation of the American Revolution. They are so precisely because they are moments of transition, moments when what America is and what it might be profoundly change. Since F.O. Matthiessen’s ground-breaking *The American Renaissance*, the period of the mid-nineteenth century has stood at the center of the American literary canon, serving as a testament to and a fount of American culture. Works by Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau have formed the basis of drawing conclusions about the distinctiveness of the “American mind” or “the American Way.” This centrality becomes all the more marked with the critical interventions of the New Americanists, critics such as Amy Kaplan, Donald Pease, John Carlos Rowe, and David Reynolds, who have dismantled the mythos surrounding the periodization of the American Renaissance, revealing it to be a fabrication of Cold War liberals such as Lionel Trilling, rather than some natural or necessary foundation of American culture. Hence, David Reynolds’s *Beneath the American Renaissance* shows how rather than being the central constituents of American culture, the authors we recognize as canonical are merely nodes in a much larger network of culture at the time. Donald Pease, on the other hand, demonstrates in his *Visionary Compacts* that these canonical figures cannot be defined in terms of some essence of America, some unified idea regarding what constitutes Americanness, for their writings,

in fact, are largely a negotiation of the contradictory status of America in the time periods leading up to and following the Civil War. The American Renaissance is not one, from these perspectives, but many; heterogeneous multiplicity – in cultural, political, and social terms – is constitutive of it as a historical period.

While I share the New Americanists' skepticism regarding the unity and cohesion of the American Renaissance, I nonetheless would argue that as a periodizing concept, "the American Renaissance" can be useful not because it describes the whole of social life in the United States during a certain period but because it names a historically-situated desire, namely, the desire to reactivate the American Revolution, to make good on it. Whitman, Melville, Dickinson, Emerson, and Thoreau – among others – all write about America as if it were failing to live up to its potential, as if, that is, it were betraying the democratic revolution it embodies. Caught in a moment of transition, marked most profoundly by the Civil War, they did not so much try to redeem America as to reinvent it, sometimes willfully, sometimes unconsciously, and in every case, with a glance backwards that was also a glance forwards. Their texts envision a future America by repeating and reactivating the American Revolution in a singular fashion.

While the American Renaissance is an established literary historical period, post-1973 American literature is not, and, as such, deserves explanation. If this periodization is meaningful, it is because it marks a shift in the conditions of American literature due to the unconscious, yet felt, presence of economic and political decline. This sense of decline runs parallel with the consolidation of postmodernity as the cultural logic of late capitalism, or with postmodernism as an aesthetic of (to use John Barth's term)

“exhaustion.”⁷² The playful formal experimentation critics associate with postmodernism is, in this context, a sign more of anxiety, fear, and insecurity than of any kind of liberation; it is part and parcel of an attempt to disavow the changing situation of America in the global context. And yet such an interpretation is only partially correct, for it not only obscures the important rise in the same period of a vast array of multicultural literatures but also forecloses the possibility that decline itself can function as an opening. The decline of American hegemony, in other words, is also the condition of possibility for a singular America, for an invocation of the desire called America that radically changes America. Thus, Thomas Pynchon and William S. Burroughs – the authors on whom I focus – simultaneously gesture towards the failure of America and towards its reinvention.

A Desire Called America begins not in chronological order but rather in the 1980s, with the late trilogy of William S. Burroughs consisting of *A City of Red Nights*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*. While the 1980s is a time of despair for those wishing for an alternative to American exceptionalism, a time when there really seemed to be “no alternative,” Burroughs’s late trilogy deploys the concept of “retroactive utopia” in order to recall the “missed opportunities” of the American Revolution. In “‘Potential America’: Biopolitical Writing and ‘Retroactive Utopia’ in William Burroughs’s Late Trilogy,” I argue that Burroughs not only marks America’s non-identity to itself, or its being haunted by that which in it is more than it, but he also writes a concrete utopia. Burroughs’s concrete utopian *praxis* centers on his fleshing out of the concept of the common: a mode of socialization which defies oppositions between

liberalism and socialism, individual and collective, private and public property and which involves a mode of individuation in which social being is predicated on a non-appropriative, constituent activity of sharing. Against the Reaganite/Thatcherite axioms that “there is no such thing as society” and “there is no alternative,” Burroughs writes the alternative as a mode of socialization against the limits of liberalism and capitalism I argue that Burroughs anticipates the theories of the multitude and anti-globalization movements, while at the same time complicating our perception of them by drawing attention to the complex labor of training, or reindividuating, our desires for the production of another world.

In the next chapter, “‘It is you who give the life’: Biopolitical Democracy and Utopian *Praxis* in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855),” I show how Whitman’s first edition of *Leaves of Grass* constitutes an attempt to reimagine American democracy in non-liberal and biopolitical terms. Whereas Burroughs conceives of the common in opposition to the hegemonic model of American culture and politics, Whitman conceives of the common as the actually existing reality of American society, the inherent mode of functioning of its heterogeneous bodies. *Leaves* theorizes itself as the expression of the power of American life in all of its diversity, yet, at the same time, it also imagines itself the utopian “realization” of America. “America” comes to be stretched between the powerful vitality of the present and the promise of the *not-yet* – between which Whitman locates the obstacles to American democracy in the form of racial, gender, and class inequalities. Rather than resolving those contradictions, Whitman’s text calls upon its readers to encounter them directly and to “realize” America by reinventing it.

In “‘A Minor Nation’: Biopolitical Poetics and Marriage in Emily Dickinson,” I show how Emily Dickinson’s poetry complicates Whitman’s “realization” of America through its attention to the role of women in the American Republic. In particular, I focus on Dickinson’s poems which parody marriage, and in doing so, call into question the very foundations of American culture. On the one hand, poems such as “I gave myself to him” possess a diagnostic function, insofar as they indicate the way in which “woman” is the disavowed foundation of American politics. I examine how Dickinson’s poems trace the mutual implication of the liberal political order, with its exclusion of women in the nineteenth century, and industrial capitalism, with its reliance on the “free” labor of the housewife. This mutual implication occurs not at the level of formal politics but on the level of biopolitics, in the very production of subjectivity. On the other hand, these poems actively cultivate discontent; they channel and intensify the unhappiness involved in being a subordinated class into an affirmative stance of refusal. Dickinson’s poetry deploys a queer utopian strategy disrupting the heteronormative and patriarchal functioning of society by establishing alternative relationships, unmediated by capital and outside of the purview of liberal governance. In doing so, Dickinson’s poetry highlights the existence of an American Renaissance whose desire is not to “realize” America but rather to challenge it through the articulation of minor forms of life.

Finally, in “‘Hidden Geometries of History’: The Biopolitical Times of Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day*,” I turn to Pynchon’s 2006 novel in order to show how it invents a singular America through its dismantling of the capitalist/protestant work ethic. Pynchon’s lengthy and meandering narratives refuse to make good use of time; they idle

away and, in doing so, trace the presence of alternative modes of temporality. I argue that this narrative idling is matched on the level of the text's form of content in the envisioning of utopian forms of life which refuse capture by capitalist temporality. These forms of life cultivate a sense of the common against the privative, appropriative tendencies of capitalism. They embody a reappropriation of the wealth of time involved in social existence. *Against the Day* insists on the impossibility of being American, on the impossibility of living according to the limits of American exceptionalism. But it also insists on the impossibility of not being American, the impossibility of simply abandoning that desire called America. Between these two poles, it anticipates a singular America, an America to come but one which could not come, could not exist, without the repetition of revolution, without, that is, the radical retrieval of those missed opportunities, those haunting remnants, of the American Revolution.

Burroughs, Whitman, Dickinson, Pynchon – these names cannot be identical to the revolution; they cannot embody it in its totality, or make good on its promises. But, perhaps, they can nonetheless mark the existence of a space in which the impossibility of being American and the impossibility of *not* being American give way to a singular America, a becoming American differently. Not *the* revolution but an indication of its possibility, its potentiality. That would, at least, be something.

Chapter 1: “Potential America”:

Biopolitical Writing and “Retroactive Utopia” in William Burroughs’s Late Trilogy

I. Introduction

Consisting of the novels *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983), and *The Western Lands* (1987), William Burroughs’s late trilogy is what one might call a revolutionary haunt. The novels constitute a catalogue, a veritable séance, of the specters of past revolutions speaking to the present. Each of the novels is what Burroughs, in the opening of *Cities*, calls a “retroactive utopia”: a bearing witness to the possibility that another world – one beyond, or perhaps to the side, of capitalism and the nation-state – “could have happened”; a feeling that “The chance was there. The chance was missed” (*Cities* xiv).⁷³ Burroughs formulates the concept of retroactive utopia in relation to the revolutions of the eighteenth century (especially the American), and, throughout the trilogy, focuses his narrative energies on moments where history might have changed course. Indeed, the novels are not so much testimonies to the loss of futures past as incitements to imagine new futures for the present: a mode of revolutionary mourning in which the loss of revolution becomes an occasion to rethink and reimagine the form and the conditions of revolution as such. This afterlife of revolution is the persistence of revolution not only as the eventual interruption of conditions but also as an excess of potential over actuality. Past revolutions haunt the history of the present,

disturbing the closure of specific situational contexts with the promise/demand of incommensurable futures.⁷⁴

Steven Shaviro is, thus, half correct when he contends that the “subversive strategy” of *Cities of the Red Night*, with its “tireless movement of repetition and intensification,” “is not to critique and exclude, but to efface limits and undermine identities by including everything, beyond any possibility of order or coherence” (“Burroughs’ Theater” 204). While the strategies of resistance that the trilogy employs can certainly be characterized as an undermining of stable identities and limits, what results is not chaos but rather the invention of subjective figures of revolution that are incomplete but nonetheless present in an anticipatory manner. Each novel multiplies figures of social subjectivity that are irreducible to the hegemonic social order, yet whose non-identity with the status quo intimates the emergence of alternative worlds. As Timothy Murphy argues, “The task of Burroughs’s fiction through the late seventies and eighties is to find some way to fill in the holes, to reconstitute the revolutionary allies, the fantastically active and actively fantasizing *audience*, that he lost at the end of the sixties” (*Wising* 169).⁷⁵ Burroughs’s late trilogy mourns not only the revolutions of the eighteenth century but also the social movements of the sixties. From this perspective, the sixties constitute a repetition of those earlier revolutions, an attempt to fulfill the potential they embodied. The question becomes the form of the political subject that would enable the realization of these revolutions, or, in other words, the biopolitical problem of the constitution of life itself in social and political terms.

From his earliest work, the writing of William Burroughs experiments with rewriting human biology.⁷⁶ It attempts to bring the work of the signifier to the level of the production and reproduction of the human species understood as a social entity (what Burroughs calls, the “human artifact”). Burroughs’s writing is at once a vast diagnostic apparatus measuring the extent to which the human is historically constituted by linguistic machines (a diagnostic biopolitics) *and* an intervention aiming at displacing this history and illuminating a potential history against the grain of the capitalist mode of production and the nation-state (an affirmative biopolitics). Burroughs’s utopian desire to “achieve complete freedom from past conditioning” is inseparable from a critical interrogation of the control systems of contemporary social life and from a positive articulation of alternative forms of social life (*Job* 21). Freedom, in other words, is not the abstract utopia of an ethereal paradise, always just the other side of the horizon, but rather the concrete utopia of another world inhering within contemporary social *praxis*.

In Burroughs, the biopolitical and the utopian are inextricable aspects of one and the same practice of writing. Utopia comes to light less as another place than as another body and another species, as the effect of “biological revolution”: “This is a biological revolution, fought with new species and new ways of thinking and feeling” (*Western* 34).⁷⁷ The utopian impulse comes to turn on the possibility of the human species rendered alien and new. Thus, when in an interview conducted shortly after the writing of *Cities* Burroughs flatly asserts, “I don’t think there exists an ideal utopia,” he polemicizes not against utopianizing *tout court* but more specifically against abstract utopias (utopia as negation or transcendence of history); at the same time, he admits the possibility of a

utopian *praxis* that would consist of an experimentation with radically other forms of life, leaving room for a biopolitical struggle in which the figures of the late trilogy attempt to “create the world they want” (“Terrorism, Utopia,” 405, 404).

In Burroughs’s late trilogy (and in his oeuvre as a whole), “America” is an ambivalent conceptual and rhetorical topos: it stands at one and the same time for the total subsumption of bodily life by control and the potentiality for forms of life beyond control. On the one hand, America is a “non-dream” – a system of control or “anti-dream plan” – suppressing the utopian desire for other forms of life (*Job* 102). America is less one nation-state among others than the most intensive and extensive apparatus of control, managing corporeal life not only through fixed institutional structures but also through the administration of desires, pleasures, and the entire repertoire of bodily gestures. On the other hand, with the idea of “Potential America” (a phrase occurring only in *The Place of Dead Roads*, but which can serve as a synecdoche for the trilogy’s utopian impulse), Burroughs gestures towards America as the utopian (non-)place from which might emerge new social relations. This is America in the mode of retroactive utopia, less a place than the spectral insistence of the *possibility* of another world. In my terms, Burroughs interrupts the dialectic between American exceptionalism (the “non-dream” or “anti-dream” of America as global system of control, as abstract utopia of consensus) and the negation of America (the significant, yet effectively limited, gesture of rejecting American nationalism in a polemical mode of opposition). His writing introduces an affirmative mode of resistance, one undermining the powerful assemblage of state and capital through a utopian *praxis* figuring a new mode of subjectivity. In other words,

Burroughs does not simply abandon America, nor does he try to redeem it. Instead, his work discovers that which in America is more than America, that surplus potentiality in which the undoing of America coincides with the advent of an America to come (or what I am calling a singular America).

We might better grasp the specific import of Burroughs's singular America by situating the late trilogy in relation to the broad political reaction of the 1980s. The trilogy's publication coincides with the consolidation of neoliberalism under the Reagan administration: the emergence of a period of reaction in which the political defeats of the seventies give way to a sense that systemic social change is no longer possible and that individualism and private property are quasi-natural elements of social life, or the biopolitical fabric of everyday life.⁷⁸ The slogans that perhaps most capture the reactionary tendencies of the eighties come not from Reagan but rather from his transatlantic partner, Margaret Thatcher, whose polemical statement that "there is no alternative" finds its (anti-)social corollary in the claim, "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families." These slogans epitomize the reactionary nature of individualism in the eighties, which in this context implies the foreclosure of social relations and forms of community in excess of the individual, the nation-state, capitalism, and family. It is this foreclosure of possibilities in the social imagination that Burroughs's late trilogy interrupts and calls into question by imagining a subject that *would* be more than "individual men and women."

Burroughs's "biological revolution" is an attempt to break out of the limits of the dominant political imaginary of the neoliberal eighties by making good on the political

promises of the sixties. In what follows, I demonstrate how Burroughs cultivates a singular America by formulating a utopia of the common, a utopia contesting the reduction of the human species to private property and appendages of state structures. This utopian *praxis* is faithful to the sixties (and not nostalgic for it), reopening its experiment in non-capitalist, non-statist forms of life. In order to grasp the way in which this utopian *praxis* is effectively *biopolitical*, I begin by elucidating Burroughs's theory of language, paying special attention to its immediately political nature. For Burroughs, language is not a mere reflection of reality, nor is it simply an instrument for working on external human subjects; rather, linguistic apparatuses *produce* subjects, fabricate their very constitution in conjunction with other apparatuses of control. In the next sections, I work through Burroughs's trilogy, focusing especially on *The Place of Dead Roads*, in order to demonstrate how Burroughs's revisionary treatment of the genres of science fiction and the western treat the frontier (including "Space," the final frontier) not as an external space but as a mode of experimentation, an encounter with radical alterity that is internal to subjects. Indeed, I contend that the late trilogy is, in effect, a retraining of political subjectivity attempting to undo the binding together of selfhood and private property in order to cultivate an ethos of the common (a mode of cooperation that stands against the universal privatization of the social). In this respect, Burroughs anticipates another utopian project, namely, the politics of the multitude and anti-globalization protests of the nineties which have come to be closely associated with the theoretical labors of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. As I argue below, what distinguishes Burroughs's fiction is not so much its prescience but, rather, how it recognizes the

complexities and contradictions involved in struggling for utopia in a situation in which private property and the state's monopoly over violence often appear the sum total of politics. For Burroughs, utopia is a matter of struggle and resistance – or in his own words, “*Paradise actually exists* [...] This is no vague eternal heaven for the righteous. This is *an actual place* at the end of a very dangerous road” (*Places* 171).⁷⁹

II. Biopolitics and “the Word”:

Control Systems and the Genesis of Writing

Like Michel Foucault, William Burroughs writes the relations between knowledge, power, and the body without any recourse to a final cause or a ground for human existence. He, too, writes an immanent history of bodies, composing texts which trace power's formation of bodies not only as they now exist but also as they might otherwise exist, as *potential*. For Burroughs, that exploration hinges on fictions of the genesis of the “body/language” difference (that difference through which the relations between bodies and languages arise in terms of mutual implication).⁸⁰ This genesis is not an event occurring once and for all time but a repeated process that acts as a structural premise and function of control systems. Control for Burroughs is not external domination but rather a capture of the body/language difference. In other words, control operates through the coding of bodies by various signs systems and through the regulation of bodies' abilities to use or relate to signs. In this section, I show how Burroughs, in elaborating his theory of writing in interviews and essays, indicates how

one might write the biopolitical in such a way that “life itself” would not be an essence or substratum but rather a complex field – semiotic and corporeal, linguistic and affective – open to transformation.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God – and the word was flesh . . . human flesh . . . in the beginning of *writing*” (*Job* 11). It is language, in its inaugural manifestation as the Word, as *logos* dictating the wedding of truth and speech, which gives birth to God and Man (“human flesh”) as twin effects of one and the same absent cause (“the beginning”). But, notably, neither of these effects – God or Man – are ethereal; they are rather particular combinations of language and bodies, or signs and flesh. Writing stands at the origin of the word, or as Burroughs says, “I suggest that the spoken word as we know it came after the written word.”⁸¹ The word is always already inscribed, given body and articulated, as opposed to being swallowed up by the breath of spirit; the word is open to a variety of uses, that is, to a dissemination whose effects cannot be guaranteed. Between the copula linking word and god (“and the Word was God. . .”) writing intercedes, displacing the myth grounding linguistic practice in a transcendent source of meaning.⁸² The ellipses above– punctuation marks that proliferate throughout Burroughs’s writing – are not gaps in speech but rather the positive interruption of writing’s basic trait; each point is the manual force of the signifier coming into being, the minimal threshold of writing as such, testimony to its excess over the Word’s control.

For Burroughs, this theological vision of genesis is a myth in need of demystification, an event shrouded in mystery waiting to be unveiled as metaphor:

My basic theory is that the written word was actually a virus that made the spoken word possible. The word has not been recognized as a virus because it has achieved a state of stable symbiosis with the host, though this symbiotic relationship is now breaking down, for reasons I will suggest later. (*Job* 12)

Burroughs presents a short biological history of the human species, marked most notably by three events: a mutation that makes the initial human-virus symbiosis a genetic mainstay; the manipulation of this symbiosis by governments in the name of “national security”; and an “electronic revolution” exposing this history to transformation by anyone in possession of a tape recorder. Burroughs narrates these events with reference to scientific authorities and contemporary events (most notably the Watergate affair). As interesting as the particular twists and turns of this historical account may be, the very historicity implied by the narrative is, I would argue, more significant: the human species is an artifact, though not one designed and created by a will. The evolution of the species revolves around transformations in the symbiosis of the “word virus” and its human subject. Or as Burroughs says, in the previous quote, “And the word was flesh ... human flesh ...” It would be possible to read these words as the unfolding of human flesh from the Word, that is, as the immaculate conception of the human from divine *logos*. The human would not only come from God but would also be of God, and writing would be confined to anamnesis, the recovery of an uncontaminated originary “symbiosis” between Man and God. This interpretation, however, accounts neither for the primacy of writing as the *techné* from which the *logos* emerges in Burroughs’s parody of genesis, nor for the existence of what might be called species history (the transformation of the very being of the human).⁸³

The history of the human species, in other words, does not consist solely of the reproduction of an origin or essence. It is, after all, a virus from which the human capacity for speech emerges, that is, an entity defined by replication and mutation without a simple originary identity. The “electronic revolution” of which Burroughs speaks and writes in a number of places is not a simple deviation from the primacy of the Word; it is a transformation of the relationship between the human and language and a transformation of the processes constituting sociality and subject-formation more generally.⁸⁴ For Burroughs, the most typical image of this revolution is the tape recorder, with its ability not only to record but also to mix and splice together diverse materials. Tape recorders invent by combining materials; they produce the new by remaking the old in forms that break with convention.⁸⁵ In addition, the very medium of tape recordings (whether acoustic or video) puts into question the ontological distinction between the authentic and inauthentic, or the original and the copy/counterfeit.⁸⁶ The original is a copy because of its mimetic, or iconic, relation to a referent but also, and more importantly, because of its immediate status as reproducible. The original is no different than the copy, no more primary than any of the number of tapes that spawn from it and which, in turn, spawn their own progeny. The indifference between original and copy does not eradicate difference but, to the contrary, enables the proliferation of difference as such, for difference is no longer subordinated to identity, to a mere replication of a given self-identical form. Rather than difference being an effect of distance from an original, the origin’s pale shadow, difference usurps identity and origin altogether; it becomes the differing of an identity from itself, a primary non-identity.⁸⁷

Burroughs's notion of electronic revolution should not be understood as a form of technological determinism. Although in Burroughs the technological (understood in the widest sense as embodied *technê*) is of the utmost importance, tape recorders are not the source or cause of the electronic revolution but a manifestation of it. In fact, the electronic revolution is itself only one mode of the radical questioning of the Western *logos*. Other modes Burroughs cites include the Chinese language, hieroglyphics, and the cut-up method of writing invented by Brion Gysin and himself. According to Burroughs, all of these modes of writing are characterized by the presentation of difference irreducible to both identity and the exclusivity of the either-or. They are expressions of a common project, which Burroughs significantly refers to as the development of a "biological weapon":

The aim of this project is to build a language in which certain falsifications inherent in all existing Western languages will be made incapable of formulation. The following falsifications to be deleted from the proposed language:

The IS of identity. You are an animal. You are a body. Now whatever you may be you are not an 'animal', you are not a 'body', because these are verbal labels. The IS of identity always carries the implication of that and nothing else, and it also carries the assignment of permanent condition. To stay that way. All naming calling presupposes the IS of identity. [...]

The definite article THE. THE contains the implication of one and only: THE God, THE universe, THE way, THE right, THE wrong. If there is another, then THAT universe, THAT way is no longer THE universe, THE way. The definite article THE will be deleted and the indefinite article A will take its place.

The whole concept of EITHER/OR. Right or wrong, physical or mental, true or false, the whole concept of OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by *and*. ("Electronic Revolution," 153-154)

This passage synthesizes a number of the traits of Burroughs's style that I discuss below. What I want to point out, here, is that these traits are viewed as elements of a project designed to alter the relationship between the human and the linguistic. Burroughs writes of "deleting" and "replacing" linguistic structures, implying that language has a material history – that the systematic totality of language is an effect of history, that languages are historical sediment – *and* that this material history is open to manipulation by a subject capable of changing it according to specific desires or ends. Significantly, the future tense and passive voice ("will be deleted"; "will take its place"; "to be deleted"; "to build") render the subject that would transform language indeterminate, its identity deferred into some fixed, yet unknown, future. But as the specific deletions and replacements themselves suggest, this deferral may be the symptom of a more radical transformation of the agency involved in language use, for all of these changes (the eradication of the copula; the replacement of definite articles by indefinite articles; the replacement of exclusive disjunctions by inclusive conjunctions) dismantle the primacy of identity and the univocity of representation. The portrait of the subject as a manipulator of external representations – as an agent whose being in the world is predicated upon being subtracted from it, upon projecting the world as difference against the self as identity – falls apart. Burroughs raises the possibility of a language use and mode of subjectivity that would move beyond what Martin Heidegger calls the "age of the world picture": the reduction of language to a tool used by the human subject for the domination of the objective world.⁸⁸

Against a view of writing as reference and representation guaranteed at an ontological level, Burroughs sketches the possibility of a writing that is performative, that creates conditions through speech-acts working on multiplicities whose unity is an effect of form, rather than simply determinate of form.⁸⁹ Burroughs's critique does not, however, take the form of a simple substitution, even if it might appear so at first. Identity is not *replaced* by difference, nor representation by the immediate expression of becoming. Such a strict and fast reversal would merely duplicate the very truth-false distinction Burroughs criticizes under the heading of the either-or ("Right or wrong, physical or mental, true or false, the whole concept of OR will be deleted..."). Instead, the emphasis on non-exclusive conjunction and the negative qualifications ("you are not an 'animal', you are not a 'body', because these are verbal labels...") suggest that what is at stake is an assertion that identity and representation are *not-all*.⁹⁰ That is, identity and representation are undeniably effective forces operating in the field of existence, for one cannot deny that claims such as "I am black" or "I am gay" produce material effects, but they are *not-all*, because the representation of identity is itself constituted by way of internalized opposition and the circumscription of material and discursive traits, which is to say that identity depends upon differential relations in excess of itself. When one represents an identity, one indicates a particular complex of differences, differences whose becoming other may be blocked up by representation's repetition, for as Burroughs claims, the "IS of identity" "carries the assignment of permanent condition. To stay that way."⁹¹ The repetition of representation can produce the appearance that identity is all-encompassing, that, for example, being gay or being black are essences always

possessed of the same sense no matter the mode of enunciation or the situation, yet the very possibility of representation hinges upon the existence of a logically and materially prior excess of differences. In short, representation represents difference as identity.

Yet, as the following sections of this chapter makes clear, it is not representation as such that is the target of Burroughs's critique but rather the reification of representation that vanishes the historicity of signification. Representation can express, or envelope, differences, but representation as reification disavows difference, transforming it into equivalence, which is to say a difference differing numerically but not qualitatively, a difference that is really sameness multiplied. More specifically, Burroughs takes aim at representation as an operation of control. For Burroughs, control is any social technology or process that incites the reproduction of identity, delimits or forecloses the possibility of transformation, and deprives subjects of autonomy. In other words, while representation in general tends to blunt the possibility of change, converting subjectivity into the obsessive-compulsive repetition of the same, control adds to sameness the quality of heteronomy, or extrinsic determination.

In "The Limits of Control," Burroughs discusses the possibility of the government inventing instruments that would directly control the mind through "behavior-modification techniques," yet he insists on the centrality of language:

But words are still the principal instruments of control. Suggestions are words. Persuasions are words. Orders are words. No control machine so far devised can operate without words, and any control machine which attempts to do so relying entirely on external force or entirely on physical control of the mind will soon encounter the limits of control (*Adding* 17)

Burroughs generalizes the domain of control beyond the realm of specifically political institutions, making it a biopolitical affair, a matter of the relations among bodies, discourses, and nodes of power. While he begins the essay with a discussion of the state, he soon spans out to include mass media and basic interpersonal relationships. Any relationship or action involving language becomes a site of possible control. Crucially, control is qualitatively different than, even if it is not exclusive of, violence or “external force.” The latter is the limit of control, the point at which control admits its status as parasite, for, as Burroughs writes, control is not “use”: “I *control* a slave, a dog, a worker; but if I establish *complete* control somehow, as by implanting electrodes in the brain, then my subject is little more than a tape recorder, a camera, a robot. You don’t *control* a tape recorder – you *use* it” (*Adding* 117). Burroughs relies upon an opposition between living organisms and machinery that he elsewhere calls into question, but the implications of the opposition are, nonetheless, significant: vitality depends upon at least the potential for resistance, or, inversely, unlike pure instrumentalization, which renders subjects into objects and makes these objects into mere means for the reproduction of a given social order, control depends upon the labor of others; it “needs opposition or acquiescence; otherwise it ceases to be control” (*Adding* 117). Control does not render social entities into robots; it rather conditions their desires and activities so that they willingly submit to their subordination, so that they even desire their own servitude. While Burroughs gives a rather limited and state-centered picture of apparatuses of

control in his essays, his novels incessantly multiply the possibilities, tracing the effects of control through everything from movies, music, and corporations to drug use, sexuality, and church.⁹²

Burroughs goes so far as to argue that it is the very nature of our linguistic system as a “syllabic language” (opposed to hieroglyphic languages) in conjunction with modern media that generates control. Burroughs’s basic example – in the sense according to which one speaks of the basic building blocks of life – is the representative sign:

If I hold up a sign with the word ‘ROSE’ written on it, and you read that sign, you will be forced to repeat the word ‘ROSE’ to yourself. If I show you a picture of a rose you do not have to repeat the word. You can register the image in silence. A syllabic language forces you to verbalize in auditory patterns. A hieroglyphic language does not. [...] It is precisely these automatic reactions to [syllabic] words themselves that enable those who manipulate words to control thought on a mass scale. (*Job* 59)

While the binary opposition between hieroglyphic language and syllabic language that Burroughs constructs is simplistic, relying upon an anthropological distinction which has been incisively critiqued, this passage, nonetheless, draws together a number of threads crucial to my investigation of Burroughs’s fiction: the relationship between automatization, or the (re)production of sameness, and linguistic representation; the centrality of self-relation for modes of control (“you will be forced to repeat the word ‘ROSE’ *to yourself* (emphasis added)); and the properly biopolitical interference between the social at a mass level and the constitution of individual bodily responses, so that power, or control, functions

not as an imposition but as a guiding of conduct.⁹³ Thus, while Burroughs employs words such as “manipulate” and “force” which suggest external determination, it is, nonetheless, “you” – the subject, or subjected – that acts, rather than merely being acted upon. Control does not entail the negation of action but rather a scripting of action, so that one functions *as if* one could not do otherwise. It is a matter, then, of governing of the relations between the virtual and the actual, between that which is possible and its execution – it is a politics of potentiality. The question, thus, becomes: Where is utopia’s (non)place in a world in which control seems not only to have penetrated into every crevice of social life but also to have burrowed itself into the most basic elements of subjectivity or vitality?

In Burroughs’s critique of identity and representation, as in his parodic rewriting of the creation myth, the biopolitical remains central. It is, as Burroughs writes, a question of inventing a “biological weapon,” a means of reshaping the interaction between language (the “word virus”) and flesh. Burroughs insists that his audience take his account literally: “I have frequently spoken of word and image as viruses or as acting as viruses, and this is not an allegorical comparison” (“Electronic Revolution,” 155). But as Burroughs’s own equivocation between the word “as” virus and the word “acting as” virus suggests, the matter is not so simple, for what is at stake is, in fact, a politics of language which hinges upon the very distinction between the literal and the figural, or as I would put it, between constative identities and performative becomings. From this perspective,

biopolitical discourse is not a hermeneutic devoted to revealing “life itself” behind the “IS of identity,” as if it were a hidden stream running underneath a mountain. Instead, it is a repeated negotiation of the relation/difference between the corporeal and the linguistic, with life not an essence awaiting discovery but an effect, produced by the mixing and splicing together of social technologies and linguistic apparatuses. Life, then, is not the essence of identity but a sense of difference; it is that which inheres as an effect of processes of individuation or of subject formation.

Before moving onto a discussion of how Burroughs’s theory of language impacts our reading of his late trilogy, I would like to point out a striking affinity between the writing of Burroughs and the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze. Without delving too deeply into the work of the latter (which I treat at greater length in the Introduction to this project), I wish to note some relations between their textual practices. In direct terms, Deleuze borrows vocabulary and stylistic elements from Burroughs, developing the implications of Burroughs’s writing through the practice of allusion.⁹⁴ I am, however, more concerned with the indirect relationship between the two, a relationship mediated by a common conceptual topos, namely, the articulation of a theory of linguistic practice in which bodies and languages are co-implicated. Both Burroughs and Deleuze, in their divergent manners, formulate the notion of a mode of language that would not merely act upon bodies as if they were simply external referents but which would rather *involve* bodies, or implicate and be implicated in/by bodies. In this

respect, Burroughs's "electronic revolution" is an event signaling not only a new language but also a new relation between language and bodies. With Deleuze, we encounter another turn of the biopolitical screw, a burrowing motion that places thought in the midst of the relation between body and language – a grounding of Burroughs utopian project in the very stuff of linguistic life. In particular, Deleuze's use of the basic biopolitical syntagm "body/language" (in *The Logic of Sense*) predicates itself on a theory of "sense" in which the effects of language are irreducible to an opposition between impersonal, systematic language (*langue*) and personal, contingent speech (*parole*). Instead, "sense" functions as a third term which serves to indicate events that reconstellate the relations between the personal and impersonal, or between the contingency of the linguistic act and the necessity of linguistic systems; a zone of indistinction opens up – the zone of biopolitics as such – wherein language works on life, and life on language, in a ceaseless dialectical oscillation. We find a conception of language use in which enunciated statements retroactively invent their own conditions, including the subject of enunciation, and in doing so, create the possibility of a utopian *praxis* in which texts (or linguistic practice more generally) anticipates and participates in the coming into being of new forms of life.

There is, of course, nothing inherently utopian about "sense," just as there is nothing inherently utopian about "difference" or the disruption of identity. The circulation of sense, the vicissitudes of linguistic transformation, may just as well lead to an intensification of control as to another social world. It may lead to an expansion of the

automatic repetition of identity, that is, the reinforcement of socio-linguistic normalization and the occlusion of alterity irreducible to identity or norms. In the essay “Postscript on Control Societies” – where the term “control” is explicitly borrowed from Burroughs – Deleuze describes the transition from disciplinary societies to control societies. Whereas disciplinary societies “mold” individuals into members of a mass/population through various modes of confinement (e.g., the school, the military, the hospital), control societies operate through a “*modulation*, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another” (e.g., the algorithms that determine recommendations on internet vendor sites, such as Amazon.com, softly but insistently nudging customers towards particular choices that simultaneously generate and circumscribe their digital identities) (*Negotiations* 179). Instead of the imposition of a discrete set of identities (i.e., black, white, male, female, straight, gay), control entails a much more flexible routing of difference wherein identity still exerts force, but force no longer concentrated in a limited number of sites. Control is rather disseminated, flowing, a series of variable limits the crossing of which is difficult, if not impossible, limits which take the form of “codes indicating whether access to information should be allowed or denied” (180). Deleuze uses the term “information” in a very general sense to include not only data but also affects, modes of self-relation, styles of being in the world. We might say the shift from discipline to control is a shift of attention from what to *how*: not *that* you are black, gay, or woman, but *how* you go about being so. Control becomes a matter of performance.⁹⁵

Control does not replace discipline, just as, for example, new forms of service or tertiary industries do not replace the factory. Instead, control complicates discipline, splintering it so that rather than one-to-one correspondences between norms, individuals, and situations, there is a more subtle and dispersed variation that averages out differences and brings them within acceptable limits. The regimes of linguistic control Burroughs and Deleuze criticize do not disappear; they fragment, multiply, changing their operations as they do so, but not without preserving the tendency to foreclose the possibility of radical difference. Thus, the transition from discipline to control does not invalidate either Burroughs or Deleuze's critique of linguistic regimes enforcing identity. Nor is the critique relegated to a region of validity that would be termed "residual." Both Burroughs and Deleuze straddle the transition from one mode of capitalist production to another (Fordist to post-Fordist), from one dominant mode of biopower to another (discipline to control). It is, in fact, this transitional quality which makes their writings so fruitful for analysis, for it exposes the very contingency of regimes of signification and the modes of biopower bound up with them. It is in this contingency, this radical historicity, that we discover the profoundly ambivalent space of the biopolitical.

III. Biopolitical America:

Between Control and Utopia in Burroughs's Late Trilogy

In Burroughs and Deleuze, we encounter a biopolitical turn, which is to say a turn towards the politically charged intersection of bodies and languages. What I have tried to

demonstrate above is that such a turn does not entail a bracketing, negation, or instrumentalization of language but rather an incitement to think language differently. Biopolitical literary criticism attunes itself to the *chiasmus of languages and bodies*: to the ways in which language opens onto corporeality, and vice versa. In Burroughs and Deleuze, this entails attention to the reproduction, the repetition with a difference, of the genesis of language, that is, the instantiations of the body/language difference. To write the biopolitical is not so much a matter of biological rhetoric, as symptomatic as that may be. Instead, it turns on the political implications of the singular relations between bodies and languages.

For Burroughs and Deleuze, the biopolitical turn is not a randomly occurring event. It is not a coincidence that they both write of – we might even say *to* – the revolutionaries of '68. The chain of revolutionary movements constituting what one refers to as “the sixties” acts as the condition of possibility for their biopolitical turns insofar as the period in question sees not only a revolt against normative operations of governments but also against the more general operations of power in everyday life. If we continue to think of the sixties largely in terms of sexual and cultural revolution, it is because sexuality and culture indicate that the powers against which one revolts are not external to subjectivity but constitutive of it. The revolutions of the sixties extend the domain of revolution outside of politics proper (especially beyond the state); they make the personal political, to cite an oft repeated phrase, but more significantly the very opposition between public and private becomes if not inoperative, then at least non-totalizing, contingent, situationally variable. The biopolitical turn is an effect of the

breakdown, at theoretical and practical levels, of the divisions between base and superstructure, bodies and language, and the political and the cultural.⁹⁶ This breakdown does not necessarily imply emancipation. It can just as well lead to new kinds of control, more stringent determinations of the bodily conduct of social actors, more intense insinuations of the state into daily life.⁹⁷

In his late trilogy (*Cities of the Red Night* [1981], *The Place of Dead Roads* [1983], and *The Western Lands* [1987]), Burroughs reconceives cultural revolution and the social role of literature in light not only of the advent of the sixties but also its failure. As Tim Murphy argues in *Wising Up The Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs*, the trilogy culminates a shift in Burroughs from negative critique (demystifying ideologies and practices of control) to the positive constitution of revolutionary fantasy (the production of a new revolutionary subject).⁹⁸ This shift begins with the fictions featuring the “Wild Boys” (cf. *Port of Saints* [1973], *The Wild Boys* [1971]). The Wild Boys are a series of horizontally articulated revolutionary groups, consisting of counterculture, queer youth, whose genesis Burroughs, not coincidentally, dates to 1969 (*Port of Saints* 73). They are, as Murphy argues, Burroughs’s attempt to provide a subjective figure for the most extreme transformations involved in the social and cultural upheavals of the sixties that culminated globally in “68.”⁹⁹

But the seventies and the eighties are not the sixties. As Fredric Jameson argues, the revolutionary fervor of the sixties is a loan on which payments quickly became due, and with interest: “The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructure credit [...]. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis, all the

old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more” (*Ideologies I* 208). The revolutions of the sixties, departing from the traditional models of both bourgeois and working class revolution, are predicated upon the redistribution – both literally and figuratively – of a surplus of time, money, and energy throughout the social totality.¹⁰⁰ The rise of panoply of revolutionary subjects, such as the black power movement and feminist struggles, in excess of traditional working class radicalism has as its necessary, if not sufficient, condition a more equal distribution of access to capital, both cultural and political. The end of the sixties – the end of a number of alternative socialist movements, of the liberal War on Poverty, of wide-scale social revolt in all the first, second, and third worlds, the end, in other words, of the (seeming) imminence of large-scale systemic change – goes hand and hand with an intensification of proletarianization, not only poverty but also a generalized deprivation of agency, a progressive reduction of proper political agents to a select few. What follows is well known: the desperate turn to left-wing terrorism, the privatization of the public and the stripping of the welfare state captured in the names of Reagan and Thatcher, the increasing permeability of the second world to flows of capital (*Glasnost*), and a postmodernism that is not only the cultural logic of late capitalism but also an erasure of any sense of the limits and contingency of capitalism.¹⁰¹ If Wall Street is emblematic of the eighties, it is not due to an idiosyncratic obsession but rather a historically determined fetishism: the increasing financialization of capital – its circulation without the mediation of labor in its classical mode (what Marx writes in shorthand as [M-M’]) – gives the appearance that the social has become a mere

offshoot of the will of venture capitalists. Capital appears as if it had swallowed the entire world, leaving nothing outside of its logic.¹⁰²

While Jameson's response to the defeat of the sixties is a quite justifiable insistence on the determinative force of the base or infrastructure, Burroughs's response is what might be thought of as *revolutionary mourning*: the loss of the loved one, the loss not only of the Wild Boys but also their conditions of possibility, becomes the basis of a reinvention of revolutionary subjectivity, complicating it in the light of defeat and renovating it for a new historical situation.¹⁰³ In Murphy's words: "The fact, the task of Burroughs's fiction through the late seventies and eighties is to find some way to fill in the holes, to reconstitute the revolutionary allies, the fantastically active and actively fantasizing *audience*, that he lost at the end of the sixties" (169). If the utopian function of Burroughs's writing in the sixties and early seventies revolves around channeling an already existing set of revolutionary energies, the utopian function of the writing of the late seventies and eighties shifts towards replacing the absence of actually existing revolutionary subjects not with pure and simple abstractions but with the *remains* of revolution. These remains include affects, signs, artistic forms, figures of subjectivity, forms of life, all of which do not just vanish with the end of the sixties but persist as specters, quasi-material memories of rebellion, perhaps less effective for their lack of attachment to actually existing revolutionary subjects, yet insistent on their own status as unfulfilled promises, reminders of a sense of possibility marking the world as incomplete, as open to other systems. The late trilogy is a revolutionary haunt, full of ghosts howling, pleading, for the fulfillment of a thousand social dreams.

1. “Retroactive Utopia,” or Revolutionary Mourning

The first book of Burroughs’s late trilogy, *Cities of the Red Night*, opens with a section entitled, “Fore!” which launches the reader into a future whose port of entry closed long ago. Before the liberal/bourgeois revolutions of America and France, there was, the section explains, a series of pirate communes, united not only by a desire for liberty but also by sharing property in common and by a set of principles, the Articles, which include the right to one’s singular sexuality, the abolition of slavery and torture, direct participatory democracy as the basis of all governmental decisions, and a generalized notion of human equality. These pirates, led by the idealistic Captain Mission, were “not pirates but liberty lovers, fighting for equal rights against all nations subject to the tyranny of government” (*CRN* xi). The pirates’ “republic of the sea” becomes a series of settler colonies; Captain Mission’s own colony, named “Libertatia,” materializes along the coast of Madagascar, a mobile and ephemeral floating freedom becoming a fixed utopian landscape. Principles translate to institutions, and ideals to material realities.¹⁰⁴

But Captain Mission’s concrete utopia meets a quick end, due to a “surprise attack from the natives,” and other such colonies likewise find themselves victims of historical contingency:

There were other such colonies in the West Indies and in Central and South America, but they were not able to maintain themselves since they were not sufficiently populous to withstand attack. Had they been able to do so, the history of the world could have been

altered. Imagine a number of such fortified positions all through South America and the West Indies, stretching from Africa to Madagascar and Malaya and the East Indies, all offering refuge to fugitives from slavery and oppression: “Come to us and live under the Articles.”

At once we have allies in all those who are enslaved and oppressed throughout the world, from the cotton plantations of the American South to the sugar plantations of the West Indies, the whole Indian population of the American continent [...] – all these are potential allies. (*CNR* xiii)

There is something strange about the temporality of this passage. Although it seems fixed firmly in the past, it wavers, skipping ahead into a future that exists laterally to the actual present, a future where what *had* failed now succeeds. The simple past tense is displaced by the past conditional, a fixed moment of time by a virtual projection without finite limit: “Had they been able to do so, the history of the world could have been altered.” As “could have been” suggests, there is no necessity in this claim: the social ills Burroughs identifies as the blockage of revolution and the pursuit of liberty – capitalism and the nation-state – may still have succeeded. But what was lost was the chance itself, the possibility of a radical difference. And yet this passage implies that the loss is not total, that, at the very least, it is possible to think in terms of *what might have been*. Thus, the injunction to “imagine,” which, here, is not so much the envisioning of a present scene but rather the negation of the closure of *the* present, its exposure to its own contingency: this present might have been otherwise. Indeed, this passage seems to contradict the fatality implied by the section’s remark that “The chance was there. The chance was missed” (*CNR* xiv). The temporal otherness of the “there” is elided by the presentation of the past as present: “At once we have allies in all those who are oppressed...” What

might appear a mere wish, a desire to rewind the tape of history, is in actuality a more complicated splintering of time, an overloading of time by its virtual dimensions.

The text intensifies the presentness of the past through an allegorical superimposition of two historical moments: the failed colonies of Captain Mission's liberty-loving pirates and the Vietnam War. The failure of the pirate revolutions is not the product of history as destiny but rather the contingent complex of infrastructural and superstructural factors whose arrangement, had it been otherwise, might have spun history in other directions:

Fortified positions supported by and supporting guerilla hit-and-run bands; supplied with soldiers, weapons, medicines and information by the local populations ... such a combination would be unbeatable. If the whole American army couldn't beat the Viet Cong at a time when fortified positions were rendered obsolete by artillery and air strikes, certainly the armies of Europe, operating in unfamiliar territory and susceptible to all the disabling diseases of tropical countries, could not have beaten guerilla tactics *plus* fortified positions. Consider the difficulties which such an invading army would face [...] The sieges could not but present a series of military disasters. There is no stopping the Articulated [the text's name for those living under the Articles]. The white man is retroactively relieved of his burden. Whites will be welcomed as workers, settlers, teachers, and technicians, but not as colonists or masters. No man may violate the Articles. (CNR xiii-xiv)

Bracketing for the moment the potential contradiction between the negation of colonialism and the persistence of whites as a seemingly exceptional class of citizens, what emerges in the text is a tinkering with the past so as to release its unfulfilled potentials, an experimentation with missed opportunities, *as if* they remained open historical doors. This experimental procedure depends upon an analogy whereby two situations (the pirate colonies and the Vietnam War) are alike and yet singular, having in

common the irruption of a revolutionary event but differing in a number of ways, not least of all in terms of the respective histories of colonialism involved.¹⁰⁵ This analogy is best considered in terms of allegory, rather than simple comparison, for what occurs is not mere juxtaposition but rather an overlapping or superimposition: there is a substitution of one event for another, estranging our perception of both.¹⁰⁶ The lessons of the Vietnam War – the power of the insurgent multitude; the ability disrupt mastery, to foil colonization, through a refusal of representation and identity (as subordinate, as a lower race) – are folded into the past in order to expose the surplus of potentiality, the virtual dimension, of the actual history of Captain Mission. In other words, the present illuminates the past not in terms of what has happened but in terms of what could have happened, of what might have gone differently. This retroaction does not merely change our view of the past as past. It also modifies the past as the informing condition of the present. The effect of this allegory is thus double: the fatalism of the past gives way to a sense that historical necessity is itself the effect of forgotten contingency; and the closure of the present, the air of *this is how things are*, gives way to a sense of openness or incomplete determination, of the mutability of the relation between past and present.

If the Vietnam War is one of the defining moments of the sixties, the allegorical linking of it with past revolutions might be said to de-singularize it, making it one moment equivalent to others. Yet determination does not vanish with allegory. Instead, determination becomes flexible. It is not a question of historical periods simply appearing alike in a chain of identical links but rather of what Walter Benjamin calls *Jetztzeit*, a moment heterogeneous in respect to the “homogenous, empty time” of linear progress,

capable of supporting the historical materialist gesture of “blast[ing] open the continuum of history,” rather than reinforcing the historicist gesture of simply shoring up chronology (“On the Concept of History” 396). The allegorical estrangement of history in the section “Fore!” is not merely epistemological, for it transforms the relation between subjectivity and temporality, both considered in material terms. The text’s insistence on using the first-person plural involves not only author but also reader; it displaces a simple desire to apprehend the past accurately with a desire for *adequation*, a desire to fulfill the promise of the past in the present. The blurred passage between linguistic tenses is not simply a sloppy bleeding together of discrete zones of temporality; it is the passage of desire as a project of liberation. We might say that the narrative voice of this section constitutes a salvage mission: it dredges up moments of defeat, searching them for avenues of escape that might have gone unnoticed. This is certainly one mode of instantiating what I am calling a singular America, that is, of harnessing national desire not so as to shore up hegemony but, to the contrary, to undermine it, to expose America to that which in it is more than it: biopolitical utopian futures.

Burroughs calls this desire “retroactive Utopia,” “since it actually could have happened in terms of the techniques and human resources available at the time” (*CNR* xiv). More than a mere counterfactual statement, the term indicates the alternative futures that haunt the present through the remnants of the past. As I have already indicated, the retroactivity of the text functions in two directions, freeing up the past and present simultaneously. Yet the vision of the trilogy, and of this foreword, is ultimately bleak. While the three novels tend to function as historical novels, narrating the past from the

present, indicating the contingency become necessity of historical irreversibility, the final effect is less the Lukácsian sense of the present as an organic development of the past than it is a sense of history running on empty, stalling out.¹⁰⁷ If history is not to be the eternal repetition of the same, then there must be the interruption of history by an event: “Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it” (*CNR xv*). These, the last lines of the foreword, would seem to cancel out the contingencies previously introduced. Necessity would seem to subsume contingency, with the only hope for any kind of radical change being a messianic happenstance arriving from outside of the world.

Yet I would argue that instead of negating the allegorical transformation of time, the last lines of the foreword shift the focus towards a biopolitical utopian *praxis*: a practice of “retroactive Utopia” which involves the transformation of the relations between corporeality and temporality. The bodies of Burroughs’s trilogy are organized by way of their relations to the revolutionary events of the past. There are subject-formations whose activities hold a place open for radical alterity, for futurity as a break with the present, and there are subject-formations that foreclose the future as anything but the homogenous repetition of the present. Indeed, Burroughs presents a consistently Manichaeic view, dividing the characters of each of his novels into two groups. In *Cities*, there are the Articulated (those who live by the Articles/the pirate communes) versus the nation-states of the world; in *The Place of Dead Roads*, there is the Johnson Family (outlaws) versus the Shits (the bourgeoisie); in *The Western Lands*, the vampire class of

the afterlife versus the afterlife proletariat. In each opposition, the former group keeps faith to a past revolution in the name of a revolution to come, while the latter group secures the territory of the present, in most cases, the nation-state, by disavowing revolution and projecting the hegemonic order of the present onto every part of the social totality. The historicity of this opposition is evident in the following statement regarding the Johnson Family, which may serve for the moment as a synecdoche of the narrative logic of the trilogy: “Their policy is Manichaeian. Good and evil are in a state of conflict. The outcome is uncertain. This not an eternal conflict since one or the other will win out in the universe” (*PDR* 102). The narrative logic of the trilogy is less the repeated imaginary resolution of these conflicts than it is their exacerbation to a point of apocalyptic explosion. (The first two novels quite literally end with explosions that tear apart the cosmos, while the last novel – verging on a mood of resignation – ends with entropic dissolution, the sky going black, then the universe ripped apart by a black hole.)

What might appear a simple dualism – implicitly contradicting Burroughs’s critique of exclusive disjunction and identity analyzed in the previous section – is, however, more complicated. Dualism breaks apart into constellations of groups, whose relations to each other and internal dimensions shift according to historical situation. What’s more, the very opposition between the two terms is variable, though the binary quality never disappears altogether. Characters who seem to belong to one group may turn out to belong to another or a character may actually shift from one group to another, whether by some accident of history or a dialectical reversal. The mutability and slipperiness of opposition makes it possible to read the multiplication of names for each

side of the antagonism (the Shits are also known simply as the virus, the Johnson Family as “potential America”) as symptomatic of the contingency of antagonism, as well as its temporal fluctuation. The antagonism orienting each of the novels is overdetermined – that is, an effect of the contingent relationships between multiple factors – and, as such, mutable. In other words, the novels’ conflicts are not “eternal” relations between fixed subjects but variable relations constitutive of subjects, relations whose irreducible attribute is tension, but which mutate form according to the movements of characters/subjects.¹⁰⁸

A crucial implication of the relationality and constitutive quality of antagonism is that antagonism cuts across particular subjects, whether groups, classes, or the atomized individual. Antagonism is not only between subjects but also within them. Nor is the splitting of subjects merely a splitting into two. Each of the novels contains, explicitly and implicitly, a theory of multiple selves, a theory articulated in *The Western Lands* as the ancient Egyptian notion that there are seven souls, each with its own function and its own relations to the other souls (4-8). Antagonism – and the ethical and political impulses of Burroughs’ s trilogy – turns on how those selves are organized in relationship to each other and whether or not they are capable of sustaining or enacting an event that frees the present from a history reduced to the repetition of the same. Indeed, it is an attention to the constitution of subjectivity in these novels, in terms of both form and content, which makes for a biopolitical inquiry into the text. The questions of the trilogy are: What are the relations the novels construct among temporality, corporeality, history, and politics? How does the text reeducate readers’ political desires, transforming them

from a privation of collectivity into a striving for the common? And, finally, how do these narrative figures project future, utopian forms of life, that is, how do they extricate the possibility of a singular America from the teleology of American exceptionalism?

2. The Western, Queer and Belated

I would now like to turn to the second novel of the trilogy, *The Place of Dead Roads*, which will be my central focus for the remainder of the chapter, because it constitutes the central axis of the trilogy's political imagination of America. This novel, which might be described as a belated Western, turns precisely upon the antagonistic division between two diagrams of American social life.¹⁰⁹ The first diagram (embodied by the subjective figure of the Johnson Family) is characterized by the abolition of regimes of private property and by an assertion of the common (of production in common, of production as the [re]production of cooperating subjects). It is also characterized by a strange combination of libertarian freedom (each to his or her own desires) *and* a positive vision of freedom as the cooperative effort to satisfy collective and individual needs. In opposition to the revolutionary desires of the Johnson Family, the novel sets the Shits, who embody not only the forces of law and order but also more biopolitically inflected forms of control including religious ritual/affect, the very desire (avarice) to accumulate money/capital, and heterosexuality as a form of security ensuring the "proper" reproduction of the nation. Instead of a typical narrative structure of conflict between the antagonistic groups followed by resolution, the novel engages in a repetition

of scenes, each time instantiating an irreconcilable antagonism where there seems to be only the smooth reproduction of order.

I call this novel a “belated Western,” because of its historical position in the wake of the Frontier myth’s failure. As is well-known, the Frontier myth (predominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) is a spatio-temporal identity according to which the destiny of the United States is to be found in the expansion of its territory to encompass the entire North American continent.¹¹⁰ This expansion is cultural as much as geographical, with its ideal being not merely the circumscription of space but the intensive reorganization of life within those spaces according to a vision of liberal democracy. The Frontier myth depends upon an association of liberty with freedom to move and expansion connected to the ideology of Manifest Destiny.¹¹¹ America is to be a nation without limits, a nation of negative liberty, or unimpeded movement and uninhibited energy. The crisis, or “closing,” of the Frontier is typically dated to 1893, with Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous declaration at the Chicago World’s Fair. With America spread out from East to West, and with the increasing rates of birth and immigration, America came to look less and less open, less and less susceptible to the movements of freedom, and insofar as the future of America, its destiny, was contingent upon expansion, the threat of an end to history (as teleology or progress) loomed large.

If the closing of the American frontier occurs in the late nineteenth century, its cultural and ideological afterlife persists much longer. Between the 1880s and the 1980s, the Frontier myth mutates repeatedly, taking on different forms and migrating to new territories. The Frontier comes to name not only the possibility of spatial occupation but

also the possibility of cultural and economic reorganization. Thus, the myth is at work not only in military operations in Cuba, the Philippines, and Vietnam, but also in the Marshall Plan in post-war Europe. As Richard Slotkin argues in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, the Vietnam War acts as the terminal point of the myth of the frontier, not its culmination but its final ruination. The fallout of Vietnam, including the long-term recession (“stagflation”) following it, throws liberal progressivism into crisis, dissociating economic gain from social prosperity, the actions of the state from the people’s welfare, and, more generally, destroying the fantasy of an identification between people and state so crucial to Cold War ideology.¹¹²

The responses to the breakdown of this myth are many. Reagan – and “Reagonomics” – names a dominant response, which includes the hyper-technological fantasy of the Star Wars project, the deregulation and expansion of finance capital (producing the old “new” frontier of the stock market and making stockbrokers into the cowboys of the American economy), and the spectacle of family values with its emblem, Reagan’s televised presence.¹¹³ In Slotkin’s words, the Reagan revolution produced “a tertiary Turnerism” in which the Frontier was voided of historical content, pillaged for images of masculine freedom without the baggage of social contradictions or struggles (*Gunfighter* 646-654). The failure of the sixties and the exhaustion of the utopian impulse I described above become translated into the nostalgic restoration of heterosexual, male-dominated, capitalist order. The sixties becomes a kind of national sickness, a pestilence of social disruption for which Reagan is the cure.

But the dominant response is not the only response. Burroughs's belated Western not only criticizes the Frontier myth and American exceptionalism. It also resurrects the promise embodied by the Frontier, albeit in a radically different form. Whereas the crisis of the frontier myth is a purely negative phenomenon from the perspective of those invested in shoring up liberal progressivism, in Burroughs, it becomes the condition of possibility for revisiting the frontier and excavating a conflicting set of desires. Connecting it to our arguments concerning *Cities*, we can say that in the Frontier, Burroughs spatializes retroactive utopia, converting it from a relation of time into a chronotope, or a space implicated in a particular relation to time.¹¹⁴ More specifically, it enables the appropriation of the Frontier myth, some might say its perversion, as a means to produce a retroactive utopian vision of America predicated not on national identity, the state, and private property but on a contingent organization of social processes, variable alliances, and the common. The Frontier comes to name an escape from the control systems of the modern nation-state and capitalism. It names the possibility of a singular America that more than simply rejecting the promise of America, of the New World, makes good on it by radically refashioning life itself.

In addition to being belated, Burroughs's Western is also queer. The temporal dislocation of the Western after the death of its historical substratum enables the queering of the generic norms of the Western in several senses. First, as Slotkin points out, the Frontier Myth functions within the political public sphere as a displacement of class struggle. The division between civilized and savage subsumes potential contradictions between socio-economic classes, making it so that the political question of class

affiliation is replaced by one of race allegiance (Slotkin 16-26). In the late twentieth century, this displacement is operative most notably in the so-called War on Crime in its various manifestations, perhaps especially in the “War on Drugs.” However, in *The Place of Dead Roads*, Burroughs returns the question of class to the political scene, largely (and problematically) eliding the issue of race, transforming the antagonism of the Western into an opposition between an outlaw proletariat (the Johnson Family) and the bourgeoisie or the middle class more widely (the Shits). Second, Burroughs makes explicit and open what was always implicit and closeted in the Western: its homoeroticism. Tableaux of male-male sexual relations function as seemingly arbitrary moments of spectacle (scenes of pure pleasure, of fun and diversion) and as the composition of subject-groups, that is, the process by which men bond outside of normative heterosexual practices. While the genre of the Western almost always contains some element of homoeroticism embedded in the homosocial environment of the Frontier, it typically straightens out such queer moments by orienting the narrative of the text towards a *telos* of heterosexual order (the latter a crucial component in shoring up American hegemony).¹¹⁵ Burroughs unleashes the queer energies of the Western, and it would not be going too far to say that homoeroticism acts as the necessary, if not sufficient, condition of utopia within the text. Finally, the novel queers the Western by reflexively turning it towards its own production: the act of writing. The novel’s characters are not only gunslingers but also novelists and storytellers. It is with this last point that I would like to begin, circling back to the other two points as they unfold themselves in my analysis.

Kim Carsons, the novel's protagonist, is a gunslinger and writer, his quest not the standardized Western's mission of bestowing order on the wilderness but of breaking with order, of producing lines of flight – flights of the imagination, flights of social change – opening onto utopian horizons. Indeed, Kim is less a character in the classical sense of a well-rounded psychological whole than a node for organizing the novel's antagonistic division of America into revolutionaries and the bourgeoisie. The text identifies the subversive tendencies of Kim with his capacity for thinking *differently*. After describing Kim's general abnormality (his "insatiable appetite for the extreme and the sensational," his love of the occult, his rank polecat smell, and his homoerotic activities), the text goes on to add:

In short, Kim is everything a normal American boy is taught to *detest*. He is evil and slimy and *insidious*. Perhaps his vices could be forgiven him, but he was also given to the subversive practice of *thinking*. He was in fact incurably intelligent.

Later, when he becomes an important player, he will learn that people are not bribed to shut up about what they know. They are bribed not to find it out. And if you are as intelligent as Kim, it's hard not to find things out. Now, American boys are told they should think. But just wait until your thinking is basically different from the thinking of a boss or a teacher. . . . You will find out that you *aren't* supposed to think.

Life is an entanglement of lies to hide its basic mechanisms. (*PDR* 16)

The passage identifies thought not with the simple ability to recapitulate the knowledge of authorities (that is, the power-knowledge nexus that Burroughs, Deleuze, and Foucault identify in the control systems of modernity and postmodernity) but, instead, with the generation of something incommensurable with normal circuits of exchange. The wry tone of the text, with its italics and mock essayistic language ("In short...") is premised

upon a division between normal and abnormal (Kim is “incurably intelligent”), where normality implies the repetition of sameness in the mimicry of social authority and abnormality a straying from sameness. It is significant that money and financial transactions make an appearance: “People are not bribed to shut up about what they know. They are bribed not to find it out.” Money buys not knowledge but ignorance, and ignorance is not a lack of knowledge but rather a confinement of knowledge to regularity, to the “entanglement of lies” that hide the “basic mechanisms” of social reality. But the passage’s emphasis is not so much on the revelation of a pre-existing truth as it is on the invention of the new and the different. If, as Marx points out, money is the “general equivalent,” the medium in which difference reduces to equivalence, then Kim’s thought functions as an interruption of equivalence in favor of the “basically different.”¹¹⁶

Normality, in this context, is not a positive function of subjectivity but rather a negative delimitation, a forgetting of multiplicity or difference insofar as it is singular. The text introduces the reader to a primal opposition within its political unconscious: America identified with a parroting of sameness versus America as singular difference interrupting the cliché circulation of sameness. Put differently, it is an opposition between America as control and America as utopian potential.

In *The Place of Dead Roads*, thought as singular difference is closely associated with the activity of fiction writing and the novel’s reflexive gestures towards it. The fictions embedded in the novel project alien bodies and alien worlds, with new social systems following in their wake. Indeed, the genre to which Kim constantly returns is not the western but science fiction – a generic choice which makes sense given that Kim’s

singular difference or non-identity is understood as an inability to “fit” into the dimensions of the world he inhabits: “Wouldn’t mind being reborn as a Mexican, he thought, wistfully, knowing he really can’t be reborn anywhere on this planet. He just doesn’t *fit* somehow” (*PDR* 304). Science fiction is a misfit genre, a genre of social outcasts and dreamers whose desires exceed the limits of a given social situation. In one of his stories, Kim writes of “the Baron” “rid[ing] his swift Arn” (“The Arn is like a stream-lined turtle with a shell of light flexible metal that serves as a means of locomotion and also as a weapon”) and of the Baron’s adventures fighting “B.B.s Bible Belts. Barbarians from the Planet Earth [i.e. the religiously-oriented conservative reaction against the sixties]” (29, 30). Kim’s science fiction stories combine the sublimation of contemporary social conflicts with biopolitical speculation on new forms of life: “On the satellite Fenec, the penis is not confined to a sexual function but serves as a general means of social communication” (30). Thus, the Baron not only struggles against the B.B.s but also experiments with otherworldly forms of sexuality that act as concrete anticipations of new modes of sociality.

While this is not the place to engage at length with critical work on the genre of science fiction, it is nevertheless worth pointing out two of the genre’s defining features, as elucidated by Darko Suvin and Fredric Jameson: first, a form of cognitive estrangement depending upon the interaction between a zero-degree empirical world and a speculative future world; second, meditation on the possibility, or the impossibility, of imagining radically other futures in relation to present historical material conditions.¹¹⁷ Science fiction thrives not on extrapolation (the extension of a set of conditions to its

logically necessary outcome) but on the interrogation of radical difference as such, or the illumination of a break in a systematic totality and the anticipation of a new one.

The Place of Dead Roads identifies with the genre of science fiction in its interrogation of the possibility of radical transformation, but it distinguishes and distances itself from the genre's commoditization (or commercialization) by reflexively calling attention to writing's implication in the capitalist world-system. Reframing these points in terms of Kim's writing, we can say that his stories estrange America's present, revealing the non-equivalence between the hegemonic social order (the Shits/B.B.s, the America *proper* of capitalism and the nation-state) and the totality of social relationships (including the outlaw order of the Johnson family, the exemplaria of singular America). This interrogation is not only epistemological but also ontological: Kim's writing not only demystifies but also experiments with new forms of life:

Kim considers these imaginary space trips to other worlds as practice for the real thing, like target shooting. As a prisoner serving a life sentence can think only of escape, so Kim takes for granted that the only purpose of his life is space travel. He knows that this will involve not just a change of locale, but basic *biologic alterations*, like the switch from water to land. There has to be the air-breathing potential *first*. And what is the medium corresponding to air that we must learn to breath in? The answer came to Kim in a silver flash. . . . *Silence*.

(*PDR* 40; original emphasis in italics; added emphasis in underline)

The passage's opening metaphor of a prisoner desiring escape makes the act of writing into an emancipatory practice, playing on the notion of fiction as a means of escape from the dreariness of the daily grind, while at the same time questioning the confinement of writing to the realm of the merely "imaginary." Indeed, to take writing seriously entails recognizing the pun in "life sentence," which signifies not only an interminable prison

stay but also life made linguistic, life as (grammatical) “sentence.” Life is “sentenced” to language insofar as the embodiment of life depends upon the difference and relation between body and language, that is, life and language are two parallel attributes of one and the same substance, and, therefore, any fundamental change to either requires that the other change. The biopolitical implications of the text revolve around the point at which life and language become indistinguishable from one another, or completely enmeshed in the play of writing. Writing, “like target shooting,” is “practice for the real thing,” that is, writing *anticipates* escape from the oppressions of the present, anticipation being not unreal but as the passage indicates, “potential”: to “practice” is to suspend the distinction between the actual and the potential in a doing that holds itself in abeyance, that suspends itself from full realization.¹¹⁸ For other worlds to be imaginable in the first place, there must be the real possibility of radical difference within this world – not the other world’s complete actualization but its intimation, its quasi-presence as real potentiality.¹¹⁹

The passage goes on to qualify this *praxis* of potentiality, or *praxis* as “practice for the real thing,” in terms of an evolutionary discourse evoking teleology only to call it into question:

Kim knew he was in a state of Arrested Evolution: A.E. He was no more destined to stagnate in this three-dimensional animal form than a tadpole is designed to remain a tadpole. [...]

Kim knows that the first step toward space exploration is to examine the human artifact with *biologic* alterations in mind that will render our H.A. more suitable for space conditions and space travel. . . . We are like water creatures looking up at the land and air and wondering how we can survive in that alien medium. The water we live in is Time. That alien medium we glimpse beyond time is Space. And that is where we are going. Kim reads all the science fiction he can find, and he is stunned to discover in all these

writings the underlying assumption that there will be no basic changes involved in space travel.

(*PDR* 40-41; original emphasis in italics; added emphasis in underline)

This intimation of radical otherness –of humans, as a species, becoming radically other – takes place through the passage’s use of metaphor and simile (the analogies to evolutionary change), which make the positing of radical otherness depend upon extending images of the same, of the worldly, to their breaking point – the point at which the sensuously incarnate present no longer accounts for the projected future: “We are like water creatures looking up at the land and air and wondering how we can survive in that alien medium.” Although the passage continuously circles back to the leap into space, the bodies that would inhabit space never appear in the passage’s descriptive imagery; they are evoked without appearing. Indeed, as the passage suggests, Kim and the reader can only “glimpse” the other world (“Space”), which is to say that while radical alterity insists on its existence, it remains unknown, confined to the horizon, posited only as theoretical possibility. The affect appropriate to this perceptual state is “wonder”: the surprise of the new, the subject overtaken by otherness, caught in an interval where the familiarity of the present recedes but where the future is not yet comprehensible.¹²⁰

The wonder Kim pursues is not the wonder of the tourist marveling at the exotic but rather the estrangement produced by an encounter with radical otherness not outside but rather internal to the subject. The crucial distinction operating in this passage is between change as spatial displacement and change as intensive transformation of corporeality or selfhood. For Kim, it is not enough to colonize space in an earthly

manner, to repeat or export sameness (the “homo” in *homo sapiens*) elsewhere; “basic biologic alterations” are necessary: “Kim reads all the science fiction he can find, and he is stunned to discover in all these writings the underlying assumption that there will be no basic changes involved in space travel.” The repetition of the word “basic” sets up an opposition between cosmetic modifications and radical transformations of human nature; “basic” in this instance signifies not simple or easy but rather “at the base of,” that is, the change for which Kim searches is a change of life itself, the latter understood as the most basic element of social existence, as a biological base in excess of a cultural superstructure. Yet this base-superstructure division becomes complicated by its very instantiation, for it is only in language, in Kim’s fiction-making, that these two spaces (base and superstructure) separate out and become articulable in opposition to one another. In other words, the very division between culture and biology paradoxically inheres *within* culture, so that when Burroughs elsewhere insists on the literal materiality of his linguistic interventions – e.g., “I have frequently spoken of word and image as viruses or as acting as viruses, and this is not an allegorical comparison” – we are struck by the impossibility of distinguishing the biological from the cultural/political (“Electronic Revolution,” 155). The biopolitical bent of Burroughs writing consists not in a reductive operation that bases everything on biology but rather in a complex gesture that suspends the very distinction between life and language, and, in doing so, opens up the space of biopolitics, that space in which, to quote Michel Foucault, “the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies” (*HS* 143).

Kim's critique of science fiction is that it confines itself to extrapolation, whereas his fiction-making produces encounters with an otherness that indicates the "potential" within the self for radical transformation and cultivates this potential as a radical project.¹²¹ The evolutionary language of the above passage equates the present state of human beings with a mode of alienation: "Arrested Development," "stagnation." This diagnosis gives the species a goal, makes it an "artifact" with a "function," but it also indicates a failure to fulfill its function, a failure requiring a fundamental transformation if it is to be repaired. Utopia becomes the adequation of the human species to its innermost potentiality; it becomes the no-place (*u-topos*) in which and through which the species would emancipate itself by unblocking its own powers. Notably, however, the shape of this fulfillment, its actuality, is never given to the reader but left variable, an unsolved X ("Space") standing as the future's placeholder. This aporia is endemic to the Kim's utopian *praxis*, due to its abandonment of the identities of self, time, and place in favor of encounters with radical alterity. The text generates a productive contradiction between utopia as the realization of a given form of life and utopia as the becoming other of a form of life. In short, utopian *praxis* realizes life only in utterly changing it.

This last point speaks, in a critical manner, to the historical and political situation in which *The Place of Dead Roads* appears, for it stands as a counterpoint, indeed, as an antagonistic challenge, to the social discourses of self-actualization which become dominant in the 1980s. In *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, Nikolas Rose writes of the seventies and the eighties as a period in which more subtle forms of power displace a conception of power as purely oppressive: "These technologies for the

government of the soul operate not through the crushing of subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social, and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of the self” (257). Power does not deny individuality, it fabricates it, and the individual, in turn, supports power through the very assertion of individuality. In other words, technologies of power have individual potentiality as their object; they shape the expression of potentiality in ways that are conducive to the reproduction of the status quo. Rose translates the Reaganite/Thatcherite counterrevolution of the eighties into positive, if no less reactionary, terms: the so-called disappearance of society translates to a displacement of the political into the most intimate recesses of the self. In the terms of our previous section, we can say that self-actualization amounts to a reproduction of the control systems which not only dominate life but also compose it. Alex Houen’s assertion, in *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s*, that in Burroughs’s late trilogy “characters and events are not offered as representations of the real so much as presentations of potential” likewise embeds the text in the political situation of the eighties (132-3). Burroughs strives to emancipate potentiality from the power relations that make up the nation-state and capitalism and to create alternative channels through which potentiality may actualize itself. Yet Houen and Rose remain caught within theorizations that consider the individual to be the ultimate level of sociality; Houen locates the emancipatory powers of Burroughs’s fiction in the invention of a utopian second body, an “astral body,” liberating the individual from the world (140-

1), but in doing so, he neglects how *The Place of Dead Roads* invents alternative modes of sociality and calls into question the very status of the individual.

Kim's science fiction tales, recall, do not shore the self up but rather expose the self to a radical otherness cutting across the limits of individuality. We can connect Kim's problematization of individuality with the second and third volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (*L'usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi*, notably published in 1984), which investigate the "arts of existence" and "techniques of the self" in Ancient Greece. It is no coincidence that in the 1980s Foucault's biopolitical reflections revolve around the "problematization" of the self.¹²² Rather than an avoidance of the present, Foucault's leap to the distant past is a mode of estrangement akin to Burroughs's notion of retroactive utopia; it brings to the light the contingency, the non-necessity, of contemporary forms of selfhood. Indeed, Foucault's response to the question of what motivates his research applies very well to Burroughs's own labors: "It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself" (*Use* 8). The "curiosity" Burroughs and Foucault share pushes them beyond a politics of self-actualization (the "assimilation" of otherness to the self; the extension/extrapolation of control) and towards a politics of problematizing the self ("get[ting] free of oneself"), but, at least in the case of Burroughs, the project does not stop there. For in *The Place of Dead Roads*, this problematization of the self is linked to a reinvention of the social in which the self and the communal/common are not in opposition to one another but rather constitutive of one

another. I would now like to turn to an analysis of how Burroughs's text reconstitutes the social, shifting from an illumination of the potential for utopia to an actualization of that potential in a revolutionary politics of the common.¹²³

3. "Potential America":

The Dynamics of Antagonism

So far I have highlighted the temporal dimensions of Burroughs's late trilogy, conceiving of utopian *praxis* as the production of alternative futures through retroactive transformations of our relations to the past present. The focus has been biopolitical, because the temporal dimensions are inextricable from the passage of life between body and text. I would like to turn now to the spatial dimensions of biopolitical utopian *praxis*, that is, the geographical situatedness of utopia as a non-place within the world, a determinate interstitial zone wherein the future is no longer the repetition of the same-old but rather a radical break with the present. I say "determinate," because what is at stake in Burroughs's work is not an abstract utopia, an idealist projection of Eden, but a concrete utopia, a socially determined negation of the present and anticipation of the future.

In Kim's science fiction tales and autobiographical writings, alien worlds and species replace the Frontier, science fiction troubling the genre of the Western from within. But this generic discontinuity does not constitute a negation of one by the other but an interference between the two, a moment of inventive contact in which the genres produce something new between them.¹²⁴ Retroactive utopia, at the level of genre, means

that the pastness of the Western (the constitutive nostalgia plaguing it in the twentieth century) becomes inhabited by the radical futurity of science fiction. As I have already shown, the text embodies this temporal dynamic in various characters that act as figures for utopia, especially Kim Carsons. These characters disrupt a dialectic in which order and disorder, law and the wilderness, would be reconciled by the cowboy (the new sheriff riding into town); they are figures not so much of transgression as invention, bearers of an emergent world whose space they carve out with the movements of their bodies. But there is a crucial quality of the text's narration of subjectivity with which I have not yet dealt: its immediately collective nature. These utopian figures are always already collective figures: intimations of a people to come, concrete anticipations of a radically other sociality. Bringing the geographical and subjective together, the task of the remainder of this chapter is to demonstrate how a radically other America – what Burroughs terms a “potential America” – takes place *within yet in excess of and against* normal, hegemonic America.

The Johnson Family is the utopian figure of a people to come in *The Place of Dead Roads*; they constitute a counter-America within America, burrowing through national fantasies to dig out an alternative social terrain. This other America is doubly defined: first, by its antagonism towards hegemony – the latter embodied by the Shits, a group of church-going, law-abiding proper citizens; second, by a form of sociality that has as its basis not the capitalist-individualist determination of private bodies and places as private property but rather a primary individuation of bodies *through* commonality (or the common, as I explain below). Turning towards the first determination, that of

opposition to hegemony, the Johnson Family consists of those dedicated to the destruction of the normal: “We seek a Total Solution to the Shit Problem: Slaughter the shits of the world like cows with the aftosa [foot-and-mouth disease]” (*PDR* 155). The biological rhetoric proliferating in the novel makes of the Shits a subspecies of the human species; they are deemed without value, subject to “slaughter,” which is to say exempt from the rights that would make their deaths an act of murder.¹²⁵ Indeed, compared to cattle, exiled from humanity, they are no more than diseased members of the herd that must be removed lest they infect the whole population. (And the text provides many vignettes in which Kim engages in biological warfare against the Shits, for example, infecting an entire churchgoing town with the smallpox [*PDR* 74].) The novel, thus, presents the Johnson Family as a revolutionary subject whose defining quality is a reactive negation of the social order; they are defined by who/what they are not.

However, the simplicity of this Manichaean dualism in which revolution amounts to no more than a revolving door between twin violences – between, that is, the lawmaking/preserving violence of sovereignty and the violence of transgression – comes undone in the text’s troubling of conventional moral categories. In the following passages, we encounter a shift from a moralizing biopolitics regulated by a simplistic opposition between good and evil to a biopolitics in which what is at stake is the potential to invent new forms of life:

Consider the menace potential posed to you and your compadres by decent churchgoing folk. . . . You want to take care of these vermin without endangering your fellow Johnsons. Now, what characterizes these shits? They *have* to be right. They *need* the approval of others. Both needs are so constant and so compulsive as to assume the proportion of biological needs like the need of an

addict for morphine. . . . (PDR 26)

We have observed that most of the trouble in the world is caused by ten or twenty percent of folks who can't mind their own business because they *have* no business of their own to mind any more than a smallpox virus. Now your virus is an obligate cellular parasite, and my contention is that what we call evil is quite literally a virus parasite occupying a certain brain area which we may term the RIGHT center. The mark of a basic shit is that he has to be *right*. And right here we must make a diagnostic distinction between a hard-core virus-occupied shit and a plain ordinary mean no-good son of a bitch. Some of these sons of bitches don't cause any trouble at all, just want to be left alone. Others cause minor trouble, like barroom fights and bank robberies. To put it country simple – former narcotics commissioner Harry J. Anslinger *diseased* was an obligate shit. Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Dillinger, were just sons of bitches. (PDR 154-155)

In both of these passages, the text enacts a division between a “we” who is virus-free, that is, cleared of the guilt of needing to be right, and the Shits who are “*diseased*,” “quite literally” infected by a virus that drives them to assert their moral rectitude. What emerges is an America divided into four subject positions: the first, the Shits, who exercise hegemony through their occupation of governmental positions such as narcotics commissioner (throughout the novel, it should be noted, lawmen are identified as Shits); those sympathetic collaborators with the Shits, conforming to their morality, but not Shits themselves (thus, the problem is not the sympathizers of the Shits but rather the source of the pernicious moralizing, those “ten or twenty percent of folks who can't mind their own business because they *have* no business of their own to mind”); the Johnson Family (“sons of bitches” on the other side of the law, interested less in transgression than with doing their own thing, constructing their own worlds); and those sympathetic with the Johnson Family (neither sons of bitches themselves nor conforming to the wills of the

Shits, doing their own thing not on the other side of the law but within the interstices of the law). The text positions itself between the final two groups, speaking as a member of the Johnson Family, declaring itself partisan, but extending itself to those sympathetic to the cause: “Consider the menace potential posed to you and your compadres by decent churchgoing folk. . . . You want to take care of these vermin without endangering your fellow Johnsons.” The repeated call to belonging and co-operation (“compadres,” “fellow”) constitutes a gesture of recruitment, reaching out to the reader, asking her to take sides, to recognize the danger in her midst and join the right side in the war. Indeed, as we see in the next chapter, this gesture of recruitment, this reaching out to the multitudes, finds poetic expression in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, in which the reader and writers circle each other, meet each other, in the text’s longing for embrace.

In the above passage, however, the right side becomes the wrong side; those obsessively concerned with moral rectitude are ill, and those who are right are without right, “sons of bitches” on the other side of the law. The text’s interpellation of the reader is contradictory, for it rests simultaneously on a critique of moralism (a critique of the simple, reactive opposition between good and evil, as well as the very will to impose it upon others) *and* on a partisan identification of right against wrong. The text’s confusions and conflations of conventional moral terms are redoubled by its disruptions of the opposition between literal and the figural. The text calls for a “diagnostic distinction between a hard-core virus-occupied shit and a plain ordinary mean no-good son of a bitch,” that is, it marks a difference between two entities according to the presence or absence of a single trait. Deeming the presence or absence of the virus a biological

matter, the text suggests that the disposition, if not innate, is nonetheless inalterable, the only solution, “the total solution,” being “slaughter.”

However, the text repeatedly equivocates on its labeling of the distinction as literal. If the disease is “quite literally a virus parasite,” it is only because the text introduces a metaphor that generates an analogical relation between the Shit’s virus and the smallpox virus. Rather than being “quite literally” biological, the need to be right “assume[s] the proportion” of biological needs. To “assume” is to take on a form or likeness, and the Shits, thus, would seem to be less driven by an innate attribute than engaging in a kind of moral cross-dressing in which they play at moral rectitude, appropriating the guise of authority. Essence or the innateness of the virus is in actuality a matter of appearance (assumption), implying a contingency to their identities, a sense that identity is effect, rather than cause. The Shits *represent* themselves as authority *proper*, but the flows of sense involved in expression exceed simple binary opposition, undermining the Shits’ univocal identification with symbolic authority. Indeed, the critical attribute that defines the Shits – being “right” – marks the precariousness of their authority insofar as it also names a particular political position: the Shits are not only right morally but also politically; they are the embodiment of the political reaction of the eighties, which, as a number of critics argue, is the moment politics and moralism tend to become indistinguishable.¹²⁶

The text, thus repeatedly draws a dividing line between two opposed subjective positions only to undo the division. Division, however, does not simply disappear but becomes, instead, a matter of relation. The mark of the virus is a differential effect,

depending on the relation of the subject to the actions of others and on the subject's reception of the text's hail: Does the subject do her own thing and defend the ability of others' to do their own thing? Or does she jealously assert her prerogative, her right, over others to decide what counts as *the* right thing? If Burroughs puts into play a division between good and evil, it is only insofar as he also deconstructs it, rendering the opposition inoperative in one sense (it is no longer a question of essential identities) and operative in another (divisive antagonism remains but now as performative, that is, the instantiation of division produces the subject positions, rather than the other way around). Antagonism remains but becomes an antagonism between dynamic relations, rather than static substances or fixed essences. In our own terms, the possibility of a singular America, of a rechanneling of that desire called America into the mode of a singular utopian *praxis*, is predicated not on an assertion of authenticity, on some return to a lost American ideal; rather, it is only in the splitting open of America, in its exposure to a future in excess of the present nation, that we encounter a singular America, an America to come.

This relational mode of antagonism I have just described is homologous to the form of domination that Burroughs terms "control." As discussed in the previous section, control is a parasitical relation in which various technologies of subjectivity (such as specific linguistic apparatuses, the mass media, etc.) cultivate the repetition of sameness in subjects and make it so that those subjects forget the possibility of difference or novelty. Central to the concept of control is that it is not a matter of a simple opposition between those who dominate and those who are dominated but, like the opposition

between the Shits and the Johnson Family, a variable *relation* parceling out subject positions depending upon contingent (but, nonetheless, materially determined) responses to a hail. Echoing Michel Foucault's writing on power, control is not the effect of an essential conflict between two given identities but a process, a mode of relation or conduct that produces identities in asymmetrical relationships.¹²⁷

In *The Job* and "The Limits of Control," Burroughs argues that America exemplifies control, that it is the cutting edge of the "Western control machine," because following World War II, it extends its direct political influence farther and farther abroad, becoming a global hegemonic force, and because it is also an innovator in such control technologies as mass media (Burroughs cites television news broadcasting) and military weapons (Burroughs cites the atomic bomb) (*Job* 102-103; *Adding* 120). The normal America of the Shits is not merely a national hegemon but also an emergent global hegemon, and, as such, America is a laboratory for the possible futures of the world, for the various global trajectories of control, or of control's breakdown. Indeed, asked by an interviewer to enlarge on a previous description of "America as a nightmare," Burroughs responds that America is not exactly a nightmare but more precisely a "non-dream": "The American non-dream is precisely to wipe the dream out of existence. The dream is a spontaneous happening and therefore dangerous to a control system set up by the non-dreamers [i.e. the Shits]" (*Job* 102). Burroughs sets up an opposition between an anti-utopian refusal of difference (American exceptionalism as the subsumption of difference in equivalence) and a utopian production of the new (singular America). America is a control machine inasmuch as it suppresses the "spontaneous happening" of

dreaming/the utopian imagination; control constitutes a negative relation to what it opposes, requiring resistance but channeling it into the repetition of the same: “All control systems try to make control as tight as possible, but at the same time, if they succeeded completely, there would be nothing left to control” (*Adding* 117).

The dualism between control and utopia – a dualism that, I explain below, anticipates Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s dualism between empire and the multitude – is thus ontologically asymmetrical, for against the positivity of the dreamers, there stands not another positive entity but rather an embodied negativity. If the Shits “assume” the form of a body or a positive biological entity, they are nonetheless parasitical by definition. *The Place of Dead Roads* indicates this ontological asymmetry through its valorization of the Johnson Family’s creative roles: “That his [Kim’s] dream of a takeover by the Johnson Family, by those who actually do the world, the creative thinkers and artists and technicians, was not just science fiction” (*PDR* 104). Burroughs reproduces the asymmetrical relation of capital to labor that is one of Marx’s central contributions to modern thought: the Johnson Family embodies not just a particular set of labors (as indicated by the fact that Burroughs includes not only artistic but also technical work) but labor-power as such, or the very potentiality to produce in whatever form. The Shits, on the other hand, are the moral/ideological equivalent of capital, a social relation that exists not in and of itself but by extracting life, surplus potentiality/time, from the Johnson Family/labor. It is more than a coincidence, then, when Burroughs, in the third book of the trilogy, *The Western Lands*, arrives at the same figure as Marx to capture this exploitative relationship: the vampire, an undead creature living off of the life of others.

Both Burroughs and Marx are thinking through the difficulties of conceiving of a form of control/exploitation that is immanent and worldly, irreducible to moralism, to the simplistic opposition between opposing substances of good and evil, yet still capable of forming the basis of struggle.¹²⁸

Yet in Burroughs, America is not identical to control but divided between control and revolution, between the Shits and the Johnson Family, the repetition of the same and “spontaneous happening.” Against the Shits’ normalization of America, there stands “potential America” as the real possibility of change, immanent to the nation, yet constrained or restrained:

Look at America. Who actually controls this country? [...] There can be no doubt that a cultural revolution of unprecedented dimensions has taken place in America during the last thirty years, and since America is now the model for the rest of the Western world, this revolution is worldwide. Another factor is the mass media, which spreads the cultural movements in all directions. The fact that this worldwide revolution has taken place indicates that the controllers have been forced to make concessions. Of course, a concession is still retention of control. (*Adding* 120)

Burroughs identifies America with a global revolution that is not merely political or economic in the reductive senses of those terms but cultural, which is to say affecting manners or modes of life. What this revolution is, however, remains ambiguous. It may just as well represent the spread of control as any form of emancipation. But as the passage makes clear, the spread of control is concomitant, in this case, with its loosening, with the proliferation of differences (singularities) escaping control’s (re)production of sameness: control concedes the possibility of and the space for something else. Indeed, the very ambiguity of the passage suggests the failure of control, the slippage of meaning

between two understandings of “revolution” a disruption of the normalizing demand for distinction, for a univocal right (and wrong). The question, “Who controls America?” is, thus, not a rhetorical question but the mark of an actual point of indiscernibility and, perhaps, indistinction: the eruption of dreaming, or the maneuvers of the Johnson Family, indicates America’s non-identity and intimates the existence of another America, a radically other America, immanent to the America of control. The possibility of this other America’s “takeover” and the shape it would assume remains, however, an open question.

What I have described, then, is the second way in which Burroughs queers the Western (the first being the self-reflexive attention to writing analyzed above): Burroughs (re)translates the struggle between civilization and savagery into a form of class struggle. Whereas a struggle defined in terms of civilization and savagery relies upon the presupposition of a set of cultural norms and the identification of these norms with racial essences/traits, class struggle, in the Marxist sense, is a relational dynamic: class formation is an emergent process, the effect of relations between real practices; and the antagonism between classes is less some inherent law of nature than a situated and strategic clash between historically constituted groups.¹²⁹ This latter view stands in contrast to class struggle conceived of as a mythical image in which a clear and distinct boss opposes a clear and distinct working class. If that myth in some cases approaches truth, it is adequate neither to the complex relations of antagonism that take place in Burroughs’s trilogy, nor to the late capitalist America from which the novels emerge. Indeed, the queerness of the antagonism is not merely that it replaces the conventional

Western savage war with class war but that it upsets the strict and fast binary oppositions constitutive of the Western, putting into play the ambiguities and ambivalences of contingent and situated struggles – of subjectivity as historical process, rather than mythical stasis. This queering is not unrelated to the first moment of queering (the queerness of writing as such), for the constitutive relationality of antagonism in Burroughs is, if not derived from, nevertheless, inextricable from the relationality of writing, of writing as the constitution of life in the passage between language and bodies. The foregrounding of writing as constitutive of life and of struggle as constitutive of subjectivity is a joint process, a reciprocal queering of the Western in its role as one of the defining ideological genres of American culture. We might say that, in contrast to a standardized postmodern aesthetic, the reflexive gestures of Burroughs's late trilogy do not signal the pastiche equivalence of historical forms or styles; instead, they loop into an interrogation of social relations, reconfiguring the body/language nexus so as to open the door for the arrival of a singular America.

4. Utopianism of the Common:

Reeducating Desire, Reinventing the Social

In Burroughs's late trilogy, as well as in his essays and interviews written during the same period, America is not one but two, divided between control and dreaming, between a hegemonic system predicated upon capitalism and the nation-state (represented by the Shits) and a utopian force of revolt (expressed by the Johnson Family). As I have

already argued, this antagonism is an asymmetrical relationship constituted by a negative, parasitical force on the one side and a positive potentiality on the other. But what defines the positive dimensions of America as dream? What makes the Johnson Family an expression of utopian *praxis*, a concrete anticipation of America's radical transformation into another world? That is, how does this political-literary grouping come to embody a singular America against the suffocating closure of American exceptionalism? I would contend that the central, if not sole, distinguishing trait of the Johnson Family is their embodiment of the common, understood as a mode of producing subjectivity that escapes simple dualisms between public and private, collective and individual, liberal and socialist, and subjective and objective.

The common, as elaborated most notably by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is defined by at least three traits: 1) a form of production whose end product is not external to producing subjects but rather the subjects themselves (*production as biopolitical production of selfhood*); 2) the replacement of a dialectic between the collective and the individual (or general and particular) by a complementarity between the common and the singular, implying the immediately social nature of individuals insofar as they are not distinct/separate from the collective but rather individuations of the common (*the common as individuation of the singular*); and 3) a surplus of potentiality over the actual so that the common is not defined by this or that particular form but rather by a multiplicity of forms in communication with one another – in other words, singular individuations do not exhaust the common but rather depend upon a relation to the surplus of material life (the virtual/potential) in excess of the actual (*the common as*

surplus potential).¹³⁰ Although most theorists of the common would be loath to invoke the word “utopia,” I would argue that from the standpoint of the present, the common is necessarily utopian, for it projects the possibility of a radically other world – a world of commonality – within and against the privations/privatizations of capitalism. In this context, the common is “surplus common,” or the social becoming other than itself through itself.¹³¹

The utopianism of the common is one of the central elements of *A Desire Called America*; it is the most recurring, though not the only, mode in which a singular America comes to embody itself. While I do not wish to speculate too much as to *why* this is the case – preferring, instead, to treat the singular instances as they present themselves – I do think that it is safe to say that the utopianism of the common constitutes a strand of American literature responding to a the hegemonic political and literary identification of America with capitalism, individualism, and the state. This strand is not so much a tradition or (sub)canon as it is a tendency: the tendency of a minor note in American letters to criticize its conditions of possibility in an affirmative manner; the tendency to figure alternative Americas functioning simultaneously as the determinate negation of the capitalist nation-state and as the invention of a people/nation to come. In Whitman, Dickinson, and Pynchon – as well as in Burroughs – we encounter a series of singular expressions of this utopianism of the common.

Before returning to Burroughs, I would like to briefly reckon with the contemporary theoretical formulations of Hardt and Negri in their collaborative efforts (*Empire, Multitude, Commonwealth*), not because they explain Burroughs but, instead,

because the affinity between their endeavors and Burroughs's suggests a common project – that of conceiving an alternative political grammar – and also because, as I explain below, Burroughs's novels productively complicate Hardt and Negri's conceptualizations. Hardt and Negri's efforts aim at generating an alternative political grammar, challenging the dichotomies of public and private, socialism and liberalism, and individual and collective. In the second volume of their trilogy, they elaborate on their subjective figure of emancipation, the multitude, which is pit against "Empire," understood as the global network of control apparatuses (including states, NGOs, etc.). The multitude is a decentralized, horizontally-articulated network of singularities in which commonality is not the effect of a presupposed essence but rather the result of cooperative relations that produce subjectivities, that is, the common. The common is to the multitude what private property is to capitalism. It is a set of social and institutional relations enabling the non-rivalrous, non-appropriative sharing of the world. The common does not stand above individuals, in the manner in which we might imagine the public stands above private citizens. Instead, the common is woven out of the diverse and many interactions of singularities, through their labors and political actions but also in the most quotidian moments of existence, including desires, habits, and feelings. It is, in other words, not classically political but rather biopolitical, that is, immanent to corporeal life. The revolutionary quality of the common rests on the way it challenges top-down models of government by insisting on collaborative and egalitarian decision-making and also on the way it liberates production from its imbrications in private property. The common is the material basis of the multitude and its vital motor.

There are, however, two multitudes. On the one hand, there is the “ontological multitude,” the multitude as *potential* for resistance and freedom inherent in the human species. This version of the multitude – derived from Baruch Spinoza – is “always-already,” which is to say that while its actual forms may change from one historical period to another, the capacities it embodies persist as the conditions of possibility for particular political struggles. On the other hand, there is the “historical multitude,” which is also the *political* multitude: “[R]eally, the not-yet multitude. This multitude has never yet existed” (*Multitude* 221). The historical multitude is a project in the sense of a subjectivity whose conditions are present but whose actual form remains to be realized. Hardt and Negri insist that these two multitudes inhere in one another as necessary complements: “These two multitudes, however, although conceptually distinct, are not really separable. If the multitude were not already latent and implicit in our social being, we could not even imagine it as a political project; and, similarly, we can only hope to realize it today because it already exists as a real potential” (222). In other words, although the capacity for resistance is insufficient in itself to challenge “Empire,” the political project which would transform the multitude from a mere possibility (the multitude “in itself”) into a revolutionary movement (the multitude “for itself”) is wholly immanent to the ontological multitude. In contrast to a vanguardism that would attempt to mold the multitude in the same way a sculptor molds clay, Hardt and Negri imagine a decentralized and plural welling-up of resistance, an emancipatory movement in which everyone governs, without domination or subordination.

Yet the question arises as to the *mode* in which the first (ontological) multitude will be actualized, or, in inverse terms, the manner in which the second (political) multitude becomes adequate to the first. It is telling, in this regard, that Hardt and Negri come to rely on the phrase “not-yet” to describe the condition of the political multitude, for it is the same phrase that Ernst Bloch uses to denote concrete utopia.¹³² Although Hardt and Negri insist that the multitude is anything but utopian, that, in fact, it is the very image of a “revolutionary realism,” it is not against utopia as such that they rail but rather against abstract utopia, or utopia as the transcendence and/or negation of the immanent – the biopolitical – fabric of everyday life (356).¹³³ The political project of the multitude, however, is utopian in its reliance on a gap between the present and the future, or between potentiality and actuality, which serves as the space of figuration for another world – or as the last lines of *Multitude* read: “We can already recognize that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living – and the yawning abyss between them is becoming enormous” (358). This “split,” this “yawning abyss,” is the condition of possibility for imagining an alternative to capitalism and global empire. With this utopian tone, Hardt and Negri echo one of their privileged examples, the anti-globalization movement, with their slogan of “Another World is Possible.” The utopian valence of this slogan remains concrete through its antagonism to that reactionary axiom of the eighties, *par excellence*, Thatcher’s “There is no alternative.” Indeed, Hardt and Negri’s work is precisely utopian, for it excavates the possibility of another world in the void of the social (the *no-place*) that Thatcher forecloses with her claim that “there is no such thing as society.” In the place of this void,

they insert the common as a concrete figure of mediation heralding the future, while remaining resolutely rooted in the present.

Burroughs's *The Place of Dead Roads* enables us not only to recognize the utopian space of figuration that opens up between the multitude in itself and the multitude for itself but also to examine the very process of producing a subject incarnating utopia. More specifically, Burroughs foregrounds what a number of critics of Hardt and Negri claim they neglect: the practicalities of social and political *organization*, or the very process of practically anticipating and implementing the construction of another society/world.¹³⁴ Nowhere in *The Place of Dead Roads* does Burroughs fill in the blank space of utopia with a necessary *telos*. He does, however, flesh it out by converting Kim's fiction writing into the novel's own articulation of an alternative social entity, the Johnson Family. Indeed, the entire novel oscillates between the narration of Kim's adventures as if he were the protagonist of the novel – the biographical substrate to which narration must inevitably return – and the displacement of Kim Carsons to the status of a mere exemplar of the Johnson Family – an instantiation of a collective movement comprehending his biography: “Kim is just another Johnson” (*PDR* 132). In the gap between Kim and the Johnson Family, between the exemplum and the generic collective, we rediscover that same utopian gap between potentiality and actuality, the multitude in itself and the multitude for itself, into which Hardt and Negri place the common as concrete figure of mediation.

Burroughs introduces the Johnson Family before the novel even begins through an author's note suggesting the Johnson Family is more a set of principles than a set of characters:

The original title of this book was *The Johnson Family*. "The Johnson Family" was a turn-of-the-century expression to designate good bums and thieves. A Johnson honors his obligations. His word is good and he is a good man to do business with. He is not a snoopy, self-righteous, trouble-making person. A Johnson will give help when help is needed. He will not stand by while someone is drowning or trapped under a burning car. (*PDR Author's Note*)

The novel frames itself by mourning the loss of the concrete possibility of a specific form of social life. An instance of retroactive utopia, the novel does not so much wistfully remember the Johnson Family as view it with an eye towards recuperating and reinventing what has been lost. If Burroughs does not explicitly make the Johnson family as an object of mourning, he nonetheless implies the activity of mourning in the very act of losing the original title of the novel, as if to say, "This novel is written in the name of the Johnson Family, in the place of their loss..." The text describes the Johnsons, however, not in terms of what they did (the past perfect) but what they do: "A Johnson honors his obligations. His word *is*..." (emphasis added). Less a discrete set of historical individuals, the Johnsons are a particular form of subjectivity that one becomes through *praxis*, as indicated by the passage designating not *the* Johnson Family but rather "a Johnson." The indefinite article – combined with the use of the present and future tense – does not cancel out the historicity of the Johnson Family but rather renders it available to the future, implicitly critiquing a historicism that would merely catalog the past in favor of an active historicism, or a mode of retroactive utopia. The indefinite article also

suggests the multiplicity of the Johnson Family's modes of being in the world: if the Johnsons are characterized by a unifying ethos, they nevertheless actualize the ethos in a number of possible ways. Retroactive utopia, thus, means not the restoration of the past but rather the force of the past in/on the present, which produces the future as something more than a homogenous extrapolation of the given. What is at stake is not mimetic instruction or prescriptive imperative (hallmarks of control systems) but rather the offering up of a potentiality whose form of actualization remains open.

The author's note goes on to define the Johnson Family in terms of the individuality of its members and the cooperation between them – these qualities being understood not as terms external to one another but as twin expressions of a single process of individuation:

The only thing that could unite the planet is a united space program ... the earth becomes a space station and war is simply *out*, irrelevant, flatly insane in a context of research centers, spaceports, and the exhilaration of working with people you like and respect toward an agreed-upon objective, an objective from which all workers will gain. *Happiness is a byproduct of function*. The planetary space station will give all participants an opportunity to function. (Ibid.)

In opposition to the Shits/bourgeoisie's obsessive rectitude, members of the Johnson Family mind their own business – but they also help when help is needed. These two traits appear, at first glance, to correspond in a simple manner: a Johnson is an individual going his own way, until an instance when someone needs assistance, at which point he breaks his solitude long enough to give aid. In this view – premised upon a negative conception of liberty – the Johnson is *first* an individual and *then* a cooperative/collective being. Yet the second paragraph of the above passage, with its vision of space-bound

exodus, contradicts this view. Individuality is not prior to collectivity but an effect of it: “*Happiness is a byproduct of function.* The planetary space station will give all participants an opportunity to function.” Without explaining how, the passage suggests that what defines the individual, his or her “function,” arises through the collectivity surrounding a common project. Nor is this commonality imposed, for it is an “agreed-upon objective” that organizes collectivity. Indeed, the immanence of this project to the collectivity engendering it is suggested by the text’s rewriting of utopian exodus as a moment when “earth becomes a space station” – one does not leave for utopia, rather one *becomes* utopian with others. Burroughs presents an immanent conception of utopian *praxis* as the cooperative exodus of people from the apparatuses of control entailed by capital and the nation-state.¹³⁵ This mode of sociality stands in stark opposition to Thatcher’s claim that “There is no such thing as society” and to Reagan’s valorization of the individual as a non-social entity.

Becoming utopian entails a functionalization of social life: “The planetary space station will give all participants an opportunity to function.” This notion of function, repeatedly invoked throughout *The Place of Dead Roads*, has little to do with a discourse of functionalist sociology in which the individual is a function of his or her position in the social whole. Instead of the general tendency of functionalism to assume a *telos* transcendent to actual social processes, Burroughs’s notion of functionality is immanent, the passage highlighting not a preconceived goal but rather the activity of working together and the affective disposition involved in such cooperation: “The exhilaration of working with people you like and respect toward an agreed-upon objective, an objective

from which all workers will gain.” This negation of teleological command in which the end dictates the means is what is meant by “*Happiness is a byproduct of function.*”

Function is not determined by a pre-given conception of happiness but rather happiness, the goal, is determined by the functioning of the social. Satisfaction becomes immanent, a positive charge inhering in *praxis*, a matter not of means fulfilled in ends but of means without ends, or activity delivered over to itself instead of instrumentalized.¹³⁶

The Johnson Family embodies a model of collectivity in which the collective-individual dichotomy no longer holds and in which the production of the social is immanent to social *praxis*.¹³⁷ It gestures towards what Paolo Virno calls *the individuation of the common*: a mode of individuality premised not on the negation of collectivity but on individuality as the singularization of that which is common, or individuality understood as the effect of the differentiation of pre-individual social relations.¹³⁸ This, then, is another way of understanding Hardt and Negri’s multitude: it entails a replacement of the collective-individual dichotomy by the individuation of common relations between singularities.¹³⁹ Instead of a collection of essentially disparate but equivalent atoms/individuals, the social becomes the transindividual place of the common: a series of singularities, or non-equivalent differences, in which relation is transformative. In contrast to Virno, however, Hardt and Negri insist on the common as a *mode of production*. From their perspective, the common is a concrete, historical expression of specific social potentials; it enables the production of subjects for whom private property is a fetter and non-acquisitive sharing second nature. Cesare Casarino specifies that Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of the common implies “the common

as potentiality as such” (*Praise* 22). Casarino goes on to argue that insofar as it is potential, the common expresses itself ambivalently: on the one hand, the common may be captured by capital for the production of surplus value, mobilized as a means to produce profit and reproduce private property; on the other hand, the common may achieve a movement of exodus, becoming autonomous of the command of capitalism and state apparatuses: “Surplus common is living surplus as incorporation (in the forms of the common, including and especially our bodies” (Ibid. 23). To “incorporate” the common is to give the common a body; it is to actualize the common as a set of social relations that break with capitalism’s extraction of surplus value. Instead of the commodity as the basic unit of capitalism in the form of reified relations of private appropriation, the common is the material basis and the figure of a society to come.¹⁴⁰

The common is inherently utopian insofar as it projects the possibility of a radically other world – a *utopia of the common* – within and against the privations and pervasive individualism of the late capitalist world. In understanding the common as a figuration of utopia, we avoid the risk of assuming that the form of the common, its actualization or institutionalization, arrives ready-made. Instead, the common as utopia implies the necessity of imagining forms of life adequate to the promise of the common’s potential, yet grounded in the material realities of the present. In *The Place of Dead Roads*, the Johnson Family embodies the common and, in doing so, traces the contours of an organizational dynamic in which the potentiality of the common becomes actualized as the political subject of a world to come. Organizational descriptions of the Johnson Family are scattered throughout the novel, appearing in such a way that they

retrospectively and prospectively render the actions surrounding them into examples of Johnson Family's cooperative social dynamic. In fact, the novel as a whole has the air of an instruction manual, eschewing narrative development in favor of a machinic interaction between semi-autonomous parts that explain aspects of the world or social relationships and that perform practical dispositions towards the world. *The Place of Dead Roads* echoes the literary genre of utopia, with its tendency to tell rather than to show, to explain rather than to let plotting do the work.¹⁴¹ The point of such texts, as a number of critics have pointed out, is to (re)educate their readers' desires in view of a utopian transformation by estranging readers from the seeming naturalness of dominant social relations.¹⁴² In the case of *The Place of Dead Roads*, the text teaches its reader not only to recognize the inequities and injustices of late capitalism but also to appreciate the common, to recognize it as a possibility and to desire it as a more satisfying manner of living. In our own terms, the novel reroutes that desire called America away from American exceptionalism and towards the possibility of a singular America.

The following passage – which, notably, interpellates the reader through its recourse to addresses in the second-person – is one instance of the text's pedagogy of utopian desire, its description of the operations of the Johnson Family providing a marked point of contrast to the centralized functions of capitalist corporations:

Porters stagger under their luggage. Kim gives them each a bright new dime. They snarl after him.

For the roles rotate. You can be *fils de famille* today and busboy tomorrow – *son cosas de la vida*. Besides it's more interesting that way.

[...]

This system of rotating parts operates on the basis of a complex lottery. . . . Some people achieved a lottery-exempt status for a time

but for most it was maybe a month, often less, before they got the dread call. Turn in your tycoon suit and report to casting.

The Johnson Family is a cooperative structure. There isn't any boss man. People know what they are supposed to do and they do it. We're all actors and we change roles. Today's millionaire may be tomorrow's busboy. There's none of that ruling-class old school tie. . . . [...]

We are showing that an organization and a very effective organization can run without boss-man dog-eat-dog fear. (*PDR* 114-115)

Two qualities of this social system are immediately evident: the autonomy of the system in respect to its parts, that is, the contingent relationship between individuals and the social roles they occupy, and the "rotation" of individuals between parts, the almost random leap from one social position to another. The coupling of the contingency of social positions and the determination of the social by a common good is a determinate negation of the eminently capitalist contradiction between individual acts and collective ends. Whereas capitalist social relations typically manage this contradiction by reconciling its two poles through the discipline of a boss/manager and the social technology of the wage (the boss directing disparate individuals towards a specific goal through the coercion of a wage, the wage transforming the contingency of an action into the necessity of a job¹⁴³), the Johnson family overcomes it by introducing an equality that flattens the social plane. This equality might be called the equality of acting, for everyone, anyone, *plays* one position and then another: "The Johnson Family is a cooperative structure. There isn't any boss man. People know what they are supposed to do and they do it. We're all actors and we change roles. Today's millionaire may be tomorrow's busboy." Once again, the functionality of social relations comes to the fore,

but this functionality remains contingent, strictly adhering to the particular desires of a group in its material situation.

Temporality is crucial, here, for it is not the social roles themselves that estrange but the changing of roles, the movement in between. The actual is not all, society never whole, for the gap between player and role, between identity and action, interrupts a conception of time in which individuals become or do what they naturally, essentially, are meant to be or do. No matter what a Johnson does, an element of counter-actualization is involved, the actual never exhausting potentiality but always bringing it into play coupled with a sense of negation, so that in playing a role, one *both is and is not* that role: one could always be/act otherwise.¹⁴⁴ This strange state of suspension between the actual and the potential implies that instead of being based on identity, subjectivity is mutable and variable, delivered over to the immanence of material practice. It is also quite significant that the rotation of parts is not predetermined but random: “This system of rotating parts operates on the basis of a complex lottery. . .” If the parts one played were decided in advance, a second nature would sediment itself (“that ruling-class old school tie”), so that even if one were *not* this or that, nonetheless, that is all one would do; habit would overtake the time of the instant, the aleatory falling prey to duration without change. The text’s emphasis on potentiality over actuality with its use of qualifiers such as “can” and “may” (“You can be *fils de famille* today and busboy tomorrow – *son cosas de la vida*”; “Today’s millionaire may be tomorrow’s busboy.”), holds open the possibility of an event that would change the functioning of the system

itself, that would transform the very order of things. What is utopian in this description is its production of subjectivity as constitutively exposed to alterity.

The passage echoes this system at the level of form in the way that it swings back and forth between exemplary dialogue and exegetical description, as well as in its stringing together of sentences joined by ellipses, as if to suggest that the text at hand is but a sampling of the system. The passage is, thus, not merely an illustration of the social dynamic of the Johnson Family but an instance of its functioning; not a universal summation but a singular performance (individuation) of the Johnson Family, so that Burroughs's novel mourns the loss of the Johnson Family's historical moment not simply by bearing witness to its passing but by repeating it, albeit in a different form. The exemplary quality of the text showcases an affective and corporeal excess over the discursive and exegetical tone of the description of the system. If the descriptions of the system generate an image of a smoothly operating control system in which individuals would seem reducible to a function and the social totality determined in a transcendent relation to its parts ("This system of rotating parts operates on the basis..."), its exemplification, on the other hand, introduces affective and bodily particularities that imply that the performance of the system (the individuation of the common) cannot be explained in terms of the execution of a transcendent system command. There is a utopian surplus of possibility over actuality, of performance over systemic reproduction.

This utopian surplus is most evident in the novel's interruption of description by dialogue. It is in the witty banter between actors, that one witnesses the variable dimensions of the individual roles, their openness to *play*. Each character not only

embodies a particular social role but also reinvents the role through the gestural inflections of his body. When Kim imagines himself as the busboy – in a section of the above passage that I have withheld until now – he dreams not of fulfilling his function but of disturbing the order of things:

Kim loves to play the acne-scarred blackmailing chauffeur or the insolent bell-hop tipped back in a chair, his face flushed from drinking the bottle of champagne he has delivered.

“What is the meaning of this?” Tom snaps. . . . The boy rubs his crotch and insolently squirts Tom in the crotch with a soda siphon.

“Oh sir, you’ve had an accident.” He bustles around, loosening Tom’s belt and trying to shove his pants down.

“What the bloody hell are you doing?”

“Just changing your didies, sir.”

Or maybe Tom is coming on and Kim the bellboy is playing it cool.

“Oh, sir, I *couldn't* sit down at the table with you. I know me place, sir, if you’ll pardon the expression, sir.” (*PDR* 114-115)

The affect at work, here, is “insolence,” contempt for inferiors, a sauciness that brooks no hierarchy, and which, according to the *OED*, is linked to a lack of moderation. Its inclusion as adverb (“insolently squirts”) suggests a labor of challenging social order, or, in linguistic terms, the disruptive traversal of communication by an excess of (non)sense, of gestures unmoored from convention, even as they rely upon conventions as conditions of possibility. Indeed, it is tempting to read this dialogic back and forth as a reflexive allegorization of meaning’s relation to system/grammar. The question, “What is the meaning of this?” is a response to the aleatory swerve of signification, the “accident” of language produced when Kim aborts the busboy script to squirt out an event upsetting the situation’s conventions. Indeed, the homoerotic gestures – the undoing of pants, the ejaculatory squirting – suggests the polysemic dimensions of conversation, the way in

which a word or trope queers the straight course of communication with splashes of linguistic excess. Burroughs's writing, as De Man might put it, is itself an allegory of reading, a reflexive meditation not on meaning but on the systemic contingency of linguistic production.¹⁴⁵

This bodily/linguistic excess bespeaks an irreducibility of exemplification to determination. The above passage plays with various possibilities (Kim as busboy, Kim as bellboy), which contains within them other possibilities, other variations. The text epitomizes Burroughs's call in "Electronic Revolution" for a linguistic practice that eschews the rigidity of identity, the determination of the definite article, and the exclusive disjunction of the either-or in favor of variable becomings, the multiplicity of the indefinite article ("Kim is just *another* Johnson"), and the pluralistic inclusive disjunctions involved in shifting from one role to another ("Or maybe Tom is coming on and Kim the bellboy is playing it cool..."). The text multiplies possible paths, not selecting *one*, but laying one atop another in a virtual map of possible worlds and possible stories.¹⁴⁶ Rather than developing a linear plot, the narrative obsessively repeats a moment, experimenting with the deviating trajectories that might emerge from a given instant. The individuation of the common, the functioning of the Johnson Family, thus, operates not through the reproduction of sameness but through repetition with a difference, repetition as the multiplication of performances that each in their own way modify the very system they instantiate. Repetition becomes a creative act, because it involves the swerve of (non)sense, a gestural, affective, or tropological break with both script and prescription. Burroughs provides the reader with a model of what Virno terms

“virtuosity,” or an activity that “*finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself in an end product*” and that “*requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience*” (*Grammar* 52). Instead of producing *something*, utopian *praxis* works on the self, invents new cooperative relations by drawing and exposing oneself to others. The body becomes a laboratory of invention, a place in which social relations meet only to rearticulate themselves. Such a mode of *praxis* is doubly utopian, for it not only beckons towards an elsewhere through its reinvention of subjectivity but it also brings to the fore the very potentiality for producing this elsewhere.¹⁴⁷

Yet Burroughs appears to contradict the malleability and openness of his utopia when he discusses the Johnson Family’s education system, of which he writes: “Our educational system is: find what someone can do and give him an opportunity to do it” (*PDR* 132). Burroughs would seem to reverse course, introducing determination according to individual identity (“what someone can do”) where there was previously only random selection. However, as already indicated, individuality is already present within the system through the playing of roles. In other words, the “opportunity” to do what one “can do” presents itself not as identification or adequation between role and self but in the gap between the two, in the play of the system. The text nevertheless manifests a residual longing for the self-sufficient, rigorous individual. Here and at other moments in the text, Burroughs risks purveying that dominant discourse of individualism so often displayed as if it were the essence of America.¹⁴⁸ It is as if Burroughs steps back at times from the radical implications of his own work, retreating into the comfortable myth of the

rugged, self-reliant individual. In a fit of despair, the text momentarily surrenders to Thatcher's dictum that "there is no such thing as society."

This residuum is, however, a necessary consequence of utopian *praxis*: the writing of utopia is not identical with another world but is rather a grappling with radical alterity. As a practice immanent to the social realm, the utopian imagination situates itself in the fissure between one world (the present as accumulation of the past) and another (an emergent future). Even if they do constitute retreats – and in this particular case, Burroughs's nostalgic longing for self-sufficient, rugged manhood, or cowboy butch, is certainly in conflict with his simultaneous wish for social commonality – the residual elements of the text also act as the utopian text's leaping off points: the hard surface of history through which utopia remains worldly but from which it also takes flight.¹⁴⁹ In *The Place of Dead Roads*, that horizon is a becoming common of the social. This becoming common constitutes a return if one conceives of commonality as an ontological substratum (the pre-individual arena of shared affects, materials, and relations from which individuals emerge) that has been blocked or repressed by the individualism of the liberal state and the capitalist wage, but it is also a leap into alterity, for what arrives is not a regressive myth of primitive communalism but the invention of a new mode of organizing social relations, a *working through* of capitalism and nationality until one arrives on the other side. Concrete utopian *praxis*, to reiterate, is not the positing of an elsewhere that would resolve the problems of the here and now but rather an expression of real, historical possibility, a struggle to release the *novum* from history's nightmare of the ever same and never changing.

The concreteness of utopian *praxis* in Burroughs, its resolutely biopolitical bent, is made forcefully evident in another of the text's corporeal dimensions: its frequent homoerotic sexual tableaux. These tableaux bring us to the third moment of queering in *The Place of Dead Roads*: queerness as a break from normative sexual practices. It is important to recall the (Foucault-inspired) lesson of a number of practitioners of queer theory that queerness means less *being gay* or *identifying* with homosexuality but, instead, a movement of disidentification and becoming that disturbs the functioning of a society undergirded by heteronormativity. As Judith Butler among others has frequently pointed out, one is not queer but one *performs* queerly, cleaving open spaces for alternative social practices and relations, enabling new forms of selfhood that resist or refuse the habitual routines of identity formations.¹⁵⁰ Against a model of straightness which outlines the social in terms of the normal and the abnormal (e.g., the dichotomy straight-gay), the queer suggests a multiplicity of paths of becoming or of self-transformation.

Indeed, in the chapters that follow, homoeroticism constitutes one of the privileged biopolitical modes of utopian *praxis*, the envisioning of a new society often requiring a cutting of the knot that ties together sexuality, capitalism/private property, and the nation-state. The subversive power of the queer should not be underestimated given the centrality of heteronormativity to the reproduction of capital and the state. As Foucault points out in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, the invention of a normal sexuality is crucial to the refunctioning of populations for the service of the capital-state nexus. But nor should the subversive power of the queer be overestimated. Recent work

by Lisa Duggan, Jasbir Puar, and Rosemary Hennessey, among others, has highlighted the danger of queer theory and practice generating its own kinds of disciplinary norms and systems of control: the construction of a proper homosexuality, an ideal image of gayness, facilitates the assimilation of gay life into the projects of the nation-state and/or the reproduction of capital.¹⁵¹ Puar, for example, writes of the U.S.'s "homonationalism" and its "sexual exceptionalism": support for gay rights and the assimilation of gay identity into the nation more generally become linked to the global War on Terror through the construction of a biopolitical division between the normal queer and the deviant queer; there is, on the one hand, the perverse queerness of the terrorist who threatens families everywhere (queer life as a figure of death), and, on the other, the safe, inoculated queerness of the white, middle-class gay man (queer life as respect for life, the latter predicated on capitalism and nationalism). What marks my own intervention into queer theory is an insistence on the positive and constructive possibilities of a queer biopolitics. That is, I am less interested in the transgressive aspect of queer theory and practice taken on its own – as important as that may be – than I am in the ways in which singular modes of being/becoming queer are bound up with projects of world-making, or of reconstructing the way society functions. This focus places my work in line with recent work by Jose Muñoz, Judith Halberstam, Elizabeth Freeman and others in emphasizing the constructive power of queer sexual practices, their ability not merely to call into question or rebel against sexual norms but also to constitute the basis of new social worlds. In this light, queer life names not only a turn away from straight life but

also the positive articulation of forms of life escaping the binary polarization of the normal and the deviant.¹⁵²

In Burroughs's oeuvre, homoerotic sexual relations constitute a laboratory for the reinvention of the self. Sexual practices occur not as isolated events but as constantly repeated movements, sometimes consisting of autonomous scenes of hedonistic pleasure, other times acting more like webbing binding one event to another. In other words, sexuality takes place in Burroughs's text not as actions punctuating a plot but as the very medium of the work, as textuality itself, the bodily substratum from which events emerge and to which they return. Because of its hypersexuality, the popular critical reception of Burroughs's work – especially of his earliest works such as *Naked Lunch* – tended to consign it to the status of pornography.¹⁵³ This denunciation of Burroughs's writing relies upon a problematic (indeed, arguably, false) conflation of pornography with an instrumentalized conception of bodily pleasure, the latter conceived of as the simple satisfaction of release. From this perspective (with its classist and puritan overtones), critics condemn Burroughs for pandering to the basest instincts of the masses, or for an all too democratic satisfaction of bodily desires. It is notable that Whitman's poetry – which I discuss in the next chapter – was also condemned as pornography. We might understand such condemnations as defensive reactions against a certain social excess, indeed, against the common itself insofar as the latter involves a queering of sexual identity.

In a sense, Burroughs's work *is* pornographic, but it is *not* instrumental, if that means that the sexual is somehow an isolated and reified component of bodily life.¹⁵⁴

Borrowing from Foucault's discussion of ancient Greek practices in *The Use of Pleasure*, we can say that Burroughs's characters, with their constant games of sexual advances and retreats, of flirting and fucking, engage in an "arts of existence" made up of "techniques of self" consisting of "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (10-11). Aesthetics, here, names not simply one's appearance to others, though that certainly is implied, but the organization of the self, the production and transformation of those forms, those gestures and affects that constitute one's "singular being." "Style," then, is not a substitutable form preserving a particular content without change but a mode of expression that is constitutive of being; style is being in its becoming, substance expressed in its modes. Foucault's desire in analyzing such practices is, recall, the utterly utopian wish, defined as a kind of "curiosity," to "get free of oneself" (*Use* 8).

It is difficult to isolate a specific practice of sexuality in Burroughs's late trilogy. Although sex occurs almost everywhere in the pages of the novels, it tends to diffuse itself, becoming the very atmosphere of the text. Indeed, we might almost say that rather than sexuality as a noun or conjugated verb (sexual identities or sexual acts), the text exhibits sexuality as an adjective that might be applied to almost every action of the plot: the gunplay, deaths, bank robberies, revolutions, and so on. Burroughs seems to have learned Freud's lesson that sex is irreducible to a discrete set of practices, that it invests the totality of everyday existence. That being said, a specific moment in which the diffuse

sexuality of the text condenses into a specific practice usefully elucidates the transformative power of the sexual. I have chosen the following scene describing Kim Carsons's relations with a ghost, with one of the "phantom sexual partners" that haunt the world, not because it is representative – there are, arguably, no representative sexual scenes in Burroughs's late trilogy – but because in its extremity, it manages to exhibit the biopolitical nature of a utopia of the common:

His [Kim's] studies and personal encounters convinced him that these familiars were semicorporeal. They could be both visible and tactile. They also had the power to appear and disappear. Rather like amphibians who had to surface from time to time.

The case of Toby, who haunted an old YMCA locker room. . . . Toby is described by several observers as blond with rather vacant blue eyes, about sixteen years old. There are a few pimples on his face which are faintly phosphorescent. He gives off a rank ruttish animal smell when aroused. [Notably, the text associates an identical smell with Kim.] Kim spent a month in this room and enjoyed many encounters with Toby.

The first time, he saw him standing naked at the foot of the bed. Kim showed no fear and threw back the covers invite the boy to get in bed with him, which he did. Then Kim caressed the boy, who writhed and steamed off his skunky smell, which increased Kim's excitement as well. He slowly turned the boy on his side, stroking the phosphorescent pimples on his buttocks. The boy emitted a purring hissing sound. No Vaseline was needed to penetrate the boy's rectum, which opened to receive him with a soft gelatinous clutch, the feeling being rather like his cock was between two reversed magnetic fields. That is, the sensation penetrated his penis rubbing inside and now the boy was slowly melting into him or rather Kim was entering the boy's body feeling down into the toes and the fingers pulling the boy in further and further then there was a fluid click as their spines merged in an ecstasy that was almost painful, a sweet toothache pain as they both ejaculated and their rectums and prostate glands squeezed together and the tips of their cocks merged and glowed with

a soft-blue fire and Kim was lone or rather Toby was all the way in him now. [...] Afterward the boy would slowly separate and lie beside him in the bed, almost transparent but with enough substance to indent the bedding. Kim concluded that the creature was simply composed of less dense matter than a human. For this reason interpenetration was possible.

Toby could speak, though he seldom did so. (*PDR* 168-69)

If Toby does not speak, it is not because language is unnecessary in these sexual encounters but because it is always already operative as gesture. Caresses and embraces, thrusting and penetrating, signify as much as words and perhaps even more. Indeed, the passage enacts the failure of words to form a smooth chain of signifiers with its use of rather clumsy sounding phrases that with their alliteration, hard acoustic syllables, and pseudo-neologisms (“skunky”) emphasize language’s material qualities, as opposed to its capacity for transparently delivering meaning: “gives off a rank ruttish animal smell,” “who writhed and steamed off his skunky smell, which increased Kim’s excitement as well,” “slowly separate,” etc. Nor is it a coincidence that this awkward, showy use of language proliferates around the text’s evocation of smell. Smell and touch – the two perceptual senses that this passage stresses – are unlike vision in its modern conception, for it blurs the boundaries between bodies, opening up zones in which bodies interfere with each other, absorb and transform one another.¹⁵⁵ In this passage, smell becomes sense (in Deleuze’s meaning of the word), that is, an immanent surplus that is at once unrepresentable excess disturbing the smooth passage of language *and* language’s condition of possibility. The lusty stink of Burroughs’s language is awkward for

interpretation. It leaves one with an affect that one feels but that resists translation into words, except, as I am doing here, by way of a gesture indicating a present absence.

The passage's emphasis on odor links up to its sense of tactility not as the contact between fixed objects but as vibration. Kim and Toby's bodies oscillate, fusing partially, then becoming one, not identical but coexisting, and then separating out, only to repeat the process. "Semicorporeal," thus, translates not to *less* corporeal but to a different kind of corporeality, a fluid corporeality of amphibian bodies that are both solid and liquid, ejaculating in the most general sense of an ecstasy (a being outside of oneself) that makes two one, and one two. This strange mode of corporeality also becomes a mode of writing in the sentence that begins, "That is, the sensation penetrated his penis..." This sentence flows on and on in a paratactic cascade of qualifications that enumerate bodily relations and positions: this penis here, that penis there; this touch here, that touch there, and so on. In addition, this "semicorporeal" sentence is also characterized by the reversibility of the gestures composing it: "the sensation penetrated his penis rubbing inside and now the boy was slowly melting into him *or rather* Kim was entering the boy's body" (emphasis added). Rather than the binary poles of passive and active that plague theorizations of sexuality (especially psychoanalytic discourse and especially in relation to the queer), penetration flows either way, each way, both ways, no way, in an "interpenetration" involving a surplus of communication, or an excess of commonality over the individuations that are Kim and Toby. This is another way of understanding of the common in its preindividual aspect: a constitutive liquidity of material social beings, a

looseness of the self, that can be reactivated, enabling new forms of life to come into being through “interpenetration.”

Sexuality, then, is a mode of producing the common: a form of communication that produces individuated subjects through the relations of pre-individual materials, tropes, particles of language, affects, and relations. To repeat, individuations are individuals without individualism: they are not atoms, not complete and self-sufficient entities, but relational and differential beings; the effect of a sharing out of matter that does not end or culminate but continues as the very potentiality for transformation. (Nor is this particular instance of sexual relations exceptional within Burroughs’s oeuvre. To briefly cite other instance in *PDR*, Kim’s relation with his friend and driver Den also involves “interpenetration”: “With a fluid grind of his smooth white hips like moving marble he flows into Kim” [*PDR* 56].) While the passage describing Kim’s relations to Toby does not directly allude to utopia, the pervasive presence of a glow culminating when their “cocks merged and glowed with a soft-blue fire” suggests an otherworldly light, a radiance indicating that in this world there inheres a being more than being, not transcendence but immanent surplus or energy. I would argue that this glow is the light of potentiality insofar as it inhabits the present, exhibits itself as present, but cannot for all that be figured as a discrete entity. Potentiality is a halo, a soft and subtle glow blurring the edges of bodies, remarking that they might be otherwise, that they are not static beings but rather (changing) individuations of the (changing) common.¹⁵⁶ It is silent, saying nothing, no one thing, but it nonetheless speaks volumes. (Recall that the above

passage is the condensation of a plural series, that is, the figuration of Kim's many sexual encounters with Toby.¹⁵⁷)

Burroughs more explicitly ties utopia to sexuality in a description of Hassan i Sabbah, "the Old Man of the Mountain," which, significantly, follows directly after the scene of Kim and Toby's sexual encounters.¹⁵⁸ Hassan i Sabbah is a radical and unorthodox Islamic leader whose organization of assassins has its basis in "a direct conveyance of divine power and leadership through contact with the Imam" (*PDR* 171). Rather than a religious organization founded upon the positing of a transcendent power, this organization – like the Johnson Family and its "potential America" – founds itself upon an immanent surplus, on utopia as concrete *praxis*: "What Hassan I Sabbah learned in Egypt was that *paradise actually exists and that it can be reached*. [...] This is no vague eternal heaven for the righteous. This is *an actual place* at the end of a very dangerous road" (*PDR* 171). While Burroughs would seem to insist on utopia's existence as *a place* at the end of a path of struggle, the text undercuts this localization of utopia, indicating that rather than a single Garden of Eden, this doctrine leads to "not just one garden but many gardens, an infinite number" (*PDR* 171). If there is an infinite number of utopias, it is because in subtracting the uniqueness from utopia, in removing the implicit definite article that makes utopia *the* good, utopia transforms from being a place that one reaches into the mode of production of "new beings": "We are considering here demonstrable biologic alteration. New beings" (*PDR* 173).

And what is the path of utopia in Burroughs, the practice that is utopia in process, rather than as destination? "Sex between males": "The Old Man's route is sex between

males. Sex forms the matrix of a dualistic and therefore solid and real universe. It is possible to resolve the dualistic conflict into a sex act, where dualism need not exist” (*PDR* 172). In this context, homoeroticism disrupts the dualism of heterosexual sex, the “conflict” between the sexes, by disrupting the necessity of identity and opening the body to the flows of change, as witnessed in the encounter between Kim and Toby. The utopian route exists as a possibility (“It is possible...”) within the “solid and real universe.” That is, the fluid semicorporeality defining homoerotic relations in Burroughs’s late trilogy is at once immanent and in excess of the present world. The “resolution” of dualism, the end of sexual conflict, is, I would contend, not the conversion of a complex, differentiated materiality into a homogenous substance, but, quite the opposite, the enabling of difference’s production through the negation of a heteronormative matrix that conceives of difference only in terms of either complementarity (straight man-straight woman) or transgression/deviance. The utopian difference of Hassan i Sabbah exceeds the heterosexual regime of identity, opening the horizon of the common, that is, of difference as individuation of the common and commonality as effect of difference.

To be more precise, we should admit that there exists in Burroughs a problematic tendency to collapse this utopian horizon into an identitarian conception of the gay male as privileged figure of emancipation. As Jamie Russell argues in *Queer Burroughs*, Burroughs indulges in a vanguardism of his own, disavowing the queer dimensions of his text by overcoding them with an identity predicated on the generalized negation of other social positions (including other non-straight positions, such as lesbianism). Taken to its

extreme point, homosexuality comes to have a monopoly over political rebellion and revolution, in the process converting its seemingly transgressive sexuality into a problematic mirror-image of the exclusionary and proprietary machinations of heteronormative identity. We are confronted once again with the fundamental ambivalence of Burroughs's textuality, its push and pull between the divergent tendencies of a queering of the social and the reactionary assertion of normative identity. As I argued previously, however, this ambivalence is less the sign of a simple failure than it is the mark of utopia's embeddedness in history, its being rooted in the messiness of everyday life. The limits of Burroughs's discursive practices are also what prevent the utopian impulse of his fiction from finding satisfaction in pale abstractions or in all too easy recourse to transcendent messianic figures.

To conclude this section, we can say that *The Place of Dead Roads* presents a utopia of the common as its horizon, a textual dynamic in which a radically other future is incorporated within the bodies that perform the social. The incorporation of this utopian commonality, its actualization in bodies and through bodily gestures and affects, significantly fails to exhaust either the utopian or the common dimensions of the text. If the text cultivates a desire to become individual *through* the common, it also incessantly multiplies the figurations of the common, refusing any final determination: the earth becoming a space station; biological revolution/evolution; a takeover of the U.S. by the Johnson Family, etc. If in every instance space is the final frontier, space nonetheless remains unimaginable, a place gestured towards, living within the bodies of the text as a longing to storm the heavens, but always somewhat amorphous, never achieving a fixed

form. There is a constitutive temporal ambivalence in the novel between the common/utopia as actualized, as always already, and the common/utopia as potential, as not-yet. In part, this ambivalence is an effect of the common itself, the necessary consequence of its production through a process of individuation that expresses commonality without any particular form being identical to it (the common as production of subjects in terms of potentiality). In Burroughs's terms, the common is a performance in which the roles not only rotate between players but are themselves modified in the process of their actualization; this acting out constitutes being as more than this or that – as surplus being or being potentially.

But this constitutive ambivalence is also the effect of history, of the common as not only ontology but also social struggle. The common always already exists as a tendency within bodies to express that pre-individual realm of the social from which they emerge, but it is also *not-yet*, enmired in the historical conditions and social forms of the present that displace and disavow commonality. More specifically, the eighties, understood as a historical period in which the political becomes subsumed in the individual (“there is no such thing as society”) and in which the relation of capital intensifies its subsumption of the social, dissimulates the common, representing it as no more than a perversion of social life, a deviation from the supposed naturalness of private property and individualism (“there is no alternative”). Indeed, the dissimulation of the common is one of the central ideological maneuvers of neoliberalism.¹⁵⁹ In turning to futures past, to moments when history might have changed course (retroactive utopia), Burroughs not only disturbs the naturalization of present social conditions but also

articulates the potential of social forms beyond the privatization and privations of neoliberalism. Burroughs does not present utopia, does not make it appear on the scene of history, but, through Kim Carsons and the Johnson Family, he does manage to express the real possibility “that an organization and a very effective organization can run without boss-man dog-eat-dog fear.”

It is this comparatively measured stance of anticipating utopia, of embodying it as potential, instead of congealing it in a fixed image or telos, that makes Burroughs’s late trilogy so contemporary.¹⁶⁰ Burroughs steps into the theoretical void – the “yawning abyss” – between Hardt and Negri’s “two multitudes” (the multitude in itself and the multitude for itself, the ontological multitude and the historical multitude), producing the space of organization or, more precisely, the space in which organization and imagination meet in concrete figures of utopia. More generally, *The Place of Dead Roads* mediates between, on the one hand, the capacities for social organization which were more or less dormant in the eighties but became visible in the political thaw of the nineties and, on the other, the actual forms or institutions through which those capacities would become *effective* in the sense of world-changing.¹⁶¹ The social never disappears, it only becomes submerged, buried in pockets of resistance to the reaction.¹⁶² Such an argument implies that we still live *with* the 1980s, if not exactly *in* it: we still live with and in the political climate of a reaction against the social, a situation in which there are those who still say, “There is no such thing as society.”¹⁶³ Burroughs writes on the threshold of this situation; he is like Charon, the ferryman carrying the souls of the dead into the afterlife – his writing carries us towards the possibility of another world in this one.

IV. "The End of Words":

The Ambivalence of Biopolitics

Burroughs constantly returns the reader to silence, the silence, I have argued, not of having nothing to say, but of desiring to say it all, of wanting to speak totality so as to release another world: "And what is the medium corresponding to air that we must learn to breathe in? The answer came to Kim in a silver flash *Silence*." It is tempting to ascribe to Burroughs a failure of words, an apocalypse of speechlessness. Such a failure would be a failure to find words for the privations, the immiseration, and the shutting down of the utopian impulse that seems not only to define the historical period of the eighties but also to be its continuing legacy. It would be a failure to generate a linguistic response beyond the sound bytes of the Reagan spectacle. Thus, we might read the following sentence, which comes from the final page of the trilogy in *The Western Lands*, as a moment of resignation: "The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words. And then? 'British we are, British we stay'" (*WL* 258). "British we are, British we stay": the "end of words" would seem to imply surrender to historical tautology (the circular nightmare of the repetition of the same) and a submission to the prisonhouse of identity and the systems of control reinforcing it. The final word of the trilogy would seem to be that words are good for nothing.

However, another reading is possible. “[T]he end of words, the end of what can be done with words” can also be read as the *terminus* of words, as the point at which words touch on the real, the point, in our own terms, at which the body/language relation becomes reconfigured in an event of sense. The end of words is not a falling silent, or a dead silence, but rather the pregnant silence of potentiality, language opening itself to its constitutive outside, exposing itself to that which in it is more than it: flesh as the bearer of utopian potential. Words do not end in nothingness; they end in the opening of new possibilities, new forms of life. That being said, “the end of what can be done with words” suggests that while writing can bring new forms of life into view, it cannot realize these possibilities, cannot, to put it differently, satisfy and conclude the utopian impulse. Indeed, while *The Western Lands* closes with “THE END” printed in bold, the lines directly before it read: “Hurry up, please. It’s time” (258). This quotation from T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” does not reinscribe the nostalgia of that poem, its dream of shoring up the world’s fragments in a new unity.¹⁶⁴ Instead, I would contend, it enacts a transfer of the utopian flame from text to reader, translating the text’s desire for/anticipation of another world into an urgent demand (“Hurry up, please”) that the reader realize the possibilities of a new world. “It’s time”: the strangeness of these concluding words – functioning almost as a deictic – lies in their refusal of any stable point of reference: not only do they suggest the pressing of the future into the present but they also oscillate between the time of writing, or of the work’s publication, and the time of reading. The text’s future, the future on which it calls, is the future of its reading, and of its readers. “The end of what can be done with words” is not to be found in the work

itself, but in the circulation of the text (or of sense) through the bodily practices of its readers.

Indeed, the unfinished quality of utopian *praxis*, especially in its biopolitical mode, is a motif in *A Desire Called America*. In insisting on the *immanence* of utopia, its emergence in the here and now, the texts with which I deal (Burroughs's late trilogy, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Dickinson's poetry, Pynchon's *Against the Day*) all suspend themselves in the midst of potentiality. Utopian *praxis*, from a biopolitical perspective, does not entail generating the image of paradise. Instead, it means attending to the powers in the present of constructing alternative worlds. This is one way to read the following sentence from Burroughs's *The Western Lands*: "This is a biological revolution, fought with new species and new ways of thinking and feeling, a war where the bullet may take millennia to hit" (34). There is a constitutive ambivalence involved in the relationship between language and biopolitics, one which becomes especially acute in considerations of revolutionary struggle (in which what is at stake is a radical and total transformation of social existence): life and language, the species and words, are not identical, even if they belong to one and the same material world. They intersect in the difference that is the relation of body/language, but they never become one, and it is the very gap between the two that enables the production of new linguistic practices and new forms of life. If "biological revolution" is in the present tense ("This is a biological revolution...") and yet prolonged into a faraway future (the "bullet may take millennia to hit"), it is because the movement between body and language constitutes a time that is both always already and not yet.

Burroughs tells us that “We can create a land of dreams,” but he also reminds us that the road is a hard one: “It is dangerous even to think such things. It is very dangerous to live my friend, and few survive it. And one does not survive by shunning danger, when we have a universe to win and absolutely nothing to lose” (*WL* 164-65). Recalling the final lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, the text points out that utopian *praxis* is not for the faint of heart; it is, as we have witnessed throughout this chapter, an encounter so overwhelming that it leaves one a member of another species, changed beyond recognition. Burroughs’s late trilogy is one of those singular cultural objects of the eighties which positively resists the shutting down of the utopian impulse. It cultivates the possibility of a singular America, that is, the possibility of a radically other America to come, against the confines of American exceptionalism.

Burroughs is not alone in his commitment to a singular America. In the next two chapters, I journey back to the moment of the American Renaissance, arguing that that period should not be understood as a consolidation of American exceptionalism but rather as an attempt to realize the American Revolution in and through literature. If I begin with Burroughs, which is to say anachronistically, it is because of the lesson his late trilogy teaches regarding retroactive utopia: the past is not settled; revolutions do not exhaust their potentiality in a punctual event; they survive themselves, leaving eddies of historical possibility in their wake. The American Renaissance is one of these eddies. In turning now to Walt Whitman’s 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, we find another instance in which the American Revolution is reactivated, reactualized, against the limits of American exceptionalism and in the name of a world to come.

Chapter 2: “It is you who give the life”:

Biopolitical Democracy and Utopian Expression in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*

I. Introduction

In the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman instructs his readers regarding not only how to read his work but also how to live democratically:

This is what you shall do: Love the Earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and the crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is always already ploughed and manured . . . others may not know it but he shall. (*LG* 1855 11)

The preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* clears the ground for the poems which follow it by contesting the limits of poetry as a practice. Poetry, it announces, will not be testament to the fount of genius; it will be, instead, the flora emerging from the soil of America and the flesh of the people in their disparate and diverse activities. Whitman proposes nothing less than a redefinition of poetic enunciation. Rather than a fixed and static document confronting the reader, a book to be digested and evaluated in purely formal terms, poetry is to become a democratic scripture, existing only virtually in print,

actualizing itself only in its bodily absorption, in becoming flesh through the life of its readers. If the activity of the poet constitutes a specific practice, this practice, paradoxically, is not that of creating the poem but of transcribing an already existing poem (“the ground is always already ploughed and manured”), of reinscribing the bodily movements that make up the nation (“your very flesh shall be a great poem...”). These lines imply an abdication of authority (the poet is not the privileged creator but a conduit for creation, a “free channel” as Whitman writes in the “Preface”), yet the strangeness of this poetic surrender is that in a profound reversal, it becomes the very source of the poet’s power. The poet becomes the people, which is *not* to say he becomes their author, or dictator, but that the act of poetic enunciation becomes disseminated into the people. The democracy of Whitman’s poetry is not simply a matter of content; it involves a reconfiguration of linguistic practice: one does not speak *of* democracy, one speaks democracy *democratically*.

Yet this begs the question of what one means by democracy. In Whitman scholarship, the answer often delivered is that Whitman’s work represents a peculiarly American democracy: a rugged individualism of anarchic proportions combined with an egalitarian mingling of bodies. Whitman is a liberal, the argument runs, but with the qualification that he supplements liberalism’s concern for liberty and formal equality with the concreteness of the body. In a useful synthesis of this position, Kenneth Cmiel argues that Whitman brings together liberal democracy’s valorization of individual liberty and radical democracy’s focus on the common good, neutralizing the tension between them (“Whitman the Democrat”). In this reading, echoed by a number of critics,

Whitman's poetry is the supplement to American liberal democracy, the bodily remainder legitimizing liberalism by infusing its formal equalities with the vigor of the people's flesh.¹⁶⁵

Whitman writes, "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it," but the real test, perhaps, is *how* the poet is absorbed (*LG 1855 24*). In the process of canonization, Whitman has been converted into a liberal. He has been taken up in such a way so as to promote an ideal of negative liberty, a homology between freedom and private property, an opposition between the public and the private, and a vigilant, if not necessarily xenophobic, nationalism. Such an appropriation takes many forms, but its most recognizable expression is in the understanding of Whitman as the poet of *individualism*. Thus, George Kateb writes of Whitman's "rights-based individualism" and argues that while Whitman emphasizes collective adhesiveness, such an emphasis is an aberration from the "genuine democracy" of his text, which consists of a respect for individual liberties and the contingent connectedness of persons; likewise, Wai Chee Dimock contends (from a less sympathetic perspective) that the syntax of Whitman's poetry constructs a nation of interchangeable individuals.¹⁶⁶ In disregarding the implications of Whitman's calls for "adhesiveness," the claim of Whitman's individualism applies an understanding of the individual as a self-sufficient, rational thinking entity that is quite at odds with Whitman's social poetics.

¹⁶⁷ It masks both the interpenetration of body and mind and the emergence of the individual from the collective in a virtuous cycle – a cycle about which it makes little sense to speak of in terms of *individualism*, unless by that term we mean a process of

individuation in which the individual exists only with and through others. The disavowal of what we might call Whitman's collectivism is a crucial presupposition of a number of critics for whom Whitman is less the champion of a radical democracy than a rugged, antinomian capitalist entrepreneur. (As I argue below, far from being a capitalist entrepreneur, Whitman's poetry constitutes a critique of the capitalist organization of social life.¹⁶⁸) My objection to these liberal appropriations of Whitman is not that they are inaccurate, *per say*, since they certainly capture elements of Whitman's poetic work, but that they enter Whitman's poetry with theoretical presuppositions that facilitate the occlusion of some of the most interesting elements of his work.

What has been forgotten in this liberal appropriation of Whitman is precisely the body, considered as not only the object but also the source and medium of political power – an unfortunate amnesia, for if Whitman is anything, he is certainly a poet of the body. I would like to remember Whitman's bodies, to follow their implications to their radical end in order to argue that Whitman's democracy consists of a radical politics irreducible, and sometimes even antagonistic, to liberalism. Indeed, critics including Michael Moon and Betsy Erkkila have demonstrated with great acuity the connection between the corporeal dimensions of Whitman's poetry and radical democracy. My contribution to this line of argument consists in complicating the consideration of the relationship between the body and politics through the discourses of biopolitics and utopia.¹⁶⁹

Whitman, I contend, reinvents democracy through the body, developing a biopolitical democracy in which liberty is a positive construction predicated not upon distance or tolerance but on contact and intimacy, on embrace. Such a democracy is not an affair of

live and let live (negative liberty, tolerance) but of the production of forms of life in terms of radical equality and cooperative power. The production of equality is central to Whitman's biopolitical democracy: instead of the chains of formal equality proper to liberal thought (person X is the same as person Y in respect to standard Z), the real equality of biopolitical democracy is the immanent effect of a process that abolishes particular inequalities. Real equality entails a politics that intervenes in the socio-economic fabric of everyday life, rather than confining itself to an autonomous political domain or echoing politics in an autonomous poetic domain.

In Whitman's oeuvre, the term "democracy" becomes biopolitical by centering itself on the question of whether or not bodies are adequate to their own powers. As I argued in the Introduction, biopolitics is thoroughly ambivalent, oscillating between a negative or diagnostic mode and an affirmative or emancipatory mode. Where the former asks how the people can become adequate to their own potential, how they can organize their life in the name of freedom and equality, the latter asks how life is put at the service of relations of powers that engender hierarchies and inequalities. Whitman does not eschew the diagnostic approach but rather subordinates it to the revolutionary call of an affirmative biopolitics. Whitman's critique of inequality plays the handmaiden to his love song for a vitalist democracy. His poetry is an ideological front in a struggle for radical democracy, projecting that democracy as the utopia towards which every line of *Leaves of Grass* gestures. In this context, utopia signifies the way that the bodies and language of Whitman's poetry figure a future in which the power of the democratic people realizes itself. The biopolitical reading of Whitman's poetry in terms of the way that it expresses

or generates bodily power is necessarily supplemented by a utopian reading in terms of the way that bodily power demands and prefigures the generation of a new society. In marked contrast to William S. Burroughs's late trilogy, this utopian *praxis* takes the form not of an exodus from America but rather of the "realization" of the nation. For Whitman, in other words, a singular America is not "within and against" the United States, a matter of cleaving a properly revolutionary people off from the reactionary bourgeoisie; instead, his poetry (especially the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, the most optimistic of the editions) suggests that America is capable of achieving its utopian promise without instantiating a radical rupture, that the American people are always already (potentially) utopian.

Whitman, however, cannot always manage to hold on to the radically other future inhering in the present. There is a tendency throughout his work to succumb to a form of American exceptionalism in which he declares that America is and has always already been the exclusive home of democracy. In such texts as *Democratic Vistas* and "Passage to India," Whitman sacrifices the struggle for democracy to a belief in democracy's linear, progressive realization. For this Whitman, America may not already be a realized utopia but it always approaches this status, and it does so not by revolutionizing but by holding its course and consolidating itself against threats to its unity. It is this Whitman that legitimates the liberal appropriations of Whitman in the name of negative liberty and the belief in the triumph of the free market. It is my contention, however, that we understand Whitman as profoundly split between a radical democracy and a liberal democracy, or, in our own terms, between American exceptionalism and a singular America. The proposition that there are two Whitmans is, in fact, a common one, usually

articulated in biographical terms as a response to the trauma of the Civil War. Whitman, the argument goes, was traumatized by the strife which broke the country in two. He recoiled from the radical implications of his democratic poetry – the unruly power of the people to split the Union – rewriting his work in the liberal terms of a triumphant America.

Such narratives falter, however, when they meet the line-by-line realities of Whitman's poetry. For one can find in the late Whitman, as much as in the early Whitman, signs of a revolutionary demand. It is not so much a matter of early versus late Whitman but of an antagonism between two political and poetic logics dividing Whitman's work from beginning to end. Two Whitmans, then, but two Whitmans in an intimate struggle: Whitman against Whitman. In this chapter, my focus is on the radically democratic Whitman, not because this Whitman is more important than the other Whitman but because my goal is to articulate Whitman's democracy insofar as it contributes to the production of that singular America which I describe in my introduction as the subterranean, utopian dream of America. In the first section of this chapter, I analyze the way that Whitman's poetic procedures imply a specific understanding of social ontology (the mode of production of life/bodies) and I show how this understanding of the social fabric is intimately linked to Whitman's refunctioning of poetry into a collective and democratic practice. In the next section, I show how this social ontology becomes a utopian *praxis* and a political struggle oriented around the realization of life. In the final section, I discuss the split between liberalism and radical democracy traversing Whitman's work. Focusing on Whitman's version of a singular

America, I track how Whitman exceeds liberalism, how his democracy goes beyond the present consensus of liberal democracy with an antagonistic barbarian “yawp.” This is what it means to read Whitman in and for the present. It is not a question of what is living and what is dead in Whitman. It is question of catching up to Whitman, of realizing that the political Whitman is not behind us but ahead of us, blazing a path towards a democracy that has yet to be realized.

II. Life in Common:

The Social Poetics of Biopolitical Democracy

In the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman reinvents democracy by plunging it into the dense complexities of corporeal life. Democracy, in Whitman’s work, is not a set of principles, or a formal constitution, standing above the political subjects that make up the nation but rather a process conducted through bodies. Whitman’s work distinguishes itself from the liberal tradition of democracy in distancing itself from the conception of the political subject as a rational free thinker for whom the body is merely a piece of property and political thought merely a matter of rational deliberation. The liberal political theory of John Locke (to name an eminent example in the American context) commences from a division between a sovereign rational mind and an unruly instinctual body and then goes on to formulate tactics for bringing the irrational desires of the body under the mind’s control, guiding them into the narrow channels of capitalist

productivity and nationalist discipline.¹⁷⁰ Whitman's poetry, on the other hand, devotes itself to unleashing latent powers of the body in the name of a democracy to come.

Whitman's recovery of corporeal complexity from the blind spots of liberal theory sets the stage for an alternative social basis for democracy. This vision of democracy predicates itself upon a social fabric in which individuality proceeds from commonality, or in which individualism is the effect of cooperation. Rather than beginning with individuals, Whitman traces the contours of a *process of individuation* in which individuals emerge from the sharing of collective knowledges, desires, affects, fantasies, bodies – the material elements of biopolitics.¹⁷¹ The “merge” towards which Whitman beckons the reader (“Who need be afraid of the merge?”) is not a call for readers to establish a political sphere separate from their everyday lives (the liberal social contract) but a call for them to “realize” the powers that are the very basis of their subjectivity, to return to the source of their formation (*LG 1855 31*). The constant metamorphosis of subjectivity in *Leaves* (“I do not ask the wounded person how he feels . . . I myself/*become* the wounded person”) depends upon a commonality not simply anterior to the life of individuals but immanent to it (*LG 1855 63*; emphasis mine). Individuals “enclose” the common, produce themselves out of the common, by taking a share in it, one which they also share with others so as to create new social formations, in a process constantly renewed by the text: “I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things/to be” (*LG 1855 77*). What results is a new kind of public sphere, not a public mind standing above private bodies, but a collective and cooperative cultural intelligence *of* bodies – a publicness without its opposite, the private.

In Whitman, democracy comes to name the socialization of bodies on equal terms, the collective realization of bodily powers in such a way that “an individual is as superb as a nation when he has the qualities which make a superb nation” (*LG 1855 24*). Democracy takes a biopolitical turn, the body and the political becoming coextensive, or, more specifically, the nation becomes no more than its embodiment, no more than the immanent effect of collective relations of bodies. Whitman revises the very concept of nation/nationality, as well as the subjective figure of *the people* that has, historically, gone hand in hand with the nation. In modern political discourses, the production of the people is a two-fold process: the citizen – or individual subject of the people – is generated through a scission between bare life/biology and the complexities of its social incorporation. The citizen is what rises over and above a more basic, brute bodily existence. Conjoined with this process of scission is an extractive process whereby what stands over and above bare life takes the shape of a specifically national social form, a national essence.¹⁷² While there are always other peoples, other nations, each nation’s people becomes an elect people, exclusive insofar as it consigns certain human beings – Native Americans and African American slaves the most obvious examples in the context of Whitman’s work – to the status of abject, non-political creatures. In this manner, the nation transcends its people, or a part of its people (bare life), even as it is posited as substratum of their existence.

Although Whitman is not immune to discourses of national purity and transcendence, there emerges in *Leaves of Grass* an alternative mode of nationality, whose founding gesture is the rendering indistinct of the boundary between biology and

the political/social. Rather than an exclusive essence, nationality becomes an elastic webbing of social relations. Nationality is no more – and no less – than the culture, the historically and socially dynamic relations, affects, and collective embodiments, of the people, not as a fixed, closed, and essential form but as a ceaselessly changing dialectic between individuality and commonality. Again and again, Whitman identifies the United States itself with poetry (“The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem”), yet if Whitman’s poetry is immanent to the nation, if it is, as it were, the very expression of the nation, the nation itself is also an expression of its people – “the common people [...] these too are unrhymed poetry” (*LG 1855* 5; 6).

Whitman’s work should not, however, be read as if it belonged solely to the genre of political theory. Whitman’s political project is inextricable from a reinvention of poetry as a social practice and the poet as a social role. While in many ways Whitman’s poetry mirrors the work of European Romanticism, especially in its connection to revolution and its desire to immerse itself in the life of “the people,” it nonetheless refuses the tendency in Romantic poetics to ground the work of poetry in individual genius.¹⁷³ Instead, the founding act of Whitman’s poetry is a dissemination of poetic authority into the people, a release from the anchoring of value in the unique, personal voice. Whitman’s poetry implies a strange temporal paradox in which it posits its own presupposition: the poetry of the democratic people itself demands the production of the democratic people, or, put differently, *Leaves of Grass* implies the event of a cultural revolution creating the audience that would be adequate to the poem that it is.

In terms of the poetic logic of *Leaves*, the first step in the production of an alternative conception of democracy is displacing and dismantling the Cartesian mind-body split. Against a dualistic treatment of mind and body in which the body is an instrument (or property) of the mind/soul, Whitman's text proposes a radical equality between the bodily and the mental: "I am the poet of the body,/And I am the poet of the soul." *Leaves* goes even further in its deconstruction of the modern subordination and instrumentalization of the body, making body and mind/spirit aspects of one and the same vital substance. In the poem that would come to be entitled "I Sing The Body Electric," Whitman explicitly addresses the body as foundation and even operative principle of his poetry. After the opening lines of the poem (in which Whitman's lyrical body disseminates itself into the flesh of the nation and, in turn, absorbs the nation: "The bodies of men and women engirth me, and I engirth/them"), the poem admits that it may be at a loss when it comes to the language of the body:

The expression of the body of man or woman balks account,
 The male is perfect and that of the female is perfect. [...]
 The expression of a wellmade man appears not only in his face,
 It is in his limbs and joints also it is curiously in the joints of
 his hips and wrists,
 It is in his walk .. the carriage of his neck .. the flex of his waist
 and
 knees dress does not hide him,
 The strong sweet supple quality he has strikes through the cotton
 and flannel;
 To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem . . perhaps
 more,
 You linger to see his back and the back of his neck and
 shoulderside. (*LG 1855 116*)

This passage demonstrates Whitman's patient attention to the body not merely as an object to be dissected and categorized but as a spectacle exceeding the subject-object

relationship. These lines lack the “I” which would unify the images into the sensory wealth of a detached ego. Instead, the passive construction of “It is in...” makes it so that the body speaks. It is the body that articulates itself into an “expression,” which the poem attempts to follow, to record, voice, and embody. That the body’s movements are a form of writing is evident not only in the reference to “the *expression* of the body” but also in the focus on clothing. If the clothing of the “wellmade man” “does not hide him,” if the body “strikes through the cotton/and flannel,” it is because the relationship between his clothing and his flesh is akin to that between signifier and signified: the one does not obscure the other but gives expression to it through a chain of metonymic displacements, whereby the signifier/clothing at one moment expresses the signified/ bodily appearance and then in another gives way (“strikes through”) to the body, which, in turn, becomes signifier. This process of metonymic displacement takes place in the fall from one line to another as an unfolding of the body across the space of the poem. Yet what strikes the reader is not simply that the body takes center stage but that the poem confesses that the body is already a poem, a poem so complex, so fine, that the poem can only hope to live up to it: “To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem . . . perhaps/more.” “I Sing The Body Electric” – and I would contend that this is true of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* as a whole – takes place in the zone of indiscernibility between body and language, between corporeality and poetry, with poetry possessing the mission to live up to the complex movements of the body, and the body, in turn, incited by the play of language.

Yet what of this excess of the body over the poem? What of the “perhaps more” of bodily expression? This surplus is, in fact, life itself. Life, in Whitman’s poetry, is the fluid substance that expresses itself simultaneously as corporeal/material and as spiritual/mental, with neither attribute being subordinated to the other.¹⁷⁴ As Whitman writes, “I am less the reminder of property or qualities, and more the/reminder of life” (*LG 1855 47*). Whitman does not eschew the particularities of poetic work, its working over of “property or qualities,” but he gives these particularities the task of increasing the power of life, or more specifically, he gives words over to the democratic project of delivering humans from the forms of bondage which hinder the expression of life and of returning institutions/products to the people. Referring to institutions ranging from religions and museums to governments and corporations, Whitman sums up the vitalist principle of his poetry: “It is not they who give the life . . . it is you who give the life” (91, *LG 1855*). Life, in this instance, is distinct both from any notion of basic biological life (life as instinct, as pure *Eros*, or as basic Aristotelian *Zoe*) and a Romantic sense of life as the underlying will of the world. Life is rather the immanent surplus of the social, or sociality insofar as it embodies itself in historically concrete forms, yet at the same times exceeds this embodiment (without resulting in a transcendent substance or subject). From this perspective, Whitman’s poetry is a return of life to itself (“it is you who give the life”), with poetry being understood as an activity of reorganizing social life, or cultural revolution. Paraphrasing Foucault, for whom biopolitics names the entry of life into politics, we might say that in Whitman, we witness the entry of life into poetry.¹⁷⁵

I would now like to turn to the 1855 edition of “Song of Myself” (untitled in the original) in order to elaborate the notion of biopolitical democracy. My central contention is that Whitman’s bodies, rather than being formed in the terms of liberal individualism, are better understood in terms of an unfolding of the common which serves as the basis of Whitman’s radical democracy. In Chapter 1, I explained the concept of the common in reference to the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, showing how William Burroughs complicates their formulations. Here, I want to elaborate on Whitman’s specific instantiation of the common, which, in contrast to Burroughs’s version, is not an alternative to the dominant social mode of the United States (the social basis of a political exodus) but rather the very foundation of the American nation (the social condition of politics *tout court*, at least as Whitman conceives of the latter). The life that circulates between the bodies of Whitman’s text, as well as between Whitman’s text and its readers, is *a life in common*: a life that inheres in the milieu between bodies, not a private, propertied life with proper attributes and the rigorous closure of self-present entities. Although, as several critics have noted, Whitman’s bodies and their movements are the result of the emerging industrial capitalist economy of the nineteenth century, they are nevertheless irreducible and often in opposition to it. Whitman may sometimes praise the progress of capitalist industry with unabashed joy, but the bodies of his poetry speak another story. The bodies of *Leaves of Grass* struggle for and prefigure a society in which diverse forms of life would be equal to each other and pass freely among each other. Of course, equality and free circulation are the very slogans of liberalism and capitalism (at least equality of opportunity and circulation of goods), but what distinguishes Whitman’s

poetry is its insistence on the reciprocity between commonality and singularity, on direct political participation and on an equality that is real and material, rather than merely formal. In *Leaves of Grass*, bodies are not equal in the sense of being equivalent but in the sense of sharing in a common project of emancipation: the generation of a society organized according to the autonomous yet cooperative rule of everyone by everyone. Indeed, real equality is one of the crucial defining features of Whitman's biopolitical democracy, for in its insistence on material effects, it resists co-opting by both liberal discourses of formal equality and the pluralism of the capitalist market.

Whitman's poetry situates itself in terms of the common by generating a powerful image of selfhood contesting the measured individualism of liberalism. Thus, in the opening lines of "Song of Myself," the self and other are not only equal but also permeable:

I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (*LG* 1855
25)

These lines oscillate between a comprehending embrace of others and a fluid dissemination of the self. On the one hand, self-valorization involves a mirror relationship in which the identities of others echo the identity of the "I". The "you" becomes a function of the "I" insofar as we understand the verb "assume" in terms of engendering identity: one assumes not merely properties but that which makes one *one*. What matters is not only that the "you" follows the "I," that what the "you" "assumes" always follows from what the "I" assumes, but also that the "I" returns to itself in the use of the reflexive pronoun. The "I" would seem to capitalize on the "you," to expand itself

through investments in others. Indeed, this entrepreneurial spirit is a refrain in “Song of Myself,” recurring in the use of economic language and the continual return to the “I” as the identifying marker of an ever-expanding reservoir of linguistic capital: “What is commonest and cheapest and nearest and easiest is Me,/Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns/Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,/Not asking the sky to come down to my goodwill,/Scattering it freely forever” (*LG* 1855 36). In this passage, as in the passage above, the capitalist economy of the self falters, goes default, every act of embrace, every return on the investment of the self in others, always becoming radically redistributed. Thus, the pair of concluding lines: “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” and “Scattering it freely forever.” There is no private basis, no individual limit legislating the sharing of bodily life; productivity, the expansiveness of life, depends upon multiplication, fragmentation, and commonality.

We can speak of dissemination at this point in two senses: The closure of the self comes undone as what composes the self (“atoms”) emerges as a shared set of properties or attributes, a kind of commonwealth. The self and the other emerge from a common substance which rather than becoming enclosed by individual forms, plays between them in the process of poetic connection and enunciation, the shifting of pronouns and the balanced mirroring of the lines. The self and other, then, disseminate into a common substance from which they also emerge, but this dissemination entails a more radical implication than the inseparability of self and other, for commonality is not an effect of the after-the-fact joining together of separate entities but rather of an ontologically prior

process of individuation. If we read the “for” of the third line as a causal statement (“For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”), then the self-reflexive identification of the first line and the interpenetration of self and other in the second line presume the mutual “belonging,” or sharing out, of a common process. The priority of this process implies a shift of level downwards to a molecular perspective resisting the fixed boundaries of identity. Before the existence of individuals, and yet inhering in individuals as material surplus, there is the pre-individual zone of the common – that is, life as common potentiality of the species.

From this perspective, Whitman belongs less to mystical traditions, as some critics argue, than to a subterranean lineage of materialist thought passing from Spinoza through Marx to contemporary thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy and Antonio Negri.¹⁷⁶ The fundamental axiom which each one of these thinkers, including Whitman, share is that being is *not* a fixed substance consisting of a denumerable set of self-contained, self-sufficient entities but rather a process of individuation in which the singular emerges from the common and the common from the singular in an infinite, if determinate, play of sharing. Singularity, in this instance, means not unique self-identity but rather a difference that emerges in or through relation, a difference *of* relation. From this perspective, subjects – whether they be political or poetic – are the reification of a prior process of sharing. In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy articulates this proposition as follows: Rather than the liberal myth in which a given set of individuals decide to join together and form a community, individuals, or better “singular beings,” “are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*,

by the sharing that makes them *others*: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of sharing: ‘communicating’ by not ‘communing’” (25). The axiom of commonality avoids not only the liberal fallacy of aggregation which makes community the effect of a voluntary decision on the part of pre-constituted individuals (a decision whose fateful political implications arise from the transfer of the power of the multitude to a separate sovereignty entity, and which ends in the reification of institutionalized politics into post-political administration¹⁷⁷) but also the communal fallacy which imagines that community consists of an essence to which the members of the community must belong as so many limbs of an organism (this is, of course, most evidently troubling in the demand by fascist regimes for a collective unity grounded in racial purity¹⁷⁸). Ecstasy, in this instance, names less a mystical experience than the functional process of socialization and the recognition that the political and social occur not after the constitution of subjects but in their very constitution.

As Betsy Erkkila points out, what Whitman calls his “politics of Nature” is an attempt to shape this process of constituting subjectivity; more specifically, it is an attempt to manage the relationship between the One and the Many of the American body politic. Sympathetic to the Jacksonian valorization of the common man, yet wary of national discord, Whitman’s poetry constantly seeks to reconcile individual drives and the good of the commonwealth, or local/group cultures and national union.¹⁷⁹ While, as Erkkila quite rightly argues, the tension between the individual/particular and the national/general never entirely disappears in Whitman’s text, I would contend that

Whitman's imagination of a possible resolution of this tension is to be found less in specifically political declarations than in the biopolitics of the text. Whitman constructs an alternative public sphere whose basis is corporeal. That is, rather than a notion of a public sphere that individuals may enter and exit as they wish, a public sphere that stands above or apart from the private life of bodies, Whitman constructs an intimate public sphere, a publicness immediately entwined in the everyday life of bodies in every kind of situation (at work, in the streets, etc.).¹⁸⁰ His poetry replaces a conception of democracy understood as a series of institutions mediating between public and private with a democracy of the common, that is, a simultaneously social and political function of bodies cooperating and produced in common.

In Whitman's poetry, this political life below the threshold of proper or institutional politics is most evident and most profound in the sexual dimensions of the text. In contrast to the regime of "sexuality" that emerges in the nineteenth century – the regime Foucault describes in *The History of Sexuality* as a system of identification in which specific sexual acts signify essential identities – the sexuality of Whitman's text consists of fluid relations in which bodies are made and unmade in a nearly perpetual flux. Sexual acts transform bodies in and through their relations with others; they open up the body to other possible formations, and in exposing them to such alterity, to a multiplicity of sexual differences, they remind individual bodies of the commonality from which they emerge. The differences that define individuals are not exclusive of or prior to relations between bodies but effects of them. In other words, the differences constituting specific sexual beings are contingent modulations of a common sexual fluidity ("Ever

love ever the sobbing liquid of life”), rather than essential traits of individuals (*LG* 1855 73).

The sexuality that Foucault analyzes in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* functions as the secret truth of individuals, an essence defining their identities, organizing them into the separate “species” of “homosexual” and “heterosexual”. Sexuality becomes an inherent property defining the self, a basic possession defining one’s existence. Of course, the different “species” of sexuality were in no way guaranteed equal rights to a public existence (or, for that matter, even to private enjoyments). Whitman writes in the midst of the consolidation of sexuality as a regime of identity, and it is difficult not to see in such lines as the following a liberal pluralist demand for the tolerance of diverse sexual identities: “Through me forbidden voices,/Voices of sexes and lusts voices veiled, and I remove the veil,/Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured” (*LG* 48).

Whitman would seem to anticipate by more than a century the collective comings out of a post-Stone Wall generation, sounding the promise of a world in which the once forbidden would be redeemed (“transfigured”), the once closeted spectacular (“clarified”).

But as much as *Leaves* displays a quasi-exhibitionist desire for public intimacy, it also undermines the very notion of sexual identity that post-nineteenth century America uses as the basis for public recognition of sexuality. Indeed, the very notion of sexuality as inherent property appears foreign to the text, a transgression of Whitman’s more general warning against possessive or acquisitive social tendencies: “Not one is dissatisfied not one is demented with the mania/of owning things” (*LG* 56). Whereas the sexuality that Foucault describes as an emergent power relation in the mid-nineteenth

century is characterized by an essential identity that persists over time, a fixed relationship between interior (psychic life) and exterior (behavior), and a mode of differentiation in which each individual possesses his or her appropriate sexual property, the sexuality of Whitman's text is characterized by the following: a mutability of form, indeed, a sheer velocity of bodily/affective change that defies reification into discrete identities; variable relationships between acts, affects, desires, and conducts, without reduction to the inside-outside (or Cartesian) model of subjectivity; and the constant production of new forms of sexual life through the connection of different bodies, or through the becoming common of different modes of sexual conduct. In line with the work of queer theory, we might say that Whitman privileges a performative notion of sexuality. However, we would also need to add that Whitman's text problematizes the typically liberal valorization of difference for its own sake.¹⁸¹ It is not difference as such that Whitman celebrates but difference (or singularity) inhering in the common.

The most repeated – and perhaps most privileged – sexual encounter in Whitman's text is that between the "I" of the lyrical persona (the textual Whitman) and the poem's second-person addressee ("you," or the virtual reader). The following passage is one such encounter:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or
am touched from;
The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer,
This head is more than churches or bibles or creeds.
If I worship any particular thing it shall be some of the spread of
my
body;
Translucent mould of me it shall be you, [...]
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you,
You my rich blood, your milky stream pale strippings of my life;

Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you,
 My brain it shall be your occult convolutions,[...]
 Mixed tussled hay of head and beard and brawn it shall be you,
 Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you;
 Sun so generous it shall be you [...]
 Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you,
 Broad muscular fields, branches of liveoak, loving loungee in my
 winding paths, it shall be you,
 Hands I have taken, face I have kissed, mortal I have ever touched,
 it shall be you. (LG 1855 49)

The opening line of this passage radically materializes the world. The commonsense dichotomy separating the spiritual and the material, or the mental and the physical, into two levels gives way to a single plane of immanence in which spirit and body are two sides of the same coin. The body comprehends spirit: the scent of armpits is finer than the prayer, the head – not the mind – is greater than religious institutions. The “divine” becomes an effect of corporeal movement and connection. It is only in the touch that joins bodies, in the affective connection between beings, that the spiritual emerges: “If I worship any particular thing it shall be some of the spread of my body.” The “spread” of Whitman’s body encompasses not only the universe of the poem but also the position of the reader. The poem becomes flesh in a process of communication that does not work in terms of separation but rather in terms of *interference* – indeed, this communication of bodies as a merging of beings is the most characteristic element of the text’s sexuality. Touch brings together that which is “inside and out” in a zone of indistinguishability; it acts not as the discrete zone of contact between two solid, self-contained objects but as the becoming fluid of the solid and the becoming solid of the fluid: the pressing of breasts against breasts pouring forth from the milky stream of life; the strange interchange between “trickling sap of maple” and “fibre of manly wheat.”

Whitman's poetry generalizes the sexual, transforming it from a supposedly isolated, private, and particular practice into the very medium of the social. In saying that the text's "milky stream" is ejaculation, we should understand it as both the literal emission of sperm and a more figurative excitement, a coming outside of oneself. Sexual ecstasy may be touch only in its most intense form, but in Whitman, this extreme becomes the very condition of both poetry and the common (which for Whitman is sociality as such). Ecstasy is in the tone of the poem as a whole, with its frequent exhortations and ejaculations, and it is in the syntax with its tendency to favor the weak or confused division of the comma (a pause which links as much as it separates) over the decisive stops of the period. The "It shall be you," which the passage repeats as a mantra, epitomizes the production of the common: it creates intercourse between two subjects; it connects and distinguishes. We might say the "I" ejaculates to become the "you", but we would have to add that the "you" is already in the "I", as the condition of its existence. Rather than possessing the other in a sexual encounter, each individual remakes him or herself through a dispossession of the self that is also a joining with another, or more precisely, a return to the otherness (the commonality) that is always already constitutive of the self.

Heterosexuality comes to be displaced by a queer sexuality, or, better yet, by a queer political economics, in the often thinly veiled descriptions of homoerotic sexuality throughout "Song of Myself." The penetration of Whitman, or his lyrical mask, by erect phallic-shaped objects is a refrain circulating throughout Whitman's work, such as in the above passage: "Broad muscular fields, branches of liveoak, loving loungee in

my/winding paths, it shall be you.” If we cannot quite pin down the language to a specific sexual act, we nonetheless cannot rule out anal eroticism as a signified necessarily implied by these lines. Indeed, it is precisely the indeterminateness of these lines that makes Whitman’s poetry so queer, the way in which the words at once gesture towards the depths of Whitman’s bodily orifices in male-male penetration and at the same time disseminate into the “winding paths” of the indiscriminate, generic, and pre-individual sexuality of *Leaves of Grass*. To say that Whitman’s poetry is queer is not exactly to say that it is gay, even if, as Robert Martin eloquently argues in *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*, we should not shirk away from the gay life of Whitman’s work.¹⁸² Rather, Whitman’s poetry *queers* social life through its refusal of the identification of sexuality, through its disruption of a heterosexual economy dependent upon the strict determination of sexual partners and the essentialization of individual identity according to sex/sexuality. In this respect, it resembles the sexual dynamism of Burroughs’s late trilogy, though it bears mentioning that Whitman eschews the latter’s cultish focus on masculine sexuality to the exclusion of female sexuality. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, Whitman’s pansexual “spread” includes its own dangers, such as the effacement of the distinct social positioning of the female body.

The queerness of Whitman’s textuality is most effective, however, not in the poetry’s enunciated content but in its address to the reader. In such utterances as “it shall be you,” where Whitman takes the reader as poetic *and* sexual partner, we find the indiscriminate and generic nature of sexuality in *Leaves of Grass*. In these moments, the reader conjugates with the poem, breeds with it, to produce new sensations, thoughts –

and even bodily life, when we consider the possibility that the poem haunts the reader's future gestures. As Michael Warner suggests in "Whitman Drunk," *Leaves* mimics the phenomenology of cruising through its use of shifters ("I," "you," etc.) that simultaneously produce the sense of a personal connection and strip subjects of personal definition, exposing them to the anonymity of the crowd.¹⁸³ I do not think that it is amiss to think of Whitman's poetry as the "city of orgies" he describes in a later edition of *Leaves of Grass*: if Whitman seems to identify himself throughout the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, through the inclusion of his name and through the portrait of himself following the book's front cover, his language disidentifies not only himself but also his reader, generating a linguistic commonality in the love between strangers, the touch between two unknowns, and the more general contact of anonymous crowds. In other words, the singularity designated by the name, "Walt Whitman," is not an individual sexual identity but a virtual, yet tactile, crowd of loving strangers. Whitman's poetry oscillates between the amorphous fluidity of an ecstatic becoming common and the sharp-edged fractal invention of singular corporeal forms.

It is important to note that, in Whitman, the world does not emanate from poetry as if from a divine creator. Instead, *Leaves of Grass* engenders a process of *expression* in which the being of the world is wholly invested in the singular beings composing it *and* is no more than those beings.¹⁸⁴ Thus, Whitman calls himself a "free channel" in the preface to the 1855 edition and speaks of "perfect candor" and of the transparency of his poetic body. "Whitman," the lyrical persona, becomes less a person than the name of the process through which everything emerges in its singularity and in connection with

everything else. The following passage from “Song of Myself” renders this thesis in corporeal terms, bearing witness to the way that the body of the poem becomes indistinguishable from its expression of bodies:

To be in any form, what is that?
If nothing lay more developed the quahaug and its callous shell
were enough.

Mine is no callous shell,
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
To touch my person to some one else’s is about as much as I can
stand.

Is this then a touch? . . . quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Traucherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lightning, to strike what is hardly
different from myself,
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs (*LG 1855 53*)

Touch acts not only as a mode of connection between discrete entities but also as an inductor and intensifier of energy. Language of electricity and fire generates a flesh constantly “quivering,” which is to say constantly in the process of becoming other than itself, melting and shocking into new forms. As the question opening this passage suggests (“To be in any form, what is that?”), more significant than the “new identity” resulting from touch is the power of becoming other inhering in every being, as well as the way in which this power is a function of connection. If there is something unique about the poem’s lyrical subject, if there is something distinguishing the voice of the poem from the objects it envelops, this difference remains one of degree, rather than kind: “Whitman” possesses “instant conductors all over”; the poem that he is

distinguishes itself by becoming indistinguishable from every other being, by becoming one with the “procreant urge” of being through a multiplication of connections. This urge, however, must not be understood in the teleological sense that would make the history of the world a unilateral course towards a preconceived goal. The course of the world does not follow Whitman, even if the course of the poem seems to. In the phrase “to strike what is hardly different than myself,” we see the multiplication of Whitman, the birth of a multitude of poets, each of which is characterized by the capacities typical of Whitman’s bodies: the play between commonality and singularity (or differentiation through connection) *and* incessant metamorphosis.

The poet and the poem, then, are not sovereign entities standing over their subjects from transcendent heights. If in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes that “the American poet is to be transcendent and new,” he also writes, “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,” suggesting a strange paradox according to which the transcendent is in actuality immanent, or the exceptional is, in fact, quotidian (*LG 1855* 8; 5). Indeed, we might understand this paradox less as a potential contradiction than as two sides of an antinomy between which Whitman’s textual maneuverings oscillate: on the one side, the poet is a privileged individual, a creator capable of engendering new worlds, new cultures, and new polities that he then may share with the masses; on the other side, to speak of “the poet” makes little sense, because poetry, rather than the effect of some special subjectivity, is a particular function of existence, one which consists in drawing out or realizing the inherent powers of being. In other words, we encounter, here, nothing less than the split

between the two Whitmans I described in the introduction to this chapter, the split between the liberal Whitman (for whom the poet is a legislator of culture) and the radically democratic Whitman (for whom poetry is an expression of the people's power).

It is the radically democratic Whitman that I would contend is most evident in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, as evidenced by the following passage in which poetry, instead of being the talent of a special caste gifted by nature, is rather the a generic power belonging to the entire human species, or at least to the entirety of the American people:

The messages of great poets to each man and women are,
Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand
us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you
enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose
there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be
unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail
another any more than one eyesight countervails another . .
. and that men can be good or grand only of the
consciousness of their supremacy within them. (*LG 1855*
13)

The passage begins by asserting that there are many poets and that these poets may be different than men and women as a whole, but this difference is not hierarchical; it entails no inequality. Yet the division between the subjects – the poets and the people, the “we” and they – introduces the possibility of a form of segregation in which the voice of the people might be equal to the voice of poets in principle but nevertheless separate and, therefore, potentially unequal in actuality. The poet would be the representative of the people, the delegate entrusted with their powers of speech and action. We would, in fact, arrive at a liberal form of democracy in which equality is only formal. However, a crucial shift occurs in the movement from “What we enclose you enclose” – implying the commonality discussed above – to “What we enjoy you may enjoy,” for the latter phrase,

instead of designating an actual state of affairs, gestures towards the *possibility* of a new condition: “you *may* enjoy” (emphasis added). This passage demands that the gap between people and poet be broken down, that the people become poets themselves, “the unnumbered Supremes” of the universe. The writing of poetry transcends the present world, but this transcendence is of a democratic breed. It transcends by producing equality, and it produces equality through a downward movement into the complexities of bodies. The poem/poet invites the people into itself so that the people become the poets. In other words, poetry and democracy are one and the same movement expressing the powers and the desires of social bodies; becoming poetic is a becoming democratic, and the flesh of the people is not merely the raw material of Whitman’s poetry but its very substance.

III. Utopian Expressions, Or, Struggles for a Democratic Body

I have argued for an understanding of the common in Whitman’s democracy, in the sense of a mode of socialization resisting the enclosures, privations, and privacies of liberal democracy and capitalism. In opposition to the archipelago of individual and private bodies that compose the public sphere of the liberal democratic nation, Whitman proposes a completely immanent commonwealth of shared and sharing bodies cooperating on equal terms. Yet it remains to be seen how the *potential* of Whitman’s biopolitical democracy translates into the *activity* of political struggle. In Whitman, I

would contend, democracy consists not of the representation of the people but of the real process of producing equality and abolishing the gap between representative and represented. It consists of the becoming powerful of bodies through the multiplication of connections between them. As I have already argued, Whitman's bodies emerge and mutate through the contact of pre-individual singularities, that is, through the organization of the common *sans* hierarchical mediation. But it is necessary to add another element to this equation, for Whitman's biopolitical democracy is also defined by a series of utopian imperatives that traverse the bodies of the nation, disarticulating and rearticulating them in the name of a democracy to come.¹⁸⁵

Indeed, Whitman's poetry would be best understood not in terms of representation but as an activity of *utopian expressionism*, that is, a utopian *praxis* that is not so much a leap into a new place than a realization of specific powers in the here and now. Whitman's poetry calls on bodies to realize that which in them is more than themselves, their capacity to mutate, but it does so by incorporating these bodies into a project in which the realization of their own powers depends on the common. Whitman wants to return life to itself; he wants the potentiality or power of the people to express itself as their emancipation. This vision of democracy is utopian in at least two senses, one primarily temporal, the other primarily spatial. Temporally, Whitman's bodies occupy the threshold between the continuum of the past-present and the horizon of the future. The language of the poems can be understood as an unfolding of history into a future in excess of the past, so that we should speak, here, not of extrapolation but of exposure: Whitman exposes History (or the past-present continuum) to the radically other future it

at once harbors and conceals. It is in this harboring-concealing of a radically other future by the historical present that we discover the spatial dynamic of Whitman's utopianism, for the democratic world Whitman heralds is the no-place, the void, of the present world – it is that surplus *cum* void of a singular America which I discussed in the Introduction to *A Desire Called America*. The space of the future unfolds as a constellation of those points in the present rendered invisible, indeed, unthinkable, by a liberal model of political economy. Such points include all of the voices rendered silent by the hegemonic social order, but it also gestures more broadly towards that excessive life, that life in common, which refuses being confined by the individualism of liberalism. Whitman's political poetry, his utopian expressionism, consists not merely in the art of making invisible identities visible (representation) but of weaving together the excessive life of uncounted bodies into the reality of a democracy to come.

In “Song of Myself,” we come across a number of clarion calls to democracy, moments in which the poem rather than assert the existence of democracy, instead demands it or calls it forth. In the following passage, we see one instance of such demand, remarkable for the way in which it makes democracy simultaneously a utopia projected into the future and an expression of powers located in the present:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
 Disorderly fleshy and sensual eating drinking and breeding,
 No sentimentalist no stander above men and women or apart
 from them no more modest than immodest.

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
 Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Whoever degrades another degrades me and whatever is done
 or

said returns at last to me,
And whatever I do or say I also return.

Through me the afflatus surging and surging through me the
current and index.

I speak the password primeval I give the sign of democracy;
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counter-
part of on the same terms.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs,
Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
And of the threads that connect the stars – and of wombs, and of the
fatherstuff,
And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,
Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts voices veiled, and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured. (*LG 1855 48*)

It is tempting to read this passage as an example of narcissism, a celebration of the self as a spectacle for others. The reiteration of the first-person in both subject and object form makes the mission of democratic redemption revolve around Whitman, who, in turn, becomes a messianic figure through which humanity will, in the final hour, be “clarified and transfigured.” Indeed, such a reading appears confirmed by the passage’s enactment of an equality in line with Christian visions of salvation: the lowest become the highest insofar as they partake of the body and spirit of the messiah; sin and degradation dissolve in his infinite charity and give way to spiritual health. “Clarified” would modify “transfigured” in such a way as to make the body of Whitman into a spiritual solvent,

eliminating the impurities associated with the degradation of the quotidian everyday. Yet the opening lines radically undermine such a reading: Whitman is no exceptional individual but only “*an* American, one of the roughs, a kosmos [...] no stander above men and women or apart/from them [...]” (emphasis added). Nor is this displacement merely a matter of multiplying messiahs, of disseminating the power of Christ into a thousand transcendent beings. These lines refuse any transcendent relation to the people. The figure of the poet is not only of the people in the sense of being formally equal to them (a like being) but also in the sense of being inextricable from them (being with them): Whitman is a body among bodies, and even if his body performs the function of the poet, this function, as I argued above, is always already in the process of being disseminated, shared out into a collective task. This refusal of transcendence, this affirmation of immersion, indicates itself in the recourse to the flesh as a common element of life and in the syntactical merging generated by an absence of commas: “Disorderly fleshy and sensual eating drinking and breeding.” The democracy Whitman heralds is as much a matter of solidarity, or the generation of commonality, as equality. Inversely, the equality articulated in the final lines of the passage requires commonality as its necessary, if not sufficient basis.

This commonality is a project, a materialist teleology in which the end, or aim, is not given in advance but constantly re-created through practice. Indeed, this teleology without a telos is integral to the concept of a singular America, for the latter does not indicate a prefabricated America whose realization amounts to a simple revelation but an encounter with an alterity that is intimate, or immanent, yet simultaneously foreign, even

otherworldly – that which in America is more than America. The lines in which Whitman calls for the breaking down of all barriers (“Unscrew the locks from the door!/Unscrew the doors themselves from the jambs!”) constitute a performative statement generating a common space beyond the division between public and private spheres, a realm of intimacy shared between a multitude of equals. Rather than an image of democracy as the institutional mediation and regulation of a set of diverse identities, Whitman articulates a democracy of the people grounded in the immediate connections and participations between bodies. Yet this tactile immediacy of flesh does not translate to a communalism founded upon pure and absolute presence. Such a foundation would imply a sameness, or at least an identity, uniting the community in terms of a shared essence, but, throughout the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, democratic collectivity is not a given but a connection-by-connection process, teleologically-oriented in terms not only of equality but also in terms of a valorization of generation, of life as productivity (“of wombs, and of the/fatherstuff”). The teleological thrust of the passage is, thus, double: it is a movement realizing the power of generation inhering in all life, in every body, and it consists of a movement abolishing the separation of high and low, by making the low high, or by realizing the low as always already high. This is one manner of reading the above passage’s claim to “speak the password primeval” and to “give the sign of democracy”: if “sign” suggests a sense of futurity, or a prophetic gesture towards what democracy may become, this futurity is nevertheless tied to the “primeval,” a word suggesting not only the *fons et origo* of things but a primitiveness, a primalness. In other words, the future of democracy is in its past insofar as the latter is understood as the

potentiality of a new world. It is this inhering of the future in the past, in *history*, that makes Whitman's teleology *materialist*.

Yet even if we understand this passage in terms of a materialist teleology, even if we admit Whitman's immersion in the multitude, the messianic impulse of the passage is inescapable. The imperative mode and the shift to the future tense, as well as the discourse of redemption, imply a gap between the present and the future, a gap in which Whitman would appear to be the privileged mediator, a vanguard forcing the people onwards towards the realization of a democracy to come. A closer analysis, however, reveals a more complex state of affairs. The future inhabits the present, impelling the present beyond itself, forcing the present to realize itself beyond itself, but this future is not the disembodied image of a transcendent paradise, nor the mechanical unfolding of a concrete necessity; it is the expression of the powers of present beings insofar as they intensify themselves and approach the threshold at which they become other. In this sense, then, Whitman's "I" is *exemplary but not exceptional*: the figure of the example is always one of many, a member of a set, yet, at the same time just beyond the set, at its threshold, embodying the extreme potential of a *type* of being.¹⁸⁶ In the case of Whitman's poetry, we might say that the exemplary democrat is the one who lives by the maxims, "Whoever degrades another degrades me" and "I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counter-/part of on the same terms" – which we can call, respectively, the maxims of commonality and of equality. The "I," then, may be a subject in the grammatical sense, but it does not imply the substantiality of a substratum or the fixation of an identity typically attributed to the subject in political philosophy (especially liberal

political philosophy). Rather than preexisting these maxims as a ground or source, the subject is an *effect* of them, a *process* of rebellious affirmation, i.e., a subjectivization.

The democratic body, then, is double: on the one hand, it consists of the powers of mutation and connection, of differentiation and commonality, insofar as they exist in present social conditions; on the other hand, the democratic body is thrown into the future, the forceful expression of the maxims of commonality and equality in their leveling of the present and opening up of a radically other future. In this sense, we can read the phrase, “I give the sign of democracy,” as an indication of a utopian mode of allegory. The “sign of democracy” is not merely a detachable part of speech but rather Whitman’s body taken in its equivocal status as both the organized capacity for action and a set of signifiers. In other words, Whitman’s language is filled with statements which self-reflexively loop back onto the process of enunciation. Whitman’s language is not merely the representation of a reality to which it refers mimetically, indexically, or otherwise. It plays with its own power of genesis, and this linguistic power, the power of the voice, is indistinguishable from the other powers of the body. This equivocal body functions as a set of practices that act on the present, weaving the people together in a radically democratic project, only insofar as it also acts as a sign of a future whose existence is only potential (but a potentiality of the actual). “Walt Whitman” is one of the people, one body among many bodies composing the democratic flesh, yet his singular name also acts as the signature of a democracy to come. And if the *Leaves of Grass* of 1855 is in some sense a personal testimony regarding the possibilities of such a democracy, we should also recall that in this edition the name “Walt Whitman” does not

appear on the book's cover but only within the poems (and for the first time, in the above-quoted lines from "Song of Myself") as if to say that anyone, any body, could exemplify the coming democracy, so long as she live by its maxims.

In *Leaves of Grass*, and especially in the 1855 edition, the power of democracy – that is, the power of the nation to realize democracy – has as its necessary historical condition the event of the American Revolution. America names for Whitman not only a geographic entity or a particular government but a new social nature, and with that nature, the possibility of a new politics. I have already gestured to this in the previous section by showing how Whitman's poetry combines individuality and commonality in a biopolitical democracy. (However, it should be noted that this privileging of America as birthplace of a new form of democracy risks sliding all too easily into an American exceptionalism that would make the United States the exclusive owner of democracy as such, that is, it risks subsuming a singular America into American exceptionalism.) From this perspective, the utopian quality of America derives from the gap that opens up between the Old World (or the European structures of government, especially monarchy, falling under that heading) and the New World (which for Whitman signifies a problematic blend of blank slate and native culture, i.e., Native American culture).

Yet, for Whitman, the American Revolution is not merely the presupposition, or *terra firma*, upon which his poetry conducts itself. The utopia that the American Revolution heralds never arrives in Whitman's poetry but always shines like a nearby star whose light his language endeavors to capture. More than a dead past inhabiting the present, the American Revolution stands as the horizon of the future, as an excessive

future haunting a retreating past. Whitman's poetry attempts to resurrect this future past, to reopen the antagonism of the American Revolution in order to fulfill its potentiality. As Betsy Erkkila argues in *Whitman: The Political Poet*, the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is born less of a sense of triumphalism than of anxiety, and at moments even despair, regarding the future of America: "It was, at least in part, out of his desire to revive the dead body of republican America that he turned his main energies in 1854 to completing the poems of *Leaves of Grass*. The poems were not, as is commonly assumed, a product of Whitman's unbounded faith in the democratic dream of America; on the contrary, they were an impassioned response to the signs of the death of republican traditions he saw throughout the land and his growing fear that the ship of American liberty had run aground" (67). Erkkila details how in his poetry prior to *Leaves of Grass* (e.g., "Song for Certain Congressmen" and "Blood-Money"), Whitman indicts his contemporary America for the institution of slavery, the dominance of market capitalism, and the entrenchment of political parties. Whitman sees these institutions as eclipsing the republican virtues of cooperation and autonomy that he associates not only with the American Revolution but also the French Revolution and the 1848 revolutions (cf. Whitman's "Resurgemus" [1850], rewritten and reprinted in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* as "Europe: *The 72nd and 73rd years of these States*"). Whitman's despair reaches its most hyperbolic moment in the poem, "A Boston Ballad," in which Whitman summons the ghosts of revolution past to condemn the corruption of the present ("What troubles you, Yankee Phantoms?" [LG 1855, 135]) and then goes on to imagine the return of King George as a living dead creature announcing the end of America's

experiment in democracy. Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass* is an attempt to rescue the virtues of the American body politic from the spreading corruption of capitalism, slavery, and the neutralization of political action by the party system; it is an arena of ghosts in which the specters of democratic revolution wrestle the specters of a coming tyranny.¹⁸⁷

For Whitman, then, the utopia of biopolitical democracy is, at one and the same time, in the past and in the future; it is the future of the past, which his poetry seeks to raise up by repeating the antagonism of revolution in the present. Yet repetition is not return, and Whitman's words do not attempt to project the past as a spectacle for the present, even if they occasionally resort to parading the past before the present as a reminder of a former vitality. To understand Whitman's work as a "reminder of life" means following the labor of language in *Leaves of Grass* as it attempts to realize the life of the past in the present and for the future, or as Whitman writes in the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*: "The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet . . . he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson . . . he places himself where the future becomes present" (12, 1855 LG). Whitman often speaks of the necessity of "perfect candor" and of adhering to "the facts," yet this realistic impulse remains inextricable from a utopian impulse: things are not what they are by remaining the same, or by retaining particular objective forms; they exist as a *process of change* in which the poet "realizes" them by exposing them to the future inhering in them as an inheritance of the past. As the word "realize" suggests, such an operation is not

neutral, not a matter of mere definition. Instead, it implies an action of selection in the form of a division between what is living and what is dead in a being.

Yet the division between the living and the dead is not homologous to the division between the present and the past; the past may, in fact, be more alive than the present, a point implied in Whitman's recourse to Christian rhetoric of resurrection. Indeed, the order of actions in this passage (the realization of life's potential follows resurrection: "Rise and walk before me that I may realize you") suggests that it is only after repeating the revolutionary event, after reopening the antagonism of the American Revolution, that life may be realized. As with Burroughs's notion of "retroactive utopia," what is at stake is not a nostalgic vision of the past but rather the kind of fidelity to an event (or, more precisely, to the possibilities, the potentialities, inhering in event) which can only find its actualization in an inventive repetition: the production of a new form of life as the realization of historical possibilities. The dead to which Whitman alludes, then, is what in the past-present continuum fails to involve itself in the future, understood as the expression of bodily potentiality, while the act of realizing life returns the present to the future by way of repeating the past *differently*. In this light, time is not reducible to the continuum of the past and present, be it arranged in cyclical or linear terms, for time is also the flight of the instant (*kairos*) as it breaks away from the reproduction of the same in a moment of innovation. The present is not merely an accumulation of history but also a process of becoming, an incarnation of the not-yet, which may inhere in the past as well as the present.¹⁸⁸ This delivering of the history over to the future, this exposure of beings to the life in them that overflows them, is what I am calling utopian expressionism.

In Whitman, utopian expressionism is biopolitical because it involves a political struggle over life itself. Life itself should not be understood as a given, as a fixed and static content that can be defined once and for all. (Such an understanding would leave in the domain of more canonical vitalisms, such as the *Lebensphilosophie* of Wilhelm Dilthey.) Nor should expression be understood in terms of a one-to-one correspondence between form and content, or representation and being. Rather, the very act of defining life, or what it means to live, is at stake in biopolitical discourse or action. Utopian expressionism, then, is prospective not in the sense that it is oriented towards a given future but in the more radical sense in which it interrogates the ground of social and political being (for Whitman, the nation inaugurated by the American Revolution) to seek out the points of inconsistency in the social field making possible a radically other social and political future. The future of democracy is haunted by the paradox that the realization of life, the intensification of its vitality or, in dialectical terms, the moment when life is not only in itself but also for itself, is also the inauguration of an *other life* – a life that inhabits America as its democratic potential, yet which cannot be captured by representation, that is, life as *constitutive excess*. Above, I argued that the constitutive excess of life consists of a frenzied movement of generation in and between bodies through which singularity and commonality are conjoined and through which beings exist only insofar as they constantly remake themselves. Yet such a description obscures the fact that in the 1855 *Leaves*, Whitman never conjures up images of life without also engaging in polemical political decisions. The poet as democrat expresses life but only insofar as he or she also follows the democratic maxims of equality and commonality

(indicated above) and the maxim of life, “It is not they who give the life . . . it is you who give the life.” In other words, Whitman’s poetry articulates a political project that expresses life in order to realize democracy; it engages in a biopolitical struggle to affirm a life to come.

More than being the description of a given state of affairs, Whitman’s biopolitical democracy constitutes a process of antagonism. From his earliest poetry on, Whitman predicates the existence of America on the movement of democracy, so that America is only insofar as it involves the realization of democracy, the material struggle for its achievement. Whitman states this conviction succinctly in *Democratic Vistas*: “I shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms” (CW, 954). The convertibility of America and democracy does not, however, consist of a simple correspondence between essence and existence, as if to speak of America were, essentially, to speak of democracy. At least, such is not the case in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, though, as I discuss below, Whitman veers in this direction at moments in his later writing. If as I have argued “democracy” is a term simultaneously utopian and antagonistic within Whitman’s corpus, then America itself needs to be understood as antagonistic and utopian in this context. That is, in our own terms, there is not one America but two, not only the America of American exceptionalism but also a singular America: America as that which in itself is more than itself; an abolition (*qua* “realization”) of national identity that, rather than being wholly negative, is the herald of an America to come. (We might also add a third America to this list, the dialectical partner or internal negation of American exceptionalism: a criticism of the American nation-state that rather than illuminating

systemic alternatives, in actuality, shores up the present system; this America is the basis of the liberal mode of critique exemplified by the work of the New Americanists.) What is so remarkable about Whitman's poetry is the way in which it places its faith in the nation, without for all that conceding to the consensus of the present or to a conception of the U.S. as always already the perfect democracy.

When Whitman writes, "I give the sign of democracy;/By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counter-/part of on the same terms," he breaks with American exceptionalism and inaugurates the course of a singular America. Whitman's resurrection of the American Revolution, far from an attempt to restore a previous proper America, consists in extracting the singular potential of America from the exceptional containment of the state and capital. From this perspective, the opening poem of the 1855 *Leaves* (the poem that will eventually be named, "Song of Myself") might be understood as the groundwork of this political project: it maps the social relationships of Whitman's contemporary America, revealing the excess of a potential America, a *not-yet* America, in the bodies of the present. It indicates the real movement of another America, above and beyond the negative totality of liberalism and capitalism, but it also indicates the difficulties of such a movement, the constraints imposed on it by capitalism (with its restriction of life to the production of profit) and by the state (with its exclusionary, identifying, and confining logic of citizenship).

In the poems that follow "Song of Myself," such as the poems which would eventually be entitled "A Song for Occupations" and "I Sing The Body Electric," we discover more programmatic political engagements. In these poems, one sees the crossing

of utopia and biopolitics in the form of language that calls on bodies to realize their powers in struggle. Whitman defends life against procedures – especially liberal-capitalist ones – that would try to fix and contain life in terms of capitalist equivalence, gender hierarchy, or racial hierarchy. Yet the defense of life is always its (re-)organization through the (re-)inauguration of the people as an emergent social actor. In other words, there is a tension between addressing life as that force harbored in bodies in excess of present modes of social and political organization and waiting to be given form, to be realized for themselves (life as vitalist substance), *and* addressing life as that which is to come, as that which would appear with the arrival of other social and political organizations (life as event). Whitman's utopian expressionism is defined by this tension, and its literary implications lie in the way that it tends to annihilate the descriptive powers of language in favor of its performative powers, or in the overriding of the indicative mode by the proliferation of subjunctive, imperative, and conditional statements. In this case, to speak of biopolitical democracy is to speak of an unstable conjunction between bodies, life, and language, a precarious combination recalling Ludwig Wittgenstein's comment that a form of language is a form of life, with the added corollary (already articulated by Wittgenstein) that language must be understood in this case pragmatically as action, and not as a mere conduit for sense or meaning. The life which Whitman invokes and convokes is never life as it *is*, but always life *otherwise*.¹⁸⁹

In "A Song for Occupations," Whitman stages a defense of the equality of different occupations, regardless of the social statuses associated with them. The poem makes clear that whether the labor involved is manual or intellectual, whether it is

gendered male or female, whether racialized black, white or brown, all occupations are equally valuable, equally worthy of poetic consideration. The poem, then, can be read simultaneously in terms of its modification of poetic history and in terms of its social impetus: it generates an equality of subject matter, destabilizing the constraints of classical lyrical poetry, with its tendency to occupy itself solely with aristocratic sentiments (or in the case of American poetry, with natural beauty or terror and the primitive, as in Longfellow); and it also interrogates the differential valuation of life under the conditions of the emerging industrial capitalist economy. The critical movement of this poem relies upon poetic procedures of mixture. The paratactic jumbling together of occupations in a seemingly indiscriminate series of associations generates a democratic creole in which the activities of a prostitute and those of a scholar are equally invaluable, equally the product of common and immeasurable human powers.¹⁹⁰

There are, however, different modes of equality. It is possible to interpret “A Song for Occupations” as asserting a mode of political equality relying upon capitalist conditions, a formal equality privileging an abstract conception of “opportunity.” Capitalism entails a leveling tendency, a dismantling of the “natural” hierarchy of castes or estates in favor of the equivalence of exchange mediated by money. Whitman’s indiscriminate lists of occupations, we might continue, are homologous to the operations of capitalist exchange: they generate a chain of equivalences in which equality is a consequence of the universal attribution of money value to diverse activities of labor – everything is, theoretically, worth something. According to this logic, even the evident inequality of wages between occupations in different sectors of the division of labor (e.g.,

the wages of domestic labor as compared to skilled labor in manufactures during the early nineteenth century) implies no contradiction, for the poem asserts formal equality – equality of opportunity – rather than real equality. It valorizes the potential for anyone to be occupied in any way, not the actually existing conditions inhering in such occupations. Lines such as the following would seem to pertain to a potential and not an actual situation: “The wife – and she is not one jot less than the husband,/The daughter – and she is just as good as the son,/The mother – and she is every bit as much as the father” (*LG 1855 89*). In the mid-nineteenth century, even basic forms of gender equality were rather distant on the horizon. We need only recall the inability in many states for women to inherit property, their lack of suffrage, and their exclusion from most occupations. Whitman’s poetry would seem to imply a subjunctive mood in which declarative statements of equality find their truth less in present social situations than in the landscape of fantasy and wish. Whitman plays the role of ideologue, crafting the poetic surplus of fantasy that endows capitalism with a shining halo.

Yet I would contend that such a reading is fundamentally inadequate to the complexities of Whitman’s poetic labor. Although Whitman sometimes constructs statements of quantitative equivalence between human beings and between their occupations (“The wife – and she is not one jot less than the husband...”), the poem repeatedly undercuts such equivalence: “I take no sooner a large price than a small price . . . I will have/my own whoever enjoys me” (*1855 LG 87*). Parodying the capitalist sale of labor (the wage form), Whitman asserts an indifference to the differential value of the wage in favor of the potentiality of production, or in Marxist language, he displaces an

emphasis on exchange value with an emphasis on the life making it possible, or labor-power. Whereas capitalist equality – better termed, equivalence – amounts to the mediated division between a set of identities, the equality of “A Song for Occupations” consists of the construction of a fabric of being common to a series of singularities.

There can be no distinction made between formal and real equality through recourse to the distinction between potential and actual, because Whitman makes potentiality actual by realizing it in the common life of human beings, or, more precisely, in a common language that is at once cause and effect of a common life. Whitman writes that he intends not to offer money or a commodity in exchange for the time of the reader but rather the very source of value: “I bring what you much need, yet always have,/I bring not money or amours or dress or eating but I bring as/good;/And send no agent or medium and offer no representative of/ value – but offer the value itself” (89). The poem distinguishes value from its fixed incarnation or its representation, yet it also distances it from the transcendent specter of capital (Marx’s vampire incapable of generating value except by capturing living labor). Whitman may present the reader with value itself, but he also makes it clear that what he presents the reader is always already in the reader. It is that which is simultaneously the source of value, yet irreducible to value in a quantitative form. The poem goes on to qualify this source of value as a certain quiddity, an indistinct yet singular something, which can be found everywhere and at every moment, yet forbids strict definition. Whitman even admits that this particular something eludes writing itself: “There is something that comes home to one now and perpetually,/It is not what is printed or preached or discussed it eludes/discussion

and print,/It is not to be put in a book It is not in this book” (LG 1855 90). Yet if this something eludes writing, poetic writing, nevertheless, alludes to it: “I do not know what it is except that it is grand, and that it is/happiness,/[...]And not something which may yet be retracted in a certain/contingency” (LG 1855 90). Whatever this quiddity may be, it possesses at least three traits: it is always already in one, even if one does not recognize it or has become alienated from it; it is in excess of actual forms, yet inheres in them, if only by allusion; and it denies the contingency of capitalist social relations, relations in which “free labor” implies the precariousness involved in selling (or not being able to sell) one’s labor.

In Whitman, value itself is immeasurable and invaluable, though form-producing and immanent. Whitman makes clear that when he speaks of value itself, he refers not to a quantitative degree applied to an entity but to the very source of modifications of the world, whether they be numerical or not. This is so because value, under the conditions of capitalism and political modernity, is what Marx calls, labor power (or, here, subjective labor): “*Objectified labor*, i.e. labor which is *present in space*, can also be opposed, as *past labor*, to labor which is *present in time*. If it is to be present in time, alive, then it can be present only as the *living subject*, in which it exists as capacity, as possibility; hence as *worker*” (Grundrisse 272). Labor power is not the quantitative measure of production but the capacity to produce insofar as it is embodied in the worker. Nor is labor power merely instrumental in the sense of being reducible to a unilateral and direct correlation between a means and an end; the term also includes complex forms of labor, such as modes of communicative or symbolic labor in which the distinction between means and end blur

and activities become ends in themselves (as is the tendency in poetry). Labor power is life itself, for in Whitman as in Marx, life is the potential to create in time, the capacity to interact with others – to exist in common – in order to reinvent the world and oneself. Synthesizing matters, we can say that both the capitalist value-form and labor-power/life are defined by their relations to potentiality, but whereas the latter is a positive relation, the former is a negative relation, or a privation of potentiality. Whitman writes as much in the most polemical moment of “A Song for Occupations,” a moment in which the poem asserts the equality of human beings through the intensity of their ability to create and give life:

Old institutions these art libraries legends collections – and
 the
 practice handed along in manufactures will we rate
 them
 so high?
 Will we rate our prudence and business so high? I have no
 objection,
 I rate them as high as the highest but a child born of a woman
 and man I rate beyond all rate.

We thought our Union grand and our Constitution grand;
 I do not say they are not grand and good – for they are,
 I am this day just as much in love with them as you,
 But I am eternally in love with you and with all my fellows upon
 the earth.

We consider the bibles and religions divine I do not say they
 are not divine,
 I say they have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still,
 It is not they who give the life it is you who give the life;
 Leaves are not more shed from trees or trees from the earth than
 they are shed out of you. (*LG 1855 91*)

This passage asserts an immanent and common source of creation in human beings, a capacity to create not only technological artifacts but also those moments of

transcendence, or divinity, usually attributed to higher beings. The language does not deny transcendence as such but relocates it in the earthly so that the leaves of trees, the Constitution, and the Union exist in the same metonymic plane as religions and bibles. Rhetorically, however, the “this may be so . . . but” rhythm of the passage implies a scission between the high and low, or between high culture, business, or religion and the lowly child or the everyday man and woman. Whitman makes an analytical distinction homologous to the one that Marx makes between objective labor and subjective labor, or dead labor and living labor: “I rate them [the supposedly transcendent structures of religion, business, and culture] as high as the highest . . . but a child born of a woman/and man I rate beyond all rate.” Transcendent structures such as capital are not the source of life, not the divine power of creation, but rather the alienation of creation from itself, the fixation and reification of life-giving activities over and above life. Whereas the life reified in transcendent structures is a measurable effect of past actions (capable of being rated), life itself is beyond rate, for it is the intensive and immeasurable capacity to generate time and to invest time in the creation of entities. Thus, in a radical ontological displacement, the poem speaks of religion – an institution that, at least in monotheistic traditions, claims for itself the very origin of time (or, more precisely, the proper shelter of the origin of time, the church) – as the effect of human activity: “I say they [“the bibles and religions divine”] have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still,/It is not they who give the life . . . it is you who give the life.” Religions exist in the past and the future tense, as products of human life that have been created and may continue to be created but which always come back to a present tense (“it is you who give

the life”) from which time eternal unfolds. Whitman’s utopian expressionism is, therefore, resolutely grounded in the present, even as it functions as the herald of a radically other future.

The equality of “A Song for Occupations” is both potential and real, if not necessarily fully actualized, for it is not a matter of equivalence between degrees (religion is more or less than this child) but of temporality and production (religion is no more than the child, for the child makes the religion, with others). Whitman generates a critique of hierarchy and heteronomy by making his poem a reminder of, or an allusion to, the common human power from which unfold the structures of oppression. The political import of this poetic maneuvering becomes even more evident, as the poem shifts attention towards specific governmental structures. Whitman assures his reader that the President and Congress, laws and courts, are all not only there *for* the common beings of America but also *from* them, as an effect of them: “All doctrines, all politics and civilization exurge from you,/All sculpture and monuments and anything inscribed anywhere are/tallied in you” (*LG 1855 92*). The “tallied,” or actualized, forms of government, social relationships, and aesthetics “exurge” (a word suggesting the demiurgic, a power of creation) from the singular yet generic source of the “you”. The maxim of equality (“I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counter-/part of on the same terms”) inhering in Whitman’s declaration of equality between occupations, thus, depends upon the maxim of life (“It is not they who give the life . . . it is you who give the life”): equality is not the effect of inherited forms or institutions, such as parliamentary democracy, which mediates between diverse particularities; it is not a

chain of formal equivalences, or a set of opportunities that can accept entities regardless of their qualities or attributes; equality is a movement, or process, through which objects return to their conditions of emergence, to the present instant of life as potentiality from which creation unfolds. The tension between sameness and difference implied in the maxim of equality – for it entails a correspondence between “counterparts” on “the same terms” – refuses the mediation of hierarchical social structures; it is a productive tension in which entities can express themselves as equal (“on the same terms”) without reducing themselves to a common measure. In Whitman, equality arises from relations without subordination between incommensurable beings; not from the maintenance of a division and distance between the occupations of beings as in liberalism but from a sharing out of life in which the common remains common, even as it multiplies into a series of distinct singularities or individuals.

In “A Song for Occupations,” Whitman tends towards the valorization of life as a force of creation that is immanent, egalitarian, and antinomian. The utopia of the poem finds its home in the potentiality that inheres in the given structures of the world and yet at the same time overflows them. Life acts as the basis for a biopolitical democracy existing on the horizon in the promise of a “realization” of common potentialities. Its creative power is only matched by the antagonistic force “beyond all rate” through which it negates the measures and constrictions of capital and sovereignty. In other words, the utopian expressionism of the poem uses language that recognizes and solicits a preexisting life, a formless and powerful life still seeking its proper form. In the terms of constitutional scholarship, it views constitutional organizations (or forms of government,

but also, I would argue, forms of property and economic organization) as a limit checking the power and sovereignty of the multitude. Such a view – common to a number of thinkers, including Baruch Spinoza and Antonio Negri – accords with my argument that Whitman’s poetry stands in opposition to a liberal understanding of the political, which, in the case of constitutional scholarship, would typically entail the liberal theory of positive constitutionalism – common to Jean Bodin and James Madison – that makes formal constitutions an active instrument in generating the people, if not the source of the people.¹⁹¹ Democracy, in this case, consists of the powers of the people which can only be captured, never expressed, by state and economic institutions.

Yet the poem also seems to paper over the gap between the present as unrealized democracy and the future as realized democracy; it superimposes the latter upon the former, a gesture which risks reducing political activity to the mere recognition of a content held in suspense. Furthermore, such a forced reconciliation – a phrase reminding one not only of short-circuited dialectics but also of the reservations into which Native Americans were forced – signifies the elision of language, or of the signifier, as a productive activity generating new social forms. We might say that the syntactic equivalence, allusion to a common, unrepresentable life-source, and imperative mood in “A Song for Occupations” stands in contradiction not only to its semantic narrowness (at least in terms of *who* is represented) but also to a confusion of the indicative and subjunctive moods. Nor is it only the political which is at stake, for it also the poetic, or language as action, which risks being reduced to a mere means, a mere conduit, of a political truth. A bad utopianism of realized harmony risks overtaking the resistance

implied by biopolitical democracy. I now want to show how “I Sing The Body Electric” corrects for this danger, by inscribing in the flesh of the democratic body the gap between present and future – a tattoo of the accumulated histories of inequality. This gap, however, is not an abdication of utopian expressionism and biopolitical democracy but rather the insistence that democracy *qua* utopia can in the present only be understood as struggle. This struggle takes place in the tense movement of conjunction and disjunction between forms of language and forms of life, between the word and the body. In “I Sing the Body Electric,” we witness the struggle for the production of the democratic body take the form of an act of political education and of poetic prophesy.

Throughout “I Sing the Body Electric,” Whitman elaborates an ethic of vitality in which the recurring question is whether or not a singular form of life is free of corruption, whether or not it lives up to its own bodily perfection. The opening and closing of the poem echo each other in raising this question. The opening reads:

The bodies of men and women engirth me and I engirth
 them,
 They will not let me off nor I them till I go with them and
 respond to them and love them.

Was it dreamed whether those who corrupted their own live bodies
 could conceal themselves?
 And whether those who defiled the living were as bad as they who
 defiled the dead? (*LG 1855 116*)

And the poem’s close reads:

If life and the soul are sacred the human body is sacred;
 And the glory and sweet of a man is the token of manhood
 untainted,
 And in man or woman a clean strong firmfibred body is beautiful
 as the most beautiful face.

Have you seen the fool that corrupted his own live body? or the
 fool that corrupted her own live body?
 For they do not conceal themselves, and cannot conceal
 themselves.

Who degrades or defiles the living human body is cursed,
 Who degrades or defiles the body of the dead is not more cursed.
 (*LG 1855 123*)

These two passages, and the poem as a whole, elaborate an ethic of the body in which the theological categories of good and evil, of purity and corruption, are translated into a matter of health. The act of defiling the dead functions as a theological threshold in which the corporeal and the spiritual blur together, for the interment of the dead, the settling of accounts with life, marks the passage from the shadow life of the earth to the true life of the heavens, or from the prelude of secular time to the finally realized time of the afterlife. Whitman, however, upsets these dichotomies by generalizing the interference between the corporeal and the spiritual: “Who degrades or defiles the living human body is cursed,/Who degrades or defiles the body of the dead is not more cursed.” No distinction between harming the body and harming the soul holds, for spirit inheres in the body as but one expression of life, and to harm life in any respect implies harming both its corporeal and rational-spiritual expressions. In Whitman, the body is always the “live body,” an expression suggesting that the body is invested with and full of potentiality. The adjectival attribution of life to the body stands in opposition to a discourse, whether theological or secular, that would make the body merely a figure of finitude or mortality, rather than the incarnation of powers which though they take finite forms are nevertheless infinite in the sense that (as we saw in “A Song for Occupations”) they are the source of all creation.

What, then, does the poem mean by the corruption of the body? What is the evil against which it asks us to guard? Such questions are extremely difficult to answer, for if “I Sing The Body Electric” begins and ends on a note of moral admonishment, everything in between is of the order of joyous affirmation. Whitman celebrates the beauty of male and female forms, catalogues a series of vigorous activities that range from “the wrestle of wrestlers” to “girls and mothers and housekeepers in all their exquisite offices,” and repeatedly asserts a desire to touch and embrace all these individuations of flesh. The poem does not imply that there exists a set of taboo practices that degrade the body, such as masturbation, sodomy, or any of the other erotic trespasses of nineteenth century Christian morality. In fact, the poem is filled with allusions to sexual desire and practice: implicitly, in the patient voyeurism of the lyric persona’s gaze; openly, in the “loveflesh/swelling and deliciously aching,/limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous . . . quivering jelly of love . . . white-blow and delirious juice” contained in the description of the “female form” (1855 *LG* 119). Far from a symptom of corruption, sexual activity signals the intensity of life’s movements. Whitman speaks of the “mad filaments” and “ungovernable shoots” of the female form in an unequivocally positive tone, for eroticism is, as usual in Whitman, also the principle of life and creation: “Be not ashamed women . . . your privilege encloses the rest . . . it is the/exit of the rest,/You are the gates of the body and you are the gates of the soul” (1855 *LG* 119). Likewise, the poem describes the male form in terms in which the vigor of physical activity fades seamlessly into erotic passions. Whitman’s corporeal ethic, whatever its precise contours, does not involve the condemnation of taboo practices.

The ethic of the body might be understood as the transposition of the theological position positing the nonexistence of evil into worldly terms.¹⁹² Evil is not an entity or a subject. It *is* only insofar as it limits the good, insofar as it hinders life, which is to say that evil lacks autonomous existence, that it is merely the effect of the good pulling back from its own exertions. Evil, or in Whitman's words, corruption, is but the shadow cast by good's failure to perfect itself. Such an understanding accords not only with "I Sing The Body Electric" but with the 1855 *Leaves* in general: when Whitman rails against injustice, when he trumpets the necessity of democratic action, he condemns only insofar as he also affirms, and on the basis of that affirmation. It makes more sense, then, to follow Friedrich Nietzsche in speaking of good versus bad¹⁹³, rather than good versus evil. Whereas the latter pair tends to lead towards the substantialization of the positive and the negative into subjects (the hero and the villain, Christ and Satan, etc.), as well as to a belief in a transcendent source of such division, good and bad remain immanent to each other, bad being but the failure of the good, but the failure of life to live itself with intensity, to live for itself. Whitman's ethics of the body is a vitalism and a naturalism: it depends upon the examination of the qualitative differences obtaining between different degrees of the intensity of physical or spiritual action – or in Whitman's words, "The expectation of the vital and great can only be satisfied by the demeanor of the vital and great" (23, 1855 LG). The circularity of this line suggests that Whitman's corporeal ethics is itself circular, turning the body back on itself in a form of autoactivity, which, if circular, is nevertheless inventive, that is, Whitman shows the body playing with itself so as to remake itself and remake the world. Indeed, as we shall see in the chapters that

follow, while there is no single form which defines a singular America, the concept has as its condition of possibility what Foucault calls an “arts of existence” in which the body reflexively opens itself to the possibility of radical transformation.

The question of whether or not life satisfies “the expectation of the vital and great” is, however, inextricable from Whitman’s polemical democratic maxims (of equality, commonality, and life). If the notion of the bad resists reification as a substance, the task nevertheless remains for the democratic poet of drawing the line between corruption and health. In this decisive action, ethics becomes political, because it disturbs the social order by producing demands that require the transformation not only of ideologies and beliefs but also of social conditions and economic structures. In “I Sing The Body Electric,” the polemical action of the poem operates largely by way of a series of implicit negations: if man and woman are equal, it is because the poem struggles against the gender norms that make the power of women depend on their patriarchal proximity to the masculine; if the workers of the world are as great as managers and political leaders, it is because the poem in its valorization of the body refuses the subordination of manual labor to intellectual labor (or, for that matter, the very distinction between the two); and if sexual relations between men are as acceptable as those between man and woman, it is because the polymorphous perversity of the poem denies strict normalizations of sexual practice in terms of identity, let alone any hierarchy of identities. In every case, the poem radically refuses organizations/practices that hinder the expression of life or that subordinates a form of life in terms of its identity.

Yet the very act of refusal depends upon the surplus of life over that which limits it. The foundation of the negative upon the positive becomes clear in the pair of slave auction scenes in which the implicit polemical action of the poem becomes explicit. If these scenes are exceptions to Whitman's otherwise completely affirmative tone (exceptions which mimic the tone of the moral admonishment in the opening and closing of the poem), they nonetheless indicate the positive limit upon which Whitman's democracy rests, for it is only in the utopian destruction of inequality, in the realization of the highest in the lowest, that the potentiality of democratic power becomes actuality, that is, real possibility. The poem, thus, does not describe the slave on the basis of what he lacks but on the basis of his power, and in respect to the limitation of that power by imposed bondage:

A slave at auction!
I help the auctioneer the sloven does not half know his
business.

Gentlemen look on this curious creature,
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for
him,
For him the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one
animal or plant,
For him the revolving cycles truly and steadily rolled.

In that head the allbaffling brain;
In it and below it the making of the attributes of heroes. (*1855 LG*
121)

On the one hand, the poem homes in on the inequality between the slave and the auctioneer and audience. The slave becomes an inscrutable spectacle, and the ethical and political dilemma centers upon the epistemological difficulty of assigning value to such a "curious creature" and his "allbaffling brain." How is one to put a price on an entity that

escapes not only evaluation but recognition in general? Yet the epistemological dilemma is, in fact, grounded in the ontological commonality between spectator and spectacle: the slave is the product of the same “globe” of which the audience and auctioneer are products. The difference in kind between the slave and those surrounding him comes down to a social difference of degree that is, in the final instance, contingent upon the historically-situated corporeal and spiritual singularities that compose the slave. The slave, in other words, is irreducible to his bondage – as suggested by the singular solitude of the object pronoun “him” as it follows the failure to rate the body of the slave – and if one cannot measure the slave’s worth in financial terms, it is not merely an epistemological difficulty but also a social, ontological, and temporal matter. For as the poem asserts, we do not know what “heroes,” or what vital and life-affirming actions, might emerge from this slave one day. Whitman, like Marx, understands the potentiality of bodies in terms of time, that is, as both the source and effect of time understood not merely as the passive ticking off of the clock but as the very substance of innovative action. From this perspective, the bondage of the slave is a blockage of time, a capturing of the “quintillions of years” and “the revolving cycles” composing his life: the slave’s time is not only not his own but also constricted by the desire to measure his time, to confine it to the profitable pursuits of white, male masters. Emancipation, then, requires a form of equality that would not only forbid the ownership of one person by another but would also generate a space for the autonomous and egalitarian unfolding of time.

Whitman’s critique of slavery strikes a strange note even for contemporary readers, because it does not rest upon the declaration of equality between races defined in

terms of identity. Whereas a liberal critique of racism might begin by positing a set of diverse but equal identities in order to fabricate a public sphere where each identity would tolerate the other (at least insofar as each agrees to certain binding limits), Whitman begins from the interplay between commonality and singularity and from a vigorously tactile – rather than distantly tolerant – form of social intercourse. The poem displaces the colored language of race, or the identification of singular beings according to racial essences, when it refers ambiguously to slave's bodily features as “these limbs, red black or white . . . they are very cunning/in tendon and nerve” (1855 LG 121). The other is not over there; we are all others, and democracy is predicated not on a parceling out of identities but on an intimate and common sharing of differences. Indeed, it is this indiscriminate intimacy that explains Whitman's circulation not only between audience and slave but also auctioneer: Whitman can almost, if not quite, identify with the auctioneer (“I help the auctioneer”), because the distinctions between these various figures are not essential but contingent in respect to relations and activities. It is a question less of fixed subject positions than of the possible transformation of the position and composition of bodily beings. Skin coloration does not imply identity; it is a particular play of appearance, which may have effects, but these effects depend not on natural/theological necessity but on social and political matters. Indeed, the prepositional phrase taking readers below the skin (“in tendon and nerve”) attributes an intelligence that belies racial prejudices that would assign intelligence exclusively to whites.

This disruption of racial identity paves the way for a redefinition of the social as an all-embracing movement of real equality. The poem speaks of the slave's common origin with humanity as a whole:

Within there runs his blood the same old blood . . the same
red running blood;
There swells and jets his heart There all passions and desires
. . all reachings and aspirations:
Do you think they are not there because they are not expressed in
parlors and lecture-rooms?

This is not only one man he is the father of those who shall be
fathers in their turns,
In him the start of populous states and rich republics
Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and
enjoyments.

How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his
offspring
through the centuries?
Who might you find you have come from yourself if you could
trace
back through the centuries? (*LG 1855 122-3*)

From racial ambiguity, the poem moves to a positive vision of miscegenation. The commonality implied by “the same red running blood” gestures towards both past and future, so that blood, we might say, becomes the epitome of a corporeal condensation of time. Once again, Whitman brings his reader to an encounter with an excessive life, a vitality that can only be indicated through the repeated use of superlative phrasing (“all passions and desires/. . all reachings and aspiration”) and vigorous, sex-infused language (“there swells and jets his heart”). These lines couple the insistence on a generic source of humanity with the ever-present possibility of the irruption of singular events through mixture: “Who might you find you have come from yourself if you could trace/ back

through the centuries?” That is, what new social relations, what new activities, thoughts, and forms of life, might emerge from the liberation of this slave, of every slave? If Whitman resists the liberal pluralism that equates diversity with the institutional mediation of identities, he nonetheless also resists the blanching movement that would reduce collective life to the reproduction of the same. The same transforms into the “populous” and the “uncountable,” a multiplication of difference unmediated by identity, yet sharing a common heritage of biological, social, and economic materiality.

Whitman’s corporeal ethics entails a democratic politics of the multitude that refuses not only reactionary defenses of inequality but also liberal negotiations and neutralizations of inequality. As I have argued, the political operates in Whitman’s poetry at the intersection between the explicitly political and the social and economic. The language of *Leaves of Grass* constantly returns the political action to the pre-individual realm of the common in which the state and capital may exist in nascent forms but in which they have not wholly captured, totalized, or otherwise cut life off from its own potentiality. Nor should we understand this realm as prior to politics in the sense of an underdeveloped, yet to be politicized, state of affairs. Playing on a now well-worn slogan, we might say that the impersonal is political. Politics is not added to the preindividual realm of ontology but emerges from it through an enfolding, a doubling back, of the social and economic modes of being upon themselves. *Leaves of Grass* is the writing of a radical democracy in which the real equality of singular social creatures comes into play not through providence but through sustained antagonism, through the incessant “urge” of linguistic action.

The absence of evidence regarding political alternatives within the domain of the liberal nation does not entail the evidence of an absence; or, as Whitman challenges us to think in speaking of the oppressed, “There all passions and desires/. . . all reachings and aspirations:/Do you think they are not there because they are not expressed in/parlors and lecture-rooms?” The question Whitman poses is, thus, not whether or not there exists another social form capable of overcoming present social conditions – such forms exist, if only as the life to come of his writing – but rather: How are we to invent the poetry of a politics capable of sustaining the innovative and rebellious movement of such social forms? How are we to sustain the event of biopolitical democracy, or enter “the merge”? And how, finally, are we to keep on the lookout for the new forms of life that will be the life-blood of a democracy to come: “How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring/through the centuries?”

IV. Adhering to Whitman, Or, Whitman Beyond Whitman

When writing of Whitman, the story often goes: a brave prophet-poet cries out in the wilderness against the bondages that persist in America; he produces a poetry of the American Revolution reborn combined with a proto-populist attention to the life of the ordinary; *but, then*, confronted with the Civil War, confronted with the near-collapse of the great American experiment in democracy, the prophecy falters, the poet tumbles into self-doubt, and the project changes; no longer an antagonistic cry for permanent

revolution, the song changes to a plea for reconciliation, to an appeal to recognize what has already been achieved and what is to come, without the need for struggle, without the risk of strife; the multitude of democratic poets gives way to the elect of poetic genius. This story resolves itself into the assertion of two Whitmans: an early radical Whitman and a late reformist Whitman; the young, fiery political poet and the old, wise religious poet.¹⁹⁴ The basic contours of this narrative form the genre of the reformed revolutionary, the young firebrand who has come to learn the way of the world and given up his foolish longings for utopia.¹⁹⁵

Peter J. Bellis's writing on Whitman brings the thesis of two Whitmans to its extreme conclusion, which, I would argue, is not an aberration but the paradigmatic summation of the narrativizing process involved in the thesis. Bellis argues that where many critics locate the traumatic break between one Whitman and the other in the traumatic irruption of the Civil War, it would be better to conceive of the break as a longer process, beginning in 1856 with the second edition of *Leaves*, involving a shift from a radicalism enacted in the very form of his poetry to a conservatism founded on a sense of loss (the death of soldiers in the Civil War and of Lincoln): "By 1865 and 'Memories of President Lincoln,'" Bellis writes, "his work had been almost entirely reconceived, as a poetry now dependent upon absence and loss, whose politics imply the acceptance of hierarchy and difference as preconditions for the poet's role as representative national figure" (103). It is not so much that Whitman abandons politics altogether but that he no longer identifies poetry with politics, let alone a politics of revolution: "His response [to the Civil War] has risen from the individual to the national

level, as he comes to address the country's collective loss. But he has done so as a solitary elegist, alone in a natural landscape that has displaced the political and social" (170). The poet has become an elegist, the preserver of culture, with culture understood, now, not as the ferment of a democracy to come but as a memorialization of the achievements of a society fixed in a course of slow organic growth. Central in Bellis' account is the oscillation between two narrative tropes: transition as break (the second Whitman is inaugurated in the second edition of *Leaves*) and transition as development (the second Whitman arrives only at the end of a long process of conciliation). In this oscillation, Bellis lays out the split between fiery revolution and conciliatory reform as a shift from a mode of temporality in which the present instant opens out onto a radically other future to a mode of temporality in which a past *durée* carries the future within itself as its organic development, in the same way some nineteenth century biologists held that within an embryo one discovered all of the stages of the development of a species in miniature. What I want to highlight is that both poles suggest that there are two Whitmans, each wholly identical to itself, each a personality and a political position. And the passage from one to the other is the result of a surrender, a giving up on revolution in favor of the "natural" landscape of liberal democracy.

In the present day, this narrative genre of the renunciation of revolution is a common one, most often invoked in reference to the revolutionaries of the sixties, who, the story goes, realizing the impossibility of their utopian dreams, finally surrender to the stubborn reality of social and/or natural human limits (read: Reaganism-Thatcherism, neoliberalism, etc.). Such a narrative rests on a number of assumptions, but perhaps its

central axiom is that failure is of the order of necessity and irreversibility. If the revolution of the sixties failed, it is because it had to fail, and that is the end of the story. If the Civil War signals the end of the American Revolution, the end of the grand experiment in democracy, it is because it had to do so, and that is the end of that story. The image, here, is of a unidirectional straight line bifurcating into two possibilities, one success, the other failure. Even if the contingency of the proverbial fork in the road is acknowledged, the irreversibility of the line's motion carries the seal of fate: the moment arrives, the path is chosen, and history moves on. The duality of decision is contained within a single moment, a moment dividing past from future and guaranteeing the linear flow of time.

Yet I would object to such an understanding on the basis of two points: First, such an understanding of temporality fails to comprehend the moments I discuss above in which Whitman resurrects the American Revolution, a resurrection whose possibility depends on the past and future haunting the present in a way which defies the linear ordering of time. Whitman's poetry – much like Burroughs's late trilogy, his "retroactive utopia" – introduces a reverse causality, that is, he introduces a retroactive force whereby the present acts on the past by realizing the future of the past which has yet to be fulfilled. Whitman does not just invoke the American Revolution as an abstract set of ideals that the present might look to as an example, nor does he think the present as a revision of the past. The present modifies the past which always already inheres in the present as its (spectral) lifeblood; the present completes the past only by reinventing it. We might say that Whitman revolutionizes the revolution, remembering the strange etymological turn

that makes “revolution” signify both a circular motion of restoration or renewal (the revolution of the planets) and an overthrow of the order of things (the construction of a new history), so that it is only in turning back to an origin to discover in it something that is always more than itself (the origin’s originary difference from itself) that the possibility of a radical break introduces itself.

Which brings me to my second point: the thesis of two Whitmans, one early, one late, is untenable not only because of the simplicity of its temporality but also because it neutralizes the two-ness cutting across Whitman’s whole corpus, the two-ness of antagonism. Whitman’s oeuvre cannot be divided into two distinct periods *not* because it would betray some unitary essence to do so but because it betrays the complexity, indeed, the divisiveness, constitutive of his poetry. Here, two-ness is not the opposition between two symmetrical wholes – the early Whitman and the late Whitman, each an integrated personality, or ego – but rather an impersonal antagonism between two poetic and political logics. These logics are liberalism and radical democracy, or American exceptionalism and what I call a singular America. As I have suggested in my readings of Whitman, liberalism is the limit against which the radical democracy Whitman’s poetry stumbles; liberalism reorganizes the powers of revolutionary America so that they can be contained within the mediations of representative governmental mechanisms and the inequalities of capitalist relationships. This reorganization of the body politic is a process of resubjectivizing democracy: liberalism transforms the monstrous commonality of the democratic people into the tamed enclosures of the liberal public with its self-identical monads. It produces individuals (or, more precisely, *individualism*) by capturing,

defining, and delimiting the processes of sharing and relating which constitute life on a more molecular level.

Whitman's poetry engages in a double process of de- and re-subjectivizing consisting, on the one hand, of deconstructing the disciplines of liberalism and capitalism and, on the other, of reorganizing the multitude in the name of a utopian form of antagonism. The basic gesture of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is that of revealing the non-closure of liberalism and capitalism by exposing the powerfulness, the vitality, of the people. In other words, Whitman introduces the signifier "life" as an antagonistic and utopian point around which crystallizes the movements of his language. In my own terms, life is the name of a singular America in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*. On the one hand, life is the void of representation; it is that which liberalism fails to completely subsume or to articulate in terms of identity. It is the molecular, subterranean, preindividual force of existence below the radar of the state, capitalism, and hegemony more generally. On the other hand, life is also surplus, plenitude; it is that which in a body makes that body more than itself, alien to itself in a positive sense. It is the utopian power of bodies to become other, to change so radically that they bring about the existence of another nation.

Life is elsewhere, or, more specifically, life is always an opening to an elsewhere, but that elsewhere is here, in the concrete anticipation of a democracy to come. It is this tension between the here and now of the body and the elsewhere of a democratic body to come – a tension which resonates with what Foucault describes in "The Utopian Body" (cf. Introduction) – that constitutes the motor of Whitman's poetry.

Yet it is necessary to add that this tension becomes complicated by the third term of liberalism as limit. The relationship between this third term and the tension which underlies it is not that of a dialectic between difference and identity, where the identity of democracy would simply realize itself against the limit of liberalism, but that of a displacement, where the life of democracy realizes itself only in becoming other than itself in its antagonism against with a limit that is in some sense a part of it. (I would add that while the third term of liberalism in part defines radical democracy insofar as the latter engages in struggle, this does not preclude the negation or overcoming of liberalism – yet what radical democracy would look like without liberalism is, for now, perhaps unimaginable.) Crucially, none of these terms can be understood independently of the others. Radical democracy is incomplete because it hinges on the anticipation of a radically other future, while liberalism is a delimitation and capture of an excess of life.

The positing of two Whitmans neutralizes the paradox of radical democracy and the antagonism between radical democracy and liberalism by converting interrelated terms into two self-identical and autonomous terms: Whitman the radical and Whitman the conservative. In other words, the two Whitmans thesis translates an antagonism internal to Whitman's poetry into an opposition between extrinsic positions. Such a translation is itself a procedure of liberalism insofar as it produces self-contained identities where there exists commonality and antagonism. The truth of such an operation is that it registers, in distorted form, the antagonism present in Whitman's writing, but it does so at the cost of missing the immanence of the terms of antagonism. In contrast to this liberal mode of interpretation, by understanding Whitman biopolitically, we are able

to attend to the conflicting political logics at play in bodies of *Leaves of Grass*, that is, to the wrestle of diverging modes of producing bodies. These different modalities are not to be understood as extrinsic substances or worlds, but as competing modes of producing *a* world. The biopolitical defining the 1855 edition of *Leaves* combines a process of antagonism with a utopian performativity, constantly reorganizing bodies in the name of equality, commonality, and vitality.

But it must also be admitted that there *is* a change in Whitman as one moves from edition to edition of *Leaves of Grass*, that the process of revision is not merely the refining of a single poetic logic but a struggle. Whitman struggles to hold onto the radical implications of the American Revolution; he struggles to remain faithful to the event, against the temptation to cede to reconciliation and reformation, or to the belief in an America that would naturally progress towards utopian perfection. Indeed, this struggle is already present in the first edition of *Leaves*, in the slippage between the constative and performative functions of language, as well as in the blurring of the indicative, the subjunctive, and the conditional moods. There are several points where one is caught in a situation of undecidability: Is Whitman describing America as it is in the present, or is he calling on it to become what it could be? Is he describing a possibility, or is he naming a reality? This undecidability is not merely an epistemological dilemma but an ontological and political situation. Whitman's concern with the potentiality of bodies, with bodies as organizations of real possibility or power, means that antagonism, or social struggle, takes place in the relation between reality and possibility, between actuality and potentiality. In the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, there are moments where the gap between

these ontological categories nearly closes, where possibility becomes almost identical with reality, potentiality dissolving in the fantasy of fulfillment, of actuality. Yet for every instance of near identity, for every moment of tentative closure, a new moment of antagonism emerges, an imperative or a subjunctive break opens the space for new forms of social life.

In later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, there are poems in which Whitman appears to have forced a complete reconciliation between actuality and potentiality, and then there are other poems where they appear to have become completely uncoupled. On the one hand, a poem such as “Passage to India” (1869) written to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal, assumes a position of American triumphalism, identifying a positive vision of world history with a supposedly exceptional nation-state. Whitman explicitly adopts the standpoint of Hegel (or a version of Hegel), shifting his work from the multiplication of bodily desires into “unnumbered Supremes” to the taming of bodies and their subsumption into a unified whole. Additionally, whereas utopia is an immanent operation of revolt in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in this later poem it becomes separated out from the world, raised to a Platonic realm of ideas, or “light of the light” in Whitman’s phrasing. The imperial qualities of these maneuvers are unmistakable. The poem praises globalization *avant la lettre* by speaking of it in terms of a reconciliation of contradictory social forms to “some inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention.” Indeed, the social content of such an intention would seem nothing other than the expansion and intensification of capital. Whitman represses the constitutive role of antagonism and tames his utopian longing by identifying it with the teleology of

capitalism and with liberalism as the political corollary of capital. What is left of the unruliness of the body becomes purified, converted into an angelic presence, or the dream of a body politic free of social contradiction and political antagonism. Of course, such an annihilation of contradiction and antagonism is itself a political gesture, a neutralization of politics which has been historically associated with the rise of bourgeois society and, especially in the American context, the dream of universalizing the middle class.¹⁹⁶

On the other hand, the poems contained in the “Calamus” cluster of *Leaves of Grass* – introduced in the third edition of *Leaves*, published in 1860 – would seem to engage in the inverse, yet parallel, operation of transforming contradiction and antagonism into antinomy. In this case, contradiction is not effaced so much as translated into an alternative between two separate worlds, between an entirely potential dream-world and an entirely actual world of the quotidian. Indeed, I would like to close this chapter by addressing the strange nature of the “Calamus” poems and by arguing that, in fact, they continue the antagonism of the 1855 edition by other means. For if this set of poems (best known for its overt treatment of homoeroticism) seems a pastoral retreat from society, such a retreat enacts a construction of utopia with important political implications. Many critics have, however, misrecognized these poems as politically neutral and even antisocial. Some critics argue that the intensified concern with homoeroticism, and eroticism more generally (in relation to which one would have to include the less obviously homoerotic poems of the “Children of Adam” cluster, also added in 1860), signals a retreat from the political as such.¹⁹⁷ In the face of the approaching Civil War, or in reaction to the increasing irreconcilability of the North and

South understood as opposed social and economic systems, Whitman, according to this argument, projects harmonious social being into the form of homoerotic love. The refrain of “comradery” encountered in “Calamus” is no more than an abstract utopia, leaving society behind in favor of dissolution into formless bodies, or a solidarity of non-entities. Such an argument, it should be noted, largely rests upon identifying sociality as such with heterosexuality, an identification which itself relies upon an assumption that sociality is wholly confined to an interaction between discrete identities (a point which I have argued runs counter to the commonality and singularity of social relationships in Whitman’s poetry).

Without underestimating the significance of the social shifts in mid-nineteenth century America or the specific impact of the changing historical situation on Whitman’s work, we might nevertheless view the shifts in Whitman’s poetry in positive terms as the generation of a new mode of political and social thought. From this perspective, the more intensified homoeroticism of the 1860 edition of *Leaves* is not a retreat from the political but a reorientation of it, or, as Michael Moon articulates it, “In reaction against the elaboration of a gender-polarizing code of sexual practices [such as the social matrix of heterosexuality] which tends to privatize and domesticize sexuality, the third edition attempts to substantiate the primary claim of the *Leaves of Grass* project: that sexuality is fundamentally a political matter because it is never simply ‘sexual,’ that is, unrelated to other economies in culture besides the erotic, such as the way one inhabits one’s class- or gender-position, or one’s relation to one’s work and to language and writing” (159). In other words, the new approach to sexuality which Whitman seems to inaugurate in the

third edition, and which is epitomized in the “Calamus” section, is also a refunctioning of the social and political field, a new mode of organizing bodies and their powers. Moon calls this new approach a “politics of nature” and notes its similarity to the Stoic doctrine which articulates the differences between bodies as a function of those bodies’ capacities to conjoin with other bodies, or to affect and be affected. Such a politics, however, is – I would argue – coextensive with Whitman’s oeuvre as a whole, even if it is more or less emphasized in certain editions; it is the biopolitical mode of Whitman’s poetry.

It is notable that Moon implicitly opposes the closure and privation – the domesticity – of sexual practices relying upon identity to the homoeroticism of the third edition, because it suggests that the changing sexual orientation of Whitman’s poetry also involves another economy of social organization. In fact, I would argue that what we see in this new edition of *Leaves*, especially in the “Calamus” section, is another practice of utopia. Instead of utopia as a generalized injunction cutting across the social totality (the maxims of democracy described above), utopia transforms into a heterotopian mode (in Michel Foucault’s sense of the term), characterized by disjunction, inversion, and seclusion. Utopia, in this case, emerges as the non-identity of society with itself, as a placed non-place that mirrors society as a whole only to cancel or displace the norms of society.¹⁹⁸ It is in this light that I would like to briefly examine the opening poem of the “Calamus” section, “In Paths Untrodden”:

IN paths untrodden,
 In the growth by margins of pond-waters,
 Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
 From all the standards hitherto published—from
 the pleasures, profits, conformities,
 Which too long I was offering to feed to my Soul

Clear to me now, standards not yet published—
 clear to me that my Soul,
 That the Soul of the man I speak for, feeds, rejoices
 only in comrades;
 Here, by myself, away from the clank of the world,
 Tallying and talked to here by tongues aromatic,
 No longer abashed—for in this secluded spot I can
 respond as I would not dare elsewhere,
 Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself,
 yet contains all the rest,
 Resolved to sing no songs to-day but those of manly
 attachment,
 Projecting them along that substantial life,
 Bequeathing, hence, types of athletic love,
 Afternoon, this delicious Ninth Month, in my forty-
 first year,
 I proceed, for all who are, or have been, young
 men,
 To tell the secret of my nights and days,
 To celebrate the need of comrades. (*LG 1860 341-342*)

The title and opening line, with their shared paradoxical formulation, suggest much about this heterotopian turn of utopia: the sociality of this poem depends upon an articulation that defies articulation, upon a secrecy that has less to do with a concealed presence than with an invisibility that is at the heart of the matter or the core of corporeality. This secrecy takes the spatial form of a fold, or a pocket, that is interior to America while at the same time being separate from it, just as the “Calamus” section is interior to the 1860 edition of *Leaves* and yet singularly apart from it. In a phrase which echoes the work of Emily Dickinson in its concern for seclusion (cf. Chapter 3, especially the reading of “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”), Whitman writes of the life which has “escaped from the life that exhibits itself” or simply of “the life that does not exhibit itself.” While such phrases certainly suggest a paradigmatic sense of the closet, or concealed homosexual identity – a point reinforced by the emphasis on “manly attachment” and the “need of

comrades” – it is necessary to insist on the more general and radical implications of a life which does not exhibit itself. For exhibition comes to be at one with “the standards hitherto published,” or the normative identities organizing society, including the abnormality of “inverted sexuality,” which classifies homoeroticism in terms of an immoral/ill identity during Whitman’s contemporary period. This poem does not merely negate a particular identity, or a particular set of identities, but rather identity as such. The life which does not identify itself is the life which “contains all the rest,” i.e., which possesses the totality of attributes and potentialities, but which refuses to consolidate and delimit them in terms of norms or in terms of rigidly determined, exchangeable identities. This poem certainly addresses the subject of homoeroticism, including the its relation to the construction of identity, yet the relation is a negative one: homoeroticism, the love between comrades or manly affection, is not merely below the radar of the heterosexual matrix of identities or of American national identity, it is beyond it, as non-identical utopian potential; or, inversely, it is not beyond nationalist identity but below it, the subterranean, molecular life of the common I have described throughout this chapter.

The spatial dislocation of the “Calamus” section, thus, enacts a mutation of the processes of subjective formation. If the 1855 edition of *Leaves* resembles a call to empower the public, the 1860 edition calls for an exodus from the public determination of identity (and, in doing so, anticipates Burroughs’s fantasy of a “Potential America,” an outlaw America that finds satisfaction less in the “realization” of American than in its abolition). The intensity of life that spread across the populous in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* comes to be concentrated and isolated in the fold, the internal margins,

of society. Likewise, the temporal paradox structuring the 1855 edition also structures this poem: life, or “substantial life,” that is, life in all of its intensities, is at once in the present and to come, both a presence and a present absence. Life is beyond the “hitherto published standards,” an invisibility to which writing can only allude (just as in “Song for Occupations,” writing could only allude to the full potentiality of bodies, without ever capturing them), yet it is also determined, shaped, embodied, Whitman addressing himself particularly to “all who are, or have been, young men.” Although Whitman states that he will “tell the secret of my nights and days,/To celebrate the need of comrades,” telling the secret does not consist in making the invisible visible, or in revealing the truth in a positively articulated set of forms. The form at stake, here, is that of a paradoxically formless form, the form of the threshold which exists at the point where the self is always other, always to come and always an effect of the comrade. The singularity marking this passage, the sense of its instantaneity produced by Whitman stating his age and the month of the poem’s writing (the deictic indication of time), consists not in the revelation of an identity but in the impossibility of identity, in the presentation of secrecy as a utopian insistence on the excess of life over its exhibition, that is, over its constitution by equivalent identities and a fixed social code.

Again, however, Whitman’s poetry refuses the urge to think the life to which it alludes as somehow prior to or transcendent to sociality. The opposition is not between the social and the asocial but between two different modes of sociality, a sociality belonging to a public constructed in terms of the equivalences between different identities and a sociality that consists in “attachments” between incommensurable singularities. In

other words, the same play between commonality and singularity present in the 1855 edition of *Leaves* is present in the 1860 edition, the difference between the two less a matter of giving up on utopia (as some critics have suggested) than in making utopia a minor affair. By minor, I do not mean trivial or superficial but rather below the threshold of the social totality insofar as the latter is conceived of in terms of an aggregation of commensurable and denumerable identities.¹⁹⁹ If the social and political ontology of the 1860 edition of *Leaves* remains fundamentally the same in my view, the relation to this ontology – which we might think of as a distinct social and political program – has changed: utopia is no longer tendentially identical with society as a whole; it is no longer the life diagonally traversing the social totality and promising to erupt at any moment; it is, instead, a life of the margins and of the fold, a secret life that can be presented only as the unrepresentable, or as Whitman puts it in another poem that is also found in the “Calamus” section, “Without edifices, or rules, or trustees, or any ar-/gument,/the institution of the dear love of comrades.” This makes utopia no less corporeal, no less biopolitical, for the matter remains one of organizing bodies and of realizing life. That being said, the valences are quite different. The fervent belief that America *is* the form, or *could be*, the form in which democracy finally takes shape has given way to much more careful sense that America *might become*, *might just possibly be reshaped to become*, that radical democracy of equality, commonality, and life that Whitman “resurrected” in 1855.

There is perhaps, then, a certain retreat involved in the movement from one edition to another, a step back from the secure assurance – which we have already seen

was born under duress – in the arrival of that democracy to come. The *to come*, as it were, becomes more radical. It is unhinged from any guarantee, endowed with the contingency of a moment that might never arrive. This missing guarantee can certainly, and productively, be read as a symptom of Whitman’s crisis in faith with regards to the more utopian implications of the American experiment in democracy, but it cannot be reduced to a merely negative moment. It is a response to a situation, but it is in the nature of a utopian politics to be always both in accords and discordant with the present situation. Of course, arrival does not mean the exhibition of life, the final conversion of every life below the threshold of the public into a determined, countable member of society – that would be the dream of a certain liberalism. In reality, there is no defining – at least not in terms of Whitman’s poetry – the precise nature of the democracy to come, nor for that matter the manner of its arrival. For if the arrival of democracy can be positively articulated as the “realization” of “life” that Whitman calls for in the 1855 preface (a definition of democracy which, I would contend, remains unchanging throughout Whitman’s work), the form, or rather, the place in which and through which life would finally take place, without limit, is the secret of Whitman’s writing. Yet this secret – one version of a singular America – is not to be unveiled or put on display. The secret remains secret, which constitutes its power, as life which insists not on being seen but felt, that is, a life that insists not on being identified but on producing effects. And it is with such secrecy in mind that Whitman asks us to read his work, to love his work, and to live his work, as a poetic and political project that he confesses he could not possibly have finished. Indeed, as I have pointed out in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves*,

the life of Whitman's poetry exists only through its circulation, only through the multiplication of poets, the generation of a socius of "unnumbered Supremes" through a practice of writing continuous with other political and social practices.

The full life of his poetry, Whitman writes in the untitled final poem of the 1860 "Calamus" section – eventually entitled with its first words, "full of life" – is not in the present of its writing or its publication but in the future of its reincarnation through committed acts of reading and interpretation:

When you read these, I, that was visible, am become
invisible;
Now it is you, compact, realizing my poems,
seeking me,
Fancying how happy you were, if I could be with
you, and become your lover;
Be it as if I were with you. Be not too certain but I
am now with you.

As a reader of Whitman who is also a "lover" of Whitman, we adhere to his work only by resurrecting it, by "realizing" its vitality in acts of interpretation that can only ever be reinventions and revisions. We adhere to Whitman's words only by taking Whitman beyond Whitman, in the "compact" existence of our bodies, in the comradery of being with others ("with you"), in the name of a life to come.

Chapter 3: “A Minor Nation”:

Biopolitical Poetics and Marriage in Emily Dickinson

I. Introduction

In shifting our gaze from Walt Whitman to Emily Dickinson, we would seem to retreat from the open road of political contestation to the solitude of domestic intimacy and metaphysical rumination. A singular America, or that sense of nationality as utopian project, as possibility for a new kind of political subject and a new kind of politics, appears to withdraw from Dickinson, just as Dickinson famously withdrew from America. And yet in this chapter, I propose that Dickinson’s poetry constitutes not an avoidance of the political but an excavation of it: if Dickinson’s poetry occupies the narrow threshold of domestic sociality, that domain usually termed the private sphere, it nonetheless finds there the entire fabric of the political. For the political – or, rather, the biopolitical – is not to be confined to government proper but involves rather the production and management of bodies, of lives, in every kind of social space. Indeed, the very intimacy of Dickinson’s poetry, its dwelling in heart and home, proves to be less a retreat than an encounter with that ever repeated primal scene of the political, the birth of the political subject in its emergence from a “state of nature.” Dickinson’s domestic spaces and metaphysical expanses are not neutralizations of the political but encounters with political life from an odd, estranging angle. In Dickinson’s words, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant” (1263).²⁰⁰

As an 1885 letter to Mabel Loomis Todd suggests, Dickinson's writing never divests itself of a desire called America but instead provokes the question as to what the shape of that desire would, or should, be. Dickinson writes to Todd, who at the time is summering in Europe:

“Sweet Land of Liberty” is a superfluous Carol till it concern ourselves – then it outrealms the Birds.

I saw the American Flag last Night in the shutting West,
and I felt for every Exile.

I trust you are homesick. That is the sweetest courtesy we pay an absent friend. The Honey you went so far to seek, I trust too you obtain.

Though was not there a “Humbler” Bee?

“I will sail by thee alone, thou animated Torrid Zone.” [...]

Touch Shakespeare for me.

The Savior's only signature to the Letter he wrote to all mankind, was, A Stranger and ye took me in. (*Letters 3*: 882).

There is a strange vacillation in this letter, a swinging between the rejection of American culture and the idealization of it as the very destination of desire's world-historical trajectory. On the one hand, the American flag marks the culmination of the West (“the shutting West”), the consummation of a culture which has Shakespeare as its totem but which finds itself at home in that “ ‘Humbler’ Bee” – a reference to a poem by Emerson from which Dickinson then quotes (“I will sail by thee...”). In fact, the citation of Emerson's poem functions doubly as an example of an American Shakespeare (Emerson as the pinnacle of American letters, as proof that the phrase “American culture” is not an oxymoron) *and* as invocation of gesture of nationalist commitment: “Burly, dozing humblebee,/Where thou art is clime for me./Let them sail for Porto Rique [sic]/Far-off heats through seas to seek./I will follow thee alone [...]!”

But cultural fruition is exile not only for the woman abroad but also for the woman at home: America may induce homesickness for an American woman in Europe but for the one here, it produces a repulsion like the coming together of two like-charged magnets: the carol of American liberty does not yet “concern ourselves.” Although included in the national imaginary, women are legally and conventionally excluded from full involvement in the country’s political and social practices – they cannot vote, their economic practices are restricted. Indeed, the final line of the letter (“The Savior’s only signature...”) alludes to the biblical book of Matthew’s description of Jesus being *refused* shelter, as if to suggest that to be a woman in America is to be a stranger, existing in the land yet not quite of it: “I was a stranger, and ye took me not in.” (*King James Matt.* 25:43). Dickinson, however, refuses this rejection, extracts from the biblical verse a political imperative: the part of no part, the people included only to be excluded (women), shall find a place, even if it means admitting that the carol of America’s liberty is “superfluous” until America itself be rewritten. That for Dickinson the task is to rewrite America, rather than abandon it, is indicated by the signature at the bottom of the letter: not “Emily” but “America.”

In signing the letter “America,” Dickinson does not identify with America but rather contests its very definition; she marks in America that which in it is more than it: a singular America. America comes to be haunted by woman as that extremely intimate other inextricable from national formation and yet (internally) exiled. For if woman is what makes America home, or rather *a home*, she also remains a body subsumed within a body politic without being *of* it insofar as the body politic itself is predicated upon

masculine subjectivity.²⁰¹ Woman, to quote Dickinson, is “a minor Nation”: “Further in Summer than the Birds -/Pathetic from the Grass -/A minor Nation celebrates/It’s [sic] unobtrusive Mass//[...] Remit as yet no Grace -/No furrow on the Glow,/But a Druidic Difference/Enhances Nature now –” (895). These lines construct a sense of nationality that is not whole (it has “remit as yet *no grace*”) but rather interrupted by a minor note that hangs low, tucked in the grass, but introducing a “Druidic Difference.” (I discuss this poem at greater length in the conclusion to this chapter.) Emily Dickinson, here, echoes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of a minor literature, a literature defined not by quantitative minimalism but by the positing of alternatives that exist in a transversal relation to the dominant, that is, by the introduction of social and linguistic possibilities that challenge the closure of the socio-political order not through a transcending motion (the positing of another, better world outside of this one) but through a burrowing that destabilizes the very conditions of social reproduction and linguistic convention, all the while making use of them.²⁰² Dickinson’s poetry burrows into standard American English only to push at its limits and open the door to new forms of collective life.

Rewriting that well-known line, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant,” we might say that Dickinson “Tells all the political but tells it slant.” She interrupts the totality of American social life so as to reveal the political stakes of its most minute practices and to gesture towards the possibilities of other practices, other forms of life. The biopolitical slant of Dickinson’s poetic practice is manifold, ranging from reflections on the immanence of death to life to considerations of the relationship between human and animal. My interest is less in comprehensively accounting for all of the biopolitical

aspects of Dickinson's oeuvre – a task which would require several books worth of analysis and argument, at least – than in demonstrating the very possibility of reading her poetry biopolitically. For at the present moment, Dickinson criticism – with notable exceptions, e.g., the work of Virginia Jackson, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, and Shira Wolosky²⁰³ – tends to circulate between the following critical *topoi*, which leave little room for a biopolitical approach: attention to the materiality of Dickinson's texts in the form of manuscript studies (cf. the work of Susan Howe, Martha Nell Smith, and Ellen Louise Hart²⁰⁴); a new historicism that reads Dickinson through the shifting lenses of various contexts such as emergent industrial capitalism (cf. Dohmna Mitchell's recent work²⁰⁵); a formalist approach highlighting the quasi-avant garde or modernist status of Dickinson's poetics (cf. work by Helen Vendler, Marjorie Perloff, and Jerome McGann²⁰⁶); and, finally, a diverse set of feminist approaches that treat Dickinson's work as a response to the socioeconomic and political situation of women under capitalism and patriarchy (cf. work by Mary Loeffelholz, Paula Bennett, and Vivian Pollack²⁰⁷).

While the above categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, they nonetheless suggest a division of labor in Dickinson studies, a tendency to separate certain zones of inquiry off from others: there is the formalist or ethical accounting which involves marking a surplus of value (sometimes called "genius") over any historical or material situatedness; there is the contextualizing labor of placing Dickinson in her time, of drawing correlations between specific formal maneuvers and specific historical situations; and, finally, there is the inquiry into the materiality of the manuscript, which renders Dickinson's poetry a kind of handicraft. What is striking in this admittedly

schematic taxonomy is the gap that presents itself between, on the one hand, the sense of a surplus of potentiality – a sense that Dickinson’s poetry somehow exceeds a bounded context, that what it gives to thought exceeds its material determinations – and, on the other, an awareness of the material status of the text – either its inherent materiality or its folding in of the material world. What is lost in this gap is the possibility of a surplus of potentiality inhering in the material world, or, put differently, the immaterial as an effect of the material. Biopolitics takes place in this missing topos; it is the tracking of processes of individuation wherein life *qua* potentiality is given shape, determined, but also opened up, exposed to the properly utopian futurity of a life to come. In other words, Dickinson’s poetry exceeds its historical and material contexts not by rising above them but by discovering an excess of potential, of possibility, in the matters of everyday life, and it does so not in opposition to formal considerations but as *a matter of form*.

The angle of my biopolitical approach in this chapter is to focus on Dickinson’s marriage poems in order to analyze the ways in which their reenactment of coupling brings to light the biopolitical production of Woman in the crossroads between patriarchy and capital. In analyzing the affective economies of marriage, I show how Dickinson’s poems work on our relations to bodies, the sentiments through which we understand our material being in the world, and in doing so illuminate other possible relations. Dickinson *queers marriage*, she operates a poetic *détournement* that serves as the basis for another way of being American. With that charming but vicious laughter that haunts so much of her poetry, Dickinson demands her readers imagine a “minor nation,” a nation

characterized not by exceptional privilege but by a contingent community composed of odd lives and queer proclivities.

II. Homebodies:

Affective Economies in Dickinson's Marriage Poems

To begin to understand the relationship between Emily Dickinson's lyrical *praxis* and the institution and practice of marriage, we might start by posing two questions: *What* is the life of a wife? And *how* is the life of a wife? Whereas the first question asks us to consider the identity implied in being a wife, the content that fills her days, the second shifts our attention in two possible directions: on the one hand, an ethical inquiry as to the happiness, or sadness, of a wife, the vicissitudes of pleasure and displeasure bound up with that role; on the other, an ontological and modal inquiry into the very being of wifeness insofar as it constitutes a process of social production. Indeed, this last sense rebounds onto our first question so that one can only respond to the question of what a wife is by considering how a wife exists in the world as a complex and relational process. The question, thus, becomes: *how is the what of a wife's life?* Or how is the life of a wife not merely shaped by worldly activities but *produced* by them?

It is such an inquiry that Dickinson's poetic investigation of wifeness in the nineteenth century provokes. To be taken seriously as a woman, to be "Woman," requires initiation into wifeness: "She rose to His Requirements – dropt/The Playthings of Her Life/To take the honorable Work/Of Woman, and of Wife -" (857). The comma

following “Woman” swallows up the conjunctive force of the “and,” making “Woman” and “Wife” synonymous: honor, or social recognition, is to be found in the identification of woman and wife. To be woman otherwise would be to *play* at being woman, to remain caught up in “Playthings” and divorced from the essence of womanhood. These few lines already open our purview to the vast horizon of the political economy of marriage: if Woman is identified with Wife and being Wife is a labor (“honorable Work”) of rising to “His Requirements,” then womanhood is a cultivation of a patriarchal economy through the (self-)production of women and the (re-)production of men.

The wife – or, more precisely, the housewife – is a central biopolitical technology of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this is one of the central insights of a long tradition of Marxist feminism that begins with Marx’s own considerations of the role of women in producing labor-power, not only with the brute act of biological production (giving birth to the future labor pool) but also with housework as the conversion of the wage into the means for satisfying the basic needs of life, or necessary labor in Marx’s terminology. As Silvia Federici’s incisive historical reflections on the transition to capitalism suggest, women are not excluded from the production of capital when they are excluded from wage labor; they are, rather, incorporated into capital otherwise, through what Federici calls the “patriarchy of the wage,” that is, women are directly productive of capital, because their labors are absorbed and concealed in the wage of husbands and fathers.²⁰⁸ Domestic space may be the opposite of the factory but capital only reproduces itself through a union of opposites, through the generalization of labor in the marriage of workplace and home: “His Requirements” become her labors.

But Dickinson's poetry is not the mere reflection of woman's physical labors for men, which would be a crass reduction not only of Dickinson's linguistic praxis but also of the "honorable Work" of wifehood. The labor of the Wife cannot be considered simply physical, as if it merely consisted of producing this or that product to satisfy this or that want, for a wife's work is also affective and biopolitical: the wife cultivates subjects, works not only on the emotional and moral life of the household but on all of those relations (corporeal, affective, material) which constitute the house as a basis for the reproduction of capital. Woman invents herself as Wife in a constantly renewed process of becoming-wife – a process Dickinson's poetry identifies not only with "honorable Work" but also with the affect and disposition of "modesty" as "befits the soul/that bears another's name," the soul that must say "a prayer, that it more angel – prove –" (280). And she fabricates the husband and the family, the totality of "home," through the management of all of those sentiments which, to cite one poem, convert a house from the inert materials of wood and brick into a "Soul" (729). Wife, as biopolitical technology, produces life through management of affects and channeling of material flows.

Yet, as a major line of criticism suggests, poetry is a paradoxical activity insofar as it is a labor predicated upon the negation of labor as such.²⁰⁹ To write poetry is imagined as an activity subtracted from the circuits of capital, an artistic supplement not exactly opposed to the capitalist mode of production and its insistence on "productive" (i.e., profit-returning) labors so much as enveloping it with the possibilities of free time and free activity that it forgets. Poetry becomes a utopian compensation for the one-sidedness of capitalist modernity, for its narrowing of subjective life. In biographical

terms, this subtraction *cum* supplement is supported by Dickinson's own refusal to publish her work, as well as her legendary withdraw from social circulation to become Amherst's famous lady in white. Publication, Dickinson famously writes, "is the Auction/Of the Mind of Man -/Poverty – be justifying/For so foul a thing" (788).²¹⁰

While this opposition between poetry and labor, between *poiesis* and *praxis*, is an important moment in the dialectic between art and society, it also tends to conceal the possibility of poetry *as* labor, of the chiasmic crossing of traits between *poiesis* and *praxis*. In other words, if poetry is an activity that works on subjects in the double sense of processing the material world and eliciting intellectual and emotional responses from its readers, then the distinction between poetry and labor can no longer be modeled on an opposition between worldliness and its otherworldly negation. Indeed, it is tempting to pose the question as to why poetry should be excluded from the category of intellectual labor, especially in present-day circumstances in which the humanities are asked to act as the moral supplement to more immediately profit-returning endeavors. In what follows, I experiment with bracketing the artistic status of Dickinson's poetry even as I emphasize the artfulness of her labors, for I consider Dickinson's poetry to be itself a form of affective labor, a linguistic praxis that interrogates, reshapes, and reinvents subjects (understood as social forms of life).²¹¹ If as Paolo Virno suggests the contemporary period of capitalism is marked by the increasing transformation of production (*praxis*) into *poiesis* because of the increasing number of labors that involve less the manufacture of discrete objects than the modification of subjectivities or the creation of experiences, linguistic codes, and affects, then Dickinson's poetry, which so intensely explores the

affective expanses and intensities of social life and the biopolitical production of subjects, offers the critic not a window into the past but a site for experimenting with the shape of the future.²¹²

It is not only the contemporary turn to affect theory that enables a consideration of the affective labors of Dickinson's poetry but also the context of her poetry insofar as it is belongs to a tradition of writing by women best known by way of the generic term "literature of misery" and the figure of "the poetess." The former term is defined by Samuel Bowles (a friend and editor of Dickinson) as a

kind of writing only too common, appealing to the sympathies of the reader without recommending itself to his judgment. It may be called the literature of misery. Its writers are chiefly women, gifted women may be, full of thought and feeling and fancy but poor, lonely and unhappy. It may be a valuable discipline in the end, but for the time being it often clouds, withers, distorts. It is so difficult to see objects distinctly through a mist of tears.²¹³

The passage equivocates in several respects: the particular quality of this strand of women's writing is its emotional intensity, but that intensity obscures its particularity; it "may be valuable," yet it smacks of cheap sentiment; the women behind this writing are, perhaps, "gifted," i.e. removed from their gender by innate talent, but they are also "poor, lonely, and unhappy," that is, trapped by their failure to succeed at a woman's proper role, marriage. Bowles can admit the "literature of misery" into the scene of literature only insofar as he also quarantines it, cordons off the affective life of its textuality, lest its "sympathies" infect the "judgment" of the reading public. We could say that Bowles protects the reader from this poetry, by stepping in, the voice of rational judgment, to prevent the transmission of bad feelings to happy readers.

But the very point of the literature of misery may be to engender a sense of unhappiness, to pop the bubble, as it were, of one's feeling of content with contemporary social conditions. In his socio-historical contextualization of the literature of misery and Dickinson's work relation to it, David Reynolds writes, "The recoil away from public activism and the diversification of perceived women's roles produced a new brand of women's writing that consciously asserted woman's power as image maker and role player while it retrained the rage and sadness that had long characterized the literature of woman's wrongs" (*Beneath* 396). Reynolds distinguishes the literature of misery from a "conventional literature" that operates by way of moral exemplification and a "women's right fiction" whose power springs from its propagandistic indignation with the social constraints imposed upon women. Whereas those traditions rely on didactic simplicity, lacking the linguistic and philosophical complexity of canonical literary texts of the American Renaissance, "a self-conscious artistry characterized the literature of misery": "In this sense, it becomes women's *literature* when it refuses to be women's *propaganda* and asserts its power as an expression of universal themes" (394). I would argue, however, that the opposition Reynolds produces between propaganda and literature, between the instrumental and the artistic, is too reductive. It repeats Bowles, even as it contextualizes and seemingly neutralizes his judgment, confining feeling to the conditions of literature and blocking excessive (feminine or feminist) emotion from entering the realm of "universal themes." Reynolds' contextualization of women's writing treats material situations and social conditions as the womb of the literary: literature springs forth, becomes universal, by distancing itself from the practical realities

of everyday life. While agreeing with Reynolds that the critical power of Dickinson's poetry lies not in any didactic or explicitly political content but in more indirect, formal means, it is important that we not disavow the affective and corporeal life of these texts, that we not repeat Bowles' logic of separating the cerebral pleasures of poetry from its emotional impact. Dickinson's poetry, I demonstrate, is complex in its very engagement with affect.²¹⁴

In the poem beginning "I gave Myself to Him," Dickinson stages the scene of woman becoming wife as an economic exchange between two bodies meeting on seemingly equal terms. Yet what the poem suggests, I argue, is less equal exchange than a logic of self-sacrifice and infinite debt in which woman (re-)produces marriage through a labor of renunciation:

I gave Myself to Him –
 And took Himself, for Pay –
 The solemn contract of a Life
 Was ratified, this way –

The Wealth might disappoint –
 Myself a poorer prove
 Than this great Purchaser suspect,
 The Daily Own – of Love

Depreciate the Vision –
 But till the Merchant buy –
 Still Fable – in the Isles of spice –
 The subtle Cargoes – lie –

At least – 'tis Mutual – Risk –
 Some – found it – Mutual Gain –
 Sweet Debt of Life – Each Night to owe –
 Insolvent – every Noon – [426]

Written in the first-person as an address to a second-person other (like many of Dickinson's poems) the text does not concern an alien object but rather the immanent domain of the speaker's voice and body. It is a transformation of the self predicated upon a relation (a contract) to an other. Marriage, here, is heterosexual exchange engendering "the solemn contract of a Life." The parallelism of the first two lines would seem to indicate an equal exchange between two autonomous subjects: "myself" for "himself." The economic language of the remainder of the poem transforms this instant of exchange into the delayed time of investment, understood as an analogue to the investment of one's life in another through the relation of marriage. Ideally, marriage is "Mutual Gain," an endeavor in which profits are returned and shared. But marriage, like any investment, may just as well return a loss. The poem's reference to the spice trade, with its mercantilist overtones, suggests that "Risk" is intrinsic to an exchange in which the promise made in an instant requires the deferral of returns. The temporality of marriage *cum* mercantilism links up to the absoluteness of the risk involved, for wealth understood as a zero-sum game (one of mercantilism's fundamental precepts) is like life or time conceived of in a linear fashion, the loss of either being irrecoverable. From this perspective, the poem reads like a credit-check *avant la lettre*: "His" hazard is underwritten by her self-interrogation, and if the investment is risky, at least the "Daily Own – of Love" guarantees some satisfaction.

But on closer inspection the temporality of the poem is confused and contradictory, suggesting that the risks involved might be even greater than evident at first glance. The shift from the simple past tense in the first stanza to the alternation

between present and future in the following three stanzas makes sense from the perspective of marriage understood as a punctual contracting based on future fulfillment, but the poem also relies upon a contradictory superimposition of mercantilism's temporality – two instants (the moment of investment and the moment of return) linked by a single *durée* (the voyage to “the Isles of spice” and back) – onto marriage's temporality – an instant followed by a *series* of cyclical *durées* (“Each Night,” “every Noon”). In other words, while the poem's recourse to a the temporal logic of mercantilism implies a finite process with a discrete beginning and end, the temporal logic of marriage involves repetitions, cycles, and a strange crossing of past and future. This confusion of temporalities also take place in the poem's rhyme and meter: the poem as a whole demonstrates a systematic, cyclical regularity in its meter (iambic trimeter in the first, second, and fourth lines of each stanza, broken up by iambic tetrameter in the third), suggesting the regular rhythms of marriage, but the rhyme scheme is erratic: the second and fourth lines of the first and third stanza form perfect rhymes but the second stanza produces a slant rhyme at best and the fourth stanza makes no attempt at all to rhyme, perhaps suggesting the element of chance involved in trade and marriage. The poem embodies a time out of joint, caught between the daily grind of work/marriage and the exciting adventures of sea voyage – no mediation bridging the gap.

But, in fact, there is a mediator in this poem, unremarked but all the more present for being without title: labor, or more precisely, domestic labor. It is, in fact, labor that has been the missing term in our analysis insofar as we understand it, as Marx does, to mean not only the production of a product but any activity involving bodily potential

(labor-power, understood in the widest sense as including intellectual and affective capacities).²¹⁵ It is the voice of the poem, the voice of a virtual wife, that crystallizes the discrepant temporalities of the poem, holds them together, if only to hear the dissonances between them. Labor, in other words, does not merely take time but crystallizes time, gives birth to futures through repetitions of the past in the present; if Marx calls labor “form-giving fire” it is, at least in part, because it gives shape to time like flows of paint directed by a brush. Labor may produce a discrete product but it may just as well generate services whose effects are real if not objective in a typical sense. (Computer programming produces codes that enable computers to perform certain functions, but these functions are not contained like objects inside the software package, just as the labor of love, of marriage, produces effects/affects without being contained in the symbolic object of a ring.) While the poem may suggest to the reader a mercantilist perspective that focuses on trade or exchange and pays short shrift to considerations of labor, the suggestion is only a ruse, albeit one immanent to the function of marriage. The symbolic function of marriage as the instantaneous joining of two equals obfuscates the asymmetry between the man and the woman entering the contract, as well as the repeated labors that goes into making the eternity of marital bliss an actuality. Indeed, Dickinson’s poem not only reenact the labor of marriage but are themselves (affective) labors on marriage as a social form, rendering visible the asymmetrical power relations fundamental to marriage insofar as it is bound up with capital and the nation-state.

From this perspective, the poem is about labor from the very beginning, labor as the production of life in language. The poem enacts that performative statement, *par*

excellence, the “I do” of wedding vows, the words of the poem not merely describing marriage but engendering it, or rehearsing its production of a life between two. But the indefinite article determining life (“a Life”) marks the contract of marriage as more than a simple joining; marriage does not simply capture two pre-given elements but produces *a* husband and *a* wife. Marriage makes a woman of a girl, those two entities qualitatively different stages in the teleology of womanhood that marriage constructs. As another poem by Dickinson reads: “I’m ‘wife’ – I’ve finished that -/That other state-/I’m Czar – I’m ‘Woman’ now – It’s safer so – How odd the Girl’s life looks/Behind this soft Eclipse” (225). So what is this “soft Eclipse” of wifehood? Or: *What kind of life is the life of a wife?* The next instance of the word “life” in the poem is extremely suggestive: “Sweet Debt of Life.” The life of the wife is *life as debt*: life split from itself, split from fulfillment or, for that matter, survival, deferred until a moment which may not arrive and mediated by husband as creditor. Of course, we might read debt as a sentimental signifier which makes of marriage the union of two souls, echoing the Platonic myth in which each would be the complement of the other, in which each would owe the other the debt of a more complete life. But the connotations of private property in “Daily Own – of Love” should warn us that the sentimentality of this poem is questionable. If both investment partners would appear to share the risk equally in the marriage venture, it is only the wife whose life is on credit, only the wife whose time is under scrutiny of a “great Purchaser.” The nomination of the husband as “great Purchaser” reverses both the equality and simultaneity of exchange suggested by the parallelism of the first lines, transforming the wife from partner into product, and not any kind of product but that

peculiar product, labor-power, which in this instance gives itself over and over in “The Daily Own – of Love” so as, perhaps, to receive as wage the satisfaction of her husband.

What this poem demonstrates is not merely the contingency of marriage ending in ruin but the structural necessity of unequal laboring in marriage, marriage being understood as an institution and social form bound up with capital, heterosexuality, and patriarchy. This inequality is subtly present in the first lines of the poem, with the seemingly innocent “mistake” of a reflexive pronoun (“himself”) where there should be, grammatically speaking, a simple object pronoun (“him”). The difference might seem minor, merely an attempt to tighten the parallelism of the syntax, but the implications are great, for what is at stake is precisely self-relation (the conjunction of “him” and “self”) and relation with the world (the conjunction of her and him in the world) – these two modes of relation being mutually implicated and forming an *affective* economy. By affect, I do not simply mean emotion, which generally implies the psychological response or deep feelings of a pre-constituted subject to external stimuli. Affect is, in Spinoza’s materialist definition in *Ethics*, “the affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, and at the same time the ideas of these affection” (164). Affect, thus, designates a zone in which the seemingly opposed attributes of the mental and the physical blur, in which what we usually think of as emotion (love, jealousy, anger, etc.) are not effects of bodily causes but also the “idea” of our worldly relations and interactions simultaneous to their occurrence. There are affects that empower, increasing a body’s ability to affect and be affected by worldly entities, to change and be changed, to relate – Spinoza calls these “pleasures” (also translatable as

“happiness”) – and there are affects that weaken a body (“pains,” “sadnesses”). If we still analyze emotions in the typical sense, it is insofar as they ripple out from more complex webs of material interactions to which they are immanent.

I borrow the term “affective economy” from the work of Sara Ahmed in order to indicate that affect is not a property that a subject contains or owns but a movement, a circulation that includes subjects but is not exclusive to them: “Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value over time)” (“Affective Economies,” 120). In fact, affects do not just circulate *between* bodies, they also generate the surfaces of collective and individual bodies, through the making “sticky” (or habitual) of our relations to other objects in the world, that is, the very composition of our bodies (its powers, its shape and its motions) depends upon our repeated encounters/contacts and the significations linked up with them: “In other words, the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds” (121). Affects produce subjects, if not necessarily in and of themselves. The angel in the household, that hegemonic figure for bourgeois femininity in the nineteenth century, is an effect of the circulation of affective complexes such as piety, devotion, compassion (each of these being emotions that implicate an interrelated set of affects), her life being the condensation of these affects understood not as feelings in the narrowest sense of the term but as dispositions, as capacities for being affected and affecting in a particular manner. The question, thus, becomes what kinds of affects circulate through the life of a wife, and what can the body of a wife *do*, given these affects? What are the powers (and weaknesses) of wifhood?²¹⁶

Anticipating the arguments that follow, it is important to insist on the distinction between emotion and affect, the two being not mutually exclusive yet nonetheless quite distinct. Emotion, as a philosophical and critical category, implies a series of correlations tying together states of mind, feelings, dispositions, and a sense of self. It has as its unifying substratum the concept of the person – that paradoxical notion, which as Roberto Esposito has recently shown, makes an individual human being unique by declining it in terms of its belonging to a species.²¹⁷ In other words, emotion supposes the delineation of a psychic interiority through recourse to the bounds of a quasi-sacred personhood. Affect, on the other hand, upsets any easy distinction between interior and exterior, or between the personal and impersonal. Its materiality is of the order of the encounter or of the relation; matter comes to be understood not in terms of the inert or mechanical aggregation of blocks of extension but as the movement of relations, as ratios of speed.²¹⁸ In this perspective, affect is the impersonal (or, to use the term we applied to Whitman's poetry, the molecular) domain from which the personal arises as a fold, a doubling back of the impersonal on itself to form a pocket of contingent interiority. If emotion folds beings into discrete individuals characterized by personal traits, affect unfolds the individual, exposes it to an exteriority, a relatedness, that is always already internal to it, constitutive of it, yet in excess of it. Between affect and emotion, I would situate the concept of affective labor, understanding it as a mediation between the personal and impersonal, as an activity of *producing persons* through the modulating, the sculpting, of affective relations/encounters.

As will become evident, my approach to Dickinson begins with the personal (with a consideration of the ways in which marriage [re]produces the wife as a specific category of the person, the ways it guards the personal from impersonal excesses) but then gradually shifts to a more concerted focus on the impersonal through a consideration of how Dickinson weaves together affective relations to engender forms of community, of the common, that exceed – or perhaps pass below – the threshold of the political economy of personhood in the nineteenth century up until the present. Here, we might also note a contrast to Whitman: whereas Whitman’s poetry in its concern for “the people” as a whole can conceive of America as a vast, boiling cauldron of impersonal affective powers, Dickinson’s poetry, more cautious and patient in its attention to the personal (gendered, sexed) boundaries of America, reaches the potentiality involved in the impersonal realm of affect only through the hard labor of peeling back the personal. Let us turn, now, to the wife’s affective labors as the door through which impersonal affect enters Dickinson’s poetry.

A number of feminist critics have discussed how the production of woman under capitalism has been the production of laborers defined as caregivers, as managers and producers of affect whose general metaphor is “the heart”.²¹⁹ We see this openly in a 1789 article entitled, “The Influence of the Female Sex on the Enjoyments of Social Life,” which far from engaging in criticism, enjoins women to embrace their innate talent as managers of feeling:

Cultivation of the female mind is of great importance, not with respect to private happiness only, but with respect to society at large. The ladies have it in their power to form the manners of the gentlemen, and they can render them virtuous and happy, or

vicious and miserable. What a glorious prize is here exhibited, to be contended for by the sex!”²²⁰

Happiness and virtue are closely tied together. What is good feels good. Pleasure and virtue are the two sides of the good life, and the possibility of both depends upon the “influence of the female sex,” that is, on a wife’s ability to shape the “manners” of her husband, to absorb the stress of capitalist competition and convert it into the ease of domestic bliss. It is her responsibility, or duty, to ensure that her husband is “virtuous and happy,” not “vicious and miserable.” And as the ejaculation of the last sentence of the quote indicates, the wife should *enjoy* this duty, should find *her* happiness in this “glorious prize” of her “sex.”

Happiness is a meta-affect, a capture and an organization of a series of affects through the production of habits that structure the motions of everyday life. In Ahmed’s phenomenological understanding of happiness, happiness is “an orientation towards objects we come in contact with” (*Happiness* 32). If affects emerge through our contact with worldly objects in such a way that we have good or bad feelings towards them, feelings that either increase or decrease our capacities, then happiness is about our general disposition towards objects, our sense of values regarding happenings in the world: “Things become good, or acquire their value as goods, insofar as they point toward happiness. Objects become ‘happiness means’” (34). Happiness, we might say, involves an affective cartography of one’s life-world, a mapping of values onto the literal and figurative geography of our everyday movements, home becoming, for example, the place “where the heart is,” the office a “grind,” and so on.²²¹ Which means that happiness is not neutral, since it depends upon codes that enable one to anticipate displeasure (or the

bad) with certain objects, subjects, and events. In an example quite relevant to our purposes, Ahmed discusses how happiness becomes conflated with family, and family with heterosexuality, so that queer/non-straight lives become obstacles, rather than means, to heterosexual happiness. That such confluations of pleasure and value have political consequences is evident. We might say that happiness is a biopolitical affair, a struggle over what kinds of lives (what kinds of practices and habits but also what kinds of bodies) are deemed legitimate or socially productive. In this struggle, women are a central site of struggle, for they are defined in advance as caregivers and moral guardians of society, or to repeat: “Cultivation of the female mind is of great importance, not with respect to private happiness only, but with respect to society at large.” To take the cliché that “home is where the heart is” to its logical end-point means acknowledging that domestic sentiments “pump” the blood of social life, not merely channels for the circulation of capital but a crucial means of its production.

Returning to the poem, if the lyrical “I” takes “himself,” rather than “him,” for pay (“I gave Myself to Him/and took Himself, for pay-”), we might say that it is because she gains the man not as object – after all, as object, as bearer of the wage, he is off to work – but as self-relation, as affective being. It is her duty to care for him, to magnify his wealth (or rather his labor-power: the very capacity for generating wealth) in the sense of cultivating empowering affective relations in him. To make him happy is to make him virtuous, and to make him virtuous is to make him productive. The inequality of this exchange of labor is indicated by the anxious way in which the subject of the poem frets over the possibility of disappointing the husband: “Myself a poorer

prove/Than this great Purchaser suspect/The Daily Own – of Love/Depreciate the Vision.” “The Daily Own” of love is a cycle of production wherein the woman (re)produces the man through housework in the widest sense, which includes affection, sentiment, as well as sexual relations and housework, *and* in which woman produces herself for him, cultivates herself for his pleasure. She must maintain “the Vision,” which is to say she must protect the value of home and family, of the bourgeois couple, by becoming the material support for the fantasy of domestic bliss, that sweet glow that softens the edges of the daily grind. Here, “Vision” brings together a specularization of Woman, her conversion into a satisfying spectacle imbued with the air of romance and adventure, *and* a sense of futurity, of prophecy or speculation, of hope. It is Woman as lyrical voice but also as absent image that secures the unity of pleasure and futurity, filling in the void of the unpredictable/risk with the measured hope of her love’s labors.

What might have first struck the reader as a mere excess of sentiment in the phrasing “Sweet Debt of Life” is, instead, an acute critical condensation of the politics of marriage: marriage appears purely a matter of emotional connection, when in actuality it is the exchange and production of life, of labor-power, but labor-power concerned with the “sweet,” with the sentiments of affective life. The production of Woman is an activity of household management in which the passions (in the Spinozist sense) weakening the wife, socially, politically, translate to the empowerment of the husband. She may not be waged, and, therefore, may not appear in capital’s ledgers, but she nonetheless is the informing and necessary condition for capital to operate at all. The wife is the exemplar of what Marx calls the “virtual pauper,” a subjectivity that is defined as “not-value” but,

as such, is the very source of value.²²² If in the night Woman has herself to offer up, possesses the wealth that is her “Life,” “every Noon” she is “Insolvent,” unable to satisfy her debt. Indeed, it is worth noting that an alternative rendering of the first two lines by Dickinson reads not “I gave myself to Him -/And took Himself, for Pay-” but rather “I gave Him *all* Myself/And took Himself, for Pay” (emphasis added).²²³ The alternative lines bring out the asymmetry of the exchange, the very being of wife becoming defined as that unrecognized sacrifice of her “all” in exchange for part of “Him” (his self-relation). Indeed, the passage from the variant to the canonical version of the poem is the passage *of* marriage as a rendering invisible of the labors of women: the “all” becomes nothing, and the poem becomes haunted by the silent sacrifice of the feminine body. This all become nothing folded into the possibility of the husband’s happiness and combined with a cyclical steadiness of time *is* the sentiment of *devotion* so intertwined with wifehood in the nineteenth century.

The logic of the marriage poem, then, would seem homologous to the wage relation in capitalism: the lyrical voice produces words, engages in affective labor predicated upon advancing the husband her life. The “solemn contract,” which is to say the sentimental language mystifying love’s institutionalization in marriage, conceals the surplus of life/time extracted by the husband: his happiness comes at the cost of her life. Happiness, as I have already pointed out, is the affective organization of marriage through the teleological selection of good and bad objects, through the parsing of *praxis* into good and bad habits. What’s more, as this poem suggests, happiness is a “sweet debt,” affective credit advanced so as to guarantee the value of present social conditions

through a claim on the future. The poem's promise of happiness entails the conversion of the female body into a site for the extraction of wealth, into a source of the future. (Only implicit in this poem is that this future finds its ultimate form in the birth of a child, in that surplus body that leaps from the poem's "Insolvent" nights and binds her all the more closely to him.) Patriarchy and capitalism, thus, secure *their* futures through the identification of woman and wife, or the transformation of her into *his*, and through the labors ("the Daily Own – of Love") entailed by wifehood.

But this is an unhappy poem, a poem whose final stanza can only be read as consolation for a great loss: "*At least – 'tis Mutual – Risk.*"²²⁴ It is a poem staging the pain of marriage, in the sense of marriage as a weakening of a woman's life, a lessening of her capacities to affect and be affected, insofar as her affective life is reduced to the role of producing herself as "Vision," of being a means towards another's happiness. The poem *as* labor, I would argue, calls into question the labor *of* the poem (the labors of wifehood), for the poem's language does not attempt to resolve the contradictory temporalities, nor does it work to swallow up the body of woman in the contract of marriage. Instead, this poem calls attention to gaps and cultivates fissures; it introduces anxiety not as an external threat to marriage but as intrinsic to its very operations, as a marker of marriage as the loss of any possibility for feminine autonomy.²²⁵ To introduce this anxiety into the heart of marriage is to shake its very foundations, for the happiness of marriage ("marital bliss") is not simply ideological in the sense of illusory but rather an important component of marriage as biopolitical technology: happiness coordinates

the affects of husband and wife in a manner that compensates for the exhausting nature of capitalism – the wear and tear of the daily grind – while at the same time maintaining it.

That the happiness of the husband must also be the happiness of the wife is suggested by another quote from the 1789 article cited above:

Nothing is so honorable as Marriage nothing so comfortable both to the body and the mind.... It is the most wholesome, the most beneficial, and rational law for the universal welfare of man. [...] It is marriage alone that knits and binds the sinews of society together and makes the life of man honorable to himself, useful to others, and grateful to the God of nature.²²⁶

This quote is an example of what Lauren Berlant names “national sentimentality”: “a rhetoric of promise that a nation can be built across fields of social difference through channels of affective identification and empathy”²²⁷ and an “antipolitical politics” that is “sentimental because it is a politics that abjures politics, made on behalf of a private life protected from the harsh realities of power.”²²⁸ In the case of marriage, national sentimentality neutralizes the political content involved in the exchange of women by embedding the promise of happiness into the affective labor of the wife; the wife as “happy homemaker” makes questions of power vanish by resolving them into the “the Daily Own – of Love,” that is, by displacing and condensing the entire affective economy surrounding marriage into the husband’s satisfaction. In this context, anxiety is more than simply a worry over the loss of the future, a fear that the voyage of marriage may end in a shipwreck, rather than delivering a profit on one’s affective investments. Dickinson’s anxious poem calls into question the very “sinews of society”; it challenges society as a whole by divorcing the valorization of the whole as “wholesome” from its effects on women who are left fretting over whether or not they might “disappoint” their husbands.

Dickinson produces a *disidentification* between the desires of woman and the reproduction of the social totality. Put differently, the unhappiness of this poem gives the lie to the socialization of happiness at the expense of women; it makes available a sense of discomfort in and at the role of Woman in the (re)production of society and against the assumption that “nothing [is] so comfortable both to the body and the mind” as capital’s marriage to patriarchy.

Unhappiness is not a failure on the part of Dickinson’s poetry, an inability to provide imaginary solutions for real social contradictions, but rather its *modus operandi*. The so-called “literature of misery” that I discussed earlier may have misery not only as its starting point but also as a strategy, or a set of tactics for producing a productive sense of discontent with social relationships. In Lauren Berlant’s terms, Dickinson’s poetry partakes of the genre of the “female complaint,” constituting an ambivalent gesture which calls into question the social order determining the affective lives of women by marking the pain and injustices women suffer and, at the same time, demands (in a utopian vein) that society make good on the promise of love and satisfaction which is the flipside of the emotional disciplinary regimes of American capitalism and nationalism. To complain – to give voice to the discontent of the biopolitical position of women, their socialization as the bearers of love’s burdens – is to ride the threshold between subverting the normal order and consolidating it.²²⁹ In “I gave myself to him,” that discontent takes the form of a surrender of time: in becoming wife, woman gives her life over to husband, to the “great Purchaser”; she becomes the medium, indeed, the very body, through which a

patriarchal economy articulates itself. Domestic labor becomes the sign that a wife's life belongs to another, that it is a life on credit.

Dickinson also has a series of poems that deal with the life of the wife as a kind of death, as a *death in life* (a life that lives the present as a loss of the future). Take the following poem:

I'm 'wife' – I've finished that –
That other state –
I'm Czar – I'm 'Woman' now –
It's safer so –

How odd the Girl's life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse –
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven – now –

This being comfort – then
That other kind – was pain –
But Why compare?
I'm 'Wife'! Stop there! (225)

Even as the pointedly present tense refrain of the copula (“I'm 'wife,’” “I'm 'Woman,’” “I'm 'Wife’”) insists on marriage as an irreversible, world-altering event, the poem engages in that act of comparison that it seems to forbid. The center of the poem, its kernel we might say, is the metaphor according to which marriage is not life but an afterlife in which one gazes upon an earth from which one has departed. By implication, life on earth is the “pain” of the third stanza, and the afterlife “comfort.” Marriage would seem to be the culmination of that death drive that pursues an ultimate relaxation of tension in the discharge of all worldly excitement. The poem even ends on a note of cessation, the sharp two-beat iambic of the last line generating not suspense but rather an abrupt halting: “I'm 'Wife'! Stop there!” The exclamation point, with its downward

stroke, visualizes the cutting off of life, like a barricade blocking woman's passage beyond wife. The life of a wife is a static life; it has all the vitality of a corpse, or an angel.

And yet the poem's tone is less that of absolute closure than of sarcastic inquiry. The same exclamation points that would seem to shut the door on woman as more than wife mix together anxiety, dissatisfaction, and willful disbelief. We could say that the focus of the poem is less the metaphor in which life becomes death than the failure of that metaphor, its inability to cover over a gap between the poem's making synonymous of woman and wife. "But Why compare?" gives the lie to the poem's semblance of surrender: the question is not a throwaway but rather a redoubling of the poem's incessant marking of the gap, the distance, between wife and woman. The poem gazes not upon the life at which it has arrived but at "that other state," "that other kind." Although the poem would seem to rest on a teleological course in which a "Girl's life" gives way to the life of woman/wife, the quotation marks that surround "woman" and "wife" ironically fissure the states that are the points that break life into stages. Those quotation marks (or "scare quotes") seem to say that while wife and woman might conventionally be one and the same, an identification that enables life to progress from childhood to maturity, they are nonetheless only conventional or habitual, only a contingent if forceful arrangement. The otherness of "that other state," the "odd[ness]" of a life before the life of a wife, is a dissonance that marks that something is missing in the life that the poem initiates, namely, a sense of futurity. For not only does the poem "soft[ly] eclipse" the future tense, but the repetition of "now" and "so" suggest that the

present is merely the shuffling of a small, fixed number of pre-given elements. “Comfort” is the dreadful finitude of futurity foreclosed.

This sense that something is missing is, I would argue, the utopian impulse at work. It is the persistence of the possibility of this world becoming another world insofar as it marks the present as fractured: not incomplete – which would render the future an extrapolation of the continuum past-present – but something messier, a crisscrossing series of diverse and disparate temporal trajectories without common measure. Or to complicate matters, we could say that there is a general equivalent that reduces all time to a single measure; that power belongs to money, and we have seen it in operation in “I gave myself to him” in the economic logic that turns woman into the medium/body through which the life of marriage secures itself as credit. The logic of money, as functional mediator of capital, is a logic of equivalence, not a negation of difference but a delimitation of the range of difference in respect to the limits of capital’s reproduction. But Dickinson’s marriage poems almost inevitably involve themselves in a dissonance, in the clanging together of incommensurable times, or what Ernst Bloch names, “non-synchronicity” (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*).²³⁰ If in the marriage poems this dissonance tends to incarnate itself only in the quasi-material figure of “the Girl’s life,” it is perhaps because childhood stands in relation to womanhood not as past to the present but as the welling up of futurity, a not-yet through which woman might become other than wife. But Dickinson can only glance over the shoulder at this girl, can only stage futurity as a future past. If the utopian is to become more than a stillborn longing, it must find other methods of expressing itself, other modes of relating subjectivity, temporality, and obligation.

In disturbing our understanding of marriage, Dickinson's *unhappy* marriage poems do not demystify in the sense of providing some neutral position of truth but rather move us away from certain relations with the world and others towards other relations. They teach us *to be unhappy with happiness*, to find displeasure in a set-up in which happiness acts as both the implementation of and alibi for the unequal laboring/production of genders and sexualities. They demonstrate a non-identity between the world as it is and the world as it might become; they teach us, in other words, that *this America (and the form of Woman to which it clings) is not-all*. Dickinson's poems are virtual experiments that test the possibility of woman becoming other than the normative model of the wife. The question now becomes: What are the other trajectories that Dickinson's poetry traces? How does the possibility of becoming-woman otherwise – or of cultivating impersonal powers in excess of personal discipline – actualize itself? Or what happens when women refuse to play wife?

III. Dickinson and the Body:

A Note on Corporeal Poesis

Dickinson's poems dealing with marriage stage what I call corporeal poesis, that is, the reconfiguration of the biopolitical syntagm "body/language" that I discuss in the Introduction of *A Desire Called America*: an event of sense generating a novel relation between the terms of corporeality and of language, it being understood that these terms are mutually implicating, that a change in the systematicity of language affects the

production of bodies, and vice versa. If biopolitics is the becoming political of life itself, then it revolves around the question of the shapes that life can take on – the kinds of bodies in which it can be – and the consequences for living in a certain manner. More precisely, as Paolo Virno has argued, biopolitics is about the struggle over the incarnation of potentiality qua potentiality, not the ability to do this or that but the ability to do at all and the parameters or conditions enabling or disabling certain kinds of practice.²³¹ I speak of a corporeal poesis not in order to suggest that biopolitics occurs once and for all as the secret origin to politics in general but rather in order to indicate the ontological stakes involved: biopolitics is a struggle over the very *whatness* of our bodies; it is a struggle to define the implication of human beings, without transcendent remainder, in social practices.

Biopolitics, then, is not something in addition to politics or to the social; it is the *production of the social as political*. In terms of political philosophy, biopolitics challenges the fundamental myth of modern politics – the emergence of political government from an exit from the state of nature – by illuminating how “nature” (or “body”) is never really left behind but recurs in the positing of bodies in terms of supposedly natural inclinations and in the managing of populations according to issues of “fitness,” “well-being,” and “health.” Biopolitics, in other words, is not about the politicization of biology so much as about the general implication of bodies and lives in political matters. Affect, I would add, is the modal expression of the biopolitical, its actualization in impersonal material relations, the unfolding and enfolding of corporeal potentials through material encounters resulting in habits, or practices, that we stick to.

That sexual difference ought central to any understanding of biopolitics is evident: the production of social bodies entails the production of sexual difference; the production of sexual difference – in the context of late modernity – is itself a matter of capturing a series of singular differences and subsuming them into the dimorphic logic of the (two) sexes and the logic of heterosexuality.²³² As Foucault writes of the bourgeoisie (the class to which we should remember Dickinson belonged²³³): “We can assert on the contrary [against the supposition that the emergent bourgeoisie amputated its sexual body from subjectivity] that it provided itself with a body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved from the many dangers and contacts, to be isolated from others so that it would retain its differential value; and this, by equipping itself with – among other resources – a technology of sex.”²³⁴ The politics of protecting class privilege did not so much depend on erasing or concealing bodily existence but rather in making and maintaining specific kinds of bodies: the virile body of a husband; the angelic or hysterical body of a wife; the excited body of a child. Each of these bodies, as Foucault argues, is linked to specific modes of knowledge and relations of power, and we might add that they are also linked to specific kinds of affects. Marriage is a particularly important technology of sex, for it produces Husbands and Wives (and Family) as the sanctified condition of society’s reproduction. As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues, the very constitution of the liberal public sphere in the U.S. depends on the production of specific kinds of bodies, in sexual, gendered, and racial terms. The so-called private sphere – the domestic space in which the production of bodies occurs – is not separate

from the social and political dynamics of the public but enfolded in it as its ever-present and constitutive underside.²³⁵

Dickinson's poetry rehearses marriage, and wifhood in particular, as a technology of sex linked up with an entire strategy for reproducing society, but in doing so, it bears witness to the constitutedness, or historicity, of "woman" as a specific "technology of sex." It is not so much a question of gender versus sexuality as of the very *constitution of sexuality*, for it is not only roles that are social(ized) but bodies themselves.²³⁶ As we have seen in the poem "I gave Myself to Him," the body is not a neutral element of the exchange between husband and wife but is produced each day in "the Daily Own – of Love" as that which secures a future for capital and patriarchy. If the body is not literally present in the poem, it is nonetheless the supplement on which the entire sense of the poem is hinged: without the body offered up between noon's insolvency and night's debt, there would be quite literally nothing at the heart of marriage. In another turn of the screw, we might observe that the by the end of that poem the geography of love is particularly characteristic of liberalism. The autonomy of the husband confirms itself in mobility, in the voyage of the "great Purchaser" to the "Isles of Spice," whereas the dependency of the wife signifies itself in the cyclical fixity of the marriage bed. His mobility and her stability express two different understandings of subjectivity and corporeality: the masculine subject is unencumbered by necessity, endowed with autonomy in the sense of opposition to external determination, possessing a light, almost non-existent body; the feminine subject is burdened and burdensome,

laden with dependencies and other-directed, caught up in the quotidian necessities of domestic chores.

The dichotomy between an autonomous subject whose body is without weight and a dependent subject whose body is burdensome is consonant with the presuppositions of American liberalism, which has historically modeled its central figure, the autonomous individual, after a masculine, white, and (later) heterosexual conception of subjectivity – in the process, exiling women, among others, to a pre- or non-political domain.²³⁷ Instead of supposing a set of basically equal subjects that happen to differ in terms of accidental particularities, American individualism presupposes a constitutive asymmetry in which the uniqueness, the self-reliance, of one subject depends upon a basic deficiency in another. In fact, it may be better to speak not of two subjects but of a masculine subject and a feminine non-subject. In “I gave Myself to Him,” the feminine is either the subject’s object (the treasure to be found in the “Isles of spice”) or the envelope of the subject (the place to which the subject returns to ground himself.) This may go some way towards explaining the general ambivalence of Dickinson’s poetry regarding the body. (Indeed, Dickinson writes in a letter to Abiah Root: “I do not care for the body, I love the timid soul [...] it hides for it is afraid, and the bold obtrusive body” [*Letters 1*: 103].) Karen Sánchez-Eppler frames this ambivalence as follows: “Dickinson’s fantasy of a fleshless liberty constantly collides with the sensual desire for a fully palpable freedom.”²³⁸ The body is the site of political struggle, even at those moments where it is written off or rendered invisible, for the autonomy of a (masculine) political subject viewed as without body is predicated on the existence of another body, the body of

Woman. Liberty would seem to require a negation of the flesh, a mimesis of masculine autonomy through ascetic practices renouncing (feminine) bodily life.

Dickinson's "I am afraid to own a Body" would seem, at first glance, to confirm the sense of the body as obstacle to political liberation:

I am afraid to own a Body –
 I am afraid to own a Soul –
 Profound – precarious Property –
 Possession, not optional –

Double Estate, entailed at pleasure
 Opon [sic] an unsuspecting Heir –
 Duke in a moment of Deathlessness
 And God, for a Frontier. (1050)

The poem would seem an elegy to freedom, a mourning for a state in which one was not split between soul and body (between the spiritual and the earthly). Freedom, then, is a spiritual state from which we depart as we enter our bodies and to which we return upon our bodies' expiration. Yet the text complicates this reading by making the body and soul convertible elements. Beginning to merge in the parallelism of the opening lines, body and soul intertwine to a point of indistinction in the third line wherein it is not clear to what "Property" refers – to "Body," to "Soul," or both? – a problem only exacerbated by the phrase "Double Estate," which knots the two terms together, distinguishing them not as two entities but as two facets of one and the same condition. Indeed, it is important that the term "Estate" itself suggests materiality, so that the poem implies that *even the soul expresses itself through corporeal form*. The subject, therefore, is inextricable from material expression, unimaginable as transcendent spirit. It as if the poem mimics Spinoza's *Ethics*, understanding mind and body as twin attributes, twin expressions, of a

single substance/totality (“God, for a Frontier”) – or as another of Dickinson’s poems so eloquently describes it: “The Spirit lurks within the Flesh/Like Tides within the Sea/That make the Water live, estranged/What would the Either be?” (1627). The soul and the body exist as co-implicated; they *are* each other in different guises. The soul is the *animation* of the body, its vital pulse, but the very shape of this vitality necessarily depends upon corporeal form. No vitality without the embodiment that gives life to life.

Yet the register of “I am afraid to own a Body” is more specific than a metaphysical consideration of body and soul. The repeated qualification of body and soul as “Property” implies that we are not dealing with material extension as such but rather with a particular mode of materiality: private property. The fear this poem announces is tied as much to issues of inheritance and transmission, to the questions of who mediates one’s relation to one’s own body and by what authority, as it is to embodiment as such. It is notable in this regards that the subject that manages a sense of autonomy is masculine: it is as if to be “Duke” over one’s own existence, one had to be at least the likeness of a man, masculinity signifying a certain gap amidst material extension or, perhaps, simply a certain savvy when it comes to handling property: man as business man, as (gendered) *homo economicus*. One might even take this materialist consideration of the poem a step further, noting that in the facsimile of the version Dickinson included in her fascicle manuscripts, only two words appear on lines of their own, “Property” and “Heir,” making the body of the poem swivel its weight (its typographical density) around the two words that transform subjectivity into property, hinging the body of the poem on property itself, as if to suggest that writing itself has to reckon with its implication in modes of

production and regimes of property.²³⁹ The materiality of the manuscript doubles, or even performs, the very problem the poem addresses. If with critics such as Sharon Cameron, Virginia Jackson, and Martha Nell Smith, we take the materiality of the manuscripts seriously, it is not because they serve as an absolute hermeneutic horizon or the ground of meaning as such but insofar as they suggest new problematics.²⁴⁰ In this case, the manuscript becomes an unfolding of Dickinson's body, an exposure of the relations that compose her corporeal existence and an attempt to explore the constitution of life's materiality by way of the materiality of the page.

What emerges from such attention to the manuscripts, understood as material extensions of Emily Dickinson's corporeal life, is a contradiction akin to the one Marx recognizes in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* between a sensuous, many-sided body and an abstract, one-sided body cleaved down to the sole function of "having":

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it – when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc. – in short, when it is *used* by us. Although private property itself again conceives all these direct realizations of possession as *means of life*, and the life which they serve as means is the *life of private property* – labor and conversion into capital.

In place of *all* these physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses – the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world.²⁴¹

Marx and Dickinson share an anxiety over what happens when life becomes the "*life of private property*." The genitive declination of that phrase generates a two-fold sense: life is colored by private property, taking its hue, becoming restricted to so many pursuits, so

many means towards the end of accumulation (“the sense of *having*”), and life belongs to private property, incarnates not its own spirit, its own desires, but the drive of capital.

When ownership mediates bodily existence, the use to which we put ourselves is instrumentalizing, that is, we use things and others only to become used ourselves. And in being used, we risk being used up. We risk that “absolute poverty” in which the many-sidedness of our social being, of our affects and practices, becomes reduced to the one-sidedness of being a function of/for capital’s reproduction. In Dickinson’s “I am afraid to own a Body,” this absolute poverty – not a lack but rather accumulation as the channeling of our existence into the narrow straits of having/property – becomes paradoxically on display in the line “Duke in a moment of Deathlessness.” If in that poem “Duke” is a figure of resolution, the possibility of owning one’s body without precarity, “Deathlessness,” reading almost as a double negative, connotes a deprivation from the very life inhering in the body (the approach to death being a definitive aspect of life), as if the restrictively gendered position of business man were also a form of poverty, the subject freed from the body only to be whittled down to the sole function of possession.

Questions of freedom and bondage are, then, necessarily questions of how subjects are embodied and what different forms of corporeality enable one to do. Returning the point to our analysis of Dickinson’s marriage poems, we might say that the properly biopolitical question that these texts raise is how the figure of the Wife monopolizes the possibilities involved in becoming-woman, how it enfolds the feminine body in a teleology in which the “honorable Work” of wifhood is destiny of every girl who does not want to be consigned to the insignificance of “playthings.” Wifhood is a

particular fold in the unfolding of the process of capitalism, or in Marx's terms, it is a conversion of "means of life" into the "life of private property." Yet Marx also speaks of an "emancipation of all human senses," and he is quite specific that such an emancipation would not occur beyond bodily life through an act of will that gifts human existence with transcendence over its misery but rather through the very estrangement of the senses, in the commerce of corporeal relations and social interaction. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx tends to place hope in a scientific understanding of the world and a teleological expression of human nature, which risks reducing the complexity of matters. Yet in a sentence such as "History itself is a *real* part of *natural history* – of nature's coming to be man," there is, in excess of its teleology, a crossroads produced between nature and history that opens thought to a thinking of the biopolitical and which suggests that emancipation must be thought in terms of the very natures we ascribe to bodies in all of their singularity.²⁴²

Dickinson, I would argue, is engaged in an emancipation of the senses. Her poetry breaks with the instrumentalization of use, the one-sided stupidity of lives and practices *qua* private property, retraining our sensuous, social being through encounters with relations between thought, affect, and bodies that surprise us, that highlight the contingency of social formations and reorient bodies towards other paths of becoming. That poems might work on bodies, that they might in any way effect transformation of bodies, is perhaps difficult to see. A poem might be a conduit for the expression of reflections on bodily sensations, but it would seem to leave the body behind in its linguistic performance. Yet Dickinson seems to have had great faith in the possibility of

poems impacting bodies and even to make it the very criterion for discerning poetry. In a conversation with T.W. Higginson, Dickinson defines what she takes to be poetry: “If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way” (*Letters 2*: 473-74). For Dickinson, poetry is defined not by conventional forms but by its capacity to move bodies, and to do so in excess of the “head,” that intellectual apparatus that poetry can apparently not only do without but even removes in its intense transmogrification of bodily life. What’s more, the impact of poetry is permanent; one cannot hope to recover from its effects: “No fire can ever warm me.”

I would argue that this understanding of poetry deserves more than to be treated as simply an example of Romantic hyperbole, even if it emerges, in part, out of the tradition of apologies for poetry such as Shelley’s. For if affects are immaterial in the sense that we cannot grasp them as objects and yet are inextricably part and parcel of material life, then there seems to be no reason not to understand poetry as affective labor of the most literal kind, working on the affects that compose subjects, if not always on subjects themselves. Poetry is an affective labor, entering through the doors of our perception and intellection to modify our habits, to change our worldly dispositions. We know it when we find ourselves changed, changed utterly. Poetry as affective labor is *corporeal poiesis*: a mode of engaging with the body insofar as it is a signifying entity in the double sense of both producing signifiers and becoming a signifier; a return not to empirical origins but to that point at which bodily affection and linguistic operations

become indistinguishable; a chiasmic crossing in which the material field of corporeality is reorganized by the impact of the signifier and the materiality of the sign transfigured by the labors of the body.²⁴³ Put differently, we might say that poetry (or corporeal poesis) works on its readers not by playing to their emotions, by playing the chords of personal sentiments, but rather by opening them to the impersonal excess of affect already inhabiting them, by exposing them to that which in them is more than themselves. But the question remains, what does Dickinson's emancipation of the senses look like? What comes after our unhappiness with the regime of happiness, our dissatisfaction with the current state of bodies?

IV. "The Wife – without the Sign!"

Heterotopia and the Common

We have seen a first sense in which Dickinson speaks to a "minor America": in the shadow of American exceptionalism, there is another nation, a nation of Woman that exists in a constitutive relationship of subordination to Man. Woman is not a position excluded from the conceptual space of America but rather tied to America in a relationship of inclusive exclusion. If the public space of the political proper forecloses women insofar as they are understood as the very embodiment of dependency, it does not simply cast Woman out but rather makes her a constitutive, immanent exception: it is the very dependency of Woman cast as pre-political Nature that serves as the basis for a masculine position of autonomy. Autonomy, in this instance, is a negative relation, a rule

over oneself predicated upon a rule *over* an other (or over an internal otherness). The submission of Woman to Man – “I gave Myself to Him...” – mediates political autonomy, for it is the very difference between oneself as raw, inert, embodied nature (feminine) and oneself as cultured, dynamic, and intellectual subject (masculine) that determines the space of politics proper. To become political is to negate pre-political Woman.

In the context of the United States, the trope of the Puritan errand into the wilderness perhaps best captures this determination of the political: America as an exceptional space, as simultaneously destiny of the world and its rebirth, entails a conversion of Nature into (Christian) civilization. In this imaginary, the land of the New World is at once inviting virgin soil and fearsome wilderness. In both cases, the constitution of the nation, the pre-history of the U.S., becomes a civilizing process that involves the masculinization of the nation through the conquering of the feminine other.²⁴⁴ From this perspective, marriage repeats this originary errand, Woman becoming both the Wilderness the husband must conquer and the virgin territory he makes his home. We might thicken this argument by pointing out that the conversion of Woman into asocial natural being goes hand and hand with the transition into capitalism. Silvia Federici argues convincingly that men’s control over women through marriage serves as a substitute and compensation for the loss of the pre-capitalist commons in the transition to capitalism. The commons were resources (often natural resources such as firewood, water, and land) that were free, belonging not to individuals but to local communities. The commons were a material condition for a form of social based not on the exchange of

commodities but on filial bonds and affiliations mediated by common interests or simple locality. With the transition into capitalism, practices of enclosure transformed the commons into private property. At the same time, women increasingly became defined in opposition to wage labor, as (potential) wives and natural supplements to the labor of men. In Federici's words: "In the new capitalist regime *women themselves became the commons*, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations."²⁴⁵ Like the commons, women and the domestic labors to which they were consigned were natural resources, seemingly unmediated by exchange value, a gift from God that continued to give while asking for nothing but love in return. We might say that implicit in the errand into nature is a *decivilizing* project transforming women into Nature, enclosing collective potentialities in the privacy of (civilized) marriage.

In *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*, Mary Loeffelholz argues that Dickinson calls into question the myth of the errand into nature, especially in its foundational role for American Romanticism. Her poetry "socializes" the figure of Woman that writers such as Emerson relentlessly naturalize, enabling an "intersubjective contest for power" or, in the psychoanalytic terms Loeffelholz employs, a contest over who can possess the phallus of political/symbolic authority (7-9). But Dickinson does more than simply call into question the naturalness of this configuration of the political. In challenging our contentment with the structure of the political, Dickinson's poems open up a space for another politics, a politics that neither consigns women to the necessity of the reproductive labor of mankind, nor opens the door for them to occupy the position of liberal (masculine) autonomy. Dickinson's unhappy marriage poems disturb

the biopolitics of marriage by introducing the possibility that female bodies might be something other than either potential wives or mimics of men.

This sense that wifedom is not all that a woman might be destined for brings us to the second moment in our analysis of Dickinson's biopolitics: the *refusal* of (heterosexual and patriarchal) marriage. If, as Dickinson writes in a letter (notably, in the process of warding off a potential suitor), "'No' is the wildest word we consign to Language," it is because as I will show below the word's negativity, its refusal of actuality, is bound up with the positivity of potentiality: Dickinson breaks with the political economy of marriage in order to highlight the concrete potential for women to live otherwise (*Letters* 2: 562). Indeed, Dickinson reinvents the pre-capitalist commons as *a non-capitalist commonality between women*, a form of relation founded not upon private property but in a sharing without proper measure, a mode of contact between incommensurable singular beings. This emergent sociality does not, however, take the form of a utopia proper, if by the latter one understands the replacement of an old, damaged world by a new, perfected one. Dickinson does not so much replace this world as generate a fold in it, a pocket of space subtracted from the dominant logic, operating much like a theater, the rules of this world suspended but not destroyed, the curtain opening onto scenes of pleasures not quite of this world, nor of another. Foucault terms such a space a "heterotopia," for unlike utopia, which is either "society itself perfected" or the "inverse of society" (in any case, "unreal"), heterotopias are not unreal but "*virtual*," "counter-emplacements, kinds of effectively real utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that one finds in culture's interior are at once represented, contested, and inverted, kinds

of places that are outside of all places, though they would nevertheless be effectively localizable” (“Espaces” 1574-76).²⁴⁶ Dickinson burrows into the proper space of marriage, mimicking its rituals in such a way that they end up other than themselves, overcome by virtual tendencies haunting normality.

This, then, is another sense of what “minor America” might mean: not subordination but a diagonal line that traverses America, unfolding buried social potentials, disrupting dominant norms not through simple negation but through the illumination of other possibilities for being American. In “Title divine is mine,” Dickinson rehearses marriage once again, but whereas “I gave Myself to Him” presumes the terms of marriage only to deconstruct them, this poem begins from the limit of marriage, the threshold at which it blurs with its outside:

Title divine – is mine!
 The Wife – without the Sign!
 Acute Degree – conferred on me –
 Empress of Cavalry!
 Royal – all but the Crown!
 Betrothed – without the Swoon
 God sends us Women –
 When You – hold – Garnet to Garnet –
 Gold – to Gold –
 Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –
 In a Day –
 “My Husband” – women say –
 Stroking the Melody –
 Is *this* the way?²⁴⁷

The difficulty of interpreting this poem takes place in the opening lines, in which we encounter a potential contradiction between, on the one hand, the claim of the lyrical persona to a divine title, and, on the other, the notion of a wife without sign, a wife not ratified, or entitled, through the act of marriage. If the subject of this poem is a wife still

incomplete from the perspective of a patriarchal and divine economy/teleology in which women fulfill their role by wedding a masculine other, then how does she lay hold to a “title divine”? The poem reminds that in the New England Puritan context, marriage is a double jointure, coupling not only man and wife but also bride and groom to God. It is not only the father that gives the bride but also God: “God sends us Women.” Woman is born into wifeness, destined to say, “My Husband,” waiting for the “sign” in the prophetic sense of a virtual tag that marks one as *to be wed* to transform into the “sign” in the evidentiary sense of a trace that one *has been wed* – a passage condensed into the tenth line of the poem in a way that suggests the sheer gravitational pull of this patriarchal declination of the feminine: “Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –” This line is a biography in miniature, the generic life-course of Woman, so it is notable that between birth (“Born”) and death (“Shrouded”), there is only marriage (“Bridalled”), the single event, or sign, that she has lives at all. Not to receive the sign is not to live at all, at least not a proper life, and a proper life, as the punning “Bridalled” suggests, is one in which Woman is Wife and Wife is beast of burden. To assume womanhood involves becoming subject *to* another (bridled by the husband) but not becoming a political subject, at least not recognized as such.²⁴⁸

To be a “Wife – without the Sign,” then, would seem to mean being doubly unrecognized. But perhaps this is the point. If woman is virtually always already a wife, or at least on the road to becoming one, then the sign of wifeness attaches itself to the feminine regardless of whether or not any papers have been signed. To be “without the Sign,” then, constitutes an act, rather than a passive condition – it is not that the subject of

this poem is *not yet* a wife but that *she is a wife without propriety, without the proper seal*. She lives *another kind of life*, one that does not fit into the patriarchal teleology of “Born – Bridalled – Shrouded –” The poem hovers between positivity and negativity, visibility and invisibility, for not only is she “without the Sign,” but she is also “Royal – all but the Crown,” the disjunctive “but” severing the quality of being royal from its status (and from its sign, “the Crown”). The poem, I would argue, enacts a conversion of sheer negativity, or lack (a woman improper for not completing her life in wifehood), into the possibility of something positive. The line “Betrothed – without the swoon” epitomizes this conversion, for it suggests the possibility that being wed to another does not necessarily entail the presence of a passive (“swoon”) or subordinate (“Bridalled”) partner, a partner defined in terms of dependency upon a masculine other. The poem gestures towards the possibility of a form of coupling that would operate in an egalitarian manner and would relate without subsuming autonomy, a possibility (I demonstrate below) that Dickinson fleshes out in “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”

But in this poem, it is less a matter of cordoning off a positive space from a negative space than of calling into question the closure of marriage enmeshed as it is in the constraints of patriarchy, heterosexuality, and capitalism. The last line of the poem (“Is *this* – the way?”) is a splitting off of the virtual, or potentiality as such, from the actual: the italicized deictic draws a line of cleavage between the present state of affairs and another, and the interrogative arrives to mark, in a positive form, the possibility of alternatives, of other ways of being and doing, where there seems to be only the fatalistic presence of nature or divine law. This overloading of existence by potentiality structures

the poem as a whole, which we might read it as divided into two parts: a first part (the first six lines) marked by a profusion of exclamations, internal rhymes and assonance, and a relatively regular meter; and a second part (the last eight lines) marked by a mirroring repetition of words, a grid-like breaking up of the syntax into so many interchangeable units, and the collapse of any regularity in the meter. We might read the passage from the first to the second part of the poem as an instance of enclosure. The combination of excitement (or ejaculation) and sonority (assonance and internal rhyme) gives way to a rather clunky and regimented blocking of words, and the paradoxical play *between* positive and negative is overcome by a rigid delineation of the positive against the negative. The poem's second part swallows up the surplus of potentiality, disciplining the promiscuous verbal multiplicity of the first lines into the stark order of private married life. Reading the line with an emphasis on the reductive capitalization of "women," "God sends us Women" magically transforms polymorphous perversity into one-dimensional normality. The poem dramatizes a defeat, an irreversible passage from the plenitude of a world in which multiplicity trumps binary order to a world with no room for indetermination, no space for what would be neither this, nor that. It strands the reader in melancholic longing for a world either prior to or simply without patriarchy.

While this analysis accounts for much of the force of the poem, it risks too hastily duplicating the structure of either-or (either *I am a proper wife, or not a wife at all*) that the poem so acutely disrupts. In fact, wouldn't we need to consider the question of the last line, with its challenge to the enclosing force of "Born – Bridalled – Shrouded," as its own semi-autonomous part, or at least as returning us in some way to the first part, as if

the poem were a kind of Möbius strip, the endpoint returning us unawares to the beginning? And that last line itself is caught up by way of end-rhymes in the lines preceding it, so that parceling out the poem into a series of discrete polemical positions becomes more and more unwieldy. I would argue that the poem instead calls for us to conceive of it as a singular disruptive traversal of the logic of marriage, a polemical instance of force that yields less a self-identical position than a hollowing out of the claustrophobic privacy of marriage *and* a still amorphous sense of potentiality in excess of actuality. This is one way to read the dashes that fissure the poem vertically down its center: they enact a suspension of the poem's flow, a dilation of the time between the positive and the negative, in which terms of judgment no longer hold, and the possibility of another kind of poem, another kind of being comes into view.

Understood in this manner, the last lines of the poem are parody. The duplication of the proper woman's words ("My Husband' – women say") and the mocking description of her pleasure ("Stroking the Melody") open a gap between propriety and the feminine as such, detotalizing the patriarchal economy in which a woman is not a woman unless she is a wife. In fact, the poem is itself a parody of the traditional fourteen-line sonnet. Whereas a traditional sonnet is something like the inverted yet intimate other of marital bliss (an expression of romantic love often trespassing the bounds of marriage but always echoing marriage in its endless reversals of mastery), Dickinson's fourteen lines assert the possibility of a relationship without mastery ("without the swoon"), in which each member paradoxically would be sovereign ("Empress of Cavalry"). The parodic is an exemplification of the immanent surplus of potentiality over actuality that haunts the

poem throughout. It consummates the “Acute Degree” of power displayed in the first lines not in a positive figure but in the opening of a *space* of otherness in excess and yet immanent to marriage. This space is neither positive nor negative but rather a stepping back from the moral obligation of wifhood, a subtraction from the very regulations that denominate positive and negative, good and bad.²⁴⁹ It is the terrain of a neutralizing suspension in which the poem enacts wifhood, plays the wife, without its complete determination by the patriarchal affective economy from which it emerges.

I would argue that the mood characterizing this immanent excess of possibility in marriage is a specific kind of melancholia. Loss, of course, is of the essence in regards to melancholia, but the thrust of the term depends upon the relation to loss, rather than the loss itself. In the case of this poem, the loss is of a woman without patriarchy, a virtual woman, one who has perhaps never existed, who is “without the Sign” and nevertheless involved with another (“Wife”). It is the future of woman, of woman more than wife, that is the lost object of this melancholia. That this loss accords to Freud’s characterization of the ambivalence of melancholia, the oscillation between love and hate in its supposedly unsuccessful mourning, is evident in my demonstration of how the poem’s last lines loop back to produce a neutralizing suspension in which wifhood is at once played at and stepped back from: “Is *this* the way?” Jonathan Flatley argues for two conceptions of melancholia in Freud’s work, a “depressive” melancholia in which the “ambivalent emotions are internalized without changing, where they then create an internal and antagonistic split” *and* a more productive – in the sense of generating new possibilities – model in which the “lost object itself is transformed into the ‘character’ of the ego.”²⁵⁰

The latter according to Flatley involves a mimetic process in which identification exceeds identity, in which the repetition of loss through “imitative incorporation” (the selective incorporation of traits of the lost other) defamiliarizes the habits and affective contours that make up a life (53).

We do not become what we have lost, we become *like* what we have lost, and in doing so, new possibilities emerge that depart from the identity of the lost object (there is no returning to an Edenic stage before patriarchy) but which nevertheless bear witness to the historical milieu. This kind of melancholia is not a simple impasse but the assumption of loss as the informing condition of a future that does not merely repeat the past.

Whereas “I’m ‘Wife’ – I’ve finished that” is utopic insofar as it gazes backwards over its shoulder at a lost place, a lost possibility, “Title divine is mine” brings that loss into the present as a productive disruption of the closure of patriarchal economies of affect, or, in other words, utopia becomes heterotopia, the enclosure of another world gives way to the potentialization of this one. The “Wife – without the Sign” does not rewind the history of Woman to a moment (girlhood) when Woman is more than Wife but rather challenges the social figure of the Wife with a loss that reveals the contingency of its existence, the transience of the present and the imminence of future alterity. Melancholia simultaneously marks the potential injustice of this order, the sense that this might not be *the way*, and gestures towards another way, another path that doubles this one only to depart from it.

“Title Divine is mine” is a queering of marriage, by which I do not mean to imply a specific sexuality underlying the poem (though as I discuss below, that may be at play)

but rather that older sense of the word “queer,” which, according to the OED, indicates at once a questioning (as in to query) and a disruption of the normal processes of social traffic (that meaning originating in the phrase to “queer the pitch”).²⁵¹ Dickinson queers marriage by interrogating it in such a way that it becomes unhinged from its own givens, becomes itself “without the Sign,” a heterotopic double of itself. While the positive articulation of an alternative social relation is minimal in that poem, we might nonetheless discern an intimation of its contours. It is a mode of relation in which every member is autonomous and yet intertwined with others; an exchange not between equivalents but between incommensurable singularities; a form of life that does not evolve out of brute, fatalistic necessity but out of an almost voluntarist insistence on contingency; and a speculative entry into the future without guarantee of reproducing past or present. We can already begin to see how this heterotopic space of a queer marriage is removed from the traffic in women endemic to the conjunction of patriarchy and capitalism: the proper circulation of women is that of a trading of equivalents between men in which the former are not only subordinate to the latter but also, as the above section argues, the immanent condition of possibility of masculine political autonomy. Dickinson’s poetry cleaves open the space of marriage, exposing it to its own excess of possibility, suggesting the outlines of an alternative affective economy, one not characterized by the leech-like transfer of power but by a playful contingency, by an ability to “strok[e] the melody of romance” without buying into the subordination of women to reproductive labor and equivalence.

One obvious possibility would be that of contraction to a singular point without relation to others, or in a word, withdrawal. Dickinson's poetry might function as a retreat into isolation in such a way that it seals itself off from the world, producing a vacuum in which liberty depends upon non-interference. An entire body of literature has grown up around how notions of privacy structure Dickinson's poetry, criticism that seeks less to uncover the truth of Dickinson's life than to map out what one critic calls her "strategies of reticence."²⁵² Dickinson's poems become so many tactics in a struggle to disengage womanhood, or perhaps simply individuality, from wifehood; they are part of a multi-pronged strategy for achieving a form of solitude that would be the condition of liberation from a patriarchal economy. But privacy can take a number of forms and possess a number of meanings. It might mean a lack of interference in one's affairs, or it might mean that one's affairs are not advertised to the public at large, that one's business is kept between a small group of familiar individuals. Christopher Benfey, taking a cue from Wittgenstein, distinguishes between human privacy as an epistemological problematic ("whether we can share our inner life with another") and secrecy ("whether we can tell other people our secrets"), but then goes on to argue that what Dickinson's poetry implies "above all is that something about her, or *in* her, remain hidden from the view of others. It is the terrible exposure of existence that appalls her."²⁵³ Benfey's argument possesses the advantage of precision, making Dickinson's privacy not simply a subtraction from the public but a hiddenness, an invisibility that preserves an unknown aspect of subjectivity. This might be one way to understand "Wife – without the Sign" or "Royal – all but the Crown": in each case, being withdraws to a point of

incommunicability, a point at which the signifier is but a negated gesture pointing towards an unnamable state of affairs. Dickinson's poetry becomes the presentation of a void.

But while Benfey alludes to the historical and material conditions that underlie this form of privacy, citing Foucault to suggest that the modern conception of privacy might not have existed until the nineteenth century and analyzing Brandeis and Warren's landmark 1890 article "The Right to Privacy" – which, notably, grounds privacy on "an inviolate personality" articulated against "instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise [that] have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life"²⁵⁴ – he nevertheless ignores the constitutive split that structures the very notion of privacy in gendered terms. As a long line of feminist critics have argued, if in the nineteenth century men are granted a right to privacy, women are consigned to it; they are designated as incapable of entering into public affairs and defined as private creatures, that is, as beings who naturally belong at home. Yet I do not think that this invalidates the assertion that there is in Dickinson's poetry a longing for something to remain hidden. Instead, it qualifies it, for the "terrible exposure of existence" of which Benfey speaks is less the unveiling of domestic space to a leering public than it is the very condition of womanhood in the nineteenth century: to be a woman is to be a virtual wife, and to be a virtual wife is to have one's existence constantly exposed, that is, constantly unfolded, parceled out, and instrumentalized for the reproduction of society.²⁵⁵ Paradoxically, then, Woman is a creature exposed (subsumed by a particular biopolitical control) through socially determined privacy.

Dickinson's desire for invisibility is best understood as the cultivation of a relation between language and femininity subtracted from the intertwined social logics of capitalism and patriarchy. A useful comparison is drawn here between Whitman's practices and Dickinson's. Virginia Jackson usefully sums it up, "Whereas he [Michael Moon] reads Whitman's writing as an attempt to put the (especially male, queer) body into a nineteenth-century discourse that had excised it, I read Dickinson's writings as an attempt to extricate the (especially female, queer) body from a nineteenth-century discourse that had incorporated it" (197). Or drawing on my previous chapter: whereas Whitman's utopian project depends upon the translation of America into a multitude of poets, one vast, promiscuous crowd of flesh, Dickinson's depends upon interrupting the circulation of bodies; it requires the breaking apart of the conflation of the female body with the patriarchal fantasy of supple virgin soil. (But as I argue throughout this chapter, Dickinson does not abandon corporeality as such but rather reinvents it.) Dickinson's desire for invisibility becomes a desire to speak the female body outside of patriarchy, beyond, or to one side of, the circulation of what she calls in one letter the "funds of the Father." Dickinson's poetry may seem to possess a will towards a certain kind of hermetic closure, and it may at times seem to rely upon an almost indecipherable private lexicon of figures and images, but its incommunicability is not an abdication of language's ability to relate or of the signifier's capacity to socialize but rather a challenge to the patriarchal and capitalist conditions informing language use.²⁵⁶

Dickinson joins the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray in her deconstruction of the masculine totalization of Western language and thought. If I place

these two writers in dialogue despite a century dividing them, it is for several reasons. Not only does setting them side by side to highlight the pertinence of Dickinson's writing for a thinking of (bio)politics and language, today, but it also enables us to mark the peculiarities of Dickinson's feminism, its position askew or aslant from the waves of feminist thought as they are typically demarcated. Additionally, Irigaray provides a vocabulary through which it becomes possible to articulate what might otherwise remain inarticulate in readings of Dickinson's poems, their simultaneously ontological and political valences as polemical confrontations with the consignment of women to the realm of non-subjects. In *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray analyzes the manner in which woman becomes visible/articulable only as a function of a masculine logic of exchange:

The use of and traffic in women subtend and uphold the reign of hom(m)osexuali-ty, even while they maintain that hom(m)osexuality in speculations, mirror games, identifications, and more or less rivalrous appropriations, which defer its real practice. Reigning everywhere, although prohibited in practice, hom(m)osexuali-ty is played out through the bodies of women, matter, or sign, and heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men.²⁵⁷

Irigaray's pun "hom(m)osexuali-ty" which makes heterosexual exchange a form of homosexuality is not a subtle nod to the homoeroticism integral to male bonding but rather a more fundamental proposition regarding the existence of difference within patriarchy: difference as a function of the masculine exchange of women is confined to a basic identity, or sameness ("homo"); difference differs only relative to the phallus, an "alibi" for the regulation of society according to models of male sexual development

and desire in what Irigaray names “phallocracy”. Patriarchy, then, is univocal. It allows for only one voice, subsuming difference (*hetero*) into sameness (*homo*) through “the standardization of women according to proper names that determine their equivalences” (173). This standardization of women operates through a mode of abstraction that splits woman off from her own body and into a division between exchange and use value: “*Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use*” (176). From the masculine perspective of this economy, phallocracy produces women as instruments, or the medium, of communication. Women are signs of male desire, “a mirror of value of and for men,” whose materiality matters only insofar as it acts as a support for (patriarchal) value (177). From the feminine perspective, phallocracy separates women from their own potentiality for speech and bodily life; their bodies become one-dimensional functions of the reproduction of masculine desire, their speech a parroting of a masculine *logos*.

Irigaray’s response to this condition is not to call for a simple reversal of the situation (matriarchy). Nor does she rely upon recourse to the concrete against the abstract, as if it were simply necessary for woman to appear in the flesh in order to interrupt the mirror-play of male desire. Instead, Irigaray – with Dickinson, as I explain below – calls for “socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language and desire” (191). Not, then, withdraw from society but a reinvention of the very relations that constitute society *and* the emergence of a language supporting other

forms of life. “*But what if these ‘commodities’ refused to go to ‘market’?*” she asks, “What if they maintained ‘another’ kind of commerce, among themselves?” (196). Recognizing that positing a utopia that is the inverse of a degraded world would risk preserving the very terms she seeks to challenge, Irigaray deconstructs the simplistic split between the identity of the present and the alterity of the future: “Utopia? Perhaps. Unless this mode of exchange has undermined the order of commerce from the beginning – while the *necessity of keeping incest in the realm of pure pretence* has stood in the way of a certain economy of abundance” (197). Irigaray’s “socializing in a different way” is utopian, for it names that remainder/surplus that haunts the social order without being confined to its logic – but it is also *not* utopian, for it is already *here*, an errant place, or a voice of alterity like an echo of the dominant order that nonetheless speaks another language. While this is not the place to recapitulate Irigaray’s complex engagements with Freud and Lacan, it is perhaps enough to remark upon the central role of the incest taboo in the organization of the social in psychoanalytic theory, its instantiation of the fundamental difference that parcels out the sexes and incites exogamous alliances, and, as Irigaray alludes to above, its introduction of a principle of rarefaction into the economy of desire, as if only one kind of desiring (Oedipalized) were possible, as if pleasure were a zero-sum game.

Irigaray, thus, identifies an excess of sense that is nonetheless immanent to the linguistic and social order. Whereas orthodox psychoanalysis, according to Irigaray, can imagine this surplus sense only in the negative, that is, as non-sense, in her own project, this surplus constitutes “another ear, as if hearing *an ‘other meaning’ always in the*

process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them" (29). In our own terms, Irigaray provides a positive register for the impersonal dimensions of existence that traverse the personal/(inter)subjective. Like Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, Irigaray's "other meaning" is characterized by fluidity, by its evasion or overflowing of the chain of signifiers constituting the symbolic order.²⁵⁸ Irigaray differs from Kristeva, however, in that she avoids the modernist cycle of transgression, the interpretive power of the "other ear" resting not upon a strict analytical distinction between order and non-order but upon a different order (or as Irigaray calls it, a "different economy") *immanent to this order*. Irigaray's strategy, like Dickinson's is heterotopic; its power lies not in binary opposition, but in the undermining of the one by way of the otherness that already haunts it.

Indeed, Irigaray's heterotopic strategy is most evident in her attempt to articulate a mode of relation that departs from oneness, that is, from the security of self-identity. This mode of relation is characterized by multiplicity: Woman's sexuality is "plural" (i.e. not localized or confined to the genitals but diffused in variable erogenous zones around the body: "*Woman has sex organs more or less everywhere*" [28]); "Woman always remains several" (31). This last sentence, with its seeming contradiction between subject and adjective – women, not woman can be several – significantly implies that multiplicity is not an aggregation of ones. Woman, Irigaray writes, "is neither one nor two" (26). The multiplicity that is the condition of an other economy of meaning is one in which difference is not consigned to equivalence but rather remains singular, that is, not unrelated but related without a basis in a pre-given set of identities – related only in the

very act of relation. It is *constitutive multiplicity*, or the impersonal plurality of existence below the threshold of the personal in its Oedipal and capitalist determinations. Irigaray returns woman to her body not by healing the split between the abstract and the concrete but by elucidating the spectral presence in that binary order of an order of multiplicity, a series of differences in a transversal relation to the Oedipal diagram: “This puts into question all prevailing economies: their calculations are irremediably stymied by woman’s pleasure, as it increases indefinitely from its passage in and through the other” (31).

The constitutive multiplicity Irigaray discovers in women is intimately linked to a blurring of boundaries that she terms “nearness”:

Nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all forms of property impossible. Woman derives pleasure from what is *so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself*. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either. (31)

As the invocation of pleasure suggests, what is at play is a tactile movement in language that renders impossible the parceling out of discourse into discrete, equivalent units. Language is *touching*. The sense of touch is indiscriminate; to touch is to be touched in a chiasmic blurring of borders that opens subjects to the possibility of becoming other than themselves.²⁵⁹ Language moves us as it becomes what Irigaray elsewhere calls “gesture-word”: an act of speech that modifies our relations to ourselves and to the world, that reorganizes the very relations composing bodies (at the level of affect, or the impersonal) not only by the cutting force of the signifier’s intrusion but also through the resonance of language’s materiality with the materiality of the flesh.²⁶⁰ The trope Irigaray employs in

the final chapter of *The Sex Which is Not One* to articulate this linguistic fleshiness, and to imagine pleasure that exceeds phallocracy, is that of the doubling of woman's lips (the chapter title is notably, "When Our Lips Speak Together"). Referring at once to women's lips and labia, Irigaray deconstructs the Cartesian split between soul/mind and body. She sketches the outlines of a mode of speech that would not echo the masculine subordination of the body to the signifier but would, instead, intertwine the pleasure of physical touch (the multiple zones of pleasure of the female body) and the power of the word. Such an imperative entails a biopolitical project transforming the relations between body and language: "If we [women] don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story" (214). The object of this biopolitical project is nothing less than the collective reappropriation of feminine corporeality, the harnessing of the impersonal powers of the feminine against the patriarchal formation of the personal: "One day we'll [women will] manage to say ourselves" (216).

In Irigaray's lexicon, the name "Woman" is split into the specular image of male desire and the utopian (or heterotopic) placeholder for another economy of meaning. Likewise, for Dickinson, Woman is also two; she is the (virtual) Wife but also the "Wife – without the Sign," a figure of potentiality in excess of the economy of heterosexual marriage. Irigaray suggests that if we are to read Dickinson, without merely subsuming her to a mirror image of that economy, we must trace a "different [affective] economy" of other pleasures and relations, one positing not another set of identities but another way of being in the world. Dickinson's texts demand that we learn to read them not as simple

expressions of her historical situation, nor as metaphysical flights, but as a paradoxical transcendence *in* immanence, the tense unfolding of “an ‘other meaning’” (to borrow Irigaray’s useful term) that entails a pedagogy in which we train ourselves to hear the surplus of potentiality, the lost possibilities, that haunt Dickinson’s poems. Yet perhaps because of their respective historical situations – Dickinson writing most of her poetry in the wake of a first wave of feminist political activism, Irigaray with the ascendancy of second-wave feminism – Irigaray imagines a more spacious and strictly affirmative expansion of female desire. Although the nature of woman may be elusive in Irigaray, she can at least assert, almost *a priori*, that the existence of woman exceeds the male imaginary. Dickinson, on the other hand, while striking the same ontological chord as Irigaray (challenging the historical delimitations of what a woman’s body can do; raising up the powers of the impersonal against the historical limits of the personal), employs a minimalist method of breaking with phallocracy, one addressed not to all women (Irigaray’s “we”) but to a few. Her poetry forgoes the grandiose, utopian aspirations of a Whitman (but also of Irigaray) in favor of a more firmly heterotopic, indeed, at times, quasi-aristocratic, selective social grouping.

We see this method taken to its extreme conclusion in “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” In that poem, Dickinson’s utopian aspirations take the form of a transformation of the commons from women *as* property (women as they are common *to* men; woman as she belongs to America by way of an inclusive exclusion) into the common *of* women: a community woven into existence through affective commonality between incommensurable yet nonetheless related social beings. Before proceeding into an

analysis of the poem, I would like to mark a distinction – one borrowed from contemporary thought regarding the common(s)²⁶¹ – between the commons and the common: whereas the former signifies almost exclusively discrete objective matter, that is, goods whose transference implies the finite exchange of one thing for another (i.e. women as the commons are exchanged from family to family through marriage producing obligations of debt²⁶²), the latter, on the other hand, involves more specifically *affective* exchange, modes of relation or activities, rather than objective goods, whose complexity is enriched, not impoverished, through exchange. The definite article in “*the* common” indicates not so much particularity as a determined indetermination, a form of sharing that abolishes private property, especially woman *cum* private property, even as it continues to circulate. This is not, of course, to say that there is no materiality of any kind to the common but that its materiality is that of processes of individuation that exceed the subject-object dichotomy.

This transition brings about a strange, almost paradoxical twist in Dickinson’s subversion of marriage, for what arrives is *not a women’s common but a common between women*, that is, not a quasi-separatist appropriation of space for a particular group but a more amorphous, if not wholly indeterminate, socialization.²⁶³ The “Wife – without the Sign” neither takes the sign for herself nor invents her own sign but rather does away with signs altogether, if by sign we understand not signifiers in general but transcendental signifiers that secure linguistic propriety/property. This doing away with propriety/property is performed as an instantiation of the common in “I’m Nobody! Who are you”:

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
 Are you – Nobody – too?
 Then there's a pair of us!
 Dont [sic] tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
 How public – like a Frog –
 To tell one's name – the livelong June –
 To an admiring Bog! [260]

In “I gave Myself to Him,” we witnessed an anxious fretting over being reduced to nothing (“The Wealth might disappoint –/Myself a poorer prove”), but in this poem we seem to witness the opposite: an embrace of poverty, a denial of the very value attributed to the affective economies of patriarchal society, an affirmation of being “Nobody.” Yet the opening line of the poem, in paradoxically making an “I am” into a “Nobody,” implies that that what we are dealing with is nothing so simple as an opposition between wealth/plenitude and poverty/lack. Indeed, the term “Nobody” is itself quite ambiguous, suggesting not nonexistence but rather a certain kind of existence, valuelessness as a positive condition, as in that contemporary parlance according to which one says, “I’m a nobody.” To be nobody is not to be without body but to be a body without worth, an uncounted presence that nonetheless makes an appearance, makes itself heard. The “no” in “nobody” does not translate to a “not-X” but to an “un-X,” not a negation but a suspension of the terms evaluating X as a positive entity. In other words, we encounter a force of non-identity suspending or blurring the very distinction between positive and negative.²⁶⁴

It might be tempting to fold this affirmation of being nobody back into identity by suggesting that the poem speaks from an experience of depression, that naming oneself

“Nobody” is a symptom of a pathological condition of blunted libidinal investment. In that case, we might historicize this pathology as the affective condition of patriarchy in which there is no place for a woman’s pleasure. Yet the poem itself suggests quite a different reading. To be “Somebody” is “dreary,” but to be “Nobody” is an altogether exciting thing: the abundant exclamation points (notice that the poem lacks commas or periods), the irregular rhythm that skips along erratically leaping playfully from dash to dash, and the loose rhyming – all of these traits suggest a form of pleasure oscillating between languor and ecstasy, between a letting go of the strictures of identity and the accelerated, quasi-schizophrenic engagement with multiplicity. In part – and this is a point to which I shall return – it is a pleasure of recognition, a pleasure that one is not alone, that this strange existence without value is *shared*: “Then there’s a pair of us!”

But the pleasure involved is more precisely ecstatic in the sense of an experience in which one is beside oneself, an experience in which one is no longer one but at least two. The repetition of “Nobody” produces a confusion of the one with the other, spreading the speaker of the poem simultaneously in two directions. In fact, the poem as a whole fails to support any moment of oneness, even in the direct address that would seem to rest upon the assumption of a unified “you.” For the homophonic resonance of “too” with “two,” in “Are you – Nobody – too?” undermines the unity of the pronoun “you” as if a shadowy multiplicity were the reality of a somebody who is in actuality “Nobody.” One is always already two, at least two, since in this poem we are dealing with two nobodies who are both more and less than two somebodies. The poem frustrates the capitalist arithmetic that commands being through the calculation of value. It

overloads the delineation of social being according to the reductive cleavage of gender difference and equivalence, scattering subjectivity into a plurality of incommensurable fragments, the scraps of language hanging between the poem's dashes. In other words, it shifts the very terms of sociality from the dimension of the personal to that of the impersonal or affective.

It is at this point that I would like to turn to the more explicitly social dimensions of this poem, for what distinguishes the life of this "Nobody" from the anxious poverty of wifehood, what makes it akin to the "Wife – without the Sign" and removes it from the calculations of what Irigaray calls phallogracy, is its communal mode of speech: a conversation between two whose grammatical mood is interrogative. This poem stages a pairing in excess of the patriarchal form of marriage we have examined in this chapter through questions that throw the reader to a figure outside of the poem to an indeterminate other (who, of course, might also be taken as the reader herself): "Who are you?/Are you – Nobody – too?" The poem, we might say, makes room for the other by suspending the indicative and allowing for the gap of the interrogative. But there are questions and then there are *questions*.²⁶⁵ A leading question determines the very answer it wishes to discover, making the question mark no more than the costume of a concealed declaration. The sheer bluntness of Dickinson's "Who are you" suggests something more open, however, an avenue of entry for the unexpected, for alterity. The qualification of this question by a follow-up question ("Are you – Nobody – too?") may seem to threaten alterity by predetermining the identity of the other: the other like me is nobody; we two are one – but such a reading depends upon the "I" and the "you" of the poem being

substantial entities, which makes little sense when, as I have already demonstrated, the very being of “Nobody” is an ecstatic being of scattered plurality. The second question delimits the openness of the first question insofar as it suggests the commonality between the nobodies of rejecting the “dreary” life of being “Somebody,” but this delimitation, in its negation of the order of identity, is also an exposure to the contingency, the novelty, of not knowing the other in advance. After all, how does one know nobody?²⁶⁶

The pairing up performed in this poem is a relation thrown between two non-identities – a queer marriage because relation functions not as a capture or static seizure of two discrete identities but as *a relation through ecstasy and incommensurability*. The poem protects this openness to alterity through its imperative to secrecy: “Dont [sic] tell! They’d advertise – you know!/How dreary – to be – Somebody!/How public – like a Frog –/To tell one’s name – the livelong June –/To an admiring Bog!” The poem would seem to forsake a boring public in favor of an exciting privacy: the first and second-person singular is set against the third-person plural, the latter threatening to subsume the former into the amorphous “Bog” of the “Frog” – rhyme being, in this instance, a euphony that neutralizes the eruption of alterity. But as I have already argued above, the term privacy can suggest a number of possibilities, one of which, of course, is the privacy of domesticity, an isolated, pre-political domain whose natural fauna is the wife (or family in general). That kind of privacy is the opposite of a public constituted as a determinate set of equivalent identities. In the terms of liberalism, domestic privacy is the *supplement* of identity, non-identity not as such but as the natural grounds of identity, as the backdrop against which publicness makes itself visible: to exempt oneself from the public merely

to retreat to domestic privacy is to “advertise” one’s identity in an open secret that invites the very gaze it pretends to ignore.²⁶⁷ “Nobody” would be but a hidden “Somebody,” and as such still subject to the interpellation of an “admiring [read: evaluating, identifying] Bog.”

Yet the coupling involved in this poem is not the opposite of the public but the suspension of the private-public distinction in a mode of socialization that produces commonality without relying upon equivalence between identities. Strictly speaking, there is no communication in this poem, no public speech, the poem following its own instruction – “Dont [sic] tell!” – and refusing to determine the “Nobody”s through any kind of attribution, refusing even “to tell one’s name,” for as the phrase suggests, to do the latter would be to make the poem’s “Nobodies” into one of them, to subsume the constitutive multiplicity or ecstasy of the poem into the transparency and clarity of proper speech. Nothing happens in this poem, and nothing is said, except for the phatic acknowledgement of two singular beings coming into contact and the refusal to speak further. Put differently, the poem is incommunicable, because it communicates nothing but its own communicability as a turning away from publicity. The poem performs this turning away in yet another instance of homophonic resonance: the “no” in “nobody” is also a “know,” so that “nobody” is a knowing body, a body in the know, one privileged to hear the ‘other meaning’ that swims in this poem’s language. Indeed, what better way to perform this other mode of knowing than as a homophonic surplus, a signifying that can so easily be passed over, yet when noticed suggests intricate, hidden folds of meaning. (Here, it is difficult not to hear an echo of Whitman’s Calamus poems, with its insistence

on secrecy – “life that does not exhibit itself” – considered as the positive withholding of identity and as the fabrication of a singular America, but it should also be noted that Dickinson, not being able to occupy the position of speaking for the nation in the same way as Whitman, more forcefully elaborates the impersonal dimension of this alternative communal formation, its status as below the threshold of the properly political person in nineteenth century America.) The dashes, I would argue, also operate in a secretive manner: they imply meaning and at the same time deflect it; they keep speech going, but they also interrupt it. This poem, then, is another instance of that invisibility, or unknowability, that we examined in “Title divine is mine” (“The Wife – without the Sign” as the presentation of a void that is also a surplus of potentiality), but, in this case, the unity of *the* wife gives way to the multiplicity of a common constructed from singular, incommensurable, even innumerable beings.

Recapitulating my interpretation of the poem, the poem stages a conversation not between two identities but between two (or more) nobodies whose unities are scattered by the poem into an ecstasy of communication that produces commonality in the very act of turning away from publicness/publicity. For Irigaray, this alternative form of being/mode of speech is the very definition of woman in excess of phallogocracy: it is “neither one nor two,” “always remain[ing constitutively] several”; it is characterized by a “nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all forms of property impossible. Woman derives pleasure from what is *so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself.*” Paradoxically, for Irigaray woman only comes into being when we leave behind the propriety of the binary model of gender complementarity. From this

quite specific perspective, woman becomes a utopian figure, an element of futurity, a not-yet, insisting on the suspension of a patriarchal world so that another world might emerge.

It is tempting to take our argument a step further and claim this poem as an example of properly queer aesthetics, an instance of lesbian love dramatizing the complexities and complications of a love that dare not tell its name: “Dont [sic] tell!” Such an interpretation would suggest that to be “Somebody” is to assume a proper role in the heterosexual matrix that is an irreducible partner of patriarchy. “Admiring” takes on the more loaded meaning of a sexual gaze: becoming “Somebody” implies making oneself attractive to a masculine public, and making oneself “attractive” entails turning towards that masculine gaze, moving towards it by giving up one’s name, by disclosing oneself. This disclosure becomes a temporal affair, a matter of adhering to a biological and social clock, for June is the month of marriage (Juno, its namesake, being the Roman goddess of marriage): to turn away from the public, to fail to assume one’s proper role, or to deviate from the straight and narrow, is to be out of time, to depart from the progress of the calendar, entering a hazy zone in which the reproduction of the world comes to a halt.²⁶⁸ The threat of the “Nobody,” of a form of social being that refuses to identify itself, refuses to go with the flow of the marriage cycle, is such that an alternative rendering of the fourth line rejects the assimilation of this otherness in favor of its exile: “Dont [sic] tell! they’d banish us – you know!”²⁶⁹ To be a “Nobody” is to live a life outside the normative vitality of the patriarchal marriage circuit (“*livelong* June”). If there

is a future in that life outside of life, it is in a redefinition of what counts as life, a critical interruption of the normative sexualities that help to constitute the national body politic.

This interpretation makes “I’m Nobody!” into a challenge to a heteronormative social order that engages complexly with the epistemological politics of the closet that Eve Sedgwick so acutely charts. It is an interpretation that receives biographical support if we accept T.W. Higginson’s claim that this poem is written more or less at the same time as a letter to Mary Bowles, a regular correspondent of Dickinson’s. That letter opens: “When the Best is gone – I know that other things are not of consequence – The Heart wants what it wants – or else it does not care” (*Letters 2*: 405). We might read these lines as a disruptive commitment to queer love, a stubborn insistence that right or wrong love’s singular quality is all. This commitment might be directed by Dickinson towards Mary Bowles (critics have speculated on the romantic and erotic qualities of Dickinson’s attachment both to her and her husband, Samuel Bowles) or it may just as well allude to the much more documented and obviously homoerotic relationship of Dickinson and her sister-in-law Sue Gilbert, in which case Mary Bowles would be a confidant, another “Nobody,” part of that non-public, virtual community anticipated by Adrienne Rich’s concept of a lesbian continuum.²⁷⁰ This poem is, then, part of a more general process of weaving together a queer (though not necessarily homosexual) community based not on rigid identities but on a shared rejection of public taboos and a shared commitment to the intensities of affection whatever form they take, or in Dickinson’s own words: “All *we* are *strangers* – dear – The world is not acquainted with us, because we are not acquainted with her” (*Letters 2*: 349).²⁷¹

The lesbian reading of this poem is not wrong. I would even say that it is necessary in order to account for the poem's complexities. Yet its risk – or more precisely risk of the critical act of *identifying* the text as *belonging* to a gay canon – is that it may subsume the queerness of the poem, its deflection of identity and alternative mode of socialization, into the more acceptable lines of a *homonormative order*. Instead of a queer form of marriage, the poem would exemplify a passage of non-normative sexuality into marriage, a purifying assimilation – a straightening out of the queer. Given Dickinson's prominence in the American canon, that critical maneuver might also engender a *homonationalist* community, an assimilation into national culture and/or the nation-state in which the queer would be but another difference in a series of multicultural equivalencies. America would consume alternative sexualities, reformat them, and then “advertis[e]” them as so many tame examples of American tolerance.²⁷²

To avoid these dangers, we must pay attention to the way in which Dickinson's poetry refuses to reconcile itself into the strict terms of positive and negative but rather bears witness to a potentiality, or potentialization of the actual, in excess of the moral conducts and affective economy of Dickinson's present. Dickinson's queer marriage poems construct a form of commonality hinging on a non-proprietary mode of belonging, on a sharing that engenders not proper unity but a scattered intermingling, a zone in which singular instances of contact displace essential grounds of identity. This strange mode of socialization is not a negation of this world but a heterotopic turning of it: the world becomes exposed to its own excess, to that which is not quite of it, yet still in it. If the “Wife – without the Sign” commits herself to another (“Betrothed – without the

Swoon”) or if multiple “Nobodies” join together (“Then there’s a pair of us!”), they do so neither under the sign of identity, nor by finding their proper place in the symbolic order, but by being no more than their modes of becoming, by giving themselves over to their improprieties, not as deviation but as the singularity of their common existence. We might call this kind of being without reserve “queer relationality.”²⁷³

To read Dickinson, then, requires estranging ourselves from those all too familiar categories through which we understand subjectivity and society (identity, belonging, essence, universality, propriety, etc.) and working with a critical vocabulary that emphasizes terms such as singularity, the common, contingency, and becoming. (I discuss these terms at greater length in the Introduction.) Singularity, as the constituent element of the common, is especially important for our purposes. If identity is tautological ($X=X$) and solipsistic (X is unrelated to Y , or only externally related to Y)²⁷⁴, *singularity*, on the other hand, exists only as *multiplicity* (X emerges only *with* Y and Z , and this *with* is the strongest kind of conjunction, not interrelation but *infrarelation*, a blurring of thresholds) and *in process* (X is not X but always X becoming other than itself, becoming something else, with others, with Y and Z).²⁷⁵ In speaking of a singularity, it makes sense to speak not of *the* singularity but of *a* singularity, for the indefinite article better captures the contingency of any singularity whatsoever, its hazardous manner of existing without insisting on the persistence of its own being in a single form. Singularity lacks the wholeness or secure placement of the one; it makes itself felt only in an in-between that disrupts and undoes edges. Always on the verge of being something else, it is best described as a motion, a becoming. Singularities *happen*.

For Irigaray, woman *is* singularity, her predication of the feminine on multiplicity and nearness refuses identity categories in favor of a ceaseless political movement that challenges the very terms constituting the social. Dickinson avoids fixing titles to her heterotopic alternatives, but she nevertheless produces singularities of her own: the “Nobody” and the “Wife – without the Sign” are singular beings, beings whose being is no more and no less than the instance of their coming into relation with otherness, their becoming themselves only in becoming other than themselves, their breaking with a given matrix of identities.

Singularity is an indiscrete touching that engenders forms of life without propriety. If community arises through singularity, it is a community of the common, a community not of shared essence but of contingent relation, not of private property but of a constitutively excessive sharing.²⁷⁶ I would like to examine a final instance of the singular formation of the common, this time in a letter by Dickinson, a letter to her (at least virtual) lover, Sue Gilbert:

Sweet Sue –
 There is no first, or last, in Forever – It is Centre, there, all
 the time –
 To believe – is enough, and the right of supposing –
 Take back that “Bee” and “Buttercup” – I have no Field for
 them, though for the Woman whom I prefer, Here is Festival –
 Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside –
 Our beautiful Neighbor “moved” in May – It leaves an
 Unimportance.
 Take the Key to the Lily, now, and I will lock the Rose –
 (*Letters 2*: 430)

In this letter, commonality is a touching between two hands that are not separate, not even intertwined, but inside each other. Interrelation becomes infrarelation, and love is

not the joining of two identities, or the becoming one of two, but rather the unfolding of a common flesh. There is no room for propriety, no space for the discrete partitioning of his and hers, or even hers and hers. To touch is to expose one's insides to otherness, to become other than oneself with another. It is singularity. The violence of this image is not that of a sadomasochistic relationship but of the disruption of identity, a "cut[ting]" open of the proper identities and ties of a married woman (Sue is married to Dickinson's brother, Austin) and an unattached daughter.²⁷⁷ The letter makes the singularity of the common into a gift of "Festival": "I have no field for them, though for the Woman I prefer, Here is Festival –" The notion of festival suggests a recurring break with daily rhythms, a carnivalesque reversal of the order of things in which up is down, and down is up – or in which an erotic love between two women is not a perversion of marriage but (queer) marriage itself. The regular irregularity of the festival is complicated, however, by the oddness of the word "preference," which names the condition of festival. To prefer someone ("the Woman I prefer") does not imply that that other belongs *necessarily* to oneself but rather something much more contingent: belonging involves a *liking*, where the latter is a process of attraction, a nearness without propriety, an inclination. Preference does not come at a preordained time but simply when it happens to occur; it is always doubled by its intimate other, to prefer not to. Love as preference is love as "Festival," a surplus of potentiality over the actuality of everyday life, an interruption of the calendar and clock in the name of a being together that simply happens to be.

The love of this letter is not, then, a fated love, not a bond between soul mates, but an intense sharing without reserve, a singular community. Dickinson has "no field"

for the “Bee” or the “Buttercup,” for in this act of writing, everything goes (in)to Sue.

But this is not to say that this singular relation between two is solitary in the privative sense. Other singularities pass through, such as “our beautiful Neighbor [who] ‘moved’ in May.” If the description of the neighbor’s departure as an “Unimportance” at first glance suggests simple exteriority to the commonality produced in this letter, it is nevertheless only in the articulation of exteriority (the quotidian affairs of life between Dickinson’s house and Sue Gilbert’s house next door) that the singularity of their love can appear. It is not that their love is out of time, or out of this world, but that it is in this world more than this world, the difference being a matter of qualitative shift in intensity, and not a movement in space. The singular emerges from the common in a folding of exteriority back onto itself to produce a sense of virtuality, a “Forever” (“There is no first, or last, in Forever”) that inheres in a now. Or to put it differently, external relations between objects in a world become the common when a preference happens, a liking that holds beings together with an intensity of feeling that may produce a likeness between them but never the fusion of identity.

This queer love is a love that happens to be in the midst of quotidian necessity. Whereas the patriarchal marriage that we witnessed in the first part parcels out time and space, securing the future by securing the affective labor of the Wife, this letter and the poems we have explored in this section, generate a more contingent, a more haphazard mode of socializing; the necessity they embody is a contingent necessity, a *making do*. As happenings, such contingent communities lack guarantees, but they gain the intensity of a commonality whose existence is completely immersed in its manner of being, in its

contact with another and with one's own otherness: "Where my Hands are cut, Her Fingers will be found inside –" The dash ending this sentence could be read as performative, as a tactile linguistic emission that touches the reader, or at least desires to do so, but which cannot be the touch to which it only gestures. Indeed, in the letter above, the dashes all appear elliptical, seeming to imply a wealth of knowledge and feeling that the letter invokes or presupposes without ever needing or wanting to state outright.

So far I have discussed the enigmatic dash of Dickinson's poetry only in passing, but the dashes themselves are rather queer creatures and deserve to be remarked upon. Strange punctuation marks, they produce more questions than answers. Cristanne Miller writes, "The dashes correspond to pauses for breath or deliberation, or to signs of an impatient eagerness that cannot be bothered with the formalities of standard punctuation. Dickinson's dashes operate rhetorically more than syntactically."²⁷⁸ Miller's statement suggests that the dash generates a confusion between patience and haste, as if time contracted into the length of the line, allowing one to recapitulate the poem, to view the language surrounding the dash from this angle and then that angle, as if one stood upon a promontory. In enabling such a reflective stance, "Dickinson's punctuation, like her poetry, teaches the reader to trust the play of the mind."²⁷⁹ To speak of the dashes as rhetoric, associating them by proxy with tropes, is to suggest that the dashes are turns of phrase that do not secure a linear flow of meaning (as we might expect syntax to do) but produce twists, not all of which can be subsumed or resumed in a single act of interpretation.

With Paul Crumbley, we might take this argument a step further, by noting that these suspended moments, these instants that are tiny eternities, are also marks of the dialogism of Dickinson's poetry: Dickinson's poetry is not the monologic stream of a single voice but a "dialogic heterogeneity," a revelation of the "interplay of speaker's voices and the mix of discourses."²⁸⁰ The dash is more than merely an exercise in mental energy, or Miller's "play of the mind"; in Crumbley's words, it "liberates meaning from syntax that would ordinarily narrow the field of reference for specific words; at the same time it alerts readers to the role they play in expanding these fields of reference. In this sense, the poems trigger imaginative responses to conservative, centripetal impulses within language that aim to stabilize meaning, so that readers personally experience the explosion of centrifugal force."²⁸¹ The dashes may generate the possibility of plural subject formations – voices meeting together to form a new collective entity, like the "pair" of "Nobodies" or the "Betrothed – without the swoon" – but these formations are contingent; they come and they go, dissipating into the polyphony of Dickinson's poetry. More than the "play of the mind," the dashes are crucial operators in a process of subjectivization of which the mind (the particular cast of thought) is an effect.

I would like to suggest a qualification of Crumbley's argument, not an abandonment of it but its *corporealization*. For Dickinson's dashes, I would argue, might also be read in a fleshy way, as linguistic gestures that involve bodies. Their length (longer than her periods, shorter than her exclamation points or question marks), their tendency to point sometimes upward and other times downward, and their irregular appearance are all traits that draw attention to the brute materiality of these linguistic

devices; they make themselves felt *as marks on a page*. But this halting of attention does not end the poem, even if it produces an instant of suspense in which language becomes senseless (strictly speaking, the dashes mean nothing in themselves), instead the dash acts like a caesura: a pregnant pause that interrupts and joins, that promises the words to come, even as it insists on the space between the words. But Dickinson's dash is *not* a caesura. Giorgio Agamben writes of the caesura that it is "the element that gives a halting blow to the metrical flow of the voice, it's nothing other than thought," going on to add that the poem's rhythm hinges upon that halting "emptiness," "and that it is this emptiness that the caesura thinks and holds in suspense, as *pure speech*, for the brief instant in which it halts the horse of poetry."²⁸² Like the caesura, Dickinson's dashes halt the horse of poetry, break with the even, measured stride of meter to allow for exponential leaps in thought. But they are not voids. If they contract the time of the poem into an instant, they do so only by way of their graphic insistence. We could say that whereas caesurae may go nude, may abandon the clothing of a comma, and stand in the full splendor of "pure speech" for those who know how to sense their invisible presence, the dash is nothing but the clothing of the mark, an absorption of thought in the material trait of writing. The dash is thought *embodied*.

Dickinson's dashes are a touching: they bring the poem into contact with the reader, they press upon the reader, but they also produce contact between the singular figures of the poem (the Nobodies). (Indeed, the dash that ends "Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside –" suggests how literal of a touch the dash is: in touching upon the eye, the dash moves us, and in this case, moves Dickinson and Sue

together, in their common attraction, their preference for one another.) We could say that her dashes are basic traits of the common, elemental devices in which the social capacity of language (its communicability) is brought to an intensely queer pitch, where the identities we hold dear loosen and come undone, and where new possibilities appear, singular preferences. (In passing, I would only like to note the functional affinity of Dickinson's dashes to the ellipses that both Burroughs and Whitman employ.) The dashes happen – in fact, they just happen to happen: there is no pure necessity to their existence; they are never wholly determined by the rhythm of the poem, nor even by the sense of the poem. They just happen. Which is not to say that they are insignificant. They do make a difference, for they act as the condition of communities of interpretation: the suspense of the dash enables the reader to exercise her preference in constructing the sense of the poem; it allows the reader to share in the making of the poem. If Dickinson's dashes constitute the trait by which we recognize her as a singular poet, it is not because they secure the grounds of a unique identity, but because they are the material trace of queer propensities, scraps of writing that function as the needles we use to thread together the singularities that form a life in common.

V. Conclusion: “A Minor Nation”

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how Whitman's poetry transforms America into the common, how it imagines the nation as a multitude of poets, each with a singular voice, and everyone mingling promiscuously with everyone. The 1855 edition of *Leaves*

of Grass locates itself in a precarious threshold between representation and anticipation: Whitman writes America as it would like to become, or as it would be, if only it “realized” its potential. Dickinson, on the other hand, steps away from Whitman’s representative tendency. Instead of standing in for or realizing America, her poems cultivate what might seem a more modest, even more tactful, goal: a community of two that breaks away from America, that engenders “a minor nation,” a singular America tearing apart the patriarchal fabric of the nation. We could say that Dickinson’s poetry prefers local and contingent intensities to the universalizing extension of a necessary freedom. It prefers discordant dashes to the all-embracing open line. Or put differently, the queerness of Whitman’s poem generally falls to the semantic level, so that the reader, according to his or her wish, might confine the queer moments of Whitman’s language to the status of deviations from the poetic realization of the nation in the rambling movements of the syntax. The queerness of Dickinson’s poetry, on the other hand, is the poem itself, insofar as we conceive of her poems, especially those in which dashes proliferates, as the constellation of so many slants, so many divergences from a straight line: “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.”

Dickinson’s poems derive their intensity from that estranging intensity that forces one to rethink the ideas one holds, including one’s political views. But this minor tendency would also seem to be Dickinson’s weakness, for the very modesty of the endeavor, its restricted compass, suggests severe limitations. Her poems could be said to lack generalizability, or in positive terms, to confine themselves to a particular sector of society. This is a point reinforced when we consider that her class position (belonging to

the American gentry, her father a lawyer and politician) was a necessary material condition that arguably informs the very shape of her writing.²⁸³ If Dickinson's poetry embodies a utopian impulse, it is perhaps no more than a surplus of possibility resulting from the negation of labor: poetry is a luxury commodity, the possibilities it opens up mere caesurae in capitalist landscapes of burdensome necessity. The common that I described as a contingent community founded upon the happening of preference might be no more than the privilege of selecting one's company, a right secured by one's social status. It brings to mind one of Dickinson's most famous poems, which begins, "The Soul selects her own Society –/Then – shuts the Door –/To her divine Majority –/Present no more." Indeed, we might add another degree of restrictiveness in considering her quite prevalent metaphors of whiteness and purity, which as more than one critic has noted does not simply guard against the impurities of editorial practice (in Dickinson's reluctance to publish) or against the "Majority"/demos but also against the increasing numbers of non-white Americans.²⁸⁴

I do not want to dispute the truth of these critical claims. Dickinson's poetry, I would argue, could not have emerged without the strange confluence of a rather precarious upper class position, a general pattern of gender subordination and sexual normalization, and a number of other material factors, including, perhaps, an affective disposition towards racism. Yet if these material conditions inform and even constitute the utopian tendencies in Dickinson's poetry, they do not for all that cancel out the disruptive counter-force, the heterotopic possibilities, that her poetry embodies. The materiality that these poems convoke is not unified but rather haunted by queer

potentialities that do not disappear in historical contextualization. To conclude, I would like to return to a poem that we only brushed up against in the introduction to this chapter:

Further in Summer than the Birds –
 Pathetic from the Grass –
 A minor Nation celebrates
 It's [sic] unobtrusive Mass.

No Ordinance be seen –
 So gradual the Grace
 A gentle Custom it becomes –
 Enlarging Loneliness –

Antiquest felt at Noon –
 When August burning low
 Arise this spectral Canticle
 Repose to typify –

Remit as yet no Grace –
 No furrow on the Glow,
 But a Druidic Difference
 Enhances Nature now –

The opening lines of the poem suggest the paradox that is at the heart of the utopian impulse of Dickinson's poetry: to be "further in Summer than the Birds," while tucked into the grass, is to convert the possibility of flight, of a certain kind of transcendence, into the immanence of the here and now.²⁸⁵ The poem as a whole speaks to this immanentization of transcendence. The nation becomes a "minor Nation," rather than a grand, overarching synthesis of the people. The "Mass" is "unobtrusive." The punning of "Mass" is significant. The "mass" is a chant (a "spectral Canticle") and an anonymous gathering of crowds. Without resolving the tension in these divergent meanings, we could say that Dickinson gestures at one and the same time towards the possibility of another

kind of people, another kind of nation, *and* the hymn that would embody such a collective being. The poem sends us shuttling back and forth between subjectivity and language, producing a threshold of affective life in which to speak is to speak into existence the possibility of other modes of life.

Against language that would assume a homogenous majority, or a major constituency that poetry would simply realize, Dickinson practices a minor poetry, where minority means not less than but rather a breaking away; a conjugation of singularities irreducible to homogenous identities or equivalent relations between identities; a reshaping of the excess of potentiality, or non-identity, of social beings into something that disrupts the given social order.²⁸⁶ The poem above speaks of an “Enlarging Loneliness,” a phrase we can take to mean a subtraction from the social proper that is not impoverishing but intensifying. Instead of representing the people, Dickinson invents a people, carves out the space for a different way of being (“a gentle Custom”) and a different kind of linguistic usage (“a spectral Canticle”). These becomings lead not to an anti-social hyper-individualism (a retreat from the social) but to different modes of socialization, composed of “Nobod[ies]” or of “Wi[ves] – without the Sign.”

We could use Dickinson’s term “Antiquiest” (“Antiquiest felt at Noon”) to predicate this minor poetry, for it acutely captures not only the abandonment of well-worn, major paths in favor of untested, minor wanderings but also the commencement of such poetry in a place of negativity. As I have argued above, the utopian tendencies in Dickinson’s poetry emerge from a sense of discontent: they presuppose the conversion of a conventional positive (domestic bliss, to use my example) into a singular negative (an

unhappiness that makes the reader feel the injustice of gender subordination). That is the same action that the letter with which I began this chapter performs, the letter that Dickinson can sign, “America,” only by disidentifying herself from America in the first place: “‘Sweet Land of Liberty’ is a superfluous Carol till it concern ourselves – then it outrealms the Birds.” Beginning from this negativity, the poems do not attempt to rectify the situation, nor do they attempt to erect a new positive, instead they suspend the very opposition between negative and positive, highlighting a surplus of potentiality that overloads a determined set of possibilities. Utopia, or more precisely, the heterotopic turning of utopia, implies not the realization of the good but the realization that this world is not-all, that the articulated possibilities (for women, especially) conceal possibility more than they reveal it. Dickinson’s poetry attests not, then, to the good life but to *the possibility of another life*.

In the words of the above poem, Dickinson introduces a “Druidic Difference” into the equivalencies of capitalist modernity. Although little of certainty is known of the pre-Roman Druids that existed in what is now Great Britain, what matters in this context is their status as an imaginary figure for a sense of cultural and social relations *not* constituted through a transcendence of the natural world: Druids’ rituals were social practices reproducing a particular culture, yet these practices were mythically one with nature, woven into the trees (the oaks from which their name supposedly derives). I am not suggesting that Dickinson mourns nostalgically for a lost harmony of any sort. Quite the opposite: Dickinson speaks not of an identity but of a “Difference,” that is, of a dissonance that pries open the closure of this world, that interrupts the foreclosure of

biopolitical potentialities, all the while remaining in the here and now. The final stanza gives shape to what Ernst Bloch calls “concrete utopia,” a transcending movement that never leaves the world, a “spectral Canticle” that sings “pathetic from the Grass”: “Remit as yet no Grace –/No furrow on the Glow,/But a Druidic Difference/Enhances Nature now –” If we can understand “Grace” not only as the sign of redemption but also a particular affective stance, one oriented towards transcendence, then to “remit as yet no Grace,” while insisting upon a “Druidic Difference/[that] Enhances Nature now,” is not a surrender to despair but the cultivation of a utopian *praxis* sticky with worldliness. Dickinson’s poetry, her “minor Nation,” teaches readers not to abandon this world but to encounter it aslant, at an odd angle in which a minor difference, a queer preference, “outrealms the Birds.”

Chapter 4: “Hidden Geometries of History”:

The Biopolitical Times of Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day*

I. Introduction

“Under the paving-stones, the beach!” This phrase – a well-known piece of graffiti that peppered the walls of Paris in May ’68 – serves as the epigraph to Thomas Pynchon’s most recent novel, *Inherent Vice* (2009). In the context of that novel, in which the repeated refrain humming in the background of the narrative is that of real-estate development swallowing up the California coastline, the phrase signifies ambivalently: it suggests a sense of loss, a sense that the promise of America has become no more than the expansion of capital; but the phrase also carries a utopian hopefulness, a longing for renewal that grounds itself in what remains of the American experiment: the beach lives buried beneath the pavement, or something of the beach, of the experiment, remains in excess of commodification. Set in 1970, *Inherent Vice* strikes an elegiac tone, registering the passing away of the possibilities the sixties represents but doing so in a manner that keeps possibility present as a faint glimmer: “And here was Doc, on the natch, caught in a low-level bumner he couldn’t find a way out of, about how the Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light, might close after all, and all be lost, taken back into the darkness ... how a certain hand might reach terribly out of the darkness and reclaim the time, easy as taking a joint from a dooper and stubbing it out for good” (254-55).

It is no interpretive stretch to understand the beach as standing for the sixties: a “little parenthesis of light” in which the name “America” held the possibility of new forms of life, or to put it differently, the sixties as the period when America seemed, once again, to become an experiment in living otherwise.²⁸⁷ Discussing the work of William S. Burroughs, I analyzed this investment in the sixties (and in the New World) in terms of what Burroughs calls “potential America”: a potentiality for a form of life that inheres in America not as identity or essence but as a minor nation, that is, a social potential that promises not the negation of America but its radical mutation. Yet as I argued, if Burroughs’s late trilogy (published in the eighties) repeats the promise of the sixties/the New World, it does so only by accepting that moment as lost: “The chance was there. The chance was missed” (*Cities* xiv). The trilogy is not, however, written in a tone of resignation but in the mode of what Burroughs calls “retroactive utopia.” This term gestures towards a utopian *praxis* that produces the horizon of a radically other future through a revolutionary mourning, which understands the past as an unsettled and unsettling remnant haunting the present and conjuring the future.

Pynchon also writes in the mode of retroactive utopia; all but one of his novels takes place in part or as a whole in a past (in respect to the time of writing) where the course of history might have changed direction, but did not, and wherein the sense of a momentous missed opportunity reminds the present that the future is no mere extension of the present.²⁸⁸ The last pages of *Inherent Vice* – describing Doc, the text’s protagonist, driving slowly down the Santa Monica freeway as the fog rolls in – speaks to this unsettling appeal from the past: “Then again, he might run out of gas before that

happened, and have to leave the caravan, and pull over on the shoulder, and wait [...] For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead” (369). The sixties is a “parenthesis,” a moment of suspension in which the history of American exceptionalism unravels itself to give way to what I call a singular America: an experimental nation whose consistency lies in its becoming other than itself, in an unauthorized deviation departing from exceptionalist norms. To suspend the course of history is to reopen the possibility of other histories, other subjectivizations of America. But a parenthesis can only last so long. The fog of the final pages of *Inherent Vice* figures the (unfigurable) return of history, which can only return as something else, something new, yet something that – from the vantage point of the present – is all too familiar. The sixties give way to the reaction of the seventies and the counterrevolution of the eighties. But Doc holds onto a hope for something resolutely different, “for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead.” The sixties is a parenthesis that despite having passed many decades ago nonetheless leaves in its wake the sense of something missing, a still poignant utopian longing, the possibility of an “instead.”²⁸⁹ The sixties is a breach in American history; it is the condition of possibility for retroactive utopia, for “futures” that might be “something else.” Pynchon writes in the breach of this future past.

Pynchon’s literary work can be divided into two periods, the first spanning the long sixties (through 1973) and including *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Gravity’s Rainbow*; the second following the sixties, remembering and mourning the sixties, including *Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Inherent Vice*.²⁹⁰ The second period follows the first in much the same way that one lives on after the death of a lover:

a following, a survival, that is also a pursuit and a haunting, an *afterwards*. In this second period, Pynchon conducts an excavation of American history (but also global and especially transatlantic history²⁹¹) whose aim is not the recovery of *the* past but rather an encounter with pasts insofar as they contain presents and futures that *might have been*.²⁹² In *Mason & Dixon*, the titular pair's surveying of America converts the New World from a realm of open possibility into a territory delivered over to the determinate ends of national government and capital. Yet in narrating this conversion, the novel testifies to the potential squandered as America, "the Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true*," transforms into "the Net-Work of Points already known [...] changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments" (345). If historicism – in the restricted sense of empirically-oriented chronology – typically involves the fixing of a past present, its insertion into a trajectory that renders the contingency of past events necessary, Pynchon's recent novels do something quite different: they expand a past present to include pasts that we do not necessarily recognize as our own and, in doing so, they open onto futures that diverge from the present we claim as our own.²⁹³ These novels introduce what might be called a parahistorical mode, a historiography that undermines historical necessity through an insistence on the reality of the virtual or the potential. There is a sense of urgency in this project, a tone that reminds one of Walter Benjamin's well-known thesis, "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" ("Theses," 255). Pynchon writes under the hanging threat that "a certain hand might reach terribly out of the darkness and reclaim the time,"

under the threat that the subjunctive “Possibilities” of the past might vanish in the wreckage of History.

Pynchon’s mourning for the possibilities of the sixties takes the form not of a nostalgic desire for return/restoration but of a genealogy of past moments that inhere in the present as the condition of possibility for practices that break with historical necessity. My focus in this chapter is on this utopian sensibility as it is embodied in Pynchon’s 2006 novel *Against the Day*. The novel’s narrative – which sprawls over 1085 pages – takes place between 1893 and 1922 and travels between many points on the map (especially North America, Europe, and Asia). Whereas in *Mason & Dixon* alternatives to capitalism and the nation-state appear as spatial enclaves – places tucked away and hidden from the expansion of empire – in *Against the Day*, utopian possibilities appear more as ways of inhabiting time differently.²⁹⁴ Throughout the novel, the return of possibility, or the “subjunctive,” takes the form of new conducts of time.²⁹⁵ This is evident in the novel’s fascination with time travel, its depiction of strikes for shorter working days, its digression into mathematical seminars on the fourth dimension, and its obsession with photography and cinematography.²⁹⁶ In a scene set in an anarchist spa (Yz-les-Bains), one character describes what I would contend is the novel’s own project:

“This is our own age of exploration,” she declared, “into that unmapped country waiting beyond the frontiers and seas of Time. We make our journeys out there in the low light of the future, and return to the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety, to report on what we’ve seen. What are any of these ‘utopian dreams’ of ours but defective forms of time-travel?” (942)

The novel explores deviations from the bourgeois, capitalist formation of the day, but it can do so only in a voyaging that returns to the day, to the workday, bringing back the

news of other possibilities for organizing time. The novel, in other words, places itself on the threshold between immanence and transcendence, at that point where *this* world threatens or promises to become *another* world, or as Pynchon writes, “But as if, too, there might exist a place of refuge [...] a place promised them, not by God [...] but by certain hidden geometries of History, which must include, somewhere, at least a single point, a safe conjugate to all the spill of accursed meridians, passing daily, desolate, one upon the next” (372-73).

“Hidden geometries of History”: From one angle, this phrase might suggest the most idealist of Hegelian historicisms – history as the secret motions of a hidden hand whose will directs events. But from another, it names the aleatory remnants of possibility that prevent history from devolving to the stillness of a vacuum-sealed container. *Against the Day* holds these perspectives together in constant tension, playing them off of each other so as to define the politics that each perspective implies. Nonetheless, it is the second perspective, that of an aleatory conception of historicity, that is in need of more attention, because it is what the novel itself tends to privilege, but also because it is what is less familiar, more occluded by the hegemonic, common sense view of history. What is at stake in this view is a sense of history as a structure haunted by that which in it is more than it. This notion of historicity has a great affinity with Louis Althusser’s concept of structural causality, in which history “in the final instance” is an “absent cause” present only in its effects.²⁹⁷ Althusser’s Marxist critique of Marxist historicism (and humanism) leads directly to a complication of history, where in the place of a univocal conception of temporality (linear time or cyclical time), we find the “*intertwining of the different times*

[...], i.e., the type of ‘dislocation’ (*décalage*) and torsion of the different temporalities produced by the different levels of the structure, the complex combination of which constitutes the peculiar time of the process’s development” (*Reading Capital* 104). What I find so crucial in Althusser’s phrasing of history is not so much the complex conjunction of different temporalities, as important as that might be. What captivates is, rather, the discrepancies, or *décalages*, the cracks between times, which do not reconcile themselves in a synthesis but instead gesture towards an immanent surplus of potentiality, an excess of temporal possibility that circulates throughout the structure as the impossibility of closure. Indeed, Althusser’s structuralism, arguably acts as a necessary condition of Foucault’s genealogy, the latter’s attention to the aleatory, contingent, and singular constitution of subjects (which I describe in the Introduction) being unthinkable without this differential play of heterogeneous temporalities.²⁹⁸

“Hidden geometries of History”: the phrase seduces with the idea of a secret depth only to force us to reckon with time’s surface, with time as surface – without *telos*, without essence, without any unified logic, yet on which surplus potentialities dance like fires on an oil-slicked lake.

Put differently, the utopian dimension of *Against the Day* is fundamentally biopolitical, a matter not of the search for a refuge that already exists thanks to God’s grace but rather of the reinvention of life itself through utopian *praxis*. As I have suggested throughout *A Desire Called America*, utopian *praxis* translates the void of a set of conditions into an embodied surplus; it transforms that which a system or a world cannot recognize, cannot suffer, into the living possibility of another world. If, in *Against*

the Day, capitalism names a structure yoking together structures, an overarching/*arche* time attempting to force a synthesis of heterogeneous times, then utopian *praxis* interrupts the synthesis, not simply by insisting that another world is possible but by composing the lineaments of that other world in the practices of today. More specifically, utopian *praxis* appears in the form of a series of what I call (following Éric Alliez) conducts of time, where the latter terms implies a way of inhabiting time, a way of shaping time, and a way of becoming other through an exposure to time. More than a place, utopia becomes a set of temporal modes, and these modes entail the production of subjectivities, particularly subjectivities that break with the homogenous, empty time of the capitalist clock.

In this chapter, I pay particular attention to three conducts of time that decouple time from the capitalist value-form. First, there is the possibility of cutting loose from the day into a state of timelessness, an idleness floating adrift from the pressures of “clock time.” Writing and reading are an *escape* from the day, a “time out,” that, while in no way revolutionary, enables a reprieve from the pressure of redeeming time. From this perspective, *Against the Day* is utopian in the way it anticipates a time *outside* of the rationalized management of time. But Pynchon also explores modes of temporal conduct that give the linearity of clock time a “ninety-degree twist,” introducing “lateral world-sets” (parallel worlds) that call into question the dominance of capitalist conducts of time. This sideways movement introduces a heterotopic and dilatory modification of linear time, the cultivation of an autonomous time, a time lived for itself, but nonetheless a time still under siege by “the day.” Finally, the novel anticipates a conduct of time that would

generate a new, radically other mode of production and socialization, one that would not be based on a good use of time defined in terms of the instrumental relationship between means and ends and the maximization of profit. Pynchon gestures towards a time of the common: time not as “time out” or timelessness, but as a rich idleness of cooperation, as a wealth of time set against the penury of the capitalist workday. The “hidden geometries of History” are neither secrets, nor miracles in waiting; they are bodily cartographies that as they double “the day” countersign the potentiality of other worlds and other forms of life.

II. “Redeeming the Time”:

On (Not) Making Good Use of Time in Post-Fordist Capitalism

There is no forgiving Thomas Pynchon for *Against the Day*. No forgiving the sheer expenditure of time it takes to wander through the novel’s ever-dilating digressions. At least, that would seem to be the general consensus of critics upon the novel’s publication. Sampling only some of the frustration: “rambling, pompous, and often completely incomprehensible” (The Economist); “the book itself has no particular reason to end where it does, other than perhaps the adhesive limits of book-binding glue” (The Guardian [UK]); “It is a humongous, bloated jigsaw puzzle of a story, pretentious without being provocative, elliptical without being illuminating, complicated without being rewardingly complex” (New York Times); “Rambling, shambling [...] overlong, full-of-bad-song, seriously scattered” (Philadelphia Inquirer); “Thomas Pynchon’s sprawling,

untidy new novel [...] dragged down by subplots galore and characters thrown in willy-nilly, as if the novel's only virtue were how many characters it could stuff into a phone booth" (Virginia Quarterly Review).²⁹⁹ *AtD*, the reviews suggest, fails to stay on course; it wanders away from any proper sense of narrative development, stuffing into the text so many ideas, tropes, and characters that the reader becomes lost in a linguistic wilderness.

It is not so much, then, the sheer length of the novel that offends – though that is certainly an element of the criticism – but the *economy* of the novel's prose, or rather the lack thereof. If *Against the Day* is irredeemable, it is because it fails to make good use of its time, fails to deliver a satisfaction corresponding to its verbiage, and, as a consequence, causes the reader to squander her own time without the appropriate "pay off." Even those critics who enjoy the novel agree that the novel implicates one in a wasting of time. The novel, we might say, is *inefficient*, suffering from an imbalance between form and content, style and plot, *syuzhet* and *fabula*. The obvious response of a scholar invested in recuperating Pynchon's text would perhaps be, through a series of subtle analyses, to demonstrate that in fact the novel does "pay off," provided that one devotes the attention to it that it deserves. While I intend to engage in such analyses, I want to argue that there is a great deal of truth in the accusation that *Against the Day* is "complicated without being *rewardingly* complex." If we are to engage with the novel on its own terms, we must be prepared not only *not* to make good time but also *not* to make good use of time, at least not inasmuch as that latter phrase implies a demand for efficiency and profitability that matches means to ends in an instrumental fashion. In this section, I would like to negatively delimit Pynchon's narrative temporality as a certain

kind of failure – the failure to make good use of time; the failure of idleness –situating it in the broader context of a shift from Fordist capitalism to post-Fordist capitalism.

There is no redeeming *Against the Day*, and the novel signals that fact in its very title. The weighty ambiguity of the definite article suggests a number of possible significations: the workday; the sheer passage of time; the unit of time's accumulation; and, finally, the day of judgment or the eschatological terminus of Judaeo-Christian religious traditions. The novel brings into play all of these possibilities, and many more, but the most significant is the nexus between the theological and the sociopolitical captured in the phrase *making good use of one's time*, or as I explain below, “redeeming the time.” (The novel names this nexus, “the capitalist/Christer gridwork” [1075].) In Christianity, specifically in its Protestant form (including American Puritanism), to make good use of one's time implies doing good works that demonstrate that one is a member of the elect (those predestined for salvation), which itself implies that one's life/soul will be redeemed in the economy of salvation. This economy of salvation regulates itself through a typological relation between times in which the historical present repeats the New Testament and the Old Testament figures the New Testament, so that any potential excesses of scriptural rhetoric or worldly action are brought into line by an implacable parallelism signifying a divine teleological continuity.³⁰⁰ Every moment, every *day*, is on loan from the Lord, and will be returned to the Lord on the Day of Judgment. In the register of capitalism, to make good use of one's time entails a recognition that “time is money,” which is to say that all of one's time is potentially convertible into money via the mediation of labor. Under capitalism, time is the time of the workday, of the day as

time for work. If in the theological schema, time well spent is recuperated at the end of days, on the Day of Judgment, in the capitalist schema, time is recuperated by way of the wage that one earns at the end of the week – but only insofar as the wage itself presupposes capital's drive to continually expand itself.³⁰¹ To make good use of one's time is to make one's life profitable in a financial sense.³⁰²

Every moment of time is the matter of value, that is, time is both the condition and the substance of value, and value itself is necessarily predicated upon the absorption of time. From one perspective, every moment is moment to repay one's debt to one's creator, to earn one's (already decided upon) salvation; from the other, a chance to improve one's means, to make one's way in the world and join the secular elect, the successful. The overlap between these two perspectives is evident. In a positive respect, they both valorize the substance of time ("the day") by simultaneously foregrounding the finitude of time and the potentiality of time: time passes quickly, yet in its passing so much can be accomplished. In a negative respect, they both rely upon categories of activity that demonize the failure to make good use of one's time: idleness, laziness, sloth, etc. The historical connection between these two perspectives – between capitalism as mode of production and ethos and Christianity as theology and institutionalized practices – receives its most canonical formulation in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Without recapitulating Weber's argument, I would only like to note that the crux of Weber's argument lies in Protestantism's status as a vanishing mediator in the transition into capitalism, or in Weber's words, a mechanism for the "arduous process of education" in the temporal discipline necessary for capitalism's

functioning (25).³⁰³ While the force of the calling as a providential valorization of one's daily occupation disappears – at least in explicit terms – with the consolidation of modern capitalism, its effects remain in the ideological force of a “willingness to work” and in a submission to exploitation by an employer as a means towards one's salvation; salvation now translates to the more secular ideals of success and self-sufficiency. The negative flipside of this sublation of the calling is that “[u]nwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace” (105). Idleness is a sin against both God and capitalism.

The corporeal, or biopolitical, dimensions of this condemnation of idleness is evident in any number of practices, texts, and discourses. Weber, as is well known, highlights the ascetic bent of the protestant-capitalist ethic, its denigration of bodily impulses as obstacles to grace/success. As a specific instance of asceticism, we might note the long-standing protestant discourse censuring excessive sleep, which, it is said, leads to a state of sloth conducive to a life of sin. The phrase that perhaps best captures this disciplinary nexus is “redeeming the time,” which comes from Ephesians 5:16: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (*KJV*). This phrase appears repeatedly in protestant sermons from the Reformation through the nineteenth century, becoming shorthand, indeed, a kind of slogan, for making the most of one's time. That the implications are economic, and, more specifically, capitalist, becomes evident in, for example, John Wesley's Sermon 93, “On Redeeming The Time,” where the proper “measure” of sleep is not only one that is “most conducive to the health and vigour of both the body and the mind” but also one capable of “*buying up* every fleeting moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly

business” (emphasis added). The health of the soul has as its condition the health of the body, and the latter depends upon a habitual practice of *not* squandering one’s time. Wesley’s language constructs an economy of time that privileges the retention or accumulation of “moments” (*kairon*) against time’s drifting away, its wandering off into idle pursuits.³⁰⁴

A good use of time, thus, involves an ascetic bodily conduct that denigrates corporeal pleasures in favor of the spirit, a bodily conduct that does not so much negate the body as control it – or put it to use and regulate it – in light of an ethical and political economy. The sinfulness of sloth, of laziness or idleness, does not disappear with the muting of the theological overtones of the capitalist ethos. Rather, it becomes diffused into a series of capitalist disciplines not simply imposed upon the individuals that inhabit the capitalist lifeworld but actually constructing, shaping, and modulating their very being. In an important essay on the culture and history of labor, “Time and Work-Discipline,” E.P. Thompson tracks the changing relation of labor to practices and technologies of time-keeping, arguing that the transition into capitalism was not a natural progress of human civilization but a political and social struggle between workers and those who would impose a “husbandry of time” or “time-thrift.” Whereas prior to capitalism feasts and holidays, idle pleasures and the slowness of the day’s labors, were accepted by feudal lords and employers as a necessary evil, in “mature capitalist society,” “all time must be consumed, marketed, put to *use*; it is offensive for the labour force merely to ‘pass the time’” (395).³⁰⁵ The transition into capitalism entails a zeroing out of

those moments without use, without instrumental purpose, and the advent of an acute attention to every moment as a moment in which to “redeem the time.”

A waste of time, a series of idle pleasures, Pynchon’s writing sins against the theological-political apparatuses, the modes of discipline and control, which enable capitalism to function. Pynchon confesses his sins in an essay on sloth, “Nearer, My Couch, to Thee.” In this short essay, Pynchon criticizes sloth as a technologized and institutionalized detachment from society – e.g. the figure of the “checked out” “couch potato” to which the title gives reference – but, at the same time, he also valorizes sloth as a necessary condition of literature:

But Sloth’s offspring, though bad – to paraphrase the Shangri-Las – are not always evil, for example what Aquinas terms Uneasiness of the Mind, or “rushing after various things without rhyme or reason,’ which, ‘if it pertains to the imaginative power . . . is called curiosity.’ It is of course precisely in such episodes of mental traveling that writers are known to do good work, sometimes even their best, solving formal problems, getting advice from Beyond, having hypnagogic adventures that with luck can be recovered later on. Idle dreaming is often of the essence of what we do. We sell our dreams. So real money actually proceeds from Sloth, although this transformation is said to be even more amazing elsewhere in the entertainment sector, where idle exercises in poolside loquacity have not infrequently generated tens of millions of dollars in revenues.

The dialectical twists of these sentences challenge both the effects of sloth and its status as a simple negative in relation to productive work. It is in the escape from productive activity, in the laziness of “idle dreaming,” that the “essence” of literature resides.

Pynchon does not say that literature in its totality is simply a kind of laziness but rather that it relies upon an oscillation between hard work and something other than work, a “Beyond.” But this “Beyond” is nonetheless internal to the world, immanent: “We sell

our dreams. So real money actually proceeds from Sloth...” Capitalism makes room for curiosity, for an open and perhaps even infinitely deferred relation between means (“idle dreaming”) and ends (“solving formal problems”), and it is able to do so because, “with luck,” the writer recuperates these “time outs” from productive labor in the completion of a manuscript, that is, in the output of the book as commodity. Sloth, then, though potentially bad, is not quite evil; it has its uses.

But there is also a certain polemical tone in the above passage, the suggestion of a distinction between different modes of idleness/sloth: there is a sloth conducive to the reproduction of capital (“idle exercises in poolside loquacity have not infrequently generated tens of millions of dollars in revenues”) but there is also, at least implicitly, an idleness that resists, if it does not completely escape, reinvestment into the circuits of capital. Curiosity, that affect or ethos of which Pynchon via Thomas Aquinas makes so much, is often considered a utopian mode of thought, and for good reason, since it implies a perception of or encounter with the future as not simply an extrapolation of past and present. Indeed, following the passage on which I have focused, Pynchon sketches an American history of Sloth that stretches from Winthrop to Franklin, and from Franklin to the advent of television and the VCR. In this narrative, Franklin’s Philadelphia is a “high-output machine,” a “rectified, orthogonal” space of productivity: “Sloth here was no longer so much a sin against God or spiritual good as against a particular sort of time, uniform, one-way, in general not reversible – that is, against clock time, which got everybody to bed and early to rise.” The condemnation of sloth is the zeroing out of time for curiosity, of time that refuses the incessant demands of the clock. This leads Pynchon

to construct a literary genealogy consisting of “great epic[s] of modern Sloth,” that includes Proust, Sartre, Musil, but is exemplified by the “I prefer not to...” of Melville’s *Bartleby*.

“I prefer not to...”: this phrase marks for Pynchon, as well as for a number of contemporary theorists or philosophers³⁰⁶, the possibility of a conduct of time irreducible to the capitalist system. But what Pynchon’s genealogy and narrative suggest is that the refusal to be productive, or sloth, is a variable entity, changing according to historical period and situation. Thus, on the one hand, if Pynchon’s heroes of Sloth (*Bartleby*, Marcel, Roquentin, etc.) appear to be relics of romanticism and modernism, we should not forget the postmodern figure of sloth par excellence, Pynchon’s own Tyrone Slothrop (*Gravity’s Rainbow*), nor, for that matter, all of those other unproductive, daydreaming antiheroes that litter Pynchon’s fiction, including Benny Profane (*V.*), Oedipa Maas (*The Crying of Lot 49*), and Zoyd Wheeler (*Vineland*). Of course, in the paranoia-filled complexities of these narratives what might seem an idle pleasure often turns out to be integral to the development of a plot on another narrative or social order, so that, for example, Slothrop’s erections and sexual dalliances become (possible) predictors of where rockets fall and, thus, a matter of acute interest for military and industrial complexes alike. But even if the possibility of idleness as resistance is ambivalent at best in Pynchon’s fiction, it is still precisely that: ambivalent, or capable of sustaining a moment of subtraction from the dynamics of capitalism, if only a moment. This ambivalence suggests a difference of postmodernist idleness from both modernist and romantic idleness: whereas modernist and romantic idleness share an oppositional logic

in which idleness constitutes a resistance to capital through the cleaving out of an autonomous position, a space of one's own – one thinks, for example of Bartleby refusing to vacate the attorney's office – postmodern idleness, as I explain in greater detail below, can only take place as a reversible modal disposition, a manner of inhabiting the world extremely susceptible to cooptation.³⁰⁷

On the other hand, Pynchon suggests that in postmodernity there may be no more room for sloth as a distinct practice or mode: “Sloth is our background radiation, our easy-listening station – it is everywhere, and no longer noticed.” While Pynchon articulates this generalization in moral terms (“Acedia is the vernacular of everyday moral life”), I would like to call attention to the political economy that the article presupposes in its historical narrative. For Pynchon recapitulates in an oblique fashion Adorno and Horkheimer's dialectic between worktime and leisure time, a dialectic in which freetime is not a negation of work but rather its necessary complement: time to refresh for the next workday but also time to consume, to absorb the labors of the workday and, thus, to keep capital in circulation. Leisure is not necessarily sloth, but the two categories, so often conflated, share an indelible affinity for one another.³⁰⁸ Pynchon himself seems rather wary of this confluence between leisure and waste as he describes the “notorious Couch Potato”: “Tales spun in idleness find us Tubeside, supine, chiropractic fodder, sucking it all in, re-enacting in reverse the transaction between dream and revenue that brought these colored shadows here to begin with so that we might feed uncritically, committing the six other deadly sins in parallel [...] peversely proud of whatever distance we may enjoy between our couches and what appears on the screen.

Sad but true.” With language that cannot help but recall Plato’s allegory of the cave and Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, Pynchon laments the vanishing of the very possibility of critique as the spectator becomes a kind of adult infant, “sucking” on its replacement maternal figure, and the television itself a hypnotic leech, “feed[ing]” on the viewer’s desire for escape.³⁰⁹ The age of television is a time when critical distance gives way to a slothful absorption in whatever passes before the “supine” spectator, but this idleness, which would have perhaps been simply wasteful a century ago, is now the necessary flipside to a consumerist or postmodern moment of capitalism.³¹⁰

Consumer capitalism, late capitalism, postfordism, communicative capitalism, bio(political) capitalism: these terms all name a historical shift in the functioning of capitalism, one which begins to take place in the post-WWII period and accelerates in the 1970s and 80s (with the rise of neoliberalism); it is a shift that implies an extension of capitalism so that it encompasses every global space (thus, the popularization of the term, globalization) but also an intensification of capital’s involvement in everyday life. As others have pointed out – most notably, Antonio Negri – we see a generalization of what is called, in Marxist terms, real subsumption in contrast to formal subsumption.³¹¹ Whereas formal subsumption indicates the inclusion of formerly noncapitalist forms of labor into capitalist circuits of reproduction without those labors being restructured on the micrological level, real subsumption indicates the reorganization of labor practices towards the goal of increasing the extraction of surplus value. What has been called “the social factory” thesis implies that real subsumption has increased to such a degree that it

has produced a qualitative shift whereby the processes of circulation and consumption come to be included in a now more generalized process of production.³¹² Every aspect of social life comes to be a form of production, as daily conversations become the fodder of marketing research, time spent “googling” enriches search databases (thus increasing Google’s stock prices), and hobbies constitute so many extracurricular activities generating a well-rounded worker for a more flexible workspace. The other side of this tendency is a restructuring of worklife. Work becomes more flexible and less discrete, characterized by project-oriented self-scheduling, freelancing, temporary work, and the “precariousness” of the job (rather than the stability of the “career”).³¹³ Labor also becomes “communicative” or “affective,” which is to say a matter of producing codes, languages, feelings, and ideas, rather than the more tangible products that characterized Fordist production; the tertiary, or service, sector of the economy expands, more and more workers finding themselves employed not in making *things* but in generating atmospheres and performances and in distributing what has already been made in a particular manner. In biopolitical terms, this entails a “capitalist organization of work [that] aims to overcome this separation [“the separation between work and worker”], to *fuse* work and worker, to *put to work the entire lives* of workers” (Marazzi 50)

In a strange reversal, the Puritan absorption of life into work – which had at least in appearance been attenuated by the dialectic between leisure time and work time – is realized on a vaster scale and more intensely. The assembly-line is no longer the synecdoche for capitalism that it used to be; the “new economy” is perhaps better imagined in terms of laptops and cellphones, portable devices that mobilize work so that

there is less a discrete workplace than an amorphous, omnipresent condition of work. (It should be noted, however, that this “tendency” does not eliminate industrial forms of labor. In fact, serfdom and other forms of pre-capitalist bondage reappear in the form of sweatshops, low-cost agricultural labor, and migrant labor; this recrudescence is not so much a return of the repressed as a refunctioning, even reinvention, of older social relations in conjunction with emergent forms of labor.) Everywhere presents an opportunity to work, to “redeem the time.” Asceticism, however, is replaced by opportunism as the ethical conduct *par excellence* of late capitalism, or in the words of Paolo Virno: “The absence of any authentic historical *telos* capable of univocally directing practice makes itself known, paradoxically, in the feverish spirit of adaptation of the opportunist, a spirit that grants the dignity of a salvational *telos* to every fleeting occasion” (“Ambivalence”, 20). The proliferation of self-help books with titles such as *Habits of Highly Effective People*, *Goal Setting: 13 Secrets of World Class Achievers*, and *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*, point to the generalization of work as the very tonality of everyday life: work becomes the atmosphere one constantly breathes instead of a discrete portion of one’s life. In their hyperbolic celebration of success and flexibility, these conduct manuals suggest that the salvational promise that had once hovered over work as the soul’s distant future now directly imposes itself on labor as instantaneous gratification, thus stripping salvation of its status as an elsewhere. The crumbling of any division between the workday and free time make it so that if not every moment is work, then at least every moment is potentially work, a moment that can be stored up to be put to good use at a later time.

Life is not only full of opportunities, it is made up of them; opportunity is the water in which the denizens of late capitalism swim.

A historical note on the emergence of this condition is necessary, a disturbing remark about real subsumption's relation to that "little parenthesis of light," the sixties. For as a number of theorists and critics note, the legacy of the sixties is as much a legacy of cooptation, or unfortunate realizations, as it is of desire frustrated or blocked.³¹⁴ The radical desires or practices and diverse subcultures, the demand for autonomy and the insistence on the right to pleasure, even the notion of "dropping out," have become internalized in the very functioning of capitalism. Whereas Fordist capitalism specialized in the useful, if uniform, mass-produced product ("Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black" [Henry Ford]), post-Fordist capitalism thrives on difference and hybridity, even if it must establish a set of receding limits to ensure that difference is profitable. Autonomy has become precarity, as the ideological identification of self-employment (the small business owner) as the very heart of American capitalism tends to conceal the rising numbers of the unemployed and underemployed, as well as declining wages and the dissipating power of unions. Even the mode of cooperation involved in capitalist production has transformed, the centralization, regular rhythm, and equivalences of the assembly-line giving way to the decentralization, flexibility, and irregular rhythms of the Toyota model of production.³¹⁵ In particular, anticonformist political practices – practices challenging the monolithic identities of "the State," "the Man," or "the System" – find their satisfaction not in the construction of new political possibilities but in consumerism, that collapse between production, circulation,

and consumption in which commodities not only signify difference or uniqueness but also enable the expression of self-invention (customizability and usability). One's MacBook or Ipod becomes a vehicle of self-determination, replacing the tired, old diatribes of the consciousness-raising group with completely individualized modes of expression.³¹⁶

Indeed, Paolo Virno calls this moment of capitalism, “the communism of capital” – meaning, in this instance, all the communism of which capitalism is capable – for “capitalistic initiative orchestrates for its own benefit precisely those material and cultural conditions which would guarantee a calm version of realism for the potential communist” (*Multitude* 110). In other words, demands such as the abolition of wage labor and the dissolution of state are met in a perverse fashion, the wage replaced by the piecemeal payments involved in freelancing or part-time work, the state dismantling itself in the name of “public-private partnerships,” “deficit reduction,” and “austerity.” While it may seem from the perspectives of both Right- and Left-wing politics a cruel joke to attribute “communism” to this moment of capital, it nonetheless captures the highly ambiguous and ambivalent social currents of our contemporary milieu, in which what once seemed like stable institutions – work, the corporation, and the state – have become fluid and malleable forces.³¹⁷ The promise of labor's socialization, of its becoming an expression of creativity, has been met, albeit within the limits of the capitalist value-form, especially in the increasingly significant sectors of the economy characterized by what has come to be called “immaterial labor,” or all of those forms of activity that revolve around the linguistic and symbolic capacities of workers, such as programming, marketing, and

teaching. The “communism of capital” is the capitalist valorization of all of those energies and practices that the Left once believed the essence of revolution.

In this light, the Pynchonian anxiety over “a certain hand [that] might reach terribly out of the darkness and reclaim the time [of the sixties]” is a melancholic fretting over what has already been lost. It is tempting to imagine this gigantic hand swooping to coopt the revolution as a set of discrete forces of reaction: the State, Capitalism, Corporatism, etc. but the truth is far more complicated and messy, for as a number of critics point out, Pynchon’s novels, in terms of the writing and the reading they involve, are exercises in complicity, adventures along a Möebius strip where an act that appeared to be revolutionary turns out, all along, to have been inscribed in the counterrevolutionary and conspiratorial register of “Their” purposes.³¹⁸ *Our* day would seem to always already be *their* day, and resistance a self-deluding inability to admit defeat. But I would like to argue that Pynchon does not lead his readers into an infinite loop of cynical self-reflection but rather into a genealogy of power in which the relays of discourse involve and expose an excess of possibility over the “communism of capital.” Or as Pynchon suggests at the end of “Closer, My Couch, to Thee,” “Perhaps the future of Sloth will lie in sinning against what now seems increasingly to define us – technology. Persisting in Luddite sorrow, despite technology’s good intentions, there we’ll sit with our heads in virtual reality, glumly refusing to be absorbed in its idle, disposable fantasies, even those about superheroes of Sloth back in Sloth’s good old days, full of leisurely but lethal misadventures with the ruthless villains of the Acedia Squad.” If, as Fredric Jameson argues, information technologies allegorize multinational capital, then Pynchon allusion

to virtual reality translates the defeat of the sixties into the melancholic resistance of “glumly refusing” to be absorbed into capital’s “idle, disposable fantasies.” Such a refusal implies its own mode of idleness, of actively failing to make good use of time. In what follows, I want to test the thesis of real subsumption – the conceptual and aesthetic sense of an extensive and intensive absorption of life itself by the capitalist value-form – through *Against the Day*; I want to measure, as it were, not only the novel’s complicity with the contemporary tendencies of capital but also its capacity to resist subsumption and illuminate other forms of life. For if there is nothing but “the day,” if there is no place exempt from the historical defeats of the sixties or from capital’s insistent demands, there are nonetheless still seeds of utopia secreted in the “hidden geometries of History.”

III. Out of Time:

Resistance to Workday Eschatology in *Against the Day*

There no longer exists the workday and its other, free time, but rather one long day, “the day,” a vast milieu for producing and extracting surplus value, for “redeeming the time.” Near its end, *Against the Day* explicitly describes this progressive conflation of time and work:

While crossing the continent the boys had expressed wonder at how much more infected with light the night-time terrains passing below them had become – more than anyone could remember, as isolated lanterns and skeins of gas-light had given way to electric street-lighting, as if advance parties of the working-day were progressively invading and settling the unarmed hinterlands of night. But now at last, flying in over southern California and regarding the incandescence which flooded forth from suburban

homes and city plazas, athletic fields, movie theatres, rail yards and depots, factory skylights, aerial beacons, streets and boulevards bearing lines of automobile headlights in constant crawl beyond any horizon, they felt themselves in uneasy witness to some final conquest, a triumph over night whose motive none could quite grasp.

“It must have to do with extra work-shifts,” Randolph guessed, “increasingly scheduled, that is, beyond the hours of daylight.” (1032-33)

Channeling Marx’s reflections on capitalism’s annihilation of the distinction between day and night (discussed below) and Foucault’s analysis of the panopticon’s sculpting of light into a medium of surveillance, Pynchon transcribes the situation of post-Fordism (or postmodern real subsumption) wherein production and consumption – the beginning and end of the process of capitalist valorization – blur together in an uninterrupted bath of luminosity.³¹⁹ The passage’s stylistic shift from hesitant hypotaxis to accelerated parataxis (“from suburban homes and city plazas, athletic fields, movie theatres...”) functions as a formal analogon to the collapsing movement of the economy, whereby what once seemed distinct spheres (production, consumption, and circulation) not only overlap but fragment and combine in new social formations. Indeed, the aerial perspective and the focus on light generate a sense of capitalism not as a finite, historical system but as the homogenous, all-encompassing medium of existence; it dissolves discrete aspects of social life into the fluid continuity of value’s circulation. The increasing opacity of the system as it sinks deeper and deeper into the landscape becomes apparent in the tentative nature of Randolph’s guess that the dazzling expanse of light is caused by the lengthening of the work-day, an uncertainty echoed by the unrevealing

description of “a triumph over night *whose motive none could quite grasp*” (emphasis added).

But as the novel’s title suggests, what is at stake is not simply the recording of capital’s invasion of time, nor acquiescence to the role of “uneasy witness to some final conquest,” but also the possibility of its subversion. Any practice of resistance to this day is necessarily utopian insofar as it implies a conduct of time introducing a non-place into the commonplace of capitalist reproduction in a situation of real subsumption. If capital is everywhere, if it saturates every moment and every particular of the world-system, then alternatives must be precisely nowhere (*u-topos*). We are forced to search for hidden enclaves of heterogeneous time, for “hidden geometries of History.” The question of our investigation, thus, becomes: How does *AtD* decouple time from value, or, more specifically, how does it free up time from the reproduction of capital/the extraction of surplus value? How does it intimate a time beyond capital?

As I have already mentioned, Pynchon constructs a series of conducts of time whose effects are to engender novel relations between subjectivity and time. The first of these is an *escape* from time, a leap into timelessness promising an abolition of one’s debt to capital or one’s subjugation to the necessity of labor. To follow the escape from “the day” that *Against the Day* constitutes and figures, it is necessary, first, to examine how the novel saturates itself with the pressure of the post-Fordist workday. The novel’s most direct encounter with the rush of capitalist time is through its narration of the life of the Traverse family, especially the father, Webb Traverse, an anarchist dynamiter, and his three sons, Kit, Reef, and Frank. Although the narrative wanders from scene to scene

without an obvious overarching plot line, it constantly returns to the plight of this family, as if to remind the reader, through the very rhythm of the novel's plotting, of that "merciless clock-beat we all seek to escape, into the pulselessness of salvation" (558). This sense of time as "merciless," as a pressure unforgiving in its indifference and constancy, is suggested by one of the novel's central events: Webb's murder by a pair of assassins hired by Scarsdale Vibe (the corporate magnate that is the text's closest thing to an antagonist). Beyond the immediate allegorical implications of this murder – the time of an anarchist, of one who resists through an active idleness, cut short by an embodiment (what Marx would term a "bearer" [*Träger*] of capital) – what is so striking is the way in which the Traverse family subset of the novel's narrative constitutes a repetition of this traumatic wound, or a constant sense of being haunted by the father's loss of time. Each son rides in the wake of Webb's life, oscillating between assuming Webb's quest of resistance ("redemption" through dynamite, or the anarchist deed as "deliverance" from the capitalist workday) and pursuing vengeance for his death. (Even the central negative example reinforces Webb's haunting the narrative: Webb's daughter, Lake, instead of carrying on Webb's legacy, unwittingly marries Deuce Kindred, one of his killers, the implication being that the family's lives are irreducibly caught up in the traumatic aftermath of a specific instantiation of class struggle.) The history of the Traverse family is inextricable from, but irreducible to, the novel's history of capital.

The Traverse family constitutes a *site of traversal* in the novel: a constellation of figures through which the novel charts the push and pull of capital and the resistance to it. The characters that make up this family traverse the world, travelling from the U.S. to

Europe and Mexico, to the Balkans and to China, and, in doing so, map the flows of capital's expansions and intensifications, but they are also themselves traversed by these flows, caught up in moments of historically decisive transformations or struggles (the Mexican Revolution, World War I, labor strikes in the U.S. and elsewhere). If, as a number of critics complain, the characters in the novel are flat and generic, it is because they are not persons at all but rather recording-devices – channels for the various social, political, and economic forces that traverse the family.³²⁰ They are like Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*, not persons but rather “a cross [...] a crossroads, a living intersection” (*GR* 637). But the recording of flows of force cuts two ways, the characters' receptions involving concomitant processes of production: the Traverse family are not simply subject *to* the time of capital but also subjects *of* it. Traversal is a question of *conduct*, the latter term understood in the “equivocal” sense that Michel Foucault notes: “To ‘conduct’ is at the same time to ‘lead’ others (according to mechanisms of coercion that are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. The exercise of power is a ‘conduct of conducts’ and a management of possibilities” (“Subject,” 138). To engage in a conduct entails participating in a network of relays through which forces travel; it means not only actualizing a set of possibilities, conducting them through practices, but also being actualized through them, emerging as a subject through them. There is a principle of reversibility according to which conducts are the causes of subjects as much as the effects of them.

To speak of a *conduct of time* – a phrase I borrow from Éric Alliez and Gilles Deleuze – is to speak of a process in which forms of life and forms of time co-constitute

each other. As Deleuze writes in the preface to Alliez's *Capital Times*, "It might be said that thought can grasp time only through a number of strides, which precisely compose a conduct, as if you were switching from one stride to another, according to determinable occurrences. Even more so, we will pass from one conduct to another, in different milieus and epochs, which relate the time of history with the thought of time" (xi). A conduct of time condenses times, or "strides" of time, in the crystallization of another time. A conduct of time is always a relation between times that brings about the possibility of another time; it is always caught in between, becoming other than itself at the very moment that it comes into its own stride: "Within each conduct, certain strides become strange, aberrant, almost pathological. But it is possible that, in the ensuing conduct, they are normalized, or that they find a new rhythm that they did not previously have" (Ibid.). A history of the conducts of time, therefore, consists of a series of passages between times, between uses or modes of time; it is a history that can only be registered through the overlapping of times, through the stretching out of an historical fabric in which residual, dominant, and emergent modes of temporality come into contact with one another and sometimes clash.³²¹ This mode of historiography does not pin down events, moments, or conditions like so many dead butterflies on a corkboard; it writes history as a series of shifting constellations, each point of which is a possibility, an opportunity, to shift towards another constellation, another order of things. This crisscrossing expanse of times also constitutes the condition of possibility for specific subjectivizations, that is, the history of time(s) is also the history of the production of subjects understood, in Alliez's words, as the "pro-jection" of time: "The subject as the drama of time having overturned

its own foundation, time as the drama of the subject ‘carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth’” (*CT* xix). The history of time gives rise to subjects of time, or conducts of subjectivizing time, but only if the ambiguity in the genitive phrase, “time as the drama of the subject,” is understood as going in both directions: subjects are shaken by time, shocked into assuming news forms, and, in turn, subjects shake and shock time into assuming new modes, new possibilities.

Against the Day is a history of times, a mobilization of conflictual and contradictory temporalizations spelling out the possibility of a new conduct of time. Returning to the Traverse family, we can conceive of the their family line as a series of tears and twistings in the power relations composing capitalist temporality. The disintegration of the family after Webb’s murder repeats the time of capital, the family member’s departures and meanderings motivated in various ways by the trauma of class struggle, but the repetitions themselves introduce differences that function as breaks with the reproduction of capital. Thus, all three sons inherit their father’s anti-capitalist ethos, and though they tend to aimlessly wander, there is nonetheless a consistency to their actions, as if their father’s words had become flesh in them:

He was trying to pass on what he thought they should know, when he had a minute, though there was never the time. “Here. The most precious thing I own.” He took his union card from his wallet and showed them, one by one. “These words right here” – pointing to the slogan on the back of the card – “is what it call comes down to, you won’t hear it in school, maybe the Gettysburg Address, Declaration of Independence and so forth, but if you learn nothing else, learn this by heart, what it says here – ‘Labor produces all wealth. Wealth belongs to the producer thereof.’ (95)

In this gesture, Webb takes the time – time out of “the day” – to educate his sons with a slogan that from the perspective of clock time can only appear to be a counterfactual statement. If, as Marx argues, labor is a matter of time, not only time one spends at work but also time on which the capitalist spends, wealth is nonetheless only labor’s in an alienated, inverted form. In a process of capitalist exchange in which wealth is that surplus that labor generates only to see it pass into the pockets of “the plutes,” labor is defined by a *separation* according to which its potentiality is actualized at the expense of its autonomy. In precise terms, labor-power is split through the social technology of the wage into necessary labor and surplus labor, the split implying a process of alienation and a relation of command.³²²

But Webb’s slogan – or rather, what all indications suggest is the slogan of the International Workers of the World (IWW) printed on the back of a Western Federation of Miners union membership card – instantiates a singular America, an antagonistic potentialization of America through which America diverges from itself at the very moment of its founding (“Declaration of Independence”) and refounding (“Gettysburg Address”). America is not one, not the (exceptional, essential, self-identical) One, but rather a constellation of relations in which the potential of some relations promise, without guaranteeing, a radical transfiguration. Indeed, the text itself highlights this process of potential divergence, as Webb goes on to juxtapose a language of truth, or “straight talk,” to “double-talking [...] like the plutes do” (93). Echoing Orwell, Webb translates three instances of double-speak: “‘Freedom,’ then’s the time to watch your back in particular [...]. ‘Reform’? More new snouts at the trough. ‘Compassion’ means

the population of starving, homeless, and dead is about to take another jump” (93). The force of these translations lies in the way they relay the father’s divergence from the symbolic authority of the nation; these speech acts generate a hermeneutic of suspicion in which the appearance of capital is not identical with its truth or its effects (a being “against the day” that repeats Marx’s dialectical method in a pragmatic mode) but they also enable a desire for the future: one day a political act, not reform (“more new snouts at the trough”) but revolution, will actualize the potentiality of American labor, will bridge the gap between the first half of the slogan (“Labor produces all wealth”) and the second (“Wealth belongs to the producer thereof”). Indeed, in a point to which I shall return, Webb’s *praxis* echoes the Italian Autonomist theory of “self-valorization” (*autovalorizzazione*), according to which revolution, understood as a concrete process that inheres in the material conditions of the present, consists of a subversive intensification of the self-determining power of labor.³²³

In *AtD*, revolution does not wait like a pedestrian at a bus stop. Rather than a purely messianic hopefulness, Webb and his sons find a more immediate possibility for redemption in the anarchist deed of dynamiting. In this novel, dynamiting is a temporal conduct, a “pathology” of time, if by that we understand the unbinding of clock time in an instant exceeding regularity and order. More specifically, the explosions of dynamite are fireworks surrounding a deeper moment of transcendence: the explosions generate swaths of timelessness, so many voidings of the capitalist ledger of credits and debts. Moss Gatlin, a reverend who preaches the gospel of labor rather than any literal understanding of the Bible, theorizes this practice:

“For dynamite is both the miner’s curse, the outward and audible sign of his enslavement to mineral extraction, and the American working man’s equalizer, his agent of deliverance, if he would only dare to use it. . . . Every time a stick goes off in the service of the owners, a blast convertible at the end of some chain of accountancy to dollar sums no miner ever saw, there will have to be a corresponding entry on the other side of God’s ledger, convertible to human freedom no owner is willing to grant. [...]

“Think about it,” when the remarks had faded some, “like Original Sin, only with exceptions. Being born into this don’t automatically make you innocent. But when you reach a point in your life where you understand who is fucking who – beg pardon, Lord – who’s taking it and who’s not, that’s when you’re obliged to choose how much you’ll go along with. If you are not devoting every breath of every day waking and sleeping to destroying those who slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check, then how innocent are you willing to call yourself? It must be negotiated with the day, from those absolute terms.”

It would have been almost like being born again, except that Webb had never been particularly religious [...]. (87)

I quote at length, because this passage recapitulates, in an inverse and perverse manner, the doctrine of “redeeming the time.” The urgency of these words, their imperative modality, repeats the protestant/capitalist investment in every moment (“every breath of every day waking and sleeping”) only to upend the eschatological framework, transforming the categories of the elect and the preterite, those saved and those passed over, into class categories: “who is fucking who – beg pardon, Lord – who’s taking it and who’s not.” As in protestant and Puritan theorizations of grace, redemption is paradoxically always already determined, predestined, and at the same time always subject to the examination of proof, the interrogation of one’s personal conduct in terms of sin or the lack thereof. “Innocence” is not a given – “Being born into this don’t automatically make you innocent” – but a mark of class belonging or solidarity that must be achieved through works. If the good works of protestant theology are generally ascetic

practices, or in its late eighteenth and early nineteenth century revision, business practices, the good works of this particular class theology are acts of class struggle that benefit the proletariat or working class: “If you are not devoting every breath of every day waking and sleeping to destroying those who slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check, then how innocent are you willing to call yourself? It must be negotiated with the day, from those absolute terms.”³²⁴ In this thinking, inquiry into the working conditions that determine “who is fucking who” leads to the necessary and prescriptive implication of a project whose lines are drawn in the “absolute terms” of an antagonism between haves and have nots and whose goal is the elimination of the parasitic term.

If we were to remain at this point in our reading of the passage, we would have arrived no further than a simple repetition, albeit with a change of sign, of the protestant-capitalist framework of redeeming the time: Gatlin’s class theology would be reducible to an optimization of the extraction of surplus time, with the admittedly important distinction that time now belongs to workers.³²⁵ Yet the passage subtly points to another reading, one departing from the teleological, economical, and quasi-Manichaeian capture of time. For if dynamite is the worker’s “equalizer, his agent of deliverance,” it is also a *pharmakon*, in Derrida’s use of that term, a constitutively ambivalent “nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance,” a “floating indetermination” that simultaneously guarantees and undermines the structure of a system (*Dissemination* 70; 93). Not just the salvation of workers, dynamite is also “the miner’s curse, the outward and audible sign of his enslavement to mineral extraction.” This does not, however, entail that there is an exact equivalence between the two expressions of this entity, for the *pharmakon*, as “the matrix

of all possible opposition,” instills in the system an excess of “play,” or a surplus of (non-)sense that floats without precise or complete determination within the system (*Dissemination* 103).

The surplus of play emerges in this passage in the form of a slippage, a non-equivalence, between the two sides of “God’s ledger.” For while on the side of the capitalists there exists a regulated economy of calculation (“Every time a stick goes off in the service of the owners, a blast convertible at the end of some chain of accountancy to dollar sums no miner ever saw...”), on the side of labor, the “corresponding entry” is not descriptive but subjunctive, trapped in a state of wishfulness and thereafter translated into an imperative to produce a “human freedom no owner is willing to grant.” There is, in other words, a constitutive asymmetry between the two classes: on the one side, there is the (objective) plenitude of the bourgeoisie (“plutes”), its dominance of and identification with the system which accords value, but, on the other, there is the proletariat, the producer of all wealth on whom value is predicated, a (subjective) void in the ledgers of capital, indeed, an insurmountable cost, but a constitutive one.³²⁶ This asymmetry is itself the condition of possibility of an incalculable surplus of time that escapes “the day,” even if “it must be negotiated with the day.” For it is between the two class terms that the writing of a time irreducible to the capitalist ledger springs to life, not as determined self-presence but as utopian specter – as a project in which labor, more than a set of objective social conditions, is a form of life embodying an irreducible future alterity.³²⁷ Indeed, the passage reinstates this surplus time in Webb’s experience of conversion, which takes the form of a rebirth (“It would have been almost like being born again...”) unhooked

from codified systems of value (“...except that Webb had never been particularly religious”). Conversion, here, is not assimilation to one term or the other, not insertion into the regulative discourse of class, but rather class as surplus, as a political project disturbing the conditions of the present.

One way of understanding the strange and tangled affair of labor time that we have encountered in *Against the Day* is through the Marxian distinction between dead labor and living labor. Marx formulates this distinction most incisively in the *Grundrisse* as an opposition between “objectified labour” – labor that has congealed into the commodity form – and “non-objectified labour, labour which is still objectifying itself, labour as subjectivity [...] as *worker*” (G 272). Dead/objective labor is “*past labour*,” labor that contains time only in the inert form of a material support for exchange-value; it is actuality overwhelming possibility in the name of capitalist value. Living/subjective labor is “present in time, alive”; it exists as “capacity, as possibility” (G 272). Living labor is “*not-value*, and hence purely objective use value, existing without mediation, this objectivity can only be an objectivity not departed from the person: only an objectivity coinciding with his immediate bodily existence” (G 296). Living labor as potentiality is incarnated in the bodies of workers; one registers it in the gap that opens up between workers’ capacity to do any activity whatsoever (within the realm of material conditions) and the activity prescribed by wage labor and the demands of value-production. Living labor is, therefore, neither a thing – even as it is material – nor a diffuse energy – even as it betrays identity to any particular activity – but rather “negativity in relation to itself, [...] the not-objectified hence non-*objective*, i.e. subjective existence of labour itself.

Labour not as an object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value” (G 296). Living labor is surplus potentiality *embodied*; it is that which mediates between the objective materiality of commodities and the immateriality of the value-form, but it is also that excess of possibility which marks the irreducible subjective, corporeal element upon which capital depends. As such, living labor is the source not only of value but also of resistance, and even of revolution. What we find in the dead labor-living labor distinction is nothing less than a biopolitical vocabulary for addressing the capitalist situation of labor.

The temporal, social, and historical significance of the distinction between living labor and dead labor becomes clear when we turn to Marx’s chapter on the working day in *Capital, Vol. 1* (Ch. X: “The Working Day”). This chapter is notable for the way in which it departs from synchronic analysis of the system of capitalism in favor of a diachronic narration of class struggle. We leave behind the sober and patient exposition of the mechanics of surplus-value extraction to discover Marx the political commentator, possessed by a rage the text does not attempt to hide: “The children were quite simply slaughtered for the sake of their delicate fingers, just as horned cattle are slaughtered in Southern Russia for their hides and their fat...” (406). But what interests us, here, is not the resemblance of Marx’s prose to the Victorian social critique of a Dickens but rather the way in which the polemical force of this chapter relies upon the distinction between living labor and dead. Marx explicitly signals this reliance in the following sentence: “Capital is dead labour which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (342). The trope of vampirism is evident throughout

the chapter in descriptions of capital sapping the vitality of the working force, draining labor-power of its multiform potentiality and reducing it to brute necessity. Marx writes, “In its insatiable appetite for surplus labour, capital oversteps not only the moral but even the merely physical limits of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body” (375). The life of the worker is a limit to the expansion and intensification of capital, but it is a limit that capital continually “oversteps.” In fact, capital only exists through this overstepping, a point conveyed in the image of capital “sucking living labour.” But what is most striking about Marx’s gothic rhetoric is the way in which it implies a point of indistinguishability between dead labor and living labor (or capital and labor-power): if the difference between labor and capital is a difference between life and death, between an excess of possibility and a reification of actuality, there is nonetheless a vitality to death, a “vampire-like” state in which capital borrows the life of labor. Indeed – and this is the most significant point for us – the working day itself is a temporal vampire.

For in Marx, the working day is not a neutral unit of time but rather an historical and political compromise between the forces of labor and capital. It is not only the capture of living labor’s life but also labor’s resistance to this capture insofar as it acts as a constitutive limit:

There is therefore an antinomy, of right [the capital’s right as purchaser to demand more time from the worker] against right [the worker’s right as seller to limit the amount of time she gives]. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over that limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class. (344)

The so-called “normal working day” has nothing to do with natural rights. “Normal” indicates an historical compromise, the emergence of necessity from political and social contingencies. The length of the working day is only natural insofar as the struggles giving birth to it are forgotten, that is, insofar as the “force [that] decides” between rights disappears in a process of political normalization. Class struggle is a matter of time. It not only takes time but also has as its object the reorganization of time, a change in the conducts of time. Marx, for example, writes ambivalently of the use of public clocks to regulate work time, a practice that he notes is itself “the result of a long class struggle” (C 395). On the one hand, a common timepiece enables the worker to check the employer’s account of his hours against his own account. On the other hand, “these highly detailed specifications, which regulate, with military uniformity, the times, the limits and the pauses of work by the stroke of the clock” are part and parcel of the subsumption of heterogeneous forms of time into the time of capital (394). The clock, from this perspective, crystallizes a moment of class struggle in a frozen material form.

The vampirism of capital is not unilateral, because the temporality of capital depends upon a continually renewed connection to living labor, which, in turn, exerts its own force on the functioning of capitalism. Dead labor (the time of capital) takes the form of a present moment congealing the past in the dead form of the commodity. This moment reduces futurity to the anticipation of the valorization of capital. We might say that with objective labor, difference gives way to the identity of “the day,” to the forgetfulness of a “normal working day” in which labor’s needs and desires are no more than the means of capital’s infinite expansion. The vitality of subjective labor, on the

other hand, consists in its *kairological* status: the present becomes an instant of rupture, the past gathered up and exposed to a *to-come*, to a future that is resolutely *not-yet*, even as it is nonetheless concrete and material.³²⁸ This is labor as “the living form-giving fire [...] the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time” (361). Against the frozen block of time that is objective labor, Marx poses the phoenix-like fire of a living present dissolving the solidity, or naturalization, of the working day. In this context, a political event arises when the disjunction between dead labor and living labor becomes an unbridgeable gap – when living labor’s excess of possibility disturbs the actuality of “the day,” the latter understood as all of the technologies of normalization which serve to secure the reproduction of capital/the rate of profit. In other words, labor becomes a political force when its time achieves a degree of autonomy from capital.

Against the Day can be understood as a rewriting of *Capital*’s chapter on the working-day, an effort not so much to update it for the present (though it does do that) as to complete it. *AtD* makes good on what Marx only intimates: a specific politics of labor and time. It transforms the analysis of the working day into a drama of political subjectivity. In the novel’s accounts of dynamite/dynamiting, we encounter a figure of the working day that highlights the tense, indeed, explosive, excess of living labor over dead labor, or the irreducibility of potentiality to actuality. If dynamiting intimates revolution, it is not in the balancing out of cosmic ledgers but in the way its explosions interrupt capitalism’s reductive actualization of labor-power. The novel’s most concerted narration of one of Webb’s “deeds” attests to this excess not by focusing on the event of

the blast itself but on the way the explosions blend into and become indistinguishable from the general “dynamitic mania prevailing” on the Fourth of July (81). Webb and his partner in anarchy, Veikko, find the Fourth to be the “perfect day all round for some of that good Propaganda of the Deed stuff,” because it “would just blend right in with all the other percussion” (80). The text endows the holiday celebrating and, in a certain manner, repeating the founding of the United States with a score, the blended together explosions of fireworks and dynamite becoming a music of “percussion.” Yet just as a musical composition may contain notes of dissonance and structures of counterpoint, the score that the text conducts is not homogenous but fissured by heterogeneous possibilities. Fireworks may literally illuminate the nation’s greatness, reiterating “the bombs bursting in air” that “give proof to the night that the flag was still there,” but *pharmakon* that such explosions are, they also give presence through a spectacular concealment to the singular American divergence of Webb’s anarchist *praxis*. In other words, the expression of America through these explosions is acutely ambivalent, a condensed instance of the dialectic that is the desire called America: the repetition of the nation’s founding that they constitute signifies not only the nation’s identity with itself but also its divergence from itself, the latter in the double sense of a *betrayal* – the nation no longer living up to its promises – and a *utopian reprisal* – a visionary rearticulation of national possibility through an act bearing witness to an America beyond America (singular America).

America is not one with itself but doubled by a virtual other that is inextricably its own. If the Fourth of July is the day when America re-members itself through

performative acts of testimonial and memorial, then Webb gives proof to another

America in an act – the dynamiting of a railroad – that splits “the day” open:

Four closely set the fabric blasts, cracks in air and time, merciless, bone-strumming. Breathing seemed beside the point. Rising dirt-yellow clouds full of wood splinters, no wind to blow them anyplace. Track and trusswork went sagging into the dust-choked arroyo.

[...]“Seen worse,” Webb nodded after a while.

“Was beautiful! What do you want, the end of the world?”

[said Veikko.]

“Sufficient unto the day,” Webb shrugged. “Course.”

Veikko was pouring vodka. “Happy Fourth of July, Webb.”

(96).

The text generates a stillness in the movement of its language, as if the narrative were unraveling itself to reveal that at its heart is not the progression of a story but the suspension of one. The railroad as a target can only be an overdetermined signifier in the American context, for historically it both models and acts as the material conduit for a specific narrative of American progress – Westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, etc. – one in which America is on the move through the ever expanding and intensifying flows of capital that ride the rails. (Railroads, it should be remembered, were not only crucial to the expansion of capital because of their transportational capabilities but also because of their ability to increase land values and facilitate real estate speculation. They did not just carry commodities, the material supports of capital’s reproduction, but remade the land in capital’s image.³²⁹) But Webb and Veikko’s “cracks in the fabric of air and time” put a momentary stop to this unfolding story, signing the haunting insistence of another America. This singular America is paradoxically presented as simultaneously a brute absence and a spectacular presence. It is a negation of the American story, one might

even say a demystification of it, but it, too, recalls the revolutionary memory of “bombs bursting in air,” so that one might read Webb’s uneasiness and dissatisfaction as the impossibility of a clear distinction between this America and that other, promised nation. The dialogue between Veikko and Webb calls attention to the inherent ambiguity of dynamite as social *pharmakon*, for not only does Veikko mimic the celebration of Independence Day as if he had simply been watching another fireworks exhibition (“Was beautiful! ... Happy Fourth of July, Webb”), but Webb’s enigmatic and seemingly resigned, “Sufficient unto the day. [...] Course,” can be read either as affirmation and confirmation of a break with the order of “the day” or as admission that the blast only recapitulates “the day” in a slightly altered form. “The day” remains on “course,” or stuck in the habitual “of course.” The text itself is stuck in an oscillation between a singular America and exceptionalist America, between America’s overcoming and its redemption, without ever arriving at the terminus of a new form of life.³³⁰

Yet the blasts, the “cracks in air and time,” echo throughout the text, if not as heralds of a coming revolution, then as indices of a timelessness inhering in time itself. On the one hand, the cracks are signs that the course of the American story is already fissured, already contaminated by the possibility of its own undoing. These cracks are traces of the class system that gives the lie to national unity. They are markings drawing a practical line between “who’s taking it and who’s not,” between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In other words, they performatively instantiate class as a political problem. On the other hand, they are also escapes, openings onto a horizon exceeding “clock time” and “the day.” Dynamite is a temporal conduct through which the course of time

suspends itself, catches itself on an instant and unravels like an old, tattered sweater. *But* the timelessness of this undoing of time is itself ambivalent to the extreme, for it implies not only a time without time (escape) but also a time exceeding time (surplus time). This ambivalence presents itself in terms of the narrative's organization, for the two passages that relate Webb's July Fourth deed bookend a chapter describing Webb Traverse's *Bildung* – how he came to be the anarchist he is. The timelessness these two passages engender literally enfolds a duration of time – Webb's *Bildung* between these two pages functioning as the pre-history of the act, so that one might say that this particular timelessness, this blasting of an instant out of the continuum of clock time, is simultaneously a crystallization of time and a dissolution of time's form. The form of time is conditioned by the formless potentiality that inheres in it and functions as its beating heart (i.e. living labor), but this very same formlessness, this pulsating power, threatens to overwhelm historically-situated forms, to dissolve them in the utopian emergence of a new social, historical formation or apocalyptic devastation.

This dialectic between form and formlessness, in which the latter term necessarily exceeds the former as its informing ground, also structures the novel's narrative operations. As already noted, the sons of the Traverse family repeat the life of Webb Traverse, not imitating his life but rather rearticulating the differences – the singularities – that composed it, making new relations out of the father's remains. In other words, Webb survives himself through his children, but this survival is neither the reproduction of a given identity (a family line/legacy), nor a mimetic process linking family resemblances (an Oedipal drama), but rather the invention of new forms of life through a

creative repetition, or as one of the brothers says to another: “You can do the mourning ... me and Frank will what Joe Hill calls organize” (216).³³¹ While the immediate implication of this line is a call to practical action, namely, “that old world o’ family vengeance,” the more significant connotation lies in the distinction between “mourning” – connoting a repetition of the past in response to loss – and “organiz[ing]” – a creative, future-oriented relation to time (217). If we understand vengeance in mimetic terms as the construction of a homogenous series of time that coheres through resemblance to a pre-given identity (the wrong occasioning the vengeance), then vengeance, like the time of capital, involves the subordination and/or elimination of heterogeneous temporal elements, all of those moments and durations that fail to fall into line or make good use of time.

Although all three brothers, in fact, engage in acts of vengeance – Frank manages to kill one of Webb’s killers (Sloat Fresno), Reef and Kit unsuccessfully make an attempt on Scarsdale Vibe’s life – these acts come to seem more and more peripheral, even incidental. As if to emphasize the contingency of the revenge plot, Frank finds Sloat Fresno only when he is no longer looking for him, and Scarsdale Vibe’s death is at the hands not of one of the brothers but of Scarsdale’s closest associate, Foley Walker. The brothers wander off to Europe, Mexico, and Asia; they carve out their own lives. They “organize,” even repeat, Webb’s life – Frank, for example, reiterating and revising Webb’s anarchism in his role as a munitions supplier and explosives expert for Mexican revolutionaries – but they do so only by introducing new differences, new divergences, into Webb’s own divergence from the time of capital. The seeming form of the narrative

time of these characters, the revenge plot, thus, comes to be overwhelmed by the formlessness of time, by that excessive kernel of timeless time that is simultaneously the condition of new times and the death knell of old times. The narrative organization of *AtD* ceaselessly oscillates between clock time and its dissolution, not in the endless cycle of Sisyphus rolling a boulder up a hill but in Nietzsche's eternal return of difference and divergence, the invention of new conducts of time through the creative recycling of the past.³³² We, thus, pass out of time, out of the incessant pressure of "the day," only to pass to the other side of time, to the possibility of a new day.

IV. Time Regained:

Narrative Idles, Counter-Redemption, and Utopia

Marx writes that the form of the working day becomes so complex under capitalism that "an English judge, as late as 1860, needed the penetration of an interpreter of the Talmud to explain 'judicially' what was day and what was night" (C 390). "Capital," he goes on, "was celebrating its orgies" (Ibid.). But the complexities of "the day" do not solely belong to capital, and if hermeneutic expertise is required to make out the temporal convolutions of life in late capitalism, then Pynchon's *Against the Day* suggests that the folds of time are ambivalent to the extreme, promising deliverance and bondage at one and the same time. We have seen how the novel and its characters engaged in a conduct (dynamiting) of blasting holes in the continuum of capitalist temporality. But this practice of negation also intimated a positive plenitude; it brought us

to posit, with Marx, the twofold character of labor, as living labor – the source of all value, time incarnate – and objective labor – value’s capture of time/life. Now, I would like to continue articulating the positive dimension of time in its excess over clock time and the working day, for as one character remarks, “Watches and clocks are fine, don’t mistake my meaning, but they are a sort of acknowledgement of failure, they’re there to glorify and celebrate one particular sort of time, the tickwise passage of time in one direction only and no going back” (456-57).

Between the instants of the “tickwise passage of time,” *AtD* locates the possibility of a redemption of time, not only the “pulselessness of salvation” but the promise of time regained (558). I would now like to analyze this promise on the level of narrative strategy, in the novel’s digressions, dilations, and doublings, and on the level of the text’s form of content, in the sections of the novel that concern time-travel and photography. These analyses lead to a reconceptualization of time and of the ontological foundation of time in terms of the relation between the virtual and the actual. Following from Gilles Deleuze’s articulation of the virtual and its actualization in *Difference and Repetition*, I understand the virtual not as the possible – the not-real that could become real – but rather as potentiality: the embodied capacity to act, or not to act.³³³ The virtual and the actual are both real, and the actual carries the virtual in itself, as its immanent and informing condition of possibility, so that *what is*, the being of the present, is not sealed off from the becoming of the virtual but suffused by it. The virtual is the motor of change inhering in the actual, the source of the real and the possible alike. While the virtual in and of itself implies no particular politics, it does nonetheless enable the thinking of

another politics. Thus, in what follows, I show how *AtD* deconstructs clock time and releases a time of simulacrum, a time not of identity or sameness but of singular differences: against the voice of capital, which pronounces all of time as if it were the “homogenous, empty time” that characterizes exchange-value and the wage, we hear the voice of living labor, a voice of heterogeneity and multiplicity.

The narrative strategy of *Against the Day* – and of most, though not all, of Thomas Pynchon’s novels – might be described as willful sloth, or active idling. The novel luxuriates in excursions on esoteric and useless subjects, for example, the novel’s obsession with the notion of the aether, an idea long ago relegated to the status of an outdated scientific curiosity. It immerses itself in digressions, losing track of plots and characters only to return to them with lazy rhetorical gestures of astonished happenstance: “[W]hom should he run into but old Ratty McHugh”; “[W]ho should appear but”; “[W]ho’d they happen to run into but Frank, Stray, and Jesse”; “[W]here whom should he run into but” (700 , 849, 1075, 1034).³³⁴ This rhetorical formula, with its pronounced yet accidental use of disjunction, allows the narrator to let go of characters in a non-chalant manner and then to then pick them back up, as if they were always waiting on just the next page. While we might read these gestures as signs of authorial omnipotence/omniscience and of a temporal necessity underlying the plot’s accidental meandering, we might also understand them not as signs at all but as linguistic devices for producing continuity out of and between differences. Time is neither a cause, nor a primordial substance, underlying the elements of the plot but an *effect* of linguistic plotting. Time does not preexist or exceed the text but is rather the immanent surplus of

the text's disjunctions, conjunctions, and deictic indicators – its *whom ... buts, one days* (“One day Miles Blundell...” [250]), *meantimes* (“Meantime Miles and Lindsay were off to the Fair” [21]), etc. Such temporal operators *actualize* the virtual time of the story (*fabula*) into a plot (*sjuzhet*). From one perspective, this crossing of necessity and contingency, of fate and chance, gives the narrative an air of happenstance, of the “just because,” eschewing the compressed necessity of a Chekhov or Carver in favor of the picaresque meandering of a Cervantes or Melville. But from another, it gives the chance-like encounters of characters an air of fate, as if to suggest that fate is only the effect of a forgotten conjunction of contingencies.

There are several different modes of narrative time – the empirical time of the reader, the diegetic time of the story, the non-diegetic time of narration, etc. – but our concern is the virtual time that inheres in the actual text, the time that the text presupposes to make sense yet does not wholly encompass. In this time, one might imagine events that do not happen, but might have happened. Indeed, the novel, with its meditations on alternate histories and multiple timelines, lends itself to such fabulation, and as Stefan Mattessich argues, Pynchon's textual practice renders the line between the actual and the virtual indiscernible, collapsing real time into its discursive conditions, making the time of life into a linguistic time.³³⁵ To speak of Pynchon's collapsing of the virtual and the actual is to speak of how his language returns the actual to the virtual, reminding the reader that more than what *is*, time is that surplus of what “*may yet be true.*”

If I call the time of *AtD* idle, or even lazy, it is not because nothing happens but because of a *lack of economy*. As the reviewers of the novel point out, the novel fails to make good use of time, but that phrase, with the long history of discipline that it trails behind it, is a loaded one, indicating not activity as such but a particular modality of activity. A narrative that “makes good use of time” ties the means of formal elements to the end of narrative progression in the most efficient manner possible. It dissimulates the virtual in the actual as if the actual were completely self-sufficient, a snake biting its own tail. But *AtD* is full of elliptical formal devices. Its plotting consists almost entirely of deviations from a central narrative thread that perhaps never arrives. Identifying a central narrative thread in the novel is impossible: would it be the saga of the Traverse family – itself a scattered and tangled web? Or the tales of the Chums of Chance, who, floating overhead, seem to have the most privileged point of view in the novel? Or would it be something more abstract, such as the build-up of nations towards the First World War? The novel refuses the reader any grounds for decision. We might describe the narrative *line* of the novel not as *a* line but rather as the set of differentials between a plurality of lines: a web of actualizations indicating a surplus of virtual time over, yet immanent to, the empirical time of reading and the formal time of the story; a time of deviation (dynamite time, time-travel, idleness) posed within and against a time of necessity (clock time, capitalist time).³³⁶

Paradoxically, idleness is characterized by a plenitude of time, even as it seems to stop time. Whereas “making good use of time” implies the rush from instant to instant, the impossibility of taking one’s time or immersing oneself in duration, idleness implies

the ballooning of an instant into a duration. The seeming stillness of idleness, its slothful refusal to be pushed along, indicates not a dearth but a richness of time: time folding in on itself, complicating itself through an expansive movement, a mining of the recesses of the virtual in the actual – it is the temporal equivalent of squatting. We have seen a notable example of this dilation of time in our analysis of the chapter describing Webb Traverse’s apprenticeship to anarchism: the chapter narrates Webb and Veiko’s Fourth of July anarchist deed (the dynamiting of a railroad) in two segments placed at opposite ends of the chapter, and in between we find Webb’s *Bildung*. The anarchist act is only an instant, but the lead-up to the instant (first segment) unfolds into a duration (the story of Webb’s life) that the instant itself (second segment: “cracks in air and time”) actualizes in an event (the dynamiting of the railroad). On the one hand, nothing happens in this chapter; it moves from an excursus on dynamite to a meditation on Webb’s family life, leaving the event the chapter’s opening purports to narrate hanging in the background, forgotten. On the other hand, nothing happening becomes the expression of an abundance of time, living labor’s surplus potentiality. It is from the duration of Webb’s life that the event springs forth, or, inversely and equally true, the event renders the duration active.

Another example of narrative dilation occurs in the novel’s fictionalization of the Tunguska Event, an enigmatic explosion that occurred in Russia in 1908. The narrative rhythm of this example is quite different, the event occurring in a sentence set off in its own paragraph: “A heavenwide blast of light” (779). This sentence fragment interrupts the time of the novel, partitioning it starkly into a before and an after. Between these two temporal segments, eventfulness recedes into an enigma, into something “[h]itherto

unprovided for in the future tense of any language” (801). But the failure of language before the event takes the form not of a black hole into which words vanish without a trace but of an origin in Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the term, that is, “an eddy in the stream of becoming,” which must be viewed through two lenses: “On the one hand, it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete” (*OGTD* 45). For Benjamin, an origin is not a point of genesis (*Entstehung*), or a punctual empirical cause complete unto itself, but rather an event breaking up a temporal continuum and expanding in a rippling motion, complete only when it exhausts itself in the final movement that reveals its truth.

In Pynchon’s retelling of the Tunguska event, the reader tracks the “eddy” of the event’s becoming in an oblique fashion, the sections and chapters that follow the event never showing the event itself but only its traces: animals capable of talking, a strange “nocturnal light,” and, most persistently, a sense of expectation, a longing for the final culmination of “Creation.” The text, however, short-circuits this desire in a trailing off:

As nights went on and nothing happened and the phenomenon slowly faded to the accustomed deeper violets again, most had difficulty remembering the earlier rise of heart, the sense of overture and possibility, and went back once again to seeking only orgasm, hallucination, stupor, sleep, to fetch them through the night and prepare them against the day. (805)

The novel’s titular phrase – which occurs in a number of places throughout the text – suggests a holding open of possibility, a resistance to letting potentiality be captured by the brute actuality of “the day.” Yet as I have already argued, actuality and potentiality are not opposed to one another but mutually implicated. The text’s eddying circles around

the event generates a surplus of potentiality that belongs to the actual, the extra-ordinary inhering in the ordinary as an intensification of phenomenality (“orgasm, hallucination, stupor”). Although the characters are in the process of forgetting the event ever took place, the text itself serves as a constant reminder, its idle speculations (“[P]erhaps another Krakatoa, no one knew, perhaps the deep announcement of a change in the Creation, with nothing now ever to be the same” [798]) countering the event’s deflation with a linguistic inflation of time: the ballooning of an instant so that it encompasses past and future, with the past transformed into reservoir of possibility and the future into the suspensefulness of a “to-come.”

Against the Day refuses the economy of time in both its religious and capitalist forms. It sidesteps revelation. It fails to deliver on the promise of meaning with which it seduces the reader. The text idles on, refusing the demands of progress and redemption. As I explain below, it is not simply that the novel curves away from linear conceptions of time – the present moment of capital is itself not necessarily linear – but rather that it refuses measure and foils strict determination or command. Again and again, the text interrupts itself, switching from developing a plot towards a satisfying conclusion to exploring a contiguous narrative thread. One moment we find ourselves with the Chums of Chance cruising beneath the desert dunes in pursuit of the hidden kingdom of Shambhala, the next in London following in the footsteps of Lew Basnight as he investigates a series of mysterious bombings. What is significant is that the passage between these points is not a straight line but a parabola, and that this curve is defined neither by its beginning, nor its end, but by the path it traces in between. It is in the

dwelling in between one point and another that we find the time of digression, a time of the swerve, or *clinamen*. The *clinamen* is a concept coming from ancient Greek atomism, specifically from Epicurus, indicating the unpredictable swerve that causes atoms falling parallel to one another in a void to collide. It is a response to the ancient philosophical question of why something happens, rather than nothing. Louis Althusser articulates this “aleatory deviation” in contrast to both first causes (primary origins) and reason (the reduction of phenomena to deterministic necessity) as the becoming-necessary of contingency: “*Rather than thinking of contingency as a modality of necessity or as an exception to necessity, one ought to think of necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies.*”³³⁷ The necessity of a particular movement is not a given but rather retroactively induced in the wake of an encounter, which is to say that determination is not a negation of freedom but only its conversion into a matter of fact, its being forgotten. Cyprian Latewood – whose name itself suggests a bucking against temporal discipline – in a meditation on arrival and departure, renders this idea with acute precision:

If there is an inevitability to arrival by water, he reflected, as we watch the possibilities on shore being progressively narrowed at last to the destined quay or slip, there is no doubt a mirror-symmetry about departure, a *denial* of inevitability, an opening out from the point of embarkation, [...] an unloosening of fate as the unknown and perhaps the uncreated begins to make its appearance ahead and astern, port and starboard, everywhere an expanding possibility, even for ship’s company who may’ve made this run hundreds of time. ... (*AtD* 821)

Departure, the *clinamen*, is what allows for “an unloosening of fate,” the advent of “the unknown and perhaps the uncreated.” It is the inverse of the narrowing down process that

defines the actualization of the virtual: a return to time's source, to the difference that lies between and enables the articulation of terms ("ahead and astern, port and starboard") without being reducible to them. We might say that language captures the power of the *clinamen* in the paratactic, conjunctive maneuverings of a stuttering "and": *and then and then and then*.

From this perspective, we can speak of a narrative *clinamen*: digression is the swerve that introduces the necessity of a main plot only in its wake; it is the deviation, the wandering off course, that enables the articulation of narrative lines through contingent encounters between characters and events: "Who should appear but..." Whereas narrative dilation balloons the instant, absorbing past and future in an idle duration, digression sends the instant into flight, in a drifting motion that refuses the economy of the straight line between two points; it generates out of the present the possibility of a future unhinged from the relatively stable conditions of the past. One of the reasons that *Against the Day* is so striking is that it manages to prolong the swerve, to put off the forgetfulness of necessity, as if the novel were trying to multiply digressions *ad infinitum*.³³⁸ But it is in the nature of digressions to be temporary, and while the novel lacks an overarching narrative thread, it nonetheless generates a sense of irreversibility overwhelming its sideways excursions: the necessity of "the day" returns, whether it be in the desire for vengeance in the case of the Traverse sons or in the increasingly constant foreshadowing of WWI. The stray instants unleashed by digression are captured in these returns, retroactively made relative to the promise, if not the actuality, of a unified plot with a final moment of narrative (dis)closure.

Yet the return of necessity does not negate the effectiveness of digression's deviations, and Pynchon's *Against the Day* is an exemplary instance of that genre. Ross Chambers names "loiterature," a category of literature defined by lingering, dilation, chatting, prolonged description, and any other formal feature that counters the teleological impulse in modern narrative. Loiterature suspends the teleological impulse of literary language, pulls the handbrake on narrative not so as to end movement altogether but rather to engage in *powerful idling*. This idling takes the form of a means without end, an endless mediatedness in which language falls into "pathlessness," lacking orientation, and becomes "multidirectional," caught up in its own potentiality to move in whatever direction (*Loiterature* 118-20).³³⁹ In our own terms, loiterature is characterized by a linguistic idleness that thins the density of actuality in order to bathe in the concealed potentiality of the virtual.

Chambers thinks this idleness as a "stepping out of line" but significantly qualifies it not as the destruction of narrative teleology but as its temporary suspension: "This 'time out' quality of loiterly writing, its failure to detach itself completely from a linearity from which it departs only to return in due course, is as characteristic a feature as its digressivity and errancy" (32). Recalling Pynchon's association of literature and creativity with "sloth," we might conceive of loiterature as literature that assumes the (ir)responsibility of unproductive time as a condition of linguistic creation. Indeed, *Against the Day* would seem to fit very well into this category of literary idleness, for it not only constitutes an enormous waste of time from a certain point of view, but it also turns that waste into a formal principle, what we might call *linguistic preterition*. In

Pynchon's oeuvre, "the preterite" are all those who have been passed over by providence, who are *not* part of the elect; those condemned to this world, factored into the capitalist/providential economy of time only in a negative manner as voids or losses.³⁴⁰ To speak, then, of linguistic preterition is to speak of a textuality that dwells in time's remainders; of the effective force, even the usefulness, of that which is without value. In Louis Mackey's account of preterition in Pynchon's early fiction, "The power of Pynchon's language is its self-dissipation. Its energy is expended in verbal waste and degradation" (22).

But what, in fact, remains of the power to idle after post-Fordist capitalism's intensive economization of time? What happens when under a condition of real subsumption the boundaries that distinguish work time from free time blur to the point of indistinction? What happens when idleness becomes productive and productivity idle? If loiterature depends on a reserve of free time secreted in clock time, then the putting to work of that reserve would seem to spell the end of loiterature. Indeed, the chatter, the observational intensity, and even the digressiveness of loiterature have all become attributes of the emergent form of labor in contemporary capitalism, that labor which has been named variously "cognitive," "communicative," and "immaterial."³⁴¹ In this emergent form of labor, what might have seemed an idle pastime becomes productive, incorporated into "the day" not as an exception that proves the rule but rather as part and parcel of the creativity, flexibility, and cooperativity that have become so valuable in contemporary capitalism. Chatter becomes brainstorming; observation becomes analysis;

and digression becomes “thinking outside the box.” Idleness seems to have been co-opted, rendered all too productive, all too valuable.

Loiterature, however, survives its own death, though not unchanged. *Against the Day* is an instance of a postmodern loiterary text that adapts to the conditions of post-Fordist capitalism. It does so not by imagining a utopia in which labor and idleness are finally reconciled but by radicalizing idleness into the refusal of work. *AtD* regains time by reorganizing “the day,” by transforming the very composition of textual and subjective temporality. It pits an activity of *counter-redemption* against the Protestant/capitalist practice of “redeeming the time.” This brings me to the last narrative element on which I would like to focus, that of narrative doubling as the proliferation of time unleashed from the capitalist value-form, but a note of qualification is necessary. For one of the characteristic aspects of postmodern capitalism is the unhinging of the nexus between the value-form and labor-time, or a breakdown in the correlation between the objective measure of time and capitalist value.³⁴² In other words, while labor time still produces value, there is no necessary proportionality between quantities of labor time and value. There are a number of reasons for this shift, ranging from increasing automatization to the reintroduction of the importance of piece-meal work through freelancing and migrant labor. Capitalist valorization increasingly depends not on the regular measure of labor time but rather on the arbitrary pricing of the *effects* of labor. One need only think of the role of gratuity as a source of income in the service sector, or of Thomas Pynchon’s allusion to “the entertainment sector, where idle exercises in poolside loquacity have not infrequently generated tens of millions of dollars in revenues.” Instead

of prescribing a static, univocal series of operations and relying upon the accumulation of homogenously-ordered time, value becomes more supple, more flexible; it fits itself to the multiform contours of diverse manners of being and doing, whatever their temporalities. Whereas the Fordist moment of capitalism actualized potentiality/living labor only insofar as it also narrowed its functioning down to a one-dimensional functionality, the post-Fordist moment puts potentiality immediately to work, abandoning the strict delimitation of living labor in favor of modulation, control, and capture *a posteriori* (via mechanisms of rent³⁴³).

For a theory of literary idleness, the implication of value becoming unhinged from the quantity of labor-time is that idleness can no longer be thought of solely in terms of an excess over necessity. It can no longer be thought of as sheer quantitative waste. If idleness is to remain idle, it must entail the separation of *praxis* from the value-form, an exodus from capitalist valorization through the positive construction of an autonomous mode of activity. In short, more than simply not working, idleness becomes the active *refusal* of work as such. This is the lesson of Autonomist Marxism whose central contention is the “*prevalence of the subjective*,” or the assertion that labor’s creativity is to some degree independent of the conditions of work, that the potentiality that inheres in labor is irreducible to the capitalist relation. The refusal of work names not only a destructuring movement but also a constructive movement, a re- or counter-valorization of labor known as “self-valorization” (*autovalorizzazione*). Antonio Negri – one of the concept’s central theorists – defines it succinctly: “Proletarian self-valorisation is the power to withdraw from exchange value and the ability to reappropriate the world of use

values” (“Domination and Sabotage,” 66). In the next section, I examine this “reappropriation” through the concept of the common and *AtD*’s production of subjectivity in an anti- or non-capitalist web of cooperation. In the remainder of this section, however, I want to work through the relationship in the novel between time-travel and doubling insofar as those tropes constitute attempts to regain time by separating it from the capitalist value-form.

Against the Day is full of doubles. Everywhere one looks, one encounters repetition: the repetition of phrases (such as the titular phrase), of character types and plot strands, of historical events and even of particular individuals. For example, we have two characters, Professor Renfrew and Professor Werfner, each the “so-called conjugate” of the other, who may or may not be one and the same person (719). The palindromic mirroring of these characters’ names gestures towards the series of mirrorings that structure the novel as a whole. For every type, there is a counter-type: not only a crusade but also a “counter-Crusade”; not only the philosopher’s stone but also the “Anti-Stone”; the “counter-Christian”; “counter-Death”; “contra-Venezia” (437; 78; 275; 372; 587). *AtD* constitutes a “*zone of dual nature*” in which the singular is always already constituted by the plural, the one always shadowed by its other (633). The question, however, arises as to the status of this dualism and its relation to repetition. Richard Hardack manages the novel’s dualistic tendencies by arguing that “[r]epetition confirms identity, but identity slightly altered” and goes on to posit the transcendental unification of the novel’s narrative labors in a “consciousness without borders” (105). This argument depends on a fundamental continuity underlying the proliferation of doubles; it depends

on the maintenance of discrete partitions between originals and simulacra, and on the existence of a self-identical consciousness standing behind appearance. This interpretation economizes the text, synthesizing the novel's heterogeneity through "univocalization" and "dematerialization" (Ibid., 120).

Yet in *Against the Day*, repetition is productive. Simulacra blur the status of originals, releasing copies orphaned of any primordial identity. In words that hold true for *AtD*, Leo Bersani writes of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "Pynchon's novel is a dazzling argument for shared or collective being – or, more precisely, for *the originally replicative nature of being*. Singularity is inconceivable; the original of a personality has to be counted among its simulations. Being in Pynchon is therefore not a question of substance, but rather of distribution and collection" (*Culture* 194). I will return to the question of the collective or shared status of being, but for now I am interested in the flattening of being towards which Bersani gestures. Copies are not the corruption of being but the very being of being, or in other words, being has no substance and exists only in its becoming other than itself through the proliferation of simulacra. It makes no sense to ask whether Renfrew is a copy of Werfner, or vice versa. Indeed, it makes no sense to even speak of identity in their/his case, for the text introduces difference into their/his very identity: Werfner and Renfrew are geographers with inverse theories regarding the geopolitical situation in Europe and the East; they and their theories are not one but rather the double articulation of a difference that is not identical with itself. Likewise, the mineral known as Iceland spar is characterized not by its unity but by a differentiation undermining unity: "But up here it's of the essence, found in no other company but its own. It's the

genuine article, and the sub-structure of reality. The doubling of the Creation, each image clear and believable....” (*AtD* 133). There is a subtle punning that occurs in this passage, as “the essence” of this mineral is to render essence inessential and the “sub-structure of reality” is not “the Creation” but rather the doubling of Creation, the proliferation of “image[s]” that are “clear and believable.”

The text dramatizes and temporalizes the effective force of doubles in a comic moment featuring Luca Zombini, a magician. Zombini employs Iceland spar in order to execute the trick of sawing a person in half, the mineral’s optical doubling of appearances making it so that “instead of two different pieces of one body, there are now two complete individuals walking around, who are identical in every way” (355). The difference that difference makes would seem to still depend upon identity, the two here being reducible to “identical” expressions of the one. Yet Zombini finds himself unable to reunite the doubles, for as he says to his daughter Dally,

“I thought it would be completely reversible. But according to Professor Vanderjuice up at Yale, I forgot the element of time, it didn’t happen all at once, so there was this short couple of seconds where time went on, irreversible processes of one kind and another, this sort of gap opened up a little, and that was enough to make it impossible to get back exactly where we’d been.”

“And here I thought you were perfect. Imagine my disappointment. So these subjects of yours are out there leading double lives. They can’t be too happy with that.” (355)

Time comes to interrupt the mediation of difference by identity; it introduces a gap between the one and the other, an asymmetry making it no longer possible to speak of two instances of one and the same thing but only of “double lives” or differences that articulate themselves in relation to one another without for all that being reducible to one

another. The passage's humor resides in the way it literalizes figural difference, the illusion of sawing a person in half becoming the literal multiplication of persons. Humor depends on a conflation of identity and difference, or better yet, it depends on the suspension of the distinction between identity and difference in an unruly play of distinctly similar differences: "Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third..." (Abbott and Costello); "He may look like an idiot and talk like an idiot, but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot" (Groucho Marx). The phrase "double lives" speaks to this condition of ambiguity, for it may mean one life that doubles another, that is, life as allusion to an original, but it may also indicate sheer surplus, life doubled (and, by implication, potentially tripled or quadrupled) – life as irreconcilably riven plurality. Furthermore, humor is here a comedy of time, for it is predicated on the "irreversible" passage from past to present, or on the introduction of discontinuity into a homogenous temporal continuum. Humor is the deviation of identity in the passage of time in such a manner that what once was identical becomes unrecognizable, becomes other than itself at its very origin. It only takes "a short couple of seconds" to open up a "gap" that "make[s] it impossible to get back exactly where we'd been." Humor is the *clinamen* of linguistic time, that irreversible swerve that sets everything going.

The temporal valence of this humorous heterogeneity becomes intensified when Zombini attempts to rectify the problem, for as is often the case in slapstick comedy, the attempt to restore things to their proper order only results in even more anarchy. Zombini is told, "The doubles you report having produced are actually the original subjects

themselves, slightly displaced in time,” and while he might manage to collect and reunite them, the text counters,

By now these subjects had gone on for too long with their lives, no longer twinned so much as divergent [...] they would have gone on to meet attractive strangers, court, marry, have babies, change jobs, move to other places, it would be like trying to put smoke back into a cigar even to find them anymore [...]. It was sort of like fathering a large number of real children, he supposed, twins, except that these came into the world already grownups, and chances were that none of them would ever visit. (572)

What is crucial in this passage is that the deconstruction of identity is inventive. Identity comes undone through its exposure to time, the passage’s multiplication of linguistic tenses and moods generating a shift from the certainties of what was (the indicative: “these subjects had gone...”) to the uncertainties of what could happen (the conditional: “they would have gone on...”). If the simile that the passage constructs between trying to reverse the process and “trying to put smoke back into a cigar” seems wholly negative, this failure nevertheless articulates itself positively as the multiplication of futures: “It was sort of like fathering a large number of real children...” We could say that the text follows a path leading from simulacra (“twins”) to the existence of real difference or individuality (“no longer twinned so much as divergent”), except divergence in this instance arises from an obscure zone in which difference and identity blur: “The doubles you report having produced are actually the original subjects themselves, slightly displaced in time.” The doubles *are* the originals, with the added difference of time. Zombini’s all too effective magic predicates itself on a surplus of time; it is what happens when illusion, with its distinction between true originals and false copies, gives way to simulacra, or expressions of the virtual. Zombini’s “children” are so many real

potentialities, so many “double lives,” orphaned of any transcendent standard. The time of humor becomes the time of simulacrum.

Zombini’s tale is a parable of counter-temporalization. It is an example of a conduct of time that runs against the grain of the capitalist, Protestant economization of time. The latter makes time a function of transcendent creation. In other words, worldly time is a partial donation of the infinite and eternal surplus of time that belongs to God; our share of this time is but a finite fraction, the prescriptive implication being that we must make good use of it while we can.³⁴⁴ Time, “the day,” is a zero-sum game, its players competing for a taste of eternity through the spendthrift accumulation of hours and minutes. Zombini’s tale dismantles the penury of this model of time. It counters the reductive equalization of time into manageable equivalents with the variable and infinite production of time as a series of heterogeneous simulacra. Time is neither Fall from eternity, nor false deviation from origins, but rather the real “divergence” of instants become autonomous, of simulacra leading “double lives” of their own. As Deleuze writes, “The simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbors a positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*” (*Logic* 262). If the smoke is irreversibly out of the cigar, irreversibility is not loss but invention, the latter term signifying *not* the once and for all of a univocal creation but rather the unruly productivity of heterogeneous and plural infinities – a time of simulacra free from the discipline of identity and originality, a time of the clinamen. From this perspective, the time of creation is not the univocal source of time but the blockage of time, time

captured, separated from itself, through ideological apparatuses pretending transcendence.

This suggests another mode of idleness, one based not on a quantitative overloading of “the day” but on the deconstruction of “the day.” This deconstruction is inventive, characterized by the proliferation of times and by insistence on a surplus of virtuality inhering in actuality. Idleness becomes the creative separation of time from value or the becoming autonomous of time. In *AtD*, this temporal productivity translates into a utopian register through the trope of time-travel, for as we read, “What are any of these ‘utopian dreams’ of ours but defective forms of time-travel?” (942). Utopia, here, is the dream of time regained, of time become *our* time. If time-travel suggests redemption, the possibility of saving what was lost, this redemption is not, however, a return of time to the source of creation, but rather the liberation of simulacra: counter-redemption. *AtD* confronts the reader with the following imperative: “Even if you forget everything else [...] remember one thing – when you come to a fork in the road, take it” (766). Time-travel embodies this paradox; it is the trope that reverses the negative implications of this impossibility into the positive articulation of overlapping series of simulacra.³⁴⁵

Time-travel takes a number of forms in *Against the Day*, and not all of them literal. The novel eschews a vulgar or conventional notion of time travel: “Pynchon soon problematizes the straightforwardness of time travel (that is, moving straight forward into the future or directly backward into the past), as well as the pace and direction of time itself” (*Corrupted Pilgrim* 115). Time-travel has little to do with a spatial imaginary that plots time as a map whose blank spaces one cannot help but wish to conquer. Indeed,

time-travel in *AtD* is first and foremost the horizontal intermixing of heterogeneous temporalities. It indicates the encounter between worlds, or the point at which two series of phenomena diverge, thus generating the “double lives” of simulacra.³⁴⁶ This estrangement is evident even where the novel flirts with conventional imagery of time-travel, as in a section explicitly alluding to “H.G. Wells’s speculative jeu d’esprit” and which even mimes the final sequence of *The Time Machine* (398)³⁴⁷:

Thus, galloping in unceasing flow ever ahead, denied any further control over their fate, the disconsolate company were borne terribly over the edge of the visible world.... [...]

Soon even the chamber had fallen away, leaving them in a space unbounded in all directions. There became audible a continuous roar as of the ocean – but it was not the ocean – and soon cries as of beasts in open country, ferally purring stridencies passing overhead, sometimes too close for the lads to be altogether comfortable with – but they were not beasts. Everywhere rose the smell of excrement and dead tissue. (404)

Whereas Wells allows his traveler to step out into the wilderness of a future fast approaching heat death, Pynchon undercuts the spatialization of time and even the fixity of objective entities: “space unbounded in all directions” opens onto things that are not the things they seem to be (“a continuous roar as of ocean – but it was not the ocean”; “cries as of beasts in open country ... but they were not beasts”).³⁴⁸ Instead of the tourist’s dominating survey in which otherness comes under the sway of identity or sameness, the passage tropes on a difference that cannot be grasped, a difference in itself that speaks simultaneously to the power of time as the force of becoming – time’s capacity to change things utterly, even to the point of total annihilation – as well as to the heterogeneity of time’s power. As “The Doctor” who manages the machine explains to the Chums of Chance, “It’s different for everybody, but don’t bother to tell me, I’ve

heard too much, more than is good for a man, frankly, and it could easily do you some harm as well to even get into the subject” (404). This sentence crucially qualifies our reflection on the power of time in *AtD*, for the distinction that I have articulated between the time of capital and the time of simulacra does not necessarily indicate the existence of antagonistic subjects (the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat), nor does it necessarily posit a moral divide between a good time and a bad time; the time of capital and the time of simulacra are *ontological* complications whose social, ethical, and political implications are multiform: simulacra, time-travel, etc. may as well lead to catastrophe as liberation.

The multiplicity of time-travel’s modalities and consequences is made even more evident in the text’s visit to Candlebrow University, site of the annual “International Conference on Time-Travel, a topic suddenly respectable owing to the success of Mr. H.G. Wells’s novel” (407). The most poignant of these recycled sci-fi tropes is that of visitors from the future who have traveled back in time in order to save the present from becoming the catastrophe of the future. These figures are known simply as “the Trespassers,” and the novel remains ambivalent regarding their intentions and doings: they may be engaged in a “dark confidence game” (418) or in “toxic business” (424), but they also claim to be refugees:

“We are here among you as seekers of refuge from our present – your future – a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty – the end of the capitalist experiment. Once we came to understand the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth’s resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalist illusion fell to pieces. Those of us who spoke this truth aloud were denounced as heretics, as enemies of the prevailing economic faith. Like religious Dissenters of an earlier day, we were forced to migrate, with little choice but to set forth upon that dark fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time.” (415)

Where before we encountered the future as difference in itself, in this instance, the future becomes a determined image turning back on the present to destabilize its image of itself. In other words, the trope of temporal trespass renders the present contingent through an encounter with an alien, yet all too familiar, future; or as Fredric Jameson argues of science fiction, it “does not seriously attempt to imagine the ‘real’ future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come. [...] SF thus enacts and enables a structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history” (*Archaeologies* 288). The Trespassers’ explanation of why they have colonized the present generates a concrete sense of capitalism’s mutability, its capability not only for crisis but also, as Marx reminds us, for generating its own gravediggers. For what the Trespassers seek is nothing less than the extinction of the time that they call home, that temporal England away from which they’ve sailed in an act of “Dissent.” Theirs, then, is a utopian quest attempting to introduce a break into the present social system so that the future will become something other than the catastrophe the present promises to deliver. Following out the implications of the analogy the trespassers make between their travels in time and the pilgrimage to America, we can say that the passage remarks upon the non-identity of America with itself, on the contradictory push and pull between America as capitalist utopia (exceptionalist America) – the New World as a laboratory in which capital realizes its destiny as though on a blank canvas – and an egalitarian American utopia (singular America) – the New World as a space of experimentation with forms of life beyond capitalism and other forms of control.³⁴⁹

With yet another turn of the screw, what is stake in *AtD*'s utopian imagination is not simply this or that future but the future as such. For the future of which the Trespassers warn is, from a certain angle, not a future at all but rather an extrapolation, even a *reductio ad absurdum*, of the present: their future is the extreme terminus of our present, presupposing a fundamental continuity between these two times. Time is subordinated to identity, and change reduced to teleology. Indeed, the novel's progression towards World War I (which it obliquely narrates in the last hundred pages or so), while presumably not the future of the Trespassers, makes a compelling case for the image of History as a train bound for a disaster that it has no way of avoiding. *AtD*'s visions of catastrophe, however, result not in fatalism but in something quite different, namely, what Jameson calls "an anxiety about losing the future": "a fear that locates the loss of the future and futurity, of historicity itself, within the existential dimension of time and indeed within ourselves" (*Archaeologies* 233). There is perhaps no better image of what drives *Against the Day* than the Trespassers desperately sailing the seas of time in search of temporal alterity, in search, that is, of a time beyond the time of capital, a place of refuge from the storm of progress. But it is only an image, and as such significant not in itself but in the manner that it symptomatizes the anxiety over losing futurity and enables the positive articulation of this anxiety in the novel's proliferation of times in excess of capitalist temporality. If we are looking for an image synthesizing *AtD*'s desire for futurity, we can do no better than to turn to the junkyard located near Candlebrow University, where "[u]p and down the steeply-pitched sides of a ravine lay the picked-over hulks of failed time machines – chronoclipses, Asimov Transeculars, Tempomorph

Q-98s – broken, defective, [...] corroded often beyond recognition by unintended immersion in the terrible Flow over which they had been designed and built, so hopefully, to prevail” (409). These relics of the desire to redeem time are themselves testaments to the power of time. The broken down husks of machines embody so many utopian wishes for a different future, and like the genre of science fiction (which the garbage dump emulates) as well as Pynchon’s *Against the Day*, it is not in any one incarnation that utopian desire finds a home but in the attempts, in the plural failures that harbor the memory of hope.

Time-travel, of course, is not only an affair of the future but also of the past. The desire to repair the past, to change its course lest we arrive at catastrophe, is one of the fundamental wishes that the trope embodies. Nor is such a wish reducible to time travel in its literal sense, for the power of what has been called revisionist history, the power, that is, to recover time by bearing witness to the plural perspectives inhering in a historical period, is certainly caught up in this wish for redemption. My last example of time travel concerns a revisionist machine. This machine transforms photographs into cinema, the fixed images coming to life, moving beyond the moment in which they were snapped. As one of its inventors, Bounce Roswell, explains:

“Snapping a photograph is like what the math professors call ‘differentiating’ an equation of motion – freezing that movement into the very small piece of time it takes the shutter to open and close. So we figured – if shooting a photo is like taking a first derivative, then maybe we could find some way to do the reverse of that, start with the still photo and *integrate* it, recover its complete primitive and release it back into action ... even back to life ...” (1036)

The description of the machine's function depends upon an opposition not only between time frozen and time in motion, or the instant and the *durée*, but also between differentiation and integration. While the latter terms are precise mathematical functions in the field of calculus, they nonetheless continue to signify colloquially, so that we can say that the passage coordinates difference with the fixing of an instant and integration, or wholeness, with the flow of duration. It is as if the passage were mimicking Henri Bergson's polemic that the true state of time is *real movement*, not the spatialization of time by clocks and other devices but rather the organic growth of time as a continuity that resists differentiation.³⁵⁰ Indeed, the organicism of the passage comes through in its invocation of the image of resurrection, or a return to life: to transform a photograph into cinema is to "release it [the image; the moment] back into action ... even back to life ...". However, Roswell's equivocation between life and action suggests a complication in this relatively simplistic schema. For action does not necessarily imply the maintenance of a continuity, nor the preservation of an identity. Action may introduce deviation into the flow of time, a turning that does not integrate but rather disseminates or bifurcates a life.³⁵¹ Differentiation potentially undermines integration, the becoming of time irreducible to the continuity of life conceived in purely organic terms.

Yet as we have seen, Pynchon puts deviation to use. He does not render it efficient or make it productive in the capitalist sense of that word, but he does nonetheless make it *effective*, generating an ethos of idleness understood as a refusal of the capitalist value-form. The power of this idleness becomes evident when the text

describes the libidinal and quasi-political investment in the machine of its other inventor,

Merle Rideout:

In the years since they'd come up with the process, Merle confided, he had begun to understand that he was on a mission to set free the images not just in the photographs he was taking, but in all that came his way, like the prince who with his kiss releases the Sleeping Beauty into wakefulness. One by one, across the land, responsive to his desire, photos trembled, stirred, began to move, at first slowly then accelerating, pedestrians walked away out of the frame, [...] dignitaries posing for portraits blinked, belched, blew their noses, got up and left the photographer's studio, eventually along with all the other subjects liberated from these photos resumed their lives, though clearly they had moved beyond the range of the lens, as if all the information needed to depict an indefinite future had been there in the initial "snap," at some molecular or atomic fineness of scale whose limit, if any hadn't yet been reached— (1037-38)

This passage subtly but forcefully redefines the resurrection of time that the machine conducts. It is no longer a matter of reducing difference to continuity, with deviation a kind of error, the unavoidable noise that haunts all information. Rather, the passage borrows the language of sixties social movements ("desire," "subjects liberated," even "molecular," an allusion to the work of Deleuze and Guattari and an indication of the significance of minority or group politics in the sixties), and in doing so, makes deviation no longer aberration but rather the very motor of becoming or change. This is suggested in a number of ways: the images stepping out of their frames ("pedestrians walked away out of the frame"); Merle's concern with an indefinite plurality of images, which indicates a forsaking of the Protestant/capitalist economization of time wherein only the elect are saved in favor of indiscriminate preterition; the frenetic movement of the language, with its long drawn out sentences, alliteration, and frantic imagery ("trembled,

stirred, began to move, at first slowly then accelerating”; “portraits blinked, belched, blew their noses, got up and left”). It is as if Pynchon’s own sentences were resurrecting time, wrapping the reader not in a settled past but in the past as the source of time, as the wellspring of time’s flight into an “indefinite future.” The redemption of time, then, is not so much restoration as multiplication and deviation, the “liberated subjects” not necessarily returning to the lives they were intended to live, but as Merle notes, “a little embarrassed,” “Unless we get it right on the nose, there’s always the chance that those little folks in the pictures will choose different paths than the originals” (1049). Roswell and Rideout’s descent into the “molecular” limits of images is not a return to continuity but a stumbling onto divergences, just as Zombini’s magic did not make things whole again but further split and multiplied them. We might speak of an “embarrassment of time,” in the same way one speaks of an “embarrassment of riches,” for if as the passage suggests, difference is constitutive of time, then the proliferation of stray lives, of “double lives,” is precisely a *wealth of time*.

It is not clear whether or not Pynchon’s counter-redemption constitutes a politics, though it certainly implies political conditions. For example, the nascent movie industry in Hollywood seems to be trying to either destroy or appropriate Roswell and Rideout’s machine, as if to stamp out any opposition to the cinema’s monopoly over our libidinal investments in time. This opposition sharpens Rideout’s dream of emancipating the images of time, lending his project a dissident air, as though we were in the presence of an underground movement: the swelling revolt of time. But it is perhaps not so much revolution as an exercise in wish fulfillment, “like the prince who with his kiss releases

the Sleeping Beauty into wakefulness.” For all the possibility of difference that the machine introduces, difference in and of itself is not a political project but only the condition of a politics to come. Yet we see this politics at work, at least in an embryonic form, in the modes of narrative idling that we explored in this section; dilation, digression, and doubling are so many means to resist time’s economization (its conversion into dead labor) and to recover time’s wealth (the surplus of potentiality that is living labor). The trope of time-travel is one of many tropes in the novel that might also be understood as a conduct of time, that is, as an apparatus that not only shapes time or channels its flows, but also constitutes subjects of time, beings that inhabit time in a specific manner. Yet if time-travel and narrative idleness introduce us to the wealth of time, to “the hidden geometries of History,” there is, I have argued, no absolute distinction separating the wealth of time from the flexible maneuverings of capital, especially since capitalism in its post-Fordist incarnation thrives on creativity and difference. In the next section, we analyze how the time of *Against the Day* becomes the time of revolution – the time of an exodus from capital, the time of the common.

V. The Time of the Common:

The Politics of Exodus and the Common

We are in a strange place in our argument, caught between the political and the non-political, in the presence of political activities (idling, loiterature, time-travel) that seem to lack a politics proper. We are in the zone of the excluded middle, of that which is

simultaneously X and not-X, a fuzzy region thought in which differences never quite add up to identities. Pynchon has long delighted in these middle regions, or as Molly Hite puts it, “Pynchon’s novels themselves are ‘middles,’ and they demonstrate how much significance can be included within a plurality of limited, contingent, overlapping systems that coexist and form relations with one another without achieving abstract intellectual closure” (21). Rephrasing Hite, Pynchon’s novels are not so much definitive solutions to problems as they are questions that suspend the grounds of common sense or ideology. Pynchon directly raises the subject of excluded middles in *The Crying of Lot 49*, which follows Oedipa Maas – who “had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided” – in her search for “transcendent meaning” (*Crying* 139). What is striking about the passage from which these phrases are drawn is that “transcendent meaning” is defined immanently as what would introduce “another set of possibilities” and cause the “symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew” (*Ibid.*). The suspension that excluded middles introduce offers another meaning of idleness: the interruption of a system’s rules; the expansion of the virtual dimensions of a world in a systemic crisis of the actual.

The temporal excess we have located in the narrative idling of *Against the Day* is the excluded middle of capitalist time, but it is also bound up with the excluded middle of politics in the situation of post-Fordist real subsumption. For one way to understand real subsumption’s integration of the totality of social life into capitalist processes is as a progressive collapsing of the social, the economic, and the political into an undifferentiated continuum. This is the obverse side of the sixties slogan “the personal is

political”: the separation between public and private spheres dissolves into a flat plane of conflicting determinations, and as Adorno and Horkheimer, Hannah Arendt, and Jacques Rancière demonstrate in different ways, the political risks becoming no more than the administration of an economic logic in which everything is calculable and each has his or her own proper place.³⁵² But as the discourse of biopolitics indicates – and as I have been arguing throughout this project– this condition is inherently ambivalent. For the proliferation of power in micro-processes inserting themselves into every aspect of social life is also an exposure of (political) power to the social. In other words, the integration of the social into the political, as well as the subsumption of every aspect of life into capital, entails the transformation of the political itself, for the latter necessarily transforms as it shifts from one situation to another.

In the introduction to this chapter, I claimed that *Against the Day*, and Pynchon’s oeuvre as a whole since *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), guards the memory of that “little parenthesis of light” that is the sixties, understood as a period of experimentation in forms of life and also as an attempt to make good on the promise of America, to repeat the American Revolution in a more radical manner (or, in my own terms, to perform a reversal/displacement in which American exceptionalism gives way to a singular America). Reframing this claim, I would argue that one of the central tasks that the social movements of the sixties assign themselves is the positive articulation of the excluded middle between collectivism and individualism. In a situation where the individualism of liberal democracy and the collectivism of socialism are both called into question – the former for its negation of forms of social cohesion unmediated by capital, its tendency to

conflate democracy with consumerism, the latter for its elision of the individual as a positive force, its dissolution of individuality into the homogenous social mass³⁵³ – the question arises of what social/political forms might overcome this antinomy. From a retrospective standpoint, the sixties appear simultaneously a failure and a success. If the goal of many social movements, from the Black Panthers to the SDS, was the radical transformation of social life in the U.S., then, arguably, the sixties failed; its legacy being not revolution but the counterrevolution that begins with the “law and order” mentality of the Nixon administration.

If, however, we treat the sixties in the present tense, understanding its legacy in terms of an active notion of inheriting the past as a set of problems, possibilities, and projects for the present, then the sixties may be understood as the birth of the real possibility of new social formations. Through the cultural and material memory of the communes and militant organizations, the cooperatives and group alliances, the sixties continues to open up the excluded middle between the individual and the collective; the period deconstructs the false opposition between individuality and collectivity through its exploration of an individuality that is the effect of cooperation. It expands the social imagination to the netherworld of what we have been calling the common. I have been arguing throughout this project that the common needs to be understood in a threefold manner: first, as an ontological axiom, stating that being is always being in common; second, as the historical emergence of social and economic relations predicated neither on the labor of the individual nor on cooperative relations organized by capital but rather on cooperative labor in excess of the capital relation; finally, as a political project,

entailing a movement beyond the organization of social life by private property, as well as the invention of egalitarian and autonomous social relations. The common as political project is biopolitical in scope, implying not simply the transformation of the legislation and governmental apparatuses but every aspect of life colored by private property and hierarchy, from our bodily relations to the institutions that reproduce everyday life. It is a project of reappropriating social wealth and producing a democracy whose mediations do not entail inequality or subordination.³⁵⁴

Throughout *A Desire Called America*, we have seen different manners of constructing a politics of the common. In Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, the common names that of which we are always already in possession, that which we only need to "realize" so that the democracy that is our birthright is achieved. Dickinson counters Whitman's optimism by marking the biopolitical difference gender and sexuality makes in American politics, by showing how women function as the material support of an all too immaterial democracy. She issues the challenge of a "minor America" in which the tensions between American exceptionalism and a singular America serve as the starting point for any politics of the common. This tension between exceptional America and a singular America is, indeed, the condition of the writer who is perhaps closest to Pynchon in my project, namely, William S. Burroughs, whose late trilogy resolutely links the possibility of America becoming something new to the revolutionary abolition *cum* fulfillment of America. For Burroughs, a singular America takes on the shape of a revolutionary cadre, indeed, a vanguard, who in transforming themselves as political subjects foment the real possibility of an America to come.

Pynchon's literary output also locates its politics in the common, understood in the double sense of that which circulates without appropriation (or, put differently, through an egalitarian mode of collective sharing) and that which is low, base, marginal (the preterite). Pynchon, I would argue, takes the politics of the common one step further towards a singular America or, at least, away from American exceptionalism, by undermining the identification (adhered to by Burroughs and even by Dickinson) of revolution with vanguardism. Burroughs's writing of politics tends to suppose a notion of linguistic and social purification as crucial to the work of transforming America; the ideological and practical limits of the U.S.'s conflation with private property and liberalism are displaced onto the limit of a group self-identifying as the advanced guard of the American Revolution to come (i.e. the Johnson Family in *The Place of Dead Roads* or the Articulated in *Cities of the Red Night*). The problem of guaranteeing the radical break from liberal America resolves itself for Burroughs in the violent rejection of the majority of Americans, a rejection doubled in the avant-garde formal strategies that make his novels so singular – and so singularly oblique.

Pynchon, on the other hand, predicates the politics of the common on the inextricability of singularity and commonality, or, in linguistic terms, on the ways in which singular linguistic events (such as a Pynchon novel) emerge through variations of the commonplace (such as vernacular language and slang, rumors and gossip, or myths and tales). Pynchon's novels are works of the common. Indeed, we might say they constitute a labor *of* the common, allowing the genitive to signify doubly as a labor belonging to the common – an *affiliation* with emergent forms of social and political life

– and as an invention of the common – a *production* of the conditions for the common's emergence as a political project. We see this labor in Pynchon's insistence on forms of social cohesion that escape both the reckless intensification of capitalism and the infiltration of life by state apparatuses. There are numerous examples of these forms throughout Pynchon's oeuvre, including Trystero/W.A.S.T.E. (*Crying*), the Kunoichi Sisterhood (*Vineland*), and, of course, the anarchist groups and labor movements of *Against the Day*. In every case, it is not simply that the individual is denied in favor of the collective but rather that the individuation of the individual, the form and content of an individual or singular form of life, depends upon its relations to others, on the common as medium and condition of individual existence. But it is not simply the content of Pynchon's texts that constitutes a labor of the common. It is also the form, or the mode, of Pynchon's narrative exertions, the ways in which his works rely upon the intellectual and linguistic resources of the common (the incessant borrowing and transformation of circulating social codes and conventions; the poaching of preexisting narratives and genres, ranging from science fiction to Saturday morning cartoons; the mimicry of dialects, idiolects, and slang that transform the text into a heteroglossic conversation, rather than a monologue), as well as the ways in which his works cultivate the common (the textual indeterminateness, which functions as an invitation to creative interpretation; the playful openness that makes the reader a collaborator, rather than a passive spectator). Pynchon's works assume the common as a precondition of their formal operations, and what's more, their self-reflexive maneuverings are extensions of the common,

constituting a struggle to de-privatize appropriations of language. In short, Pynchon's fiction returns language to the common.³⁵⁵

That being said, on a formal level, there is no essential difference between Pynchon's oeuvre and postmodernism, the former serving for many as a canonical synecdoche of the latter, i.e., Pynchon as embodiment of postmodern pastiche. If there is a distinction to be made, a political difference which enables us to discover a post-capitalist Pynchon, a Pynchon as it were beyond the canonical postmodern Pynchon, then it is on the level of *ethos*, rather than form, in regards to the particular disposition or mode of being in the world that Pynchon's textuality supposes. The most defining feature of this ethos is what I have already discussed in terms of "preterition," that is, in David Cowart's words, "[Pynchon] expresses, in numerous ways, a profound empathy with what he calls the preterite, the left out, the passed over in every form of election (spiritual, economic, racial, cultural)" ("Sixties," 4).³⁵⁶ It is an ethos not merely of collecting the lost and abandoned but of discovering in them an alternative world. An early essay by Pynchon, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," exemplifies this ethos. Written in 1966, in the aftermath of the Watts riots, the essay examines the "terrible vitality" of Watts, where "the poor, the defeated, the criminal, the desperate" are inventing new forms of life, new urban practices, in order to survive ("Watts"). Preterition means not only that one is overlooked or stepped on by the dominant powers ("Watts is country which lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel") but also that, bereft of the "luxury of illusion," reduced to a situation in which domination is as omnipresent and apparent as patrolling police

cars, refusal becomes a positive act, even an art: “August’s riot is being remembered less as chaos and more as art. Some talk now of a balletic quality to it, a coordinated and graceful drawing of cops away from the center of the action, a scattering of the Man’s power,” while “[o]thers remember it in terms of music; through much of the rioting seemed to run, they say, a remarkable empathy, or whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights; everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal” (“Watts”). In this description, the common rears its head in the horizontal, non-hierarchical articulation of anonymous crowds, as well as in the improvisational virtuosity of graceful movements whose relations shift from minute to minute. The common is a form of communication, a quasi-instinctual back and forth (“everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal”). More than simply feeling for the other, or even feeling as if one were the other, empathy in this instance implies the cooperative reinvention of the social; it names the common as a process not only of organization but of self-transformation. It is a biopolitical moment, for what is at stake is the ability to live, or in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, to overcome “the necessity that they [“the poor, the defeated, the criminal, the desperate”] should live the impossibility of living” (*Critique* 766).

It is all too easy to deny the political significance of Watts, as well as the other preterite movements that litter Pynchon’s texts like so many weeds. While they involve alternative modes of organization and produce change, they seem to lack the proper consistency of recognizable power relations. Indeed, in the mass cultural news media, Watts is a kind of synecdoche for all that falls outside of politics proper, for an abject

people without a politics. Pynchon's association with such non-political movements may lead one to say, for example, "Pynchon's political theory is one of resistance being a noble, but futile gesture in the face of the 'real' politics of grasping power, money and influence" (Molloy). There is a degree of truth in such a statement. On the one hand, in Pynchon's novels, we constantly find ourselves before characters compelled to march towards their own doom, their only escape being tentative refuge, rather than systemic social change. On the other hand, Pynchon often reduces politics to a pernicious will to power. The political, as he writes in his preface to the centennial edition of Orwell's *1984*, tends towards "the exercise of power for its own sake" (*1984* xxi). We read early on in *Against the Day*, of "how much the modern State depended for its survival on maintaining a condition of *permanent siege* – through the systematic encirclement of populations, the starvation of bodies and spirits, the relentless degradation of civility until citizen was turned against citizen" (*AtD* 19). Politics would seem reducible to affairs of the state, or at least to an acquisitive pursuit of domination over others. Politics is domination; domination is power; and power is violence.

Yet this argument, which conflates the political as such with state power and domination, ignores the excluded middle of politics by taking "the political" as a given. It starts from an assumed idea of what constitute "real politics," rather than asking what politics is or what it might become. We would do better to move in the direction of Samuel Thomas, who argues in *Pynchon and the Political* that Pynchon's works perform not only a critique of dominant political forces but also an expansion of what is considered a viable political institution (9; 11-14). In our terms, the biopolitical is

irreducible to state politics, even though it is inextricable from the various forms of governmentality associated with state power. If from the perspective of an orthodox political science, the Watts riots are no more than an outburst of chaos, from a biopolitical perspective the Watts riots constitute a refusal of dominant political structures and an emergent form of self-organization. The riots are political *in themselves* by virtue of their traversal and reinvention of what counts as politics. We might say, then, that Pynchon, in his essays and in his fiction, calls into question the limits of the political by narrativizing the fuzzy remnants of politics proper as the emergence of an alternative politics, or, in our own terms, as the embodiment of a singular America.

We have already seen how the political emerges in *Against the Day* as a series of refusals, or modes of idleness, breaking the ties between the time of capital and the time of life, between dead labor and living labor, but the question remains of how these refusals transform into *autonomous political projects*. We can understand Pynchon's positive traversal of the political in terms of Paolo Virno's concept of exodus, which indicates a process of "engaged withdraw" whereby the act of exiting the hegemonic structuring of the political field, of leaving behind both capital and the state's control of social relationships, is itself an invention of a new politics: "Nothing is less passive than flight. The 'exit' modifies the conditions within which the conflict takes place, rather than presupposes it as an irremovable horizon [...]. In short, the 'exit' can be seen as a free-thinking inventiveness that changes the rules of the game and disorients the enemy" ("Virtuosity," 199). Exodus is a form of utopian *praxis*: it invents a radically other future, another world, through that which in the present exceeds the present (the void *cum*

surplus). Exodus is not simply an actualization of previously unexplored potentialities in the virtual but an actualization of those potentialities in the virtual that would require the very structure of actuality to be reconfigured. More than the introduction of contradiction or incompatibility, exodus implies the development of a “non-State public sphere”; it generates a “realm of common affairs” removed from the administrations of states and corporations, alike, predicated upon a “latent wealth” – the wealth of the common, or of social relations in excess of private property (196; 199). The common becomes exodus when it breaks with the property relations, proprieties, and social codes that capture it in the state-capital nexus.

In *Against the Day*, the desire for exodus, for flight, becomes literal in the group of characters known as the Chums of Chance. The Chums of Chance are a crew of indeterminately-aged young men that pilot a skyship, *The Inconvenience*, and float from adventure to adventure. Their lives are quite literally the stuff of adventure tales, the text repeatedly alluding to their adventures in other novels: “(For readers here making their first acquaintance with our band of young adventurers [...]). For details of their exploits, see *The Chums of Chance in Old Mexico*” (7). The Chums of Chance are, thus, ambiguously located in ontological terms, for within the universe of *AtD*, they belong simultaneously to the realm of fiction – the pages of dime novels – and to the “real” world – the (quasi-)material realities shared between the text’s characters.³⁵⁷ This ontological ambiguity can be read in at least two ways. On the one hand, it suggests a certain lightness of being, or levity: the Chums of Chance are literally and figurally above the world, floating in and out of the pages of the text seemingly unburdened by what goes

on below. They even seem unaffected by the passage of time, for while they may age, the text implies that their physical appearances remain constant. Indeed, the genre of the adventure novel itself implies a kind of timelessness. The genre's seriality – each tale self-contained and independent – forecloses the possibility of enduring change by locking the reader into an endless cycle of returning to the same starting point. No accumulation of history is possible, only the pristine recommencement of chance encounters and extraordinary occurrences. Not exodus but escape would appear to be the social logic implied by the Chums of Chance – a thesis confirmed in a striking manner by their non-relation to the WWI, “as if, long ago, having learned to fly, in soaring free from enfoldment by the indicative world below, they had paid with a waiver of allegiance to it and all that would occur down on the Surface” (*AtD* 1023).

We might even go so far as to consider the Chums of Chance a figure of *escapism*, noting that the adventure novel is an ambivalent entity, characterized, on the one hand, by a rupture with capitalist temporality – the extraordinary adventures of our heroes interrupt the quotidian run of clock time, introducing a time free of financial worry – and, on the other, by a mimetic relationship to capitalism, infinite seriality being no more than the time of commodity consumption, in which the momentary satisfaction of a need always breeds need anew, so that consumption is less the satisfaction than the deferral of need. Nor are these two temporal characteristics independent of each other. The emancipatory promise of the adventure novel is dialectically intertwined with the bad infinity of its consumption, insofar as the former functions as the utopian compensation for the ideological emptiness of the latter. Freedom from the burdens of history, if only a

promise, alleviates the nauseating sense that every adventure is merely the reiteration of an old formula, and escape no more than the apex of an arc necessarily returning to the groundedness of “the day.” The pernicious implication of escapism is, then, that it confuses the brightness of a spectacle with material change, that what seems a break with the dominant regime of temporal regulation is only the release valve allowing just enough pressure to escape to ensure the reproduction of the system.³⁵⁸

On the other hand, the ambiguous ontological position of the Chums of Chance might also be understood in terms of a productive confusion between material reality and fiction, necessity and contingency, the indicative and the subjunctive. Flitting in and out of the pages of *Against the Day*, the Chums of Chance obey no obvious narrative necessity, coming and going at seemingly random moments, functioning as a reprieve from the inexorable forward march of linear narrative time. They incarnate digression and dilation in character-form, not so much leaving “the indicative world” behind as opening it up to new possibilities. More than an ideological obfuscation of the material world, then, the Chums’ flight reveals the surplus of potentiality inhering in the earth. They offer another instance of idleness, or refusal to conform to the rhythm of “the [capitalist] day.” Which is not to say they are innocents. To the contrary, when we first encounter the Chums, they are performing security and surveillance functions for the Chicago World’s Fair, and we also learn of their political allegiance to the United States (“the national heartland”), their anxiety regarding “the inexorably rising tide of World Anarchism,” and their frequent engagement in “intelligence-gathering activities” (3; 6; 7). The Chums’ freedom is predicated on power relations embedded in the nation-state.

They are instruments extending the power of the state, increasing the latter's administrative knowledge.

Indeed, with their hazy position simultaneously inside and outside of the law, the Chums of Chance come to embody that paradoxical deviation that Giorgio Agamben places at the heart of political sovereignty: the state of exception. Following Carl Schmitt, Agamben understands political sovereignty to found itself upon the sovereign's ability to suspend the rule of law in a state of exception (*HS* 15-17). Fundamental to this conception is the paradoxical status of this suspension insofar as "what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it*" (Ibid., 17-18). In other words, the state of exception is not chaos, not the pure negation of law or the eruption of anarchy, but rather the production of a "zone of indistinction between nature and right," that is, a region of being wherein the pure force of the law operates on the very facts of bodily existence (Ibid., 21). "*The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying,*" because the force of law in excess of its letter nonetheless secures that letter as a backdrop, as an empty principle powerful by virtue of its very emptiness.

From this perspective, the Chums of Chance are part and parcel of the generalization of the state of exception, the progressive conflation of rule and exception that Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben diagnose as a tendency of modern social life.³⁵⁹ The Chums are not merely an effect but also a cause of what the novel calls "a condition of *permanent siege*," in which "the systematic encirclement of populations" leads to "the relentless degradation of civility until citizen [is...] turned against citizen"

(*AtD* 19). But the generalization of the state of exception, its expansion into a universal form of governance, also constitutes an exposure of sovereignty to its intimate outside, that is, to the an-archy of being, the surplus of social existence over and above the effectiveness of ruling orders.³⁶⁰ In practical terms, the terrain the exception opens up between the norm and the application of the norm invites the possibility of the link between the two becoming severed, as is the case, for example, when police or military forces break with a government in support of a popular uprising, or when a revolutionary movement delegates the creation of new laws to the multitude in the form of autonomous councils. In both of these examples, the letter and the force of the law are overwhelmed by an outside no longer contained by the state of exception. As Agamben argues, there “is no return from the camps [his paradigmatic example of the exception’s generalization] to classical politics,” but this does not mean there is no hope of alternative political possibilities: the collapsing of law into the facts of existence might give way to a “form-of-life,” to a “being that is only its own bare existence and to this life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it” (*HS* 188). Agamben reveals a utopian horizon in which the administration of the state, “the encirclement” that transforms the bodies of citizens into the means of state power, gives way to an autonomous “form-of-life,” to a means without end.³⁶¹ Whereas the state of exception depends upon a scission between the social and the biological in which the richness of the former always risks becoming reduced to the poverty of the latter (“bare life”), “form-of-life” names the potentialization of life, life’s being delivered over to its own “possibility”/“power,” to that which in its “own factness and thingness” is more than mere actuality (“Form-of-Life,” 9)

Agamben returns us to the vicissitudes of the virtual, to that surplus of potentiality that is immanent to actuality even as it is also the motor of actuality's becoming other than itself.³⁶² He does so in a manner that reminds us that the virtual is not necessarily a force of emancipation but rather an ambivalent concept whose expressions include not only forms-of-life but also states of exception. The question becomes: *what kind of relation to the virtual, to potentiality, does a given social figure constitute?* If the Chums of Chance begin the novel by sublating the virtual into the actual operations of the state, they end it by becoming an autonomous form of life, an embodied utopia. This transformation involves a double process of defection and self-relation. We, thus, read that they “voted, finally, to disaffiliate. [...] The boys were all free to define their own missions and negotiate their own fees, whose entire amount they would now get to keep, rather than tithing half and even more back to the National [organization]” (*AtD* 1018). Autonomy, in this instance, is still predicated upon a relationship with capital, albeit one that has become global and mobile, free from the fetters of national territories and unbound from the directives of a centralized organization. In a movement of exodus, the Chums become their own boss – but a boss is still a boss, and the profit imperative still seems to dictate their movements.

Against the Day nonetheless manages to make of the Chums of Chance a utopian-image. It does so by overshadowing the profit-motive with new forms of socialization: the Chums marry another set of aeronauts, an “Ætherist sorority,” who introduce them not only to a new technology of flight (an engine operating by means of the Æther and

enabling them more freedom from gravity) but also to a synthesis of escape/flight and complicity/material grounds:

[T]he Chums were destined after all to seek wives, to marry, and have children and become grandparents – precisely among this wandering sisterhood, who by the terms of their dark indenture must never descend to Earth, each nightfall nesting together on city rooftops like a flock of February chaffinch, having learned to find, in all that roofs keep out, a domesticity of escape and rejection, beneath storm, assaults of moonlight, some darker vertical predation... (1030)

This sentence constructs a middle-zone, a realm among the “rooftops,” “beneath storm, assaults of moonlight” and yet above the “Earth.” Gravity becomes less downwards pull than horizontal attraction, which is to say that the Chums’ embeddedness in the material and social world is displaced onto sexual desire: the “wandering sisterhood,” as object of desire, mediates between pure escapism and bondage to “the day. There remains a sense of material necessity – not only mortal threat (“some darker vertical predation”) but also the bonds of family and romance – but it is condensed and confined, internalized in the form not of a minimal material support. Indeed, the sentence itself enacts this negotiation between material necessity and transcendence, the sheer weight of its many clauses and the hard sounds of the alliterated *ds* buoyed up by the proliferation of verbs without subjects and the stuttering velocity generated by the brevity of its clauses. If the Chums’ eternal youth constitutes an exception to “the day” that nonetheless reinforces sovereign power, this entry into time by way of marriage projects a future that is not so much of “the day” as to one side of it – a bubble of time subtracted from clock time, a “domesticity of escape and rejection.” That last phrase captures the utopian ethos of the Chums, which predicates the overcoming of the conditions of the world below (“escape

and rejection”) on the construction of an alternative world (“domesticity”). This alternative world may be understood as a self-bounded material topos, or a horizontal plane allowing for no instance of heteronomy. It is difficult not to hear in this domestic arrangement an echo of Dickinson’s “minor America” in which a singular America arises not through the realization of the nation but through an escape from it which is also a reappropriation and refunctioning of America’s potentials: a queer marriage that does not implant law and economy in the couple’s bodies but rather operates a critical *détournement* of life itself.

The Chums of Chance, thus, embody one of the paradigmatic features of the genre of utopia: utopia’s self-enclosure and separation, or its status as an enclave.³⁶³ The threads that bind the Chums to capitalism and the political system of nation-states snap, the profit-motive giving way to “the supranational idea,” “literally to transcend the old political space, the map-space of two-dimensions, by climbing into the third” (1083). “The third,” here, is that which exceeds the boundaries of nation-states (without being recuperated by the state of exception) and which, in doing so, opens up the place for another form of life. One way of comprehending the utopia that the Chums of Chance construct is as an exemplary instance of Agamben’s “form-of-life,” or the suspension of any separation between the contingent appearances of a being and the essence of a being. Life becomes wholly and solely itself, with the crucial *proviso* that what is proper to a life is not a given essence, identity, or set of behaviors but rather the potentiality *not to* be/do this or that. In Agamben’s words, “Every human power is *adynamia*, impotentiality; every human potentiality is in relation to its own privation”

(“Potentiality,” 182). Insofar as a form of life dwells in its own potentiality to not do/be something, what is most proper to it is an impropriety that is the result of life never being identical to any of its acts or attributes.

In *The Coming Community*, Agamben proposes the idea of an “inessential commonality,” a “solidarity that in no way concerns essence. *Taking-place, the communication of singularities in the attribute of extension, does not unite them in essence, but scatters them in existence*” (18-19). He goes on to qualify this commonality as “whatever being”: a mode of being characterized by “in-difference with respect to properties,” a “paradoxical *individuation by indetermination*,” and an “irreparable” condition of being “consigned without remedy to their being-thus” (19; 56; 39). The common is not a fabric woven of identity but a “solidarity” that individuates itself only in remaining indeterminate. Whatever being – the being of the common, the excluded middle of ontology – consists and persists only insofar as it “scatters,” which is to say only in its abandonment of identity’s propriety in favor of a threshold existence in which the being of any being whatsoever is *this or that* only insofar as it is also *potentially not* this or that. The solidarity of Agamben’s coming community is not the compact, homogenous density of identity but rather the dispersive, heterogeneous relatedness of a contingent weaving together of singularities.

Like the Chums of Chance, Agamben’s version of the utopia of the common, his “coming community,” constitutes a “supranational idea,” for as he writes, “What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition

of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition)” (*Coming* 86). In both cases, we approach a “utopia of the common,” or an emergent existence – a non-place or excluded middle – between the poles of individualism and collectivism. While the utopia of the common is located in the social tendencies of the present, it points towards the future, towards the political aspect of the common as a project that remains *not-yet*. Thus, we may read Agamben’s peculiar use of the present tense – “Whatever singularity, which *wants* to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language...” (87; emphasis added) – as a blurring of the indicative and the subjunctive: the production of a zone of indistinction in which the possibilities of social life *in the present* fade into the pressing desire for a radically other future. Just as whatever being is not this or that but rather impotentiality and indetermination, so too Agamben’s theoretical practice does not point to an actually existing entity but to a “coming,” to a figure approaching on the horizon.

In the final paragraph of *Against the Day*, the text renders the sky-city of the Chums precisely a *coming* community, a community blurring together the present and the future in the name of utopian desire:

Never sleeping, clamorous as a non-stop feast day, *Inconvenience*, once a vehicle of sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted. For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us. No one aboard *Inconvenience* has yet observed any sign of this. They know – Miles is certain – it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace. (1085)

Two aspects of this passage are striking. First, there is the tension between the common and the singular, between belonging as resolutely indeterminate openness and belonging as the effect of relations between distinct singular entities. On the one hand, the text includes “us” in this passage through the use of the first-person plural. While we are not “they,” we nonetheless seem to be on-board, approaching grace *with* the Chums. Indeed, the word “chum” in itself suggests a tension between the familiar and the foreign, for as the OED notes, the oldest sense of the word means simply “to share chambers together, to live together,” with no implication of intimacy, while its more recent meaning is “to become intimate, be on friendly terms *with* (someone).” Proximity and friendship blend together in the text’s catholic ethos, which draws the reader in through the colloquial ease of its narrative tone and through its gestures towards universal inclusiveness. The novel is an open community, in Agamben’s words, a “co-belong[ing] without any representable condition of belonging.” By “chumming around” with the Chums of Chance, we all become “chums,” dwelling together in an indeterminate community to come.

On the other hand, the use of proper names – in this paragraph, “Miles,” but just preceding it, “Heartsease,” “Pugnax,” and “Ksenjia” – individuates the floating city into a delimited and distinct being. It gives the city *character*, which is to say that it *identifies* the city as the home, the proper place, of an implicitly finite series of individuals. The repetition of the third-person “they” produces a spectatorial situation that functions as the necessary condition of the passage’s utopian impulse, for it is in the distance between us and them, in the gap between this world and the non-place that they inhabit, that hope, or the future as possibility of radical alterity, is allowed to take place. From the vantage

point of this flight “toward grace,” we may say that utopia belongs not to us but to the future, to the community to come, yet at the same time, we must add that utopia is not any *one*’s, for its impropriety, its constitutive openness, amounts to a peculiar friendship: a “chumminess” with radical futurity.

This brings us to our second point regarding this passage towards grace, namely, its foregrounding of utopia as a kind of general will. We see this in the concern for the (utopian) wishes of those who dwell in the flying city, “where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted.” The flying city is a utopian community in a double sense: it not only constitutes a no-place (*u-topos*) hovering above or to the side of the world-system but also a place in which the good, indeed, the highest good (*eu-topos*), finds its place. The particularities of individual desires dissolve in the word “any,” whose indetermination generalizes desire through the implied equivalence of every moment of desire; we might imagine a long procession of claimants, each demanding his or her impossible utopian desire in the same manner, each addressed in the same way. However, in a crucial move, the text brings utopia back down to earth, by limiting its capacity to fulfill the totality of wishes, and by implication, its ability to resolve the contradictory goods of individuals and social groups: “For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us.” There is a cost involved in wishing, at least until some kind of “evolution” occurs that rids “known Creation” of its debt to the determined and determinate.³⁶⁴ The flying city is less a place of desire fulfilled than a place for posing the demands of desire.

Yet for all the indication of the concrete as an obstacle to utopian desire, the thrust of the passage clearly lies in the possibility of overcoming determinate limits by entering a state of “grace.” Thus, in the final sentences of the novel, the oscillation between the present tense and the future tense renders futurity not so much over the horizon as obtruding into the present: “They know – Miles is certain – it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace.” The present tense of “they know” quickly cedes its place to the future tense of “they will,” only to have the present tense return, with the “glory” of the future, in “[t]hey fly toward grace” – a sentence whose brevity collapses the messianic implications of “grace” into the punctuality of an instant (they “fly” at *this very* moment). More generally, we can speak of the absolute immanence of this utopia of the common, in both temporal and spatial senses, for movement gives way to the self-reflexive enclosure of a floating utopia (the *Inconvenience* is “its own destination”). The sky city carries the future within itself; it is an embodied *not-yet*, a *self*-exposure to temporal alterity, a harbor in which utopia might finally come to port.

Synthesizing our analysis, we can say that in its final hour, *Against the Day* brings utopia into the closest proximity to its readers, only to send it off again in a flight towards transcendence. It leaves us with the intimation of a community to come, but it is no more than an intimation. Indeed, what we are left with is what Ernst Bloch calls an “immature” or “abstract” utopia: a conception of utopia divorced from the concrete tendencies of the

social, or an instance of wish-fulfillment that rather than express real and specific historical possibilities, negates history in a pure flight of fancy. The text's ability to construct the Chums of Chance as a utopian moment in its narrative depends on increasingly removing them from the world and locating them in a self-enclosure immune from the social and historical disruptions below. Their promise of redemption resides in a cyclical eternity, wherein there is always enough time for another wish, because "the day" has been bracketed. Their wishfulness tends to sacrifice the actual to the virtual. In short, the abstract utopia of the Chums does not resolve social contradiction through *praxis* but rather neutralizes it through an indeterminate abstraction.

But does *Against the Day*, in fact, manage to generate a concrete utopian *praxis*? As we will see, we encounter concrete utopias in the most unlikely of places in the novel, specifically, in the movements of refugees and in the depths of poverty. These two conditions are inextricable in the novel, for the text's refugees are not only materially poor but poverty itself involves taking refuge from the twin violences with which the text is most concerned, namely, state violence and the violence of capital. For reasons that will become obvious, I focus primarily on the condition of poverty. Throughout the novel, but especially in the crescendo beginning approximately 400 pages prior to the novel's conclusion –which notably coincides with the build-up to World War I– the text locates a counter-redemptive power in the struggles of characters to survive, to live beyond the predations of both capital and states. To close this chapter, I would like to articulate the existence of another utopia of the common in *Against the Day*, born not of the world's transcendence but of immersion in the world. In this version of the common,

what is utopian is the reversal of the negative valence of poverty into a positive potentiality: a doing without capital and the nation-state, a refusal that is also a self-valorization. This amounts to a refunctioning of Autonomist Marxism's concept of self-valorization and of Marx's distinction between dead labor and living labor. Negri, recall, defines self-valorization as "the power to withdraw from exchange value and the ability to reappropriate the world of use values." That is, the concept describes what Virno calls exodus, or the exiting from capital and the nation-state through a reappropriation of the latent wealth of subjects and the construction of a non-State public sphere.

To grasp living labor's relation to poverty, we need only turn to Marx's definition of it as "*not-value*, conceived positively," or "*absolute poverty as object*, on one side, and [...] on the other side, the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity" (G 296). Poverty, in this instance, denotes the non-identity of labor and capital, their contradictory relation. Capital – and its disciplinary instrument, the wage – demands the pure potentiality of workers, stripped of rights to the fruits of their labor, but this denudation of labor generates a contradiction simultaneously subjective and objective: objective, because it rests on a material separation between the means and the power of production; subjective, because it involves, at least tendentially, an affective and libidinal disinvestment in the reproduction of capital. Workers are "*not-value*," because they are the *a-* or *u-*topos of capital, that which capital requires, indeed, presupposes and even produces as its necessary condition, but which is also, at a certain moment of analysis and practice, unaccountable and unsubsumable. Labor is irreducible to capital. Its constitutive

condition of poverty makes it not only less than capital but also more than it; it is the subjective embodiment of the *not-yet*, or concrete utopia in its biopolitical form.

Before returning to *Against the Day*, it is necessary to take note of a contemporary revision of Marx's theorization of living labor as powerful poverty, which, not coincidentally, is closely related to the Autonomist theorization of self-valorization. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri conceptualize a new mode of poverty, a globalized poverty, defined less as a particular empirical position in the social totality than as an ontological condition. The postmodern, or post-Fordist, paradigm of poverty generalizes poverty as both a universal precarity *and* a universal productivity. In regards to the first, Hardt and Negri argue that "the flexibility of the [post-Fordist] labor market means that no job is secure. There is no longer a clear division but rather a large gray area in which all workers hover precariously between employment and unemployment" (*Multitude* 131). In regards to the second – a corollary of the first – "[t]here is no 'reserve' in the sense that no labor power is outside the processes of social production. The poor, the unemployed, and the underemployed in our societies are in fact active in social production even when they do not have a waged position" (Ibid.). Poverty is a "common condition" not only because we are all relatively excluded from the contemporary flows of capital, or more precisely excluded from the wealth that the capital relation organizes through the structures of private property, but also because we all produce capital by virtue of the sociality of our very existence (Ibid., 134). Hardt and Negri cite the "creative role of African American speech within American English" as an example, of how, without remuneration, the former contributes to, transforms, and innovates the latter,

which, in turn, enables the continued valorization of particular industries (e.g., mass culture and marketing) that cannibalize every scrap of language so as to appeal to new audiences. Hardt and Negri are, therefore, able to assert that “*the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself*” (Ibid., 133).

Hardt and Negri update Marx’s conception of living labor by situating it in terms of the conditions of real subsumption and by making poverty the ontological condition of the common. That this gesture is in some sense utopian – despite their reservations regarding this term³⁶⁵ – is implied in the manner in which poverty functions as the embodiment of the set of all sets of (resistant) life, or as Negri puts it elsewhere, “the poor are the common of the common” (*Time For Revolution* 195). The definitive article Hardt and Negri use to singularize poverty, i.e. *the poor*, translates it from an attribute, or condition, of proletarian subjectivity – which is what it is in Marx’s *Grundrisse* – into a subject in its own right. In being the subjective figure that gathers all of the potentiality of the workers of the world into one place it is also *no-place*, that is, it is not any one figure but rather the unrepresentable, monstrous synthesis of every singular figure of labor power. In addition, the figure of the poor is utopian in the sense that it insists, with the anti-globalization movements of the nineties, that “another world is possible.” However, inasmuch as the identification of the poor as a new subject of history or a new bearer of the utopian impulse rests on a notion of productive force (living labor) tending towards formlessness, there is the risk that this figure constitutes another instance of abstract utopia. Hardt and Negri’s reliance on a notion of force or potentiality, Jacques Rancière points out, may lead to a collapsing of the real labor of political organization into a faith

in the sheer powerfulness of life itself.³⁶⁶ Life becomes an abstract and messianic reservoir of hope, with little relation to concrete situations. The only means of avoiding this collapse is by introducing a singular difference that is not the incarnation of a universal movement but rather the non-identity of that movement with itself, or the constitutive gap that supports a process of self-transformation through the introduction of points of mediation. It is beyond my scope, here, to articulate Hardt and Negri's response to this objection, but I would argue that in their most lucid analyses, they conceive of the multitude precisely as *figure* and *project*, a name locating the utopian desire for another world in the practices and conditions of the present.³⁶⁷

From this perspective, utopia takes a biopolitical turn. In contrast to the self-contained wealth of the Chums of Chance – whose bodies we should remember are eternally young, as if sealed away from history in a vat of formaldehyde – the figures of the poor in *Against the Day* are densely corporeal, their vitality coming from the ways in which they transform in response to historical change. To focus our approach, I want to follow three characters through the last few hundred pages of the novel, concentrating on the manner in which their *ménage à trois* produces the common by working past the simplistic dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. These characters are Cyprian Latewood, a gay spy working for the British who finds himself (uncharacteristically) in love with a woman. Yashmeen Halfcourt – the second character with whom we are concerned and the woman with whom Cyprian falls in love – is a mathematician known for her hypnotic beauty. Finally, there is Reef Webb, whom we have already discussed. All three of these characters are in exile in some manner: Reef

running aimlessly from his father's legacy, trying to gain a distance from the henchmen of Scarsdale Vibe and the Vibe corporation; Yashmeen caught for undisclosed reasons in power struggles between rival national factions (especially Russian and British); and Cyprian escaping and/or betraying the intelligence agencies of several nation-states. What is striking in these portraits is the combination of singularity and disidentification: each of these characters become singular, become a difference irreducible to equivalency, by disidentifying with particular national, capitalist, or sexual institutions. The close link between singularity and disidentification is a feature of the novel as a whole, with characters entering into processes of self-transformation by breaking with the institutions defining them. For example, Kit Traverse only discovers his love for aeroplane flight when he severs his connections with Vibe Corp. These disidentifications are the verb-form of the ontological state of poverty in the novel; they translate what risks being reduced to a negative condition of deprivation into the positive power of innovating life through exodus.

What distinguishes these particular characters, i.e. Cyprian, Yashmeen, and Reef, without making them unique in the context of the novel, is the degree to which singularity and disidentification are bound up with the production of the common. This intensity comes to light at the moment in which the three-way relation between them is no longer mediated solely through Yashmeen, no longer reducible to a sexual back-and-forth in which Yashmeen engages Reef and Cyprian in turn but never the two at the same time. Not incidentally, this moment arrives during "the secret counter-Carnevale known as Carnesalve," which in contrast to Lent constitutes "not a farewell but an enthusiastic

welcome to flesh in all its promise. As object of desire, as food, as temple, as gateway to conditions beyond immediate knowledge” (*AtD* 880). Whereas the sanctioned Carnevale preceding this perverse double amounts to an outlet for repressed desires, a kind of pressure valve releasing the built-up steam in the social machine, counter-Carnevale interrupts the dialectic between the law and its transgression, that merry-go-round in which the desire to break the rules is bred by the very prohibitions forbidding it.³⁶⁸ In terming the counter-Carnevale “an enthusiastic welcome to flesh in all its promise,” the text extends and amplifies, rather than contains and dampens, the rebellious pleasures and desires of the flesh. As promise, the body is utopian; it is not a determined place but a no-place for experimenting with different forms of life, for getting “beyond immediate knowledge” and transforming the self. The utopian quality is heightened by the event’s alternate name, “Carnesalve,” with its connotations of a repair of the body, of the body restored to its full powers. The biopolitical density of these lines comes across in the manner in which the utopian impulse involves not a flight transcending the body but a sinking into it – “as object of desire, as food, as temple, as gateway...” Indeed, the very name of the event, “counter-Carnevale,” or as we might also parse it, “counter-bodily-valence,” suggests that it is an affair of extricating a subversive mode of corporeality from a dominant mode.

Counter-Carnevale’s “enthusiastic welcome to flesh in all its promise” invites the reader to become carried away by the subversive bodily transformations of the text. Indeed, enthusiasm names the breakdown of the limits of the individual, a process of

social interference in which the individual is caught up in a movement of becoming

common:

With no interference from authority, church or civic, all this bounded world here succumbed to a masked imperative, all hold on verbatim identities loosening until lost altogether in the delirium. Eventually, after a day or two, there would emerge the certainty that there had always existed separately a world in which masks were the real, everyday faces, faces with their own rules of expression, which knew and understand one another – a secret life of Masks. [...] At Carnevale, masks had suggested a privileged indifference to the world of flesh, which one was after all bidding farewell to. But here at Carnesalve, as in espionage, or some revolutionary project, the Mask's desire was to be invisible, unthreatening, transparent yet mercilessly deceptive, as beneath its dark authority danger ruled and all was transgressed. (880).

It is tempting to point towards the emergence of an autonomy defined against “authority, church or civic,” but we must be careful not to overlook the passage’s undermining of the very basis of the typical notion of personal autonomy. For if autonomy is generally understood in terms of self-closure and removal, or self-rule predicated upon an atomistic conception of individual identity, in this instance, the very identity that allows for such a conception comes undone, “all hold on verbatim identities loosening until lost altogether in the delirium.” As “delirium” suggests, life in Carnesalve is life besides itself or *not* “verbatim,” life caught up in an ecstasy that renders one *not* one, that breaks with oneness in favor of a plurality that is both more than one (constituted by multiplicity, rather than unity) and less than one (irreducible to self-closure). The passage as a whole reinforces this sense of multiplicity and plurality, emphasizing deception not as a covering up or over – the Mask as surface concealing identity’s depth – but rather (as implied by “transparent yet mercilessly deceptive”) a positive conception of simulacra, a

proliferation of appearances that cannot be contained in a transcendental unification.

Appearances are all, it being understood, however, that appearance is not epiphenomenal and that like the Masks emblemizing appearance, “they have their own rules of expression.”

These “rules of expression” constitute another idea of autonomy: autonomy as the negation of authority *through* relations to/with others. In other words, the anarchy of Carnesalve (“danger ruled and all was transgressed”) is not the end of sociality but rather the reconstitution of the social as the common. The break with the ruling order occurs not through a transcendence of the flesh in which the individual finally becomes authentically him or herself but through the multiplication and modification of the flesh in such a way that it becomes permeable to others. This is a radical perversion of Paul’s universalistic notion of the circumcision of the heart: whereas Paul predicates universality on overcoming the differences of the flesh and on a commitment to God via the mediation of a single figure (Christ), Carnesalve’s logic of Masks predicates commonality on specific connections between differences/singularities and on a commitment not to a/the God but to the equivocal and plural expression of flesh.³⁶⁹ Carnesalve’s utopian content – its “promise” to restore the body to its powers – is inextricable from the body’s becoming common; it is a leveling movement in which flesh mingles with flesh on a horizontal plane and in which an egalitarian logic of shared bodily access reigns the day.

Turning back to Cyprian, Yashmeen, and Reef, the night of Carnesalve witnesses the transformation of what “had been limited to the two heterosexual legs of the triangle” into a veritable triangle, in which no side is particularly privileged (881). Whereas prior

to this evening a heterosexual logic dictates that only Yashmeen has access to every partner, Carnesalve interrupts this closure by opening up contact between Reef and Cyprian, the text narrating Cyprian performing fellatio on Reef, as well as the two engaging in anal intercourse. Cyprian becomes a “little go-between,” the diminutive in this instance suggesting not that Cyprian is reducible to a mere means but rather a sense of intimacy and troublemaking (as in the Americanism, “you *little* stinker”) (883). As a mediating body, Cyprian is not ineffective or neutral, instead he troubles the privative and proprietary erotic relations between bodies (e.g., Reef’s possession of Yashmeen, and vice versa) with an indiscriminate play of pleasures that is no less differentiated for its being against the grain of the heterosexual matrix. The text is full of graphic visual detail describing not only the “biomechanics” between their bodies but also their clothing: “Cyprian sank to his knees in a rustling of silk taffeta...”; “having aroused herself with kidgloved fingers busy at clitoral bud...” (882). What is at stake, then, is not the dismantling of difference in favor of a mystical oneness but rather the *economy of difference(s)*, the various levels of and relations between difference, as well as their subordination (or not) to identity.

If the heterosexual economy of difference reduces sexuality to the logic “M/F,” with that formula encompassing a reproductive drive in which a future identity emerges only from the proper coupling of opposites, the sexuality of the common arising between Cyprian, Yashmeen, and Reef constitutes a more unruly process of differentiation, multiplying difference without respect for the maintenance of proper identities and taking pleasure in the blurry region in which a specific sexuality comes undone in the

multiplicity and plurality of bodily movements. The last line of this erotic tableau is telling in this regards:

But here let us reluctantly leave them, for biomechanics is one thing but intimacy quite another, isn't it, yes and by now Reef and Yashmeen were smiling too directly at one another, with Cyprian feeling too absurdly grateful here held between them so securely as to make the vigorous seeing to he was now receiving seem almost – though only almost – incidental. (883)

While we might read this sentence as attesting to a difference in kind between bodily pleasure and spiritual commitment, we might also read it more perversely in terms of the phatic aside, “isn't it,” not as a marker of certainty but as an indication of the unraveling of the division between body and spirit, with the body becoming not merely a site of expenditure but of productivity. Thus, “the vigorous seeing to” Cyprian receives is “only almost ... incidental,” for sexuality, here, is not some brute material interaction in Newtonian physics but rather names a zone of reality in which the material and immaterial, mind and the body, the individual and the common, are open to each other without for all that being reducible to one or the other. There is, a surplus of potentiality that inheres in specific bodies but that belongs to no one body. This is an exemplification of what Cesare Casarino terms, “surplus common,” or the surplus of knowledges, affects, experiences, etc. that is not proper to the individual but between individuations of the common (“Surplus Common”). Nor is it incidental that the passage includes the reader in its negotiation of publicness and privacy. The text recognizes our desires – we, thus, “reluctantly leave them” – but it also implies, in our very act of leavetaking, a limit to the openness involved, a determination via the specific “biomechanics” of this particular relationship. A triangle, after all, is a closed shape.

We will return, shortly, to the issue of openness versus closure in the bodily constitution of the common, not least, because it has important implications for the utopian impulse of the text, but we now need to elaborate the implications of the “only almost ... incidental” anal eroticism of the text. In *Homosexual Desire*, Guy Hocquenghem writes,

Control of the anus is the precondition of taking responsibility for property. The ability to ‘hold back’ or to evacuate the feces is the necessary moment of the constitution of the self. ‘To forget oneself’ is the most ridiculous and distressing social accident there is [...]. ‘To forget oneself’ is to risk joining up, through the flux of excrement, with the non-differentiation of desire. Homosexuality is connected with the anus, and anality with our civilization.³⁷⁰

As Hocquenghem makes evident in the tight connection he draws between heterosexual propriety and private property, there is nothing “incidental” about the anus, indeed, it is at the heart of things, because its closure, its reduction to an “exit only” instrumentality, is the bodily instantiation of an overarching logic of privatization. The desexualization of the anus in the passage that Freud articulates from the anal stage to the genital stage of sexuality is also a passage from the last gasp of a polymorphic perversity that knows no proper boundaries to a territorial, acquisitive and, in Hocquenghem’s account (not to mention Pynchon’s), paranoid mentality that requires a quasi-fascistic securing and policing of sexual flows and fluxes; it is a passage towards a regime of bodily property in which our experience of bodily life is entirely conflated with the logic and the laws of private property – or as Marx puts it in the *1844 Manuscripts*, the reduction of life to the sense of “having” (1844 107)

Homosexual desire, which includes (but is not limited to) the sexual use and enjoyment of the anus, is the no-place – the *u-topia* – of the capitalist, heterosexual social machine, to which Hocquenghem responds by advocating the conversion of the negativity of anality into a positive power (from *u-topia* to *eu-topia*), a disruption that is also a production and proliferation. The above passage suggests that “to forget oneself” in the positive sense of surrendering one’s proprietary relationship to one’s own body and the bodies of others involves a descent into “the non-differentiation of desire,” an immersion into a stream of sexual multiplicity irreducible to identity. However, I would argue that in this instance, “non-differentiation” is an unfortunate terminological choice, for, to reiterate, what is at stake is not an opposition between identity and difference but rather between kinds of difference, between the paranoid differentiation of capitalist territoriality and the “forgetful” differentiation of a proto-communist homosexuality. It, therefore, makes sense when Hocquenghem speaks not of an accession to a primal unity but of “the drift where all encounters become possible” and where “desire produces and feels no guilt” (guilt, both Nietzsche and Freud explain, is inextricable from bondage to a heteronomous logic of identity³⁷¹) (*HD* 131). The “pick-up machine” (Hocquenghem’s name for his articulation of a revolutionary and utopian subjectivity) demands that “instead of translating this scattering of love-energy [i.e. ‘forgetting oneself’ as a negation of private property] as the inability to find a centre, we ... see it as a system in action, the system in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis” (*Ibid.*). The pick-up machine invents a sociality in which subject-formation occurs on a “non-exclusive basis,” in which the “scattering” of the “polyvocal” voices of the

multitude is not dissolution but an articulation of common property relations. Combining the lexicons of psychoanalysis and biopolitics, we may speak of an antagonism between the production of an anal retentive life, or a life whose relations and attributes are oriented towards appropriating and owning, and the production of a common life, or a life whose relations and attributes are oriented towards sharing and associating.

Anal eroticism, then, is not simply an affair of alternative sexual identity, instead it opens onto the foreclosed dimension of social relations under capitalism, onto the possibility of the negation of private property that Marx names “communism.”³⁷² This does not entail assimilating queer desire to a preexisting political project but, rather, as Hocquenghem insists, “Revolutionary demands must be derived from the very movement of desire; it isn’t only a new revolutionary model that is needed, but a new questioning of the content traditionally associated with the term ‘revolution’ particularly the notion of the seizure of power” (*HD* 135). Throughout *A Desire Called America*, I have insisted on the connection between the discourse of biopolitics and the renovation of political thought in the wake of the sixties. Writing in the early seventies, in the wake of ’68, Hocquenghem, like Pynchon, stumbles upon the possibility of the common, understood as a biopolitical project of reappropriating (from the capital relation) the wealth we produce and reorganizing it on an egalitarian, non-privative basis. In this light, the homosexual desire that traverses the triangle between Cyprian, Yashmeen, and Reef constitutes a *working through* of proprietary, heterosexual, and identitarian social relations towards a utopia of the common. It is a utopian *praxis* translating the void of a given set of social conditions into the positive conditions for the actualization of another

sociality. With Jose Esteban Muñoz and Kevin Floyd, and in contrast to (but not quite against) Lee Edelman, I would argue that there is a future in the queer, one irreducible to the heterosexual logic of reproduction.³⁷³

However, a working through implies a degree of friction or resistance, and we see this especially in Reef's homophobia, which is closely tied up with his imaginary identity as a "cowboy," or the epitome of American masculinity. I have already discussed the figure of the cowboy in America's political and sexual imaginary in my discussion of Burroughs's *The Place of Dead Roads*. For our purposes, what matters is the connection between the imperialistic and acquisitive tendencies associated with the cowboy's frontier life and the violent repulsion of any penetration/disruption of secure identity. While Reef enjoys his "rodeo rides" with Cyprian, i.e., the act of penetration, he cannot imagine "[h]ow a man can let somebody do that to him, without even—" and even goes so far as to say, "I'm sayin if it was me, I'd want to kill anybody tied that on me. Hell I'd *have* to kill 'em" (884). What is striking in Reef's response is the gap that emerges between the imperative ("I'd *have* to") – whose italicization renders it almost an instance of hysteria – and desire – which the conversation between Cyprian and Reef reveals to be a more plastic and malleable affair. In what follows, Reef finds himself stumbling over his own attempts to justify and rationalize his stance, while Cyprian, playing the Socrates, needles, "Perhaps I've only failed to see a connection between honor and desire, Reef" (*AtD* 885). In fact, the text does indicate by way of internal monologue that Cyprian sees the connection, but his words perform and enact the disjunction between the two, temporalizing it in the process, "[W]hatever 'honor' meant, it *no longer* had much to do

with these *outmoded* sexual protocols. Let others if they wished, keep floundering along in the *old* swamps – Cyprian worked better on firmer ground” (Ibid., emphasis added).

The heterosexual economy of desire, as well as the proprietary relations are bound up with it, become the residual dregs of an outdated system, “old swamps” dragging down the emergent relations of the common. Utopian *praxis* takes on a dialogic mode, becoming the no-place that opens up between the iteration of settled discourses and appearance of transgressive or queer desire.

Cyprian’s strategy of needling Reef to liberate his desires speaks to the textual strategies of *Against the Day* more generally. The novel evokes the limits of desire in order to call them into question, to render them contingent so as to allow for the invention of other modes of subjectivity. This play between the residual and emergent also presents itself in the way in which the narrative resorts to pregnancy as a way of securing the concreteness of the utopian impulse. Yashmeen becomes pregnant with Reef’s child, and very significantly, we know it is Reef’s, because Yashmeen never allows Cyprian to penetrate her (only various forms of fetish play and oral sex occur between them). This would appear to recuperate and sublimate the queer play of desire into a heterosexual economy in which the straight course of history is guaranteed by the “the Child,” the latter understood in the terms of Lee Edelman’s arguments against “reproductive futurism.” The Child is “the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests,” an operator guaranteeing a “a marriage of identity to future” in which differences only matter to the degree that they are differences for the Other, that is, insofar as they maintain the exclusionary violence of the social order or the conflation between life/the

future and heterosexuality (*No Future* 12, 14). Reef and Yashmeen's child would seem to herald a return to normal – a suspicion confirmed by Cyprian's subsequent break from the triangle and retreat into a convent, convention demanding that the figure of the third be the child as guarantor of social continuity.³⁷⁴

My own sense is that in *Against the Day*, as in much of Pynchon's work, there exists an acute ambivalence between the heterosexual economy of desire and various queer modes of desire. The text is caught up in the push and pull between normalization and subversion; it is not identical with itself, and as such, it cannot be reduced to a single position or a homogenous field of discourse. We might, however, understand this ambivalence less as a failure or insufficiency than as an immanent and constituent engagement with the difficulty of exodus in a situation of real subsumption. That is, in line with studies emphasizing the complicity of the Pynchonian text with what it endeavors to criticize (capitalism, the state, heteronormativity, etc.), I would argue that *Against the Day* responds to the postmodern absence of an outside to capitalism and to the state system by avoiding romantic nostalgia and insisting on the necessity of a resistance that begins *within and against* the system.³⁷⁵ This ambivalence is axiomatic in regards to the concept of utopian *praxis*, for the latter can exist only through the articulation of the no-place, the void as excess, of a particular social regime; it is, in other words, an immanent overcoming of a particular state of affairs, rather than a fantasy of transcendence.

In the preceding pages, we have explored how the triangle consisting of Cyprian, Yashmeen, and Reef articulates the emergence of the common as a negation of the

body's coding in terms of private property and as the construction of a horizontal plane of equality in which bodies are shared without propriety. In regards to the problematic of poverty, we can say that the exodus of the text, its utopia of the common, appears only through the dissociation of private property and corporeal life. With a properly Marxist sense of historical irony, it is only the poor body, the body stripped of its property rights, that it is able to reappropriate not merely the wealth of accumulation but the very potential that generates wealth. Or to repeat Marx, "*not-value*" is the "*general possibility of wealth*." What stands out in our analysis is the manner in which this conversion of negativity into positivity does not necessarily entail its identification with potentiality held in reserve (Agamben's potentiality *not to*, which is like a coiled up spring waiting to be released) but may also involve the concrete working through of the value-form (or communism/commonism as the real abolition of private property relations).³⁷⁶ Poverty is the subjective form of self-valorization under conditions of real subsumption. However, the question remains of how the project that these forms of life embody can take place – i.e. can put the *topos* in utopia – without falling back into the old habits of capitalism and the nation-state.

The "Anarchist spa of Yz-les-Bains" provides one response to this question, a particularly privileged one for our purposes, since it functions as a culmination to the production of the common that we have followed in the triangle between Yashmeen, Cyprian, and Reef. A caveat is required, however, for the text itself does not necessarily privilege this instance. It is, instead, only one experiment among many others the text narrates. Indeed, that the text, with its episodic tendencies, refuses to foreground a single

experiment as *the* utopian solution attests to the impossibility, intrinsic to the concept of utopian *praxis*, of reducing politics to a univocal teleology. The pluralistic utopianism of *Against the Day* abandons the univocity of the traditional utopian narrative – the insistence there is one place that represents or embodies the highest good – in favor of a utopian *praxis* in which the *not-yet* leads to multiple destinations.³⁷⁷

Yz-les-Bains is a cooperative commonwealth embodying anarchist principles, which is “hidden near the foothills of the Pyrenees, among steep hillsides covered with late-ripening vines, whose shoots were kept away from the early frosts by supports that looked like garlanded crucifixes” (931). The geographic description is significant, because it produces the space as relatively, not absolutely, enclosed. The commune is tucked into the mountains, invisible, accessible by “a secret path,” but it is nonetheless rooted in the earth, enveloped by natural surroundings, rather than imposed upon the landscape in the spirit of the technocratic and rationalistic utopias of the industrial era (*AtD* 933). Yz-les-Bains, thus, functions as what Fredric Jameson calls a “utopian enclave,” a “pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change,” the “momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum” (*Archaeologies* 15). For Jameson, this closure is a crucial component of the utopia genre, enabling the distinction between the radical difference of utopia and the relative or partial differences endemic to the capitalist social totality. To cite a paradigmatic example, it is the islandness of More’s *Utopia*, its isolation from the world-market, that enables it to suspend the value-form, rendering gold a material among others, instead of money’s

embodiment. Yz-les-Bains, we might argue, allows for the suspension of private property relations and the production of the common insofar as it closed itself off from the capitalist system surrounding it.

Yet as I already indicated this closure is only relative and, in fact, the barrier that separates the commune off from the rest of the world is porous, if selectively so. We, thus, read that “all could find lodging at this venerable oasis without charge, though in practice even those against the commoditizing of human shelter were often able to come up with modest sums in a dozen currencies and leave them with Lucien the concierge” (931). In contrast to the exclusive and often exclusionary enclave-form of the traditional utopia, Yz-les-Bains welcomes “all” and “without charge,” which is to say it neutralizes the mediation of social relationships by exchange-value without linking that neutralization to the economy of a closed set of members. This openness is predicated on the non-absolute nature of the commune’s negation of private property, its willingness to allow the circulation of “a dozen currencies” in order to support the material bases of this alternate social existence. Yz-les-Bains is, therefore, a compromise formation in which increases in social freedom hinge upon the internalization, albeit to a minimal degree, of the given socio-economic order.

Of course, this opens it to the critique that Marx levels against the Saint-Simonians and that Marxism levels against social democracy, namely, that such negotiations are, in reality, capitulations, the overcoming of private property/capitalism being an all or nothing affair.³⁷⁸ Crucially, however, Yz-les-Bains does not conceive of itself as an accomplished fact or fulfilled political project. Instead, it is a process of

exodus, a utopian *praxis* embodying the *not-yet* through a point by point negation of private property relations and the state-form: “We’ve chosen more of a coevolutionary role, helping along what’s already in progress. [...] The replacement of governments by other, more practical arrangements, [...] some in existence, others beginning to emerge, when possible working across national boundaries” (933). In this light, Yz-les-Bains resembles less the national bank schemes of the Saint-Simonians than the revolt of the Paris commune, of which Marx writes, “It was [...] the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to *work out* the economical emancipation of labour” (*Civil War* 60; my emphasis). Rather than the “backwater” of the enclave, Yz-les-Bains and the Paris Commune are *transitional forms* that nonetheless incarnate that which they anticipate, or, in other words, they “work out” the limits of present historical conditions by extending and intensifying the social tendencies that counter the capitalist and statist subsumption of social life. If Yz-les-Bains is an “enclave,” it is a peculiar species of enclave that closes itself off only while at the same time enclosing that which in a given set of conditions exceeds those conditions; it is an immanent outside, not transcendence.

“Though in practice” (“though in practice even those against the commoditizing of human shelter were often able to come up with modes sums in a dozen currencies”) is not a capitulation, then, but quite the opposite: it is a declaration of the *immanence* of utopian *praxis*, an insistence that the imagination of utopia is bound up with the material conditions and struggles of *this* world. Rather than being a negative qualification, the “though” functions as a practice of what we might call “utopian impoverishment,” that is,

a practice that empties the capitalist and statist content of forms of life in order to expose them to the utopian horizon of the not-yet.³⁷⁹ The text provides various examples of this utopian impoverishment in the context of Yz-les-Bains, for instance, Cyprian's former colleague Ratty McHugh, who was one of many inspired by Cyprian's defection to engage in a "mass desertion" of the state intelligence apparatus and who "is free unarguably now from the rigid mask of his old office self," basking in "the joy in being released from it at last" (*AtD* 932). This instance makes evident the way in which the "release" from capitalist relations and state apparatuses enables the recuperation of suppressed/repressed pleasures – a realization of individual potentials that would be uncomfortably similar to capitalist ideologies of self-fulfillment, if it were not for the inherently collective and openly rebellious process that functions as the material conditions of this fulfillment. What is at stake is not the "realization" of given potentials but rather the reinvention of potentials, their being refunctioned to allow for satisfaction in specific social relations.

That the pleasures arising within the commune are not the effect of an imposed or heteronomous logic comes through in the text's descriptions of the negation of hierarchy, as well as the repeated association of anarchism with "practicality" and "common sense." Governments are being replaced by "more practical arrangements," and when Yashmeen inquires as to how planning can possibly occur in the commune, Ratty's response is: "We work for one another, I suppose. No ranks, no titles, chain of command ... no structure, really [...] By knowing what has to be done. Which is usually obvious common sense" (933). "Practicality," in this context, speaks not to the necessity of efficiency or

simplicity but rather to a political insistence on immanence, understood, here, in a two-fold manner: an adherence to present material conditions and needs; and the construction of a horizontal plane wherein hierarchy has no place, no room for growth. “Structure,” as the list preceding it suggests (“No ranks, no titles, chain of command...”), is a limited term in this context, indicating not organization as such but rather organization according to an *arche*, or a first principle that would rule over and order things in a hierarchical manner. Instead of fixed, hierarchical structures, “common sense” prevails, which we might rephrase as instead of command, the common prevails, for in addition to coupling the negation of hierarchy with an insistence on material conditions and needs, the passage also introduces shared negotiating power and democratic decision-making: “We work for one another.” The form in which these ideas are related to the reader performs, or at least gestures towards, the ideas themselves, the back and forth of dialogue implicitly mimicking the very process of egalitarian and cooperative governance. Indeed, this is confirmed in the rather off-hand manner in which Ratty conducts his exposition (“I suppose...”), suggesting that the commune operates not in terms of fixed rules but in a more fluid manner according to changing situations and transforming needs.

“By knowing what has to be done” – Ratty’s response to the organizational quandaries of Yz-les-Bains – might appear to reduce Lenin’s famous political question (“What is to be done?”) to a merely epistemological question: how does one discern the needs in a given society? But the text interrupts the simplistic conflation of epistemology and politics by highlighting the transforming nature of need, its changing form and content in the revolutionary situation of the commune. We have already seen this in

Ratty's transformation from an "old office self" into "an awakened spirit" for whom desertion is only the beginning of an intensive reworking of the self. We also witness the protean nature of need in the commune's feminist tendencies, its desire to be rid of "patriarchal rubbish" (since "as long as women were not welcome, it ["Anarchism"] never had a chance"), which has as a corollary, "If a woman's only there under the romantic spell of some bearded good-for-nothing then it might as well be croquettes in the kitchen as bombs in the basement. [...] But if she's able to think critically [...] Then there's a chance" (934). Woman is not a fixed entity but is a socially produced subject whose very being depends on her specific interactions with specific situations, which is to say that merely switching contexts does very little, for that simply results in more "croquettes in the kitchen." Once again, the text performs a utopian impoverishment, this time emptying the social content of gender roles – the man as boss/governor, the woman as loyal servant/subject – in order to open the door to egalitarian relations between the sexes. Nor is this a matter of women alone transforming themselves, for just as necessary, Ratty explains, is men being able to "let go of that old we-know-what's-best illusion" (Ibid.). The parodic tone of these exchanges occurs, notably, not in the narration but in the dialogue; parody constitutes an activity of loosening the hold of historically sedimented norms, a work on the self that exposes one to the possibility of change.

Lest we imagine that existence in Yz-les-Bains is a spartan affair, a miserable life of sheer necessity, let us turn to a final practice in the commune, the game of "Anarchists' Golf," "a craze currently sweeping the civilized world, in which there was no fixed sequence – in fact, no fixed *number* – of holes, with distances flexible as well,

some holes being only putter-distance apart, others uncounted hundreds of yards and requiring a map and compass to locate. Many players had been known to come there at night and dig new ones” (934). This game is especially interesting for the way that it combines anarchy, the absence of ruling first principles, with a consistent, though fluid, structure. If there is “no fixed sequence,” if the game is not rigged but rather an open process involving futurity, it nonetheless *can* be played, indeed, it is eminently playable, for the “play” involved is not the simple execution of a given set of rules or conditions but the “play” of the rules themselves, that is, the exposure of the rules to their own mutability and contingency. (We should recall, here, the way in which the “roles” of the Johnson Family in *The Place of Dead Roads* are not fixed positions but rather variable and shifting relations which are altered by the players and, in turn, alter them. The common is inseparable from what Paolo Virno describes as *virtuosity*, a mode of activity in which social being rewrites itself in its very performance.³⁸⁰) What emerges, then, is a microcosm of the commune itself – especially when we consider the reversal of the class connotations involved in an anarchist *golf* – highlighting how the functioning of social relations exceeds mere functionality by constantly engaging in reinvention, in the transformation of the very conditions and modes of social existence.³⁸¹

I would like to close our consideration of Yz-les-Bains by turning one last time to the triangle of Cyprian, Yashmeen, Reef. Shortly after leaving the commune, Yashmeen, in a moment of theoretical reflection on their carnal relations, announces, “The rule [...] is that there are no rules” (943). Not interesting in and of itself, except perhaps as a confirmation of the way in which their respite in Yz-les-Bains cements and extends their

anarchist/associative tendencies, this impulse to transgress becomes more interesting in practice. For Reef, in his own moment of reflection, echoes the sentiment in response, significantly, to Cyprian once again coming on to him and his “appealing bottom”:

And Reef stalked out, not nearly as annoyed as he was pretending to be. For Yash was right, of course. No rules. They were who they were, was all. For a while now, anytime he and Yash happened to be fucking face-to-face, she would manage to reach around and get a finger, hell, maybe even two sometimes, up in there, and he guessed it wasn't always that bad. And to be honest he did wonder now and then how it might be if Cyprian fucked him for a change. Sure. Not that it had to happen, but then again ... it was shooting pool, he supposed, you had the straight shots, and cuts and English that went with that, but around these two you also had to expect caroms, and massés, and surprise balls out the corner of your eye coming back at you to collide at unforeseen angles, off of cushions sometimes you hadn't even thought about, heading for pockets you'd never've called...” (943)

There is much in this passage of interest, but, for our purposes, it is the bringing together of the biopolitical and the utopian that is so striking. For the text folds the geography of Yz-les-Bains, its structure as a paradoxically open enclave, into the relations between these three, as well as into their relations with that which exceeds them. They, too, are porous beings, creatures open not merely to the quotidian run of the world but also to its swerves, to the *clinamen* that generates new encounters, new relations. The analogy to billiards unfixes any routine or reified qualities in their erotic machinations; in an all too obvious allusion to sexual orientations, “shooting pool” is not solely a matter of “straight shots” but also of “unforeseen angles” that lead to queer lines of flight “you hadn't even thought about, heading for pockets you'd never called...” The ellipsis with which this exposure to unpredictable alterity concludes is like the ship of utopia leaving port; in its prolongation of the present into the vicinities of the future, it gestures towards what Jose

Esteban Muñoz calls “the then and there of queer futurity,” a queer temporality interrupting the “self-naturalizing temporality” of “straight time” and exposing it to the ecstatic, collective temporalities of shared being.³⁸² In our own terms, this is the time of the common: not linear development towards some final paradise of desire but coming to one’s senses, realizing oneself, only by dispossessing oneself, by becoming other with others.

The very act of analogy in this passage enables, or lubricates, the encounter with otherness, making it not an encounter with the wholly alien – which would imply a fixed and static conception of the self – but an opening up to that otherness which already permeates the self. This is the meaning of Reef’s riff, “They were who they were, was all,” which, rather than an instance of tautology, attests to the non-identity of this collective (the space between the first “they were” and the second), its capacity for transformation. Put differently, singular America is that which in American exceptionalism is more than it; that which in U.S. nationalism escapes the nation and exposes the people to the real possibility of becoming otherwise. Utopian *praxis*, the unfolding of the *not-yet* in the here and now, chips away at the rigid and closed-off nature of Reef’s cowboy persona; instead of the linear teleology of Manifest Destiny, we arrive at “wonder” (“And to be honest he did wonder now and then how it might be if Cyprian fucked him for a change”) as the phenomenological expression of an opening to queer possibilities. Importantly, this desire is never explicitly consummated but rather left in suspense (“Not that it had to happen, but then again...”), avoiding the neutralization of temporal alterity by leaving the reader at the threshold between present and future, and

contingency and necessity. Indeed, at the risk of the perverse, there is perhaps no better emblem of the biopolitical bent of this utopian *praxis* than Reef's anus, which closed off at first becomes more and more open through the collective labors of the three lovers ("she would manage to reach around and get a finger, hell, maybe even two sometimes, up in there, and he guessed it wasn't always that bad"). If utopia is concrete, if it is *praxis* and not simply abstract wish, it is because it takes root in the body, in material life at that most basic, yet utterly complex, level of needs and desires.

It is no coincidence that we end our discussion of *Against the Day's* utopia of the common with the biopolitical twist of an anal utopia, for as we have already discussed, under capitalism, the anus is an overdetermined and privileged site of policing. It is the place where the regime of private property becomes the regime of bodily property, anal retention being a disposition towards reducing life to the function of acquisition and possession. To dispossess the anus, to free it from the restrictions of its heteronormative, "exit only" coding, is to render it a figure of the poor in the sense we have discussed in this section: a figure of embodied potentiality (living labor) stripped of its attachments to the hegemonic order. The utopia of the common involves not only the articulation of a space in which non-capitalist forms of life can take place but also the refunctioning of bodily life. The impoverishment involved in such a utopian *praxis* is neither a quantitative loss, nor a separation from wealth as such, but rather a reappropriation of the latent wealth of social existence (*self-valorization*). "Reappropriation," however, is not quite right, for as we have seen, the revolution or exodus involved in the utopia of the common cannot remain trapped in the logic of acquisition (whether in its private form,

capitalism, or its public form, socialism) if it is to remain utopian. Instead, we should speak of association and sharing, of a being *in common* irreducible to the private and privative determinations with which we are so familiar in this capitalist life-world. In opening ourselves to the concrete utopian *praxis* of *Against the Day*, we do not wish for what we once had, nor even for what we assume we want, rather we expose ourselves, like Reef Traverse, to what we “hadn’t even thought about,” to what we “never’ve called.”

VI. Irredeemable:

A Conclusion

The final movements of the characters in *Against the Day* are California-bound, as if that territory were a utopian magnet, pulling bodies towards it with the promise of new beginnings. Which is not to say that what it promises is the same for everyone. While Roswell and Merle work in the vicinity of the nascent movie industry, tinkering away on their machine to recover futures past, “Reef [and Yashmeen] propelled by his old faith in the westward vector, in finding someplace, some deep penultimate town the capitalist/Christer gridwork hadn’t got to quite yet” heads west (*AtD* 1043). They wind up, along with several other Traverses, including Reef’s son Jesse, taking refuge from capitalism and the state system deep in the redwoods of Northern California, which we might parse as an extreme point, a terminus of sorts, where America is no longer identical with itself, is riven by the desires and hopes that pull at its edges. A brief exchange

between Reef and Jesse suffices to gesture towards the utopian *praxis* at play in the text: Jesse returns from school with an assignment to “write an essay on What It Means To Be An American”; his response, which is short and to the point, reads, “*It means do what they tell you and take what they give you and don’t go on strike or their soldiers will shoot you down*” (1076). They go on to discuss the possibility of seceding from America, or as Yashmeen suggests, “We should start our own little republic” (Ibid.). Understood as a totality of power relations, America appears in a dystopic light; it is not the bastion of freedom but the negation of it, not the promise of redemption but the foreclosure of novelty and chance.

Yet the characters do not secede. They remain in place, but the place in which they remain is irreducible to, indeed, constitutes an antagonism with, “What It Means To Be An American.” Instead of defining America or identifying it with an essence, they diagonally traverse it; they unfold the utopian desire that inheres in America in strange directions. It is another instance of that which I have been calling, throughout *A Desire Called America*, a singular America: a utopian *praxis* that locates hope, or the concrete expression of the *not-yet*, in the void of American exceptionalism, in the no-place for which exceptional America cannot account. American exceptionalism thrives on exclusive disjunctions that define citizenship, or the proper state subject, in terms of usefulness (the production of capitalist value), race, gender, and sexuality – attributes that not only enable the marking of particular identities but also the engendering of relative distances from and distinctions within national belonging – a whole differential scale of citizenship. If there is an acknowledgement of diversity, this diversity is nonetheless

curtailed and differentiated according to degrees of proper or essential Americanness. American exceptionalism depends not only on an imaginary homogenous social cohesion (*the people*) but also on the demonization of a threatening Other whose never-ending siege against America forecloses the possibility of changing “What It Means To Be American.” In other words, American exceptionalism is simultaneously utopian and anti-utopian. In its wishful and romantic investment in a social body tending towards homogenous coherence, it is utopian, in the precise sense of superimposing an ideal no-place over the real, material social contradictions that constitute what we call America. But in its foreclosure of fundamental social transformation, in its sealing up the social body so that no holes, no gaps, are left for the introduction of a singular difference, it is profoundly anti-utopian.

One strategy for responding to American exceptionalism’s perverse marriage between the utopian and anti-utopian is to demystify its supposed closure and absoluteness, to reveal the fissures and gaps that nonetheless persist. The New Americanists have been especially acute in their analyses of the ways in which the project of exceptionalism is an inevitable failure, constantly contradicted by local resistances, as well as the intrinsic and systemic impossibility of its logic’s totalization. My intervention has been to suggest that the utopian spirit which goes under the name “America” is irreducible to American exceptionalism, the non-identities and fissures in the latter being not merely negative moments of resistance but also positive articulations of a utopian *praxis*. In others words, that desire called America is in excess of its actualizations without for all that being transcendent to them. Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson,

William S. Burroughs, and Thomas Pynchon do not simply reject America, nor do they transcend it on the way to an abstract utopia, some Edenic place over the rainbow. Instead, they traverse American exceptionalism; they sabotage it from the inside, siphoning off its powers and redirecting them towards the end of renewing an American project that would not be *the* American Project. In this chapter, we have seen how Pynchon's *Against the Day* conjures up this utopian *praxis* in three forms: a practice of negation (Anarchist dynamiting) which interrupts the systemic operations of capitalism and the nation-state, without replacing them; a practice of idling, or the expansion of time in a process of self-valorization; and, finally, a utopia of the common, or the break with conflation of bodily life and private property and the emergence of associations and shared relations intimating another mode of socialization, even another world. Each of these practices opens up a space for the radical transformation of America, for its utopian conversion by way of the *not-yet*, but it is only in the last form that we truly arrive at a singular America, or a reinvention of "What It Means To Be American."

There is, however, no redeeming America. The genealogy of utopian *praxis* I trace in this project does not gesture towards the fulfillment of an original intention or desire. It is not messianic or teleological but rather "irredeemable," wholly delivered over to the immanence of historical material conditions. If I have focused on the American Renaissance and on American literature following the sixties, it is because these two periods exist in the wake of immense upsurges of radical energy (the American Revolution; the social movements of the sixties). They do not simply imitate the events they follow but rather try to live up to them, by remembering the no-place, the void *cum*

excess, that those events mark in American political topography. Thus, I have argued that “the sixties” constitutes the moment of the emergence of biopolitics as a discourse, understood as an attempt to transform the dimensions of the political as such, or, more specifically, an attempt to fill in the excluded middle between liberalism and socialism by producing the common. There is no redeeming America, but this does not entail a life of sin, a life subordinated to that liberal guilt that knows only criticism and reform, never fundamental change. Instead, the authors I examine, each in his or her own way, find an other place, a singular America, in the fissures of exceptional America. Whitman’s “realization” of America, Dickinson’s “minor America,” Burroughs’s “potential America,” and Pynchon’s “counter-Carneval” are all modes of reinventing America by exposing it to the radical otherness that it harbors inside of itself. My focus has been on the common, because it functions as a concrete expression of utopia, the thinnest of thresholds in which an absolutely other future meets the here and now to provide the conditions of possibility for real change. Rather than “What It Means To Be American,” our “assignment” should read: “What Might America Become.” There is no redeeming America, no saving it, but perhaps there is another America, whose name we only imagine we know – this America but more than this America, a desire called America.

Notes

Notes to Introduction

¹ On the ways in which the Vietnam War forms the unconscious repressed material of postmodernity, see especially, William V. Spanos, *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*, especially Ch. 3 and 4. Spanos argues that, in the Vietnam War, America encounters a spectral otherness – a form of sociality irreducible to the Western *logos* – of which it can only repress the existence.

² In “Finding as Founding” (in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*), Stanley Cavell analyzes Emerson’s method – and, by implication, American literature and philosophy more generally – as a “founding” of a new world through the rearticulation of the categories through which one sees the world. He also notably emphasizes the way in which loss and novelty is intertwined: just as in Emerson’s essay “Experience” the loss of Emerson’s son becomes the occasion to reinvent his individual life, so too in America’s cultural “poverty” (the lack of a continuous cultural heritage such as the one many American writers ascribe to Europe) we find the possibility of reconceiving thinking as such in terms an experiencing of a singular path. Cavell writes: “What seems to me evident is that Emerson’s finding of founding as finding [that is, Emerson’s replacement of a rigid, schematic approach to experience with a more pragmatic, subtle approach], say the transfiguration of philosophical grounding as lasting, could not have presented itself as a stable philosophical proposal before the configuration of philosophy established by the work of the late Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein, call this the establishing of thinking as knowing how to go on [not only to “go on” after suffering a loss but also to “go on” as a carrying out of the future], being on the way, onward and onward. At each step, or level, explanation comes to an end; there is no level to which all explanations come, at which all end. An American might see this as taking the open road. The philosopher as the hobo of thought” (116). While – as I explain in the chapter on Whitman – *A Desire Called America* takes a certain distance from the Emersonian tradition in American letters, I nevertheless find Cavell’s interpretation of Emerson quite suggestive, in particular, his notion of thought “taking the open road” or of thinking as a (re)commencement of life.

³ There are any number of works that demystify the ideological equation of American liberty and violence against a savage Other, especially as concerns the Frontier. For example, see Richard Slotkin’s frontier trilogy, *Regeneration Through Violence: the mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*; *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800 – 1890*; and *Gunfighter Nation: The*

Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America. See also, William V. Spanos's *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*.

⁴ The New Americanist volume *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease) is an especially significant treatment of the disjunction between the U.S. and America as ideological and analytical terms. The shift towards "United States" (rather than "America," which as I explain below is the preferred term for the New Americanists in other volumes) is meant to enact "the restoration of heterogeneous cultural histories," ones which account for the internal and external colonizations that are inextricable from U.S. history (23). What is most important in this volume (and in the work of many of its contributors, including Kaplan, Pease, Michael Rogin, José David Saldívar, and Bill Brown) is not simply the acknowledgement that the U.S. is founded through imperial acts but that imperialism, colonialism, and empire are integral dimensions of the U.S. from the beginning of its history to the present, and, as such, the borders defining the U.S. are socially and politically contingent. In a similar manner, my approach to "singular America" (explained below) calls attention to the contingency of the national limits of the U.S., though in a different manner, one which emphasizes alternative modes of producing subjectivity.

⁵ In "Old Glory," Susan Willis notes how the desire to heal the wound to the American ego resulted in a boom in the purchase and display of the American flag. She goes on to argue that the U.S.'s refusal of a "cleansing release" produces a fundamentalist reaction in which the nation as a whole is mobilized for violence. Willis's *Portents of the Real: A Primer for Post-9/11 America* is an excellent study of how the desire for security in post-9/11 America effects a myriad of changes in the biopolitical composition of everyday life.

⁶ While this point may brush against the grain of Hardt and Negri's central arguments, it does not contradict them. As they dutifully note throughout the three works they have written together, the nation-state has not disappeared, nor has it lost its effectiveness, but the terms of its existence have changed and can no longer be comprehended – if it ever could – through the lexicon of nations and international systems.

⁷ See Berlant *The Queen of America Goes to Washington* and *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*; and Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* and *The New American Exceptionalism*.

⁸ "Community," in this context, is understood in Jean-Luc Nancy's terms as a quasi-fascistic exorcism of difference in the name of unity and identity. See *The Inoperable Community*.

⁹ Or has done so, for that is how I would interpret the contemporary Tea Party movement, to cite a prominent case. In other words, the Tea Party movement, and its affiliated members of the Republican Party, are symptoms of American hegemony in decline. Their idealistic-nostalgic and quasi-fascistic belief in an authentic American identity that must be secured from others, as well as their desire to dissolve federal government *tout court*, amount to a channeling of the desire called America into the narrow domain of a nostalgic utopia.

¹⁰ On Fredric Jameson's notion of the dialectic between ideology and utopia, see especially, Jameson, "Conclusion: The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology" in *The Political Unconscious*; and "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" in *Signatures of the Visible*. Jameson's argument is invaluable in articulating the necessity to coordinate positive and negative hermeneutic strategies, but it does not necessarily account for – though it arguably leaves a place for – the zone of indistinguishability in which the very positive-negative division dissolves. That being said, Jameson's more recent writings on utopia address this indistinguishability by insisting on utopia as a radical difference and on the anxiety, and even fear, surrounding utopia. See especially, "Utopia, Modernism, and Death" in *The Seeds of Time*, the first part of *Archaeologies of the Future*, and "Utopia as Replication" in *Valences of the Dialectic*.

¹¹ Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, pp. 6. But Berlant elaborates this notion throughout the book, especially Ch. 2-3. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

¹² Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 177-81. What is central in understanding the drive, for both Freud and Lacan, is not confusing it with "instinct." The drive is not natural, in the sense of being self-identical, essential, or a simple conception of need. Instead, it is the positive putting into play of a void; it is not necessarily sublimation but rather the complex articulation in practice of a basic contingency to human life. In conceiving of a singular America in terms of psychoanalytic drives, my point is to emphasize the productivity of a desire whose object, if not incidental, is nonetheless subordinate to the movement, the means without end, of its circuits.

¹³ On the subject of American exceptionalism in general, the following works have been important for my understanding: Michael Kamman, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration"; Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*; David Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of American Exceptionalism*; William V. Spanos, *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*; *Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism*, ed. Ashley Dawson and Malini Johar Schueller.

¹⁴ See Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*. Bercovitch tends to suggest a too simple process of consensus-formation in which America is more or less equivalent to the perennial call for cultural unity, but his study nonetheless remains of great significance, U.S. culture being undoubtedly still suffused by the reactionary demand to imagine a coherent, essentialist, and self-identical sense of nationality.

¹⁵ See, for example, Deborah Madsen's "Witch-hunting: American Exceptionalism and Global Terrorism," in *American Exceptionalisms: From Winthrop to Winfrey*, pp. 15-31, which argues for the continuity between the Salem witchcraft trials and the contemporary "War on Terror" in the context of American exceptionalism.

¹⁶ I should add that this exceptionalist trajectory is not confined to the political Right or to Republicans. President Barak Obama, for example, in his 2011 State of the Union Address alludes to "what sets us apart as a nation" and to "what America does better than anyone." Indeed, he even refers to America as a "light to the world," while in the first electoral debate with John McCain he admonishes the Bush administration for diminishing America's global reputation, going on to say, "But because of some of the

mistakes that have been made -- and I give Senator McCain great credit on the torture issue, for having identified that as something that undermines our long-term security -- because of those things, we, I think, are going to have a lot of work to do in the next administration to restore that sense that America is that shining beacon on a hill.” While I would not want to ignore the significant differences in policy, culture, and ethos between the Bush administration and the Obama administration, there is nonetheless a fundamental unity (American exceptionalism) between them which forecloses or, at least curtails, the imagination of the future in non-nationalist, non-state, and non-exceptionalist terms.

¹⁷On biopolitics, preemption and the war on terror in the American context, see especially Ch. 5: “From Virgin Land to Ground Zero: Mythological Foundations of the Homeland Security State” and Ch. 6: “Antigone’s Kin: From Abu Ghraib to Barack Obama” in *The New American Exceptionalism*. On biopolitics and preemption more generally, see Brian Massumi, “The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat” in *The Affect Theory Reader* and “National Enterprise Emergency: Steps Toward an Ecology of Powers” in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*.

¹⁸Spanos has written extensively on American exceptionalism and on the specters haunting it, but I have relied especially, in this instance, on *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick*, Ch. 1 and Ch. 2; *America’s Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*, Ch.1, 3, and 4; and *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization*, Ch. 1, 6, 7.

¹⁹ *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 87-88.

²⁰It must be added, there is, in fact, an institution – Futures of American Studies, Dartmouth College – which has facilitated the fixation of New Americanist Studies as an institution, a problem or contradiction which I discuss below.

²¹ On the distinction between concrete utopia and abstract utopia, see especially, Ruth Levitas, “Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia.”

²² Michel Foucault elaborates on liberalism and neo-liberalism as a mode of producing subjectivity (at the level of ontology) in the lectures entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Neo-liberalism, Foucault argues, constructs “a social fabric in which precisely the basic units would have the form of the enterprise, for what is private property if not enterprise? [...] In other words, what is involved is the generalization of forms of ‘enterprise’ by diffusing and multiplying them as much as possible, enterprises which must not be focused on the form of big national or international enterprises or the type of big enterprises of a state” (148). Foucault defines this “enterprising” disposition in terms of a set of conducts which emphasize what he calls “capital-ability” (“so that the worker himself appears as a sort of enterprise for himself”) (225). What is at stake in *A Desire Called America* is the analysis of an alternative social fabric to the one that Foucault describes.

²³ Pease defines this “national meta-narrative” as follows: “Those images interconnect an exceptional national subject (American Adam) with a representative national scene (Virgin Land) and an exemplary national motive (errand into the wilderness)” (“National Identities” 4).

²⁴ Representative examples of New Criticism include Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*; W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy"; and John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism*. For a detailed response to the legacy of New Criticism, see Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*.

²⁵ In a truly excellent piece, "Fear of Formalism: Kant, Twain, and Cultural Studies in American Literature," Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that the New Americanists miss the political dimensions and implications of form, because – in a gesture which reproduces the liberal subject that they seek to dismantle – their contextualizing impulse quickly leads to a neglect of the very formal structures that enable or even engender the autonomous subjectivity of liberalism. I completely agree with Dillon's concluding remarks, which state, "Indeed, it is precisely the resource of literary studies to be able to address the formal qualities of texts in relation to historical and material contexts. The familiar opposition of political agency and 'mere' formalism obscures the political distribution and enactment of formal notions of subjectivity, agency, and authorship. Indeed, I would further suggest that the aesthetic may be most political in its formal dimensions, that is, in the forms that it deploys which aim toward the production of coherent political subjects" (67). I would add that I take this point to be the legacy of poststructuralist literary criticism, as well as Marxist aesthetic theory, and note Fredric Jameson's life work as exemplary of the task Dillon sets the engaged literary critic.

²⁶ There are any number of methodological statements regarding "internationalizing" American Studies or making it more comparative. See, for example, Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism,"; Djelal Kadir, "Introduction: America and Its Studies" and "Defending America Against its Devotees"; Paul Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives" and "Transnationalism and Classic American Literature." More generally, the journals *American Studies International* and *Comparative American Studies* are invaluable resources for considering this turn in American Studies. Another, emergent perspective (and one that I find more compelling) is that of planetary American Studies as proposed most forcefully by Wai Chee Dimock. See Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* and Dimock and Lawrence Buell, *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*.

²⁷ See Wiegman, "Refusing Identification: Americanist Pursuits of Global Noncomplicity" in *Object Lessons*, especially pp. 232-36.

²⁸ There are a number of useful critiques of liberalism on which I have relied. Slavoj Žižek's work is indispensable, especially in its criticism of the liberal regimes of human rights and of multiculturalism. See especially, *Tarrying with the Negative*, Ch. 6; *The Ticklish Subject*, Ch. 4; and "Multiculturalism, or, The Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." Domenico Losurdo's *Liberalism: A Counter-History* is an excellent demystifying history of liberalism's contradictions, one which highlights the intrinsically violent mechanisms of exclusion and inclusive exclusion at its core. In the American context, see also Robin Blackburn's *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation, and*

Human Rights. Jacques Rancière's work is notable for the way it pits liberal democracy against democracy as such, contrasting the former's calculated management of difference to the latter's subversive irruptions of difference. See, for example, his *The Hatred of Democracy*. There are, of course, any number of other critiques.

²⁹There is no one place where Lacan definitively describes the categories of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Indeed, they shift meaning, structure, and tactical usage throughout his 24-year long seminar. I rely for the most part, here, on *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, but I have also had recourse to *Seminar III: The Psychoses*, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, and *Seminar XX: Encore*.

³⁰In "Utopia, Modernism, and Death," Fredric Jameson provocatively suggests that utopian desire is irreducible to the simple satisfaction of a particular desire by way of a particular object. Instead, encounters with utopia are inherently reflexive, a matter of learning to desire otherwise: "[W]e might think of the new onset of the Utopian process as a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place, along with new rules for the fantasizing or daydreaming of such a thing" (90). This contention might serve as one way of looking at the desire called America, especially in its mode (I describe below) of singular America: what is important in a singular America is not the particular content of the images proposed by Burroughs, Dickinson, Pynchon, and Whitman but rather the singular manners in which they reconfigure the very desire for another world and the forms of life involved.

³¹The convertibility between void and surplus, from the angle of an ontological thinking of politics and culture, is central to my project of thinking utopia biopolitically. The void in a particular field of being (an ontic, or ontological, region) is that which in it cannot be thought, cannot be posited, yet without which the system cannot exist. It is the constitutive outside of a system conceived of negatively. Surplus, on the other hand, treats the void as an unaccountable presence, as something which traverses a system or a field in such a way that it points towards an immanent transcendence, a passage between worlds. Jacques Lacan's notion of the *not-all* (or *pas-tout*) is crucial to my understanding of surplus/void. In *Séminaire XX: Encore*, Lacan grapples with female sexuality, the position of "Woman" (*La Femme*) in psychoanalysis, by treating it as that which calls into question the One (*l'Un*) by being in its essence, *not-all*: "Il n'y a pas *La femme*, ça ne peut s'écrire qu'à barrer *La*. Il n'y a pas *La femme*, article défini pour désigner l'universel. Il n'y a pas *La femme* puisque [...] de son essence, elle n'est pas toute" (68). In the field of patriarchy (a social ontology about which I have much to say in the chapter on Dickinson), Woman is not simply the void of desire but also its supplement, that *jouissance féminine* which not only sustains masculine fantasies but also interrupts them (Lacan refers to it as "ex-sistence," or an outside that insists without ever becoming identical to itself). Two interpretations of the void *cum* surplus have contributed to my analysis to a great degree: Kiarina Kordela's *Surplus: Spinoza, Lacan* and Cesare Casarino's "Surplus Common" in *In Praise of the Common*. My own intervention is to insist upon the necessity of embodying this void/surplus in an emergent form of life, or in a corporeal (non-)entity whose existence can only be adequate in the arrival of another

world. In other words, the crossing of biopolitics and utopia depends upon the incarnation of the void/surplus in a corporeal project.

³² For three interesting Lacanian readings of utopia, see Ryan Anthony Hatch, “*Tuché & Utopia*”; Juliet Flower Maccannell, “Nowhere, Else: On Utopia”; and Slavoj Žižek, “The Ambiguity of the Utopian Gaze,” all of which are to be found in *Umbr(a): Utopia* (2008).

³³ I find Heidegger’s diagnosis of the limitations of Western ontology in “The Age of the World Picture” indispensable, though the biopolitical approach to culture, philosophy, and, more specifically, literature that I articulate is distant from Heidegger in its treatment of subjectivity. See also Michel Foucault’s rewriting of this drama of representation in *The Order of Things*, especially Ch. 9 - 10.

³⁴ Fredric Jameson and Judith Butler – in, respectively, “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan” and *Bodies That Matter* (especially Ch. 2, 3, 7) – both criticize the divide that Lacan constructs between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and, at least implicitly, between those two registers and the Real. They both call for a historical and political mode of analysis which would highlight the emergence of the Symbolic and the Imaginary from the Real. In doing so, they indicate, if only implicitly, the conceptual space of biopolitics.

³⁵ One of the best accounts of the misinterpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy as merely a pantheistic dissolution of being into unchanging eternity is Pierre Macherey’s *Hegel ou Spinoza*, wherein Macherey more than questioning Hegel’s interpretation of Spinoza shows how Hegel’s dialectical thinking depends on a working through of and encounter with Spinoza.

³⁶ This project is one which has been pursued by others, though not in the biopolitical manner in which I approach it. In addition to the writings of William V. Spanos, I call special attention to the ontological inquiries into American literature of Branka Arsic, especially *Passive Constitutions or 7 ½ Times Bartleby* and *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson*; Eduardo Cadava, *Emerson and the Climates of History*; Carey Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*; and Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, and Conrad in Crisis*.

³⁷ Thus, for example, the seminar *The Birth of Biopolitics* focuses on neoliberalism and ordoliberalism, defining these political-economic regimes of power in terms of their cultivation of subjects for/of the market. Foucault analyzes the ways in which neoliberalism produces an entrepreneurial subject, one who manages his/her own “human capital.” See especially, pp. 185-317.

³⁸ On the concept of individuation, see especially, Gilbert Simondon, *L’individuation psychique et collective*; Paolo Virno, “Angels and the General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon” and *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp.76-80; and Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*.

³⁹ The inventive quality of Foucault’s conception of power is perhaps most evident in his late work, which turns to the Greeks and to their “arts of existence” or “cultivation of the self.” For instance, see *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* and *Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, as well as the late lectures, especially *The Hermeneutics of the*

Subject, The Government of Self and Others, and The Courage of Truth. In these texts, Foucault focuses on the “problematization” of being, on individuals’ attention not simply to what they are and what the world surrounding them is but also to the possibilities of transformation. All of this being said, I understand Foucault’s genealogical work and his work on the subject to be more or less in continuity, the latter inflecting the former but not departing from it. In both cases, it is a productive conception of power that is being developed, not power as suffocating cage but power as the generation and/or transformation of particular individualities and socialities. The inflection of the later moment consists in elaborating the implications of this conception of power, by turning attention towards the way in which power does not define being once and for all but is rather an ongoing process of “cultivation” in which about-faces, mutations, or belabored transformations are not uncommon.

⁴⁰ This is not to say that Agamben does not have a positive component in his philosophy – he does, as I explain in later chapters – but rather that *Homo Sacer* (and the very concept of bare life) tends towards a negative modality of biopolitics whose object is the reduction of life to a condition of impotence. For notable critiques of Agamben’s notion of bare life, see Antonio Negri, “The Political Monster: Power and Naked Life” and Ernesto Laclau, “Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?” See also my own, “Life in Crisis: The Biopolitical Ambivalence of Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*,” pp. 95-98.

⁴¹ See Agamben, “Form-of-Life” in *Means without End*.

⁴² This opposition is operative throughout the books Negri has written with Michael Hardt (*Empire, Multitude, Commonwealth*), but see also Negri, “A New Foucault” and “Bio-power and Subjectivity” in *Empire and Beyond*.

⁴³ Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, pp. 84.

⁴⁴ This is a point that seems to be missed or neglected by a number of Foucault’s more empirically-oriented interpreters, Nikolas Rose, for instance, or Julian Reid. See Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself* and Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity, and the Defense of Logistical Societies*.

⁴⁵ I only wish to note the striking affinity between this bent in Foucault and the late Louis Althusser’s notion of an aleatory materialism. See Althusser, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, pp. 163-208.

⁴⁶ All translations of “Le Corps Utopique” are my own.

⁴⁷ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining –The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and The Invisible*, pp. 130-156.

⁴⁸ On this point, see especially, Louis Marin’s *Utopiques* and Phillip Wegner’s *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*.

⁴⁹ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 45. Benjamin distinguishes origin as *Ursprung* from origin as *Entstehung*. Where the latter indicates origin as empirical process of an existent entity coming into being, *Ursprung* “emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance” (Ibid.). Rather than some fixed point from which beings springs to life (origin as creation), *Ursprung* implies a notion of beginning that always already involves repetition. Even more pertinent, it implies that the fulfillment of an

origin is only found in its “recognition,” that the singularity of an event only achieves any kind of adequacy in a specific practice of recognition, one which at the very least involves locating a surplus of possibility inhering in actual empirical matters (46). *A Desire Called America* can be understood as itself a particular recognition of the singularity of the American Revolution and as an attempt to describe a series of recognitions which have in common their departure or dismantling of American exceptionalism. I should make it clear that what is at stake is not the teleological completion of America but rather competing conceptions of America’s futures as they come to be embodied in singular forms of life.

⁵⁰ *Ethics*, Book III.

⁵¹ There are too many examples of this use of Whitman to cite, but one might mention F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*, in which Whitman serves as one of the central authors founding American literature, along with Hawthorne, Emerson, and Melville and also Sandra M. Gilbert’s “The American Sexual Poetics of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson,” which argues in its conclusion that Whitman and Dickinson represent the two sources of American literature, unbroken and intertwining strands running through the American lyric up to the present.

⁵² I discuss this “liberalization” of Whitman in the second chapter of *A Desire Called America*.

⁵³ In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman bemoans the lack of a common “skeleton” of American culture, the lack of an “essence” of what it means to be American. Thus, we read the claim that what is most needed are “two or three really original American poets [...] that, from their eminence, fusing contributions, races, far localities, &c. together they would give more compaction and moral identity,” and also that “the fear of conflicting and irreconcilable interiors, and the lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close, continually haunts me” (CPP 959). The historical context for this sense of lack is certainly the violent traumas of the Civil War, but it nonetheless constitutes a repudiation of the inextricability of singularity and commonality, of difference and multiplicity, without substantial ground, that we find in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*.

⁵⁴ For example, the nineteenth century proletariat, as an individual class, comes into being through a myriad of relations, including the formal politics of the bourgeois state, dietary habits, educational institutions and various kinds of machinery; instead of a unitary subject, the proletariat is the name of a set of relations, with a degree of variability and the possibility of modification.

⁵⁵ Two texts, in particular, highlight this dimension of Deleuze’s thought: his final book with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*; and the short essay, “Immanence: A Life...”

⁵⁶ On the “interference” between philosophy and literature in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, see Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, especially 216-18. See also Cesare Casarino, “Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Preface” in *Modernity at Sea*; and Christian Haines, “Corporeal Time: the cinematic bodies of Arthur Rimbaud and Gilles Deleuze.”

⁵⁷ All translations of *Dialogues* are mine.

⁵⁸ For a reading of Melville which is comparable to Deleuze's – and one which speaks to my own understanding of that desire called America – see Leo Bersani's "Incomparable America" in *The Culture of Redemption*. In Melville, "America's history will take place in the space at once cluttered and blank where all imaginable social bonds have been simultaneously figured and dissolved. Melville's America is a historical meta-oxymoron: it defeats the defeating oxymoron of a democracy ruined by fulfillment of its own promise by erasing all promises in order to make the wholly unauthorized promise of an absolutely new society" (149-50). Bersani emphasizes the essential "orphanhood" of America, its not simply being without a continuous line of heritage but also the power it derives from this condition. The utopian valence of America comes from its "repeating its impoverished beginnings, its utopian negations" (154). What Bersani captures – and what I, indeed, also argue throughout my project – is the way in which the power of American literature comes not through the securing of value but through the opposite, a productive bankruptcy, a constant recommencement.

⁵⁹ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, pp. 24.

⁶⁰ On Deleuze and utopia, see especially, Ian Buchanan, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary*, especially Ch. 5 and 6.

⁶¹ Notably, Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, where Deleuze includes his most concerted discussion of singularity, is organized as a series of paradoxes, in a manner which bears more than simply a resemblance to Rancière's definition of politics in terms of paradox. Both thinkers are attempting to reckon with the descriptive power of the structuralist legacy (with its ability to map homologies, isomorphisms, and other forms of cross-connection between various social levels), while at the same time insisting on the importance of the aleatory, or that which exceeds – paradoxically – the systematicity of structures.

⁶² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Félix Guattari map the possibilities of such transformations through the interplay of "deterritorialization" and "territorialization," as well as "smooth" and "striated" space. These terms mark the difference between, on the one hand, a field of actuality in which beings are reduced to exclusive and unitary identities, without the possibility of differing from themselves, and, on the other, a field of actuality in which beings are exposed to their own non-identity, to the potentiality to become otherwise which blurs the edges of a given individuality. Slightly against the grain of Deleuze's thinking and writing, we can say that an experience becomes utopian when it achieves a high-degree of deterritorialization, when it experiments with such intensity that it reveals not only new forms of life but also a new structure, a new world, of existence. Deleuze and Guattari state the matter in programmatic form in the following sentence: "This is what it's necessary to do: install oneself on a stratum, experiment with the chances it offers, search there for a favorable place, for some movements of deterritorialization for some possible lines of flight, test them, secure here and there some conjunctions of flux, try out segment by segment some continuums of intensity, have always a little piece of a new earth" (199; my translation). This sentence serves as an excellent exposition of what is meant by the phrase "utopian *praxis*" insofar as it revolves around an embodied *praxis* connecting together a mode of thought and a mode of action or practice, insofar as it locates utopia not in a transcendent space but in an outside, a

“new world,” immanent to this world, and insofar as it emphasizes the tentativeness, the essayistic quality, of utopian *praxis* as a process of inventing a new life – utopia is not the once and for all resolution of a set of contradictions but rather the process of changing the coordinates that make up reality.

⁶³In particular, I am referring to Deleuze’s rejection of “New Philosophers,” a movement in France which reacted against the supposed excesses of ’68, especially its Marxist tendencies. The New Philosophers include André Glucksmann, Alain Finkielkraut, and Bernard-Henri Lévy. Deleuze’s critique of this movement can be found in “On the New Philosophers (Plus a More General Problem)” in *Two Regimes of Madness*, pp. 139-48.

⁶⁴ On the murder of the primal father and the ensuing regime of guilt, see Freud, *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

⁶⁵ On Deleuze’s notion of “minority,” or “minor literature,” “becoming-minor,” and a “minor utilization,” see especially, Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Ch. 3.

⁶⁶ See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, “Hegemony Unravelling – 1” and “Hegemony Unravelling – 2”; Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Curve of American Power”; and David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. The literature on the decline of American hegemony is, of course, vast, so these can only be taken as particular examples of its description.

⁶⁷ I am, of course, relying to a great degree on Fredric Jameson’s important *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.

⁶⁸ On the notion of *Nachleben* (“afterlife”) in Benjamin’s work, see especially Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1*, especially pp. 254-56.

⁶⁹ While this is not the place to reiterate or incorporate the important work of revisionary historiography concerning the American Revolution, it is worth at least noting and gesturing towards it. Much of this work revolves around a narrative in which the event of the American Revolution embodies itself in an irreducibly heterogeneous set of insurgencies (including women, Native Americans, slaves and black freemen) whose potentiality is shut down or blunted by its being channeled into the more homogenous and unitary operations of the U.S. Constitution and its concomitant governmental machinery. See, for example, Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*, Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, and *Beyond the American Revolution*, ed. Alfred F. Young. Additionally, I take Michael Hardt’s essay on Thomas Jefferson, “Jefferson and Democracy,” in which he articulates a theory of radical democracy in Jefferson’s writings to be a superb dramatization of a singular America. Hardt negotiates the ideological limitations of Jefferson’s thought not by shirking from it but by retrieving a biopolitical undercurrent contradicting these limits, exposing them to other possibilities, other forms of life. Betsy Erkkila performs a similar critical division of Jefferson’s thought, though she emphasizes the ways in which the radically democratic elements are intertwined with the reactionary more forcefully than Hardt. See Erkkila, *Mixed Bloods and Other Crosses: Rethinking American Literature from the Revolution to the Culture*

Wars, especially Ch. 2: “Mixed Bloods: Jefferson, Revolution, and the Boundaries of America,” pp. 37-62.

⁷⁰ On the difference repetition makes, see especially, Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, and Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context” in *Limited Inc*.

⁷¹ Much of Hannah Arendt’s work performs a critique of biopolitics from the standpoint of a quasi-liberal conception of politics. In works such as *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition*, Arendt seeks to delimit and contain the practice of politics to a particular sphere of existence (though, at the same time, she makes politics into a practice that puts the entirety of the individual at stake through an exposure to novelty or commencement). In particular, Arendt wishes to separate off the political from the social, distinguishing the American Revolution from the French by way of the former’s properly political modality against the latter’s contaminations of the political by the social. It is perhaps needless to say that *A Desire Called America* departs from a very different axiom, namely, that what Arendt understands to be politics proper is really only one domain of the political (liberal politics) and, additionally, that biopolitics takes place in the becoming political of the social. It is quite problematic to see the interference of the social and the political as mere contamination or corruption. I prefer an understanding of politics that allows for a historically variable understanding (beyond more or less true to the properly political), one which does not presume an essence or fixed content in advance.

⁷² See John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion” in *The Atlantic* (1967).

Notes to Chapter 1

⁷³ Hereafter *Cities of the Red Night* is cited parenthetically as *CRN*.

⁷⁴ See Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, especially pp. 139-41. This concept of revolutionary mourning also resonates with Jonathan Flatley’s *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* and Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*.

⁷⁵ In *Wising Up The Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs*, Timothy Murphy argues that whereas Burroughs’s fiction in the sixties invokes an actually existing set of revolutionary groups, that of the eighties, in the wake of political defeats and reaction, fantasizes the constitution of a new revolutionary group. I largely agree with this argument, which acts as my point of departure, but I am more interested with the specific, micropolitical processes that differentiate Burroughs from liberal political traditions and capitalist power relations. See Murphy, Ch. 6.

⁷⁶ In Burroughs’s earliest works, the writing of biology takes the form of a diagnosis of life forms in relation to the normal practices of the state and capitalist entities. Especially prominent in these early works are addiction and queer sexuality. While I discuss queer sexualities in this chapter, I do not discuss addiction in any detail in this chapter, for it falls outside of its scope. That being said, addiction is an important aspect of the biopolitics of Burroughs’s oeuvre. Addiction is a social technology and a form of life in which bodies are linked to the reproduction of the capitalist economy. The illegal

“shadow economy” of drugs is the dialectical counterpart of “normal” capitalist reproduction, a supplementary transgression that does not call capital into question but shores it up. The illicit quality of drugs also intensely exposes addicts to the state (through policing) and to apparatuses of control, such as rehabilitation centers and detoxification clinics. The marginalization of drug addicts as either minor members of a counterculture or simply “degenerates” acts as a negative condition for the construction of normalized citizenship. The drug addict is a kind of sub-citizen, exiled from society for his improper use of his own body, allowed to reenter society only through delineated conduits of normalization. On the other hand, drug use and addiction in beat culture serves the purpose of marking a distance from normalized social and state practices, marking members of an emergent counterculture as part of America but another America, a minor America of misfits and dropouts. This form of minor America has obvious resonances with the utopian forms I discuss in this chapter. On the subject of addiction in Burroughs, see Frank D. McConnell, “William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction;” Eric Mottram, *William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need*, pp.13-62; and, most pertinently, Jason Morelyle, “Speculating Freedom: Addiction, Control, and Rescriptive Subjectivity in the Work of William S. Burroughs” in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*.

⁷⁷ Hereafter *The Western Lands* is cited parenthetically as *WL*.

⁷⁸ On the eighties as an historical and cultural period, see especially, Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years*; Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*; Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*; and Jeffrey T. Nealon, “Periodizing the Eighties.” On neoliberalism, see especially David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, and Niel Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*.

⁷⁹ Hereafter *The Place of Dead Roads* is cited parenthetically as *PDR*.

⁸⁰ I discuss the biopolitical syntagm “body/language” in the Introduction to *A Desire Called America*, Part IV.

⁸¹ Burroughs’s critique of the theology of the word parallels his contemporary Jacques Derrida’s own deconstruction of the Word. While their methods and practices of writing are quite different, they both dismantle the logocentrism of Western culture, producing new possibilities for thinking the practice of writing. For relevant discussions by Derrida, see especially *Of Grammatology* and *Dissemination*. Robin Lydenberg discusses the parallels between the work of Burroughs and the poststructuralist theories of Derrida, Roland Barthes, and others in *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs’s Fiction*, especially Part 2.

⁸² Indeed, this interruption of orality by writing constitutes one of the central formal qualities of the book, *The Job*, in which this text is found, for the book consists of interviews with pieces of Burroughs’s writing interpolated by Burroughs in the editing process. There are no clear boundaries indicating what text emerges from transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews and what text was written outside of the interview format. In either case, we encounter not so much a division between writing and speech as a series

of variations on modes of writing, and on writing's relations to machinery, such as the tape recorder.

⁸³ There has been a recent turn in critical theory to discussions of species history, a turn which, I would contend, is part and parcel of a more general biopolitical turn. See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"; and Nick Dyer-Witheford "Species-Being and the New Commonism: Notes on an Interrupted Cycle of Struggles."

⁸⁴ On Burroughs's notion of electronic revolution, see especially, "Electronic Revolution" in *Ah Pook is Here, And Other Texts*.

⁸⁵ On this subject, see also, Burroughs, "Technology of Writing" in *The Adding Machine*.

⁸⁶ On Burroughs and counterfeiting, see Tim Murphy, *Wising Up The Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs*, pp. 169-180. Of course, William Burroughs is preceded in this inquiry into the political implications of reproducibility by Walter Benjamin in his well-known article, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility," which argues that the loss of the conditions of possibility that made artworks unique, "aura"-saturated experiences is also the opening of new possibilities, especially for the relationship between art and collective social practices. See also, Fredric Jameson, "Video: Surrealism without the Unconscious" in *Postmodernism*.

⁸⁷ On difference as such, or difference irreducible to the distinguishing of identity, see for example, Jacques Derrida, "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy* and Gilles Deleuze, *Difference of Repetition*, especially Ch. 1, 4-5. Burroughs produces a telling image of this primary non-identity by returning to and rewriting the creation myth, once again, but this time, with tape recorders: "I advance the theory that in the electronic revolution a virus is a very small unit of word and image. I have suggested how such units can be biologically activated to act as communicable virus strains. Let us start with three tape recorders in the Garden of Eden. Tape recorder one is Adam. Tape recorder two is Eve. Tape recorder three is God, who deteriorated after Hiroshima into the Ugly American" (*Job 14*).

⁸⁸ See Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

⁸⁹ Many of the traits of Burroughs's writing that I am discussing are defining features of the canon of postmodern fiction/aesthetics: the irreducibility of the world to oneness/the existence of plural worlds; writing as in excess of representation, as a practice that creates worlds, rather than simply represents them, or writing unbound from reference; a hyper self-consciousness of the very act of writing; a distrust of realism; an emphasis on difference and multiplicity, rather than on sameness or unity; the use of pastiche or generalized parody; a break with linear narrative in favor of the anecdotal, the non-linear, etc. One could, of course, go on listing off a series of attributes that characterize Burroughs's postmodernity, yet I prefer, along with Timothy S. Murphy in *Wising up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs*, to insist on Burroughs's distance or break with a standardized postmodern aesthetic. While Burroughs's work certainly engages in a number of the linguistic techniques characterizing postmodern fiction, his work would seem to be of a quite different ethos than the ludic playfulness generally associated with the postmodern aesthetic. Like the revolutionary movements of the sixties, Burroughs

does not give up on the desire for a form of change that would be total, that is, he does not give up on totalizing narratives (such as the narrative of control). As Murphy argues, Burroughs proposes a kind of “schizophrenic model of totalization,” a mode of totalization that is self-conscious but without end (38). Burroughs, thus, preserves the utopian desires usually associated with the modernists of the early twentieth century, but he also disrupts such modernist commonplaces/foundations as the division between mass culture and high culture, the position of the artist as priest of high culture/spirit, and the belief in art as an autonomous realm of redemption. While Murphy argues that this strange combination of attributes generally associated with modernism and postmodernism is the effect of Burroughs’s *amodernity*, Marianne DeKoven makes an interesting suggestion that it is Burroughs’s liminal status as an author whose work emerges from the space *between* modernism and postmodernism, that is, the space of the sixties, which distinguishes his work. (Burroughs shares this liminal status, between eras or historical logics, with Thomas Pynchon, whom I also discuss.) I would argue that it is, perhaps, more productive to agree with Fredric Jameson that postmodernism is less an aesthetic than a cultural logic that conditions a number of different aesthetics. From this perspective, it is possible to say that Burroughs is postmodern insofar as he, too, must respond to the breakdown of epistemological and ontological certainties, as well as the changing cultural and economic structures, often associated with a post-Fordist mode of production, but Burroughs’s work distinguishes itself insofar as it attempts to reinvent collective modes that are often written off as merely nostalgic. On postmodernism in general, see especially Jean François Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. On postmodern fiction or postmodernism as an aesthetic category, see especially, Brian McHale *Postmodernist Fiction* and Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. On Burroughs and postmodernism, see especially, Timothy S. Murphy, *Wising up the Marks*, Ch. 1; Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*, Ch. 8; Steve Shaviro, “Burroughs’s Theater of Illusion: *Cities of the Red Night*”; and Wayne Pounds, “The Postmodern Anus: Parody and Utopia in Two Recent Novels by William Burroughs.”

⁹⁰ The notion of the *not-all* comes from Jacques Lacan in *Seminar XX: Encore*. It refers at once to the impossibility of wholeness/totality insofar as wholeness/totality constitutes itself by way of a remainder, an excess, that also renders it incomplete *and* to the surplus of existence or signification over totalization, to the positive articulation of that which is irreducible to the enumeration of a set of identities. See especially, Alain Badiou *Being and Event*, Trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005 [1988]); Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); and Kiarina Kordela, *Surplus* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

⁹¹ This notion of identity resonates with the critical sense of identity produced by Judith Butler.

⁹² On the notion of control in Burroughs, see, Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks*, pp. 52-64, 80-85; Nathan Moore, “Nova Law: William S. Burroughs and the Logic of Control.”

⁹³ The critique of this simple distinction is most notably executed by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, in his discussion of the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, pp. 97-139.

⁹⁴ Deleuze's concept of the "Body without Organs," for example, originates in Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Perhaps even more significant is the way in which Deleuze, especially in his work with Guattari and especially in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus*, borrows stylistic elements from Burroughs, especially the paratactical use of non-exclusive disjunctions, the use of infinitive verbs, the deployment of semi-autonomous philosophical routines (rather than linear narrative or the development of a system).

⁹⁵ The notion of control as a determination by way of variable limits that guide the habits of daily life is central to the work of Judith Butler. Butler analyzes how individuals become conscripted by specific norms (especially heterosexuality) through the performance of these norms, but she also shows how performance also enables the reiteration of these norms *with a difference*, that is, in such a way that other modes of existence become possible. See especially, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, especially Ch. 3, Sect. IV, and Conclusion, and *Bodies That Matter*, Ch. 1, 4, 8.

⁹⁶ On the complication and problematization of the base-superstructure model, see, for example, Jason Read, *The Micro-politics of Capital* and Fredric Jameson, "On Interpretation" in *The Political Unconscious* and, more recently, *Valences of The Dialectic*, pp. 42-49.

⁹⁷ For example, Lauren Berlant describes how the Reagan Revolution of the eighties involved the perversion of the slogan "the personal is political" into the pseudo-apolitical "the political is personal," that is, the political becomes privatized, reduced to a mimetic logic grounded in a strictly defined norm (the heterosexual white male), and the private becomes highly vulnerable to the operations of state and para-state institutions, especially when the private consists of non-normative bodies. In addition, the personalization of politics also entails the translation of politics into economic consumption: on both the left and the right, politics becomes a matter of what one chooses to purchase. Boycotts become an extreme political action and choosing to buy organic foods identifies one as a liberal. See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, especially pp. 1-55, 145-175.

⁹⁸ See Murphy, Chapter 6.

⁹⁹ Notably, the Wild Boys, as their name suggests, are exclusively male, yet – indicating the biopolitical thrust of their existence – are capable of biological reproduction, which is to say that they are capable of producing a social continuity without heterosexuality or the bourgeois nuclear family. They are capable of generating social relationships outside the bourgeois norms of social reproduction. Of course, the exclusion of women is quite problematic, and arguably anti-feminist, but as I explain below, Burroughs's undeniable moments of anti-feminism are undercut by a more general critique of identity and of the heterosexual matrix of bourgeois society. For an extended discussion of Burroughs's homosociality/homoeroticism/homosexuality and its relationship to misogyny/anti-feminism, see Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs*, which argues that Burroughs's politics and literature pursues the quest of an authentic masculinity inseparable from homosexual

identity and homoerotic practices. Burroughs's work defines itself against the effeminate, in this argument, and is, thus, constitutively misogynist, despite its best efforts at an egalitarian and progressive politics. Russell argues that Burroughs must be understood as gay and *not* as queer in the contemporary theoretical sense. I quite evidently disagree. Burroughs's misogyny, inseparable from his nostalgic longing for the self-reliant individual, is undermined by the formal practices of his work, which call into question the very possibility of authentic identity and, in fact, valorize a mode of collective belonging that depends upon a process-oriented, fluctuating production of selfhood.

¹⁰⁰Indeed, the rise of the consumer society twins these revolutionary uprisings, as a double and, in certain cases, a condition of their existence.

¹⁰¹ There are many texts I have found relevant regarding the political and social turn America takes during the eighties. Haynes Johnson's *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* is an excellent journalistic account of the rightward swing of American politics during the Reagan years. It is especially attentive to the changing ideologies of U.S. public life, especially the rise of the view that the government is by its nature a negation of individual freedom and that the capitalist market is sole ground of "good" politics and social relationships. For another useful general account, see Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*. Michael Rogin's *Ronald Reagan, The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology* analyzes the way in which the demonizing of opponents by the right in the eighties shuts down the possibility of various kinds of left-leaning politics. Fredric Jameson's classic "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984) narrates the passage from the seventies into the eighties in terms of an excitement (schizophrenic intensities) predicated upon the death of a collective sense of history. The possibility of large-scale systemic historical change gives way to changes that are inflections of the historical present, rather than alternatives to it. In particular, Jameson's work registers the displacement of the utopian impulse from the invention of alternative systems (what he, borrowing from Coleridge, calls Imagination) to the modification of particular elements of a given system in new forms (Fancy). Jeffrey T. Nealon's "Periodizing the Eighties" echoes Lauren Berlant's *The Queen Goes to Washington City* (see Note 29) in arguing that during the eighties the political becomes personal in a new sense (which Nealon explicitly identifies as biopolitical): the divide between public and private breaks down with the political matters that were formerly parceled out one side or the other of the public-private split all coming to invest, in totality, the most minute gestures of individual life. Nealon strikes a hopeful note, claiming that this folding of the political into the personal opens up a new range of political actions. Even in Nealon's more hopeful tone, I would argue that the eighties as a historical period implies a sense of exhaustion: the exhilaration of capital's increasing speed is matched by a sense that the alternatives to capitalism, including the increasingly decrepit institutions of actually existing socialism, are no longer real alternative but rather historical zombies, creatures moving despite their time having come and gone. In other words, the eighties are characterized by a negation of large-scale utopian projects, by a present whose horizon is completely defined by the internal limits of capitalism and liberalism. Yet as I make clear in this chapter and others, this general negation of

historical consciousness and utopian desire does not prevent singular instances of a collective utopian imagination reckoning with the limits of the eighties. For specific reflections regarding the literature of the American (but also the British) eighties, see Colin Hutchinson, *Reagan, Thatcherism and The Social Novel*, especially, Introduction, Ch. 1, 3, 6; Joseph Dewey, *Novel's From Reagan's America: A New Realism*; Josephine Hendin, "Fictions of Acquisition" in *Culture in an Age of Money: The Legacy of the 1980s in America*; and David Kaufmann, "Yuppie Postmodernism" in *Critical Essays on American Postmodernism*.

¹⁰² On the increasing financialization of capital in the 1980s, see especially Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century*, especially Ch. 1, 4. Notably, Arrighi argues that the transition to financialization is an indicator of a decline of political and economic hegemony. I discuss the relationship between the current decline of American hegemony and the utopian imagination in the Introduction. See also Randy Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life*, which explains the way in which "financialization" entails the reorganization of interpersonal relations (such as those between parents and children) more generally. I discuss financialization at greater length in the final chapter of this project on Pynchon.

¹⁰³ My reading of the late trilogy does not insist upon the psychoanalytic register of mourning, preferring a more affect-oriented and less subject-centered focus on the temporality of the virtual and the actual, but a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading dealing with the issue of repetition, trauma, and the troubling of the symbolic order would be a profitable endeavor. On the subject of mourning, see especially Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*; Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"; and Klaus Mladek and George Edmonson "A Politics of Melancholia" in *A Leftist Ontology: Beyond Relativism and Identity Politics*. But see also Slavoj Žižek's interesting meditation in *In Defense of Lost Causes* on the relationship between repetition, Deleuze's notion of the virtual, and revolution in which he argues that revolution is always a repetition, with a difference, of a historical political failure, and that such failures always leave a spectral remainder that is the condition of possibility for future revolts. The point, then, is not to move on from failure or even to simply learn from it but to inhabit it, to embrace what survives it as the traces of a new future buried in the past. See especially, pp. 139-41, 207-210.

¹⁰⁴ In "A Grenade With the Fuse Lit: William S. Burroughs and Retroactive Utopia in *Cities of the Red Night*," Sean Grattan provides an excellent analysis of the novel in terms of the vicissitudes of utopia as it oscillates between being an ideal and a material reality. Most significantly for my own purposes, Grattan insists on the way that utopia survives its failure, the way that it lives on, still producing effects, even as it fails to live up to its own principles.

¹⁰⁵ Burroughs's work is consistently entangled with the legacy of colonialism, much of his work not only taking place in formerly colonized spaces, such as Northern Africa (the *Maghreb*), but also depending upon the interdependency of distant global regions that is a product of the long history of imperialism and capitalism. On Burroughs and colonialism, see especially, *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier*.

¹⁰⁶ If this understanding of allegory is unorthodox, it is not unfounded and, in fact, rather literal, harkening back to the term's meaning as "speaking difference" or a "speech of difference," that is, saying one thing in terms of another. This use of the term is analogous to Paul de Man's use of it in "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

¹⁰⁷ On the historical novel and its legacy, see Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* and Fredric Jameson "Historicism in *The Shining*" in *The Signatures of the Visible*, pp. 82-99. Especially relevant to this discussion is Jameson's argument in "Progress versus Utopia, or Can We Imagine the Future?" that science fiction inherits the historical sense of the historical novel, but gives it a new spin: the future of science fiction narratives generate a sense that the present is contingent, that change is possible.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion of group politics in Burroughs, see Murphy, *Wising Up The Marks*, Ch. 5. For more general discussions of the complex dynamics of group politics, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. 1, especially pp. 345-576, and Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. 229-305;

¹⁰⁹ I use the term diagram, which I borrow from Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, to describe an abstract organization of social life, where abstract means *not* ideal as opposed to material, but rather capable of being translated into multiple forms, a unity which is the effect of its multiple and variable expressions. On the notion of the diagram, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 141-148 and Deleuze, *Foucault*, pp. 34-38.

¹¹⁰ On the myth of the Frontier and its legacy in the twentieth century, see especially, Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

¹¹¹ Of course, what emerged was not a simple homogenous social realm but competing organizations of social space – Jacksonian democracy, for example, competing with Jeffersonian and Madisonian visions of democracy – as well as those dejected and rejected spaces, the reservations, which consigned indigenous peoples to a para-national existence. For excellent discussions of the complexities of American westward expansion/Manifest Destiny, see, Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, and *Cultures of United States Imperialism*.

¹¹² On the breakdown of Cold War ideology and its consequences for American exceptionalism, and by implication, the Frontier, see Donald Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*,

¹¹³ See Note 29, for sources regarding the general turn of politics in the Reagan era. On Reagan as a televisual presence or media spectacle, see,

¹¹⁴ I, of course, borrow the concept of the chronotope from M.M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, especially "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," pp. 84-259.

¹¹⁵ On the relationship between homoeroticism of the genre of the Western, see especially, Kevin Floyd, "Closing a Heterosexual Frontier: *Midnight Cowboy* as National Allegory" in *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, pp. 154-195, and see also, Chris Packard, *Queer Cowboys and Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth Century American Literature*; Christopher Le Coney and Zoe Trodd, "Reagan's Rainbow: Queer Challenges to the Cowboy Dreams of Eighties America." On Burroughs

and the Western, see also, David Glover, “Burroughs’s Western” in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*.

¹¹⁶ See especially, Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 1, Section 3.

¹¹⁷ On these two points, see respectively, Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*; Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Part 1.

¹¹⁸ On potentiality qua potentiality insofar as it inhabits *praxis*, see especially, Paolo Virno’s notion of “virtuosity” in *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 47-73, and Giorgio Agamben, “On Potentiality,” in *Potentialities*.

¹¹⁹ Another motif in *The Place of Dead Roads* which makes the reality of potentiality apparent is the activity of gunplay or shooting: “Identify yourself with your gun. Take it apart and finger every piece of it. Think of the muzzle as a steel eye feeling for your opponent’s vitals with a searching movement. Move forward in time and see the bullet hitting the target as an *accomplished fact* [...] I am learning to dissociate gun, arm, and eye, letting them do it on their own, so draw aim and fire will become a *reflex*. I must learn to dissociate one hand from the other and turn myself into Siamese twins. I see myself sitting naked on a pink satin stool” (*PDR* 68-69; emphasis in original). Shooting, as a practice involving not merely hand and eye but body and soul, entails the becoming actual of potential in an embodied manner and in a form that interrupts the identity of the present, its complete determination, opening it to an encounter with otherness. In the text, this otherness, not surprisingly is death, but notably, it is not the death of one’s rival so much as the death of oneself, the radical mutation of oneself, through another’s death: “Identify yourself with *death*. See yourself as *death* to your opponent” (*Ibid.*).

¹²⁰ In *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, Louis Marin argues, in a similar vein, that utopian fictions are defined by their ability to generate anticipatory figures of an unfigurable future; they fabricate the poetic place from/in which the future will emerge prior to any concept of it. See Marin, pp. 162-64.

¹²¹ It should be noted that the critique of science fiction as extrapolation is a critique that science fiction performs itself. See, for example, the work of Ursula K. LeGuin, Samuel Delany, and Octavia Butler, each of whom share Burroughs’s interest in the intersection between the social and the biological.

¹²² Jeffrey Nealon makes a similar argument in *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, Ch. 4. See also Michael Hardt’s argument that Foucault’s late work constructs a militant *ethos* in “Militant Life.”

¹²³ I have chosen to focus in this section on the text’s reflexive gestures towards Kim’s science fiction tales, but one might equally make similar arguments by attending to the recursive loop whereby the text comes to write itself: “Kim’s first book, a luridly fictionalized account of his exploits as a bank robber, outlaw, and shootist, is entitled *Quién Es?* [which is also the title of the third section of *PDR*, in which this portion of the text finds its home]” (201). The text goes on to make striking clear the fact that this blurring of fiction and reality implies not the

illusory nature of reality but rather the practical effectiveness of fiction. We thus read: “Kim Carsons does he exist? His existence, like any existence, is inferential . . . the traces he leaves behind him . . . fossils . . . fading violet photos, old newspaper clippings shredding to yellow dust [the novel opens with a newspaper account of Kim’s death] . . . the memory of those who knew him or thought they did . . . a portrait attributed to Kim’s father, Mortimer Carsons: Kim Carsons age 16 December 14, 1876. . . . And this book” (Ibid; typographic irregularities in original). The meta-textual dynamics of the novel do not disembodied the world and text in a stereotypically postmodern fashion. Instead, text becomes flesh, and the reader finds herself caught up in a chiasmus, where text and body interfere with one another in complex ways – or in our own terms, what is at stake is the circulation of sense in excess of and yet immanent to the difference body/language. As I discuss in greater detail below, for Burroughs, fiction is not the construction of illusory worlds but rather the practical exercise of retraining human desires, of reconstructing the social through an anticipatory tracking of the concrete or material possibility of other worlds.

¹²⁴ Fredric Jameson discusses the interaction between genres within genres in terms of “generic discontinuities.” See Fredric Jameson, “Generic Discontinuities in SF: Brian Aldiss’ *Starship*” in *Archaeologies of the Future*.

¹²⁵ What one sees, here, is an instance of what Giorgio Agamben has discussed in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* as the relationship between sovereignty and “bare life.” Bare life is a life defined as without value and, therefore, as both inside and outside of the law: inside, insofar as it remains vulnerable to exceptional kinds of violence; outside, insofar as the violence committed against it counts as neither murder, nor sacrifice. The power of sovereignty depends upon its ability to decide upon the status of citizens’ lives, to produce bare life as both the substratum and residuum of the state. In Burroughs, I would argue, there is a moment when the Johnson family emulates national sovereignty, engaging the Shits in a battle for possession of sovereign authority. In doing so, it produces the Shits as bare life. This strategy (one which echos a number of revolutionary struggles) is a mode of pedagogy in which that which is the defining standard of value becomes redefined as without value. (Indeed, such a reversal takes place in the act of renaming the bourgeoisie “the Shits.”) However, I argue that the Johnson family is not a mirror-image of the Shits, a simple reversal of polarities, but rather a usurpation of the very logic of sovereignty. Instead of a social movement defining itself in terms of its opposition to an Other, the Johnson family defines itself through an immanent process in which negation is only element of practice, other elements including utopian gestures and the expression of the common. (Both of which I describe in detail.) On bare life, see especially, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

¹²⁶ On the conflation of politics and morality/moralism, or the personalization of politics as its privatization, especially by American conservative movements, see Lauren Berlant *The Queen of America goes to Washington City*, Introduction, Ch. 1, 2, 4.

¹²⁷ On power as a determination of conduct and a relation between relations, see especially, Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power” in *The Essential Foucault*.

¹²⁸ Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, pp. 342: “Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.” And see Burroughs, *The Western Lands*, pp. 164-65

¹²⁹ On class as relational, see Marx, *The German Ideology*, pp. 82-95.

¹³⁰ On the concept of the common, see especially, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Multitude*, especially 103-127, 196-227; Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 35-45, and “Angels and the General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon”; Jason Read, “The Production of Subjectivity: From Transindividuality to the Commons”; and Cesare Casarino, “Surplus Common.”

¹³¹ I borrow this phrase from Cesare Casarino’s “Surplus Common,” though the utopian spin I put on it is my own.

¹³² See *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1 and *The Spirit of Utopia*, both of which use the phrase repeatedly throughout.

¹³³ Kathi Weeks, in her recent *The Problem with Work*, makes a similar point to mine, also drawing on Hardt and Negri’s work. See especially, Ch. 5: “The Future is Now: Utopian Demands and the Temporalities of Hope.”

¹³⁴ See, for example, Crystal Bartolovich’s acute critique, “Organizing The (Un)Common,” as well as William Mazzarella’s “The Myth of the Multitude, or, Who’s Afraid of the Crowd?” Hardt and Negri’s follow-ups to *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, are attempts to work through this criticism by formulating a new paradigm of institutionality. For an excellent response to Hardt and Negri’s critics, see Murphy, *Antonio Negri*, pp. 195-207. In addition, Murphy makes a connection between the Hardt and Negri’s work and Burroughs’s, though in a very different way, in “Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs among the Situationists.”

¹³⁵ On the concept of exodus as a political movement, see Paolo Virno “Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. For Virno, exodus is a process of organized defection from capitalism and the nation-state, which, in the very process of taking leave, also engenders a “non-state public sphere.” This non-state public sphere is how Virno understands “the multitude.”

¹³⁶ On the notion of “means without ends,” see Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture” and “Notes on Politics.”

¹³⁷ Michael Clune makes a similar point in “William Burroughs’ Virtual Mind,” arguing that in Burroughs’s first trilogy – the Nova trilogy – “self-interest and an interest in the collective cannot be separated” (101). While Clune ascribes this indivisibility, or “auto-coordination,” of individual and collective to the market, I would contend, at least in the context of Burroughs’s late trilogy, that Burroughs resists the conflation of human social life and the market. The price system Clune posits as uniting Burroughs and Hayek would, in fact, stand as another instance of the reduction of the human species to the industrial regime of equivalence against which *PDR* polemicizes.

¹³⁸ See Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 76-80.

¹³⁹ On this point, see Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, pp. 103-27, 196-208.

¹⁴⁰ Nick Dyer-Witheford makes a similar argument in “1844/2005/2044: The Return of Species-Being.”

¹⁴¹ On the crossing of theoretical and narrative registers in the genre of utopia, see especially, Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, especially pp. xiv-xx.

¹⁴² On utopia as the education of desire, see especially Ruth Levitas, “Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia” and Fredric Jameson, “Utopia, Modernism, and Death” in *The Seeds of Time*.

¹⁴³ On capital as a *management* of workers’ powers and form of control, see especially, Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, especially Ch. 3-5, and *The Constitution of Time in Time For Revolution*.

¹⁴⁴ On counter-actualization, see also Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 148-54.

¹⁴⁵ See especially, Paul de Man, “Semiology and Rhetoric” in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. On the interplay of body and textual theory in Burroughs more generally, see especially, Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs’ Fiction*, especially Ch. 2 and Ch. 9-11.

¹⁴⁶ In “Electronic Revolution,” Burroughs writes, “The aim of this project is to build a language in which certain falsifications inherent in all existing Western languages will be made incapable of formulation. The following falsifications to be deleted from the proposed language: *The IS of identity* [...] *The definite article THE* [...] *The whole concept of EITHER/OR*” (153-54).

¹⁴⁷ It should be noted that for Virno, virtuosity is characteristic of the post-Fordist mode of production, which is characterized by the valorization of informational/communicative labors. Significantly, Burroughs’s trilogy appears at the same time that this mode of production consolidates itself. Virno writes more concertedly about linguistic invention in “Jokes and Innovative Action: For A Logic of Change.”

¹⁴⁸ I have focused on those aspects of Burroughs’s writing that go largely unnoticed in much of Burroughs criticism, namely, the collective social dimensions of his writing. Of course, there is a strong streak of individualism in Burroughs’s work, derived from the legacies of Emerson and Thoreau, mutated in its contact with the anti-conformity of American countercultures, especially Beat culture. On Burroughs’s individualist tendencies, see especially, Tony Tanner, “Rub Out the Word” in *City of Words*.

¹⁴⁹ On Burroughs’s nostalgic attachment to butch forms of masculinity tied up with ideologies of rugged individualism, see especially, Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs*, which argues that Burroughs’s radical gay subjectivity “apes” traditional, heterosexual American masculinity, with all of its violent implications (7).

¹⁵⁰ On queerness as performance and as an interrogation and/or negation of identity, see especially, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Part 3 and Conclusion, and *Bodies That Matter*, especially Ch. 4; and Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, especially Introduction and Ch. 6-7.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*; Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity”; and Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*.

¹⁵² See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*; and Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*.

¹⁵³ See, for example, John Willet’s “Ugh...” (which originally appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*) as well as the responses to it, collected in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*. In most cases, the indictments of Burroughs combine homophobia and a general repulsion towards “excessive” bodily presence.

¹⁵⁴ In a more complex take on pornography – one which provocatively argues for pornography’s intimation of the possibility of human liberation – Giorgio Agamben writes of its ability to profane human capacities, that is, detach them from their immediate or instrumental ends and to deliver them over to their own multiform potentiality (including the potentiality to not do this or that – just as pornography tends to abandon those narrative constraints which determine the movement of bodies). However, Agamben also notes the limits of pornography in a capitalist situation: “What it captures is the human capacity to let erotic behaviors idle, to profane them, by detaching them from their immediate ends. But while these behaviors thus open themselves to a different possible use, which concerns not so much the pleasure of the partner as a new collective use of sexuality, pornography intervenes at this point to block and divert the profanatory intention. The solitary and desperate consumption of the pornographic image thus replaces the promise of a new use” (“In Praise of Profanation” 91). Pornography – as a commodified entity – marks the potential for and promises the possibility of a new use, that is, a new mode of activity in the world beyond capitalist constraints, but it also channels that promise into the easy gratifications of isolated consumption. Burroughs, on the other hand, we might say performs a *détournement* on pornography, breaking its link to capital by making it an affair of producing the common, or of generating a new collective experience of sexuality. See Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” pp. 88-92, but see also the section “Dim Stockings” in *The Coming Community*, pp. 47-50.

¹⁵⁵ On the issue of a hierarchy of senses and the relations between them, see Michel Serres’, *Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, in which Serres calls attention to perceptual and affective surpluses irreducible to the objective field of vision, information, etc. See also Donald Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* and Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*, regarding the rise to dominance of vision in particular and its relation to processes of rationalization, capitalist production, and reification. In an interesting note to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud identifies smell as a “primitive” human sense and associates the devaluation of the olfactory with the “raising up” of man to an upright gait. This “raising up” doubles both the “progress” from savagery to civilization and the movement from a pre-Oedipal to an Oedipal stage. Indeed, one way of reading the flows of bodily life in the sexual relations of Burroughs’s text would be as not so much *pre*-Oedipal relations but as post- or non-Oedipal becomings of the body. Burroughs calls into question the

teleological trajectory of modernity/capitalism at the very level of the body. See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, pp. 54, Note 1.

¹⁵⁶ Or, as Agamben puts it in *The Coming Community*, “The halo is this supplement added to perfection [“perfection,” meaning in this instance, the “being thus” of singularity] – something like the vibration of that which is perfect, the glow at its edges [...] One can think of the halo, in this sense, as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable” (55-56). Crucially, this supplementarity is not of the order of a transcendental remainder guaranteeing the cohesion of a system but rather an affair of thresholds: the halo is the folding in of potentiality qua potentiality into the actual, and its glow is not the otherworldly light of transcendence but instead something like the intense glow of a metal heated to the point where it become malleable, capable of changing its form.

¹⁵⁷ In “Pleasure: A Political Issue,” in *Ideologies of Theory*, Vol. 2, pp. 61-75. Jameson argues for a dual focus on the body, one which takes the body at once as the site of particular political practices *and* as a “figure” for larger collective struggles. Jameson writes, “So finally the right to a specific pleasure, to a specific enjoyment of the potentialities of the material body – if it is not to remain only that, if it is to become genuinely political, if it is to evade the complacencies of hedonism – must always in one way or another also be able to stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole” (74). I agree with Jameson’s allegorical/totalizing focus on the body insofar as it suggests the way in which the body can function as a laboratory, a place of figuration, for new social systems. But rather than argue that the body is merely a “figure” in the focus on the “genuinely political,” I would argue that it is also a condition of possibility, and an informing condition at that, in reconceiving social totalities. The body not only allegorizes totality, it also can serve as the wellspring for new forms of social totality.

¹⁵⁸ On Hassan I Sabbah, see Murphy, pp. 119-123.

¹⁵⁹ In addition to Thatcher’s claim that “There is no such thing as society,” Reagan’s gesture, in 1981, of firing striking air traffic controllers (PATCO), as well as his administration’s more general war on the labor movement and its dismantling of social welfare institutions, inaugurates the eighties as a decade of disavowing the social.

¹⁶⁰ Jennie Skerl argues, in a similar vein, that the utopian quality of Burroughs’s characters is best understood “as a *force*, not as literal images of the ideal community” (“Freedom through Fantasy,” 192).

¹⁶¹ For an excellent cultural analysis of the nineties centering on the U.S. and attuned to the imagination of utopia, see Phillip Wegner’s *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*.

¹⁶² In literary historical terms, I would posit the existence of a strand of American literature, stretching through the eighties and nineties and including works by Thomas Pynchon and Kathy Acker, among others, that insists upon a sociality resisting the reduction of life to atomized individuality through commonality/cooperation. This literary strand stands in contrast to, for example, the darkly ironic *reductio ad absurdum* of the eighties of Bret Easton Ellis’s early writing, as well as the “new realism” Joseph

Dewey identifies in the works of John Irving, Joyce Carol Oates, and Richard Powers, among others, which seeks to “reenchant work” (Dewey 21).

¹⁶³ Wendy Brown has recently argued this point (the persistence of the 1980s) in a response to Occupy Wall Street, which she argues is an attempt to restore the social to the political. See, “Return of a Repressed *Res-Publica*.”

¹⁶⁴ This quoting of T. S. Eliot (which occurs repeatedly throughout the trilogy) suggests Burroughs’s vexed relation to modernism (and perhaps also more specifically to the poet with whom he shared a place of birth [St. Louis]). While I do not have the space to support the argument here, I would contend that Burroughs is a kind of belated modernist insofar as he is faithful to that current in modernism which viewed the role of art as the renewal of the collective capacities of human beings. Simplifying matters a great deal, in regards to Eliot, poetry’s function is that of restoring the existential meaningfulness of human existence through a recourse to Christianity as the proper culture of the West. In contrast, for Burroughs, there is no given tradition out of which to fabricate a new human collectivity. Accepting the shattered or fragmented condition of modern life, Burroughs’s art endeavors to construct a form of commonality out of the heterogeneous, diverse fragments of everyday life.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹⁶⁵ For other examples of this liberalization of Whitman, see Wai Chee Dimock, “Whitman, Syntax, and Political Theory”; Jerome Loving, “The Political Roots of *Leaves of Grass*” in *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*; George Kateb, “Whitman and the Culture of Democracy”; Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. To reiterate, my objection is not to the recognition of a liberal strand in Whitman’s work but rather to the *identification* of Whitman and his work as liberal, that is, the subsumption of his work in terms of the liberal norms and ideals of negative liberty, private property, and rational interest (to name only a few qualities).

¹⁶⁶ See, respectively, “Whitman and the Culture of Democracy” and “Whitman, Syntax, and Political Theory.”

¹⁶⁷ Wai Chee Dimock argues that the politics of Whitman’s poetry is characterized by the attempt to generate a utopia of perfect, indiscriminate equality: “The objects of Whitman’s attention are admitted as strict equals by virtue of both the minimal universal ‘Me’ they all have in common, and of a poetic syntax that greets each of them in exactly the same way, as a grammatical unit, equivalently functioning and structurally interchangeable” (71). She adds that the problem facing such a general and universal form of equality is that it effaces the particular bonds of affective linkage that hold communities together, such as nationality, gender, ethnicity, race, etc. Whitman, she argues, is caught in the trap of the “contrary claims [of] personhood,” split between “identity and distinction.” I agree with Dimock that insofar as one understands Whitman’s poetics in terms of the category of equivalence – syntactically and politically – it forecloses the singular and the contingent, yet my contention is that Whitman’s poetics displaces an equality based on equivalence (which typifies liberal democracy)

with one based on singular connections in which equality is the effect not of exchangeability or a generalized indifference but of the real movement abolishing particular forms of inequality. Dimock, I would argue, makes a mistake when she begins with the categories of individual personhood and formal equality, borrowed from the theories of Immanuel Kant, Noam Chomsky, and John Rawls; this decision forecloses some of the most interesting aspects of Whitman's work, one of which is a mode of individuality that exceeds the dialectic of identity and difference and the antinomy between the universal and particular. Dimock's last line is interesting in this respect: "If nothing else, Whitman makes us long for what he does not and cannot offer: an ethics of preference, one that in giving voice to what is not exhausted by a language of formal universals, what remains its conceptual or emotional residue, might suggest some way of reconciling the democratic and the affective, some way of rescuing 'love' from being the lost soul of political theory" (78). In fact, the democracy of Whitman's poetry – what I call its biopolitical democracy – is precisely predicated upon the inextricability of the affective and the political, and love is one of the central modes of political connection throughout Whitman's oeuvre.

¹⁶⁸ For an example of the making of Whitman into an entrepreneur, see Benjamin Barber's "Whitman's Song of Democracy" (in *Walt Whitman, Where the Future Becomes Present*) in which Barber argues that Whitman shares the ethos of a group of outlaw capitalists in the American frontier prior to the postbellum consolidation of industrial capitalism. Barber makes the case for an understanding of Whitman's poetry in terms of diversity, equality, and risk, which he argues is homologous to the logic of capitalism. In *Walt Whitman & The Class Struggle*, Andrew Lawson, on the other hand, argues for an identification of Whitman's life and work with the lower middle class stratum of society. He associates the fluidity and equality of Whitman's work with the "market revolution" of the mid-nineteenth century. If Whitman criticizes capitalism, he does not criticize capitalism as such but rather its industrial form. He advocates, according to Barber, a vision of capitalism reconciled with an older artisanal culture, or a capitalism that would enable the independent pursuit of progress, without the anxiety-inducing precariousness of the marketplace. In this chapter, I show how Whitman's notions of equality and diversity are irreducible to modes of capitalist exchange, because they refuse the appropriation of potentiality/surplus value by transcendent sources and because they work in terms of the continuity between commonality/collectivity and singularity/individuality (rather than the capitalist antinomy between them).

¹⁶⁹ Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* is an exemplary text in this respect. It not only argues the significance of corporeality in Whitman's writing but also ties the corporeality of Whitman's textuality to an anti-capitalist radical democracy. Moon shows how the fluid mode of embodiment at work in Whitman's poetry resists both capitalist and liberal discourses: "The '[l]ove and friendship which *Leaves of Grass* is designed to release into dissemination, then, are neither the mild and rational; social pleasures endlessly fostered in the liberal, 'philanthropic' rhetoric of post-Enlightenment humanism nor the social ideal of privatized domestic bliss that had largely come to replace it in the United States during

Whitman's childhood" (9). Instead, Whitman's "corporeal-utopian program" generates indeterminate and fluid relations that displace and exceed the forms of equivalence, identity, and difference that belong to liberal modes of political thought and to capitalist forms of organization. In addition, Moon's emphasis on the power of revision, as both a literary and political activity, is extremely provocative. In an argument that very much resonates with what I discuss in terms of the real movement of democracy, Moon claims that Whitman's poetic work shares with a certain form of American democracy the quality of ineradicable provisionality, an openness to modification that defines its democratic nature. M. Jimmie Killingsworth's *Whitman's Poetry of The Body*, likewise, demonstrates the intimate connection between corporeality and democracy in Whitman's work, arguing that Whitman advocates an ethical and political vision that subverts liberal rationalism: "In an artistic effort analogous to social revolution, the poet subverts the accepted conventions of poetic practice to reveal a new literature whose rhetorical strength is founded in a figural representation of bodily forces that overwhelm the rational, self-defensive tactics of conventional thinking and writing" (xvii). Whitman, Killingsworth goes on to argue, makes democratic politics into an affair that refuses confinement to a liberal public sphere. It becomes an activity of deconstructing and reconstructing life in the name of equality and freedom at the level of private life. Other works that I have found indispensable in my analyses of Whitman's work include, Allen Grossman's "Whitman's 'Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand': Remarks on the Endlessly Repeated Rediscovery of the Incommensurability of the Person" and Tom Yingling's "Homosexuality and Utopian Discourse in American Poetry" (both to be found in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*), as well as Betsy Erkkila's work, especially "Whitman and The Homosexual Republic" in *Mixed Bloods and Other Crosses*. While all of these works demonstrate different ways that Whitman's poetry exceeds the categories and discourses of liberal democracy, they often encounter the difficulty of lacking a set of terms to *positively* articulate the kind of democracy that Whitman does produce, or they rely upon an often vague conception of fluidity lacking in consistency. It is my contention that the discourse of biopolitics (with its emphasis on the commonality and singularity, potentiality and corporeality) provides such terms.

¹⁷⁰ The tradition of liberal thought which defines the body as property has a long and complicated trajectory, one perhaps most intensely crystallized in John Locke's *The Second Treatise of Government*, where he argues that personhood and private property are synonymous. See especially John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (Mineola: Dover Thrift, 2002), Ch. 5: "Of Property." On the Lockean legacy in the American context, see especially, Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, The Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). On Locke's association with "possessive individualism," that is, with a mode of individualism treating the self and world as private property, see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke*, especially Ch. V.

¹⁷¹ The notion of individuation has many sources, but in this chapter, my understanding of it emerges largely from the work of Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Paolo Virno. In each of these thinkers, the individual emerges from a pre-

individual realm and does not exhaust that realm. Instead, the pre-individual persists in excess over the individual, as the potentiality for radically remaking the individual entity. Indeed, rather than thinking in terms of the individual (with its often implicit opposition to the collective), I prefer the term singularity, which I take to be inextricable from the concept of commonality. Where the individual is defined in terms of identity, the singular is defined through its relation with other singularities in or through the common. In the words of Paolo Virno: “Outside the Common, there is *identity*, not *singularity*. Identity is reflexive (A is A) and solipsistic (A is unrelated to B): every being is and remains itself without entertaining any relations whatsoever with any other being. Wholly to the contrary, singularity emerges from the preliminary sharing of a preindividual reality: X and Y are individuated individuals only because they display what they have in common differently” (“Angels and The General Intellect” 61). Individuality, then, is but the consequence of the individuation of that which is held in common by a series of singularities. See especially, Gilbert Simondon’s *L’individuation psychique et collective*, Part II; Paolo Virno’s *The Grammar of The Multitude*, pp. 76-80, and “Angels and the General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon.”

¹⁷² On the biopolitical construction of national peoples, see especially, Giorgio Agamben, “What Is a People?” in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

¹⁷³ I would argue that the imperative of individual genius is part of the episteme of Romantic thought and literature – indeed, one which Whitman himself succumbs to at times – yet this is not to discount tendencies which tend to collectivize this genius, such as are evident, for example, in Percy Shelley’s “A Defense of Poetry” (1840).

¹⁷⁴ This understanding of the body is quite close to that of Baruch Spinoza in the *Ethics*. The body and mind are not separate substances but parallel attributes of one substance. See especially, *Ethics*, Book II. On the implications of Spinoza’s thought for theorizations of democracy, see especially, Antonio Negri, “*Reliqua desiderantur*: a conjecture for a definition of the concept of democracy in the final Spinoza,” *Subversive Spinoza*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy, pp. 28-59.

¹⁷⁵ Of course, such a poetic event (the entry of life as such into poetry) is not unique to Whitman, nor is Whitman necessarily the first poet of such an event. An exploration of the relationship between the poetics of Romanticism, in its various national contexts, and the biopolitics of nineteenth century political and economic regimes would be very fruitful. Indeed, an example of such a work can be seen in Saree Makdisi’s excellent study of William Blake, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*. Gilles Deleuze captures this entry of life into art *through* the body in the following lines from his writing on the cinema – lines, it should be noted, which explicitly echo Spinoza: “The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of

the body, its postures. ‘We do not even know what a body can do’: in its sleep, in its drunkenness, in its efforts and resistances. To think is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity, its postures.” (*Cinema 2* 189). In many respects, the project Deleuze proposes finds its fulfillment in Whitman’s poetry, as Deleuze himself recognizes in his short essay, “Whitman.”

¹⁷⁶ A sampling of this lineage would include the work of Spinoza and Marx (especially the former’s *Ethics* and the latter’s early work), a certain Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and the late work of J.-P. Sartre, the collaborations of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and the work of Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, Luce Irigaray, and Antonio Negri (among others). This lineage is not homogenous, and for all the continuity in terms of an axiomatic understanding of the commonality of being as such, there are, of course, significant differences between these thinkers.

¹⁷⁷ In *Aux Bords du Politique*, Jacques Rancière argues that the post-sixties, neo-liberal and conservative reactions against emancipatory and revolutionary politics amounts to a post-political administration of the social in the mode of a “realist utopia.” Implicitly echoing Fredric Jameson’s arguments regarding postmodernity, Rancière views this administration in terms of a “pacification” of political action, its assimilation into pre-programmed procedures which foreclose the promise of transformative politics and which combine the closure of an eternal present with the claustrophobia of a completely ordered and tightly regulated political space. Politics does not vanish in this vision, but it becomes the annihilation of politics as such. Against this evacuation of antagonism from politics, Rancière theorizes the real possibility of movements of emancipation; procedures of “subjectivization” in which the uncounted, not only the excluded but also the invention of political subjectivities to come, insert themselves into the political sphere through revolt. I bring this work up, because Rancière notably identifies the “realist utopia” or the neutralization of politics with the very category of the middle class and with liberal thought. It is my contention that in many ways Rancière and Whitman are engaged in the same struggle to locate the possibility of antagonism against the foreclosure of radical politics by liberal constructions of the social and the political. In addition, in both Whitman and Rancière, antagonism takes the form of an invention of a new political subject through poetic operations, operations which reconfigure what Rancière calls *la partage du sensible*, or the division of the sensory/sensual, the aesthetic organization of the social. Emancipation is a utopian movement which breaks up the middle class utopia of the neutralization of the political. I call it utopian, because Rancière conceives of it as emerging from the no-place of the political, or the place foreclosed by the administrative ordering of the social. Finally, in both Rancière and Whitman, the positive expression of politics is named “democracy.” See Jacques Rancière, *Aux Bords du Politique*, especially Part 1, “Du Politique à la Politique”; *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*; and *The Hatred of Democracy*.

¹⁷⁸ But as a number of astute thinkers have noted, this communitarian drive, or communalism, is no stranger to liberal politics. It is, in fact, the perverse excess proper to liberalism, whose desire for security, for the self-enclosure of its body politic, requires an often violent policing of external and internal borders. Liberalism may premise itself

upon the equal engagement of individuals in a public sphere, but this equal engagement is itself premised on a process of exclusion guaranteeing the propriety of citizenships. Some are “fit” to be citizens, while others are not. On the perverse excessive violence that is the reverse side of liberalism, see the work of Slavoj Žižek, especially *Tarrying with The Negative*.

¹⁷⁹ Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman: The Political Poet*, Ch. 5. See also, Donald Pease, “Walt Whitman and the Vox Populi of the American Masses” in *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Contexts*, pp. 108-158. For a more recent example, see Edward Whitley, “Whitman’s Occasional Nationalism: ‘A Broadway Pageant’ and the Space of Public Poetry,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 60:4 (2006), pp. 451-80.

¹⁸⁰ On the subject of public intimacy/intimate publics, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” in *Publics and Counterpublics*, and Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, pp. 1-24.

¹⁸¹ On performative sexuality, see especially, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Part Three and Conclusion; and José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

¹⁸² Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*. I do not want to reject the productivity of thinking of Whitman in terms of gay writing or an emergent homosexual identity (Robert Martin, Betsy Erkkila, and others have testified to the strengths of such arguments), yet I would assert that there is a tendency in Whitman’s poetry better understood in terms of a queering of straight subjectivity, such as is suggested in the work of Butler, Warner, and Muñoz, among others.

¹⁸³ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, pp. 269-89.

¹⁸⁴ Throughout this chapter, I use the term “expression” in order to describe Whitman’s poetics and to distinguish it from notions of emanation and resemblance. I am especially influenced in this regards by the work of Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics* and, in particular, by Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza’s expressionism, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Emanation is based on a sliding-scale declination of being, according to which Being or God is perfect in itself but the creations of God/Being (that which is emanated) are degraded because distant from the source of God/Being. From this perspective, there is ultimately, or, more precisely, at the origin, a transcendent surplus of being in respect to finite beings. In contrast to emanation, expression implies no point of transcendence. As suggested by Spinoza’s well-known proposition “God or Nature” (*Deus sive Natura*), the cause of being (or Being as such) is wholly immanent to that which it is expressed in (beings). Put differently, the distinction between the ontic and ontological does not hold, and beings completely express Being without corruption or degradation. In Spinoza’s terms, the essence of God/Nature expresses itself completely in its attributes (most notably, though not exclusively, matter and thought), and those attributes express themselves in the modes of being. That being said, Spinoza introduces the question of adequacy (whether or not a particular being is adequate to its cause) as a way of differentiating the power of beings, which is to say as a way of scaling their *relative* power of existence. A being is more or less powerful insofar as it expresses more or less of the world of relations in which it is embedded. This implies no point of transcendence

but rather indicates the degree of *commonality* which a particular being has achieved (or its capacity for affecting and being affected, as both Spinoza and Deleuze would say). In Whitman, poetics is a matter of expression in a very precise manner. Poetry is not a matter of transcending the world, of pointing to some realm beyond everyday life. Instead, as Whitman makes quite evident in the preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, it is a matter of expressing things in terms of their own powers of existence: “The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity . . . nothing can make up for excess or for the lack of definiteness” (*LG* 1855 12). “Simplicity,” in this context, means the perfection of beings, the expression of their existence without recourse to an extrinsic standard. Simplicity is not in opposition to complexity – if we were searching for an opposing term, it would be in Whitman’s terms “exaggerations” – instead Whitman’s concern is to fabricate commonalities between beings that increase their power without prescribing or forcing an extrinsic form of life onto them. From this perspective, “America” names the commonality of commonalities in Whitman’s poetry, the point at which beings achieve their maximum power, or adequacy, through the “Union” that recomposes them into “Americans.” As I explain below, in speaking of a utopian expressionism in Whitman’s poetry I do not intend to reintroduce a point of transcendence but rather to indicate the manner in which utopia – understood, in this context, as that no-place in which beings are perfect, or wholly adequate to their singular powers – is an effect of commonality. In other words, the perfection of beings is “realized” (to use Whitman’s terms) not in isolation but through a becoming common that promotes positive encounters. In addition to Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Deleuze’s *Expressionism in Philosophy*, see also Cesare Casarino, “Marx Before Spinoza: Notes Towards and Investigation.”

¹⁸⁵ Of course, the utopian quality of Whitman’s work has often been noted, sometimes with the term, “utopia,” and at other times more indirectly, with terms such as “perfectibility.” It is with the latter term that F.O. Matthiesen – whose readings of Whitman in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* remain striking and relevant – diagnoses Whitman’s work as helplessly flawed: “Whitman had neither Thoreau’s lucidity nor firmness. By cutting himself loose from any past [here we note the temporal aspect of utopia], he often went billowing away into a dream of perfectibility, which tried to make the human literally divine and was hence unreal. But because he was more porous to all kinds of experience, he gave a more comprehensive, if confused, image of his fluid age than Thoreau did. This cult of perfection was an inevitable and concomitant of the romantic cult of the future” (651-2). This is not the place to discuss the many complexities of Matthiesen’s interpretation of Whitman, but I would like to note a few features. First, as is evident in the above passage, Matthiesen sees in Whitman a kind of looseness, a tendency towards a too quick dissolution of solidity into fluidity, which is at once Whitman’s strength and weakness. Yet, as I try to demonstrate, the very perception of fluidity in Whitman’s work is relative to the social categories through which one interprets his work – the fluid, in other words, is the escape from the category of the individual, the evidence of a pre-individual realm of the common through which individuation operates. From this perspective, Matthiesen

misses the social logic of the common, when he groups Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson too closely together, deriving Whitman's poetics from Emerson's transcendentalism. Second, Matthiesen, nonetheless, bears witness to Whitman's socialist affinities in a way that I find quite conducive to my own readings of Whitman (542-44). Indeed, Matthiesen goes so far as to directly compare Whitman to Marx, equating their respective interests in material practices and the determination of consciousness by "life" (615-17). Yet Matthiesen also writes, "But Whitman would at no period have satisfied a strict Marxist for more than ten minutes" (616). Matthiesen goes on to say that Whitman was too interested in the "atmosphere" surrounding material objects to meet the expectations of a Marxism interested in the brute material determination of social life (the determination of the superstructure by the base). Matthiesen seems to have in mind the particular orthodoxy of dialectical materialism (or Diamat) as codified in the Soviet Union, especially under Stalin, yet bracketing this identification of Marxism with brute materialism (an identification which encompasses very little of Marxist thought), it does point to an interesting aspect of Whitman's work: the non-identity of matter with itself, the inescapable movement of life ("the urge" as Whitman writes), which denies any strictly objective logic. Matthiesen understands this non-identity of material life with itself in terms of spirituality, but, as I argue, the radical reversal and displacement of the dominance of mind over body, or the spiritual over the material, suggests that it is still necessary to think Whitman corporeally, or materially, rather than making recourse to a separate, transcendent source; the spiritual, one might say, is a particular attribute, or rather quality, of matter in certain states. Utopia is one name for this impulse of material life to overcome itself, to deny its own stability, even to revolutionize itself. If Matthiesen is wary of the term "utopia," preferring the solidity or heritage of "democracy," this is because he identifies utopia with a certain Romantic tendency, occluding the possibility of a crossing of utopia and democracy. Regarding Whitman's utopian tendencies, see especially, Tom Yingling, "Homosexuality and Utopian Discourse in American Poetry."

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On the notion of exemplarity, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, pp. 9-

13.

¹⁸⁷ In *Healing the Republic*, Joan Burbick makes an argument similar to mine in some respects and quite different in others. Whitman, Burbick argues, "represents the athletic, muscular, vibrant body as synonymous with the felt sensations of political liberation, national pride, and future greatness" (118). Burbick coins the term, "biodemocracy," to refer to the vitalist emphasis on health as the condition and even the experience of political liberty in Whitman's work. Yet Burbick's emphasis on the continuity between Whitman's work and the social discourses surrounding the, then, as of yet codified field of medicine tend to subsume the distinctness of Whitman's thinking of the social under the rubric of individualism. It is individual health and the individual body that is of concern for Burbick, with the implications for collective entities following as a consequence. While I agree that Whitman's work is usefully understood in terms of discourses relating to health/biology and that Whitman thinks the political in terms of a vitalism of the flesh, I disagree with Burbick's prioritization of the individual body. In doing so, Burbick occludes the way in which vitality, or "life," in Whitman does not

merely move between bodies or within them but is constitutive of bodies in a process of collective individuation. In addition, I also feel that Burbick underplays the revolutionary dimensions (as well as the utopian dimensions) of Whitman's poetry by too closely identifying individual health and national health so that Whitman's poetry is seen as administering to the health of the nation, tending its social wounds. Antagonism comes to be swallowed up by a tendency to conflate vitality with wholeness. My term biopolitical democracy attempts to capture the collective and antagonistic nature of Whitman's poetry.

¹⁸⁸ I take the phrase "not-yet" from Ernst Bloch's work, especially *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch's "not-yet" (*Noch-Nicht*) inheres in the social structures of the present as the real possibility of transforming the conditions of life. His hermeneutic operations center upon a distinction between abstract possibility and real possibility, a distinction that my project preserves in the distinction between utopia as transcendent and as immanent.

¹⁸⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 7.

¹⁹⁰ In "Whitman and the Problems of the Vernacular" (in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*) Jonathan Arac argues in favor of a "creole perspective" on Whitman's poetry, rather than a vernacular understanding. Where the latter would seem to imply a populist sense of purity, that is, a unified people and folklore that would be the origin of the poem, the creole perspective enables one to think Whitman's poetry in terms of the diverse, disparate, and common/popular sources that it emerges from without reducing those sources to a unified substance. As Arac argues, this multiplicity of sources but also of the text itself is, in part, an effect of the reaction against colonial forces, a reaction that took the form of nationalism. Up until this point, I agree with Arac, yet I part ways with him when he conflates Whitman's creolized writing with capitalism, identifying mass culture with capitalism, and writing that "Whitman wrote with his age" (58). Against such assertions, I try to show that Whitman, in fact, does not simply write *with* his age but rather *with and against*, a thesis that depends upon recognizing the antagonistic quality of both American democracy and American nationalism.

¹⁹¹ The questions surrounding constitutionalism mirror the questions surrounding the relation between literary texts and subjectivity, especially political subjectivity. On this, three sources which I have found particularly relevant include: Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution*, Antonio Negri's *Insurgencies*, and Jason Frank's *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America*. The last is especially relevant, for it recognizes – as do I – that the utopian moment of constitution-making consists not so much in the frictionless projection of an ideal onto reality but rather on the discrepancy between the invention of a people and the expression of a people, that is, on the mutual interplay of bodies and signifiers.

¹⁹² This tradition is evident in a number of thinkers, but one of its most interesting and influential proponents is Baruch Spinoza. The nonexistence of evil does not entirely do away with evil as a category of thought; it, rather, limits the category to registering material effects, especially sources of what Spinoza calls, sad passions, those particular worldly relations which generate a weakening of life, a draining of power. Two points follow from such a relational and pragmatic perspective on ethics: First, evil is not

transcendent, not an eternal or essential being, but an effect of interactions between entities and relations. Second, evil is relative. What is evil for one entity may not be evil for another. Everything depends upon the particular interactions resulting from the encounters between beings. For these arguments, see especially, Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book 3 and Book 4.

¹⁹³ See *The Genealogy of Morals*.

¹⁹⁴ This division even receives support in the juxtaposition of, perhaps, the two most famous images of Whitman. The first image is that which adorns the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 in lieu of the author's name: it is a young Whitman, with a relatively well-kempt beard, shirt open, one hand against his hip, the other in his pocket. With an arched brow and a cocked hat, this Whitman throws a challenging gaze at the reader, a gaze which stares out from the lines of "Song of Myself" as the call of an earthy poetry and a radical democracy. The other image of Whitman is a photograph of the poet in his later years. The hat remains, yet the visage has changed. The beard is grey, flowing down over a jacket into which Whitman has placed both of his hands. His eyes are bright, yet a certain fatigue haunts his face, gathering in the shadowy folds beneath his eyes. The gray, old poet; the wise, old man – this bearded bard has learned the way of the world, his earthy tones now the matter of culture, not politics.

¹⁹⁵ Besides in the work of Bellis, explicit and implicit claims of a conservative political trajectory and a renunciation of revolutionary intent in the late Whitman can be found in Burbick's "Biodemocracy in *Leaves of Grass*," Ezra Greenspan's *Walt Whitman and the American Reader*, M Wynn Thomas' *The Lunar Light of Whitman's Poetry*, and M Jimmie Killingsworth's *Whitman's Poetry of the Body*, among many others.

¹⁹⁶ See Note 14, but I would also add that the great classical analysis of this neutralization of the political is to be found in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where Marx analyzes with great acuity the relations between class composition and the political sphere.

¹⁹⁷ Bellis, for example, argues the presence of such a retreat but also Burbick, Kateb, and Erkkila (in *Whitman: The Political Poet*, but not in "Whitman and the Homosexual Republic"). Some of the strongest arguments against such a retreat are to be found in Moon's *Disseminating Whitman*, Erkkila's "Whitman and the Homosexual Republic," and Tom Yingling's "Homosexuality and Utopian Discourse in American Poetry."

¹⁹⁸ While Foucault distinguishes heterotopia from utopia, I would nonetheless argue – and I believe Foucault's text supports such an argument – for the continuity between utopia and heterotopia. Heterotopia is not in opposition of utopia but a modification of the utopian impulse, understood, at once, as a determinate negation of the social totality and the production of a new order of things. Indeed, I would argue that what Foucault confronts one with is the fruitful paradox of a placed utopia, of a negation of the social totality that is internal to the social totality, which is to say of an outside that is inside. For Foucault's notion of heterotopia, see, the Preface to Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Foucault's "Des espaces autres." But on the continuity between utopia and heterotopia, see also Cesare Casarino's *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, and Conrad in*

Crisis, Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* and Kenneth Surin's *Freedom Not Yet*.

¹⁹⁹ On the subject of the minor, and minor literature, see especially, Gilles Deleuze's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* and Gilles and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Notably, Deleuze recognizes such a minor literature as particularly evident in the Anglo-American setting. Strangely, America is exceptional precisely in its capacity for supporting minor movements of literature, that is, movements of writing which escape identification and identity, numeration and designation. I discuss this point in the Introduction and in the first chapter of *A Desire Called America*.

Notes to Chapter 3

²⁰⁰ Unless otherwise stated, quotations of Dickinson's poetry come from R.W. Franklin's reading edition and are cited by poem number. As per convention, I refer to Dickinson's titleless poems by their first lines, not always preserving syntax or punctuation.

²⁰¹ I discuss the masculinity of the political subject in the second section ("Dickinson and the Body").

²⁰² On Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a minor literature, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. The criterion for a minor literature is three-fold: 1) it "deterritorializes" a major language, which is to say that it unhinges or destabilizes (often national) linguistic conventions; 2) everything in it is political, which is to say that the social milieu is "not mere environment" but rather the site of struggle (17); and 3) "everything [in it] takes on a collective value," writing existing as a relay between writer and a "collective assemblage" or "people" that is at once existent and to come, or both a practical and utopian reality (17-18).

²⁰³ See especially Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*; Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*; and Shira Wolosky, "Emily Dickinson's Manuscript Body: History/Textuality/Gender."

²⁰⁴ Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*; Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*; and Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart, *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*.

²⁰⁵ See Domhnall Mitchell, *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception*.

²⁰⁶ See Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries*; Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*, Introduction, pp. 1-43.

²⁰⁷ Mary Loeffelholz, *Emily Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*; Paula Bennett, *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet*; and Vivian R. Pollak, *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*.

²⁰⁸ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, pp. 97-103. See the chapter "The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women" more generally for Federici's complex analysis of the shifting of role of women in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. On the role of the housewife as productive of capital, see also, Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of*

Reproduction, Dalla Costa and James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, and the collection *Woman and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, especially the title essay by Heidi Hartmann. Much of this literature takes as its starting point, Engels' reflections on these matters in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

²⁰⁹ The canonical basis for this argument regarding the autonomy of art is still the work of Theodor Adorno. See especially, *Aesthetic Theory*. In terms of Dickinson's work, see especially, Mitchell, *The Monarch of Perception*, pp. 82-87, 134-37, 171-77.

²¹⁰ Yet Dickinson's refusal to publish more than a handful of poems in her life is an ambiguous act which can be read a number of ways and which has impacted the legacy of her work in an often contradictory fashion. Shira Wolosky suggests – and I agree – that this refusal is not an absolute refusal to appear in print (a quasi-agoraphobic retreat) but rather a resistance to the *terms* of publication, ranging from the tendencies of a male-dominated industry of publishing to tame female desire through selective editing to the standardized typography and typesetting which might have drowned. See Shira Wolosky, "Emily Dickinson's Manuscript Body: History/Textuality/Gender," but also see Mitchell, *Monarch*, Ch. 5; Erkkila, *The Wicked Sisters*, Ch. 3.

²¹¹ The work of Jacques Rancière on poetry and the politics of workers is an important theoretical challenge to the opposition between poetry and politics based on a presumed identification of the one with a certain form of intellectual prowess and the other with a basic and instrumental intelligence. Rancière demonstrates not only the implication of the literary and poetic in capital and labor but also the complex linguistic/rhetorical intelligence involved in worker's politics. See especially *The Flesh of the Word: The Politics of Writing*, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, and *The Politics of Literature*.

²¹² Paolo Virno discusses this becoming poetic of labors in *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 49-66. For overviews of affect theory, see the useful introductory readers, *The Affective Turn* and *The Affect Theory Reader*. For analyses that rely on concepts of affect, see especially, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (especially Introduction); and Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington*. My understanding of affect largely derives from a lineage of thought coming out of Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (see especially Book 3), especially insofar as it passes through the influential interpretations of Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri. See, respectively, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* and *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*.

²¹³ Quoted in Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, pp. 395; originally appearing in *Springfield Republican*, July 7, 1860.

²¹⁴ While I chose to approach the explicitly and intensely affective nature of Dickinson's poetry by way of the genre of the "literature of misery," another approach would begin with the figure of "the poetess." The latter emerges in nineteenth-century America as a category that serves less as a generic marker than a descriptive and surreptitiously prescriptive conception of intentionality. It ties women's poetic production to the "heart" and "soul": to write as a woman means to express a hyper-sensitivity to emotional life; it

means symbolizing that “secret sorrow” or “misery” that is simultaneously boon and burden of the sensitive soul. That women’s poetry is by definition a putting on display of inner life renders the poet intensely vulnerable – to bare the heart is to bare one’s life, and to bare one’s life is to open oneself to social censure, most notably, the accusation of transgressing the proper role of woman (“the angel in the household”) with its associations of piety, care, chasteness, devotion, and submission. The figure of “the poetess” is, thus, one mode of producing writing as a biopolitical function, a specific mode of shaping and controlling the bodies and lives involved with poetic production – but, as I explain throughout this chapter, the biopolitics of Dickinson’s poetry is *ambivalent*, the ties between corporeality and language just as capable of producing images of liberation as bondage. On the figure of the poetess, see especially, Cheryl Walker, *The Nightingale’s Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900* (especially Ch. 2) and Paula Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of Women’s Poetry, 1800-1900* (Intro and Ch. 1-3).

²¹⁵ On Marx’s understanding of labor-power as distinct from commonsense understandings of the term labor, see especially Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*, Ch. 2 and Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*. This more expansive definition of labor-power is especially characteristic of the Autonomist and post-Autonomist lineages of Italian Marxism, characterized by such thinkers as Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti, and Paolo Virno.

²¹⁶ At this point, a comment is necessary regarding my understanding of the term affect in regards to discursive and non-discursive registers. Much of the research in affect theory proposes that affect be understood as autonomous, that is, as operating according to its own rules, distinct from discursive construction or representation. From this perspective, affect theory moves beyond or away from the linguistic turn of theory. (For this argument, see especially, Brian Massumi, *Parables for The Virtual*, Ch.1 “The Autonomy of Affect”; Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*; and William Connolly *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed*. For critiques of this argument, see especially, Ruth Leys “The Turn to Affect: A Critique” and Claire Hemmings, “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn.”) I would argue – with Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Jonathan Flatley, among others – that affect is not autonomous from the discursive but rather interferes with it, supplements it, and otherwise interacts with language, even if it reducible neither to an effect or attribute of it. At the very least, discursive constructions and symbolic codes condition our receptivity to and productivity of affects. Affect is not an autonomous field but rather the modalization of discourse in practice. It may still involve the ontological, but the ontological is not before language but rather immanent, if irreducible, to it. See especially, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affect*, Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington and Cruel Optimism*, Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholy and the Politics of Modernism*, and the special issue of *Textual Practice*, entitled, *Affects, Text, and Performativity*.

²¹⁷ See Esposito, *Third Person*, especially Ch. 1-2.

²¹⁸ I am paraphrasing Spinoza, here, who in the *Ethics* defines bodies (which are always composite) as follows: “When a number of bodies of the same or of different magnitudes are constrained by others in such a way that they are in reciprocal contact with each other, or if they are moved with the same or different degrees of speed in such a way that they communicate their motions to each other in some fixed ratio, we shall say that those bodies are reciprocally united to each other. We shall also say that all such bodies simultaneously compose one body, i.e. an individual, which is distinguished from others by this union of bodies (128). Any complex body, such a human body, comes to be defined as a multiplicity whose composition can be described in terms of habits of movement, that is, more or less constant ratios of speed. In other words, individuality is always a complex amalgamation of diverse materialities, and, if we understand movements here to indicate temporal duration, always a historical affair.

²¹⁹ The tradition of Marxist feminism is especially interested in this point. See Note 9. But see also, the work of Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* and *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*.

²²⁰ Quoted in Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom*, pp. 126.

²²¹ For a more nuanced development of the concept of affective mapping, see Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholy and the Politics of Modernism*, especially Ch.2.

²²² *Grundrisse*, pp. 296-300.

²²³ *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition, Vol. 1*, pp. 451.

²²⁴ While I argue that Dickinson’s poetry produces a sense of unhappiness, that it actively fails at happiness, I am *not* arguing whether or not Dickinson herself was happy. Vivian Pollak may or may not be correct in adducing a biographical sense of unhappiness in Dickinson’s marriage poems, one based on sexual anxieties and frustrations, but I do not think that this can ground a reading of the poem, except in a purely speculative manner. Nor, as I make clear below, do I think that Dickinson’s poetry can conceive of an escape from or negation of the patriarchal exchange of women solely in terms of death or a retreat into pastoral visions of Nature. See Vivian Pollak, *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*, especially, Ch. 6: “The Wife – without the Sign.”

²²⁵ Several critics argue that the critical potential of Dickinson’s poetry lies in its ability to produce fissures and contradictions and, in doing so, to reveal the cracks already present in the social order. See, for example, Shira Wolosky, “Emily Dickinson and American Identity” and Paul Crumbley, “Dickinson’s Dashes and the Limits of Discourse.”

²²⁶ Quoted in Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom*, pp. 126.

²²⁷ Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics” in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, pp. 128

²²⁸ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington*, p. 11.

²²⁹ Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, see especially Introduction, Ch. 3, Ch. 7, and “Overture/Aperture.” Berlant’s insistence on the ambivalent nature of the female complaint – its ability to call

into question the social order, but its tendency to consolidate that order by functioning as a release valve for political pressure (or, in other words, its tendency to personalize the political to the point of depoliticizing it) – is quite compelling.

²³⁰ See Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics.”

²³¹ See Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 81-84. More specifically, Virno identifies biopolitics with the struggle over labor-power understood as the very capacity to work, or to do in general. Life is the immaterial potential that a body incarnates, a potential that exists only through a particular body even as it remains irreducible to it. This definition of biopolitics differs from the perhaps more well known theories of Giorgio Agamben, especially as articulated in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. While this is not the place to engage in a comparison between these theories, I would like to make two remarks. First, Agamben’s focus on the scission between *zoe* (the basic fact of life common to all living creatures) and *bios* (the way of life of a specific group or social class, in the widest sense) is roughly homologous to Virno’s distinction between potentiality qua potentiality and its incarnation. In both cases, what matters is not so much the terms in of themselves but the situational/historical modification of the relations between them. Second, I draw more on Virno’s than Agamben’s, because the former’s historical specificity (Virno confines the biopolitical to capitalism, Agamben generalizes it to encompass human civilization) seems more appropriate apropos of Dickinson’s poetry.

²³² However, very little explicit attention has actually been paid to the relationship between the biopolitical and sexuality, at least in the most well know theories of the former (i.e. Agamben, Negri, etc.). While not explicitly a work on biopolitics, Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* is quite significant in this respect, as is Jasbir K. Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* and f Kevin Floyd’s *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism*.

²³³ On the specific class dimensions of Dickinson’s poetry and life, see Betsy Erkkila, “Dickinson and Class” and Domnhall Mitchell, “Emily Dickinson and Class.”

²³⁴ Pp. 123. It is not a coincidence that Foucault’s most paradigmatic delineation of the biopolitical is in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. I would argue that it is Foucault’s thinking through of sexuality that required the positing of biopolitics, the latter making sense of the former’s imbrication in power relations in general. On the emergence of the dimorphic model of sexuality, see especially, Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*.

²³⁵ See Maddock, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*, Introduction and Ch.1. On the political struggles over the privacy of marriage, see Lauren Berlant, “Subject of True Feelings.”

²³⁶ The conceptual maneuver in which it is not merely gender which is social (leaving sexuality as a kind of unknowable thing-in-itself) but also the sexual is, of course, articulated most famously by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. For my purposes, the most crucial aspect of this argument is that it opens up a sense of bodily practices in which it is the very being of the body, not merely this or that form, which is at stake in the biopolitical. We could say that Butler paves the way for a

politically-informed poetics of corporeality. I would also add that there is a significant line of feminists that draw on the work of Baruch Spinoza (and Butler) that have greatly impacted my understanding of these matters. See especially, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, and *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. Gatens.

²³⁷ Although liberalism's masculinization of the political is a widely discussed subject, see especially, Maddock Dillon, Introduction and Ch. 1; Carol Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* and *The Sexual Contract*; and Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality*, Ch. 2, 3, 6.

²³⁸ Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "At Home in the Body: The Internal Politics of Emily Dickinson's Poetry," in *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*, pp. 126. Sánchez-Eppler's focus is the way in which the body becomes a site for reflecting upon splits in the body politic, especially the negotiation of private and public domains. My own approach shifts the focus away from a model in which the body *internalizes* political problems towards a model in which the body is the very substance of political life, the latter being conceived less in terms of a sphere of government than a field of variable relations. For two other very insightful engagements with corporeality in Dickinson, see also Shira Wolosky, "Emily Dickinson: being in the body" and Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*, Ch. 4: "Faith in Anatomy."

²³⁹ Franklin, *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, Vol. 2, pp. 1259.

²⁴⁰ On the materiality (and visuality) of Dickinson's manuscripts, see especially, Sharon Cameron, *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles*; Shira Wolosky, "Emily Dickinson's Manuscript Body: History/Textuality/Gender"; Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (especially Ch. 1); Cristanne Miller, "Whose Dickinson?"; Jerome McGann, "Emily Dickinson's Visible Language."

²⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 106-107. Original emphasis.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 111.

²⁴³ I also discuss the term corporeal poesis in the conclusion to "Corporeal Time: the Cinematic Bodies of Arthur Rimbaud and Gilles Deleuze," *Angelaki* 16:2, pp. 120-21.

²⁴⁴ On the errand into the wilderness, see especially, Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*.

²⁴⁵ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 97. For Federici's argument regarding the transformation of women into a substitute for the pre-capitalist commons, see pp. 85-103. On the process of enclosure more generally, see especially, Marx, "So-Called Primitive Accumulation," in *Capital*, Vol. 1; Retort Collective, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, especially Ch. 6; *Midnight Notes 10 – The New Enclosures*; and the journal *The Commoner*, Ed. Massimo De Angelis.

²⁴⁶ Translation mine. While Foucault tends to present heterotopia and utopia as mutually exclusive, my own practice is to understand heterotopia as a mode of what Ernst Bloch calls the utopian impulse or Fredric Jameson the desire called utopia, an instance of utopian expression that does not become a full-blown utopian project but rather remains an immanent praxis contesting the closure of the social totality, *potentializing* the present

against overwhelming actuality. On utopian potential as a corporeal matter, see the Introduction, especially Part III.

²⁴⁷ In this instance, I have used the earlier version of this poem, or first variant, due to its more differentiated formal structure. R.W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition, Vol. 1*, pp. 228.

²⁴⁸ One could draw out the implications of this allusion to the animality of woman connoted in “Bridalled.” Woman becomes that generic animality that constitutes the disavowed origins of humanity, the latter understood in the ideologically loaded manner of humanism. Woman is tolerated only insofar as she is domesticated, tamed, i.e. a wife, or insofar as she is wild, outside of the *polis*, on the edges of town, i.e. a prostitute.

²⁴⁹ In this respect, my argument resonates with that of Anne-Lise François in *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Ch. 3), where she argues that Dickinson’s poetry involves a “gesture of desisting,” or a sense of “inconsequence,” which suspends the very act of judgment, refusing to instrumentalize time for the necessity of making every moment “count.” My argument differs insofar as I insist not so much on “the ethical value of doing nothing” (197) but on a suspension that opens up a new field of possibilities, a field not subsumed by morality.

²⁵⁰ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, pp. 50. Citations hereafter cited parenthetically.

²⁵¹ Maddock Dillon also discusses Emily Dickinson’s queering of marriage. Like Maddock Dillon, I argue that Dickinson deconstructs any simple public-private opposition by tracing an alternative mode of sociality irreducible to the terms of identity. But whereas Maddock Dillon proposes Dickinson’s poetics as a model of “open sociality,” a “middle ground” civil space between public and private, I propose viewing Dickinson’s poetry as an articulation of the common, because I think that it better avoids confusion with the liberal public sphere.

²⁵² See Joanne Dobson, *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence: The Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century America*.

²⁵³ Christopher Benfey, *Emily Dickinson and the Problem of Others*, pp. 62.

²⁵⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 57.

²⁵⁵ Domnhall Mitchell argues in *The Monarch of Perception* that the closed off spaces Dickinson constructs for herself – both in her poems and in her life – are not so much a negation of that which is outside of them as it is a selective enfolding of the outside inside in a process which grants the writer a degree of control over the world, even if it remains at the level of perception. It is a protective measure, one conditioned by the precarious existence of the American gentry (like the Dickinson family) in a modernizing, capitalist landscape. See especially, Introduction, Ch. 1, 2, and 8.

²⁵⁶ On the notion of Dickinson’s poetry as composed of a private lexicon, see especially David Porter, *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, Ch. 3.

²⁵⁷ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, pp. 172. Hereafter cited in the text parenthetically.

²⁵⁸ On the concept of the semiotic, see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Part 1.

²⁵⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty analyzes the chiasmic interplay of the senses, especially touch, in *The Visible and The Invisible*, especially Ch. 4: “The Intertwining – The Chiasm.”

²⁶⁰ See Irigaray, *To Be Two*, Ch. 2: “The Wedding between the Body and Language.”

²⁶¹ See especially, Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common*, especially “Surplus Common”; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, pp. 103-127, 196-227; Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp. 35-45, and “Angels and the General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon”; Yves Citton, “Equisse d’une économie politique des affects,” pp. 152-163; and the special issue of *Rethinking Marxism*, “The Common and the Forms of the Commune.”

²⁶² It is, of course, Claude Levi-Strauss who gives us the most well-known theorization of this marriage economy. See *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

²⁶³ Paul Crumbley discusses the commons and Dickinson, especially in terms of intellectual property rights. Crumbley’s argument tends to juxtapose the intellectual commons against private bodies, whereas I suggest that the common involves an alternative socialization of the body. Additionally, Crumbley situates the commonality more on the side of reader response than my own argument does. That being said, Crumbley’s insights regarding how Dickinson’s poetry generates dialogic interactions between author and reader, mingling their bodies together, and critiquing notions of literary originality insofar as they imply private propriety, are quite consonant with many of my points. In particular, Crumbley highlights the excess of potentiality in Dickinson’s texts over and above their contexts, without for all that making recourse to an extrahistorical standard. See especially “Copyright, Circulation, and the Body” in *Winds of Will: Emily Dickinson and the Sovereignty of Democratic Thought*.

²⁶⁴ Borrowing from Jacques Rancière, we can speak of this “Nobody” as “the part of no part,” that is, an immanent remainder, an abject figure that takes part in society even as it has no part, no place, of its own. See especially, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Ch.1.

²⁶⁵ I inherit my understanding of the forcefulness of the interrogative mood in thought from Maurice Blanchot, who writes in *The Infinite Conversation*: “To question is to seek, and to seek is to search radically, to go to the bottom, to sound, to work at the bottom, and, finally, to uproot. This unrooting that holds onto the root is the work of the question” (11).

²⁶⁶ In *The Sublime of Intense Sociality*, Shawn Alfrey argues that Dickinson’s poetry “works to maintain, not to quash, a balanced tension between subjectivity and alterity” and that her “supposedly indomitable subjecthood – her ‘sovereignty’ – is the site for exchange of perspectives and identities” (71). I largely agree with Alfrey, but would avoid the term “balance” and emphasize the antagonistic nature of Dickinson’s poetry which must pry free the possibility of alterity from patriarchal strictures and which, as I argue above, exceeds the interpersonal relation I-Thou in favor of the transpersonal and, at times, impersonal qualities of the common.

²⁶⁷ On the notion of the “open secret” as an enticement to the normalizing gaze, see especially, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, especially Ch. 1, and D.A. Miller, “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets” in *The Novel and the Police*.

²⁶⁸ Lee Edelman has provided the most incisive critique of heteronormative concepts of temporality in his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, where he analyzes the normative force of heterosexual models of reproduction in sexual life.

²⁶⁹ *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition, Vol. 1*, pp. 279.

²⁷⁰ On the notion of the lesbian continuum, see Adrienne Rich’s classical essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” On Dickinson and lesbianism, see especially, Martha Nella Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*, especially pp. 25-30; Ellen Louise Hart, “The Encoding of Homoerotic Desire: Emily Dickinson’s Letters and Poems to Susan Dickinson”; Paula Bennet, “‘The Pea that Duty Locks’: Lesbian and Feminist-Heterosexual Readings of Emily Dickinson’s Poetry” in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*; Rebecca Patterson, *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*. H. Jordan Landry’s “Animal/Insectual/Lesbian Sex: Dickinson’s Queer Version of the Birds and the Bees” is closest to my own reading of Dickinson’s homoeroticism in its insistence on a dialectic between “lesbian praxis” and a reconfiguring of corporeality. For a skeptical appraisal of identifying Dickinson with a single, all-encompassing sexual identity, see Sylvia Henneberg, “Neither Lesbian nor Straight: Multiple Eroticisms in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry.”

²⁷¹ While I am analyzing the alternative form of community that emerges in Dickinson’s poetry in terms of the common, it could just as well be understood as a series of counter-publics (as articulated by Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant), that is, as a performative affiliation predicated on subaltern status. Warner writes, “Counterpublics are ‘counter’ to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects” (122). My preference for the concept of the common is that it crosses the traits of the political and the economic, suggesting that a new kind of politics requires a resocializing of the economic. That being said, perhaps the common cannot emerge except as a counter-public, at least initially. If the common is to emerge from the concrete situation of capitalism, it would need to emerge as a project that begins from subalternity and proceeds by way of generating affective bonds linked to a counter-imagination of social space. On the concept of counter publics, see especially Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* and Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*.

²⁷² On homonormativity, see especially, Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” and on homonormativity and homonationalism, Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.

²⁷³ I am indebted to Jose Esteban Muñoz’s brilliant, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, for an understanding of the intricate relations between queer performativity, utopian futurity, and alternative modes of socialization. But see also Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, especially Introduction and Chapter 3.

²⁷⁴ Of course, deconstruction teaches us that, strictly speaking, identity exists only insofar as it is haunted by otherness, by originary difference (or *différance*), but perhaps singularity marks not a distinction between two different kinds of difference so much as two different relations to difference. Identity is difference disavowing difference, in the process constraining the possibilities of difference, whereas singularity, in its exposure without reserve to difference, opens the door to a multiplication of differences in which identity is only an afterthought, an effect rather than a cause.

²⁷⁵ Paolo Virno explains the relation between the singular and the common with impressive brevity in a discussion of Gilbert Simondon and Duns Scotus: “Identity is reflexive (A is A) and solipsistic (A is unrelated to B): every being is and remains itself, without entertaining any relations whatsoever with any other being. Wholly to the contrary, singularity emerges from the preliminary sharing of a preindividual reality: X and Y are individuated individuals only because they display what they have in common differently.” Paolo Virno, “Angels and the General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon.” While the material on the concept of singularity is too vast to list, the following are directly relevant for my purposes in this chapter, Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 100-109; Hardt and Negri, 338-44.

²⁷⁶ In his incisive commentary on community, *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben writes, in reference, notable, to Spinoza, of the “idea of an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence. *Taking-place, the communication of singularities in the attribute of extension, does not unite them in essence, but scatters them in existence*” (19; emphasis in original). Agamben places himself in a lineage of thought that might begin with Spinoza’s musings on the common in the *Ethics*, passing through Marx in the nineteenth century, to be inherited by such diverse thinkers as Antonio Negri, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-Luc Nancy in the twentieth century. All of these thinkers have in common the desire to produce a mode of belonging that would be non-proprietary, that would give up the obsessive search for the essence of the self and the other and engage, instead, in creative instances of non-identity *in relation*, in experiments with affiliation without prior filiation. See especially, Maurice Blanchot, *The Inavowable Community*; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; and Antonio Negri, *Kairò, Alma Venus, Multitudo*.

²⁷⁷ Of course, Dickinson is not *unattached* in the strictest sense. The daughter of a well-respected family, her letters exemplify the impact of daughterly duties on her class, the role of daughters as substitute wives. That being said, her lifelong avoidance of marriage also enables her a degree of liberty.

²⁷⁸ *Emily Dickinson: A Poet’s Grammar*, pp. 51.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51.

²⁸⁰ Paul Crumbley, “Dickinson’s Dashes and the Limits of Discourse,” pp. 14.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23.

²⁸² Agamben *Idea of Prose*, pp. 25-26

²⁸³ On Dickinson’s class position, see especially, Erkkila, “Emily Dickinson and Class,” and Mitchell, “Emily Dickinson and Class,” as well as *Monarch of Perception*, Ch. 1. Mitchell makes a compelling argument that Dickinson’s poetry is informed not by a

unified class position but rather by the precariousness of her class position. Dickinson's family's financial problems (including bankruptcy resulting in moving away from the Dickinson family house) and the intensification of modernization processes in New England produce a defensive quality in Dickinson's poetry, a desire for enclosure and autonomy, a security of privilege.

²⁸⁴ On Dickinson, whiteness, and purity, see especially Vivian Pollak, "Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness." Gilbert and Gubar discuss Dickinson's desire for purity as an anxiety problem, a literary and personal agoraphobia, in "A Woman – White: Emily Dickinson's Yarn of Pearl" in *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

²⁸⁵ I plan on writing a separate essay on the significance of creatures of flight in Dickinson's poetry, especially birds and bees, so I will hazard only a remark or two on the subject, here. For Dickinson, creatures of flight are not only symbols of a life more/other than human but affective experiments in becoming-animal, that is, experiments not in being like an animal but in appropriating traits of other kinds of animals so as to challenge human social life. Of particular note is the way in which several poems (e.g. "Because the Bee may blameless hum," "Could I but ride indefinite," etc.) imagine a mode of socialization that operates outside of guilt and shame or which uncouples individuality from the construction of boundaries by way of the debt involved with guilt.

²⁸⁶ I am, of course, gesturing towards Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minority. See Note 3. But see also, Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 105, 108-9, 361-74. The notion of a minor poetry corresponds to my concept of a "singular America." As I argue in the Introduction, the minor and the major, the singular and the exceptional, are dialectically intertwined, the former terms emerging as reversals and reworkings of the latter terms.

Notes to Chapter 4

²⁸⁷ On the sixties as a period, see especially Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing The Sixties," the special issue of *Social Text* entitled, "The Sixties, Without Apology," and Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*. More specifically regarding Pynchon and the sixties, see David Cowart, "Pynchon and the Sixties"; M. Keith Booker, "America and Its Discontents: The Failure of Leftist Politics in Pynchon's *Vineland*"; and John Kraft, "Thomas Pynchon" in *The 60s, Without Apology*.

²⁸⁸ On the historicity of Pynchon's fiction, including its transformation of the genre of the historical novel, see especially Shawn Smith, *Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, Introduction; Christy L. Burns, "Postmodern Historiography: Politics and the Parallaxic Method in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*"; and Paul Bovè, "History and Fiction: The Narrative Voices of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*."

²⁸⁹ The utopian valence of the formulation, "Something's Missing" comes from Ernst Bloch (quoting Bertolt Brecht) in conversation with Theodor Adorno. Bloch says: "Thus,

now, if a world were to emerge that is hindered for apparent reasons, but that is entirely possible, one could say, it is astonishing that it is *not* [...] and this would provide some space for such richly prospective doubt and the decisive incentive toward utopia that is the meaning of Brecht's short sentence, 'Something's missing'" ("Something's Missing," 15). What is so striking in this sentence (which I have admittedly abbreviated) is the way in which the void or absence ("missingness") is predicated not on a poverty but on a wealth of time, on pressing possibility.

²⁹⁰ *Vineland* in this schema functions as a hinge, almost a revision of *Gravity's Rainbow*, updated for the eighties, that also concedes the necessity if not of a new style, then of a new narrative mode or mode of temporalization. I do not mean these periodizations to be rigid statements of objective truth but strategic manners of approaching the texts in question so as to capture the forcefulness of their historicity. I am indebted to Fredric Jameson's understanding of periodization as an unavoidable critical function, as well as to Phillip Wegner's periodizations of the nineties and of Jameson's oeuvre. See especially Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (where we find the maxim, "One cannot not periodize"), and Phillip Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long 1990s and Periodizing Jameson; or, the Adventures of Theory in Post-Contemporary Times*.

²⁹¹ On the transatlantic dimension of Pynchon's work, see especially Paul Giles's *Virtual Americas*, Ch. 8: "Virtual Englands: Pynchon's Transatlantic Heresies."

²⁹² In this respect, Pynchon's fiction works in a homologous manner to the genre of science fiction, as it has been understood especially by Fredric Jameson. See especially, "Progress Versus Utopia, Or Can We Imagine the Future?" in *Archaeologies of the Future*. I discuss this at greater length below.

²⁹³ Two critiques of historicism important for this chapter are Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" – which juxtaposes a recuperative mode of historiography, one which rescues the instant or "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*) from the "homogenous, empty time" of capitalism and imperialism – and Fredric Jameson's recuperation of historicity against genetic/linear history in "Marxism and Historicism." Jameson's call for a "hermeneutic relationship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on the condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and Utopian transformation, alive" bears a striking resemblance to Pynchon's narrative-historical ethos in *Against the Day* and, arguably, all of his other fictions.

²⁹⁴ *Against the Day* is the logical, as well as chronological, sequel to *Mason & Dixon*. Where the latter explores enclaves that resist subsumption into capitalism and the nation-state in largely spatial terms, the former does so largely in temporal terms. In *Mason & Dixon* it is the West, as simultaneously mythic and historical entity, that bears the seeds of utopia. The narrative follows the plotting of the Mason-Dixon line, but it occupies its time inventing enclaves, heterotopic subtractions, that abut and yet escape the apparatuses of control that the titular line figures and introduces. The novel's concern for the subjunctive, for "all that *may yet be true*," goes hand in hand with a "Westering" movement: "The under-lying conditions of their Lives is quickly established as the Need to keep, as others a permanent address, a perfect Latitude,-- no fix'd place, rather a fix'd

Motion, -- Westering. Whenever they do stop moving, like certain Stars in Chinese Astrology, they lose their Invisibility, and revert to the indignity of being observ'd and available for earthly purposes" (707).

Near the beginning of *Against the Day* (*ATD*), the novel, in a nod to empirical history, makes reference to "Freddie Turner[']s" (Fredrick Jackson Turner's) Frontier thesis (delivered most famously at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition – the setting of the novel's opening), which declared the closure of the American frontier and, with that closure, the possibility of a decline or entropic dissolution of American dynamism: "To the effect that the Western frontier we all thought we knew from song and story was no longer on the map but gone, absorbed – a dead duck" (52). *Mason & Dixon* figures the emergence of the United States as the conversion of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the subjunctive into the unity and stability of the declarative. *AtD* reverses this movement, though not in the sense of a regression: the novel focuses on scenes of resistance that act as so many returns of the repressed subjunctive, eruptions not of a buried past but of buried possibility, of the future buried in the present as surplus of the (indicative) past.

²⁹⁵ On the notion of "conducts of time," see Éric Alliez, *Capital Times*, xi, xix-xxi. I discuss this notion at greater length below.

²⁹⁶ A blurb for *Against the Day* that appeared on Amazon.com, apparently written by Pynchon himself, reads: "Contrary-to-the-fact occurrences occur. If it is not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two. According to some, this is one of the main purposes of fiction." I cannot conceive of a more apt and concise encapsulation of Pynchon's utopian *praxis*.

²⁹⁷ On structural causality, see Althusser's section of *Reading Capital*, especially Ch. 4: "The Errors of Classical Economics: An Outline for a Concept of Historical Times." See also Jameson's explanation of structural causality in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 32-49.

²⁹⁸ Foucault deploys the term "diagram," if not haphazardly, then at least sparingly. It receives its most dense expression in the chapter, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish*, where we read, "The Panopticon, on the other hand, must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. [...] But the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream-building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use. [...] In short, it arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact" (205-6). The diagram is an effective abstraction; it is an absent cause that exists only in its variable effects, or as Foucault puts it, "so subtly present" in the many "points of contact," the many nodes of power relations. For an incisive and comprehensive treatment of Foucault's diagram, see Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, pp. 34-38. Deleuze makes clear that the diagram ("the map of

relations between forces,” a “non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field”) does not reduce matter to a single form or essence, “because the diagrammatic multiplicity can be realized and the differential of forces integrated only by taking diverging paths, splitting into dualisms, and following lines of differentiation without which everything would remain in the dispersion of an unrealized cause” (37-38). In what follows, I treat capitalism as an economic and social diagram, one which realizes itself in particular conducts of time, and I also show the ways in which there exist divergences from this diagram, incipient diagrams of a new mode of production.

²⁹⁹ This is not to say that the reviews were all negative. But almost all of the reviews – even the positive ones – treated the novel’s length, non-linear plot development, digressiveness, and cartoonishness as in and of themselves negative qualities that the text either had to overcome or compensate for in order to achieve literary success. Indeed, while there is not space to discuss the matter, here, it is perhaps the very ideology of success, of success as the highest good in capitalism, that is the unquestioned presupposition at work here. Reviews of *Against the Day* are collected on the Thomas Pynchon Wiki: http://pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=ATD_Reviews

³⁰⁰ On this conception of Christian typology, see, Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* and Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*.

³⁰¹ Of capital’s endless, limit-surpassing expansion as embodied by the commodity, Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*: “Fixed as wealth, as the general form of wealth, as value which counts as value, it is therefore the constant drive to go beyond its quantitative limit: an endless process. Its own animation consists exclusively in that; it *preserves* itself as a self-validated exchange value distinct from a use value only by constantly *multiplying* itself” (270).

³⁰² In Benjamin Franklin’s well-known words: “Remember that *time* is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.”

³⁰³ On the concept of the “vanishing mediator, see Fredric Jameson, “The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller,” in *The Ideologies of Theory*, Vol. 2, especially pp. 25-34. Jameson argues that Protestantism is a vanishing mediator, enabling the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

³⁰⁴ In the Greek text of Ephesians 5:16, “time” in “redeem the time” reads as *kairon*: an opportune moment, the right instant, a chance or unique possibility. I wish, here, merely to note that this term has been the subject of a long struggle over temporality in Western philosophical and political thought, one which often takes the form of either reducing the moment/instant to an equivalent unit of exchange or treating it as an opening or entryway to radical alterity (the possible commencement of another epoch or period). It is this latter operation – that of rendering the instant into a *to come* or an opening to alterity (the advent of an other time) – which I articulate as a central component of Pynchon’s break with “the day.” On this kairological thinking, see especially, Antonio Negri, “Kairòs” in *Time For Revolution*, pp. 147-81; Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 162-68; and

Giorgio Agamben, "Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum"; and Cesare Casarino, "Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal."

³⁰⁵ E.P. Thompson elaborates on this transition – the subjective formation of the working class – in *The Making of the English Working Class*, but see also, Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* for an excellent correction to the former, in its concern for the differential relations of gender under capitalism.

³⁰⁶ See, for example, Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula"; Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency"; and Branka Arsic, *Passive Constitutions, or 7 ½ Times Bartleby*.

³⁰⁷ On Pynchon's resistance of clock time and of the imperative to make good use of time under capitalism, see also "'Perchance to Dream': Clock Time and Creative Resistance Against the Day."

³⁰⁸ One need only think of the moral commentary of instruction manuals in the nineteenth century, with their emphasis on how reading novels, especially for women, might slide from simple leisure to sin. On the subject, see, for instance, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*.

³⁰⁹ This is not Pynchon's last or only word regarding television. The novel *Vineland*, though it echoes this moralizing tone, also suggests a much more critically acute and ambivalent engagement with television as the new ontology or mediascape of the postmodern world. See especially Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, Ch. 5: "The Art of Switching Channels: On *Vineland*," pp. 115-45, and Erik Dussere, "Flirters, Deserters, Wimps, and Pimps: Thomas Pynchon's Two Americas," pp. 585-593.

³¹⁰ On consumerism as a third period of capitalism following the second industrial revolution or Fordism, see Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in *The Cultural Turn*, pp. 1-21, and Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*.

³¹¹ The concept of real subsumption (and the distinction between real and formal subsumption) is sketched out – in a relatively tentative fashion – in what has been collected as the appendices to Marx's *Capital*, Vol. 1. It is, however, not until the work of the Italian Autonomists, and especially in the writings of Antonio Negri, that the concept becomes an operative element of Marxist social and political theory. The relevant passages in Marx occur in *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 1019-38. For the elaboration of this distinction in Marxist theory, see, for example, Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, pp. 114, 142, 163, and "Twenty Theses on Marx," in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*; Michael Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 254-56, 271-2; Jason Read, "The Real Subsumption of Subjectivity by Capital" in *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Michel Bérubé's emphasis on a politics of "cultural transmission" (predicated on a blurring of the realms of production, distribution, and consumption), in *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon*, is an implicit instance of real subsumption being translated into literary/cultural theoretical terms. See pp. 211-19, 306-15.

³¹² The thesis of the social factory is most notably proposed by Mario Tronti. Tronti writes, "The more capitalist development advances, that is to say the more the production

of relative surplus value penetrates everywhere, the more the circuit production-distribution-exchange-consumption inevitably develops; that is to say that the relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state, become [sic] more and more organic. At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole of society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society” (*Quaderni Rossi* no. 2, cited in Harry Cleaver, “The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation”).

³¹³ The bibliography on precarious labor is extensive. See, for example, Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody* and the special issue of *Mute Magazine*, “Precarious Reader,” and Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception.”

³¹⁴ For a popular version of this argument, see, for example, Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, but this is also the argument of Franco Berardi’s much more incisive and complex *The Soul At Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Berardi’s arguments rely on the Autonomist thesis that the transformations of capitalism are reactions to labor, and not vice versa. See also Fredric Jameson’s writings on postmodernism – including *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, the essays collected in *The Cultural Turn* – as well as the already mentioned “Periodizing the Sixties,” which also suppose the cooptation of the sixties as fundamental to the transition into late capitalism.

³¹⁵ There are any number of sources regarding the shift from a centralized Fordist model of production to a decentralized post-Fordist/Toyota model. Daniel Bell’s canonical *Coming of Post-Industrial Society* provides a rather triumphalist, yet still informative, view of the subject. For an overview of the subject, see *Post-Fordism: A Reader*. Michael Hardt and Negri detail it in a complex yet accessible fashion in *Empire*, Part 3: “Passages of Production,” pp. 219-351. I have also found the following works very useful: Yann Moulier Boutang’s *Le Capitalisme Cognitif: La Nouvelle Transformation*, Christian Marazzi’s *Capital and Language* and *Capital and Affects*.

³¹⁶ The example of Apple, and Silicon Valley in general, is especially relevant. One need only note the first major commercial for Apple, premiered during the 1984 Superbowl, which features a 1984esque Big Brother dystopia in which a lone figure breaks from the crowd to launch a sledgehammer into the apparatus of control, a gigantic television screen. What is notable is a shift away from the mass production of uniform commodities towards a flexible and shifting (or modular) production of commodities whose function, form, and content are not fixed in advance.

³¹⁷ For a short but incisive commentary on this transition, see Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies,” which draws on the work of Foucault in describing a shift from the “molds” of a “disciplinary” society to the “modulation” of a control society. I discuss the notion of control society in greater detail in Ch.1 of *A Desire Called America* on William S. Burroughs.

³¹⁸ On the function of complicity in Pynchon's textual practices, see especially, Stefan Mattessich's excellent *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Throughout, Mattessich highlights how "the self-implicating dynamic of Pynchon's prose is able to focus the incommensurabilities at work in language [...] and so point through them to a negative and critical textual desire"; or, regarding parody in *Gravity's Rainbow* and in language borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Pynchon "writes to retrieve the capacities of desiring-production from a desire that can only acquiesce to the System, accommodate itself to its insanity, addict itself to its addiction to energy [...] It is therefore never really a question (for parody) of colluding in or celebrating capitalism (complicity in an 'exclusive' or, one could say, 'elect' sense) so much as indexing in its ductile or docile body the degree of deterritorialization necessary to fissure it, to open in it the inclusive disjunction that makes it a body without organs" (94; 180-81). What Mattessich so precisely hits on is the way in which Pynchon discovers the possibility of resistance not in a simple oppositional logic (Power versus Life, Subject X versus Subject Y, etc.) but rather in unfolding and refunctioning the internal and constitutive otherness that always already haunts the system.

³¹⁹ Foucault writes of the sculpting of vision by architecture and urban design in *Discipline and Punish*, Part 3, Ch. 3: "Panopticism," pp. 195-231.

³²⁰ This point echoes Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* in which subjects, like characters, are not substrates or functional units of identity but rather the peripheral effect of a set of interrelated production processes (which include textual practices but are not limited to them). See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, especially Ch. 1.

³²¹ Ernst Bloch articulates this same point, in a different manner, through the employment of the term "nonsynchronism" (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*), which captures the differential relation between historical temporalities in any given period. See Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics." It also bears affinities with Raymond Williams's tripartite temporal division: the dominant, residual, and emergent. See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 121-28.

³²² Marx articulates this point throughout his work, but see especially *The German Ideology*, *Grundrisse*, and *Capital*, Vol. 1. While the exact declination varies (ranging from "alienation" to "separation" to "fetishism"), in every case, a distancing or non-identity is involved with a reduction in autonomy or a deferral of power. Étienne Balibar does an especially good job of pointing out the differences and continuities between Marx's various understandings/writings of alienation, fetishism, separation, etc. in *The Philosophy of Marx*, Ch. 2 and 3. See also Negri in *Marx Beyond Marx*, which – in line with the Autonomist theory of self-valorization – makes this separation the very condition of emancipation, the possibility of labor's autonomy. More recently, Giorgio Agamben, following Walter Benjamin, has emphasized capitalism as a *dispositif* separating human social powers off from themselves. Agamben traces a connection between religion and capitalism, arguing that the very definition of the former is the removal of the profane into the sacred, a quarantine of the worldly in a domain of pseudo-transcendence. For Benjamin, this separation is captured by "guilt"/"debt"

(*Schuld*), that is, our temporal capture by, or indebtedness to, the logic of capital. Picking up on this point, Agamben astutely contends that emancipation of capital must involve an abolition of this logic of guilt through a “deactivation” (or “profanation”) of commodities and commodified social relations so that they are subtracted from exchange-value, rendered into “pure means” and opened up to a “new use.” See Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion” and Giorgio Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” in *In Praise of Profanation*, 73-93.

³²³ On Italian Autonomism’s concept of self-valorization, see especially, Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx* and “Domination and Sabotage”; and Harry Cleaver, “The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation.” It should be noted that self-valorization supposes the strategy of refusal as a necessary component of emancipation, that is, for workers to realize their own power they must also refuse the relation of capital. See Mario Tronti, “The Strategy of Refusal.” While these two concepts are less current in contemporary theoretical vocabularies (including Marxism), I would nonetheless insist on their continuing usefulness and contend that, for example, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of nomadism alludes to these concepts, Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude more or less constitutes a repetition of them brought together in a subjectivized synthesis, and Paolo Virno’s concept of exodus (discussed below) is also an update of them. On the history and thought of Italian Autonomism more generally, see Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, the collection *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi), and the collection *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno).

³²⁴ It should be noted that the meaning of proletariat or working class belonging in this novel is broad, including not only the traditional understanding of the proletariat (industrial workers) but workers of all sorts (from prostitutes to scientists) and the un- or ill-employed, those who refuse to or are unable to negotiate with “the [working] day.” What defines this category, then, is not the wage-relation as such but more generally the imperative to work, the objective, structural pressure to go to work and earn a living. In logical terms, Pynchon, I would argue, begins with Marx’s concept of the proletariat as a relation of labor (all of those from whom surplus labor is extracted or who are subject to the conditions of wage-labor) and then shifts its modality from the indicative to the subjunctive: all of whom *may be* or *should be* working, according to the ever expanding demands of capital. In a sense, this is the same theoretical maneuver as the Wobblies, or IWW, whom Pynchon has shown a fondness for in more than one novel. (See, for example, the history of Jessie Traverse and his family elaborated in *Vineland*.)

³²⁵ From one perspective, this reconciliation is what the “Third Way” (social democracy), and even socialism, amounts to: a transformation of the worker into the capitalist in a massified form.

³²⁶ Of course, this understanding of the proletariat as void *cum* surplus has a long genealogy, one which includes Marx (“The communists have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” [*Communist Manifesto*]) and “The Internationale” (“We are nothing. Let us be all.”) and stretches to the present in the leftist thought of

Jacques Rancière (cf. *Aux bords du politique* and *Disagreement*), Antonio Negri (cf. *Time For Revolution*), and Slavoj Žižek (*First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*).

³²⁷ I am echoing, here, the Autonomist distinction between the technical composition of class and the political composition, the former denoting class as an effect of the division of labor or the dominant relations of production and the latter denoting class as a subjective unity inextricable from a political project of reappropriating power.

³²⁸ On the notion of *kairos*, see Note 18.

³²⁹ On railroads and American culture, see, for example, Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of American Culture*, pp. 57-60.

³³⁰ Here, I would only like to call attention to the long tradition of the Fourth of July address in the U.S. text, and, more specifically, to the possibility it opens up for a subversive invocation of national identity. See, for example, Frederick Douglass's "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html>) in which Douglass marks the betrayal of the American promise in regards to the situation of African Americans.

³³¹ The reference is, of course, to the famous statement by Joe Hill made in a letter to Bill Haywood, an IWW leader, as Hill prepared for his execution: "Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize."

³³² On this reading of the eternal return, see especially Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 241-44, 297-301, and *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, pp. 53-56, 77-83, 213-23.

³³³ See especially, Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 208-14.

³³⁴ I owe my attention to this trope to Richard Hardack's "Consciousness without Borders: Narratology in *Against the Day* and the Works of Thomas Pynchon," pp. 105-6. I address my disagreements with Hardack below. On the narrative complexities of *AtD* more generally, see Heinz Ickstadt, "Setting Sail Against the Day: The Narrative World of Thomas Pynchon" in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, Brian McHale, "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching" and Amy J. Elias, "Plots, Pilgrimage, and the Politics of Genre in *Against the Day*" (the latter two essays in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*).

³³⁵ See Mattesich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*, especially pp. 80-94,

³³⁶ My argument regarding Pynchon's narrative line as the differential of a series of deviations owes debts to two thinkers: first, to Gilles Deleuze's discussion of "the difference of difference," or difference as a differential/relation between differences, in *Difference and Repetition*, and secondly, to Molly Hite's invaluable argument that Pynchon's novels invoke "ideas of order" only in order to challenge and subvert them. Hite's claim – with which I agree – is that Pynchon carves out a space between order and non-order/chaos, a space of contingent and plural orders, that exist as coexisting potential times. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Ch. 1 and 4, and Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, Introduction and Ch. 1. But see also, Sascha Pöhlmann, "Introduction: The Complex Text" in *Against the Grain*.

³³⁷ Quoted in Casarino, "Time Matters," in *In Praise of the Common*, pp. 222.

³³⁸ Indeed, rather than a parabola, we should perhaps think of the narrative more in terms of a complex differential equation, whose sinuous line would be composed of a series of curves.

³³⁹ On “means without end,” see Agamben’s “Form-of-Life” and “Notes on Gesture” in *Means without End* and “In Praise of Profanation” in *Profanations*. The term names a third term cutting through the impasse between a means reduced to its instrumentality towards an end and an end fetishized to the exclusion of means. Instead, “means without end” names a “common power” or a “communicability” enabling human activity to be a “use” for itself.

³⁴⁰ Although “the preterite” is a term most closely associated with *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it is, arguably, the concern of every one of Pynchon’s works, from his first novel *V.*, with its collection of pseudo-bohemian artists known as the “Whole Sick Crew,” and his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, which centers around the (possibly existing) underground postal organization known as Trystero – whose slogan is *W.A.S.T.E.*, or “We Await Silent Tristero’s Empire,” and who use waste-bins as receptacles for messages – to his most recent work, *Inherent Vice*, with its assortment of beach bums. Pynchon’s texts consist of strung together remainders and oscillate between proposing an alternative teleology (an other providence) and refusing the economy of capital/providence altogether. I discuss the implication of this term for subject formation in the next next section of the chapter. See also my discussion of the preterite and *Gravity’s Rainbow* in the Introduction to *A Desire Called America*.

³⁴¹ See, for example, Marazzi, *Capital and Language*; Boutang, *Le Capitalisme Cognitif*; and Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*.

³⁴² The crisis of the capitalist value-form is elaborated most concertedly by Antonio Negri. Negri emphasizes that this crisis is not the disappearance of the value-form as an operative component of capitalism but rather its transformation from a scale of measure into a technique of command. Of course, measure – in the form, for example, of the wage – has always functioned as a technique of command, but in late capitalism its groundlessness or artificiality becomes immediately apparent. See Negri, “Value and Affect” and *Time For Revolution* (pp. 23-29, 60-65, 149-58). See also, Gayatri Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value.”

³⁴³ A number of critics emphasize the return of rent in the contemporary moment of capitalism, that is, the extraction of surplus value without the organization of the relations of production or the provision of means of production. See, for example, Carlo Vercellone, “The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit.”

³⁴⁴ On this transcendent model of time, see especially Eric Alliez, *Capital Times*, especially Ch. 3 and 4. In particular, the Neo-Platonic model in which earthly time is a corrupt form of the eternal time of God, with the concomitant series of abstractions derivable from that model, still has ideological caché; one need only think of the popular term “job creators,” which implies the donation of time by pseudo-sovereign/divine beings to the more earthly category of workers.

³⁴⁵ On time-travel in *Against the Day* and more generally on the novel’s politics of time, see Inger H. Dalsgaard, “Readers and Trespassers: Time Travel, Orthogonal Time, and

Alternative Figurations of Time in *Against the Day*” in *Pynchon’s Against the Day*, and Simon de Bourcier, “Travels in the Fourth Dimension in *Against the Day* in *Against The Grain: Reading Pynchon’s Counternarratives*.

³⁴⁶ As I argue in the Introduction to *A Desire Called America*, this encounter between worlds, or overlapping of simulacra, is a defining feature of the concept of singularity.

³⁴⁷ For a detailed treatment of Pynchon’s literary inheritance from Wells, see Keith O’Neill, “Against the Master: Pynchon’s Wellsian Art” in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon’s Counternarratives*.

³⁴⁸ I would agree, however, with Joshua Clover that Pynchon does not simply convert space into time in *AtD* but rather converts one into the other in a perpetual oscillation. See Clover, “Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital,” pp. 39-41.

³⁴⁹ On the trope of “two Americas” as a persistent trait of Pynchon’s work, see especially, Erik Dussere, “Flirters, Deserters, Wimps, and Pimps: Thomas Pynchon’s Two Americas.”

³⁵⁰ On this argument, see Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, especially Chapter 4 and the “Summary and Conclusion, as well as *Time and Free Will*, Ch. 1 and Ch. 2.

³⁵¹ Indeed, Bergson’s solution to the problem of free will and determinism is to predicate action on a delay that is constituent of human thought; the thinking subject takes the time to think, thus interrupting the continuity of time’s flow, introducing the possibility of a determined series of events changing course, the possibility, that is, of deviation. See Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Ch. 1., as well as Deleuze’s useful commentary on Bergson’s theory of action in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, pp. 1-12, 56-71. See also Hanjo Berressem’s “‘Vectors and [Eigen]Values’: the Mathematics of Movement in *Against the Day*” (in *Against the Grain*), which though primarily concerned with mathematical, rather than philosophical, meditations on time nonetheless addresses the Bergsonian question of how to conceptualize real movement (rather than spatialized movement) as time.

³⁵² See Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Rancière, *Disagreement*; and *Hatred of Democracy*, and Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

³⁵³ For an excellent version of this double indictment of socialism and modern liberal democracy, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*.

³⁵⁴ In Hardt and Negri’s words: “We need to begin to imagine an alternative legal strategy and framework: a conception of privacy that expresses the singularity of social subjectivities (not private property) and a conception of the public based on the common (not state control) – one might say a postliberal and postsocialist legal theory” (*Multitude* 203-4).

³⁵⁵ Agamben proposes a politics of returning language to the common in *The Coming Community*, arguing that it amounts to a return of humans to the powers/potentialities that define them. Late capitalism, for Agamben, is defined by a separation of human beings from their linguistic capacities (and implicitly their capacities to produce beyond instrumental relations in general); resistance to late capitalism, then, entails a commoning in which the fetishization or particularization of the human as commodity in the universal

equivalence of exchange gives way to the individuation of singularities out of commonalities. See *The Coming Community*, pp.79-87. See also Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation” for a similar argument.

³⁵⁶ Michel Bérubé’s arguments regarding preterition in “Against the Avant: Pynchon’s Products, Pynchon’s Pornographies” bring together these two different notions of commonality – that of a certain empathy or solidarity and that of a return of language to the common powers on which it is predicated – suggesting how Pynchon’s work complicates a simple distinction between high and low cultures by productively activating complex uses of culture traversing it. See especially pp. 226-29.

³⁵⁷ Pynchon’s work often blurs the line between different ontologies, shifting between worlds whose rules vary. See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 21-26, 26-43.

³⁵⁸ On the dialectic between utopia and ideology in general, see Fredric Jameson, “Conclusion: The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology” in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 271-91.

³⁵⁹ This is the argument of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” and Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*.

³⁶⁰ This point is implicit in Hardt and Negri’s *Multitude* in its discussions of the transformation of war into a global policing (a policing which opens up points of resistance), as well as in Agamben’s arguments in *Homo Sacer*, *State of Exception*, and *The Power and the Glory*. For an incisive explanation of this inherence of anarchy in ordering procedures, see Nicholas Heron, “The Ungovernable.”

³⁶¹ On the concept of “form of life,” see “Form-of-Life,” in *Means without Ends*.

³⁶² On Agamben’s engagements with the virtual generally come by way of the topic of potentiality, but see especially the essays, “On Potentiality” and “Absolute Immanence.”

³⁶³ See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, Part 1, Ch. 2 and Ch. 3, pp. 10-42.

³⁶⁴ There is a hint, here, of Pynchon’s older tropology of entropy and heat death, present since at least his early short stories (cf. “Entropy”) and very much at the forefront of his first three novels (*V.*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *The Crying of Lot 49*). While the question of entropy certainly occurs at points in *AtD*, my sense is that it is much less a structural part of the narrative and more of one code, among many, that the novel circulates as an interpretive lens.

³⁶⁵ Negri especially, following in Spinoza’s footsteps, distances himself from utopia, arguing that it amounts to a positing of transcendence that neglects worldly powers. He nonetheless has recourse to utopia through the deployment of terms including “dis-utopia” and “the void.” I discuss this matter in the Introduction to *A Desire Called America*.

³⁶⁶ See, Rancière, “The People or the Multitudes” in *Dissensus*, pp. 84-91.

³⁶⁷ See Chapter 1 for a more concerted discussion of the utopian dimension of Hardt and Negri’s multitude.

³⁶⁸ I am, here, articulating two closely linked theoretical strands, namely, M.M. Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque and the theory of transgression as articulated by Georges Bataille among others.

³⁶⁹ On the contemporary significance of Paul for social and political thought, see especially, Jakob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*; Agamben, *The Time That Remains*; and Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Agamben, arguably, pursues a perversion of Paul that is similar to the one I indicate in Pynchon, while Badiou is in a certain sense much more faithful to the orthodox uptake of Paul's writings, given his insistence on predicating the universality of the law of the heart on a catholic production of sameness and the negation of difference. While I do not wish to pursue it further at the present moment, I would argue that this perversion of Paul is part and parcel of a more general perversion of the New Testament in *Against the Day* – a biopolitical radicalization in which the attributes of spirit become absorbed in the flesh, and the position of God the Father vanishes into a void. We see this in the strange relations between ghosts and matter in the text, as well as in the insistence on bodily resurrection, for example, “These were solid bodily returns, mind you, nothing figurative or plasmic about them” (*AtD* 410).

³⁷⁰ *Homosexual Desire*, pp. 99. Hereafter cited as *HD* parenthetically.

³⁷¹ See, Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 62-63, 91-96. The ways in which the ego comes to be policed, reinforced, and consolidated or undermined by guilt (and the superego) are elaborated by Freud in a number of places, but see, for example, “The Ego and the Id” and *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

³⁷² See, Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 100: “Communism is the positive expression of annulled private property.”

³⁷³ See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism*, and Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. See also Floyd's review of Muñoz, “Queer Principles of Hope.”

³⁷⁴ That being said, the perversity of Cyprian joining a *convent* should be noted, for the cross-dressing the decision involves continues the revolt of Countersalve and calls attention to the heterogeneous manners in which the common may be instantiated. (Indeed, various religious orders, such as, for example, the Franciscan monks, provide historical examples of a negation/naturalization of private property and an organization of shared goods in a non-proprietary or common way.) If we speak of *the* common, we do so in order to mark its historical distance from the pre-capitalist “commons” and in order to indicate the global scope of the common as a (conditioned) condition (a new mode of production), which does not, however, entail that the homogeneity of either its social functionings or its political actualizations.

³⁷⁵ I have already alluded to Stefan Mattesich's excellent study on complicity and parody in Pynchon; I would add, here, Giorgio Mobili's *Irritable Bodies and Postmodern Subjects in Pynchon, Puig, and Volpini*, Ch. 1, “Desire, Body, and the Real in *V*.” From a Lacanian perspective, Mobili indicates a “radical ambivalence whereby the Real of the body [that in the body which interrupts, denies, or disrupts fantasies of wholeness and plenitude of corporeal life] comes to bespeak, in Pynchon, both a will to resist the interpellation by dominant discourses and the effects of that very strategy of domination” (79). Mobili's point is that this corporeal excess or alterity simultaneously functions as

the condition of postmodern spectacles and as the possibility of calling them into question.

³⁷⁶ That is to say, that politics, cultural or otherwise, cannot be reduced to a politics of potential, where the latter phrase implies unactualized capacities, for such a delimitation ignores the way in which the virtual/potential is also shaped by actually existing practices and relations. For a complex analysis of the interrelation of communism as actuality and as potentiality, see Peter Hitchcock, "Commonism."

³⁷⁷ This pluralization of utopia is part of a more general tendency, since the seventies, of challenging the univocity of utopian narratives, without giving up the utopian impulse. It is evident in the work, for example, of Ursula K. LeGuin (cf. *The Dispossessed*), Samuel Delany (cf. *Trouble on Triton*), and Kim Stanley Robinson (cf. the Mars Trilogy), all of whom, it should be noted, foreground the concrete relations between the utopian imagination and the body (or the biopolitical). On the pluralization of utopia, see, for example, Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 211-33; Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, Ch. 5; and Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," pp. 208-12.

³⁷⁸ See Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 153-57.

³⁷⁹ This notion bears much resemblance to Jameson's concept of world reduction in "World Reduction in Le Guin," but while Jameson emphasizes the moment of hollowing out or emptying – world reduction is "an operation of radical abstraction and simplification" or "ontological attenuation" of reality *tout court* (*Archaeologies* 271), I emphasize the conversion of negativity into positivity, which parallels that same process in the concept of poverty we have discussed.

³⁸⁰ See Ch. 1 of *A Desire Called America*, for my discussion of "virtuosity" and subject-formation in relation to the Johnson Family in William S. Burroughs's *The Place of Dead Roads*.

³⁸¹ For a complex treatment of Pynchon's anarchist tendencies, where anarchy does not simply mean a lack of order but rather an order set against authority, see especially, Graham Benton, "Daydreams and Dynamite: Anarchist Strategies of Resistance and Paths for Transformation in *Against the Day*" and "This Network of All Plots May Yet Carry Him to Freedom: Thomas Pynchon and the Political Philosophy of Anarchism." See also George Levine's more general, yet interesting, early reflections on Pynchon and anarchy, "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction" in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*.

³⁸² See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, especially Introduction and Ch. 1.

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