SOME OF THE PARTS: FRAGMENTARY LITERATURE AND QUEER POLITICS

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Investigating the interplay of textual form and conceptual problems, "Some of the Parts" studies the strategic use of fragmentary literary styles by queer novelists over much of the past century, focusing especially on the connection between formal deviance and sexual difference. These works are "fragmentary" in that they deliberately foreground their own incompleteness, calling constant attention to their refusal to tell full and final stories. To the extent that they dramatize the fundamental lack of a text, fragments become a powerful means of imagining the mechanisms of desire and the denial thereof. In the process, fragmentation offers a paradoxical resource to queer authors, one that allows them to explore political, social, and even biomedical problems that would otherwise be overwhelming in scope. On the one hand, the shattered worlds that these authors summon up mirror the fraught contours of queer life and experience. Simultaneously, fragmentation serves as a tool that enables richer encounters with the very ills it diagnoses.

The first chapter provides a broad overview of the ways fragmentation has been understood and put to work in the past. The second chapter, which attends to the memoiristic writings of Gertrude Stein, tackles a long running critical tradition that castigates Stein for her failure to identify herself as a lesbian, an absence that is ultimately but one point of fragmentation among many in her work. The third chapter looks at the ways William S. Burroughs repurposed bits and pieces of his early pulp accounts of gay life in his later work. This method allows him to undermine the otherwise intractable stability of the categories he had reluctantly embraced earlier in his career. The fourth chapter explores the long-term usefulness of this approach by turning to the queer, African-

American science fiction novelist Samuel R. Delany, who, in The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals, his 1984 novel of the AIDS crisis, embraces a multigeneric style in order to confront an otherwise incomprehensible challenge to queer existence. The final chapter of this project turns to the early 21st century novels of David Markson, in which fragmentation provides a means of negotiating the persistent pressures of the closet. Ultimately, the conclusions shows how fragmentary logics offer new means of thinking about problems of causality, arguing that such an approach is necessary as queer studies moves forward.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jacob Brogan received a BA in religious studies from Yale University in 2005. He completed his MA and PhD in English literature at Cornell University.

For C.P., without whom…

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Every gesture of gratitude is freighted with its own incompleteness. To thank some is, inevitably, to forget others. If I have hesitated to begin these words, and I have, it is for fear of falling into the very fragmentation I attempt to chart in the pages that follow. I can hope only that in acknowledging that all acknowledgements are partial these few paragraphs can point to a whole of whose contours they are no more than a solitary edge.

I am grateful most of all to my many fellow students in Cornell University's graduate programs in the humanities. Pursuing a PhD can be alienating, all the more so in an often isolated town like Ithaca. Nevertheless, the community built by my fellow students ensured that I never felt alone and that, moreover, I always had intellectual resources aplenty as I worked to develop my own thinking and scholarship. This sense of community was most clearly manifest in Cornell's vibrant reading group culture, with its sometimes baffling, but always exciting, fusion of the social and the scholarly. In these groups, I both encountered the ideas that helped me begin my own project and found friends who encouraged its development. In particular, the Theory Reading Group provided a critical foundation for much of my work both in and beyond my dissertation. TRG's many members, including Aaron Hodges, Tatiana Sverjensky, Bradley Depew, Rob Lehman, Sarah Pickle, and Audrey Wasser gave me both the opportunity to grow and a rich set of models for my own critical practice. Likewise, the Gender and Sexuality Reading Group, and members such as Corinna Lee, Avery Slater, and Lynne Stahl, helped me test the limits of my project's queer dimensions. I am equally thankful to the numerous others who participated in these groups' regular meetings, especially those who I mention in other capacities below.

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I finished the body of this project in a Pittsburgh cigar shop. We leave behind us ashes and smoke, but smoke dances as it mingles with other air and ashes lend texture to new earth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Queer Fragments

This project argues that fragmentary literature serves as a means of investigating otherwise inaccessible notions of significance, relation, and value. Seeking a way to understand the discontinuities and multiplicities of queer politics in the 20th and 21st centuries, it turns American novels of the past one hundred years that foreground their own incompleteness. Within these works, every individual fragment tends to assert its ability to speak for the whole, as the isolation of each part allows the fragment to declare its independent status. In turn, the movement from one fragment to the next perpetually challenges these assertions of certitude. Expanding on the work of scholars like Leonard Barkan, I identify this process as the basic grammar of fragmentation, a principle that I study in the works of Gertrude Stein, William S. Burroughs, Samuel R. Delany, and David Markson.

The queer fragmentary aesthetics that define these 20th and 21st century texts allow them to tarry with claims to absolute and definite meaning, even as they encourage their readers to chart larger narratives about the way such claims are constructed, underwritten, and ultimately undone. This logic enables prose stylists to explore questions of value – economic, aesthetic, and even moral – in a way that turns fragmentation into a powerful resource for queer art and politics. The deliberate embrace of fragmentation serves to mirror the more properly accidental incompleteness of queer works whose authors were silenced by oppression, self-hatred, or death. Further, it becomes a means of both complicating and correcting the gaps, elisions, and fissures that run through queer historiography.

There is nothing fundamentally queer about fragmentation or its literary deployments. Indeed, as scholars like Linda Nochlin have argued, fragmentation may be endemic not just to modernity as such, not just to particular artistic movements, such as German romanticism. To the extent that, pace Foucault's famous formulation, the homosexual as species is a relatively recent invention, all attempts to represent or speak for a queer subject position necessarily emerge within this climate. Yet to conflate the conditions of this climate as such with those of queer life in particular would be reductive at best and dangerous at worst. Homosexuality risks slipping into the mere weave of the present here, potentially rendering null any attempts at radical resistance, even those that embrace the insider rhetoric of Foucaultian counter-discourse.

What's more, many of the features of what I call the fragmentary novel, especially its way of assembling discontinuous elements or genres within a single form, have long been fundamental to the novel itself. Long before Mikhail Bakhtin set out to describe the fundamentally polyphonic character of the novel's "dialogic imaginary," Friedrich Schlegel pointed to a similarly multigeneric quality in the novel. In "Letter on the Novel," the third lecture in the Dialogue on Poetry, he has Antonio, the figure who most clearly represents his own positions, explain, "I can scarcely visualize a novel but as a mixture of storytelling, song, and other forms" (102). The important term here is "and other forms," a non-conclusion that characterizes the novel's architecture as open. While he goes on to name Cervantes and Boccaccio as the exemplary progenitors of this model, he might as well have named many of those who came after, from Melville to Joyce and beyond, in whom the novel is subjected to ever new strategies of formal inclusion. It is no wonder, then, that the young Georg Lukács would argue that the novel is the genre par excellence of an era that lacks immediate access to the whole, one whose people find their destiny not in the map of the stars, but in their erratic wandering from one station to the next.

This is all to say that it would be wrong to treat the writers I discuss in this project as if they were remarkable for their discovery of a new form. To some degree, the form they take up is not even new; it is only an extension of the centuries old practice of the novel itself, one sidetracked by the regularized banalities of a certain realistic tradition, but always resurgent in this or that period as writers rediscover the real potential of the genre. Nevertheless, queer writers consistently drive toward the experimental limits of the novel – those points at which its fundamentally fragmentary character becomes visible – in a way that demands attention. This drive must be understood pragmatically. As I will show, it constitutes a response to real needs in specific circumstances. The novel helps make certain aspects of fragmentation – especially its dual orientation toward desire and totality – visible in ways that allow the writers I study to respond to real dilemmas that might otherwise be beyond their grasp. Fragmentation is not essentially queer – is anything? – and neither is the novel. But the conjunction of these two – the fragmentary novel, a concept that flirts with tautology, to be sure – nevertheless provides powerful resources to those who would interrogate the meanings and values of queerness.

These cautions have not prevented a variety of thinkers from attempting to place some form of fragmentation at the heart of queer life. Perhaps most formatively, Leo Bersani once held that a species of self-shattering, a willing embrace of subjective death, could be the only response to the real threat of material annihilation. As Bersani recounts in "Is the Rectum a Grave?", the AIDS crisis "unleashed and 'legitimized'" "murderous representations of homosexuals," that queer activists largely worked to oppose (28). As he explains, many of these activists resisted such tropes in a way regularized the meanings of sex. This move threatened to be every bit as problematic as conservative efforts to do the same. In lieu of such self-defeating resistance, Bersani argues, we must instead embrace the link between sex and death. Bersani locates this potential in the proposition that "Sexuality… may be a tautology for masochism" (24). He has in mind the way that jouissance,

especially as located in the rush of orgasm, temporarily destroys our experience of self. Because this same self is the basis of power relations, disrupting it might mean disrupting the machinations of power as such (25). Hence, sexuality's ability to shatter us, breaking us into pieces that can never be put back together in quite the same way, contains a radical kernel. By fragmenting our experience of self, it promises to interrupt those regimes, whether of the left or right, that would mobilize sex in the service of their own agendas.

In more recent years, Bersani has backed away from his initial celebration of self-shattering, and with good reason. Bersani's insistence on the centrality of orgasm, even when cloaked in the philosophical euphemism of "jouissance," as the ground of radical politics is dubious at best. Imagine: A middle class teenager jerks off to a Sasha Grey anal video, gym sock at the ready. Is he really subverting the political order that underwrites the structure of his heterosexual family? For that matter, does this supposed feeling of self-shattering really tell us anything about queer homosex that couldn't be said about the most banal of heterosexual relations? In practice, acts like those that Samuel R. Delany describes in novels such as The Mad Man and Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders, acts to which orgasm may be only incidental – urinating in a partner's mouth or eating his boogers – probably do more to trouble power than the mere emission of semen into a rectum. Yet these more transgressive activities are by no means politically transformative in their own right. Whatever power we may have to change the status of sex, it almost certainly does not reside in sex acts themselves. Importantly, works like Delany's recent novels instead tend to privilege the negotiation of sex acts with a partner, the mutual exploration of what Marilyn Hacker has called the "margins of love" (24). As we will see, almost all queer fragmentary texts uphold this process of negotiation through their unusual forms.

It is, however, worth remembering that Bersani's originally embraced sexual self-shattering in context of the AIDS crisis, an event that seemed to proliferate experiences of fragmentation. As I

discuss in my fourth chapter – which focuses primarily on the first complete novel to treat this phenomenon, Delany's The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals – the early years of the epidemic were horrifying not just for the shadow of inevitable death that they cast over queer communities, but also for the simultaneous excess of information and dearth of real knowledge about the syndrome. Those who sought to understand the disease in its early years were confronted both by the sudden absence of friends and lovers and by a radical sense of discontinuity about the meaning of such losses. Bersani's discussion of self-shattering in the 1989 "Is the Rectum a Grave?" must therefore be read as an attempt to pass through a fragmentary situation by means of fragmentation, an approach that will prove fundamental for all the novels I study in this project. Bersani's own formulation has become problematic, but it nevertheless stands as an effort to adapt to real circumstances at a terrifying time, an attempt to bend into the wind rather than be blown over by it.

Though fragmentation may not always be what is directly at issue in them, a similar logic propels many recent queer theories of the negative. Distinct from a purely destructive cynicism, these theories turn the terms and forms of queer oppression into resources, sometimes in the service of a more vibrant politics, and sometimes in an effort to reject the political altogether. Bersani's most direct successor is Lee Edelman, who, in No Future, aggressively rejects what he deems the rhetoric of the child, and with it a vision of tomorrow that would merely reproduce the discontents of today. In its place, he proposes that queerness must embrace its own constitutive negativity with regard to the social. Importantly, he insists that this negativity must remain irrecoverable. He writes that we must not embrace the negative in order to extract a more affirmative politics from it, "but rather to refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane" (Edelman 4). To put this more simply, Edelman calls on queer radicals to see themselves as the limit cases of the political order itself, a political order in which we are constituted as subjects and without which we arguably cannot

live at all. This position is a willfully impossible one that turns around an even franker celebration of the psychoanalytic death drive. Indeed, it does so more emphatically than even Bersani whose work comes to seem like a mere preparatory sketch for Edelman's more extreme description of queer negativity. Fittingly, though, Edelman's elaborate language, like Bersani's own, often draws on a vocabulary of fragmentation, as when he suggests that the death drive "tears the fabric of symbolic reality as we know it" (Edelman 25). It is no longer enough to shatter the self, Edelman suggests; we must now also shatter the system through which selves are made.

So persuasive are Edelman's arguments that they have become an almost compulsive point of reference for queer scholars working in the wake of No Future, even for those who do not embrace the extremity of his position. Heather Love's 2007 book, Feeling Backward, for example, obligingly cites Edelman in its introduction, even as Love acknowledges that she is "ultimately less interested in accounts of same-sex desire as antisocial or asocial than… in instances of ruined or failed sociality" (22). This conceptual shift derives from Love's desire to trace continuities between older models of queer loss and our ostensibly more enlightened and happy present state. Her title promises an affective inversion that will allow us to understand the persistence of the negative. Thus, while she does not uphold the negative as an ideal, she insists on its ongoing importance. Yet for all that she distances herself from Edelman's call for boundless destruction – a sentiment that Wittgenstein tellingly identified with the pre-discursive yowls of infants (Culture and Value 3) – she too takes up the conceptual horizon of the fragment. In the passage quoted above, she shackles the experiences of failure that interest her to the image of ruination. The point will be to recognize just how partial all forms of queer dwelling have been and remain: She looks to the fragments of the past to remind us that we still live a life in which we are exposed to the elements of an inimical world.

Rightly or wrongly, J. Halberstam has characterized the recent queer theoretical embrace of negativity as "The Anti-Social Turn." Love, as we have already seen, might well reject this

characterization, but it nevertheless rings at least partly true for the movement out of which she springs. Like many of Edelman's most compelling critics, Halberstam holds that he does not go far enough, or at least that he does not go far enough in the right directions. Halaberstam expresses a degree of skepticism about the archive on which Edelman and his ilk draw, suggesting that it is too fully characterized by affects like "fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity and camp" (Halberstam 152). These feelings, Halberstam suggests, tend to keep the world at a distance, preventing theorists from getting their hands dirty in a way that they might if they were to take up the authors, figures and genres that she privileges. Though Halberstam's language is sparer than that of Edelman – indeed, Halberstam finds theoretical fault in his supposed excess – and less suggestive than Love's, the fragment still makes its way into Halberstam's work by way of an expanded archive. Halberstam dwells, for example, on Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece," in which the audience was incited to come up on stage and trim away bits of the artist's clothing. Halberstam reads this performance as an act of "radical passivity" that functions in an anti-social mode. Here, though, we once again find the body and its extensions torn away, broken into pieces. Should it surprise us that Halberstam finds something queer in the work of a woman most famous for tearing apart history's greatest homosocial band? This reading demonstrates an implicit link between what the "anti-social" mode and yet another species of fragmentation.

So, no, there is nothing fundamentally queer about fragments, but they have nevertheless exerted a compelling and consistent call to queer theorists of negativity. It may not, however, be the case that fragmentation can only generate a negative anti-politics. To the contrary, as I begin to show in the next chapter, fragmentation has long been enlisted in the service of a more affirmative understanding of desire. A more thoroughgoing study of this affirmative potential, an approach to it that would treat it as more than the assumed substrate of queer reflections, might help to resolve

some of the binds that queer theory has wound around itself throughout the past three decades. Many thinker of queer negativity create problems for themselves when they insist that we must break down all social relations if we are to combat the coercive force of constituted forms of power. In psychoanalytic thinkers like Edelman, this breakdown follows in no small part from a generalization of the Lacanian maxim that the sexual relation is impossible. But even those like Halberstam who find Lacan's reach distasteful – brushing away Edelman for just this reason -- risk implicitly endorsing a similar position when they drift toward the anti-social. In these models, we lose our ability to think about the mutually generative – and only rarely reproductive – possibilities inherent in relations between persons and bodies.

I treat this concern at greater length in the conclusion to this project, where it becomes, to no small extent, a question of how we understand the term "queer." As I show there, queer has all too often come to function as a synecdoche for all forms of resistance and disruption. Even otherwise careful thinkers like Edelman sometimes seem to be chanting, "We're here, we're queer, get ready for the breakdown of grammar itself!" To merely suggest that these gestures are counterproductive inevitably leads us to wrongly overlook a host of subtle and important arguments. But when we deploy the term "queer" in a purely resistant manner, we drain it of its ability to speak to the lives and the liveliness of those who lay claim to it. It is, of course a term that draws much of its force from both a history of homophobic insult and the citational opposition to that history, yet its power today increasingly resides in the polyvalent vagaries of its many uses and users.

What stands out most about the term queer is its open, almost fragmentary, form of referentiality. One need not turn it into a catchall for resistance as such to recognize that it can be applied to a dazzling array of objects. In this project, I primarily use the word queer to describe barred, restricted or otherwise restrained forms of desire. Moreover, I take the goal of queer studies to be an ongoing effort at recognizing and undoing these points of blockage. Thus, it applies for me

primarily to those subjective positions that are constituted in and through their inability to grasp the objects toward which they incline themselves. To be in this position is to be isolated, caught up in a form of life separated from a life giving context. It therefore entails a problematically fragmentary way of being. In the idiosyncrasy of their various constitutive dilemmas, lives lived in terms of barred desire are not reducible to one another. As such, when we apply the word the word queer to one or the other of them, we necessarily leave out an infinity of other possible referents. Similarly, when we instead apply queer to the sum of all possible referents, it loses almost all of its specificity. It is a word that is forever saying too much and too little, such that in its own turn it is fundamentally incomplete. Fragmentary from the start, "queer" further indicates why queer studies as such would do well to further interrogate the meanings of fragmentation.

Further, insofar as it embraces a fragmentary multiplicity of possible subjects and objects, queer studies must take up both differential and discursive forms of inquiry. If "queer" is to have a meaning at all, it can only derive from a ceaseless labor of juxtaposing this word's limitless referents to one another. Here, the real value of queer studies for the humanities more generally comes into view, as the stakes of any one site of blockage can only be understood in relation to the others that inevitably gather around and beside it, gather without quite touching it. In a manner that would not have been alien to Wittgenstein, however ambiguous his own sexual politics remained throughout his life, this comparative work helps to make visible the background rules, laws, and grammars by which we live. When Wittgenstein introduces an apparently nonsensical sentence like "The rose has teeth in the mouth of the beast" (Investigations 188-189), he reminds us that solitary nonsense achieves nothing on its own. We must restage these moments of isolated undecidability in a variety of contexts, inflecting them with the rhythms and tones of other voices.

This is precisely what the experimental electronic group Matmos attempts in their track "Roses and Teeth for Ludwig Wittgenstein," in which a variety of speakers pronounce this

pronounce this famously incomprehensible phrase until it achieves a kind of sense from the basic fact of their mutual locution: Belonging here to a community of speakers, it is less alone than it once was, thanks to the way it acquires significance from their collective search for meaning. The enigmatic, doubly bracketed phrase with which Wittgenstein concludes this passage of the Philosophical Investigations – "[[Connection to pain in someone else's body.]]" (189) – consequently takes on a meaning that it lacks in the original. Mutual fragmentation encourages us to attend to the frustrations and wants of others who are just as fragmented as we are. This climate of sympathy helps us to imagine the widespread failings and inadequacies of the constituted order in which we all participate, revealing not just the fact of our grammars and laws, but also the violences that they perpetrate.

Sappho – to whom I will return at length in the next chapter – provides an example of how such inquiries might shape the way we understand our larger situations. As Page duBois explains in Sappho is Burning, Sappho is exceptional in part for the way her isolated singularity allows us to contest conventional notions of Mediterranean antiquity. duBois convincingly argues that the figure we know as "Sappho" is little more than a fragmentary assemblage, a collection of snatches of song and mutually contradictory fables that add up to something both more and less than an empirical individual. With all this in mind, duBois writes,

Sappho's legacy lies in fragments, and we can use her fragmentary corpus as a supplement to destabilize a reading of Greek antiquity as sober, classical, balanced, austere, masculine, the origin of the West. Sappho's fragments stand as a supplement in the sense that they unbalance the classical, pedimental, Attic Greek, and insist upon a lyrical, sensual, emotionally laden textuality, disrupting and interrupting a mainstream of the representation of Greek thought and culture as a disciplined wholeness. That wholeness was itself only a fragment of a larger whole, a fluid and fragmentary collectivity. (26)

I quote these remarks at length because they speak to the powerful potentiality – Spinoza's readers might say the pontentia – of fragmentary literatures to upset all claims to a stable whole. Above all else, fragments proliferate fragmentation. They do so by interrupting the claims that their fellows make to the whole, even as they must inevitably be interrupted in turn. As we will see in the next chapter, Schlegel and the German romantics emphasized the ability of the fragment to speak to totality, but they failed to grasp is the way that other fragments continually unsettle such claims. In the process, they may also undo the illusion that the larger situations in which we are embedded – call it the Lacanian symbolic, the fact of grammar, or the operation of constituted power – remain stable or coherent. They make fragments of that with regard to which they themselves are fragmentary. In doing so, however, they do not ultimately undo that order, or even oppose it with an absolute negativity, as in recent models of queer theory. Fragments are not destructive; they are generous. Instead of destroying, they generate new forms of relationality, forms predicated on the recognition of a universal incompleteness. When we listen to the ways that fragments speak to one another, to the ways they bicker and banter, we hear communities coming into being.

In a movement directly connected to the so-called anti-social turn, recent queer theorists have worked to trouble the category of community, articulating an altogether reasonable skepticism about its indebtedness to the movements of capital and the politics of homophobia. An anxiety very much along these lines runs throughout Miranda Joseph's Against the Romance of Community. Joseph makes the case that communities have a fetishistic character insofar as they serve as points of identification that have an existence independent of those who participate in them. Involvement in communal life is itself a form of labor, the products of which tend to efface the actual contributions of individuals. "First of all, the participation and activism of group members is erased in the appearance of the group, the community, as an organic and eternal effect of identity" (Joseph 58).

Because the members of the collective identify with the social field engendered by their mutual engagement, Joseph posits, they necessarily act as if this field grounds their engagement with it. Reversing cause and effect, those who make community learn to live as if community had made them.

In light of Joseph's critique, we must develop strategies that will allow us to witness the ongoing reconstitution of community if community is to maintain some conceptual value for queer studies. Michael Warner's famous account of the "counterpublic" risks losing track of this demand. In his insistence that queer communities are made through their resistance to normative structures of the ordinary public sphere, he leaves little space open for the constant renegotiation of the oppositional norms that necessarily shape these other spaces. According to Warner, a counterpublic is an organization of strangers that has a resistant relationship to the more conventional and unmarked forms of the public sphere. "Discussion within such a [counter]public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying" (Warner, Publics 56). Who recognizes this contravention of the rules? The question is not an idle one, as Warner's syntax leaves some ambiguity as to whether it is the members of the counterpublic itself or those they ostensibly shock that stand to learn something from this mode of resistance.

We would do well to instead take fragmentary literary forms like those that I explore in this project as models for alternative ways of thinking about the valences of community. As we have already seen, fragmentary texts work through a form of endless dialogism. Like the participants in real communities, the incomplete elements that make these texts up can be heard gossiping, bickering, and modifying one another, even as they invite us to join in the conversation. The community of fragments is never more than an ad hoc assemblage, thanks to the way that the inevitable breakdown of grammar or sense within this or that component leads to a constant

interrogation of the norms that bring these fragments into relation with one another. When we predicate community on the model of fragmentary, we refuse to reify it. Rejecting such fixative operations, fragmentary texts instead encourage us to envision forms of relationality that are made and remade with each new moment of contact, even as we maintain a critical continuity with the past.

Thinking fragmentation in these terms may not be as peculiar as it first seems; indeed, fragments may be at the very origin of human community. In proposing what he calls the "fragmentation premise," the archaeologist John Chapman argues that prehistoric peoples may have exchanged fragmentary objects in order to maintain some sense of social continuity in the face of divergent migratory patterns and other experiences of separation. The archaeological record suggests that these ancients believed objects to be inalienable from their producers, such that they would continue to serve as symbolic extensions of those who had made them even if they were given away or otherwise exchanged. Passing objects from one person to the next would have therefore led to what Chapman calls "enchainment," whereby symbolic tokens of labor guaranteed the ongoing symbolic presence of absent members of the group, a practice that maintained social networks (Chapman, Fragmentation 23-37). As the theory goes, because the trace of personhood remains in the object regardless of its material condition, objects could be deliberately broken in order to maximize the spread of enchained relations. Chapman notes, "Indeed, the symbolism of pas pro toto, claimed to lie at the heart of prehistoric ideology… is a very physical extension of enchainment, in which each part of a fragmented object stands for not only the rest of the artifact but both persons concerned with the exchange" (Fragmentation 37). Thus, in the Neolithic, we find that a conception of the fragment's relationship to the absent whole already exists. Further, if Chapman's fragmentation premise is true, fragments have long played a critical role in allowing persons to comprehend their imbrication with one another in spite of their differences.

Importantly, this capacity of fragmentary objects may have helped to overcome the very real fragmentation of groups. If, for example, a tribe of hunter gatherers were to separate for a season, they could shatter a significant object, with each of the newly formed sub-groups taking one part: "The fragments of the object are then kept until the reconstitution of the relationship is required, in which case the part(s) may be deposited in a structured manner" (Chapman, Fragmentation 6). This suggests that fragments served not only as a means of parsing the connections between persons, but also that by the same token they could facilitate negotiations between groups. Fragments would have allowed these linked collectivities to come to terms with their sense of newfound social incompleteness. The broken artifact marks both the fact of division and the continuing promise of union that underlies it.

Further elaborating these notions in work with Bisserka Gaydarska, Chapman proposes that fragmentary enchainment may be rooted in the evolutionary development of the human brain. As hominids moved from thinking in terms of species being to individuated consciousness, their experience of family and community would have become increasingly complicated. The experience of the individual's difference from the whole would have left these newly minted subjects feeling that the social whole itself was increasingly incomplete. Fragmentary tokens would have served, the theory goes, as a means of both acknowledging and overcoming this dilemma (Chapman and Gaydarska, "Premise" 130-153).

At stake in Chapman and Gaydarska's theories is a distinction between dividual and individual persons. Where the individual ostensibly stands alone, the dividual can only be understood as a person to the extent that it exists in a relation to some larger whole. As such, the participants in an enchained social context necessarily experience themselves as fragments of their larger situation. Chapman and Gaydarska's work on the Balkan Neolithic in particular suggests that our contemporary conception of the gendered and sexed body may have come through a later

nominalist imposition on these frameworks of dividual enchainment. In fact, they argue that for some time, conceptions of embodied androgyny may have served as a means of negotiating the emerging tension between the dividual and the individual, between social structure and personal agency (Chapman and Gaydarska, Parts 53-70). All of this implies, then, that fragmentation's intimate connection to the politics of community has also long played a role in the negotiation of culturally specific gendered and sexual norms.

It would be foolish to imagine that queer community today works on the same basis as this prehistoric model. To the contrary, queer subjects have been castigated for their supposed atavism for far too long, as the work of Valerie Rohy ably shows. In Anachronism and its Others, a book I return to in my chapter on Burroughs, Rohy argues that queer persons have long been characterized through metaphors of primitivism and temporal inversion. With Rohy's cautions in mind, we should be reluctant to fully position the literary texts I study in terms of Neolithic patterns, lest we inadvertently embrace a homophobic logic in doing so. Perhaps more to the point, however pervasive the fragmentary premise may be across achaelogical contexts, the past is, as the saying goes, a different country, all the more so when dealing with truly prehistoric paradigms. Nevertheless, the way that a will to fragmentation might help individuals negotiate their relationship to a whole that both exceeds and fails to fully capture those who make it up surely still pertains today. As we will see in the next chapter, Sappho's brackets – Anne Carson's terms for the innumerable gaps and elisions in the Sapphic oeuvre – generate excitement because they help to demonstrate this very possibility. After all, it is, as duBois reminds us, in Sappho's songs that the individual first begins to sing of herself (6). To the extent that she sings to her community of her own affects and feelings, she had already staged herself as a dividual fragment, even before her work was literally broken apart.

We might, then, think about fragmentary texts as scenes in which individuality is constantly interrogated within the moving framework of an immanent, ever emerging whole. Per the claims of the romantics, individual fragments endlessly assert their own definite certitude, truth or stability. Their relation to the fragments around them, however, necessarily interrupts, undermines and transforms these claims. Fragments do no replace one another so much as they modify the force of their fellows' claims, just as they will be modified in their own turns. This tendency finds an analogue in the proposition that the terms we use to describe sexual identities should be thought of as adjectives rather than nouns. I draw this possibility in part from Amy Villarejo who writes, "I like that dimension of rote involved in the grammatical breakdown of a noun, the commonplace and commonsensical repetition of people, place, and things modified with a lesbian inflection or provenance" (4). Fragments generate many such grammatical breakdowns, breakdowns that generate a climate in which adjectival forms repeatedly transform one another. This process is essential both to my own way of reading fragmentary texts and to the work I believe such texts engage in on their own. As I hope to show in the chapters that follow, when this process becomes a question of sexuality, and not just of grammar, identity– the basic claim to individuality – becomes the ground of modification.

Not all of the texts I will be discussing directly treat questions of community. As I show, queer writers have employed fragmentary forms to confront otherwise unresolvable or even unthinkable problems. They do so by embracing the fragments capacity for dialogism and the impulse to adjectivalization it begets, two forces that I take to be at the heart of all communities worthy of the name. In every case, the authors I examine direct these impulses toward problems that confronted them in their own respective presents. The formal possibilities that arise from these historically specific conditions, however, may provide compelling resources for our own present, and for our own ways of connecting with one another. Whether or not community is at issue within

these works, the ways that they mobilize and organize fragments demonstrate new strategies, strategies that might help us generate communities that would not, pace Joseph's concerns, claim to generate us! In granting us such visions, these texts promise to allay some of the very real problems raised by the anti-social turn in queer studies. What's more, they do so without forcing us to abandon the social altogether.

A project like this one can only begin to explore such possibilities. It is, after all, a literary critical endeavor, and to deny that would be to risk overreach. In this dissertation, I seek only to understand how fragmentary forms have been put to work by queer writers. I do so, however, in the hope these strategies may offer new resources for our own moment. To do so, we must first understand how literary fragmentation itself works. Accordingly, the first chapter explores a triumvirate critical moments in the history of fragmentary forms more generally. Studying the reception of Sappho, the excavation of broken ancient statuary in the Italian Renaissance, and the literary theories of the German Romantics, I analyze the longstanding connection of fragmentation to problems of desire and totality. While none of these three moments is solely responsible for shaping contemporary literature, in their aggregate they help to identify important trends and tendencies.

The four chapters that follow narrate the ways more recent queer American novelists have employed fragmentary forms over the course of the 20th century. Such a story is necessarily incomplete, a fact that would have been self-evident to Gertrude Stein, whose The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is the focus of my second chapter. Though they are less visibly fragmentary than the works of many who would come after, Stein's memoiristic writings perform their incomplete quality through their fractured narratives. Attending to the things Stein relentlessly points to and yet never describes, this chapter explores the subterranean connections between Stein's conception of modernism as a project unwittnessed in its own present and her notorious silence about the exact

nature of her relationship with Toklas. While critics tend to treat Stein's muted descriptions of her lifelong bond as a condition of shame, my own approach suggests that it is a kind of aesthetic strategy. Ultimately, her narrative elisions allow her to imagine a version of lesbianism that is somehow not of its own moment, even if it one day will have been.

William S. Burroughs, the subject of my third chapter, likewise treats sexual identity as an enterprise in progress. As his work develops, Burroughs pays careful attention to how and when sexual difference becomes socially and textually visible. Here I examine the way that he chops up and repositions bits and pieces of his two earlier pulp novels, Junky and the suppressed Queer, in Naked Lunch. By repositioning elements of these earlier assertions of identity, he attempts to weaken their hold, or at least transform their grip into something more like a caress. In the process he creates a kind of dreamlike textual community that endlessly entangles past and present as he attempts to imagine a tomorrow that would be radically different from today.

Asking how this fragmentary logic fares in the face of problems that threaten to efface the future of sexual difference outright, my fourth chapter turns to Samuel R. Delany's seminal early novel of the AIDS crisis, The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals. Confronting a situation that seemed all but unrepresentable as Delany was composing the novel in 1984, this text fragments along lines of genre. Thus, for example, a brief episode of heroic fantasy finds an immediate counterpoint in journalistic reportage on experimental theater. This trans-generic play can be understood as an experimental optics that provides various lenses on a set of facts, such that their real complexity becomes intelligible. In the process, the novel develops a way of negotiating the varying meanings of AIDS, even as it eschews anything resembling a full and final explanation. Here, fragmentation enables a sense of community among discourses that would otherwise be incapable of engaging with one another.

As powerful as approaches like Delany's may be, a risk always inheres in them. To embrace fragmentation is to admit one's own incompleteness and thereby expose oneself to the judgments of others. My fifth chapter takes this danger up, exploring the possibility that in attempting to negotiate the intricacies of fragmentation as a way to flee the threats of or to non-normative sexuality, one might imprison oneself in a non-relational vacuum. The final novels of David Markson show that what emerges in such a case is a subject excluded from the comforts of community. In the process, these novels envision their authorial subjects – and by connection Markson himself – as what one might term unconfirmed bachelors, figures incapable of entering into the bonds they desire thanks to their attempts to overregulate their relations to others.

In my conclusion, I suggest that the figures of imperiled subjectivity imagined by Markson couple with the fragmentary project as a whole to help identify a crisis in the ways contemporary queer thought reflects on relationality as such. Tracing patterns in queer criticism and theory, I propose that these fields have been increasingly refused to think about causal connections. In their attempts to break free from the tyranny of linear norms queer theorists tend to rule out all causal bonds. This trend threatens to paradoxically redouble the central problem of queer politics – a project structured by the attempt to reopen barred forms of desire – insofar as it treats all determinant relations as conservative. To allay this dilemma, I turn to a text that I touch on in each of the preceding chapters, Spinoza's Ethics, a work in which I find a more fully realized model for contemplating the relationship between desire and necessity. Read in this light, the queer fragmentary project suggests an alternate possibility: When authors like Stein, Burroughs, and Delany encourage us to embrace the mutual modification of fragmentary literature, they offer a new way of imagining causality, one predicated on the premise that we are never whole.

CHAPTER ONE

Fragmentary History/Histories of Fragmentation

From the start, the queer literary tradition arrives in pieces and parts. It comes to us in the form of incomplete quotation and vague allusion, like some half remembered dream into which we impossibly and endlessly find ourselves awakening. We begin, as it were, in ruins, forced to make our homes in shattered dwellings that provide little more than partial shelter, and on which we attempt to build the forms of a more livable future. The exemplar of these always incomplete beginnings is, of course, Sappho, whose poetry marks both the origin of lyric tradition and the first measure of fraught queer life. But queer literature neither has a single genre nor a single yard stick, and if Sappho provides a myth of origins, it is as much for what became of her work as for the passions of which she sings. Indeed, the true starting point of this project comes some twenty-seven centuries later, not with the restoration of what had been torn asunder, but with the willing embrace of queer fragmentation by a series of contemporary novelists. Nevertheless, if we hope to understand that more recent trajectory, we must first trace – if only in pieces – a few of the different moments in the history of fragmentation that helped to form and deform our shattered present

A. Sappho's Exciting Brackets

For all that Sappho's own fragmentary fate is largely accidental, she may prove a compelling point of dialogue, thanks both to the way that her songs thematize incompleteness and the ways in which more recent artists have put those songs to work. Historical records indicate that Sappho

composed as many as nine volumes of poetry in her lifetime, but for all that it was celebrated in her wake, almost none of this material remains extant. Indeed, most of what persists comes to us in pieces and parts, either through quotations of her work in the texts of more recent ancient writers or through damaged scraps of pottery and papyrus. In one way or another, all of these traces are fragmentary. As Anne Carson notes, quotations of Sappho's writing are "intentionally incomplete" to the extent that they preserve only that which this or that writer saw fit to cite ("Introduction" xi). The papyral record, by contrast, is incomplete thanks to the vicissitudes of time and the material instability of the parchment itself. That they survived at all was a consequence of the unusually dry conditions in a trash heaps of the ancient Egyptian town Oxyrnchus, a fact that compellingly links forms of queer survival to the literally trashy, base, or low.[1] These texts are nevertheless riddled with gaps and erasures, weathered by time in a way that accidentally allegorizes the equally real silences and censures that run through queer history.[2]

The incomplete status of Sappho's work inevitably becomes a pressing concern for her translators, a concern that necessarily gives way to new forms of creation.[3] As Page DuBois notes, "A crucial question for the presentation of the Sapphic text has always been how to represent the absences, the holes, the gaps in the poetic object; how does a publisher, without sanitizing, rectifying, fetishizing, print these fragments, show the tears, frangible edges, erasures, abrasions?" (28) Statements by Sappho's recent translators speak to the ongoing urgency of this problem. Stanley Lombardo, for example, writes, "I have engaged in some kind of reconstitution, as a translator must, and have constructed something – a poetry book – out of the seventy-three pieces I have chosen to

[1] For a brief account of this discovery, see Gordon ix.
[2] As Pamela Gordon notes, popular legend has it that the early Christian church ordered that Sappho's poems be destroyed (Gordon v). Whether or not this story is true, it serves as another marker for the ways in which her work's fate has come to serve as an allegory about the historical elision of queer life. To some extent, the ruined status of Sappho's corpus marks her as a sort of sacrificial victim, though which god she was offered to, and the service of which cause the offering was made, must remain unclear. On fragmentation and the tropology of sacrifice, see Nochlin.
[3] For a history of Sappho in English translation, see Prins 36-67. For Anne Carson's thoughts on translation more generally, many of which are in the background of my claims in this section, see her performance lecture "Cassandra Float Can."

translate, all that I could make poetic sense of" (xxvi). What Lombardo describes in the final clause of this sentence seems at first to resolve the dilemma that DuBois describes. By selecting only those poems that he can make sense of, those that he can render in a meaningful poetic register, he largely avoids those fragments that dramatize their fragmentary quality too clearly. Simultaneously, however, when Lombardo hides Sappho's fragmentariness, he paradoxically fragments her work once again to the extent that he excludes much of the language that we associate with her. As Lombardo both implicitly and explicitly acknowledges, then, one cannot help but tarry with fragmentation when one turns to Sappho. Indeed, as this example suggests, fragmentation may be fundamental to whatever creative possibilities translation reopens.

Anne Carson embraces this lesson far more explicitly in her own translation of Sappho, *If Not, Winter*. Carson's already standard translation is remarkable for the way that it refuses to flee from the difficulties of the incomplete. Instead, she actively calls attention to it, including brackets to mark the many moments at which – to paraphrase Barthes' *Pleasure of the Text* – the papyrus gapes. More than a mere move in the game of translation, this decision constitutes a poetic act in its own right. On the one hand, Carson explains that she has attempted to maintain some fidelity to the original text: "In translating, I tried to put down all that can be read of each poem in the plainest language I could find, using where possible the same order of words and thoughts as Sappho did" ("Introduction" x). Though Carson slips into the conditional at the center of this phrase to describe her experience as a translator, she bookends the sentence with the simple present and past. We hear, then, of what Sappho "did" as well as what "can be" done with her texts, constructions that promise real access to a moment that has otherwise been lost. The role of the translator in this mode resembles that of the amanuensis, a displacement from the origin to be sure, but one that nevertheless suggests that that origin remains recoverable, if only in part.

On the other hand, Carson's brackets – which propose to show us the text as it exists today – engender new configurations of meaning. Carson writes, "Brackets are exciting. Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp – brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure" ("Introduction" xi). In this account, the translator becomes something like a vanishing mediator, or perhaps a spirit medium who puts the reader into contact with phantasmatic author. If the word phantasm suggests that Sappho is a sort of ghost, it also evokes the experience of fantasy, a possibility underwritten by the suggestion that brackets excite. To describe this encounter as a "drama" is thus also to invoke a climate of play in at least two senses. The "you" that Carson addresses is invited to join Sappho on an imaginary stage, inventing new lines at those moments when the ancient lyricist falls into silence. If this model is true to Sappho – giving us a version of her that is as close to the real thing as it can be – it is also altogether novel, insofar as we insert her into a generic form altogether distinct from that of her own productions when we attend to her work's accidental fragmentation.

Much as this dramatic relation functions within a theatrical framework, it is also fundamentally a drama of desire. To speak to and with Sappho is always to long for her, to be caught up in the tragedy of her absence as surely as in the beauty of her persistent presence. It is this longing that Carson's brackets make impossibly visible – visible because they show us the space in which our desire comes to life, but impossible because that vitality goes unrepresented in the translation itself. Describing accounts of Sappho's songs that could not make their way into *If Not, Winter*, Carson writes, "As acts of deterrence these stories carry their own kind of thrill – at the inside edge where her words go missing, a sort of antipoem that condenses everything you ever wanted her to write – but they cannot be called texts of Sappho's and so they are not included in this translation" ("Introduction" xiii). It is with these words that Carson's introduction tellingly breaks

off and the poems themselves begin. As translator, she can only prepare the ground for our arrival, and then she must depart.

Nevertheless, Carson's language suggests a notion of desire grounded in impulsion and power instead of melancholy. These texts will "thrill," inspire us to action rather than invite us to stare blankly into the face of lack. Here desire takes on a form more like that of the Spinozian *conatus* – a striving to persevere in our being, to act according to our nature – than one founded on what we ourselves want – what we *want*, that is, in the sense of what we lack. Here one finds an inaugural trope of fragmentary literature, that the contemplation of fragments gives way to an experience of our own plentitude. What Carson calls out is the real potential of the fragmentary text, its ability to engender relations that might have otherwise been barred. It is this potentiality that hums throughout the novels that I discuss in the subsequent chapters of this project.

Though Sappho's words have fragmented by accident of history, many critics would argue that she would not be altogether unprepared for their fate. Yopie Prins, for example, holds that Sappho's verse always describes the disintegration of language itself, its collapse into its own materiality as it passes from the mouth of one body to the ear of another (49-53). Page duBois goes further, arguing that the content of Sappho's poetry, especially the accounts of desire she offers, describe a form of relationality that is fundamentally fragmentary. duBois writes against a critical tradition that had long treated Sappho as a melancholic, made miserable by her putatively impossible love for women. Refusing to locate any sense of self-loathing in Sappho's expressions of desire, duBois counters, "It is not clear to me that Sappho's desire for girls produced ambivalence about homosexuality at all; we could read her songs of longing as her ontological situation, her aesthetic response to the separation from the beloved that almost all lovers experience" (68). That is, to the very extent that they reflect on desire at all, and to the still greater extent that they do so successfully, Sappho's songs must describe bodies torn apart – torn apart from one another as surely as they are

sundered internally by the mere fact of desire itself. And as duBois notes elsewhere, this disintegrative mode of relation emerges again in the experience of reading, in the desire to read *about* desire (52). What results "is the realization that all texts are fragments, parts of some elusive whole, whether it is the absent corpus of all ancient lyric, the 'social text,' the biographical details of the poet's life" (53).[4] Sappho, then, is the writer who teaches us that all tongues break, that all voices fail. That time has shattered her own writing is only an unhappy double of this lesson.

It is once again Anne Carson who most powerfully brings out the creative potential of this shattered milieu, an effect she achieves by refragmenting that which is already in pieces. The work in question is *Bracko*, a performance piece that Carson created with her frequent collaborator Robert Currie.[5] A neologistic portmanteau composed of the word "bracket" and the name Sappho, the title *Bracko* alludes to the texture of fragmentation and loss that Carson weaves into *If Not, Winter*. Carson and Currie began by using a random number generator to select a small array of fragments for Carson's translation. While this selective chance operation might at first seem to further reduce Sappho's already desiccated corpus, it ultimately restages the very contingencies that make her available to us today. Accordingly, it affirms her persistent presence, even as it acknowledges the process of her partial erasure from the historical record.

A set of literally cartographic operations next determined the actual play of voices in the piece itself. The fragments that Carson and Currie had chosen by their random method were arrayed over the brightest points of light on a star chart of the sky above the island of Lesbos in 653 BC, the approximate year of Sappho's birth. Next, as Carson and Currie explain, "to create a two-voiced text we overlayed the fragments with a map of lakes of northern Ontario; one voice reading inside the

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[4] duBois' consistent refusal to use conjunctions when listing terms seems designed to emphasize this very point.
[5] *Bracko* was first performed on December 4, 2008 at the Skirball Auditorium in New York City as a dance choreographed by Rashaun Mitchell and performed by Mitchell with Marcie Munnerlyn. This performance featured the voices Carson, Currie, Elisabeth Streb, and Penelope Thomas. My own thoughts on the piece are partially based on my own experience performing the spoken text on February 17, 2012 with Carson, Currie, and Dan Sinykin.

lake [and] one outside" (personal correspondence). The superimposition of Sappho's sky with the terrestrial topography of Carson's childhood home redoubles the dialogic fragmentation of mouth and ear already present in Sappho's poetry. The authorial and the personal correspond, even as they serve clearly distinct functions. Simultaneously, the way one voice speaks that which falls within the lakes and the other that which remains without cannot help but remind us of Carson's allusion to the "antipoem" found "at the inside edge." If the words found in this case remain Sappho's own, they nevertheless also belong to a personal register by dint of the principles of their selection. What *Bracko* seems to suggest, then, is that to encounter Sappho at all is to fragment her once again, to tear her apart through the very personal investments that give us access to her in the first place. As Page duBois might argue, perhaps the best we can do is carefully attend to the many meanings that such fragmentation generates, refusing to pretend that these broken things were ever whole.

To attend to fragmentation, however, is always to attend to the multiple registers through which it works. In performances of *Bracko*, two other voices join those that read the inside and outside of the lakes. The first almost ceaselessly pronounces the word "bracket" at points where the other two fall silent, allowing little space between them. Thus, even as the sum of Sappho's corpus has been refragmented by chance operations and cartographic arrangement, the material dissolution of the pages found at Oxyrnchus continues to reassert itself. At the same time, another voice reads from Carson's endnotes to *If Not, Winter* at irregular, timed intervals that often overlap with the other voices. These scholarly asides inscribe our always incomplete knowledge of Sappho and her world over the equally incomplete record of her own songs.[6] This component of the work literally

[6] For example, one note that comes early in the short performance reads, "7.1 Ancient sources suggest that 'Doricha' is the name of a courtesan favored by Sappho's brother Charaxos." I am grateful to Carson and Currie for providing me with a record of these notes, as well as with a copy of the overlayed charts through which they created the piece.

speaks to and of the manner in which the Sappho that we know today is, as duBois puts it, a sort of fragmentary assemblage.[7]

What *Bracko* demonstrates, what it teaches us about both Sappho and those more strategically incomplete works that my own critical project explores, is that fragmentation is never singular. Fragments work by disrupting the closure of this or that mode of thought or form of inquiry. While they may, as we will see shortly, paradoxically inform our orientation toward totality, they can only to do so to the extent that they perpetually remind us of just how incomplete our own knowledge always remains. Fragmentary works may thus be at their best when they allow us to juxtapose these incomplete paradigms to one another. In *Bracko*, for example, our incomplete knowledge of Sappho's poems formally rhymes with our partial knowledge of the voice that speaks out of them. They do not engage with one another in the hopes of generating something fully and finally complete – how could they? Instead, fragmentary texts interweave distinct fragmentary paradigms in order to reflect on the very possibility of a completeness that we might generate with one another.

Fragments thus stage a problematic of mutual becoming, of a communal bond that we enter into precisely because none of us are sufficient unto ourselves. In my chapter on Samuel R. Delany, I name this process – one by which fragments interrupt, overwrite, and somehow still support one another – desiring supplementarity. It is, as we have already begun to see, a question of desire for at least two reasons: First, because it describes the way that incomplete objects are drawn into productive dialogue with one another. Second, because, again in the form of the Spinozian *conatus*, it makes each of them more fully themselves than they would have been on their own. Though each of

[7] duBois writes, "I should say at the start that when I use the proper name 'Sappho' I mean only the voice in the fragments attributed to her, only the assembly of poems assigned to her name.. She is not a person, not even a character in a drama or a fiction, but a set of texts gathered in her name" (duBois 3). In a paranoid, but nevertheless important, mode, Joan de Jean has argued that attempts to generate a stable and canonical version of Sappho herself tend to serve a masculinist ideology threatened by feminine expressions of desire (de Jean 787-805). For a slightly more generous account of male attempts to speak through and as Sappho, see Harvey 79-104.

the novelists I discuss finds different approaches to the drama of fragmentation, this dynamic has been fundamental to queer writers of all stripes throughout the twentieth century.

B. The Renaissance's Broken Bodies

Traditionally, academic scholars of the fragment have attended most fully to the Romantic understandings of this category. While such reflections certainly have their place here, we must first look back further still to the discovery of shattered ancient statuary during the European Renaissance. Though previous eras had, of course, possessed and made use of fragmentary objects,[8] the ancients themselves apparently possessed no concept of the fragment as such. Glenn Most argues that fragmentation only becomes a going concern when a civilization cannot experience a true sense of continuity with their predecessors. Because the distinct epochs of Mediterranean civilization always overlapped to some degree, they never experienced a sense of radical rupture with the past (Most, "Fragments" 13-14). As Most writes, "This is why ancient scholars never collected fragments: they lacked not only the word for a textual fragment, but seemingly also the very concept" ("Fragments" 14). That is, they lacked an orientation toward the incompleteness of incomplete things to the extent that the objects that came to them from the past never seemed wholly other. Paolo Liverani confirms this insight in a study that shows how the late Roman Imperium repurposed elements of earlier statuary in their monuments: "In their new context the older fragments referred to a consciousness, common both to the spectator and to the patron, a consciousness educated by dozens of similar monuments" (33). In other words, it was precisely the familiarity that later viewers had with these ostensible fragments that made them usable. They were

[8] I turn to the prehistoric use of fragmentation, which recent archaeological theorists refer to as the "fragmentation premise," in the final section of this introduction.

sufficiently familiar with the context of these partial monuments to correctly interpret their political significance in the present.

A millennium later, when these same objects began to emerge from the Roman soil at the height of the Italian Renaissance, their meaning was altogether different. In his study of this very moment, *Unearthing the Past*, Leonard Barkan notes, "The Renaissance inherits the supposition that ancient flourishing Rome and desolate modern Rome do not exist in the same dimension. If they are not in the same dimension, then one cannot literally travel between them" (25). Gone, then, was the sense of temporal imbrication that had bound the imperial residents of Rome to their republican predecessors, the republicans to the earlier Attic civilizations, and so on.

The distinction might be best understood through the changing fates of *The Aneid*. Virgil had written his epic to provide Rome with a creation myth, one that would mark the continuity between the imperial lineage and the Trojan past that also selectively borrowed from the Homeric epics of the earlier Greeks. *The Aneid* could thus be read as a whole insofar as its various parts linked the imperial present to all that had come before it. For the fifteenth and sixteenth century Italians, on the other hand, texts like *The Aneid* became tools for understanding the meanings of otherwise incomprehensibly isolated art objects. The famous discovery of the *Laocoön* in January of 1506, for example, was informed by Pliny's discussion of the sculpture in his *Natural History* (Barkan 2-7). Simultaneously, however, Laocoön's place in Virgil, where he pronounces the immortal maxim, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts," secured the statute's significance (Barkan 4). If this is fitting, it is precisely because the statue emerges as a gift from the past, an object that arrives in the present through a sort of non-economic exchange with a wholly other context.

In the Renaissance, the discovery of fragmentary statuary exerted an appeal to the imagination not unlike that which Carson finds in Sapphic brackets. Barkan writes, "From this perspective, the fragment, far from containing a diminished immanence, points to a greater

wholeness than would any complete works. The more ruined, the more it inscribes; the more it inscribes, the more it invokes the modern imagination" (Barkan 124). Renaissance artists and thinkers found plentitude and lack interdependent. Incomplete things did not so much speak to the fallenness of the present as to the fullness of it real potential. Viewers of fragments could project backward to past wholes through their very attention to what was missing. At the same time, these shattered works must have marked a call to think forward toward a still richer creative future. In other words, fragments were not only markers of a past greatness; they also became calls for new forms of art.

Naturally, the very ability to recognize the value of fragments – or, for that matter, the ability to recognize fragments as fragments, and not as mere junk – was also entangled with present conditions. William Tronzo, for example, argues that statues like the *Laocoön* appealed to Renaissance artists in part because they resembled contemporary images: "In the Renaissance, antiquity – and especially ancient sculpture – came to hold the present in its grip, but the present was also the means by which antiquity itself was imagined. Present-day reality re-created antiquity in its own image" (53). If Tronzo is right, the Renaissance selectively celebrated particular pieces of the past that conveniently lined up with their own ways of imagining and representing reality. By way of example, he points to formal echoes between sculptures like a second century Roman copy of the *Apollo Belvedere* and Titian's resurrection altarpiece, which predated the sculpture's rediscovery. In a slightly different mode, Barkan far more extensively documents later paintings and sculptures that seem to quote the forms of previously uncovered works. Nevertheless, Tronzo's claims point to the ways in which any orientation toward fragments is at least partly an orientation toward ourselves, toward our own values, preoccupations, and concerns.

As Glenn Most has shown, much the same has long been true in historical reflections on (and of) Sappho. The simultaneous excess and dearth of information about Sappho, the doubled

over- and under-determination of her corpus, has forced scholars in each era to select for the figure that most fully corresponds to their own needs. Accordingly, "the reception of Sappho can be interpreted as a series of attempts to come to terms with the complexity of this set of data" (Most 14). Something similar was surely true for the artists of the Renaissance, who had far too many incomplete things to choose from and therefore had to select those that mattered to them with care. They may have privileged the *Laocoön*, for example, because of their familiarity with Pliny and Virgil, but their comfort with these was is not wholly neutral. Attending to the particular pieces of the past that we select at a given moment, then, may well tell still more compelling stories about the stakes of the present. I return to this question of the actuality of the present in my first chapter, which takes up the work of Gertrude Stein.

By wrapping us up in our present condition, the fragmentary objects that we privilege provide us with an external manifestation of our internal orientations. As such, they might well be read as spectacles of desire, concrete signs of those forces that push and pull at us in unpredictable ways. Barkan argues that Renaissance viewers of ancient sculpture experienced them in just such a spirit: "Works like the *Spinario* are sexy, and the artistic play they inspire is itself a sign and an exercise of the eroticism. The corporeality of these sculptures, the qualities that make them 'Rome's other population'… speak to their fictive reality not only as historical persons but also as objects of desire" (152). To a large extent, this erotic drive becomes evident more through the representation (or re-presentation) of fragments than from the objects themselves. The *Spinario* – a sculpture of a seated, lithe boy pulling a thorn from his left foot – to which Barkan alludes, for example, was one of the most complete sculptures to arise out of antiquity. Its fragmentary quality, as Barkan notes, comes primarily from the mysterious absence of any information about this figure's identity (150). The complete sculpture itself, with its visible but partially concealed genitals, and its subject's near

onanistic self-involvement in his bodily task, asserts a certain inescapable erotic charge. The original context of this eroticism, however, remained and remains unrecoverable.

For Barkan, the real sexiness of the sculpture appears in the attempts of Renaissance artists to capture it from different perspectives. Low angle drawings emphasize the boy's penis and the muscular curve of his calves, while sketches *a tergo* emphasize the taught cleavage of his buttocks (Barkan 152). Insofar as they underline specific sites of fascination, such drawings redouble the erotic charge of an already sexualized figure. Thus, these representations amplify the erotic by breaking up that which had been whole. Here, fragments themselves enable a form of fetishistic reflection, but they also work as fetishes in their own rights. Though it risks the banality of the obvious, it would not be wrong to equate the erotically charged sculptures and representations of sculptures that Barkan studies with the psychoanalytic part-object, that, "Type of object toward which the component instincts are directed without this implying that a person as a whole is taken as love-object" (Laplanche andPontalis 301). The part-object refers back not to an individual object, but to a knotted configuration of desire itself. For Freud, by way of example, while the fetish stands in for the penis, it represents not this or that desired penis, but the child's attempt to defer the horror of discovering its mother's apparent castration. By displacing the idea of the penis to another site on the body, the fetishist is able to effectively rewire his or her desire around the broken circuit generated by this primal panic (Freud, "Fetishism" 198-204).[9] In this regard, ancient statuary seems to make the real fact of desire itself available by allowing the artists who contemplated it to attend to specific parts of the body and its extensions in a way that was largely free of context. The mysterious anonymity of the *Spinario*, its narrative fragmentariness, would be what underwrites the fetishistic illustrations that were made from it.

[9] Tellingly, in a footnote to this essay, Freud acknowledges that he first alluded to fetishism in this regard in his 1910 reflection on Leonardo da Vinci (199). One might reasonably propose that Freud here intuits something of the fetishistic compulsion that ancient statuary would exert on Leonardo and his ilk, a compulsion visible, as Barkan suggests, in Leonardo's own willful reluctance to complete his projects.

In the Renaissance, ancient statues served as more than sites of erotic investment; they also served as loci of unstable gender. Barkan points to a host of examples in which statues of Greek gods were mistakenly identified as goddesses. In one telling case, a broken statue of Apollo was repeatedly identified as a representation of Hemaphroditus. As Barkan puts it, "Clearly this fragmentary body, despite its unmistakable male genitals, was being read as female; only by reference to the double-sexed mythological figure could the incongruity be rationalized" (183). To no small extent, this confusion must be the consequence of an uncomfortable collision between Hellenistic standards of beauty and Renaissance expectations about normative masculinity. This misidentification testifies to a crisis of gender norms, one that the narrative appeal to hermaphroditic mythology attempts to resolve, or at least defer. Thus, this operation betrays no small degree of anxiety. Nevertheless, the ability of Renaissance scholars to willfully misidentify the sculpture speaks to the basic openness of fragmentary objects. To the very extent that they are incomplete in one way or another, fragments invite modification or transformation, taking on new meanings through our attempts to repair or resituate them. It is surely this same openness that charges such objects with erotic potential, even as it also allows that charge to be redirected or restrained.

In Barkan's account, the openness of fragments comes through most clearly in the ways that they became "places of discourse." As he puts it, "these objects became occasions to tell verbal stories that were new and original but at the same time could be seen as fulfillments of a history that began in the hallowed time when the ancient art was made" (210). Fragments call on us to generate language that pulls us toward a truly novel future, even as it finds its authority in an always incomplete experience of the past. We have already seen an instance of this potentiality in Carson's transformative fidelity to Sappho. Here, however, something more radical is clearly at stake, as fragments can serve to underwrite forms of speech that would otherwise be unutterable or even unimaginable.

During the Italian Renaissance, this sense of chatty mischief aligns most clearly with public use of *Pasquino*, a massively damaged sculpture to which all species of troubling and treasonous speech were associated. Most strikingly, authors of these "pasquinades" attributed complaints about impotence and castration to the statue, a form whose own genitals are pointedly absent, though it was sometimes also made to utter crude come-ons and propositions.[10] In other circumstances, the anonymous writers would direct such complaints at authorities of the state and the church.[11] Such attributions point not merely to the erotic compulsion of some fragments, but also to the way that they can originate new folds in the erotic imagination. As Barkan shows, the *Pasquino* demonstrates this possibility through the conversational form of the pasquinade itself. He observes, "The sheer range of social impulses behind the [pasquinade] ritual and the variety of qualities in the statues that were thus exploited produced a Paquino with a complex voice allowing for no simple determination of who is speaking. In the most fundamental way Pasquino is dialogic. He speaks to the viewers, and the viewers speak to him" (Barkan 223). This plurality of voices marks a certain internal fragmentation of the individual, such that the fictional character of Pasquino splits into a multitude of partial persons. This plurality of possible individuals modify and act on the utterances that their fellows make, creating a discursive climate that both models the social and seeks to challenge its norms. I will return to the question of dialogism when I discuss fragmentary methodology. For the time being, it is enough to acknowledge that fragments seem to empower forms of speech that can contest norms and conventions as they orient us toward new possibilities.

Above all else, Barkan's study compellingly demonstrates the fundamental correspondence between language directed at fragments and the discourse of desire. While the incompleteness of fragments may allow those troubled by them to reconfine the threats they pose, the example of the

[10] For example, "Touch this groin, harder than rock, which I am happy to show you; it is under my clothing and has a noble red head. Go for it as much as you like" (Quoted in Barkan 221).
[11] For example, "Each and every one of the cardinals, out of politeness, is fucking around with each other" (Quoted in Barkan 221).

Pasquino reminds us that they can also always be reopened to plurality and difference. Something along these lines seems to be at stake for Roland Barthes in his *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*. In his enigmatic description of his methodology, he explains, "Everything follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomal subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is 'unreal,' i.e. intractable. Whence the choice of a 'dramatic' method which renounces examples and rests on the single action of a primary language" (*Discourse* 3). Barthes refuses to treat the condition of the lover as a singular one, instead he divides it into a host of interrelated fragmentary states, each of which seems, but only seems, to be primary in the moment that we find ourselves speaking in its terms. These distinct figures are each internally divided as well, creating points of differentiation within themselves. Barthes' multiple levels of distinction produce the appearance of dialogue both within and between fragments that keeps the text's own discourse perpetually on the move. While it would, of course, be ludicrous to argue that Barthes drew this methodology from the example of the pasquinade, the correspondences between them are nevertheless striking. In Barthes' book, as for the renaissance participants in the pasquinade ritual, we must listen to the play of voices that constitutes our desire if we hope to understand its meanings.

C. Romantic (W)holes

Some two and a half centuries after the height of the Italian Renaissance, the rise of German Romanticism bore witness to a profound shift in the modern relation toward antiquity. Where the fragmentariness of fragments had captivated the Renaissance, the romanticists were instead explicitly drawn to the theoretical plentitude to which these objects had aspired when they were whole. The central figure of this new understanding may well have been the fifth century BC Greek painter Zeuxis who, according to Pliny, once produced a painting so realistic that birds flew down from the

trees to pluck at the grapes on his canvas. Against Plato's handwringing about the discontents of mimesis, this myth locates the possibility of depicting the real and the beautiful in ancient Greek art practices. Importantly, the romantic era would recognize Zeuxis not for his ability to capture the truth of everyday experience in his paintings, but for his way of overcoming the fragmentary quality of everyday embodiment. Following Plato up to a point, Zeuxis supposedly believed that no individual object or body could capture the essence of the beautiful. As such, when he set out to paint a famously perfect figure like Helen of Troy, he would compose her piecemeal by drawing on the example of various models, each of whom approached perfection in one way or another. As Joel Black explains, "By combining these component charms in his representation, Zeuxis was able to create a masterful rendering of the feminine ideal which transcended any specimen of womanly beauty appearing in nature" (Black 190). What is especially striking in this story is the idea that Zeuxis achieves painterly greatness by first recognizing and then overcoming the fragmentary quality of ostensibly complete bodies. As in the *Republic*, empirical existence proves inadequate, a mere shadow of the eidetic reality from which it derives. Nevertheless, Zeuxis is able to break nature apart to grasp fragmentary traces of a more perfect real by imaginatively disassembling the bodies of women into "shoulders, legs, breasts, and so forth" (Black 190). From a false completeness he moves to a fragmentary notion of perfection, one that he overcomes by melding these pieces into a composite image more whole than anything found in nature. According to this approach, then, fragmentation is only a transitory state, one that must be acknowledged so that it can be overcome.

The erotic component of Zeuxis' art practices as he moves toward a more perfect whole should not go unnoticed here, as it surely did not for the romantic thinkers who admired his mythic place in the history of art. Indeed, Black argues that the mid eighteenth century German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann attempted to push Zeuxis's ideals still further, to the point where they would result in a melding of the sexes: "Whereas Zeuxis represented ideal feminine beauty

through a studied selection and combination of particular features of five beautiful maidens, Winckelmann implies that in order to represent ideal beauty in its totality, such natural selection and artificial recombination should not be restricted to a pool of models representing only one sex" (Black 193). This more extreme version of the recombinatory ideal posits an almost orgiastic form of creation. Bodies rub up against and into one another with little attention to their supposedly natural configurations. In Winckelmann, the gendered confusion of Renaissance art interpretation becomes programmatic, generating transhitorically totalizing notions of beauty, rather than merely overcoming the differences between the ideals of yesterday and those of today. Thus, for Winckelmann the inadequacy of everyday reality hereby authorizes a queer confusion of bodies and beauties. This conceit will prove to be a founding principle of later fragmentary art, though it would not survive the romantic era wholly unchanged.

Winckelmann and his theories make a handful of passing, but important appearances in Friedrich Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry*, a book that is arguably the most significant prolonged reflection on fragmentation to emerge out of the romantic milieu. He initially crops up in the first of the four "lectures" that make up the body of the text, a discussion of the "Epochs of Literature" attributed to a man named Andrea. As he nears the end of his speech, Andrea observes, "Wincklemann taught that history was to be viewed as a whole, and was the first to demonstrate how to establish an art through the history of its genesis" (Schlegel, *Dialogue* 73-74). This remark promisingly marries Winckelmann's post-Zeuxisian composite approach with his syncretistic understanding of antiquity as a whole. Yet the very genre in which this connection plays out suggests that Andrea, and perhaps Schelegel himself, would not fully embrace this line of thought. Given Schlegel's eponymous promise to describe a dialogue, the term "lecture" immediately rankles. Where dialogue suggests mutual interchange, lecture implies something more like a solitary performance. The distinction, however, speaks directly to the way that Schlegel – and many of the other Romantic

philosopher poets – would break from Winckelmann's notion of fragmentary composites, however much they may have admired his scholarship more generally.

In its simultaneously isolated and public form, the lecture all but embodies the Schlegelian conception of the fragment. The four sub-texts that make up the majority of the *Dialogue* are each presented as public readings of essays on various literary topics given by and to a group of friends as they articulate their respective positions on the true source of poetic novelty. The first deals with the importance of poetic history, the second with literature's mythological underpinnings, the third with the form of the novel, and the last with poetic practice in the present, a present embodied by the development of Goethe's oeuvre. After each of these fictive talks, the other participants briefly respond, sometimes issuing objections and sometimes tentative praise, but the various speakers never truly alter or otherwise modify their initial positions. Structurally, the *Dialogue on Poetry* resembles Plato's *Symposium*, another text in which individual performances are interspersed with snippets of collective conversation. Yet where one might, as many have, identify a developmental narrative within the *Symposium*, the *Dialogue on Poetry* rejects any such generative interchange. Ultimately, Schlegel's four speakers doggedly hold to their respective positions. Even if, as we will see, they ultimately acknowledge that those of their fellows carry some truth, the interlocutors remain evidently unmoved by the "Bacchic frenzy of philosophy" that sweeps over Plato's own conversants.

Schlegel lays out his rationale for this counter-discursive rigidity in the methodological preface that opens the *Dialogue*. In the text's second paragraph, he describes a sentiment that can only be his own: "There is only one reason, and for everyone it remains the same; but just as every man has his own nature and his own love, so does he bear within his own poetry, which must and should remain his own as surely as he is himself, as surely as there is anything original within him" (53). The "one reason" to which he initially alludes speaks to the romantic conviction that there is an

underlying order or truth to which all rational beings have access. Yet Schlegel's own contribution to this paradigm is to suggest that we each come to this truth by different means, means that are unique to the fundamental configuration of our individual being. As he explains in the prior paragraph, all people love poetry, but here he suggests that if they are to make poetry worthy of the name, they must do it in their own ways. When the four friends lecture one another, they do not do so to establish universal prescriptions, but to outline their own ways of grasping the one spirit that all humans share. If they were to waver in the face of some alternative, they would betray their own experience of the truth, rendering them incapable of composing truly novel artworks.

By the same token, the four positions that Schlegel outlines in the *Dialogue* are not meant to be exhaustive. His speakers cover the past of poetry, its general climate, its generic status, and its present, but in so doing, they only examine four of a hypothetical infinity of approaches. Near the end of the text, one of the speakers, Lothario, tacitly acknowledges this point in response to Ludovico. At first, the latter argues that "poetry is indivisible and everywhere the same" (114). Ludovico's position here restages Schlegel's own foundational claim that "There is only one reason, and for everyone it is the same." Lothario's response establishes the impracticality of this position from the perspective of the individual artist: "The spirit to be sure! Here I would like to apply the division in to spirit and letter" (114). We may all love one and the same underlying essence of poetry, but in practice we can only experience and produce partial manifestations of this fundamental substrate. At the level of the spirit, of undivided universal reason, we are all one, but at the level of the letter, the best we can hope to do is experience ourselves as fragments, "streams of poetry" that flow into "one vast sea" (Sclegel 53).

According to the *Dialogue on Poetry*, so long as we remain true to ourselves, we are condemned to a fundamentally fragmentary form of life. As Schlegel makes clear in his preface, the last thing that poetry requires is regulation: "It is not necessary for anyone to sustain and propagate

poetry through clever speeches or precepts, or especially to produce it, invent it, or sustain it, and impose upon it restrictive laws as the theory of poetics would like to" (*Dialogue* 54). According to the Schlegelian model, to produce great poetry is simply to embrace one's own idiosyncratic configuration, to be moved by the spirit as it moves within. The whole of the *Dialogue* must therefore be read as exemplary rather than programmatic. Schlegel offers a series of examples of ways in which one *might* be moved, not a catalogue of ways in which one *should* be moved. The banter between friends that interrupts the sequence of talks therefore serves primarily to demonstrate the degree to which each of their positions is fragmentary, and rightly so. Schlegel goes on to explain, "since one's poetry is limited, just because it is one's own, so one's view of poetry must of necessity be limited" (*Dialogue* 54). According to this model, it is right to be limited, right to maintain one's borders and hold one's ground. Perhaps the best we can do is acknowledge our fragmentary status, even as we insist on the way that it partakes of the totality into which it flows.

Thus, for all that Winckelmann, that great thinker of composite fragmentation, has his place here, Schlegel's references to him can only ever come and go in passing. For Winckelmann, the world of the ancients arrived to the moderns in fragments. Yet to the very extent that the greatest of the ancients like Zeuxis had composed their works from the best of the pieces and parts that confronted them, we could nevertheless grasp the ancient world as a whole by conjoining its traces to one another. Schlegel argues to the contrary that fragmentation is primary and we need not seek to overcome it. Even in asserting the central place of Winckelmann, as well as of his revision of Zeuxis, within the *Dialogue*, Joel Black admits the limits of such a program's scope when he notes, "It is precisely this incomplete nature of the fragment that makes it such a powerfully suggestive form of expression and medium of visionary insight [for Schlegel]" (196). Though Schlegel's characters allude to something like bisexuality, they could never imagine composing a hermaphroditic subject in the same manner that Winckelmann does. For them, as for Schlegel

himself, all individuals are fragmentary, and a gendered composite, a queer fragmentary subject, is altogether out of the question.

It is precisely around the question of gender that Schlegel tentatively ironizes the limits of his system. Though several women are present at the fictional scene of the *Dialogue*, marking another pointed distinction from the *Symposium*, at which even Diotima is only discussed, none of them are granted more than passing opportunities to address the group. After the third of the four speeches, Antonio's didadactic and condescending "Letter on the Novel," which is directed at the largely mute Amalia, one of the other silent participants, Camilla, seems to briefly voice some concern with this paradigm. Camilla begins by ambiguously praising Amalia, and women in general, for their ability to accept such critiques. Lothario immediately responds by shifting the modesty that Camilla attributes to women onto men, describing it as "this premise of an excellence which we do not yet possess, but whose existence and dignity we begin to realize" (Schlegel 105). This is to say he suggests that men are good to the extent that they manifest some consciousness of their asymptotic approach to excellence, such that any goodness they manifest is purely fragmentary in nature since they simultaneously indicate the good and fail to realize the whole of it. Given her initial appearance of slavishness, Camilla's rejoinder is surprisingly cutting: "Camilla asked if pride and self-complacency had this function for men, since every one of them considered himself the more unique the more incapable he was of understanding what the other wanted" (105). With this, she suggests that to the very extent that men acknowledge and embrace their own fragmentary quality, they close themselves off to others. Like a lecture, the Schlegelian fragment brooks no modification in the moment of its presentation. Subjects who predicate themselves on this form are likewise closed off to their environment. Accordingly, much as the Schlegelian model demands a plurality of fragments, it cannot accept real difference, gendered or otherwise. The orgiastic composite of Winckelmann's

hermaphroditic ideal falls by the wayside here, sidelined by a regime of gender – and, perhaps, sexuality – that Schlegel suggests, but cannot quite acknowledge.

Schlegel's near blindness toward gendered difference comes to the forefront through the figure of interruption, a term that ordinarily characterizes the romantic operation of fragments on themselves. In the sentences following Camilla's remarks, Antonio ostensibly comes to Camilla's defense when he suggests that women are just as involved as men in reflections on higher things. Schlegel begins this section, however, by writing, "Antonio interrupted her…" (105). This verb troubles first because it seems to belie his own claim that women are capable of speaking for themselves. Perhaps more importantly, though, it describes a strange action, given that Camilla has apparently already concluded her remarks. Why would he need to "interrupt" one who has already said what she intended to say? The answer to this query lies in the fact that under ordinary circumstances, fragments work by interrupting themselves.

As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy put it in *The Literary Absolute*, "The fragment closes and interrupts itself at the same point: it is not a point, a punctuation or a fractured piece, despite everything, of the fragmentary Work" (57-58). Fragments in the Schlegelian model are deliberately so to the extent that they are, as we will see below, designed to be sufficient unto themselves. Even as they indicate an impossible whole, they do so on their own. The viewer cannot and should not treat them as if they are or should be part of something that they do not show. They "interrupt" themselves, then, by acknowledging that they are themselves enough, if only for the moment. When Schlegel has Antonio "interrupt" Camilla, he therefore seems to be suggesting that women can have no place in the properly fragmentary scene. Throughout the *Dialogue*, men repeatedly interrupt themselves, closing off their speeches just before they meet their limits, accepting no change to what they have said. On the rare occasions when women speak, they must be cut off by some other voice. Schlegel's system thus refuses a more general use of its fragmentary

logic in its apparent insistence that only some are capable of employing it rightly. As I will show in many of the chapters that follow, the 20th century queer fragmentary tradition contests and undoes this troubling tendency in its movement from a fragmentary logic to a fragmentary grammar.

Schlegel fittingly encloses his most famous description of fragmentary closure within a fragment. The *Athenaeum Fragment* §206 reads, "A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine" (Schlegel, *Fragments* 45). The word here translated as "porcupine" is more often rendered as "hedgehog," but porcupine perhaps captures the sentiment more accurately. Both are animals that embody their own systems of fortification. With their spiny defenses, they keep the world at bay, always prepared to hold off predators and their own kin at one and the same time. As anyone who has held an infant of the species in one's hands knows, however, there is something adorable about the hedgehog. But few love the porcupine; tellingly, it is all but impossible to imagine what it is like for them to have sex (see Bittel). One might therefore be read Schegel's insistence on fragmentary enclosure as a kind of anti-eroticism: It is not just women who are excluded from his scheme of fragmentary subjectivity, but anyone who might rupture one's defenses. The romantic fragment, as conceptualized by Schlegel and the Jena group, appeals to totality precisely and solely to the extent that it cuts off everything that it does not contain. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, "Each fragment stands for itself and for that from which it is detached. Totality is the fragment itself in its completed individuality" (44). The romantic fragment is thus a work of art that stands for all works of art, refusing to be determined or, and this may be the important thing, penetrated by them.

Strictly speaking, romantic fragments both do and do not stand alone. In fact, the incompleteness of the individual fragment demands plurality, calling on us to proliferate ruins. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe, "Fragmentary individuality is above all that of the multiplicity inherent to the genre. The romantics did not publish a unique *Fragment*; to write the fragment is to

write fragments" (43-44). Yet, importantly, these plural fragments relate to the totality for which they stand in a non-accumulative manner. Gathering together many fragments does not allow us to better approximate some absent whole, it only varies our orientation as we direct ourselves toward it. To put this differently, for Schlegel, all fragments indicate the same truth; they merely do so in different ways. This conceit reinscribes the structural lesson of the *Dialogue on Poetry*, a book in which four characters describe four means of coming at a universal poetry without meaningfully contributing to one another's positions. In this sense, the plurality of fragments indicates the fact of their absolute independence from one another: They speak endlessly, but they do not converse.

Ultimately, the defining feature of the romantic fragment is its autonomy, an independence from other fragments and the hypothetical whole from which it is drawn. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write, "If the fragment is indeed a fraction, it emphasizes neither first nor foremost the fracture that produces it. At the very least, it designates the borders of the fracture as an autonomous form as much as the formlessness or deformity of the tearing" (42). This means first that the actual event by which an object becomes a fragment matters far less than the fragment that results from this event. Fragments qua fragments perform whatever they perform to the very extent that they are fragments; that which precedes their partial state is largely irrelevant. Where the fragment inspires us to posit a relationship to the whole, we must understand this to mean the whole as such, or the absolute, not an empirical whole that once was. This is so, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy suggest, because the broken state of the object sets it off from the world and thereby guarantees its independence. In their "essential incompletion" (42), fragments become powerful tools for speculative critical reflection, as the autonomy that arises from their disregarded origin gives them the appearance of auto-production (12). The fragment's broken border both defines it and closes it off, such that it becomes what it is through the way that it is, a tidy and all but irresistible tautology.

The German romantic tradition plays a central role in this history in large part for the way that it authorizes the production of deliberately fragmentary texts. When what matters in a fragment is the fact of the fracture and not the genealogy thereof, the pieces and parts of antiquity no longer hold pride of place. Instead, the created fragment comes to the fore, precisely insofar as it enables us to reflect on our own subjective status. Schlegel famously asserts in *Athenaeum Fragment* 24, "Many of the ancient works have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written" (Schlegel, *Fragments* 21). Far from a mere description of a fallen modernity in which we no longer have access to the truth of Nature, this statement should be read programmatically. One notes, for example, the literal shift from a language of becoming to one of being. In embracing fragmentation from the start, Schlegel suggests, new literature can better capture its own essence. Where the artists of the renaissance had been inspired by fragments, and had sometimes created their own work on such models, Schlegel insists that fragmentation can be a starting point in its own right. Though he stops short of upholding modern literature over that of the ancients, it seems clear enough that the prospect of beginning in ruins holds considerable promise for him, as it would for generations of writers to follow.

It would, however, be a mistake to read Schlegel's system into the work of fragmentary writers who came after him, or even into that of his contemporaries who were working in other contexts. In her thorough study of the English tradition of the romantic fragment poem, Marjorie Levinson takes pains to establish its relative independence from German philosophy: "The English Romantics practiced the fragment; they generated the form naïvely – not in the absence of ideological and material constraints, but without benefit of collaboration, perceived precedent, or theoretical apparatus" (11). While she acknowledges that Shelley, for example, attributed a greater perfection to ancient fragments than he would have to the complete versions of the same objects, she insists that such positions did not inform the rise of the fragmentary forms in the Anglophone

world (29-33). Instead, she locates the rise of the form in the complicated emergence of a species of readers trained over time "to conceive textual irresolution as a formal fact susceptible to structural and semantic manipulation" (48). According to Levinson, reading such poems comes to be about the pursuit of a hypothetical closure through the imaginary completion of that which was presented as unfinished. This experience would, of course, be a far cry from the speculative union of subject and object in the work of art sought by Schlegel.

In France at the end of the 18th century, a similarly fragmentary tradition sprung up, but it too is not reducible to the German model. Surveying images of severed heads and broken bodies in her book *The Body in Pieces*, Linda Nochlin writes, "Put in its simplest terms, the omnipresence of the fragment – in a variety of forms and with a wide range of possible significance – in the visual representation of the French Revolution had something to do with the fact that 'the French Revolution was caught in the throes of destroying one civilization before creating a new one'" (10). Here, the fragment becomes a marker of political upheaval, a site that can be variously invested with sentiments of celebration and mourning. As she traces the persistence of fragmentary imagery in the wake of the French Revolution, however, Nochlin diligently declines to treat the guillotine and its victims as formative of this new attention to broken forms. To the contrary, she concludes, "I firmly believe that the fragment in visual representation must be treated as a series of discrete, ungerneralizable situations. Were I to attempt to construct a general theory of the fragment, however, I would be sure to establish it on a model of difference rather than attempt to construct a unified field of discourse" (56). While her subtitle promises to treat "The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity," she holds in the end that it is only a metaphor for modernity insofar as the concept modernity itself resists the final closure of a fixed definition.

As these brief sketches of distinct histories suggest, fragmentation itself is fragmentary. To the extent that it is a concept, it is a concept in pieces, pieces that never quite cohere into a

meaningful whole. Thanks to its foundational role in much of our contemporary critical thought, the German romantic tradition remains almost unavoidable in any discussion of fragmentary texts. In particular, the Schlegelian account of the fragment's orientation toward and embrace of totality grounds almost every attempt to understand deliberately incomplete art. It should not, however, become the only way to interpret fragments. To the contrary, as the Sapphic corpus and the Renaissance rediscovery of ancient material reveal, any investigation of fragments must take up questions of pleasure and desire. On the one hand, fragments, as Anne Carson suggests, are exciting in their own right, while on the other, fragments often seem to long for one another. With this longing, they encourage us to think not just about what they mean on their own – however enjoyable such speculations may be – but also of how they work in relation to one another. Schlegelian texts like the *Athenaeum Fragments* and the *Dialogue on Poetry* seem largely unprepared to take such a position seriously, and it is in this, above all else, that they meet their limit. When Nochlin suggests that any general theory of fragmentation would have to attend to difference, she refers primarily to the difference between different epochs and artists. Nevertheless, we might reasonably extend this demand to the study of fragments themselves. Contra Schlegel, fragments do not all do the same thing and they do not all do it in the same way. If we are to move ahead, then, we must imagine a new methodology for approaching fragmentary texts, one predicated on difference rather than speculative union in the absolute.

CHAPTER TWO

Gertrude Stein's Silences

In July of 2011, a security guard at the San Francisco Jewish Museum created a scene when he attempted to eject a lesbian couple from an exhibit on the life of Gertrude Stein for the crime of holding hands (Nevius). Reports of the incident drew out the cheap irony inherent in it, noting not just how strange it was that such an event could take place in a city like San Francisco, but also that it could occur in an exhibit celebrating the career of a lesbian icon (North). Yet according to a familiar critical tradition, this denial of lesbianism may be less ironic than it seems, insofar as it is arguably of a piece with Stein's own failure to name her desires. Public as her coupledom with Alice B. Toklas may have been, the accusation goes, she nevertheless performed a denial of lesbianism not unlike that perpetrated by the museum guard. Indeed, like the guard, she sometimes seems to pull apart that which has been linked, making fragments where bonds have been.

Such assertions are almost certainly inadequate, but as is often the case with critiques of Stein, the way in which they fall short nevertheless speaks to her real methodology. Ultimately, Stein's own complicated relation to her "sexuality" must be understood in terms of her equally fragmentary orientation toward modernism. For Stein, nothing marks the revolutionary character of contemporary art – and perhaps of all new things – so much as the invisibility of its novelty in its own moment. This fact manifests in her memoiristic texts through a variety of interrelated absences – not just the refusal to discuss sexuality as such, but also in her reluctance to describe the modernist art works that she admired and even in her elision of artists she loved. When one reads these points of fragmentation in dialogue with one another, Stein's present yields a new way of imagining the

future, one in which the richness of what *has been* will become visible at last. The fact that this vision is still not altogether clear to many of those who watch over Stein's legacy – and the events at the San Francisco Jewish Museum are nothing if not an allegory of this tendency – is far from an indication of the failure of Stein's project. Instead, it is a call to engage in its silences anew.

I.

Despite a long literary critical tradition that perpetually sutures shattered forms to lost desires, Gertrude Stein's readers remain troubled by Stein's apparently vexed relationship to her own lesbianism. Anyone who offers *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* to undergraduates in a queer studies course is bound to meet with confusion at first. Who, one's students ask, are all these women and why can't they look at the pictures already? To the unprepared, this far-reaching memoir of lesbian coupledom is all but without evidence of lesbian desire itself. What's more, they observe, the word "lesbian" is nowhere to be found! Significantly, this is a novel that is not without its gestures to a kind of ticklish sexuality: Picasso's fiery relationship with Fernande Olivier, for example, features prominently in the early chapters, though only in passing does Stein mention that Olivier is his mistress and not his spouse. There *is* scandal to be had here if one knows where to go looking for it, but amidst it all, the relationship between the book's eponymous narrator and its actual author-protagonist goes outrageously undescribed.

At times, Stein actively plays with the putative unameability of this bond, all but calling out her own refusal of a queer nomenclature.[12] Nowhere is this more evident than in a widely cited but rarely discussed paragraph in which Stein has Toklas describe the book she had planned to write before beginning the one the reader now holds:

[12] Such conscious attention to what one's texts lack might well be the defining feature of the fragmentary novel.

> Before I decided to write this book my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein, I had often said that I would write, The wives of geniuses I have sat with. I have sat with so many. I have sat with wives who were not wives, of geniuses who were real geniuses. I have sat with real wives of geniuses who were not real geniuses. I have sat with wives of geniuses, of near geniuses, of would be geniuses, in short I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses. (Stein, *Toklas*, 14)

Given its tightly woven intricacies, and its suggestive way of tarrying with the risk of paradox, this passage presents itself as a sort of riddle, or perhaps as a logic puzzle. Who, one is left wondering, are the real geniuses and who the would-be geniuses? Perhaps more importantly, what makes a wife not a real wife, and how would we know if we met her? Not insignificantly, these remarks come on the heels of a still-more notorious passage at the close of the first chapter that finds "Toklas" announcing that Stein was one of only three geniuses that she had met in her life: "I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken" (5). The geniuses in question here are Stein herself, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead, and though Whitehead's wife is a "real wife," she will not appear for many chapters and then only to vanish again. Fernande Olivier, by contrast, appears repeatedly, even as her bond with Picasso seems perpetually in the process of dissolving. As such, Stein's enigmatic evocation of the book that Toklas has left unwritten offers a cheeky suggestion, but only a suggestion, that Toklas herself is the single real wife of a real genius to be found. The book she would have written could therefore only be yet another memoir.

Toklas suggests this in part through the kind of cross-referential implication that all of the more explicitly fragmentary works I turn to in subsequent chapters embrace. The strategically incomplete syntax of Stein's prose demands that we read in this very way.. Note, for example, the absent "of" between "this book" and "my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein." This exclusion productively suggests that *Toklas* itself might be indistinguishable from the bond between these two women. Here an absence promises to become a point of union, linking together bodies and forms that are and remain incomplete in their own condition and context. As we have already seen in the

prior chapter, fragmentation has long been understood as the paradoxical signpost of totality, insofar as the incomplete thing promises a whole that would otherwise remain inconceivable. Stein's incomplete syntax – and, as we will see, her interruptive approach to storytelling – suggests a more thoroughgoing logic of fragmentation. The relationship between "this book" and the "twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein" which it both does and does not stand in for proposes the possibility that incomplete things might lean on one another. As a bond predicated on the dissolution or disappearance of bonds, this connection does not, as in the traditional understanding of the fragment, point to something complete by dint of the whole's absence. Instead, it marks an entry into an always ongoing process of *making* complete, not *bricolage* in the old Levi-Straussian sense of selective recombination, but what we might cheekily call *pluscolage*, an endless labor of addition.

Both this additive process and the torturous involutions of Stein's riddling discussion of wives and non-wives find a striking double on the first page of the novel – a page to which I will return in an altogether different comtext below – where Stein renders the bonds of biological family similarly enigmatic. "Toklas" reports, "My mother's father was a pioneer, he came to California in '49, he married my grandmother who was very fond of music. She was a pupil of Clara Schumann's father. My mother was a quiet charming woman named Emilie" (3). A kind of informational excess overwhelms and undoes the presentation of family history, such that we immediately have both too much and too little information about Toklas' origins at our disposal.[13] In the process, Stein muddles Toklas' genealogy to such an extent that the actual valences of her family become difficult to track.

Formally, the juxtaposition of these two passages, the first of which renders the bonds of blood unreadable and the second of which does much the same to marriage, implies that new kinds

[13] This moment might well be read as a prehistoric antecedent to recent strains of affective scholarship in which critics, historians, anthropologists and others attempt to accumulate the experiential connections between things without appealing to the symbolic structures through which those things conventionally appear before us. See, for example, Stewart.

of family might emerge out of the gaps and elisions that run through the old. As I will argue in this chapter, the very fragmentary logic through which these new forms of union will emerge allows us to know individuals only by the way they modify others and are modified by others in turn. The trick here is that in this model, a model proposed by Stein's style and by the things she fails to say through it more than it is by those things she actually does assert, there is no way to guarantee in advance who will modify whom and in what ways. In this maneuver, Stein's complex accounts of family and marriage stage much of what is at issue in her approach to incompleteness throughout texts like *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

Despite these foundational warnings, many of Stein's readers remain disappointed by her failure to properly characterize the nature of her relationship with Toklas. Like the Ancient Mariner's vengeful crew, Stein's critics tend to hang the word "lesbian" around her neck, as if in failing to invoke it she had killed the thing that should have led her home. This way of treating Stein has been prevalent at least since the early 1950s, when discussion of her sexuality first began to enter the public conversation, thanks in no small part to the posthumous publication of *Q.E.D.* In a review of this short novel, one that had been written almost half a century before, Edmund Wilson argues that Stein writes opaquely because she cannot publicly articulate her desires:

> The reviewer [Wilson] had occasion some years ago to go through Miss Stein's work chronologically, and he came to the conclusion at that time that the vagueness that began to blur it from about 1910 on and the masking by unexplained metaphors that later made it seem opaque, though partly the result of an effort to emulate modern painting, were partly also due to a need imposed by the problem of writing about relationships between women of a kind that the standards of that era would not have allowed her to describe more explicitly.[14] (Wilson, 581)

One need only look at virtually any other sentence that Wilson wrote in his long career to know that something is amiss here.[15] The trouble begins with his almost excessive flight from the first person,

[14] This passage derives from a review dated September 15, 1951.

[15] The sentence immediately prior to the one quoted above, for example, reads, "It [*Q.E.D.*] is a production of some literary merit and of much psychological interest." Similarly, the sentence following Wilson's brief moment of excess

whereby "the reviewer" ostentatiously takes the place of the more comfortably Wilsonian "one," engendering an almost clinical distance. In the course of the 91 words that follow this peculiar introduction, Wilson allows his sentence to double back on itself repeatedly until its structure is overwhelmed by his apparent need to clarify his claims, or at least to limit the scope of their domain. And finally there is the puzzling thing itself, "relationships between women," a domestic euphemism that today makes it seem as if Stein had been obliged to stay mum about her book group. Indeed, on the two occasions that Wilson himself uses the word lesbian, he capitalizes it, as when he explains that *Q.E.D.* details "the tangled relationships of three Lesbian American girls" (581). Here, his use of the upper case, coupled with its juxtaposition to "American," seems intended to emphasize the strictly geographic origins of the word, despite its obviously sexual significance in the present.[16] All the while, by filing Stein under the honorific "Miss," Wilson happily misses the obligation to characterize her relationship with Toklas as a marriage, though his knowledge of Stein's own semi-private use of the term surely spurred his initial speculations. Wilson thereby enacts an erasure of his own, even as he calls attention to Stein's erasure of sexuality.[17]

Despite his own surprising trepidation, the connection Wilson establishes between Stein's supposed inability to articulate her desire gave shape and her circuitous style would become a leitmotif of much of the criticism of her work that followed. Over three decades later, one finds Catharine Stimpson explicitly grappling with this conceit. Stein, Stimpson argued was unable to speak plainly of her pleasures, a condition that led her "to fix monstrous qualities of the female

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reads, "It seemed obvious that her queer little portraits and her mischievously baffling prose poems did often deal with subjects of this sort."

[16] On the other hand, this adjectival use of the word may bring with it a surprising critical richness, though it surely does so in spite of itself. See Villarejo's *Lesbian Rule*, which I discuss in my introduction.

[17] Indeed, in *Light*, Wilson's appends a brief note to the end of the review in which he bizarrely asserts that he may have originally "exaggerated in this review the Lesbian aspect of Gertrude Stein's obscurity" (586). Having had the opportunity to review newer materials, and clearly on more familiar ground, he explains, "One feels rather that the ruminative dimness is the result of an increasing remoteness in her personal relationships." The doctoral candidate wonders how these "personal relationships" differ from those "between women" that Wilson alluded to in his earlier formulation. I return to this indistinct distinction between erotic desire and the desire for relation more generally in my final chapter, which takes up the work of David Markson.

body" in language as "somagrams" (67). As Stimpson goes on to explain, both Stein and many of those who wrote of her circumvented her lesbianism by calling attention to the excess of her body. In her fatness, her material solidity, they found a way not to speak of her sexuality (Stimpson 68). For some readers, this approach becomes a paradigm of lesbian experience itself, as it does for Teresa de Laurentis, who deploys it as an example of the ways that "lesbian writers and artists have sought variously to escape gender, to deny it, transcend it, or perform it in excess," even as they nevertheless manage to inscribe the erotic in one way or another (de Laurentis 159). de Laurentis' telling embrace of Stimpson speaks to the ways in which readers have repeatedly turned Stein into a martyr in the ongoing quest for lesbian self-representation.

More recently, Madelyn Detloff has read across the grain of this tradition, showing how Stein's complex reflections on her relationships provide ways of understanding a variety of issues, especially with regard to her often reactionary politics. For Detloff, Stein becomes a figure of shame, albeit one who "works apotropaically to ward off shame by representing it" (53). While Detloff's approach is a good deal more complex than many of those that preceded it, it still follows from the assumption that the apparent absence of "lesbian" is a point of crisis. In another telling recent example, Janet Malcolm traces the parallels between Stein's refusal to discuss her sexuality and her general reticence about her Jewishness. Malcolm implicitly suggests that textual points of fragmentation – that is, ways in which texts seem incomplete – are exchangeable, but she is reluctant to allow them to comment on one another. As such, Stein's disavowal of her sexuality becomes little more than a way in to that which is the more important issue for Malcolm, her reticence about ethnic and religious identity. One imagines that it is, as in the Barthesian formulation of myth,

precisely the long-established prior critical tradition of worrying over the former silence that reinforces and enables Malcolm's more thoroughgoing claims about the latter.[18]

One idea prevails across this critical tradition, the conceit that Stein's lesbianism has been repressed, emerging only in distorted or distended forms. Implicitly drawing on work such as Terry Castle's theorization of Sapphic spectralization in *The Apparitional Lesbian*, many recent scholars argue that this absence is an illusory one insofar as Stein's texts are invariably haunted by that which they must pass over (Castle 28-65). Stimpson's insistence on the structuring importance of absent lesbianism, for example, leads her to claim that Stein's "happiness with Toklas diluted the guilts and stains of a homosexuality that violated the 'decent' norms of the heterosexual bourgeois family to which Stein had once been committed" (72). Though Stimpson sets "decent" in quotation marks, it is not at all clear who she is citing. We are left with a Stein who looks less like herself than her friend Etta Cone, a woman who, like Queen Victoria, is said to have wondered, "After all, what can two women *do*?" (Burke 547). When Stimpson overlays such opinions on Stein, she begs the question. She proposes that Stein shares these views because she assume that the "taboo against mentioning lesbianism" (Stimpson 69) is the single and most important absence in Stein's oeuvre. Moreover, she implies that this absence was a product of Stein's problematic situation rather than something she worked through in her own right. To take such an approach is to embrace the simplest kind of fragmentary logic, according to which a text's lack is the sole ground of it orientation toward an otherwise unknowable totality. Everything in the text becomes an insubstantial sign of that which is substantially absent. In its own turn, this tendency paradoxically enables reading strategies that may have little to do with what one finds on the printed page.

[18] That is, Malcolm empties out a prior critical sign in such a way as to turn it into the signifier for a new signified in a way that draws its force from the earlier total sign (Barthes, *Mythologies* 111-137).

Interestingly, however, the facts of Stein's biography complicate the more conventional understanding of the way that such ghostly traces of desire arise from societal repression. While it would be wrong to deny that Stein faced social prejudice, it is not at all clear that these external forces had turned her into some kind of radically denying puritan as Stimpson and others sometimes claim. Indeed, the most profound repression of Stein's lesbian past took place at the behest of Toklas herself. In the early thirties, Toklas was enraged to discover evidence of Stein's youthful romance with May Bookstaver, a romance that had concluded years before the lifelong companions met. In her anger, Toklas famously destroyed all evidence of the relationship with the exception of the then unpublished manuscript *Q.E.D.* (Souhami 187).[19] The point of this example is that the apparent erasure of lesbianism as such may in part be a product of this particular lesbian couple's complex conditions of shared existence. This does not, however, mean that we should, like Stimpson, hold that their bond is entirely turned inward. Stimpson ultimately argues that Stein's language is an anti-language, directed at and to Toklas and by connection "a homosexual anti-society" of which they were citizens (76). Following Stimpson herself, as well as the way her claims have been taken up by de Laurentis, accepting this argument means holding that Stein writes for and to a lesbian audience. Why, then, would she remain structurally incapable of naming her desires?

Among other things, asserting that Stein directs her work at some sort of sexual underground means neglecting her tendentious relationship with *and desire for* a reading public, a question intimately linked to her complex relationship with modernism. Instead, one should, like Sara Blair, attend to the mutually constitutive relationship between the Stein-Toklas couple and the modernist scene in which they were engaged. Where Wilson's foundational argument would have us

[19] As Ulla Dydo has shown, this event had profound (if peculiar) consequences for Stein's own literary practice at the time. In "Stanzas in Meditation," which is roughly contemporaneous with this incident, Stein laboriously replaced every use of the word "may" with "can," even when it referred to the month and/or resulted in a grammatical impossibility. Dydo argues that Stein made these bizarre revisions in response to Toklas' jealous insistence that Stein erase all trace of May Bookstaver from her work . (Dydo 489-491).

believe that the elimination of "relationships between women" grounds Stein's style, scholarship like that of Blair helps remind us of the profoundly social genesis of almost everything that Stein wrote. Blair argues that the space of 27 Rue de Fleurus, where Stein and Toklas made a home for much of their life together, and where they famously entertained hundreds of guests, should be understood as a space of modernist relation and creation. For Blair, 27 Rue de Fleurus offers an image of the generative co-contamination of the intimate and the public, an environment that makes it impossible to speak, as Stimpson does, of Stein's writings as examples of the way "monsters speak up within, and for, their lair" (Stimpson 76).[20] Once one begins to think in these terms, one cannot help but acknowledge that if lesbian relations go underrepresented in Stein's work, so too do a great many other things. Ultimately, these absences, these plural points of fragmentation, serve to enable relations rather than to deny them. For Stein, to leave something out is to leave open the possibility of new forms of connection and association – not just those forms that resemble her bond with Toklas, but all those that underwrite her literary practice. Absence must be understood as the differential motor of Stein's memoiristic prose. That which is excluded enables relationships of all kinds rather than precluding them. To understand how this labor of fragmentation works for Stein, we must therefore look first to her always troubled position within the networks of Parisian modernism itself.

II.

From a certain perspective, Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* stands at the origin of the contemporary memoir. A real fear simmers beneath the hysteria generated by recent autobiographical fabulations like *A Thousand Little Pieces* – the terrifying possibility that to speak of one's past is always to compose a critical fiction. We never call up are never neutral versions of our

[20] Stimpson, "Somagrams," 76.

private histories. They are always already sites of evaluation and inquiry by dint of the way recollection ruptures them from their original contexts and presents them to us piecemeal. This fragmentary relationship to the past is at the heart of Stein's style in *Toklas*. Ventriloquizing her longtime companion, Stein willfully leaves out more than she lets in, repeatedly returning to particular moments and details, while skipping over others without apology. Ultimately, Stein's narrative evasions and elisions prove essential to her evaluation of the aesthetic moment that she describes, even as they speak to modernism's own fundamentally incomplete character. That this approach has gone largely unnoticed, even in discussions about modernist fragmentation writ large, however, speaks to the precarious status of her peculiar fragmentary stylistics.

The rare attempt by an unpopular artist to turn a profit that actually managed to do so, Stein's autobiography was an almost immediate success, selling thousands of copies and generating much needed income for its author (Souhami 189-193). This enthusiastic reception was surely due in no small part to the book's gossipy tone, which promised an entry point into the hermetic world of European modernist art. Just as the *Autobiography* itself simplified Stein's notoriously difficult prose by comingling it with her partner's conversational style, her novelistic memoir's anecdotal tone offered its readers a sketchy map of the twists and turns of an alien, but inviting culture. This promise clearly troubled some of the book's putative subjects, many of whom felt – no doubt rightly – that Stein had misrepresented them in one way or another.

Public frustration with Stein's disfigurations of the modernist landscape came to a head in *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, a pamphlet published by Maria and Eugene Jolas as a supplement to their literary journal *transition* in February 1935. As Eugene Jolas explains in his prefatory note, the intention of this pamphlet was to offer a number of artists "the opportunity to refute those parts of Miss Stein's book which they consider require it" (Jolas 2). Jolas' phrase is odd, insofar as it couples with the project's grandiose title to synechdochally condemn Stein herself for her book's faults. Yet

even as one thing (*Toklas*) stands in for the whole of another (Stein), Jolas holds that this condemnation can be brought about through a labor of fragmentation. It will be enough, he suggests, to ferret out "those parts" of the book that are wrong to show that the whole business should be thrown out the window. Here, then, the prototypical logic of fragmentation seems already to be at work, a movement in which each part stands in for the whole, and that whole in turn becomes the site of a potentially infinite series of substitutions: This or that error in this or that part of *Toklas* can be extracted from the whole to show the error of all of *Toklas* and the error of all of *Toklas* unveils the fundamental badness of Stein herself. As we will see, this approach leads Stein's critics to reinscribe the very tendencies they challenge in Stein, tendencies that are essential to the ways in which *Toklas* functions.

Perhaps most telling among the various responses in the *Testimony* is that of André Salmon who paradoxically faults Stein for saying too much precisely insofar as she says too little. A relatively minor figure in *Toklas*, Salmon appears only during a sequence in which Stein describes a banquet held by Fernande Olivier and Pablo Picasso in honor of Henri Rosseau. Over the course of the scene, Salmon – who is described as "then a rising young poet and journalist" (*Toklas* 106) – becomes too drunk and is ejected from the room by some of the other attendees. Much later in the evening, the guests discover Salmon asleep in the front room of the atelier, "and surrounding him, half chewed, were a box of matches, a petit bleu and my [Toklas'] yellow fantaisie."[21] These comical descriptions of drunken excess are in keeping with the gossipy tone of Stein's novel. Relatively insignificant figures like Salmon wander in and present themselves to the reader less to tell their own stories than to texture Stein's version of the Parisian modernist scene.

In a compelling study of some of Stein's more recondite plays, Chad Bennett has suggested that for Stein, gossip becomes a way of resisting, or at least troubling, stable claims to identity.

[21] Stein has "Toklas" add, "Imagine my feelings even at three o'clock in the morning" (*Toklas* 107).

Bennett writes, "uncoupling gossip and the figure of the gossip, Stein's play helps us to reimagine gossip as a theatrical space in which one might float on the sound of dish, both risking and resisting the embodiments of identity and performance" (313). According to this approach, gossip engenders an environment in which identity becomes flexible precisely because the language of gossip seems to come from everywhere and nowhere at once. Bennett productively suggests that a formal approach to gossip in Stein makes it more difficult to differentiate works like *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* which take gossip as their overt subjects from the more difficult experimental works (313-314). In this light, the nebulous climate of modernism Stein creates in *Toklas* might be read as structurally similar to the oral and aural tapestry of the landscape plays. Pace Bennett's reading, then, characters like Salmon would wander in not to demonstrate something about their own personhood, but to help disrupt all claims to identity. Looking ahead, we also find an intimation of what is at stake in the equally interruptive climate of sexuality that Stein generates.

Nevertheless, Stein's own way of articulating – in at least two senses – her relationship to gossip in *Toklas* suggests that she embraces more discrete and stable experiences of referentiality than Bennet's approach allows. Seemingly remarking on her own project, Stein famously has Toklas report, "Lipschitz is an excellent gossip and Gertrude Stein adores the beginning and middle and end of a story and Lipschitz was able to supply several missing parts of several stories" (*Toklas* 203). The conjunctions that separate "beginning" from "middle" and "middle" from "end" in this sentence demonstrate that Stein's seeks to connect things otherwise distinct from one another rather than produce a seamless synthesis. The sentence as a whole echoes this structure through the ands that separate what Lipschitz "is" and "was" doing from what Stein "adores." Here, then, the point is not that gossip involves the reconstitution of temporalized narratives, but that it involves the effort to assemble a sum of things otherwise known only in pieces and parts. *Toklas* as a whole embraces the narrative style suggested by Stein's doubled syntax in this passage, suturing together its distinct

components in a way that calls attention to the stitches that bind them rather than covering them over.

Understanding what Steinian gossip conjoins entails attending to the multitude of brief appearances by a variety of players throughout the novel. Here, Mark Goble's ingenious account of cameo appearances in *Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography* offers a critical key to the way that gossip works for her. A cameo shows a version of its subject in miniature, turning the proliferation of brief appearances throughout these autobiographical novels into "a canny strategy on Stein's part, an attempt… to offer a 'diminutive' or 'manipulatable' account of modernism and modernity" (Goble 98). But if cameos make their subjects accessible through their smallness, they also do so by leaving a great deal out. As Goble notes, cameos rely on a degree of readerly knowledge – particularly, the ability to recognize the figure who makes an appearance. Accordingly, "The cameo appearance draws a charmed circle of self-congratulatory viewership, as if we too were part of this family business that is the culture industry" (Goble 92). The reader who recognizes what is at stake in a cameo appearance can inhabit the illusion of involvement in a circle of gossip. Indeed, it is incumbent on a cameo-rich text's audience "to read *against* the reduction in scale and fashion their own highly personal surplus of meaning" (Goble 103).

To invoke a theoretical vocabulary on which Goble draws elsewhere, this makes the cameo a "low definition" object in the sense that Marshall McLuhan might use the term. That is, it conveys a paucity of the information needed to understand it and thereby invites a high degree of participation from the reader (McLuhan 22-23). More immediately, however, this process of fantasized involvement calls up the kind of fragmentary opperations that Leonard Barkan describes in the relationship of Italian Renaissance artists to the pieces and parts of ancient statuary. One suspects that this way of making modernism available to a broad readership – indeed, this way of inviting readers into a gossipy participation in the modernist scene – helped disturb the authors of the

Testimony. Indeed, this same tendency has been central to the academic reception of *Toklas*, a book that critics often dismiss for the way it seems to make Stein accessible, thereby eliding the attendant difficulties of "real" works – works that take work – like "Tender Buttons" and "Stanzas in Meditation."[22] Further, the hospitable invitation implicit in the structures of Steinian gossip productively runs perpendicular to another tendency in the novel – one that will be described in greater detail below – the tendency to treat modern art as something that no one knows how to look at.

In any case, it becomes increasingly clear that the cameo appearances with which Stein peppers her novel have more to do with providing her readers a way into the discursive networks that her book navigates than they do with providing full and final accounts of any of those networks' nodes. Importantly, they do so by providing strategically *incomplete* accounts of the things they describe. Hence the abrupt departure of Salmon from the novel when, upon waking and politely exiting the building with the other guests, "All of a sudden with a wild yell [he] rushed down the hill" (*Toklas* 107). Insofar as the reasons for his dramatic departure go unexplained and his future is left uncertain, Salmon's exit functions as what we might term a conjunctive rupture. Within the fabric of the text as a whole, his "wild yell" provides an emphatic "AND" that connects what has come before to what will come after without winding their threads together. In lieu of a continuous, orderly story, Stein offers a necessarily incomplete attempt to depict a total scene, the distinct components of which she crudely sutures together in a manner that shows the stitches rather than hiding them. Quite simply, what she offers in this sequence is a story about modernism as such – a modernism often embodied, her detractors would suggest, by its self-proclaimed avatar, Stein – in which Salmon is a piece of the puzzle rather than a real player.

[22] Here, Bennett's suggestion that Stein's "audience" works and her more difficult texts might not be so dissimilar when studied through the lens of gossip productively returns.

While Salmon's own understanding of Stein's project in *Toklas* seems to have been altogether different, he was, nevertheless, upset by the use the book had made of him. Almost thirty years after the events Stein describes took place, he writes in the *Testimony*, "I am not angry but I think Gertrude Stein went too far when she made all these things public" (Jolas 14). One is reminded here of Barthes' suggestion that gossip is dreadful because it tends to reduce the other to the status of the pronoun, stripping him or her even of the specificity granted by a name. He writes, "When I realize that common discourse takes possession of my other and restores that other to me in the bloodless form of a universal substitute, applied to all the things which are not here, it is as if I saw my other dead, reduced, shelved in an urn upon the wall of the great mausoleum of language" (*Lover's Discourse* 185). Confronted with a version of his younger self that stands in more for the excesses of early Twentieth century modernism than it does for the deeds of a real body, Salmon is no doubt right to be offended. Stein has turned his younger self in to a museum piece, an object that can be interesting only insofar as it has been separated from its living context.

By way of rejoinder, Salmon suggests that the joke was on Stein all along, and that this joke hit home precisely because of how little she understood. Speaking of his friendships with Apollinaire, Max Jacob, and others, Salmon writes, "We invented an artificial world with countless jokes, rites, and expressions that were quite unintelligible to others. Obviously, she did not understand the rather peculiar French we used to speak. Furthermore, we saw 'the Steins', as we used to call her and Miss Toklas, very rarely, and I was at her house only once" (Jolas 13). On the one hand, Salmon argues that Stein was herself a marginal witness to a world whose totality she could not begin to grasp. This "world" serves here as a metaphor for modernism itself, the intricacies of which Gertrude Stein did not understand, if the various contributors to the *Testimony* are to be believed. Significantly, though, he also insists that she did not comprehend the *language* that constituted this world, such that her description of him in *Toklas* arises from bits and pieces of

conversations and performances whose sum eluded her. If Stein, in her gossipy way, said too much about the younger Salmon, as he suggests at the start of his entry in the *Testimony*, it therefore can only have been because she did not understand enough. Salmon identifies in *Toklas* a parodic version of the basic critical movement of fragmentation, in which the loss of the whole enables the speculative investigation of forms of totality that would otherwise be inaccessible. Moreover, in the process, Salmon salaciously suggests that he too is capable of saying too much when he calls attention to what Stein has effectively left out – the specifics of her *de facto* marriage to Toklas. As we will see, he here repeats the very mistake that he attributes to Stein, failing to grasp the impossible whole immanent within *Toklas*' network of narrative elisions and exclusions.

This tendency to formally repeat the very problems that Stein's critics identify in *Toklas* resonates throughout the *Testimony*. It is tempting, for example, to point to the cheap, accidental hypocrisy of Braque's entry. Braque first claims that in her monomania Stein failed to understand that cubism, was a discipline built around the annihilation of personality, not a cult of personality (Jolas 13). A few short lines later, however, he faults her for not telling the best story about their interaction, as if troubled that his own personality has not come through clearly enough (Jolas 14). Yet this sort of comically overt rupture between theory and practice – or, perhaps, desire and renunciation – plays out on a more striking register in the way that the *Testimony*'s contributors present their concerns. Particularly striking is the manner in which Matisse and Maria Jolas literally fragment *Toklas*, breaking off pieces of it in order to better get at that which is supposedly wrong with the whole. Matisse responds to each of these fragments in turn, such that his entry reads like a monastic commentary on an esoteric forbidden volume. His intends to correct and he remains wedded to the letter of *Toklas*, but his version of the novel is still every bit as incomplete as he claims its version of him is. By contrast, at the start of her own entry, Maria Jolas collapses together all those passages from *Toklas* that concern her, her husband Eugene Jolas, or their literary journal.

She thereby offers a heavily bowdlerized version of the novel as a whole, as well as, in her own corrective remarks, an ostensibly more accurate rewriting of it. By further fragmenting – or, perhaps, making explicit the fragmentary qualities of – *Toklas*, the authors of the *Testimony* clearly hope to recuperate the novel's basic incompleteness. Yet one might reasonably suggest that they manage only to reinscribe that incompleteness at a still more individual level of remove. Obviously, what both of these approaches share is a narcissistic practice of fragmentation that criticizes the blinding self-regard of another by blindly ignoring all that does not concern one's own self. Even as the various contributors repeatedly claim that Stein did not understand the modernist scene as a whole, they inadvertently suggest the necessity of her approach, showing that modernism was never some unified field that could be reclaimed once and for all, but instead was always a panoply of subjective positions, each of them engaging in its own form of selective vision. According to this understanding, to be a modernist might well mean to be a fragment that mistakes itself for a whole, blind to the other incomplete things that surround it.

Always cheekily self-deprecating in her responses to her critics, Stein replied to the *Testimony* in her unfairly maligned *Everybody's Autobiography*, demonstrating just how fully she saw through the veneer of corrective scolding to the core of self-concern. After describing the horror with which some of *Toklas*' unwitting subjects greeted its publication, Stein notes, "Later on they wrote in English it was written in English in transition it was never written in French, Matisse said that Picasso was not the great painter of the period that his wife did not look like a horse and that he was certain that the omelette had been an omelette or something. Braque said that he had invented cubism, he did not say this but at any rate if what he said was so then that was so" (*Everybody's* 33). Though she moves quickly to the specific charges of those who attacked her – especially those of the most famous among the group – it is surely no accident that Stein begins by addressing the language of the *Testimony*. In doing so, she refers obliquely to the accusation – made most clearly by

Andre Salmon, who otherwise goes unmentioned, in the passage above – that her mastery of French was insufficient to comprehend the scene she claimed to describe. Very much to the contrary, her refusal to typographically distinguish *transition* suggests that modernism must always be understood in terms of the transit between one discourse, language, or place and another. As such, she seems to recognize the *Testimony* as contiguous with her own project of gossip as both explanation and exploration in *Toklas*.

On a more pedestrian register, the features of Matisse and Braque's contributions that Stein calls out serve as the sum of her own critical apparatus. She singles out Matisse in particular for his uncommonly petty concerns. Her allusion to "the omelette" is telling, referring as it does to a story early in *Toklas* in which Matisse presumes his right to stay for dinner and for his troubles is served fried eggs by the Stein's housekeeper, because, "It takes the same number of eggs and the same amount of butter but is shows less respect, and he will understand" (*Toklas* 8). In highlighting this minor incident, she calls attention to the excessively personal, petty nature of Matisse's complaints in such a way as to suggest a continuity between his selfishness in the past and his persistent self-regard in the present. Perhaps more to the point, the tautological form Stein employs as she paraphrases Matisse – "the omelette had been an omelette" – points to the impossibility of confirming the validity of one version of a story over another through anything other than the brute force of an aggressive assertion. The ambiguous shrug of the "or something" that concludes the sentence offers a way out. As if waving off any commitment to final validity, Stein here acknowledges that it might be possible to set any two versions of a story beside one another, allowing them to chatter, argue and gossip with one another as each undermines the truth claims of the other through the very act by which it insists upon its own. As we will see, this same principle underlies the repetitive phrases and figures which run through Stein's corpus, but here Stein goes a step farther than she would elsewhere, implying that such transit is possible between texts as well.

The comfort Stein shows with the mutual presence of stories that never quite lock into place with one another goes some way toward explaining why she never explicitly replies to Matisse's boldest critique. Concluding his entry, Matisse writes in a high rhetorical spirit, "Her book is composed, like a picture puzzle, of different pictures which at first, by their very chaos, give an illusion of the movement of life… In short, it is more like a harlequin's costume the different pieces of which, having been more or less invented by herself, have been sewn together without taste and without relation to reality" (Jolas 8). Stein declines to respond to this charge because she need not do so. Matisse has done nothing other than explain *Toklas* as it is and as it is evidently meant to be. Paul K. Alkon observes that the attachment of the *Testimony* to an issue of *transition* is not without irony, given "that the *Autobiography* ever since has been mainly charged by its enemies with the fault of doing one of the things *transition* was founded to encourage" (880). Alkon refers to the grounding principles of the publication like the idea that narrative should transform reality rather than merely restage it and the idea that literature should disrupt the regimes of time. To all this, one might reasonably add that in its various fragmentary ways, the *Testimony* as a whole is no more or less of a patchwork than *Toklas*. They differ only in that Stein's book makes a virtue of its silences and failures, offering its fragmentary character to the future, while the *Testimony*'s contributors each see their own version as the end of the story. This is true in no small part because Stein's bizarre ventriloquism of her partner willfully undermines the certainty of her every claim, while her critics maintain a dogged commitment to the radical validity of their various subjective stances.

One of the most peculiar illustrations in the first edition of *Toklas* clearly demonstrates the book's self-undermining structure. As Alkon notes, opposite the novel's *final* page – on which Stein, though still writing in Toklas' voice, identifies herself as the author of the novel – one finds a photographic reproduction of the *first* page of the book. Alkon, who imagines a reader inclined look over a book's illustrations before turning to its actual contents, proposes that this image complicates

the temporality of reading itself: "Calling attention to the first page also invites attention to the last page (printed opposite the final illustration), which will therefore often become the first printed page actually read" (Alkon 850). As such, the novel's first readers would have been confronted with the text's ultimate revelation of its duplicity from the start. As Alkon asserts, this final image demonstrates that, for the reader, illustrations in such texts serve as both anticipations of what is to come and as externalized memories of the already read. Insofar as the reproduced manuscript page reenacts this experiential doubling on the shape of the narrative itself, it also becomes Exhibit A of the manner in which *Toklas* embraces the temporal disruptions that *transition* supposedly privileged.

Perhaps more tellingly, however, this image conflates Stein and Toklas themselves without fully collapsing the two women into one another.[23] Famously, the final paragraph of *Toklas* calls attention to both Stein's authorship of the text as a whole and the work's status as a complicated fiction. Stein concludes, "About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it" (*Toklas* 252).[24] In invoking Defoe rather than, say, the author of a ghost written memoir, Stein calls definite (or initial, if Alkon is to be believed) attention to the fictive quality of the book she has just finished. Yet as the manuscript page would surely have reminded the book's early readers, Toklas will still have her own indirect say.

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[23] This distinction of the two women at the very point of their encircled union might allay the worries of Madelyn Detloff who express an important anxiety about readings that embrace the romantic sameness of Stein and Toklas. Detloff writes, "A lack of psychic boundries between people in a romantic couple is something that would be seen as worrisome in a heterosexual relationship. Why a similar dissolution of boundaries between women would be celebrated as erotic, subversive or empowering is a puzzling question" (Detloff 64). Detloff's concern is altogether right and reasonable, but the distantiation evident in this paratextual loop suggests a form of union that cannot be collapsed into fundamental sameness.

[24] As Ron Ben-Tovim might point out, the reference to Crusoe here is no accident, as *Robinson Crusoe* turns around the protagonist's discovery of a footprint on his supposedly unoccupied island, a revelation that introduces the self-differentiating experience of the social into the previously unified crystalline purity of his language and thought. Crusoe himself is therefore the figure par excellence of the inevitable presence of others in one's own language, a fact that the narratological structure of *Toklas* endlessly plays out (278-292).

Toklas was Stein's primary typist and copy editor, and this handwritten page recalls the silent contribution that turns Stein's ostensibly finished product into the printed volume that the reader holds. More than evidence of a repressed scene of labor, this image affirms that Toklas underwrites Stein's *Toklas* even as Stein overwrites Toklas herself throughout the book. Theirs is a coupledom that is at once asymmetrical and profoundly interdependent. At this moment when the text folds Stein's handwriting into what Toklas makes of it, it collapses the spatial and temporal distance that separates their distinct labors. Yet even as it does so, it reminds us that entangled as their work may be, Toklas' efforts are fundamentally different from those of Stein and vice versa. This sense of the distinction between them resonates throughout the whole of the book, erasing any illusion that Stein sought to produce a smooth, stable surface. The loop that this image forms between the beginning of the book and its end is like a wedding ring designed by MC Escher, forming a shape in which the two women are entwined in and through their difference from one another. In Matisse's terms, they are like the unmatched halves of a harlequin's costume, conforming to the contours of the single body of the text, even as they divide and fragment its form.

If *Toklas* as a whole seems surprisingly comfortable with Matisse's description of it, it may stand in a more tendentious relationship with one of his most personal attacks on Stein. Near the end of his series of responses, Matisse explains that his irritation with Stein has its origins in her failure to financially assist their mutual friend Juan Gris during the First World War, despite her supposed promise that she would do so. He writes, "To my stupefaction I learned later through Gris that she had done nothing about it and that as a result he had been obliged to come to Paris and to make out as best he could. For this reason, I have never seen Gertrude Stein since the first months of the war" (Jolas 7). One imagines that this remark must have struck far closer to home for Stein than his other barbs. In *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein alleges that Matisse had only "had pieces [of *Toklas*] translated to him," playfully suggesting that his fragmentary response to her fragmentary

book was itself based on fragments, just as her own supposedly incomplete experience of modernism was a consequence of linguistic confusion (*Everybody's Autobiography* 32). But Matisse must have read enough of the book to have caught on to her persistent references to Gris, despite his failure to ever appear in the narrative itself for more than a few lines. Indeed, within the book's first twenty pages, she repeatedly has Toklas refer to the premature death of "Juan Gris whom we all loved very much… (he was after Pablo Picasso Gertrude Stein's dearest friend)."[25] Later, in a similar spirit of affective reportage "Toklas" observes, "The most moving thing Gertrude Stein has ever written is The Life and Death of Juan Gris" (*Toklas* 20). Given the apparent intensity of Stein's feelings for Gris it is puzzling that she fails to come to her own defense on this account. Indeed, she hardly mentions him at all in *Everybody's Autobiography* or the similarly focused *Picasso.*

The answer to this enigma – and it is a tangled one – may well begin in the financial terms of Matisse's complaint. As we will see, Juan's persistent, and persistently wan, presence in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* has everything to do with Stein's anxiety about putting a value on modernism. He becomes a site of endless deferral, a promise that Stein makes to the future itself about that which will one day be known to have always been worth something all along. Until that day arrives, however, he remains an allegory for Stein's own orientation toward the incomplete, unrealized and unspeakable – in a word, toward all those things from which one must look away. To understand how she makes use of her friend, however, we must first turn to her unusual arrangement of narrative time.

III.

[25] The parenthetical reference in this sentence is particularly poignant insofar as the lack of punctuation allows no real separation between Stein and Picasso. As such, it melancholically suggests the possibility that overdetermined "after" (which might also mean that he was her dear friend insofar as he painted "in the style of" Picasso, among other things) will never arrive in any meaningful temporal sense insofar as these two friends will never be pulled apart.

For much of its length, but especially throughout its first few chapters, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* jumps backwards, forwards, and even sidewise in time, manifesting a desire for narrative adequacy that actively disrupts the stability of narrative itself. These moments in *Toklas* are striking not merely for the way that Stein turns away from one strand of her narrative to another, but also for the way Stein's peripetetic narrator calls attention to these turns. Astute readers of the book tend to build their accounts of it around these pronouncements. Valerie Rohy, for example, suggests that the way it "repeats and repeats the moment of Alice's arrival in Paris ('once more I have come to Paris')" stages an uncommonly queer relation to the archive ("In the Queer Archive" 357). These phrases, the argument goes, make visible an anxiety about the queer relationship to the past, a basic fear that the story we know is not as complete, full or whole as it could be. That is, they suggest that we must travel again and again back into the thickets of the past until we find the truths that were hiding in it all along. With this anxiety about the fragmentary quality of queer cultural history comes the obligation to revisit again and again what has been in the hopes of filling the story out – getting it right this time and for all time. In Rohy's example, Toklas' arrival in the city of light is only incidentally at stake. Surely more important is the event that that arrival marked: Toklas' first meeting with Stein, who had previously known Toklas primarily through letters that Toklas had written to a mutual friend (Souhami 80). Thus, the moment to which she relentlessly returns is an originary point of lesbian coupledom itself, the historical ground of the union on which much of the book is predicated.

A different approach to *Toklas*' gestural digressions suggests that Stein concerns herself more with the difficulty of studying the future than with the impossibility of adequately capturing the past. Intertwined with *Toklas*' repeated returns to its eponym's transatlantic crossing, Stein has Toklas speak of a more immediate difficulty on visiting Gertrude and Leo Stein's atelier for the first time. Admitted to the atelier with the help of a Yale key – "the only yale key in the quarter at that time" –

her attention is immediately drawn to the less modern things in the room. "Against the walls were several pieces of large italian renaissance furniture and in the middle of the room was a big renaissance table, on it a lovely inkstand, and at one end of it note-books neatly arranged, the kind of note-books french [sic] children use, with pictures of earthquakes and explorations on the outside of them" (*Toklas* 9). Here, Stein marks a strong contrast between the practical passage facilitated by the jagged edged modern key – an object whose singularity calls up the "three little Matisse paintings, the first modern things to cross the Atlantic" that Toklas saw in San Francisco and that called her to Paris in the first place – and the antique objects that arrest and prolong her attention (*Toklas* 5). There is a languorous quality to the description of the desk and its trappings, Stein's descriptions of them doubling the easy offer that these objects of the past make to the present eye.

By contrast, the following sentence begins and ends abruptly, as if cut off from the very moment of observation it claims to describe: "And on the walls right up to the ceiling were pictures" (*Toklas* 9). Like a dreamer's hand, grasping for something that continually recedes from it, the "And" with which this sentence begins struggles to connect new information with old, managing instead only to call attention to a rupture, as in the Steinian experience of gossip. Likewise, the juxtaposition of the two phrases cannot help but call attention to the relative vacuity of the second, drained as it is of the lovingly recalled affective detail that characterizes the older objects. In such a context, it should be no surprise to find that "Toklas" immediately turns away from these unwelcome adornments to "a big cast iron stove" and a variety of miscellaneous objects "from the pockets of Picasso and Gertrude Stein," which "one looked at curiously, but did not touch" (*Toklas* 9). The eye of the narrative settles only on those things that belong to a recognizable – "Renaissance" – and

localizable – "Italian," "French" – past. That which is truly modern – the Yale key, the paintings – becomes something through, or by means of which, one moves.[26]

Toklas' attempt to describe Gertrude and Leo Stein's collection of modern art quickly becomes the textual double of Toklas' own repeated returns to her arrival in Paris. The novel's second chapter is run through with suggestions that it will now, at last, "return to the pictures."[27] More often than not, Stein follows these assurance not with an actual account of what Toklas saw, but with a description of the difficulty of looking at these images in their own moment, as when "Toklas" explains, "It is very difficult now that everybody is accustomed to everything to give some idea of the kind of uneasiness one felt when one first looked at all these pictures on these walls" (*Toklas* 10). In a manner that should be obvious, these narrative evasions seek to model this disquiet. To the very extent that she evades historical specificity, Stein calls it up in a different register, speaking not of the modern things one looked at, but to the very experience of looking at them. This seems to be what she has in mind when, having at last placed Toklas before a muddled wall of Cézannes, Picassos, Renoirs, Matisses, Gauguins, and the like, she writes, "Now I was confused and I looked and I looked and I was confused" (*Toklas* 11). Syntactically, this sentence is almost palindromic in its structure, its four conjoined clauses folding atop one another in a way that suggests the manner in which the confusion on the wall mirrors the confusion inside the spectator. Only the temporalizing adverb "Now" disrupts this formula. Precisely insofar as it pulls the first of these four phrases into the present, it breaks Toklas out of the contemplative, crystalline closure of this super-subjective moment of dehistoricized reflection. This semantic mirror fractures to the very extent that all attempts to contemplate the presence of the present necessarily break with themselves. As soon as we endeavor to study the present, we must acknowledge that what we call

[26] To put this in another way, in this passage – and perhaps for Stein more generally – adjectives provide points of access, while isolated nouns are the provenance of an unavailable newness.
[27] Some variant of this promise can be found on 8, 9, 10, and 15.

"now" immediately becomes an all but unmarked then.[28] For Stein – or at least for Toklas – this familiar paradox inheres in the very attempt to grapple with modernist art itself.

Hand in hand with the difficulty of looking at that which is properly of the now comes a critical uncertainty regarding what counts as an object ready to be studied at all. Early in their time in Paris, Gertrude and Leo Stein visit the gallery of Ambroise Vollard, a prominent early advocate of various modernist painters. When the Steins request a Cézanne landscape, Vollard offers them "a tiny picture of an apple with most of the canvas unpainted" (*Toklas* 31). Over the course of the short scene that follows, they repeat the demand for a landscape no fewer than three times, and on each occasion they are offered a fragmentary object, things as yet unready for the world. Only when they explain in fuller detail the sort of images they hope to purchase – "one of those marvelously yellow sunny Aix landscapes" – does Vollard come "back with a wonderful small green landscape" (*Toklas* 31). Here it is description, adjectivilization, that undoes the fragmentariness of the fragment. Further, the repeated association between landscape and fragmentation that this passage sets up is no accident. Indeed, as we will see below, Stein sometimes suggests that the defining feature of landscape is the way it fractures the otherwise unbroken continuity of the land itself. More immediately, however, this passage allegorizes the attendant difficulties of modernist art in its own moment. The incomplete images that Vollard parades before the Steins suggest a climate in which art appears unfinished *because its audience is not yet ready to see it* rather than because its artist has moved on prematurely. Though the painting they ultimately purchase covers "all the canvas," one leaves the sequence with the sense that in growing familiar with the new – and learning to describe it properly

[28] This familiar paradox actually has a double in the workings of mirrors themselves. The version of myself that I see when I contemplate my own reflection is the product of light's double journey from my body to the mirror and from the mirror to my eye. The me that I admire or bemoan is therefore a me at once minisculely older and younger than the me that I ostensibly am in the moment in which I meet myself. For every meter that separates us, we are divided by $1/1.5*10^8$ seconds in time.

in the process – they have simply surpassed the moment of its production.[29] That is, the putatively incomplete images provided a sort of pedagogy that allowed them to ask for the "finished" ones. Art, Stein suggests in this scene, only appears as art when its own moment has passed – when, in a word, it is finished in every sense. So long as modern art continues to claim it is of the present, it must bear the risk that it will remain incomplete, undone by its very attempt to do the new.

A remark that Stein attributes to Alfred Maurer offers a possible resolution to this structural hesitation between works of art that at once proclaim their modernity and their status as works. Maurer observes, "Of course you can tell it is a finished picture… you can tell because it has a frame, now whoever heard of anybody framing a canvas if the picture isn't finished" (*Toklas* 11). A familiar claim tells us that a frame indicates that an image is complete precisely because it describes borders and thereby asserts finitude. What makes Maurer's version of this formulation intriguing is that he proposes it in context of an image made incomplete by the way he presents it. Attempting to show off a Cézanne portrait to other guests in Gertrude and Leo Stein's ill-lit atelier, Maurer is forced to hold matches up to the canvas, which allows him to show only small pieces of the total image at a given time. While the frame may offer an answer to accusations of incompleteness, it cannot hold perceptual fragmentation at bay. Thus, in line with an ideology at least as old as German romanticism, fragments and wholes – or, perhaps, holes and wholes – may not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, the frame becomes that which turns fragmentation from a fault to a point of contemplation, literally embracing the failure to show it all. Like Stein's repeated attempts to purchase a landscape, Maurer's partial illumination of the Cézanne portrait almost certainly works as an allegory of modernist art itself, one designed to show something that no description of such images could reveal.

[29] On seeing two aged charwomen descend a set of back stairs and leave Vollard's building, Stein jokes that the pieces they have been shown are not Cézannes at all but are instead hastily composed fakes made by the women upstairs. Though the possibility is clearly proposed in jest, it establishes a foundational connection between the perception of incompleteness and the moment of creation.

Stein's careful attention to the relationship of part and whole in Cézanne finds a striking double in Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic criticism. Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty explains, strove for a kind of fragmentary holism, simultaneously detaching distinct moments of perception from one another and conveying their experiential aggregate. He writes, "In giving up the outline, Cézanne was abandoning himself to the chaos of sensation, which would upset objects and constantly suggest illusions" (Merleau-Ponty 63). That is, Cézanne refuses to grant objects a single definite border, a choice that threatens both their structural integrity and the rigidity of their distinction from their environment. In lieu of singular, bordered images, Merleau-Ponty claims, Cézanne "follows the swelling of the object in modulated colors and indicates *several* outlines in blue" (65). Unsurprisingly, this transforms Cézanne into the painter of phenomenology *par excellence*, as for a thinker like Merleau-Ponty, these plural possibilities of form stand in for nothing other than the flux of perceptions. The Cézanne who appears in Merleau-Ponty's thought might be understood as a basically fragmentary stylist insofar as he allows us to identify specific moments that would never be distinct in perceptual practice.

Yet Merleau-Ponty ultimately rejects this understanding of Cézanne's work as fundamentally fractured. Immediately after pointing to the plurality of outlines, he writes, "Rebounding among these [various outlines] one's glance captures a shape that emerges from among them all, just as it does in perception" (65). Unlike Futurist paintings, which strive to capture movement as such, Cézanne's images depict the ultimate closure of perception onto itself. While they may not grant an indexical version of the object as it really is, they do leave us with a full image of our perception of the object. Merleau-Ponty's use of "glance" – with its implication of instantaneous sensation – is telling, suggesting as it does that Cézanne's paintings invert the ordinary priority of phenomenological experience. The various moments of perception that Cézanne's multiple outlines allegorize would normally be available only if we could somehow slow the process of perceiving a

thing to the point where we could comprehend the infinitesimal steps of perception itself. Here, however, it is that most passing moment of perception, the glance, which yields a sense of the image as a whole. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty argues that in Cézanne's art, the fragmentary basis of perception becomes available only through prolonged contemplation that paradoxically makes what would otherwise be chronologically distinct moments available within a synchronic horizon.

Thus, while Cézanne's images may stage dramas of perceptual dissolution, they do so in a way that has always already produced an uninterrupted illusion of the whole. It is on this point that Stein most clearly breaks with Merleau-Ponty. Both attend to the fragmentary character of Cézanne's images – Stein in her telling anecdote about Maurer holding a match to various parts of the painting and Merleau-Ponty in his powerful description of the unstable framing of painted objects – but where the latter insists on the ultimate restabilization of the image, the former refuses to settle on a singular experience of it. One imagines that for Merleau-Ponty the frame functions as a point of reference, directing the momentary gaze, as well as offering it a finite visible field from which to engage in totalizing perception. Stein's story about Maurer's matches – and here one must imagine the way in which even this partial perception is further fragmented by the need to continually reignite this source of light as matches burn out or burn the hand that holds them – suggests a different orientation toward the modernist lineage that emerges in Cézanne's wake. Here one is reminded of the earlier incident in which an obviously complete Cézanne painting becomes available at Vollard's only when Gertrude and Leo Stein learn to properly describe what they hope to see. It is no accident that they seek "one of those marvelously yellow sunny Aix landscapes" (*Toklas* 31) as what they describe here is precisely a quality of light, and hence a condition of visibility. In telling this story about the way that modernist art was *perceived* at a time when electric lighting had not yet been installed at 27 Rue de Fleurus, Stein quietly offers an allegory about the necessarily incomplete way that these works were *understood* in their own moment. Seen in the flickering, dim light of

Maurer's matches, frames do not merely prove that images are complete, they also function as promises about wholes that we may one day be able to see. Stein implies that Merleau-Ponty's instantaneous flash of perception – in which we are overwhelmed by the wholeness of the now – will be possible only in retrospect. In their own moment, frames offer a space in which to reflect on the fragmentariness of fragments without allowing recourse to their sum.

If frames fail to ensure that the objects they contain are whole, they at least seem to regulate the ability of the enframed image to speak to that which lies beyond it. As Maurer argues, to set a thing in a frame is to claim that we need not say anything more about it and thus, by connection, that it need not say anything else. This formulation points to the manner in which framed fragments tend to repeat the primary rhetorical move of the *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*. To the very extent that they close off the broken thing, they posit the basic self-sufficiency of their contents. That is, even as a framed fragment admits that it does not – indeed, that it cannot – show everything, it implicitly posits that what it *does* show is enough. In much the same manner, Matisse, Jolas and the other plaintiffs of the *Testimony* argue that that their partial re-presentations of Stein's text at once tell us all that we need to know about Stein herself and at last get right the story of modernist art she supposedly mangled. These are fragments that stand alone, sealed against contact with the world by the very move that allows them to stage their claims to truth.

In a manner of speaking, then, the frame might itself be the basis of a kind of fragmentation, a means of detaching work from world and world from work. This is the point for Lisa Siraganian when she attributes a theory of art to Gertrude Stein built around the subjective autonomy of individual works. Arguing that Stein would oppose the interpretative strategies Merleau-Ponty employs to make sense of Cézanne*,* Siraganian writes, "[For] Stein the phenomenological space of the beholder is different from the space of the art object… Stein wants to make everything about the beholder or reader irrelevant to her art" (661). Siraganian, in other words, claims that Stein

radically distinguishes between view and viewer. She finds a clear demonstration of this in Stein's tendency to erase every trace of the experience of the reader from her writings. In particular she points to Stein's famous reluctance to use commas, especially in texts like *Tender Buttons*. The comma, Siraganian claims, indicates where we should breathe when reading, but it says nothing about what that which we read is doing. Exploring the significance of this point for Stein, Siraganian writes, "She sees punctuation as an effort to dictate the literal experience of reading; to focus on the reader would be to sacrifice the autonomy of the text" (663). According to this approach, punctuation fragments the text by introducing a presence into it that is wholly other from it. To avoid this alien imposition of the rhythms of readerly life – the ordinarily automatic exhalations and inhalations that ensure our ongoing vitality – onto that of the text, Stein must, in Siraganian's formulation, evacuate her works of all air. More than a mere line of demarcation between outside and inside, the frame here becomes a vacuum seal, draining the art work of all that would render it livable. Making reference to Stein's essay "Pictures," Siraganian suggests that this commitment to airlessness is both descriptive and prescriptive for Stein. For Siraganian's Stein, true works of art are compelling precisely because they are fundamentally inimical to our ways of living (657-659). Though not exactly *outer* space, works of art at least constitute a qualitatively *other* kind of space. And if, as the saying goes, "In space no one can hear you scream," then in the airless work of art no one, the work itself least of all, cares if you speak.[30]

Siraganian's reading of Stein's supposedly rigid separation of the reader from the read would almost certainly break down on closer analysis, but it nevertheless matches up with Maurer's partial revelation of the match-lit canvas. As we have seen, in revealing Cézanne in pieces and parts, Maurer makes the experience of incomplete phenomenological perception of the image one with the

[30] Needless to say, Stein was no rigid Kantian in her aesthetic speculations. Nevertheless, this irrelational indifference of viewed to viewer evokes a rich tradition of philosophical thought. On recent developments, see especially, Loesberg.

conditions under which the image is seen rather than essential to the image itself, as Merleau-Ponty would have it. Not insignificantly, Stein repeats Maurer's claim to frame later in *Toklas*, as if to insist on the real force of the conceit that frames and finality go hand in hand (*Toklas* 33-34). Importantly, this second citation of the phrase detaches it from its original narrative context, transforming it into an aphoristic floating fragment within the text as a whole. Repetition underlines the claim, suggesting that it maintains its force beyond the moment in which it was first spoken. As is often the case with fragments, it achieves truth value by the very fact of its desituated isolation. Paraphrasing Derrida, one might similarly suggest that truth in painting, if there is such a thing, arises from the way that frames engender the illusion of separation between work and world. This illusion at once promises that a painting has something to say and makes the painting wholly other to the milieu to which it ostensibly addresses itself. For Stein and Derrida alike, frames become conditions of fragmentation, visible markers of the way that the pretense of finality always reveals a thing to be incomplete.

The fragmentary force of framing becomes most troublesome when it goes unacknowledged, a fact that the late Wittgenstein knew all too well. Just over one hundred paragraphs into his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein momentarily pauses in his ramble to quote a passage from his earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The phrase he cites – "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are" (*Investigations* 41) – is telling as much for its apparent commitment to the real state of things as for the suggestion that individual states can be broken off from one another and described in and of themselves. In what follows, Wittgenstein does not dismiss this initial claim outright. Instead, he subsumes his earlier formulation into the latter, here literally repurposing the *Tractatus* as a fragment within the still-more fragmentary topography of the *Investigations*. This fragmentary *pas de deux* is redoubled by the way the *Investigations* reworks the *Tractatus*' meta-proposition: "That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless

times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it" (*Investigations* 41). The force of framing returns with a vengeance here, taking on new meanings in the process. As when Stein's invokes Maurer, the frame seems to guarantee the truth of that which it contains. But frames also encircle an imaginary lens through which we attempt to bring a thing into focus. The frame itself hereby becomes the most important object for the manner in which it delimits one's field of vision. In failing to countenance it, we unknowingly conflate our prostheses with the impaired capacities of the bodies they supplement.

Here, Wittgenstein calls attention to a foundational danger – or, one might say, the danger of foundationalism. As he reflects still further on the lines he has cited from his *Tractatus*, he writes, "A *picture* [*Bild*] held us captive. And we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (*Investigations* 41). In this passage, the *Tractatus* becomes an image that attempts to index something real and instead only succeeds in depicting its own strategies of indexicality. In a manner of speaking, then, what the frame enframes is a lens that impossibly turns outward to look at the frame itself. A frame, in this sense, serves to put the frame on those who use it, imprisoning them within its contours. The ideology that would separate milieu from work, or viewer from image, therefore threatens to collapse the former into the latter. For Wittgenstein, the most important thing about a picture is therefore not what it shows, but how it is framed. In attending to the frame, one comprehends the limits of the picture, thereby remembering the fact of its unseen excess. Frames are the proof that no picture is ever more than a fragment. However lively they may seem, pictures themselves always estrange us from our lives by separating the contents of the image before *us* from the everyday movements that position us before *it*.

Stein implicitly comes to a similar conclusion in *Toklas*. Describing her tour of France with Toklas during the First World War, Stein has her partner note, "Soon we came to the battle-fields

and the lines of trenches of both sides. To any one who did not see it as it was then it is impossible to imagine it. It was not terrifying it was strange. We were used to ruined houses and even ruined towns, but this was different. It was a landscape" (*Toklas* 187). A landscape – and here the reference is undoubtedly to landscape painting – is more ruinous than a ruin because it is enframed and therefore cut off from the vital flux of life as it is lived. One can still find shelter, perhaps even comfort, in a ruined town, but to find oneself in a landscape is to be separated from real exchange and contact. With Siraganian, one might suggest that landscape offers an image of land that has been drained of air, and has thereby been made inhuman, or at least inhospitable to human life. When Stein goes on in the following sentence to remark, "It belonged to no county," she confirms this reading, as "country" for her is first and foremost the space in which subjects are nurtured and instilled with the character that will animate them. The crisscrossed lines of trenching shaped by all countries permits no such vital inspiration. Unlike one's own land, landscape alienates – Stein might say "estranges" – us from ourselves.[31]

If any one picture threatens to foreclose its own horizon, and if any description of language tends to become a picture, the only alternative may be to offer up a plurality of representations. Surely it is this that Wittgenstein has in mind when he observes that the *Investigations* "is really only an album" (*Investigations* ix). That is, in it one finds not a single landscape (as one might in a philosophical monograph that offers a systematic account of a single topic), but a series of diverse terrains throughout which one passes, the one after the other. The whole of the text becomes something like the ruined towns in which Stein suggests one might find comfort, but through which one would have to continually move when human habitation leads each fractured domicile to

[31] Throughout *Toklas*, when the word "landscape" is used to refer to actual land, it always describes the moment at which what we see becomes alien. Thus, for example, a few pages before the remarks quoted above, Stein describes a day when they drove a young American soldier through the countryside. On learning that the various small clusters of houses that they pass are known in France as towns, the soldier "fell very silent and looked at the landscape as he had never looked at it before" (183-184). The experience of landscape as landscape drains the subject of his subjectivity, making him other to both his experience and himself.

collapse. In many ways, though, the *Investigations* is more like a comic book, a medium in which each individual panel must be read in terms of all those that surround it. Indeed, as Wittgenstein notes, the "clear and simple language-games" that make up much of his text "are not preparatory studies for a future regimentation of language." Instead they are "set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of the similarities, but also of dissimilarities" (*Investigations* 43; emphasis original). Insofar as each paragraph of the book is a picture, they cannot fail to lay claim to something like the truth, but insofar as they are also juxtaposed to one another, each calls out the incompleteness of every other. The paragraphs of the *Investigations* frame one another, unveiling the limits of each new account of language that the book offers by proposing new ones. It is in this approach to composing philosophy that Wittgenstein the stylist meets Wittgenstein the thinker. Recognizing that we cannot help but make propositional claims or hang framed pictures, he embraces a technique that allows him to call out the paralyzing effects of the fragmenting frame. Where the solitary fragment threatens us with what David Owen terms "aspectival captivation" (82), to set a multiplicity of fragments beside one another is to reopen the possibility of play.

Unlike the later novelists whose work will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Stein does not engage in the kind of visibly fragmentary style that Wittgenstein employs so powerfully. Even as she recognizes the threat of enframed life – thereby challenging the rigid distinction of inside and out that Siraganian attributes to her – her memoiristic writings threaten to offer a singular representation of her life and times. Sometimes, she alludes to strategies that might help allay this dilemma. At one point, for example, she notes, "[A] landscape is such a natural arrangement for a battle-field or a play that one must write plays" (*Toklas* 132). Where the war makes those sections of the land that it touches alien by cutting off all communication with that which lays beyond them, Stein's "landscape plays" emphasize the way that voices ricochet off of one another, pace Bennett's

elegant reading of Steinian gossip. In them, Stein suggests that she finds a way out of the univocity of the enframed image by turning its restraints on their heads. *Toklas*, by contrast, seems to risk a more private closure, its meandering narrative threatening to recast all voices, even that of Toklas herself, in Stein's tone. This is what the authors of the *Testimony* have in mind when they accuse Stein, as Eugene Jolas does in his prefatory note, of having "no understanding of what was happening around her" (Jolas 2). Enclosed within a self-made frame, Stein closed herself off to the life of the modernist scene.

Yet as should already be clear, *Toklas* – and, to a different extent *Everybody's Autobiography* and *Picasso* – are run through with fractures. Understanding what is at stake at these points requires a renewed attention not just to what Stein leaves out, but also to her seemingly endless points of repetition and return. Above, I suggested that when Stein repeats Maurer's claim that frames complete a painting she effectively detaches the remark from the texture of the narrative, thereby enhancing its claim to be more than a clever *bon mot*. Perhaps more striking, however, are those points in the narrative itself to which she repeatedly returns. Might it be the case that in coming back to the same claims, scenes, and phrases again and again she quietly recognizes that something is incomplete? Elizabeth Freeman argues that the standard way of understanding Stein's repetitions is that they work as attempts to revise earlier formulations. As Freeman points out, this approach tends to privilege the final formulation, whether or not it resolves anything. In the place of this approach, Freeman suggests that we read Stein in terms of what she calls "the chronic." In this mode, different instances of a repeated phrase or idea could be understood to express unpredictable and endlessly variant levels of bodily intensity. While this approach is powerful, it does little to account for the surprising absence of bodies and bodily relations – especially those of Stein and Toklas – in the memoiristic writings. Given the way that bodies, and the bodies of queer women in

particular, disappear here,[32] we must think instead about the way that Stein's repetitions serve as a persistent means of calling attention to otherwise unmarked absences, absences that do not go away with any iteration.

Here it might be worth returning, as Stein so often does, to Toklas' evasive relationship to narrative time in *Toklas*. As we have already seen, just as she looks only with great difficulty at the array of paintings on the walls of Gertrude and Leo Stein's atelier, she keeps promising to describe her arrival in Paris. The most compelling of such moments comes at the start of the novel's fourth chapter, a chapter which will, as its title, "Gertrude Stein Before She Came to Paris," indicates, dodge backwards in time. Stein's opening sentence has a mirrored quality similar to, though not nearly as overt as, that which she uses when describing Toklas' confused spectatorship: "Once more I have come to Paris and now I am one of the habitués of the rue de Fleurus" (*Toklas* 69). In the first place, "Once more" clearly calls back to her earlier narratorial promises that she will, at last, describe her arrival in Paris, even as it reimagines those promises as plural realizations. Here, however, "I have come" suggest that she has at last arrived, suggesting a final end to this point of nothing but returns. Yet she does so under the sign of a prior moment, the time before even Stein herself had arrived, as if in finally coming she has somehow come too early – she has come, that is, before her partner. This temporal disjuncture makes the "now" that sits at the center of the sentence ambiguous, as it seems somehow to refer simultaneously to the earlier time referenced in the chapter's title, the actual time of Toklas' arrival, and the much later period when the novel was composed. Thus at the very point when we seem to be free from repetitions, time splits into at least three distinct, but mutually dependent, moments. And even here – whenever that here is – Toklas

[32] Nick Bertozzi's recent graphic novel *The Salon* offers a striking contrast to this Steinian approach to Stein and her body. In the process of detailing the fanciful (and entirely imagined) adventures of Stein, Toklas, Braque, Picasso and others in 1907, Bertozzi includes a strikingly graphic sex scene in which Leo Stein spies on Gertrude stein and Toklas as they make love (95-96). In a narrative that features ghosts made of paint, this dramatization of corporeal pleasure and the visibility thereof may mark Bertozzi's most pointed departure from *Toklas*, which is otherwise his primary source.

still seems trapped in a cycle of repetition, as Stein has her describe herself as "one of the habitués" of the Rue de Fleurus, and not as one its inhabitants. She comes, the suggestion seems to be, frequently, but does not yet reside there. In this, Stein engages in a significant bit of sleight of hand, as she names the street on which she and Toklas would live for much of their lives, but not the actual address – "Rue de Fleurus" rather than "27 Rue de Fleurus," as she calls it throughout the rest of the book.[33] In the process, Stein constructs Toklas a sort of street walker rather than a participant in a *Ménage* à *deux*, pointing away from the relationship between the two women at precisely the moment when it began. Like the paintings lining the walls of the atelier, which were too difficult to really study in their own time, but that are easy to understand in the now of the novel's composition, the Stein-Toklas couple goes all but unseen here in Stein's own writerly present, its contours at once traced and neglected by the persistent promise of arrival.

This version of Stein's notorious reluctance to characterize her bond with Toklas finds a surprising, if still strategically incomplete, analogue in *Toklas*' tentative negotiation of another much-loved figure. Studying photographs of Stein and Toklas, Mark Goble suggests that the dogs the couple raised together, especially the sequence of French poodles they named Basket, may serve as the "defining secret" of sexuality (Goble 138). Significantly, Goble contends that the dogs – and here he speaks more of their appearances in *Everybody's Autobiography* than of their place in *Toklas* – are not simple stand ins for an otherwise unspoken lesbianism, but that they are active mediators of this troubling term of identity. While this approach is compelling, it does not speak to the simmering complexity of sexuality in *Toklas*. I would like to contend that to understand how Stein thinks through sexual identity in this earlier memoir, one must look to her much professed adoration for

[33] In practice, Toklas, who came to Paris and met Stein in 1907, did not move in with the Gertrude and Leo Stein until 1910, despite Stein's proposal to Toklas in 1908. Nevertheless, the phrase "habitué," which suggests a regular visitor, seems a strategically gross understatement in light of the fact that Toklas arrived at her partner's address daily to type manuscripts, cook the American food for which Stein longed, and participate in other aspects of the domestic scene (Souhami 77-109.)

Juan Gris. For Goble, the Baskets become receptacles for the dubious collusion of the private scene's intimacies and celebrity's problematic structures of visibility. By contrast, Gris' simultaneous ubiquity throughout and absence from the larger narrative of *Toklas* allows Stein to knot her sexual politics to her theorization of modernism.

IV.

A relatively minor cubist painter, Juan Gris nevertheless became deeply important to Stein, up to and beyond his death in 1927. Though the two were friends for years, it is his passing that tends to arise most prominently throughout *Toklas*, which was written a full five years later. Indeed, this event often anchors Stein's discussions of other occurrences, even as she drains it of any immediately obvious valences of its own. In one especially exemplary instance, she writes, "Many years after, that is just a few years ago, when Juan Gris who we all loved very much died, (he was after Pablo Picasso Gertrude Stein's dearest friend) I heard her say to Braque, she and he were standing together at the funeral, who are all these people, there are so many and they are so familiar and I do not know who any of them are" (20). A number of essential features resonate throughout this brief passage, not least of which is the way that Gris mediates Stein's relationship to more important artists – here, Picasso, Braque, and a host of familiar but unnamed others. Pointedly, he does so at the moment of his own absence, as his funeral becomes a site around which an entire generation of modern artists comes together again, his still open grave marking the empty center of this late-coming salon.

Most striking, though, is the complicated manner in which Stein expresses her love for her departed friend. First, there is the tellingly vague subject who loves here, a "we all" that might encompass the entire modernist scene – Stein, Picasso, Braque and others – or perhaps merely Toklas and Stein. This uncertainty summons up the similarly vague pronouns of Stein's earlier prose

portrait of Toklas, "Ada." When she turns, in the final paragraph of this short piece, to a description of the uncommon happiness that Ada – one of her pet names for Toklas – eventually found, she writes only of an unspecified "some one who was loving" Ada ("Ada" 276-277). In a manner that should be obvious, this sort of obtuse and non-gendered language seems to participate in the troubling disavowal of lesbianism that critics have identified in *Toklas* and other texts. Yet it bears noting that the liberation of pronouns from their referents is fundamental to "Ada" as a whole. Indeed, the first sentence of the portrait begins with a similar act of effacement: "Barnes Colhard did not say he would not do it but he did not do it" ("Ada" 275). In the absence of an antecedent, "it" is left open here and throughout the story. In this climate of referential ambiguity, the primary difference between the text's beginning and its end is the way Stein turns away from the complex structure of negation ("did not," "would not," "did not") that resonates throughout this initial phrase at the moment when she embraces the experience of love at the end. As such, the openness of Stein's "some one" serves as an invitation to multiple forms of loving rather than a foreclosure of meaning. Similarly, even in the face of Gris' own mortal negation, Stein's "we all" proposes an open circuit of loved and lovers, a circuit that seems to embrace the familiar figures of the modernist scene, even as it also refers to the narratorial Toklas and her ventriloquist partner.

Amongst the illustrations to the first edition of *Toklas*, Stein includes only one image by Juan Gris. The painting in question, titled "A Transatlantic," offers a partial view of one of the upper decks of an ocean liner. Everywhere throughout the picture, Gris' angles are askew, such that the ship's smokestacks lean improbably in one direction even as the cloud that pours out of them pulls away in another. The image, then, is one not just of a transatlantic vessel, but also of the tension that at once unites and pulls apart Europe and the Americas, especially for an expatriate figure like Stein. As Paul K. Alkon notes, apart from the way it invites such broad allegorical readings, this image is a peculiar one in that it is neither discussed in the text nor particularly representative of any of Stein's

common subjects (875-876). Building on the kind of reading Alkon proposes, one might suggest that this image, which is at once formally complete and irredeemably partial, foregrounds not just Stein's more general experience of transatlantic tension, but also her particular bond to Spain. At one point she famously has Toklas observe, "Gertrude Stein and spaniards [sic] are natural friends," a remark predicated on Stein's belief that both their respective countries are marked by a basic incompleteness (*Toklas* 125).

This painting also suggests a more subterranean current that speaks not just to what is unfinished, but also to that which has been willfully left out. As readers of *Q.E.D.*, Stein's thinly disguised autobiographical novelization of her youthful romance with May Bookstaver, will remember, Stein's first quasi-erotic experiences took place shipside. In fact, the way Stein roughly situates the events, placing the women on steamer chairs and thereby suggesting a deck not unlike the one that Gris depicts, suggests that "A Transatlantic" may have a richer significance for *Toklas* (if not for Toklas herself) than Stein admits. In its own turn, this possible connection points to a paragraph of *Toklas* in which a moment of private intensity is made quietly public. Near the end of the fourth chapter, "Toklas" explains that just before leaving America for good, Stein wrote a short novel. Soon, the ventriloquized Toklas goes on to explain, Stein forgot about it, and did not discover it again until the spring of 1932, at which point she could not stand to read it, offering it to Louis Bromfield with the instruction that he should read it in her stead (*Toklas* 84-85). Here the chapter breaks off.

The short novel in question was, of course, *Q.E.D.*, and as Stein's biographers have shown, things certainly did not end when Stein fobbed the book off on Bromfield. What disappears into the gap between chapters is Toklas' much commented upon rage at discovering extensive evidence of this earlier, previously unmentioned love affair. When Stein has "Toklas" observe, "this first piece of writing was completely forgotten, she had never mentioned it to me, even when I first knew her,"

she is tacitly admitting not just the way she kept the text from her partner, but also her failure to mention the romance at all. In light of this improbably credulous statement, and in the absence of the familial crisis that should follow the incident with Bromfield, *Toklas* leaves us with a far smoother version of Toklas, albeit one that remains pointedly incomplete. Stein herself seems to insist on the truth of her own amnesia – and the fragmentary character of her own erotic past – such that on one occasion she claims to have forgotten all details of an earlier trip to Spain, a trip that features prominently in *Q.E.D* (*Toklas* 167-168). Amidst this almost catastrophic ruination of relationships past and present, "A Transatlantic" stands as a subtle reminder of the stories that exist just beyond the limits of those that Stein tells, resisting their fragmentary foreclosure. Given that *Q.E.D.* would go unpublished for decades, barely seeing the light of day until long after Stein's death, this painting might itself be read as an allusive and elusive fragment of coupledom's jagged contours.

Like *Q.E.D.*, which was written in 1903, but was among the last of Stein's projects to be published, Gris simultaneously does and does not belong to his own moment. The narrative of *Toklas* perpetually arrives too early or too late to catch Gris in his prime, just as Toklas' continual arrivals in Paris signify the apparent impossibility of representing the intensity of her real contact with Stein. On one occasion of the former type, Stein has her narrator observe that parts of the party for Rosseau discussed above took place in "the studio which was later to be Juan Gris'" (*Toklas* 105).[34] Gris himself, however, makes no appearance at this juncture, even as figures like Salmon spring in and out of the scene with bizarre vivacity. Other observations, like the one Stein makes about Gris' funeral situate her admiration for him within the horizon of a retrospective

[34] Earlier, Stein describes the studio in similar terms, adding that in it "Juan Gris was to live out his martyrdom" (21). Given that this remark arrives at a point when the narrative is ostensibly focused on Toklas' arrival in Paris, it points to the way that Gris is more than usually unglued in time for the Stein of *Toklas*, even within the book's highly irregular temporal rubrics.

melancholy, from which it is apparently impossible to make any difference in his past. He is always due to show up "later" or, worse still, has lamentably already become "the late."

Though "Gris dead these five years is beginning to come into his own" (*Toklas* 117) within the book's 1932 present tense, he never so much as makes a cameo appearance in Goble's sense of the term. Even when Stein speaks of her direct collaborations with him, she tends to do so by way of temporal displacements. Thus, for example, late in the novel, Toklas speaks of the summer when Stein "wrote the Completed Portrait of Picasso, the Second Portrait of Carl Van Vechten, and The Book of Concluding with As A Wife Has a Cow A Love Story this afterwards illustrated by Juan Gris" (*Toklas* 222). Tragically, Gris is here denied mutual participation in the active past tense in which Stein "wrote," confined instead to some othered passive past that belongs to an altogether different register of the "afterwards." He *was not* then and *is not* now; the only question is whether he somehow *will have been*.

But if Gris comes too late and if Toklas, as we saw earlier, comes too early, at least someone has been coming all along. This, at any rate, is what Gris' connection with the richly titled and profoundly erotic "A Book Concluding With As a Wife Has a Cow A Love Story" seems to imply. As has been widely established, Stein often spoke of Toklas as her wife (Souhami 94-95). More significantly, critics have long held that "cow" was Stein's private euphemism for orgasm,[35] such that the title of the slim volume that Gris illustrated might just as well have been, "The Book Concluding With Alice Toklas' Orgasm A Love Story." One need not be acquainted with the intricacies of Steinana to make sense of paragraphs like these two that come near the start of the text:

[35] This conclusion has recently been upset by little discussed critical investigations of Stein's private love notes to Toklas in which "cow" almost always appears to refer to Toklas' bowel movements (Turner 29-37). The fact remains that in a text like "As a Wife has a Cow," the more public use of the word seems to maintain its sexual import, even if it does so in the service of covering over still less admissible forms of intimate embodiment. The apparent connection between the excremental and the erotic in Stein is worthy of further scholarship.

> PINK.
> Pink looks as pink, pink looks as pink, as pink as pink supposes, suppose.
>
> QUICKLY.
> She will finish first and come, the second time she will finish first and come. The second time. ("A Book Concluding" 495)

Well before the long orgasmically moaning "Moo" that ends the text, it becomes abundantly clear to any moderately conscious reader that the work Stein had her "[second] dearest friend" illustrate was nothing if not a bit of her erotic poetry.

The first of the four images Gris contributed to the slim volume shows a modestly dressed woman holding a book, which is turned outward toward the viewer. A few pages later, a second charcoal drawing depicts a man strumming a guitar. Together, these two pictures depict the normative heterosexual coupledom promised by the "wife" of the title. As it happens, however, Gris' subsequent images propose an altogether different sort of coupling. His third – the only one of the four to appear in color – shows not the union of the man and the woman, but a community of objects. The book and the guitar here appear again, this time without their holders, and now accompanied by a variety of other inanimate objects including a pipe and a vase. This still life gives way to a sketchier vitality in the last of the drawings, which shows these objects bleeding into one another. Here, the book and the guitar play on strikingly feminized shapes: The figure eight curves of the guitar resemble nothing so much as an idealized hourglass figure, while the still open book into which its head has disappeared invites labial comparisons. Gris' orgiastic comingling of objects becomes an enthusiastic allegory of lesbian sexuality, albeit one from which real gendered bodies have disappeared. His work at once anticipates and mirrors the ambiguous status of the Toklas-Stein bond in *Toklas*, a relationship that is simultaneously put on display and hidden away. Though these two women and the man they loved rarely seem to belong to the same moment, they somehow manage to participate in something of uncommon beauty together.

Gris' own story, insofar as it gets told at all in this text, tends to be the story of the fate of his paintings. In fact, the most we learn about Gris himself is that he spent much of his life in desperate straits because no one would look at his work. Describing the immediate wake of the war, Stein writes, "Juan Gris was ill and discouraged. He had been very ill and was never really well again. Privation and discouragement had had their effect. Kahnweiler came back to Paris fairly early after the war but all his old crowd with the exception of Juan were too successful to have need of him" (*Toklas* 194). Stein's simple, repetitive verbiage conveys a sense that Gris' illness and discouragement are far from temporary conditions. He stands here and elsewhere in the narrative as a monument of failure and dejection, precisely because of the way his hypothetical public fails to look to his work. The importance of Kahnweiler – a Paris-based gallerist of German origins – cannot be overstated in this passage. A champion of various cubists, he fails Gris to the very extent that he has long since succeeded at drawing attention to Picasso, Braque and others. Yet what is still more telling is the way Gris seems to be nothing other than the experience of his failures. Even as Stein professes her deep admiration for him, her narrative turns away from him in much the same way that his public did. In the process, Gris becomes a powerful emblem of the deeply loved, yet persistently unseen.

At stake in Stein's at once fragmentary and emphatic presentation of Juan Gris is the performance of an incomplete mourning for an incomplete life. The very title of Stein's portrait of Gris – "The Life of Juan Gris; The Life and Death of Juan Gris" – vacilates between fully lived life and a life hopelessly conjoined to death. Equally striking is the argument Stein claims she had with Picasso after their friend's passing: "Gertrude Stein said to him bitterly, you have no right to mourn, and he said, you have no right to say that to me. You never realised [sic] his meaning because you did not have it, she said angrily. You know very well I did, he replied" (*Toklas* 212). Both claim to "have" Gris' meaning, as surely as they have the right to mourn, but insofar as the content of this meaning goes unelaborated, so too does the specificity of their mourning. In the face of his absence,

then, Gris disappears once again, but he does so at a moment heavily freighted with affective connotations that go largely unarticulated. To mourn is here to acknowledge the loss of something that already was, and perhaps always has been, a site of profound lack.

One might propose that this empty, endless mourning at once differs from and remains in a relationship to Stein's mostly unelaborated bond with Toklas. Indeed, the kind of grief that plays out over the course of *Toklas* could be read as figures for her experience of modernism and lesbianism alike. Madelyn Detloff, for example, has argued that the projects of many key modernist figures structure their works in such a way as to provide resources for those seeking to live "in the midst of loss and violence" (3). Such "resilient writings" sidestep the easy pieties of traumatic art by finding new ways to express the particularities of loss that they negotiate (Detloff 14-15).

Though Detloff concerns herself primarily with other Steinian texts, this formulation seems especially resonant with the account Stein gives of Picasso's modernism. One early description of a Picasso image is especially compelling in this regard: "Picasso thereupon brought out a smaller picture, *a rather unfinished thing that could not finish*, very pale almost white, two figures, they were all there but very unfinished and not finishable" (*Toklas* 22; emphasis added). The way pronouns drop out of this sentence, such that it becomes unclear whether Picasso could not finish his painting or whether the painting could not finish itself, speaks to a modernist predicament similar to that which Detloff describes. Loss becomes endemic to both the act of making art and the actual work that results. Equally significant, the two figures that Stein mentions, suspended between something that is "very pale almost white" and their own hazy outlines, sound like nothing in this description so much as ghosts, persistent afterimages of what has been lost.

Tammy Clewell proposes a still more thoroughgoing theory of ongoing mourning in her own work on modernism. For Clewell, the gaps that run through both modernist and postmodernist texts point to the way these works relate to particular lost objects. Struggling against the claim that

modernist styles cover over the relation of these texts to lack, Clewell argues that "the apparent consistency of modernist form collapses around an excess attributed to the lost object, an excess that resists consolation and cannot be expressed or contained within the novel's formal structure" (6-7). Thus, at the very level where they stage their own formal dissolution, these texts put on a performance of mourning. This performance takes on a pedagogical function, providing a "shared mourning practice… for a culture bereft of viable expressions of grief." (Clewell 13). Most powerfully, Clewell argues that in continually reorienting us to the otherwise of lost and abandoned things, ongoing mourning grounds an emancipatory politics. With this, she contests the still dominant claim that modernist art tends toward a kind of conservative closure, even as postmodernism supposedly cynically abandons all faith in liberation.

Clewell's approach productively suggests that Stein's repeated returns to the death of Juan Gris might have a political content. On the one hand, it is tempting to think in these terms about the way that Stein's continual professions of love for one who fails to appear supplement her failure to articulate the terms of her love for Toklas, whose own voice is the condition of all appearances in the novel that bears her name. In this sense, Stein's ongoing mourning of Gris might double as – or at least point to – a way of thinking through her largely unspoken lesbianism. On the other hand, Gris stands in for the frustrations of the modernist scene itself. It seems clear, then, that Gris – a man at once deeply loved and doubly lost – serves as a bridge between Stein's silence about her lesbianism and her ambivalence about modern art. By connection, the future that she imagines for Gris, a future in which he will at last be acknowledged by those who have overlooked him, might also be a future in which her bond with Toklas will also "come into its own." This future is not, however, one that will be radically different from the present. Instead, it is one in which the self-difference of the present from itself, a difference that went unspoken or unseen in its own moment,

will at last be recognized. As we will see, Stein cautiously imagines not a revolution that is to come, but the retroactive acceptance of one that is already quietly in process.

V.

As is well known, Foucault all but equates modernity and modernism by gesturing to the ways in which both attend to their own present. Modernism's claims on the immediate are largely obvious, but Foucault's characterization of modernity writ large is somewhat more tendentious. Indeed, who among us can count on the fingers of both hands without running out of digits the number of academic essays that begin with some variation of the phrase "Modernity begins with," where what follows this introductory clause is the subject of the essay itself. Modernity, we might say, begins with a gilded mirror in which we glimpse the elevated image of our private concerns. We are forever telling stories about ourselves and calling them the truth of history.

Foucault has this very problem in mind when he speaks of modernity – which almost always goes for him under the alibi of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) – as an attitude of attention. As Foucault repeatedly notes throughout the final period of his work, the Enlightenment is the first epoch to affirmatively define itself as an epoch. In a famous phrase, he argues that it did so because it asked us to turn our attention to ourselves, encouraging us to inquire into how we became what we presently "are." He writes, "To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (*Politics of Truth* 108). As moderns, we must endlessly ask ourselves how we became modern, such that if the Enlightenment is an incomplete project for Foucault, as it was for his antagonist Habermas, it is so because *we* are not fully and finally finished. Further, because this process reveals us to be "objects" of an "elaboration" that exceeds us, the basic labor of modernity will brook no Cartesian *epoché*. To

bracket the world would be to deny much of what is essentially inessential about our own subjective life, not least of all the regimes of governance that seduce us.

Modernity thus requires what Foucault suggestively alludes to as an "analytic of actuality," a form of critique entangled with, but distinct from, the analytic of truth (*Truth* 94-95). As Foucault puts it, this analytic "is not an issue of analyzing the truth, it will be a question of what we could call an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present" (*Truth* 95). In this phrase, Foucault slips programmatically from the negation of the present tense ("is not") to the affirmation of the future ("will be"). He calls on us to interrogate the present in a way that would transform it, engendering new forms of futurity. Further, when he doubles an "ontology of ourselves" with an "ontology of the present" he does not ask us to interrogate the static stability of our being. Instead he hereby encourages us to engage in a transformative relationship to what is going on here and now in a way that is of a piece with the claim he makes elsewhere that critique is "the art of not being governed quite so much" (*Truth* 45).

It should come as little surprise – even to those who do not, as Foucault probably would, read the footnotes first – that these claims derive primarily from an essay titled "What is Revolution?" What might be surprising is that his primary interlocutor in this text is Kant, who was, if not exactly conservative, at least the most anxious of all great philosophers when it came to describing political upheavals. Kant, Foucault suggests in "What is Revolution?" and elsewhere, is the thinker who most clearly leads us to recognize the relationship between reflecting on an actuality and contesting this or that present mode of governance. As Foucault puts it in "What is Critique?" the 15th and 16th centuries saw a massive explosion in modes of governance – governance of individual subjects as well as of their relations to one another. He argues that the "critical attitude" – of which Kant is the most significant proponent – first emerges as a response to this new excess of governmentality (*Truth* 44). If governmentality becomes the main current of modernity, then

modernity arrives as modernity – that is, as the contemplation of what is going on right now – when we begin to reflect on the ways that we are being governed. Kant's own methodology therefore betrays a powerful current of radicalism that his explicit statements may sometimes seem to deny.

With typical perversity, Foucault further radicalizes Kant by examining Kant's deeply troubled effort to think through the French Revolution in *The Contest of the Faculties*. He ultimately connects this richly ambivalent text to Kant's "*Was ist Aufklärung?*", a "minor text" about which Foucault wrote endlessly, noting: "These two questions: 'What is the *Aufklärung*?' and 'What is Revolution?' are the two forms Kant used to ask the questions about his own actuality" (*Truth* 93). According to Foucault, when Kant struggles to think through the status of revolution – of a given revolution as well as the concept as a whole – he reflects more specifically on the conditions of the present writ large. What fascinates Foucault is the way that Kant is himself fascinated by the fascinating effects of revolution. As he reminds us, for Kant the revolution itself was monstrous and not a sign of anything good. Instead, he explains, "What is significant is the manner in which the revolution turns into a spectacle, it is the way in which it is received all around by spectators who do not participate in it but who watch it, who attend the show and who, for better or worse, let themselves be dragged along by it" (*Truth* 90). This way of thinking about revolution as something to which *we* must pay attention *together* places it in a synechdochal relationship with modernity as a whole. Significantly, it does so not just because it engages us in an extreme climate of publicity, but also because that publicity is itself explicitly directed at problems of governance. One might therefore argue that for Foucault revolution is more than a compatriot of *Aufklärung*. It is also the secret of Englightenment modernity, unveiling the political punch of ostensibly disinterested contemplation.

In Rebecca Comay's helpful exegesis of *Contest of the Faculties*, Kant's own attention to attention derives from the emergence of a reading public. She writes, "The very medium that seems

to isolate every reader in solitary reflection is precisely what unifies the public as a virtual collective whose gaze is directed simultaneously outward, to the historical drama unfolding elsewhere, and inward, to the sign of cosmopolitan humanity imprinted within its own interior – a 'moral character' in every sense" (*Comay* 33). Newly emergent reading practices allow individuals to collectively contemplate what is at stake in revolution even as they remain on their own. For Kant, at least, what follows from this is a shared meditation on individual disinterestedness that allays the sublime horror of regicide. But what really matters, at least for Foucault, is the way in which the publicative publicity of revolution allows us to think about the general force of *our* present to the very extent that it is *ours*. This experience of collective simultaneity comes through still clearer in another metaphor that Comay extracts from Kant: Revolution is like a theater in which the real action is what is going on in the stands. The events unfolding on stage may well be distasteful, but our distance from them saves us from their taint and allows us to contemplate that which is closer to us, the reactions and responses of our fellow spectators.

In the movement that Foucault makes from modernity to modernism, this distance between art object and viewer is all but annulled. Instead, he proposes a model whereby the work of art itself participates in the analytic of actuality. Here, I have in mind his ingenious juxtaposition of Kant and Baudelaire in "What is Enlightenment?", a juxtaposition designed to reveal the way that aesthetic objects might amplify the radicalized forms of reading proposed by *Aufklärung*. This is, of course, a peculiar kind of 19th Century French modernism, but the connection would seem to hold to any art form that willfully stages its relationship to its present. Writing of Baudelaire – and of the kinds of art that Baudelaire privileged – Foucault observes, "Modern man… is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself" (*Truth* 109). Those familiar with Foucault's final claims about sexuality will note the resemblance between this assertions and those that he makes about S&M sex, practices that are, he claims, all about

engendering radically new kinds of pleasure (Foucault, "Politics of Identity 163-173). Modernist objects have a similar potential in that they engage with the present in ways that begin to reorganize the forms of power that make it up. Aesthetic revolutions – the attempt to generate unforseen forms of art – therefore overlap in their effects with political revolutions. Both force us to grapple with what is possible today in a way that promises to actually change its scope.

Gertrude Stein likewise posits a critical connection between aesthetic and political revolution, though the way she lets this relationship play out will ultimately be entirely different. She builds this linkage most enduringly in her short biography of *Picasso* when she suggests that wars are nothing more than a way of publicizing already accomplished facts. She writes, "The spirit of everybody is changed, of a whole people is changed, but mostly nobody knows it and a war forces them to recognize it because during a war the appearance of everything changes very much quicker, but really the entire change has been accomplished and the war is only something which forces everybody to recognize it" (Stein, *Picasso* 30). The thing that comes before war – the thing that actually brings about the change that no one notices at first – is, of course, revolution. Revolution therefore names the almost unknowable vitality of the present. I say "almost unknowable," because Stein asserts that only those caught up in this change in a truly original way really recognize it. But – and here the collapse of aesthetics and politics into one another rears its head – she deems those who are really involved in what is going on not revolutionaries but "creators": "A creator is not in advance of his generation but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation" (*Picasso* 30). With this subtle slip from the one thing to the other, art and politics become almost indistinguishable for Stein. Or, at any rate, the latter becomes a mere supplement to the former.

For Stein, however, this means that revolutions – which she unequivocally collapses into climates of original creation – must go almost unnoticed when they are taking place. All but laughing

in the face of Kant, she writes, 'The French revolution was over when war forced everyone to recognize it, the American revolution was accomplished before the war, the war is only a publicity agent which makes everyone know what has happened, yes, it is that" (*Picasso* 30). At a purely factual level this series of claims is obviously farcically untrue, unless one accepts that here as for Foucault "recognition" has more to do with critical understanding than mere perception. War does not simply publicize that there has been a revolution, it identifies that revolution's meaning. Thus, one can, according to Stein's peculiar system, acknowledge that some sort of revolution is going on without knowing what is actually happening.

This, at any rate, seems to be what Stein has in mind when she equates the real political revolutions of her time with the background details of everyday life. In *Everybody's Autobiography*, a text roughly contemporaneous with her book on Picasso, she writes,

> Every time I go out I meet some one and we talk together of revolutions and the weather. Revolutions do and many of them can never do better than come. The Spanish Civil War has frightened the French.
> Every time we talk about revolutions we know there is going to be another. (*Everybody's Autobiography* 125)

Though she speaks of a force that tends to upset the social, turning neighbor against neighbor, Stein domesticates revolution, winding it into the phatic weave of civil society. Moreover, in conjoining it to the weather – that emptiest of topics – she suggests that it is largely evacuated in this kind of speech. It is no accident that her interlocutor is an unnamed "some one" – a rarity in this book that names the names of virtually everyone she has ever met, but a striking double of the ambiguous "some one" who "was loving" in "Ada." This is not speech directed at this or that person; it is a kind of communication that seeks to shore up the weak bonds that tie together community as such. Conversation about revolution transforms into a sort of katechontic or apotropaic charm against the real risks of revolution. If the Spanish Civil War frightens the French, the French speak of it in order to resist the danger it presents, the threat of social dissolution. Pure accumulation of such speech

drains revolution of its signifying content: It keeps coming, yes, but seemingly without reason. We talk about revolution in the hopes of never recognizing it – of never recognizing that it has come to us.

Reading across Stein's memoiristic prose suggests that revolution is an interruption that forcibly makes itself present to us *because of the way it calls attention to loss or lack*. She writes, "All the time that I am writing the Spanish revolution obtrudes itself. Not because it is a revolution, but because I know it all so well all the places they are mentioning and the things they are destroying" (*Everybody's Autobiography* 90). The erratic grammatical shift in this sentence from the singular "it" to the plural "places" and "things" conflates what revolution destroys with revolution itself. Revolution thereby calls attention to an absence that stands in for the absence-in-presence of revolution. Through a typically torturous kind of Steinian circularity, the absence of revolution leads us to attend to other absences. It points, on the one hand, to our own socio-discursive vacuity, but also to the absence of the things that should be most important to us. Revolution thereby becomes Stein's master trope for our inability to speak the truth – if there is such a thing – of our desires.

However, this interruptive awareness of lack grounds a more a more affirmative awareness of time. Describing a period in which Picasso was without Period – a period, that is, during which he was unable to paint – Stein notes, "It was the very first time in his life" (*Picasso* 38). On the most overt level, she means that this was the first time he incapable of working. But in a subtler way, her simple syntax implies – and here she approaches the Foucaultian position without embracing it – that when Picasso wandered from the perpetual present of creation he was able to contemplate the "now" that had been in a new way. Far from forcing us to contemplate our own immediate "actuality," as Foucault might suggest, the function of revolutionary interruption may be to free us from the tyranny of the present it helps to generate.

Stein codes the temporal stakes of the movement between revolution and war, or creation and publicity in a deeply difficult sequence about how Picasso came to paint again. Once again, she locates this development in relation to the Spanish Civil War:

> Finally war broke out in Spain.
> First the revolution and then war.
> It was not the events themselves that were happening in Spain which awoke Picasso but the fact that they were happening in Spain, he had lost Spain and here was Spain not lost, she existed, the existence of Spain awakened Picasso, he too existed, everything that had been imposed upon him no longer existed, he and Spain, both of them existed, of course they existed, they are alive, Picasso commenced to work, he commenced to speak as he has spoke all his life, speaking with drawings and color, speaking with writing, the writing of Picasso. (*Picasso* 48)

What to make of the profoundly knotted ambivalences of this passage? The first two sentences suggest that what Picasso had lost was his own awareness of the moment, for as Stein has previously suggested, revolution stands for the mere fact of the present while war is only the public's retroactive awareness of it. Further, the way that she entangles painting, writing and speech conflates her own projects with those of her friend. Indeed, the reference to speech may even fold Toklas – whose way of talking Stein famously borrowed in the first autobiography – into the formula. Picasso becomes a figure of Stein's modernist scene as a whole, his private artistic practice taking on the overdetermined burden of multiple forms of creation. Yet in being reawakened by war rather than its antecedent revolution, this modernism returns to itself at a moment that is no longer its own. The persistence of Picasso's practice might thus be a kind of ongoing mourning of the sort that Tammy Clewell describes, a way of continuing to relate to a lost thing. If so, however, we must account for the status of Spain which both is and is not "lost" at the instant when its destruction is most fully risked. War thus offers a perverse consolation for Stein: In acting as a "publicity agent" it makes available that *was* anihilates in the moment of its own realization.

So, in Steinian revolution, an object is both lost and upheld, even as revolt's temporalizing function directs us to a future in which we will realize that it was with us all along. Here one is reminded of Stein's relentless professions of love for Juan Gris in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*,

professions that sometimes seem to take the place of her love for Toklas, even if they do so only by way of temporary juxtaposition. Thus, when Stein speaks, as she often does, of the way that Gris is coming "into his own" she means that he is coming in a very different way than "revolutions do." What the wake of revolution promises – for good or for ill – is a world in which we will at last be able to comprehend the changes that it wrought. Gris, his work, and the quiet passions for which he stands, have long been with us, Stein seems to say, but only when the now that birthed them is no longer can they be known.

To return to Comay's reading of the *Contest of the Faculties*, revolution in the Kantian, and perhaps Foucaultian, sense tends to overwhelm temporal difference. Comay writes, "The present moment becomes vivid to itself in offering a glimpse of the future –a 'fragment' (*Stück*)—in the light of which history suddenly presents itself as an unbroken totality, and past and future are simultaneously redeemed" (28). In this model, the fragmentary character of the future is all but indistinguishable from that of the revolutionary present. All moments become equal to the extent that they are indistinct. Revolution's present is not so much perpetual as eternal. Such an understanding of revolt risks repeating the error of the *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, in which individual fragments were made to stand alone, thereby denying the inadequacy of each partial attempt. But if for Kant revolution made a totalizing fragment of the present, for Stein it shatters past and future alike to very extent that it subtracts part of the present from itself. Thus, what revolution makes many fragments: It ruins everything in a way that encourages us to posit the relation of these self-totalizing part objects, ultimately asking us to inquire into the ways that they comment on, and perhaps modify, one another. We see this in nothing so much as Stein's suggestion that the future publication of the revolutionary present allows us to think through what the creative present lacks. Stein's revolutionary modernism teaches us to see and read things that are not *of the now, but will have been*. Significantly, this is neither a narrative of unstoppable progress nor

another story of elite modernist snobbery. Instead, it is a promise that we will one day know the things we should have always known and love those that we should have always loved.

It is no accident that the implied verb tense in which all of this takes place is the future perfect. To speak in the future perfect is to acknowledge the mutual inadequacy of today and tomorrow, as the former becomes meaningful only in light of the latter and the latter's primary function is to illuminate the former. That is, their relationship is one of modification; they act on one another in a manner that enlivens and expands both sides of the equation. The drama of exclusions and elisions across Stein's oeuvre, but especially in her memoiristic works, likewise founds a process of modification. Gris, who sometimes seems to be a sort of erotic mediator for Stein and Toklas, is unknown in his own moment, but she promises that his accomplishments will have been clear in the future. In relation to this, one cannot help but read a similar pledge that the future will show her seeming silences about Toklas to have been a kind of speech all along. Far from revealing an internalized self-hatred, Stein's coyness demonstrates her longing for a richer understanding of her relationship with Toklas than the impoverished vocabularies of her own present – and perhaps ours as well – could provide. Like modernism, which can only be accurately characterized through the perpetually incomplete workings of gossip, this more appropriate understanding would delineate a form of identity intelligible only in and through real relationships and the modifications that arise from them.

CHAPTER THREE

William S. Burroughs' Fragmentary Incorporations

I.

Like so many American novelists in the post-World War II era, William S. Burroughs had a fundamentally vexed relationship to his own visibility within the public sphere. In a late autobiographical reflection, he reports, "During my period of addiction in Tangiers, I was known as 'El Hombre Invisible,' The Invisible Man" (Burroughs, *Queer* xii). Though he initially presents this appellation as a sign of his own drug addled disintegration, it would come to serve as a defining trope in studies of his life and body of work. Barry Miles, for example, turns this Spanish insult into the title of his admiring 1992 biography of Burrough. Likewise, Timothy S. Murphy argues that Burroughs' invisibility affirmatively marks him as a fundamentally "amodern" writer rather than a merely modernist or postmodernist one (16-45).[36] If "El Hombre Invisible" sticks, it may be because it speaks to the way Burroughs is forever disappearing into a language that is not quite his own, even as that disappearance paradoxically marks the very point of his arrival. From the start of his writing career, he simultaneously proclaims his own presence within his work and hides his face, an ambivalent movement that would characterize everything after.

Nowhere is this doubled movement of self-presentation in evasion clearer than in the name William Lee, the *nom de plume* under which he published his first novel, *Junky*. Burroughs had originally intended to write under the name Dennison, the appellation that Jack Kerouac had given to Burroughs' double in *The Town and the City*. In an April 1952 letter to William Ginsberg, however,

[36] For Murphy, amodernism constitutes a properly resistant attitude to the matrices of capitalism, unlike more conventional postmodernisms, which, in his formulation, merely submit to the logic of capital.

Burroughs indicated that he could no longer do so in good conscience: "I have decided to drop Dennison because Ma read Kerouac's book. Lee is the name. I guess 1st name will be William though that is getting close again" (*Letters 1945-1959* 111). Even as he holds onto his own given name, as if embracing it for its anonymizing banality, he takes up a new family name that seems to point elsewhere. Like a carnival mask that covers only the upper half of a performer's face, this pen name at once conceals and promises to reveal the man who hides behind it. Reading *Junky*, one might reasonably imagine that Burroughs originally chose to hide his identity in an attempt to disassociate himself from the troubling subject matter of the novel itself. A first person narrative of heroin addiction – one in which the narrator, also named William Lee, deals in stolen merchandise, grows marijuana, and forges prescriptions, among other criminal enterprises – *Junky* sometimes seems more like a signed confession than the pulp entertainment promised by its original marketing. The name William Lee, then, might be understood as a criminal alibi of sorts, a Get-Out-of-Jail-Free card that at once allows Burroughs to proclaim his proximity to the scene of the crimes he describes and permits him to disassociate from them.

Yet Burroughs' choice of the name Lee itself is surely no accident, and the extent to which it resists the arbitrary otherness of a good disguise speaks to the real rationale of his evasive self-performance. Lee, after all, was Burroughs' mother's maiden name, meaning that through the very act by which he claimed an alternative identity, he also took up the mantle of his own matrilineal heritage. As Oliver Harris rightly notes in his introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of *Junky*, this name "revealed the very thing [Burroughs] claimed to want to hide" (Harris, Introduction xii). In the process, it points to the complicated autobiographical status of this and other Burroughs texts, works that have long been taken as descriptions of his real life despite their countless elisions and fictionalizations. Indeed, the Burroughsian drama of naming points to a quality of selective fabrication in the various fragmentary queer novels discussed in this project, all of which present

pieces of their authors' real lives in the service of fictional ends. The assumed last name too points back to the author's real identity, but it does so in a way that complicates the gendered logic of familial inheritance. Burroughs recovers something that had been sloughed off before his own birth, inverting the temporal priority of the narrative produced by the juncture of biology and the law. Insofar as authorial evasiveness slips into familial drag, there is something fundamentally queer about the way that Burroughs negotiates his own visibility.

It should be no surprise, then, to find that Burroughs' pen name initiates a complicated torsion of identity through which he would negotiate his own sexuality over the course of his writing life. As we will see, the way he recovers something ostensibly lost to the past – his mother's maiden name, in this instance – is critical to this practice. More immediately, however, the atavistic inversion of his chosen appellation invites comparison to discourses of perverse ahistoricism. In *Anachronism and its Others*, Valerie Rohy charts the manner in which those who have helped, in Foucault's famous phrase, to produce the homosexual as "species," have repeatedly relied on a rhetoric of perversion as temporally retrograde (Foucault, *History of Sexuality vol. 1* 43). The queer subject, these stories explain, either reverts to an earlier stage in the evolutionary development of the human organism or fails to fully carry out the psychosexual development of the human individual (Rohy, *Anachronism* 1-20). As Rohy suggests, these time-out-of-joint narratives construct queer subjects in opposition to a normative time, a chronology that would be "straight" in both its claim to linear progression and its heterosexual character. Importantly, Rohy refuses to valorize the aberrant temporality that these narratives thrust on queer subjects. She writes, "Unlike those queer critics who align marginality with temporal abberation, I address the ways in which queer and antiracist projects inherit the lines of scientific racism and nineteenth century sexology" (*Anachronism* xv). For Rohy, queer anachronism is the constitutive excess of straight time, such that assertions of queer difference affirm, rather than undo, the structures of oppression they ostensibly oppose.

In these terms, Burroughs' matrilineal penname might be understood as, at best, an admission that even in his attempts to hide, he becomes the dupe of a power that exceeds him. Here, when Burroughs dons the mantle of his feminized past in 1952, he would simply be repeating the logic by which homosexuals had been explained into being for over half a century: He loses himself in the past and thereby fails to assume his properly masculine role in the dawning present. Something similar arises in the way that Leslie Fiedler described – and damned without quite dismissing – Burroughs' work. Fiedler's 1960 *Love and Death in the American Novel* serves as one of Rohy's privileged examples for the way that it "understands homosexuality *both* as what comes before, the relic of a racialized past, *and* as what follows after, the symptom of a failed heterosexuality" (*Anachronism* 18; emphasis original). As Rohy argues, Fiedler provides a literally ambivalent account of queer temporality, one in which the past and future bifurcate the present and thereby render it meaningless. Thus, Fiedler homophobically attacks post-modern literature in terms of the very experience of temporal indeterminacy that has been celebrated by recent theorists of queer temporality.

Indeed, five years later in "The New Mutants," Fielder would argue, "Burroughs is the chief prophet of the post-male post-heroic world… for *The Naked Lunch*... is more than it seems: no mere essay in heroin-hallucinated homosexual pornography – but a nightmare anticipation (in Science Fiction form) of post-Humanist sexuality" (202). Despite the language of prophecy that saturates Fiedler's account, the temporal status of Burroughs' supposed project falls into obscurity. As Fiedler puts it elsewhere in the essay, Burroughs heralds an attitude in which "the past threatens momentarily to disappear from the present, which itself seems on the verge of disappearing into the future" (191). Here, history itself dissolves before the mutations that "post-Humanist sexuality" brings, a dissolution that follows from the breakdown of the reproductive heterosexual couple. The threatened loss of normative family unit – which follows from the Burroughsian "radical

metamorphosis of the Western male" (Fiedler 204) – leads in turn to the collapse of a readily legible version of history, thanks to the way the distinction between past and future ordinarily derives from the fact of reproductive lineage.

Even if Fiedler fails to locate the homosexual subject in the developmental past, he persists in treating homosexuality as a temporal deviation. For Fiedler, Burroughs' decision to take his mother's maiden name would presumably follow from the same "revolt against masculinity" (Fiedler 205) that breaks down the family order. Burroughs' assumed identity effectively denies the historical fact of his parents' marriage, insofar as it makes present the prehistory of their union. In the process, it seems to annul differential history altogether, predicating Burroughs' ambiguous acceptance of queer identity on an unstable temporal order. Such dilemmas may not have been altogether alien to Burroughs, for whom maintenance of a potent masculinity was, as we will see, far more important than critics like Fiedler ever realized. It may be the case, then, that his attempt to hide in the folds of time was as much a problem for him as it was for his later readers.

There is, however, something cheeky about Burroughs' pen name, something that leaves one wanting to take him as more than a knowing dupe. Like dying one's hair its original color, this false name that isn't seems run through with a pronounced degree of winking irony from the very start. Most significantly, there is the way that the name proliferates throughout Burroughs' early work, such that he ultimately wound up pinning it, in Robin Lydenberg's phrase, to the "walk-on roles as junky, con man, carnival huckster, detective, or intergalactic revolutionary agent" (Skerl and Lydenberg, *Burroughs at the Front* 234)[37] in which he cast himself, even as he began to attach his own patrilineal family name to his work. The name Burroughs initially extracts from his familial past is no

[37] As Lydenberg goes on to remind us, Burroughs would later take up the name William Seward Hall for his authorial stand ins. Here it is his middle name, so long collapsed into the abbreviated S. that normally sits silently between William and Burroughs, that simultaneously points away and back. This shift arguably marks a late attempt to unfold the potentiality implicit in the present moment, instead of seeking them in a temporalized otherwhen, one that I cannot consider in any detail in the present chapter.

mere retrograde return to a prior moment. Instead, it is more like a clipping from a plant, one that can be coaxed to new life in varied soils. It will be no accident, then, that this name inaugurates Burroughs' career as a writer, because such practices of transplantation are, as we will see, fundamental to his way of representing and negotiating his sexuality. A related technique of fragmentary appropriation would allow Burroughs to undermine the otherwise intractable stability of the categories he had reluctantly embraced earlier in his career. By repositioning elements of these earlier assertions of identity, he attempts to weaken their hold, or at least transform their grip into something more like a caress.

II.

Burroughs first and most frankly describes his sexual orientation early in *Queer*, a partially incomplete novel – he calls it a "manuscript fragment" in his introduction to the 1985 edition (*Queer* xiv) – that he began writing shortly after *Junky* and which went suppressed for almost forty years for reasons that will be discussed below. While courting a young, ostensibly heterosexual man named Eugene Allerton, the novel's protagonist, William Lee, initially wishes that someone else would explain his sexuality to his potential conquest, saving him the awkwardness of confession: "He thought, 'I hope Dumé tells him about me.' Lee felt uncomfortable in dramatic 'something-I-have-to-tell-you' routines and he knew, from unnerving experience, the difficulties of a casual come-on: 'I'm queer, you know, by the way'" (Burroughs, *Queer* 35). In the desire that someone else should provide Allerton with this information, Burroughs tacitly embraces community and gossip as sites of disclosure. Lacking such a mutually informative context, however, he necessarily falls into the patterns of confessional speech. The two commas that divide his hypothetical admission create the effect of a stutter that suggests uncertainty about the epistemological status of that which is being admitted. Placing "you know" at the this center of this phrase seems to propose the form of an

interrogation, but the absence of a question mark instead implies that he offers this information as if it were an already familiar fact. His queerness thus functions here as a sort of open secret, already evident but unavailable as a site of action in the absence of public demonstration. At stake in this unwanted confession, then, is a pronounced concern with the visibility of sexual difference.

This problem of partial appearance is redoubled in the following lines, as Lee thinks through the selective deafness of those to whom he has offered this information in the past: "Sometimes they don't hear right and yell, 'What?' Or you toss in: 'If you were queer as I am.' The other yawns and changes the subject, and you don't know whether he understood or not" (Burroughs, *Queer* 35). The verb "yell" sits awkwardly in relation to the possibility of mishearing, suggesting an affective intensity that is clearly out of proportion with a simple failure of the ear. Threatening violence to come, "yell" proposes that Lee's interlocutors have heard him, and have understood, even if they pretend not to. Just as it comes into view, sexuality is here forcibly repressed, effectively re-closeting the newly visible queer subject. While it lacks this tonal intensity, the yawn similarly hews to the space between comprehension and incomprehension. As if bored to exhaustion by the already known, Lee's confessor feigns ignorance in a way that leaves Lee himself unsure whether or not his message has been received. Far from clarifying, confession multiplies ambiguities, denying the subject knowledge even as he attempts to present the truth of himself.

Some twenty years before the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Burroughs here problematizes the pastoral framework of subjectification that Foucault would describe. For Foucault, confession marks both the grounding of agency as such and the point at which one's agency is no longer properly one's own. In English, this condition is tidily suggested by the noun confessor, which perversely suggests that the one who hears a confession is the agent of the confessional act. Burroughs likewise attempts to resolve an ambiguity that prevents him from acting on his desires, only to have ambiguity thrust upon him by the one to whom he speaks. The very act

of admitting his inclinations so that he might act upon them spins him about on his axis, leaving him dizzy and uncertain how to proceed.

Though Burroughs was raised in a strictly Protestant household in which self-disclosure seems to have played little part, he remained fascinated by technologies of confession throughout his life, especially those of a psychotherapeutic character (Skerl, *Burroughs* (1985) 2). Burroughs was all too familiar with the violences of this institution. In the late 1930s, he severed the top joint from the little finger of his left hand with a pair of poultry shears. While he had intended to present this excised object to a lover as a gesture of his devotion, he first euphorically showed it to his analyst, one Doctor Wiggers. Horrified, Wiggers had Burroughs committed to the Bellevue hospital (Miles 34-35).[38] Though Burroughs had other therapists at certain points in his life, his repeated returns to this incident throughout his oeuvre suggest that this betrayal in the wake of his confession scarred him deeply.[39] Similarly, Burroughs' vexed engagement with Scientology, an institution that positions itself in opposition to the psychoanalytic establishment but that also demands endless confessions from its adherents, points to his continued interest in the paralytic potentiality of self-disclosure. As we have already seen, his pen name may have marked an attempt to negotiate the demand to come clean without losing control of himself. In practice, however, his techniques of self-management are even more deeply embedded in his formal literary techniques, most of all in the performative mode he calls the "routine."

As Burroughs explains it in his 1985 preface to *Queer*, routines are fantastical performances that demand attention. In *Queer* they derive in particular from Lee's experience of withdrawal from the drugs that he – or the character that shares Lee's name – abused throughout *Junky*. Burroughs writes, "While the addict is indifferent to the impression he creates in others, during withdrawal he

[38] Burroughs himself narrates a thinly fictionalized version of the story in "The Finger" (Burroughs, *Interzone* 13-17). He would also frequently return to the incident in his letters to Ginsberg throughout the 1940s and 1950s.
[39] For Burroughs' thoughts on psychoanalysis more generally, as well as brief references to his later experiences in analysis, see "On Freud and the Unconscious" (Burroughs, *The Adding Machine* 90-98).

may feel the compulsive need for an audience, and this is clearly what Lee seeks in Allerton: an audience, the acknowledgment of his performance, which of course is a mask, to cover a shocking disintegration" (*Queer* xv). This passage plays cleverly on the language of withdrawal, proposing that a movement away from one object of desire must always result in a movement toward another. It suggests, moreover, that the initial movement away threatens the subject with dissolution, dissolution that can be prevented by the recognition that another object offers.[40] Burroughs continues, "So [Lee] invents a frantic attention-getting format which he calls the Routine: shocking, funny, riveting" (*Queer* xv). The three adjectives that end this sentence describe a clear affective sequence, one in which a subject is first electrified to attention, then pleased, and finally attached in a definite way to its interlocutor. Lee's bawdy, elaborate stories must therefore be understood as strategies of seduction, attempts to grab and hold those who can save him from fragmentation.

Tellingly, the word "routine" features prominently in *Queer* in the passage quoted above when he thinks through the difficulty of articulating his sexuality to Allerton, marking only its second appearance in the text. Above all else, this fact speaks to the conjunction of the Burroughsian performance of coming out and the labor of seduction. Most of the routines that Burroughs has Lee perform throughout the novel are, however, far more complicated than that stutteringly undramatic seven word "dramatic 'something-I-have-to-tell-you'" speech, and all of them are far bawdier. In particular, his eventual disclosure to Allerton takes a far more dynamic form. After Lee learns that Dumé has, in fact, obligingly let Allerton in on the open secret of Lee's "proclivities," Lee virtually explodes with speech:

> A curse. Been in our family for generations. The Lees have always been perverts. I shall never forget the unspeakable horror that froze the lymph in my glands—the lymph glands

[40] This logic resembles that of the stoned paranoiac. As drugs like marijuana disrupt the coherence of short term memory, they threaten the stability of self-identity, which we the consciousness constantly reconstitutes by connecting the prior moment to the present one in anticipation of the next. Paranoia serves as a buffer against this loss of self insofar as it works according to the formula, "If they're out to get me, there must be a me for them to get."

> that is, of course—when the baneful word seared my reeling brain: **I was a homosexual**. I thought of the painted, simpering female impersonators I had seen in a Baltimore night club. Could it be possible that I was one of those subhuman things?" (*Queer* 39; emphasis original)

More than almost any other speech in the book, this passage is full of the traces of natural speech. Lee's initial inversion of "lymph glands" and his subsequent correction, for example, mark the excited mumblings of a naturalistic utterance. Likewise, the powerful typographical emphasis that Burroughs places on the phrase "I was a homosexual," not italicizing it, but writing it in bold, underscores the intensity with which Lee pronounces these words without resorting to narratorial intrusion. As such, the emphasis literally remains on the fact of speaking itself, thereby redoubling the overwhelming affective rush of the revelation. As in the paradigmatic model of trauma, the original experience and the description of it collapse into one another, the two moments becoming one for the horrifically imperiled subject.

Simultaneously, the highly crafted character of Lee's story speaks to its meticulously scripted origins. Nowhere in Queer but in the routines does Burroughs resort to elaborate constructions like "the baneful word seared my reeling brain." "Seared" in particular must be carefully chosen, given its homophonic resonance with "seer" and its consequent implications of a sudden wisdom that burns as it arrives. Likewise, the contrast between frozen lymph glands and a reeling brain describes a body disincorporated by the knowledge of embodied desire, an image that prefigures the shattered corporeal figures for which Burroughs would become famous later in his career. Most peculiar is Lee's use of the clinical sounding "homosexual" in lieu of "queer," which he prefers throughout the novel for reasons that I explore below or the more derogatory language he applies to the drag queens he "had seen in a Baltimore night club." This ostensibly neutral term conveys a sense of careful selection, even as Burroughs' typography evokes spontaneous speech. As a whole, then, this passage vacillates between the poles of spontaneity and craft, evoking the style of automatic, unedited writing for which Beat writers like Jack Kerouac would soon grow famous in a way that at

once celebrates and gives the lie to such a methodology. Burroughs' doubled syntax exposes the drama of writing itself as pure stage craft, a performance of spontaneity already removed from the act that it claims to describe. Put simply, this is the mark of the routine, a crafted performance of speech designed to be imported into other contexts – an attempted seduction in a grimy bar or a sudden digression in a realist novel – as if it belonged naturally in that new environment.

In this climate of artful artlessness nothing comes through more earnestly than Burroughs' surprisingly aggressive effeminophobia. Though Burroughs would become notorious for his misogyny with later works, here it is the pretense to imitate femininity that reduces the female impersonators, apparently his only models of male homosexuality, to the status of "subhuman things."[41] The key adjective is "painted," a word that speaks to the superficial pretense of a gender not their own. Of course, if it is artifice itself that rankles, Burroughs himself is inevitably implicated in that which disgusts him, given the cultivated pretense to naturalness that we have already witnessed in this passage as a whole. Burroughs' style therefore pulls him into his own circuit of disgust, effectively queering the mode of the routine itself. While this twist of technique may complicate Lee's expression of loathing, it does nothing to defuse the intensity of its eruption.

In his extensive study of Burroughs' sexuality, *Queer Burroughs*, Jamie Russell argues that the cultural equation of male homosexuality with heterosexual femininity initially rendered it impossible for Burroughs to pursue truly mutual relationships with other men. According to Russell, Burroughs hoped to affirm his own maleness while also acting on his longing for men, but in doing so he found himself in an impossible bind. He identifies traces of this aporia in the Lee of *Queer*: "In order to

[41] In his prologue to *Junky*, Burroughs offers an altogether different chronology of his confrontation with his own sexuality, though it remains unclear whether he writes here as Burroughs, Lee, or some combination of the two: "I read more than was usual for an American boy of that time and place: Oscar Wilde, Anatole France, Baudelaire, even Gide. I formed a romantic attachment for another boy and we spent our Saturdays exploring old quarries, riding around on bicycles and fishing in ponds and rivers" (xxxviii). One notes the seamless transition from his description of boyhood reading to his account of adolescent romance. Against the pained experience of self-discovery in the routine that Lee delivers to Allerton in *Queer*, this passage suggests that early contact with literary models of queer male homosexuality led to a painless, even bucolic, transition into self-acceptance. Only the peculiar preposition "for" in lieu of "to" suggests that something might be amiss or unusual in his description of "romantic attachment."

rediscover this masculine identity (without renouncing homosexuality) it is clear that Lee must take an effeminate partner, thereby retaining an active, dominant role for himself. But his 'effeminophobia' prevents him from taking this step. Lee is so disgusted by the very idea of a man pretending to be a woman that he searches for a partner who is as masculine as he believes himself to be" (Russell 19). Russell too, then, identifies pretense to femininity as the point of crisis. But if Russell is right and Lee can only imagine sleeping with a man pretending to be a woman, lest he risk losing his own masculinity, the very possibility of sexual fulfillment is all but barred.

Ultimately, this same crisis contributed to the decades long suppression of *Queer* itself. Unlike many works of queer memoir and fictionalized autobiography that went unpublished for much or all of their authors' lifetimes, *Queer* was suppressed not just by some external authority, but also and primarily by Burroughs himself. Burroughs initially began *Queer* in March 1952, just as he was submitting the manuscript of *Junkie* to Ace Books, which would eventually publish it in a double edition with an explicitly anti-drug novel titled *Narcotic Agent*. When A.A. Wyn, an editor at Ace, insisted that Burroughs lengthen *Junkie*, the novelist gutted forty pages from what was to be his second book, rewriting them in the first person (Miles 62).[42] While Burroughs still hoped to publish queer, he came into further conflict with Carl Solomon at Ace when Solomon insisted that the second book should be titled "Fag" rather than *Queer* (Russell 9-11). As David Savran explains, to Burroughs' midcentury ear, "fag" connoted the feminized gayness that horrified him, while "queer" would have referred to a more masculine form of deviance. Quoting both an April 22nd, 1952 letter to Ginsberg and *Junky*, Savarn writes, "For Burroughs… there is a clear distinction between the 'strong, manly, noble' homosexuals (or 'queers') and the dehumanized 'fags' who 'jerk around like puppets on invisible strings, galvanized into hideous activity that is the negation of everything living

[42] On the complex publication history of *Queer*, especially the changes made to it by editors in the mid-1980s to ready it for publication, see Harris (*Fascination* 78-80).

and spontaneous'" (70).[43] As the passage that Savran quotes indicates, Burroughs associated the position of the "fag" with a loss of agency, volition, and will. In this nominative stance, then, we find an echo of the structural bind suggested by his choice of pen name. "Fag," however, troubled him in a way that "Lee" never seemed to.

Given that Burroughs is known for his irregularities of style and syntax, it may be surprising to find that the phobic distinction he draws between "fag" and "queer" obeys strict grammatical principles: The former almost always appears as a noun, while the later principally plays an adjectival role. This distinction is already in evidence as early as *Junky* in the passage that Savran quotes, a scene in which Burroughs turns his anthropologically trained eye on the denizens of the New Orleans bar scene. Burroughs writes, "In the French Quarter there are several queer bars so full every night the fags spill out on the sidewalk. A room full of fags gives me the horrors… Occasionally, you find intact personalities in a queer bar, but fags set the tone of these joints, and it always brings me down to go into a queer bar" (*Junky* 60). Throughout this section, "fag" consistently refers to a class of persons, albeit of persons who have seemingly been drained of all individual personhood. Burroughs compares them first to "puppets on invisible strings" and then to "ventriloquists' dummies." The power of the noun claims them in a way that ensures that they are no longer their own men. They have literally been characterized by this term in a way that leaves them shattered and without characteristics of their own to the extent that they are no longer "intact personalities." Twice repeating the word "full," Burroughs suggests that the "fags" are a teeming, indistinct mass. To use his own image repertoire, in which humans are forever turning into insects, the "fags" are more like locusts than men.

For all the phobic horror that this passage demonstrates, it is not strictly homophobic. Burroughs pointedly and repeatedly uses the word "queer" as an adjective. It is a word that sticks to

[43] Burroughs' description of "queers" as "strong, manly, noble types" appears in Burroughs, *Letters* 119.

others, changing their significance in a way that can only ever be partial. While the "fags" who fill up "queer bars" may make such environments unlivable for Burroughs, it is clearly not the bars themselves that trouble him, nor is it the fact of their queerness. To the contrary, that these locales are "queer bars" and not "bars for queers" seems to be their saving grace. So long as it remains adjectival, this word preserves the bare possibility of living vitality. As its original meaning suggests, it promises strangeness and hence difference, rather mere submission to a nominal norm.

As early as 1971, Alfred Kazin pointed to the adjectival character of Burroughs' writing, describing the way this linguistic tendency shaped the composition of Burroughs' novels. Studying the irregular narrative character of books like *Naked Lunch*, Kazin writes, "These rapid shifts and indiscriminate couplings of scenes take place in Burroughs's books as if they were violently oscillating and exploding in the telescopic eyepiece of an astronomer who just happens to be gloriously soused. He writes scenes as fluently as other people write adjectives, so that he is always inserting one scene into another, *turning* one scene into another" (263). Coupling cosmological observation with human inebriation, Kazin astutely points to the dizzying experience of an adjectival world, one in which the experience of the world itself is nothing other than a continuous process of modification. Some twenty years earlier, before his career as a writer had properly begun, Burroughs would express a similar sentiment when he wrote in a 1950 letter to Ginsberg, "You say you have found out you are just human like other humans. Human, Allen, is an adjective, and its use as a noun is in itself regrettable" (*Letters* 68). What the adjective resists is pure likeness, an endless reduction of the other to the stolid same. No simple anti-humanist, the Burroughs of this letter imagines the value of the human to be in its ability to change something – perhaps one's self, or perhaps one's others. Kazin astutely captures this sentiment as well when he notes that Burroughs "*is different* and he writes out of his difference" (264n; emphasis original). What Burroughs seems to resist – in his style, as well as in his thought – is, in the strictest sense possible, pure identity, the endless reduction

of any other to the same. In any case, the importance of this preference for the adjective will become clearer when we turn to Burroughs' fragmentary style, which works by revealing the fissures within a text, thereby reinstating the fact of difference and reopening his experience of sexuality to modification. At this juncture, however, it bears noting that Burroughs' style may well have its origins in his phobic ideology, even if the former ultimately helps to undermine the latter.

Given Burroughs' effeminophobia, it should be little surprise to find that in the same letter that Savran quotes, Burroughs implicitly describes editorial meddling as a species of rape. Burroughs writes to Ginsberg, "Furthechrissakes a girl's gotta draw the line somewheres or publishers will swarm all over her sticking their nasty old biographical prefaces up her ass" (*Letters* 119-120). In a graceful close reading of these lines, Russell observes, "The hierarchy of gender identifications [Burroughs] relies upon [here] is explicit; the 'girl' will always be a victim unless she stands up for herself (becomes a man). The feminizing rape can only be avoided through violent (masculine) retaliation" (10). Ultimately, of course, Burroughs did not "see [Solomon] castrated" before letting himself "be called a Fag" as he threatens earlier in the letter. Instead, he maintained what little agency he could in the face of Solomon's feminizing meddling, withdrawing queer from publication for more than three decades. This suppression must therefore be read as an attempt to maintain some species of will in the face of a misrepresentation of sexuality that supposedly would have undone him. Burroughs did not fear the exposure of his proclivities, but the possibility that they would be exposed incorrectly, presented to the public in a manner that would drain his ability to act at all.

While it remains important not to lose oneself in Burroughs' often bizarre theories, the power he attributes to names here is worth dwelling upon. Solomon threatens Burroughs not simply by calling him a "fag," but by naming him at all. It is surely no accident that Burroughs capitalizes this epithet in his letter to Ginsberg, as if it were a proper name. Here, then, Solomon assumes a

paternal role, assigning a name to Burroughs that will shape the ways that others see him as he moves ahead. Naturally, it is precisely this paternalistic imposition that Burroughs subverts when he takes up the pen name Lee, choosing to embrace matrilineal line instead of the tyranny of the patrilineal mandate. Yet we see here that he does so not in order to assume a feminine position, but to avoid it. By controlling the process of naming, he seeks to further regulate the ways that he will be seen. In this sense, it is apt that he prefers a word ("queer") that is primarily adjectival over the aggressive noun "fag." The former allows him to modify the ways that he will be perceived, such that he can maintain his masculine status, even as he extends masculinity's valences, while the latter threatens to capture him completely.[44] Burroughs was therefore closer to the literary masculine ideal that Fiedler articulates in *Death and the American Novel* than Fiedler ever realized. It was not women that Burroughs feared so much as the loss of control that they (not unproblematically) represented for him. Indeed, Russell rightly points to a "doubleness of Burroughs and Fiedler," one found above all else in "the fact that Burroughs' vision of the masculine is always mediated through heterosexual understandings of sex and gender" (106). Though Burroughs is an unavoidably queer figure, his own sexual politics were nowhere near as anti-normative as one sometimes hopes they would be.[45]

For all its troubling effeminophobia, the full version of the "I was a homosexual" routine from *Queer* holds out the possibility of something like queer community. As Lee carries on, he tells Allerton,

> I walked the streets in a daze, like a man with a light concussion – just a minute, Doctor Kildare, this isn't your script. I might well have destroyed myself, ending an existence which

[44] This deployment of "queer" – in which it refers not just to a history of insult, but also to an affirmation of midcentury masculinity – might well complicate our understanding of the uptake of the term by activists in the late 1980s. While Judith Butler and others who took up the term obviously did not intend to invoke Burroughsian effeminophobia, the kernel of his use of the term may haunt our more recent formulations, not least of all because he was one of the first prominent GLBT figure to find anything positive in the term. We lose track of such of such overdetermined histories at our own peril.

[45] Another hint of why Burroughs suppressed the novel can be found in his characterization of the novel's composition in 1985. He observes, "While it was I who wrote *Junky*, I feel that I was being written in queer" (*Queer* xiv). The shift from the active voice to the passive position evokes a condition akin to the metaphorical passive sexual position that Solomon's demands threatened to force on Burroughs.

> seemed to offer nothing but grotesque misery and humiliation. Nobler, I thought, to die a man than live on, a sex monster. It was a wise old queen – Bobo, we called her – who taught me that I had a duty to live and to bear my burden proudly for all to see, to conquer prejudice and ignorance and hate with knowledge and sincerity and love. Whenever you are threatened by prejudice, you emit a thick cloud of love like an octopus squirts ink… (*Queer* 39-40; ellipses original)

In its evocation of the suicide of queer youth who find themselves unable to accommodate to an unaccommodating world, this section of the routine feels surprisingly contemporary. Similarly, Lee's claim that he discovered his "duty" to live in plain sight and oppose prejudice reads more like a product of the post-Stonewall gay rights movement than of Burroughs' early 1950s milieu. Were it not for the all too Burroughsian simile about emitting "love like an octopus squirts ink," this passage as a whole might not feel out of place in a collection of contributions to Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" campaign. Indeed, Lee's account of the wise man that helped him find peace might as well be a hagiographic description of an encounter with Harvey Milk. But it is not Milk we meet here – it would not be, even if it could – instead it is the "old queen" Bobo, a name that ends with a masculine vowel, but proposes no definite gender. Given the effeminophobic language of the preceding section of the routine, this name, one that an indeterminate "we" bestows, makes the feminine honorific "queen" as deliberate as it is strange. Much as Burroughs loathes the feminine position, he is able to learn something from one whom he puts in just such a position.

Burroughs' evident discomfort with the mode of intersectional relationships – relationships, that is, predicated on difference – comes to the fore in the following paragraph of the routine when he has Lee summarily execute Bobo: "Poor Bobo came to a sticky end. He was riding in the Duc de Ventre's Hispano-Suiza when his falling piles blew out of the car and wrapped around the rear wheel. He was completely gutted, leaving an empty shell sitting there on the giraffe-skin upholstery. Even the eyes and the brain went, with a horrible shlupping sound" (*Queer* 40). Up to this point, Lee's routine has traversed a comfortably realist terrain: One can imagine these things happening to

Lee, perhaps even to Burroughs. But when it evokes Isadora Duncan's famous death in 1927 – her flowing scarf became entangled around the spokes and wheels of an Amilcar, breaking her neck – this phase of the story immediately becomes recognizable as a fantastic fabrication, and would even if it were not for Lee's revision of the tale. The grotesque image of Bobo literally emptied out through the anus definitively transports us into an altogether different mode. This turn to the bizarre also clearly marks the point at which the seductive component of the routine comes into play, compelling its shocked audience to laughter and hence to riveted attention. Thus, precisely at the point when he makes his demand for a particular relation clearest, Lee distances himself from the promise of an interellational politics that he had limned in the prior paragraph. If it is to return, it will only be able to do so at the level of Burroughsian form, barred as it surely is and will be in his texts' content.

Understanding how such possibilities recur necessitates a fuller exploration of the nature of the Burroughsian routine. From the start, they are communal in character. Burroughs explains to Ginsberg, "I have to have a receiver for routine. If there is no one there to receive it, routine turns back on me and tears me apart, grows more and more insane (literal growth like cancer) and impossible, and fragmentary like berserk pinball machine and I am screaming: 'Stop it! Stop it!'" (*Letters* 201).[46] The structure of this epistolary sentence provides a compelling echo of the experience that Burroughs describes, his vanishing prepositions and increasingly childish syntax mirroring the very descent into madness of the isolated routine. His only bulwark against this descent into fragmentation – fragmentation of the self as well as of the sentence – is the promise that his words will be heard. Burroughs experienced this receptivity of the other as a form of collaboration, as without it he could not write at all (Miles 62). Further, at their fullest, his routines had their origins in

[46] Strikingly, in addressing Ginsberg here, he bemoans that Ginsberg has not responded to any of his recent epistles. Adelbert Lewis Marker, on whom he had based the Allerton of *Queer*, had similarly refused to respond to Burroughs after the end of their initial affair, an event that briefly led him to abandon writing altogether (Burroughs, *Letters* 138).

a still more dynamic form of mutual production. In many case he would tell the stories in dialogue with his friends, with each man acting out different parts in the improvisatory stories.

Thus, we can identify four crucial elements in the form of the Burroughsian routine. First, they were communal and collaborative in character, directed to and produced by a variety of significant others. Second, they were designed to work as animated performances, traces of which are still evident in Lee's speech to Allerton. Third, as we have already seen, Burroughs thought of them as tools of seduction. Fourth and finally, should these other conditions fail, routines themselves collapse into fragmentation. While it remains important not to rely on Burroughs' attempts to theorize his own literary practices, these four elements provide a basic account of the form under ordinary conditions. Even as scholars have called attention to the communal context of Burroughs' literary production, they have largely neglected the consequences of the other three points. In particular, they have overlooked the self-consciously fragmentary quality of these texts, a quality that underwrites the formal resurgence of community in Burroughs' novels.

In practice, Burroughs sent many of his routines to his fellow writers, as well as to other friends, in epistolary form. Others were perfected over years of druggy, drunken evenings. Insofar as they belong to other textual contexts, the inclusion of these performances within his other texts, a practice that effectively begins with *Queer*, carries the trace of community into the body of his writing. Even as they mark a desire to pull the other closer, their presence insists on the fragmentary persistance of the other in the self, such that their inclusion bears a certain resemblance to the practices of prehistoric enchainment that I described in the introduction to this project. Though they are fragments on their own, they become something else when incorporated into a new textual context. Their very differences – in style, in content – from the material that surrounds them shows them once again grasping for contact and recognition. Simultaneously, in them, the supportive voices of past friends and lovers like the unceremoniously executed Bobo continue to reverberate,

voices that Burroughs' works otherwise silences. As such, these inclusive strategies must be understood as the ground of a more affirmative relation to sexuality.

First and foremost, the inclusion of fragmentary routines within the body of novels like *Queer* doubles with the way Lee himself uses the routines in a never complete attempt to overcome his own sense of isolation and alienation. Though they mark a demand for an audience, Burroughs' routines in *Queer* often fell on deaf ears, just as the book itself would languish in silence for decades. More often than not, Lee's routines in the novel are prompted by something in his environment. Triggered by a remark or an act, these routines attempt to produce a swerve in the course of a conversation in a way meant to shift the attention of Lee's interlocutors onto Lee himself. On one such occasion, he pursues Allerton through the bar Ship Ahoy, ignored and avoided at every station, until he catches his would-be paramour in a game of chess. Lee begins by offering an elaborate alternative history of the game that soon shifts into a story about his attempt to purchase a boy at "Corn Hole Gus's Used-Slave Lot" (*Queer* 64-70). Though the routine does not belong to the social world in which Lee participates – it is a fragment of other discourses and fantasies – it nevertheless responds to the terms of that world, even as it seeks to modify them beyond all recognition. Like the deeply Burroughsian aliens in *They Live*, who begin their invasion of earth by polluting our environment to make our atmosphere more like their own, the Lee of *Queer* attempts to connect with others by changing the very conversational climate in which they all ostensibly participate together.

More often than not, Lee's attempts seem to fall short of their goal, perhaps because they change their environment in such extreme ways that it ceases to be livable for those he addresses. The "Used-Slave Lot" routine closes on just such a note of heightened isolation. Burroughs writes, "The routine ended suddenly, and Lee looked around. The bar was nearly empty" (*Queer* 70). The spare simplicity of these sentences stands in stark contrast to the rich excess of the punning, ribald

language that fills up the preceding pages. In loosing himself to the rush of his performance, Lee fails to perceive that he is all but without an audience. An act that began as a call for company leaves him in a still greater state of isolation, its erotic inclinations diverted into onanistic emptiness rather than enthusiastic coupling. In the process, the stylistic difference between the two modes reemphasizes the fundamentally fragmentary character of the routine within what otherwise appears to be a "straight," realist narrative. To the extent that he loses himself in all of them, each of Lee's routines in the novel similarly leave him stranded, such that he seems like nothing so much as a man performing to an audience with their backs to the stage. In a way, then, all of his routines reinscribe the selective deafness that tends to meet his "I-have-something-to-tell-you" speeches. Nevertheless, in refusing the purely confessional mode of that coming out speech, they at least mark an attempt – however much it might fail in practice – to reach out to the other in Burroughs' own terms. While they leave him in a fragmentary state, they allow him to persist in and through his struggle to overcome this condition. The erotic community they aspire to may never arrive in *Queer*, but the effort to grasp it remains consistent.

III.

As I have already suggested, the affirmative aspirations of Burroughs' literary techniques have been largely neglected by his critics and other readers, most of whom prefer to treat him as a theorist rather than a stylist. In the process, even critics like Russell who are attentive to the subtleties of Burroughs' sexuality have downplayed the erotics of literary form in his work. More than in any volume or essay, however, this tendency is powerfully exemplified in David Cronenberg's filmic "adaptation" of *Naked Lunch*. Drawing on some of the most famous images and ideas in Burroughs' 1959 masterpiece, Cronenberg's film transforms this famously erratic and discontinuous novel into a linear *bildungsroman* that charts Burroughs' transformation into a writer.

As Jennie Skerl puts it, Cronenberg "created a narrative about the writing of the book with its author romanticized and heterosexualized as the tortured genius, thereby encapsulating the novel within the biographical legend of the bohemian artist-hero" ("The book, the movie, the legend" 168). Timothy S. Murphy further emphasizes the heterosexualizing impulses of the film, when he notes that it drains Burroughs' central concerns of any significance: "This is particularly true of Cronenberg's treatment of homosexuality, which is labeled 'the best all-around cover story an agent could have' (a cover story for heterosexuality, apparently, since the film's central relationship is Lee's affair with the two Joans) and thus denied the critical force with which Burroughs endows it" (*Wising* 69).[47] As these and other remarks rightly suggest, Cronenberg's film borrows images and ideas from Burroughs without ever grasping the means by which he formulates them or the practical ends toward which he directs them.

In order to narrate its fictional version of a writer's becoming, Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* draws heavily on Burroughs' 1985 introduction to *Queer*, especially his assertion, "I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan's death, and to the realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing" (*Queer* xxii). Burroughs refers here to his by all accounts accidental murder of his common law wife Joan Vollmer during a game of "William Tell" gone wrong in 1951. While this claim has been widely cited, most readers neglect the following sentences in which he alludes to possession by "the Ugly Spirit," a malevolent presence to whom he attributed much of the evil that befell him.[48] As such, these lines arguably have more to do with Burroughs' battle against the networks of external "Control" in opposition to which he positioned himself throughout his career than they do with his most famous heterosexual union. Cronenberg's film ignores this possibility, instead implicitly

[47] Murphy himself only considers homosexuality in passing.
[48] On the "ugly spirit" and Burroughs' attempts to exorcise it late in life, see Miles, *Burroughs* 250-265.

arguing that Burroughs' writing has its origins in the crisis and collapse of heterosexual coupledom. In accordance with this proposition, the film largely sidelines his far more prominent homosexual inclinations. Even as it introduces fictional versions of Burroughs' real life lovers like Allen Ginsberg and the Moroccan hustler Kiki, neither of whom appear Burroughs' novel, it largely sidelines their centrality to the configuration of his desire.

Nowhere does Cronenberg's minimization of Burroughs' homosexuality come through more clearly than in the way that it represents his routines, speeches that were meant as dynamic tools of seduction. To witness this pattern at work, one look no further than the film's version of the "I was a homosexual" routine from *Queer*, a speech that Cronenberg imports into the film almost verbatim. Peter Weller, as Lee/Burroughs, delivers this speech across a small breakfast table in a largely empty restaurant to the campily sinister Yves Cloquet, whose version of fay, criminal queerness seems drawn more from homophobic moments in the cinema of the fifties and sixties than from Burroughs' own work in that era.[49] Weller delivers his speech to no one in particular, instead speaking with downcast eyes in a flat monotone that roughly approximates Burroughs' late life public reading voice, less the omnipresent sense of irony and hypnotic rhythm. He conveys the impression of a man disinterested in contact, so detached is he from the man across the table. Not insignificantly, Cronenberg removes the phrase, "—just a minute, Doctor Kildare, this isn't your script," an exclusion that drains much of the energy from the routine, by subtracting both its suggestion of planned spontaneity and the image of a communal setting in which it erupts.[50] None of the ecstatic drama of Burroughs' routines is present here, nor is any sense of the invitations they

[49] Cloquet is likely based on Jacques Stern, a French Jewish writer with whom Burroughs was friendly in Paris in the late 1950s. Burroughs references Stern by name in the first edition of *Naked Lunch*, but the reference does not exist in later editions (Burroughs, *Letters* 389n).

[50] The other exclusions tend to push the routine in a far more homophobic direction than the original. Cronenberg excises the following phrases: "…ending an existence which seemd to offer nothing but grotesque misery and humiliation. Nobler, I thought, to die a man than live on, a sex monster." and "…to conquer prejudice and ignorance and hate with knowledge and sincerity and love. Whenever you are threatened by a hostile presence, you emit a thick cloud of love like an octopus squirts out ink…." He also removes the final paragraph and replaces "piles" with "hemorrhoids." This last change is, no doubt, understandable.

proffered. When Cloquet later suggests that he briefly thought Lee was "making a pass" at him, the remark evidences Cloquet's rapacious villainy rather than a real acknowledgement of the seductive role of the Burroughsian routine. Who could seduce in such sullen tones? Who could enter the frozen world they summon up?[51]

Cronenberg and his collaborators give us a Burroughs in flight from his sexuality to the very extent that he flees sexual community. To some extent, their reading may not be entirely unreasonable, however mistaken it may be in its fuller context. They effectively confuse Burroughs' very real effeminophobia – especially as witnessed in the "I was a homosexual" routine – with a deep sense of self-loathing directed at his homosexuality as such. But they go too far, far too far, in treating the violent suppression of normative heterosexuality as the ground of writing itself. In this account, queerness becomes little more than a necessary accident, an unwanted side effect of a more general renunciation. As the very real and very complicated suppression of *Queer* demonstrates, Burroughs was not concerned with quashing his desires, regardless of the objects they directed him towards, and thereby rendering his sexuality invisible. Instead, he sought to regulate the ways that those desires were perceived and to control the meanings that accrued to them.

What's more, we have already begun to see that Burroughs attempted to regulate his desires in and through the same techniques – most of all the performance of his dramatic routines – that he used in the attempt to act upon those desires. If Burroughs embraced his status as "*el hombre invisible*" it was not in the hopes of never being seen; instead, it entailed an effort to manage the means by which he became visible at all. Burroughs certainly never hid his sexuality; taking up Bobo's mandate, he lived proudly in the open long before it was generally acceptable to do so. Neither, however, was he comfortable with the status of queer icon more generally, at least not in the more

[51] Later in the film, Lee delivers the "Talking Asshole" routine from the passenger seat of Cloquet's "wonderful" car. Kiki is positioned in the back seat, out of sight and out of touch. Lee again speaks in flat tones, his eyes scanning the middle distance and again addresses neither man. As with the routine from *Queer*, the effect is to drain any sense of seduction from the speech.

contemporary inclusive sense of the term. Nevertheless, the technologies of control that Burroughs pioneered with his style might yet help to overcome the anti-communitarian impulses that so clearly flummoxed the likes of Cronenberg.

In practice, Cronenberg's inclusion of routines from *Queer* in his version of *Naked Lunch* is less a violation of the original novel's form than it might at first seem. One might reasonably object – many have – to the film's imposition of linear narrative on a fundamentally discontinuous and fragmentary text.[52] Similarly, its strangely heteronormative take on Burroughs' biography obviously rankles. Despite all of this, when Cronenberg imports characters and incidents from other Brroughs texts in *Naked Lunch*, he follows Burroghs' own mid-career methodology to the letter. The original *Naked Lunch* is nothing if not a composite work, less a novel in any conventional sense of the term than an assemblage of largely discrete episodes drawn from the immense body of writing that Burroughs produced while living as an expatriate in Tangiers and Paris, a corpus that he referred to as the "Word Hoard." Ultimately, Burroughs was unable to assemble the book alone. Throughout much of its composition, Allen Ginsberg played a crucial editorial role, typing up selected chapters and submitting to literary journals on Burroughs' behalf. Later, Sinclair Beiles, who was Maurice Girodias's editorial assistant at Olympia Press, and the painter Brion Gysin helped Buroughs assemble the manuscript on short notice. Soon after, French typesetters, who were unable to make sense of Burroughs' English, scrambled the order of the book, an accident that Burroughs decided to keep in place.[53] Like *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, in which Stein had ventriloquized her partner, who then went on to type and compile the book for Stein, the creation of *Naked Lunch* is deeply indebted the sometimes erotic bonds of Burroughs' immediate creative community. This

[52] For a thoroughgoing survey of critical responses to the film and its tenuous relationship to the original novel see Jennie Skerl, "The book, the movie, the legend" 171-174.
[53] On this process, see Miles 92-99.

most fragmentary of novels therefore took form within the contingent networks of his deeply queer social context.

The collaborative, even communal process through which *Naked Lunch* came together marks a return to the original collaborative composition of routines like "Twilight's Last Gleaming." Written in 1938 with his school friend Kells Elvins, "Twilight's Last Gleaming" may well be Burroughs' first adult experiment in fiction, though the original manuscript has apparently been lost – it exists today in repurposed versions found in novels like *Nova Express* as well as in a reconstruction that he appears to have written while in Tangier (Grauerholz xv). As Barry Miles explains, Burroughs and Elvins did not compose the original version at a typewriter. Instead, "In order to write the piece they acted out the different roles, laughing uproariously as they did so" (Miles 32). It should be no surprise, then, to find that *Naked Lunch* is a novel defined by the form of the routine. In fact, to a very real degree, the erratic composition of *Naked Lunch* makes it a text composed of nothing other than Burroughs' routines. So thoroughgoing is the book's commitment to the form of the routine that characters will sometimes break into them in the middle of a section, just as Lee did in *Queer*, lending the novel a slubby, irregular texture that defies easy comprehension. Though some of the novel's first wave of critics attempted to provide wholistic readings of it – as when Mary McCarthy treated it as a story of addiction and recovery (33-39) – most of its readers have encountered it piecemeal.[54] Indeed, the book's fame derives in no small part from the way elements of it have been extracted and performed in new contexts. Frank Zappa, for example, took great pleasure in reading the notorious talking asshole routine aloud to his audiences. This and other similar approaches to the text take Burroughs at his word when he writes in the book's concluding

[54] On a making of featurette on the Criterion Collection edition of the film of *Naked Lunch*, for example, David Cronenberg explains, "As a book you can kind of dip into it, you don't read it wall to wall, you dip into it. It's like the Bible, you know, a little bit here, a little bit there. Cross references: You find your favorite parts" (Rodley). This attitude is an exemplary one for artists who have been inspired by the novel in their own work. DJ Spooky, for example, describes a similar relation to the book (233-237).

"Atrophied Preface," "You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point… I have written many prefaces. They atrophy and amputate spontaneous [sic] like the little toe amputates in a West African disease confined to the Negro race…" (187; first ellipsis original). Severing pieces of *Naked Lunch* and giving them new contexts repeats the fragmentary paradigms of the novel's composition, even as it echoes the images of bodily collapse that resonate throughout its otherwise distinct routines that make it up.

At a number of junctures in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs lifts pieces of routines directly out of *Queer*, which he had abandoned seven years before. Early in the *Naked Lunch*, the sinister Doctor Benway, addressing an auditorium of students, asks, "Did any of you see Doctor Tetrazzini perform? I say perform advisedly because his operations were performances" (52). Here he directly echoes a digression in the routine from *Queer* that ends with Lee alone in a near empty bar. Lee's version takes a slightly different tack, but its general form remains the same: "Did you ever have the good fortune to see the Italian master Tetrazzini perform?... I say 'perform' advisedly, because he was a great showman, and like all showmen, not above charlatanism and at times downright trickery" (*Queer* 65-66). Benway's revised version of this speech resembles nothing so much as a Renaissance attempt to restore a broken ancient sculpture recently extracted from the ground. Burroughs doubly fragments these two sentences in *Naked Lunch*, first by transporting them in part to a new home and second by removing parts of them and adding new words into the gaps.

Transformative transpositions like this one might best be understood as renewed attempts to achieve the kind of ideal contact with the other that *Queer* had failed to manifest. It is fitting, then, that the Tetrazzini speech derives from a routine that ends with Lee alone. Similarly, the fact that Burroughs takes these words out of Lee's mouth and puts them in Doctor Benway's takes on considerable weight when considered within the scope of Burroughs' career. Benway first appears in "Twilight's Last Gleaming," the story that Burroughs composed with Kells Elvins in his youth. In

fact, Burroughs alludes directly to this routine (and by connection, its formative role in his writing career) a few pages later when he quotes, apropos of almost nothing, the lines "Gave proof through the night / That our flag was still there…" In beginning this quotation after the line that titlesto the early story, but also failing to give them their full syntactic context, he implicitly suggests that *Naked Lunch* marks a fragmentary continuation of his earliest work (*Naked Lunch* 55; ellipsis original).

Importantly, the very fragmentary technique by which Burroughs restages his earlier, failed longings for collaborative sociality and erotic contact also transforms the meaning of these repurposed phrases. The inclusion of routines from outside the text within a novel's weave produces a constant torsion of perception, modifying our experience of all that surrounds them. With this act, these integrated intertexts unsettle our easy comprehension of what we are reading, forcing us to look at the whole differently. This strategy takes on an unavoidable importance with regard to his reappropriations of *Queer*, a text that he abandoned rather than allow himself to be cast in an undesirable light. Extracting elements of this novel and repositioning them turns on his preference for the adjective over the noun in that abandoned novel. The new placement of these textual fragments of a fragmentary text within a more deliberately fragmentary work opens them to modification. Simultaneously, they promise to modify the new routines in which they take up residence, making them at once adjectival and adjectivalized at a structural level. Significantly, Tetrazzini becomes a doctor rather than an artist, allowing his name to take on new meanings. Now a surgeon, he transforms the shape of existing bodies, reordering their genital configurations and replacing dead organs with younger ones that keep the whole vital. A similar tendency becomes clear as Burroughs shifts the meanings of words that he introduced in *Queer*, their new context allowing them to take on wildly different values, a tendency that I explore below. Certainly this approach is not one that Burroughs can rigorously control. When Burroughs reuses the fragments of his earlier productions, he subjects them to a high degree of structural contingency, but in his very ability to

regulate these transpositions at all, he maintains a degree of structural freedom that he had lost in his dealings with Carl Solomon and Ace Books, as well as his failed relationship with Eugene Marker, to whom he had initially addressed *Queer* as a whole (Burroughs, *Letters* 105).

Where Burroughs' distrust of the confessional form anticipated the Foucautian critique of the pastoral, his fragmentary reuse of *Queer* in *Naked Lunch* models something like the mode that Foucault would later call "the care of the self." In the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault draws on peculiar sites such as ancient marriage manuals that discuss issues like bodily comportment. These labors jointly constitute practices of regulation and control that comes from within rather than without. This subject initially seems to be a strange one in the course of a project that began with a thoroughgoing investigation of the intersection between contemporary forms of discourse and the effects of power. It makes considerably more sense, however, when one recognizes that all of the diverse modes of self-care that Foucault analyzes involve how individuals can and do master the way that they appear to others. As Foucault has it, the care of the self begins in "self-examination," "a kind of administrative review, where it is a matter of evaluating a performed activity in order to reactivate its principles and ensure their correct application in the future" (*Care* 61). That is, by continually evaluating their commitments to a set of conventions or structures, ancient subjects were able to parse their ongoing relationships to those conventions. Tellingly, this self-examination works not through the investigation of one's actions, but one's appearance, the way that one manifests to and for others. Self-examination, Foucault explains, "should have the form of a steady screening of representations: examining them, monitoring them, sorting them out" (*Care* 63). By taking themselves as their own objects of study, they are able to better contemplate their relationship to others, most of all to the way that others see them and hence speak of them. In controlling their appearances, they restrain the claims that social discourse can make on and about them. Foucault does not advocate the wholesale adoption of ancient practices.

Instead, his own *Care of the Self* functions as series of case studies describing ways in which others have resisted the claims of discourse, claims that can modified but never escaped. *The Care of the Self* might therefore be read as an argument for the value of rigorously managing one's own social visibility.

While the Foucault of *Care of the Self* does not, like the antiquarians of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, invite us to take up residence in the dusty halls of yesteryear, it maintains a powerful temporal component (Nietzsche 72-77). The ancient world provides him with a meaningful horizon that is both distant enough from and sufficiently connected to that of the present to comment on it without being controlled by it. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler broaches this very possibility when she writes, "Foucault understands that, in considering the Socratic, Stoic, Cynical, and materialist views of self-care, he is at a remove from modern notions of reflexivity. But this contrast is crucial to the 'critical' operation of his text, since modern conceptions of the self are neither true nor inevitable, but have been made through a complex history of indebtedness and disavowal in relation to these, and other, earlier formations of the self" (129). To the extent that ancient modes differ from more modern ones, they help to reveal the contingent character of our forms of self-making. That is, they reveal that *things* could be otherwise, that *I* could be otherwise, that *we* could *become* otherwise. Simultaneously, because these ancient modes maintain a genetic, but by no means wholly deterministic, continuity with modern ones, they allow us to speak to and causally act on current modalities of subject formation that would otherwise determine us absolutely. Here, then, we find another version of a recurrent trope within the chapters of this dissertation: The fragments of the past allow us to envision and represent ourselves in the present in ways that promise to change the meanings of the future. Much as Leonard Barkan argues that incomplete

ancient statues helped change the course of the renaissance, past strategies of self-styling can teach us to represent ourselves differently today.[55]

The ways that Burroughs folds older texts into his later ones should be understood in terms similar to those that Foucault lays out in *Care of the Self*. Having described himself as a junky and homosexual in the plain language of the early novels, his status as a deviant is left all too visible. This condition makes him a subject who is all too subject to the terms of a discourse whose vocabulary and grammar are not his own. Instead of fleeing these earlier claims into some other paradigm of selfhood and social identity, he breaks them apart, giving them new homes and hence new meanings, acknowledging the causal claims of the past while also questioning their hold. In the process, he seeks to decrease their ability to describe him in ways that are inimical to his own form of life. His fragmentary labors therefore work like a selective guerilla action on the terms by which queer life takes discursive shape. To put it differently, he carefully recovers his past experiences of overexposure so as to transform what they mean to others who look at him in their wake.

This practice of transformative reincorporation can, perhaps, best be understood when one looks to the ways Burroughs recalls critical words and terms from his early work in *Naked Lunch*. Most telling may be the figure of the lymph glands, an organ that plays a crucial part in his "I was a homosexual routine" where he explains that the discovery of his sexuality "froze the lymph in my glands – in my lymph glands, that is, of course." Early in *Naked Lunch*, a character describes a particularly virulent disease that recalls this earlier turn of phrase: "And after an initial lesion at the point of infection the disease passes to the lymph glands of the groin, which swell and burst in suppurating fissures, drain for days, months, years, a purulent stringy discharge streaked with blood and putrid lymph. Elephantitis of the genitals is a frequent complication…" (37). We once again find the double repetition of lymph, but here the sequence is reversed, such that the sentence precedes

[55] On Brakan's work, see the introdtion to this project.

from "lymph glands" to "lymph" as such. Where *Queer* presented a subject struggling for a control it could not manifest at this juncture, *Naked Lunch* suggests a gleeful release of mastery. Further, Burroughs here specifically locates the glands in proximity to the genitals, organs which the disease promises to shatter. In doing so, it calls attention to their fluid vitality, reanimating that which had been frozen in the earlier passage. These same genitals swell and their contents ooze out into world, as if the "victim" of this disease were perpetually tumescent, while also perpetually coming. Sex and its bodily symptoms take on an unavoidable visibility here, fully present in all their grotesquerie. Far from fleeing his earlier formulations, Burroughs pushes them to their limits in a way that makes what had previously seemed stable – even "frozen"! – all but inaccessible to easy discursive control.

As should by now be clear, Burroughs did not initially embrace transformative incorporation as a strictly revolutionary strategy. To the contrary, he initially took up this methodology by external fiat. As I explain above, his editors at Ace insisted that he pad out the manuscript of *Junky* by bringing over material from the then in progress *Queer*. While both of the early novels were written in a plain language unlike anything that he would employ in the decades that followed, they were significantly different in style. First and foremost, Burroughs composed *Queer* in the third person where he had written *Junky* in the first. As Barry Miles notes, this shift made it impossible for the new novel to function as a continuation of the old one, despite their shared characters and concerns (Miles 60). Burroughs, for his own part, wrote to Ginsberg that he penned the novel in this manner because, "The subject matter makes 3rd person convenient and at times mandatory. Take this passage for example. Lee has undressed preparatory to laying an Indian: 'Though he was near 40 he had the thin delicate body of an adolescent.'… Wouldn't I feel silly putting the above passage in the 1st person?" (*Letters* 111). That is, the shift from first to third testifies to a certain discomfort with the body, even at uncommonly erotic junctures. The differences between the two books run far deeper than narratorial pronouns and conjugations, however. *Queer* is a gloomier book than its predecessor

in almost every way, far less interested in guiding its readers through the debauched underworlds that the characters of both novels inhabit. In revising material from *Queer*, Burroughs did little more than change its he's into I's. Oliver Harris has shown that these minimal transpositions account for the otherwise baffling shifts of tone and content that crop up throughout parts of *Junky* (*Fascination* 80). While these irregularities might be read as faults in another novelist, they serve an almost proleptic function in Burroughs, staging the style that he would employ throughout much of his career well before it took central stage.

Given the excisions and transplantations Burroughs was obliged to perform on *Queer*, it may be surprising to find that he took up such a similar process while composing the chapters that would become *Naked Lunch*. The very strategies that had contributed to the suppression of *Queer* here become critical to its partial resurgence. Certainly *Naked Lunch* draws also on *Junky*, as when the narrator of one section explains how to inject heroin with a pin when needles are not available (*Naked Lunch* 10). *Junky*, however, functions almost as an instruction manual for reading much of *Naked Lunch*, the glossary of the former providing the confused reader of the latter with tools to make sense of passages like the one in which one of the book's narrators requests "A quart of PG and a hundred nembies" (*Naked Lunch* 13). That is, *Junky* helps make *Naked Lunch* approachable, while *Queer* only contributes to its strangeness, even as it is retroactively made strange in its own turn when it is read dialogue with its sibling texts. The distinction likely derives in no small part from the fact the *Naked Lunch* never comes close to acknowledging the phantom traces of this once lost work within its interstices. On the one hand, Burroughs borrows from *Queer* strategically, selectively rewriting it in ways that transform the identities it helped to dramatize. On the other, he refuses to call attention to what he is doing, lending a ghostly character to *Queer*'s partial appearances. In this sense, Burroughs' borrowing stages the experience of melancholia, that psychic state in which one holds on to a lost object without acknowledging the fact of the loss itself.

Naked Lunch's melancholic relationship to *Queer* speaks to the way that Burroughs grapples with many of the crises that faced his early work, crises organized principally around the question of relation itself. Understanding how it performs this hat trick, however, requires a brief diversion through the conceptual history of melancholia itself. Freud begins his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" by first establishing the similarity of the two psychic states referenced by his title. In their most extreme forms, both involve "a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity" (243). In both cases, this sense of impaired agency follows from the absence of a love-object, an absence that leaves the patient unable to form new relations. Throughout his life, Burroughs repeatedly found himself in just such a position, not least of all when rejection by Lewis Marker led him to temporarily abandon writing altogether. The queerness of his romantic life throughout the early period of his work was derived as much from this condition of blockage as it did from his homosexuality.

Mourning and melancholia differ from one another first in that the latter also involves "a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (Freud, "Mourning" 243). This distinction derives in no small part from the fact that unlike mourning, "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (Freud, "Mourning" 244). Freud argues that a subject's inability to acknowledge this loss begins in ambivalence toward the absent object. Confronted with mixed feelings of love and hate that predate the loss, the subject finds itself in a simultaneously celebratory and sorrowful mood. Unable to reconcile these antithetical affects, the melancholic effectively forgets the loss, pushing it down into the unconscious where the ego absorbs the lost object into itself. Identifying with the lost object even as it disavows the loss, the subject turns the ambivalence it initially felt toward the other back onto itself, resulting in the paralytic "self-revilings" to which Freud refers. Almost in passing, Freud describes this identification

as an attempt to "to *incorporate* this object into itself" ("Mourning 248; emphasis added). The term "incorporation," along with the concept of "introjection" to which it is twinned, would become a foundational one for later psychoanalytic accounts of melancholy. Here, however, it points primarily to the way that identification with something once loved both makes the lost thing indistinguishable from the ego and turns the ego against itself.

In "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," a powerful reading of Freud's reflections, Judith Butler argues that melancholic incorporation may help to constitute normative models of sexuality and gender. Butler holds that heterosexuality originates in the demand that the child renounce same sex desire. She writes, "Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments" (*Psychic Life* 136-137). The very possibility of homosexual desire becomes unavailable to the emerging subject, meaning that even the fact of this "loss" must be lost, such that the prohibition of homosexuality takes on a fundamentally melancholic form. According to the Freudian formulation, identification follows from melancholy. Specifically, the subject comes to identify with the gender of those it is no longer allowed to love, such that the sense of the self as masculine or feminine follows from the initial structure of refusal. As Butler puts it in one of her most famous formulations, "The straight man *becomes* (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he 'never' loved and 'never' grieved; the straight woman *becomes* the woman she 'never' loved and 'never' grieved" (*Psychic* 147; emphasis original). According to this model, sexual identity engenders gender identity, rather than the other way around. Thus, even as Butler distances herself from the purely performative understanding of gender and sexuality that characterized misreadings of her earlier work, she continues to insist on the complicated, socially determined, and interdependent production of both.

When Burroughs quietly folds elements of his earlier works into his later ones, he both follows the patterns that Butler describes and seeks a way out of their weave. Of course, the dilemmas that he confronts here predate *Naked Lunch* by almost a decade. Indeed, the fragmentary incorporation of *Queer* within *Naked Lunch*, in which the former can only be present in the later so long as the terms of their bond go unspoken, effectively repeats the aporias of Lee's desire in *Queer*. As we have seen, Lee found it impossible to act on his longing for men while maintaining a masculine position. Thanks to Burroughs' heteronormative understanding of homosexual bonds, he found it impossible to be with his others without losing something fundamental to himself. He refuses, that is, to admit that he has ever loved and hence ever lost, a formulation that echoes the account that Judith Butler offers of heterosexualized gender formation in "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification." When Burroughs abandons *Queer* rather than face an imposition on his masculinity, he effectively allegorizes this process at another level. In drawing material from the lost model into *Naked Lunch* he affirms his textual identification with his own suppressed writing. Yet just as Freud insists that nothing is ever truly forgotten, the deep linkage between incorporation and identification ensures that no object is ever fully and finally lost.

While *Naked Lunch* maintains much of the effeminophobia that marked Burroughs' earliest writings, the fragmentary traces of *Queer* that it subsumes and transforms promote a kind of structural hemaphroditicism. As it gradually comes to terms with this fact, *Naked Lunch* promises to reopen itself to new, previously impossible forms of relationality. As Butler notes, "Perhaps only by risking the *incoherence* of identity is connection possible, a political point that correlates with Leo Bersani's insight that only the decentered subject is available to desire" (*Psychic* 149; emphasis original). The heterosexual prohibitions Butler describes promote the closure of subjects unto themselves, preventing them from forming new bonds with others. When they can learn to attend to that which they have long disavowed, some of this self-closure may be overcome. In *Naked Lunch*,

the basic grammar of fragmentary relations ensures that the terms of gendered identity are perpetually on the move, forever subjecting one another to modification. This modification allows *Naked Lunch* to overcome Lee's blockage at the level of its textual form, even if it persists at times in the novel's explicit content.

IV.

This formal resolution of Lee's dilemma emerges most clearly in the images of shattered and disintegrating bodies that resonate throughout *Naked Lunch*, bodies that are forever drawing pieces of their fellows into themselves. As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis explain in their *Language of Psychoanalysis*, the most primitive form of incorporation arrives with a child's literal attempts to draw some desirable thing into its body, often by eating it. Post-Freudian thinkers like Melanie Klein would extend this tendency to show how it gives way to fantasies of cannibalism, especially those directed at partial objects – fragments of a loved body (Laplanche and Pontalis 210-211). While Freud, unlike some of those who worked in his wake, rarely distinguished between incorporation and introjection, the later seems to refer more specifically to incorporations that correspond directly to identification (Laplanche and Pontalis 228-230). Both, however, remain squarely focused on the status of the body in relation to that which is other to it, especially insofar as what Laplanche and Pontalis call the "bodily frontier" models the ostensibly stable contours of the subject's psyche (228-230). In this model, to experience the body as imperiled or incomplete is to both call attention to prior incorporations and demand new ones. If I feel that something is missing, it may be because I no longer recognize the incorporated object as part of me. This same feeling initiates a demand to bring new objects within myself, incorporating them in a way bound to engender new forms of identification.

At least as early as *Queer*, Burroughs' writings are rife with images of corporeality in crisis, a crisis deeply linked to questions of gender and sexuality. Burroughs rarely describes Lee's body in *Queer* without resorting to a vocabulary of collapse and ruination. In his 1985 introduction, he initially connects this condition of embodied fragmentation to drug addiction, suggesting that it was this very state that led the urchins of Tangiers to refer to him as "El Hombre Invisible" – invisible, that is, precisely because he was not *indivisible*. Using strikingly, if only accidentally, Freudian language, he writes, "This disintegration of self-image often results in an indiscriminate image hunger" (*Queer* xii). Facing the loss of self, he attempts, like T.S. Eliot, to shore fragments against his own ruins. Lee's withdrawal from drugs throughout *Queer* amplifies this need and gives it a newly erotic focus as soon as "the family jewels" are no longer "in pawn to Uncle Junk" (*Queer* 1). Thus, in some sense, he seeks from the start to incorporate Allerton into himself, his desire for coupledom descending from a need to restore the damaged contours of his body. When his relationship fails to satisfy, the results only serve to reaffirm his destroyed condition. Thus, after a particularly hurtful rejection Burroughs writes, "Lee was depressed and shattered" (*Queer* 58). As in the Freudian model of incorporation, this pair of adjectives ambiguously links the collapse of the body to that of the psyche. He sets up a similar parallel in a scene that finds Lee fantasizing that he can see through the eyes of boy he desires: "[Lee] could feel himself in the body of the boy. Fragmentary memories… the smell of cocoa beans drying in the sun, bamboo tenements, the warm dirty river, the swamps and rubbish heaps on the outskirts of town" (Burroughs, *Queer* 96). Here, though he imagines possessing a whole body, he can only grasp its mind in pieces. Desire renders him fragmentary, but in so doing, it makes his own fragmentation visible to him, reaffirming his need to overcome it.

Ultimately, just as *Queer* was left unfinished, Lee finds no resolution to his fragmentary condition, a fact that threatens him with a more thoroughgoing loss of self. As he continues to imagine that he can see through the eyes of the boy, he finds "himself" in one of the bamboo

tenements that he had previously "remembered" in which the boy meets a woman. Burroughs writes, "Lee could feel desire for the woman through the other's body. 'I'm not queer,' he thought. 'I'm disembodied'" (*Queer* 97). In the absence of some fragmentary supplement to his own fragmentary state, he faces the loss of his body itself, and with it any control over his experience of his desire. If disembodiment negates queerness, it does so because it brings to an end any ability to resolve his desire, any ability to find satisfaction. Burroughs suggests something similar a few pages later when he has Lee despairingly repeat a variation of this revelation to Allerton: "I want myself the same way I want others. I'm disembodied. I can't use my own body for some reason" (*Queer* 99). With this, he evokes nothing so much as the experience of paralysis that Freud locates in both morning and melancholia, suggesting that the loss of the body follows from the loss of its love-objects. Bodily fragmentation must therefore be understood as a metaphorical consequence of barred desire. To this extent, disembodiment would be the paradoxical quintessence of queerness, insofar as we understand the term to apply to restricted forms of desire. If Lee – and by connection Burroughs himself – is to pass out of this state of paralysis, he needs to find radically new ways of relating to his others. As a careful reading of *Naked Lunch* and its relationship to *Queer* will show, finding this new modality may mean passing deeper into fragmentation itself.

Where *Queer* connects the fragmentary body directly to frustrated desire, *Naked Lunch* turns it into a general condition, something more like the fate of all bodies than the failing of some. At times, Burroughs even seems to suggest that fragmentation is an affirmative condition, the consequence, perhaps, of some adaptation to modernity. Thus, for example, he writes early in the novel, "Con men don't change, they break, shatter—explosions of matter in cold interstellar space, drift away in cosmic dust, leave the empty body behind" (*Naked Lunch* 11). Here he tellingly moves away from the model of *Queer*, in which he always links the body in ruins to the shattered psyche. In this passage, it is the spirit of the con man that disintegrates, providing him with a release from the

prison that is the body, a body that is in turn left fragmentary insofar as it is hollowed out by this dualistic fission. It is tempting to treat images like this one as instances of a compensatory self-destruction or a willful schizophrenia. Robin Lydenberg takes just such an approach in her book *Word Cultures* when she reads Burroughs in dialogue with a variety of theorists, but most of all Deleuze and Guattari. Taking Burroughs as an exemplar of the forms of desiring production that this pair of thinkers describes in *Anti-Oedipus* and other texts, she treats Burroughs as an early theorist of the post-modern, a thinker who offers us a way of negotiating the madness of our present moment.[56] With Harris, however, we can agree that "it would be a mistake to assume that Lee's disintegration possesses a subversive power that matches the liberating fragmentation of the subject valorized by poststructuralists" (*Fascination* 100). To the contrary, it is important to understand how such images and ideas play out within the structural mechanics of the texts in which they appear if we hope to understand their real significance.

When we begin with the form of Burroughs' texts rather than, as many critics tend to, intellectual formulations that they resemble, his commitment to fragments takes on a different set of values. In particular, his images of fragmentary bodies are always haunted by the sense of incapacity that he attributes to Lee in *Queer*, where the partial body is a paralyzed one. In this, one finds none of the endlessly generative productivity of the Deleuzian "desiring machine." Burroughs instead seeks to constitute a fuller body in and through the relations between his texts, texts that nevertheless remain fragmentary in their different ways. This new body, the body of the literary corpus, is one that can be perpetually remade through the melancholic incorporation of other bodies and texts. It is a body whose configuration defies easy comprehension, but a body all the same, one

[56] Lydenberg explains, "I hope to demonstrate, through the remarkable similarities between Burroughs' experimental writing and contemporary theory, that the ideas we now recognize as characteristic of post-structuralism and deconstruction were being developed independently by Burroughs almost thirty years ago" (*Word Cultures* xi). Lydenberg dedicates the second half of this book to a cut up experiment in which she fuses selections from Burroughs' prose with the writings of thinkers like Barthes and Deleuze in an attempt to revel the connections between their modes of thought.

that continually folds other bodies into itself to overcome the sorrow of real lost bodies like that of Allerton, as well as of freer experiences of desire that they represent.

In the science fiction mode that he employs throughout much of *Naked Lunch* and his subsequent work, Burroughs describes the incorporative capacity of the body in characteristically nightmarish language. In the novel's "Bradley the Buyer" sequence, he tells the story of an undercover narcotics agent who disappears so completely into his role that he begins to take on monstrous characteristics.[57] When his district supervisor confronts him, he at first plays at meekness until his body unexpectedly "flows forward" and absorbs that of the supervisor. Burroughs stops short of describing the action, instead setting the eerie noise of the act in quotation marks, rendering the distinction between speech and mere sound permanently unclear: "*Schlup… schlup schlup!*" (*Naked Lunch* 16). This word plays out on several levels at once: It suggests first the ravenous, lip smacking mastication of an ill-mannered eater. Second, to the extent that it echoes the Yidish "schlep," it offers the image of a body carrying that which it consumes within itself. Finally, in its onomatopoeic echoes of the sound of sucking up a viscous liquid, it acquires irredeemably sexual connotations. It thus describes a relation between bodies that is simultaneously alimentary, incorporative, and erotic.

The act of schlupping other bodies acquires increasing importance over the course of what passes for a plot in *Naked Lunch*. Many of the novel's fragmentary episodes take place in a liminal city known as Interzone, a metropolis that, like post-WWII Tangiers, exists both between and beyond established nations. Burroughs explains that Interzone is ruled primarily by two warring political parties, the Liquefactionists and the Senders. The latter group communicates telepathically, maintaining distance between bodies and refusing to let in the signals of others, while the former group aspires to the endless subsumption of bodies into one another (*Naked Lunch* 136-137). A third

[57] The figure of the narcotics agent arguably gestures toward the literary historical coupling of the novel *Narcotic Agent* with *Junky* on the latter's initial publication. Tellingly, Burroughs admits in a 1953 letter to Ginsberg, "*Narcotic Agent* not so bad as I expected it would be" (Burroughs, *Letters* 187). This grudging admission of appreciation might be read as an early allegory for the modificatory power of coupled fragments that seem opposed until they are set beside one another.

group, the Divisionists, takes the middle ground. "They are called Divisionists because they literally divide. They cut off tiny bits of their flesh and grow exact replicas of themselves in embryo jelly. It seems probable, unless the process of division is halted, that eventually there will only be one replica of one sex on the planet: that is, one person in the world with millions of separate bodies…" (*Naked Lunch* 137; ellipsis original). Here Burroughs reimagines bodily fragmentation as a tool of self-preservation, one that would allow the subject to escape the cycle of gendered reproduction. Burroughs seems almost to propose that this endless self-division might resolve his sexual aporia: According to his effeminophobic ideology, the only man a man could fuck who would be as manly as himself would be the man himself.[58] Ultimately, however, Burroughs' description of the divisionists goes in a differently sexualized direction. When one set of clones grows too numerous, "The other citizens are subject to declare a 'Schulppit' (wholesale massacre of all identifiable replicas)" (*Naked Lunch* 138). Here again, then, is that eroticized word, now turned backwards to suggest an erotic consumption of the atuo-erotic pleasures of others. In this case, schlupping does not suggest simple undifferentiated absorption, but the differential incorporation of another's self-directed pleasures.

At the risk of lending too much credence to Burroughs' often unhinged beliefs, it bears noting that he sometimes spoke of his own wish to "schlup" those he desired. Oliver Harris suggests that this wish may have originated in Burroughs' often frustrated sexual obsession with Allen Ginsberg. Describing the period when the two were assembling the book that would become *The Yage Letters*, an epistolary novel loosely based on their real correspondence, Harris writes, "Burroughs had been pressuring Ginsberg into an intense sexual affair, determined by his fantasy of

[58] In his writing of the 1970s, especially *The Job*, his book length interview with Daniel Odier, this position finds its most explicit form when it couples with his virulent misogyny in this period. For example, he tells Odier, "I think that what we call love is a fraud perpetrated by the female sex and that the point of sexual relations between men is nothing that we could call love, but rather what we might call recognition" (Burroughs and Odier 118). Rather than attempting to explain away Burroughs' misogyny, as critics like Murphy have attempted (*Wising* 9-15), I hope that I have begun to show that Burroughs' style contests his stated positions, though it necessarily does so in dialogue with them.

a total bodily merger he called 'schlupping' (ominously, the aim of Lee with respect to Allerton in the other manuscript [i.e. *Queer*] they were working on). In *this* context, it's likely that Burroughs was the one who seized on the epistolary" (Oliver Harris, Introduction, *Yage* xxxvi). With this, Harris confirms the erotic connotations of Burroughsian schlupping, connotations that found expression in the generative creative partnership between the two men, if not in their actual sexual bond. But where Burroughs sets this concept up in a way that demands the coextensive overlap of two bodies, the epistolary means by which they worked complicate his desire. Writing of the strikingly similar correspondence between Hawthorne and Melville, Christopher Castiglia writes, "As is always the case in epistolary relationships, distance and silence are as important to the interpretive inventions comprising intimacy as are the proximate grasps of the hand privileged by [Hawthorne's character] Kenyon" (123). Letters always mark a gap in both time and place, a gap between sender and receiver, but these gaps can contribute to powerful form of intimacy. As such, this fantasy of schlupping realized in creative collaboration if not erotic union is underwritten by a fundamentally fragmentary mode of contact. The epistolary mode quietly shatters every image of the total body these two would form together, subjecting it to repeated revision by the fact of their intermittent communication.

As would be the case with the Divisionists of *Naked Lunch*, the very means by which the Burroughs-Ginsberg schlup is achieved undermine the illusion of wholeness toward which it is directed. With this, *Naked Lunch* tacitly acknowledges what it accomplilshes at the level of textual and intertextual form within the interstices of its endlessly interrupted narrative. The Divisisionists occupy a "moderate" or "midway position" between the Liquefactionists and the Senders to the extent that their technologies couple the dissolution of bodies into one another with the radical

separation of them from one another.[59] Ultimately, this way of maintaining differential relations in assimilation is repeated at the level of the novel's form in the erratic shifts from one section to the next. *Naked Lunch* is made up of twenty-five chapters of varying length and though many of them share themes or characters, it is all but impossible to trace a continuous story from the one to the next. It is therefore immediately fragmentary in a way that has little to do with the irregularities of Burroughs' syntax or imagery. That these distinct chapters somehow cohere into a whole, a whole run through with powerful internal differences, suggests that the novel itself embraces something like the Divisionist position. Schlupping may convey an ugly sense of erotic menace, but it nevertheless contains the kernels of its own critique.

The fragmentary means by which schlupping makes its way into *Naked Lunch* further affirm this resurgence of internal difference at the very moment of total union. Schlupping makes one of its earliest and most striking appearances in Lee's account of the death of Bobo near the close of his "I was a homosexual routine" in *Queer*. In *Naked Lunch*, Doctor Benway, Burroughs' fictional surgeon of fragmentary incorporation, repeats this monologue almost to the letter. Setting the two beside one another speaks to the way that sucking other bodies into one's own always changes both. Lee's speech is on the right, while Benway's is on the left:

[59] As Murphy notes, Burroughs himself may not have embraced this middle position (86-89). Nevertheless, it plays a powerful hermeneutic role within any attempt to understand the stakes of fragmentation in the novel itself.

It was a wise old queen – Bobo, we called her – who taught me that I had a duty to live and to bear my burden proudly for all to see, to conquer prejudice and ignorance and hate with knowledge and sincerity and love… Poor Bobo came to a sticky end. He was riding in the Duc de Ventre's Hispano-Suiza when his falling piles blew out of the car and wrapped around the rear wheel. He was completely gutted, leaving an empty shell sitting there on the giraffe-skin upholstery. Even the eyes and the brain went, with a horrible shlupping sound. The Duc says he will carry that ghastly schlup with him to his mausoleum… (Burroughs, *Queer* 39-40; first ellipsis added)

I studied neurology under Professor Fingerbottom in Vienna… and he knew every nerve in your body. Magnificent old thing… Came to a sticky end… His falling piles blew out the Duc de Ventre's Hispano Suiza and wrapped around the rear wheel. He was completely gutted, leaving an empty shell sitting there on the giraffe skin upholstery… Even the eyes and brain went, with a horrible schlupping sound. The Duc de Ventre says he will carry that ghastly *schlup* to his mausoleum. (Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 139; ellipses and italics original)

Both passages insist on the pedagogical relationship of the victim to the speaker. Where Bobo helps Lee understand how to embrace his queerness, however, Benway's mentor instructs him in the material substrate of the psyche. Tellingly, however, his childishly filthy name – Professor Fingerbottom – suggests that his teachings may have maintained some erotic horizon. Both men are described as "old," though only one receives the dignity of a noble honorific. In practice, the other differences between the two passages are largely immaterial, coming down to little more than slight shifts of punctuation, word order and emphasis. Only the three ellipses that Burroughs inserts in his second attempt at this passage truly capture the difference between the two. These ellipses point to the fact something is missing, explicitly staging Benway's speech as a fragment, even if one does not – as few of its readers in the seventies or eighties would have, recognize its origins in the still suppressed *Queer*.

When Burroughs transplants Bobo's fate into *Naked Lunch* he therefore does so self-consciously, symptomatically calling attention to a displacement that he never quite acknowledges. In the process, he ultimately demonstrates how fragmentary incorporation can transform the meaning of words and experiences. When he meets his end in *Queer*, Bobo becomes a fragment, emptied out through his own anus. In the earlier text, schlupping bespeaks fatality. If it promises union, it can only come at the expense of one of those who participates in it. The fragmentary recurrence of the story in *Naked Lunch* suggests that he has sucked the fictional Bobo into himself, thereby preserving that which he had lost to fragmentation *as* a fragment. Fittingly, in both passages, brain and eyes go. This fragmentary other must therefore continue to gaze and reflect from within, engendering different ways of seeing and thinking through the very absorption that was meant to overcome difference. This incorporated other thereby maintains its pedagogical function, but it now instructs a body of which it is a part. In *Queer*, schlupping had been a sign of death, and to be sure it maintains some of these connotations in *Naked Lunch*. But here it also proposes that there might be

some hope of mutual instruction in the differential union of bodies with one another. In shifting the meaning of this term through the very reappropriation of its grimmest instance, Burroughs subtly gestures to the way that fragments can revise one another. Bobo the queen may be gone, and his name may have been replaced, but in death he returns as an instructive adjective, bringing with him another vision of sexuality that promises to transform Burroughs' own.

Burroughsian fragmentary incorporation strives to wake melancholy bodies from their slumber, impelling them to spring back into movement, vitality, and action. Where the fragmentary forms of his texts may at first seem to model the melancholic mode, the self-conscious way in which he pursues them help his textual body to witness the differential relations that make it up. No philosopher has more clearly broached this need than Baruch Spinoza. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza first axiomatically defines bodies as objects that "either move or are rest" and that move "now more slowly, now more quickly.[60] (IIP13A1 and A2). As he goes on to explain, composite bodies are formed when simpler bodies lie beside one another or move at differing speeds in such a way "that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner... all together [composing] one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies" (IIP13L3A2"D). Simple as these assertions may seem, they provide an important reminder that the whole of any body is multiple, not singular. It only seems to be so because of the communication of its parts with one another, communication that we witness primarily through its effects. As we have seen, the schlupped bodies of Burroughs' texts – like his texts themselves – only appear to be undifferentiated masses. Closer study calls out the generative distinctions that make them up.

Spinoza's definition of the body applies as much to the human organism as it does to the whole of Nature, but it becomes most meaningful for us when we understand that every society, every community is also a body in these terms. We go wrong, and societies go wrong with us,

[60] All subsequent references are provided in text to volume, proposition, and, where applicable, axiom and demonstration.

Spinoza explains, when we fail to understand the causal relations that bind us to one another. When we grasp these relations more fully, acquiring adequate knowledge of them, we cease to be governed solely by our passions, by which he means those forms of unthought feeling that move us without appeal to the will (VP6). The central labor of the *Ethics* can therefore only be the ongoing effort to visualize how the bodies that make us up constitute themselves through the relations of their parts. Most of all, this means acknowledging that every part is acted on by those around it, even as it acts upon others in turn (IVP2). The whole in and through which we live would be, according to this system, nothing other than an endless process of modification, an infinitely scalable body whose parts move in dialogue with one another. In attending to these relations, we become all the more able to act according to our natures, and it is this, for Spinoza, that defines the essence of desire (IIIP9).

Burroughs the man would surely find these ideas repugnant, but the textual body that begins to constitute itself through *Naked Lunch*'s fragmentary incorporation of *Queer* agrees queerly with them. Burroughs was first troubled by the ways in which his queerness made him visible, both to himself and to society at large, in all the wrong ways. In order to resolve this dilemma, he shattered his early work, reorganizing it in a manner that would change the ways it was seen. Nowhere is this more palpable than when he restages the death of Bobo, as what he is truly repositioning here is nothing other than his confession of his own homosexuality. Through fragmentary incorporation, Burroughs attempts to reconcile himself with his own exposure of and exposure to homosexuality. He shatters this initial experience – or at least his fictionalization of it in *Queer* – in order to put its pieces into new configurations that will allow it to mean in different ways. In these terms, his works can be understood as an endless process of overcoming his fragmentary and fragmenting experience of sexuality through literary fragmentation. Among other things, this entails aspiring to new

relations, relations that would make him less alone in this experience precisely insofar as they too give it new meanings.

In the end, Burroughs does not manage to control how he is seen – how could he? – but he does reposition the parts of this routine, as he also did when speaking of lymph, in order to multiply the ways in which this confession might be modified. While he does not abandon his effeminophobia in such texts, he achieves these effects by bringing others into the weave of his work and allowing them to play off of one another. As with the Spinozian body, which can embrace organism, society, and cosmos, Burroughs' fragmentary style thus begins to engender a more inclusive and permissive understanding of what sexuality might involve through the very strategies by which he attempted to restrict the public meaning of his own desire. We must, however, turn to later writers, most of all Samuel R. Delany, who is the subject of my next chapter, in order to understand what a more willfully communitarian use of fragments might require.

CHAPTER FOUR

Samuel R. Delany's Paraliterary Optometry

"Later, the big man slept..." So begins "The Tale of Fog and Granite," the first chapter of the first story in the third volume of Samuel R. Delany's Return to Nevèrÿon quartet (*Flight* 13). From the start, this is a narrative that presents itself as incomplete, made fragmentary by its foundational displacement from an unknown origin. Later than what, one wonders? After some other story, some other act? In more ways than one, this initial uncertainty exemplifies the strategic use of fragmentation throughout Delany's series. Superficially, the texts that make up the quartet are tales of heroic fantasy, fictions of barbarism and magic in a time that seems to distantly precede our own. Simultaneously, these stories explicitly stage themselves as commentaries on the queer present, mixing often explicit references to Freud and Levi-Strauss into descriptions of fictional primeval tribes or meditating on the meanings of AIDS through the depiction of ancestral plagues. In one of his occasional authorial intrusions, Delany owns up to this tendency: "The Nevèrÿon series is, from first tale to last, a document of our times, thank you very much" (*Flight* 245). These narratives are thus always addressed to a time "later" than what they claim to describe. Yet, if they collectively function as a document of "our" times, they are also a reminder that our times are never fully our own. As the ambiguous "Later" with which Delany begins "The Tale of Fog and Granite" reminds us, to point to the present is always to construct "now" from the perspective of a "then" that is denied by the very performative formula that

announces the newness of the moment it inaugurates. To point to the present is to interrupt time, fragmenting then from now and now from what comes after.

Narratively speaking, embracing the present always entails disavowing some form of the past. "Later" nails down the elusive presence of the present by skipping past something, leaving something unsaid. The present does not entail plenitude, but loss and subtraction. You know it is now, "later" tells us, because you forget what it was like then. From its first word, a consciousness of this fact pervades the novella's syntax and structure. Its second chapter begins "Some years later" and the third "Minutes later" (*Flight* 17 and 25). Other incidents take place "still later," "Months later," "three hours later," and so on (*Flight* 16, 23-24, 74). More than any other, this term grounds the diverse temporal frames of the text, even as it continually fractures the narrative whole, separating it everywhere from itself through the elision of the untold or unknown.

This structural intermittence is fitting, given the central narrative of the novella, the story of a smuggler striving to construct an authoritative version of the life of Gorgik the Liberator, a former slave whose campaign to emancipate all those still in bondage has almost come to a head. The smuggler knows his idol only in pieces and parts, fragments of a life as heard from multiple, often competing sources. When the smuggler meets a man he mistakes for Gorgik, the former repeats a speech the latter is said to have delivered years before. On completing the recititation, however, he admits that his version of the oration is a composite of his own creation: "They spoke of it through all the markets of Nevèrÿon; they repeated what you said, and many said it wrong. But I asked and inquired of many more, till I'd finally put the right version together – that's what you *must* have said!" (*Flight* 88; emphasis original). Wanting a continuous, stable narrative, the smuggler constructs his idol of fragments, carefully selecting from the ruins of rumor in order to build a more ideal other. Fragmentation gives way to assemblage, a process that imbues life and intelligible meaning in

that which would otherwise be unknowably overdetermined. As we will see, this is an activity evident everywhere throughout the Nevèrÿon quartet.

Here, the story of the smuggler himself inverts the relationship between fragmentation and reconstitution. His story is bookended by two brief chapters, separated by a decade within the narrative that depict distinct moments in Gorgik's life. Though Gorgik is a central figure in many of Delany's other Nevèrÿon texts, no other story relates the period between these two chapters. From the perspective of the series as a whole, then, the smuggler's adventures are a sort of implied and impossibly protracted "later." Or, to put it another way, the story of his effort to reconstitute the whole of Gorgik's life fragments the narration of that life, passing over it in silence as surely as the introductory clause "Later" passes over all that might have otherwise taken place between sentences or paragraphs. The smuggler himself is smuggled into the gap, paradoxically brought to life by his attempt at the level of the narrative to reunite that which he divides at the level of the text. There is a certain promise to this torturous formulation, as it suggests that forms of life – or at least liveliness – can emerge from the relation to fragmentary forms.

One might tentatively approach "The Tale of Fog and Granite" as a belated proof of concept for the Nevèrÿon quartet as a whole. Here we have a text that pointedly makes the case that certain forms of life emerge only when we embrace the fragmentary, even if we do so with an eye toward smoothing over its rough edges and reconnecting its broken parts. Indeed, the entire series is built around the premise that Delany's fictions are merely elaborations on a mathematical retranslation of a primeval fragmentary story (Delany [as S.L. Kermit *Tales* 247-260). The quartet's central conceit is therefore that true vitality emerges from the investigation of that which is no longer, or never was, complete. Importantly, however, the texts that make up the series refuse to settle on a single means of engaging with

the scattered or ruined. Indeed, where "Fog and Granite" thematizes this process through its temporal syntax, the two other major texts in *Flight from Nevèrÿon*, the volume that it opens, actively perform it in wholly different ways.

The second story in the volume, "The Mummer's Tale," takes the form of a long conversation between an actor and a philosopher in which only the former's speech appears on the page. As Delany eventually makes clear, these two men are rough stand-ins for Socrates and Plato, making this monological conversation into a broken version of a philosophical dialogue.[61] Because the words of the Mummer's interlocutor are only implied, the onus of refutation and response falls to the reader whose own life becomes the catalyst of the same within the text. As "The Mummer's Tale" institutes this relation, it also inverts the priority of Platonic philosophy, giving back speech to "Socrates" and taking it from his erstwhile disciple. The story's own fragmentation thereby serves as a reminder of the fragmentary character of Plato's own works, works that would speak with only one voice (Plato's), even if they were accurate relations of real conversations. This is an incompletion more fundamentally dishonest than that of Heraclitus, whose corpus must have always seemed fated to return to the fire from which it was formed. By contrast, Plato's works promises a kind of heteroglossiac holism, covering over the fact that all reportage is mono-dialogical and hence all records are incomplete. We are everywhere met by fragments that disguise themselves as wholes, promising totalities toward which they can only point.

The first function of a fragmentary style might therefore be to dispel the illusion of true mimesis, dramatizing the seams and gaps that more stable texts normally cover over. Such an approach would support the work of critics like Robert Reid-Pharr, who argues that Delany's work

[61] See, for example, Delany, *Flight* 270-276. These pages of the text that follows "The Mummer's Tale" find the Mummer complaining that his theoretically inclined friend has written a number of dialogues in which the latter's opinions are put in the former's mouth. Tellingly, he notes, "Oh, there will be bits and pieces of me in his dialogues that I or anyone else would recognize – the details with which he will decorate his text. But there will also be much that only I could give the lie to" (Delany, *Flight* 275-276).

strives "not to explode any one myth, but to demonstrate that myths are not hermetically sealed 'truths' or even self-consciously fashioned ideologies, but, on the contrary, modes of communication" (347). Fragmentation reopens seemingly closed systems, forcing them back overt communication with realities beyond themselves. With this possibility in mind, one to *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, the novel-length third section of *Flight from Nevèrÿon*, a work that at once serves as a meditation on the early years of the AIDS epidemic and a continuation of the fictional narrative of Delany's queer prehistoric kingdoms. Written in numbered sections that vary wildly in both style and content, *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* might be understood, on a facile reading, as a text that performs the difficulties of accurately representing a situation as apocalyptic as the emergence of a new disease, especially one as dire as AIDS. Such an effort, this reading might hold, would inevitably leave something out, denying the living vitality of those already desperately fighting for survival. This account of *Plagues and Carnivals* is true insofar as the novel's form reflects the difficulty of properly encompassing its subject matter. Nevertheless, this labor of demystification does not exhaust the potential of this and similar fragmentary works. Indeed, to recognize that all representations of totality are incomplete is, perhaps, to approach, if only asymptotically, more fully realized visions of the whole of things.

The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals actively aspires to provide a more complete account of the AIDS epidemic by putting different generic forms into dialogue with one another. This novel produces a heteroglossiac climate – that is, one in which multiple ways of speaking play off of, with, and against one another. As originally and most famously deployed by Bakhtin, all true novels are fundamentally heteroglot insofar as they put the languages of different social spheres into conversation with one another. There is nothing fundamentally liberative or radical about this fact unless one finds something revolutionary in the mutual

presentation of the high with the low. Where *Plagues and Carnivals* differs from the sort of texts that Bakhtin describes is that above and beyond inventing discourse across social strata, it engenders communication between different forms of textuality. More often than not, these discrete textual forms belong to what Delany provocatively names "paraliterature" – genres such as fantasy, science fiction, mystery, pornography, and so on – though this novel rarely hews to one style for any length of time. Because, following Delany's own critical work, these generic modes are not so much ways of writing as they are ways of reading – strategies, that is to say, for making texts intelligible – *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* can be understood as a mass of overlapping lenses, each providing a subtly different perspective on the otherwise almost incomprehensible events that the text seeks to represent.

A totalizing account of a problem like AIDS would involve not just an understanding of what the syndrome is, but also an attempt to map the affective resonances that it engenders. Events like the appearance of AIDS threaten systems of meaning in large part because their overwhelming scope makes it unclear how to relate them to other signifying operations on which they touch, operations that they reshape with every new contact. In a 1991 essay, Thomas Yingling suggests something very much along these lines when he compares the scope of information on AIDS to the sublime experience of Kantian infinity: "Any one [sic] interested in AIDS must suffer from a similar vertigo: the number of books, essays, pamphlets, and articles, the kinds of information, issues, and events that occur are so overwhelming in sheer number as to defeat any attempt at comprehensive incorporation by one person" (291). This dizziness is not dispelled when – as Delany's appendix to *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, to which he added sections in 1985, 1987, and 1990, makes clear – little definite information is available amidst the sea of possibilities (*Flight* 361-367). Uncertainty about the nature of the disease couples with the danger it presented in such a way as to force the processes of meaning themselves to grind to a halt. Just as too much information makes it difficult

to grasp the whole, having too little renders the few facts and figures that are available as worlds unto themselves, islands of information separated by unbridgeable gaps of ignorance.

For Susan Sontag, lack of knowledge about a disease tends to set it free, transforming it into a floating signifier ready to be occupied by metaphor and myth: "Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally contagious" (6). When fear is twinned with ignorance, we sever illness' connections to the world of lived social and material experience, effectively allowing disease to mean anything other than what it actually is. In this account, the tumor becomes a sort of pineal gland through which real bodies are possessed by the anxious spirit of the social. If this is dangerous, it is so because it interrupts our ability to understand how we actually relate to disease. As Sontag puts it, "Nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning – that meaning invariably being a moralistic one" (58). Sontag deems this gift of significance problematic largely because it tends to imprison individuals who suffer from an illness, preventing them from seeking treatment or cutting them off from friends and family. One might go a step further and suggest that it also cages the disease itself, preventing it from entering into new associations and bonds that might improve practical understandings of it.

Given this risk of isolation, it might be surprising to find how many early works on AIDS eschew stable, continuous narratives in favor of a fragmentary style. *And the Band Played On*, Randy Shilts' seminal history of the early years of the epidemic, for example, tells its story over the course of hundreds of short sections, most of them somewhere between a few sentences and a few pages in length, organized by date and location. Importantly, these brief segments are focalized through a multiplicity of different real subjects whose supposed

experiences and affects texture Shilts' ostensibly journalistic tale.[62] This style, more that of a schizophrenic diarist than a traditional newspaper reporter, leads Ellis Hanson to compare *And the And the Band Played On* to *Dracula*, "in which newspaper clippings and case studies and bits of diaries diaries and journals, etc., are edited together to create a narrative" (Hanson 331). The comparison is apt, as both texts arguably use their respective cut-up styles to limn almost unspeakable horrors.

On a charitable reading, one might add that Shilts' style also reflects the failures of communication that marked the years after the disease first emerged. Yingling gestures to such an understanding when he argues that AIDS discourse exemplifies the problem of Lyotardian postmodernity, in which different language games grow increasingly incommensurable with one another: "Translating this to the question of AIDS, we find a true incommensurability of discursive universes: as disciplines, medical and scientific research have indeed become separate, autonomous realms of knowledge and power unprepared to meet the emergency of social conditions of the AIDS epidemic" (298-299). Shilts, who has been praised by even his harshest critics for his dramatization of the failures of the governmental and medical establishments,[63] finds in fragmentation a formal analogue to the socio-medical dilemmas he describes. The separation of these voices, one might argue in Lyotardian fashion, tells the story of a world in which only small stories remain.

Yet there is something profoundly despairing about this approach to both the actual AIDS crisis and its representations. Suggesting that the failure of organizations like the National Institutes of Health to respond to AIDS was a product of the postmodern end of grand narratives and not, for example, homophobic policy decisions seems at once defeatist and disabling. It is no doubt true that AIDS was "an epidemic of signification" (Paula Teichler, qtd. in Tucker 232) or even that, as Delany

[62] Due in part to this fictive device, it has become *de rigeur* to append the phrase "Randy Shilts' controversial bestseller" before all mentions of *And the Band Played On*. If I refrain from doing so here, it is largely because numerous others have evaluated the book's strengths and weakness in far greater detail than I can hope to offer.
[63] With the notable exception, of course, of those critics who were parts of those establishments.

puts it, "the controlling, dominant metaphoric structure" of the disease has been a search for a metaphor by which it could be managed (*Shorter Views* 137). The trouble is that such descriptions can easily become their own end points. This tendency risks foreclosing practical responses to AIDS in much the same way that Sontag warns of metaphor reducing individuals' ability to respond to cancer. On a still more hopeful reading, and with this threat in mind, one could suggest that *And the Band Played On*'s diffuse narrative marks an attempt to rectify the very situation it so ably depicts. Confronted by a situation of overwhelming complexity, Shilts struggles to map some of the countless relations that constitute it, providing a kind of perspective on the larger situation without losing the immediacy of the events he describes. A similar desire informs oral histories of the epidemic like *White Nights and Ascending Shadows*, texts that work on the assumption that no one perspective is adequate to the challenges real crises bring to bear on traditional regimes of reflection and understanding.

Strikingly, *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* fragments along lines of genre rather than voice. It is rare that a sequence of subsequent entries occupies the same narrative frame, let alone the same stylistic mode. One series of entries moves from the fictional kitchens of an ailing prehistoric lord to a reflection on the word disease, returns again to the imaginary city of Nevèrÿon, shifts back to a discussion of the mysterious qualities of AIDS, only to end with a discussion of "one of the aging street people" of Delany's acquaintance who was briefly thought to have the disease (Delany, *Flight* 184-187). The authorial voice of each of these passages is unquestionably Delany's own – at no point does he claim, as Shilts does, to channel the thoughts of others, even when he cites things supposedly real people said or did. Instead, each entry differs in the formal strategies it employs.

More often than not, Delany signals these shifts of genre with considerable efficiency, leaving little question as to the form of each section of the novel. Consider, for example, section 9.7, which begins, "Got a flyer from Temple University about a symposium, 'Post Barthes/Post Bakhtin'" (*Flight* 276). Like the "Later" that opens "The Tale of Fog and Granite," the informal "Got" with which this sentence begins textures all that follows. The missing personal pronoun before this initial word does more to construct and characterize the implied speaking subject than the capital letter itself could were it actually present. Given the lack of an opening salutation, this is an "I" that needs no introduction, addressing itself to an audience to which it is already transparent – an audience of *I*, which is to say an audience of *one*, one that is at once speaker and addressee. From the first word of 9.7, then, we know that what confronts us is diaristic writing, or, at any rate, something that passes itself off as belonging to Delany's "private" journals. This initial implication is confirmed near the end of the section when Delany remarks, "Another journal entry, based on notes made that morning in November [of 1982] and written out more fully a day or so later" (*Flight* 280). Whether or not the observations sandwiched between "Got" and this concluding "later" truly represent a verbatim transcription of the author's diary is insubstantial. More significant is that genre *qua* genre is staged as such at the very moment when the text passes on to something else, making it impossible to ignore the fact that this is a text invested in the recombination of otherwise distinct ways of writing.

Among the generic forms with which Delany tarries over the course of *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, one might count academic commentary, theoretical analysis, and memoiristic reflection, but the modes to which he turns are frequently more populist. Most obvious in this regard is the structuring frame of sword-and-sorcery fantasy that gives the novel what passes for an overarching plot. I will return to this foundational frame shortly, but it seems important to note here that the fantastic is only one of what Delany calls the "paraliterary" styles this text embraces. Among the

others forms that generally fall under this rubric, he counts, "comic books, pornography, film and television scripts, advertising copy, instructions on the back of the box, street signs, popular song lyrics, business letters, journalism – in short, the graphic flood from which most of the texts each of us encounters over any day come" (*Silent Interviews* 32). If the numerous textual forms Delany names here are, as the prefix of "paraliterature" suggests, somehow beside the literary, it is because we tend to constitute literature in opposition to these, its countless others (*Silent Interviews* 212-214). The fragmentary structure of *Plagues and Carnivals* literally makes this constitutive besideness visible, producing a tapestry of adjacent, and sometimes overlapping, paraliterary possibilities.

The first section of the novel, which initially reads as a realist description of a crumbling Manhattan footbridge, takes a sudden turn in its final sentence that demonstrates this generic muddle from the very start: "It's the bridge Joey told me he was under that sweltering night in July when, beside the towering garbage pile beneath it, he smelled the first corpses" (Delany, *Flight* 183). Knowing that this is a novel about the AIDS epidemic, a reader might be forgiven for thinking that the unseen bodies of this passage are those of early victims of the then largely unknown syndrome. Surely the tone of this passage supports such an understanding, physicalized phrases like "that sweltering night in July" suggesting the language of one who was there and speaks with the authority of experience. Surprisingly, later passages eventually reveal that these corpses are not AIDS-related at all, that they are instead victims of a serial killer stalking the homeless of Manhattan. Though they retain a quality of anthropological reportage on the ultimate underclass of New York City, the occasional sections of the novel that take up this thread frequently feel more like bits and pieces of a *Law and Order* episode than anything else. This ambiguity contributes to the

novel's broader investigative relationship to AIDS, even as it adds to the paraliterary quality of these sections.

To understand why *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* engages in this associative generic play we might consider the idea that genre is as much about the way we approach texts as it is about the way they present themselves to us. Clear as our concept of how something along the lines of "journal writing" differs from "journalism," most categories of genre are little more than loose conceptual frameworks. Insofar as they collect sets of expectations regarding what will and will not be important in certain texts, ideas of genre surely play a part in the way we read. By no means is this a radical or new idea. E.D. Hirsch, to give but one example, argues that genre is nothing more than the name we give to collections of typologized traits that we extract from different experiences. We can, Hirsch insists, recognize the fundamental character of certain traits without initially knowing what type they belong to. After repeatedly encountering them, we ultimately reify this intuitive experience, allowing it to give way to more stable generic understanding (Hirsch 76-77). These more fully fixed notions help us to determine quickly what we are reading and, as such, improve our sense of how to make sense of it by giving us a clearer concept of what norms apply to the text in question (Hirsch 68-71). Genre might therefore be understood less as something that we look for while we read rather than as something that we seek out *avant la lettre*.

Summing up his own stance on the issue in an "interview" with the fictional K. Leslie Steiner – who also makes a cameo in *Plagues and Carnivals* – Delany comes to much the same conclusion about the "paraliterary" field of science fiction. This genre, he explains, is nothing more than the name we give to certain ways of approaching certain texts – a conceit whose vagueness is its critical strength (*Silent Interviews* 273). He then goes on to remark that to describe a given genre as a way of reading is not, strictly speaking, to give a specific account of it, precisely because this claim is applicable to all ideas of genre: "This is *not* a definition of science fiction because it applies as

much to poetry, history, pornography, and philosophy as it does to SF" (*Silent Interviews* 273). According to this line of thought, genre is a guide for the understanding, a frame that helps determine how we understand what it contains. While *Plagues and Carnivals* may not seek to provide a description of how the genres it deploys function, it does take advantage of the multiplicitous epistemological vantages that they provide.

Consider the generic mode of "sword-and-sorcery" fantasy, a discourse that provides the various possibilities at play in the novel with one of their primary frames. In a passage very much in line with the ethos described above, Delany remarks that textual objects change their character depending on the lenses through which they are perceived. Shortly after citing a Benjaminian citation of Baudelaire, Delany observes, "Placing Benjamin's quotation from Baudelaire in a fantasy context produces a very different effect from placing the same quotation in an SF context" (*Flight* 210). The language of placement here suggests the work of a careful *bricoleur*, thoughtfully deploying his sizeable, if ultimately finite, toolkit to different ends. All the same, it is less than clear what problem Delany thinks his doubly enclosed citation solves or, for that matter, how he intends to use it. Though he continues to insist that every generic situation makes a difference, he refuses to explain what that difference is, here or anywhere else throughout the text. The point is, of course, a strategic one: if genre truly is a question of how we read, understanding what this or any other repurposed object means is ultimately a matter of how we encounter it.

The question remains as to why we should read *Plagues and Carnivals* as having a "fantasy context" in the first place. This is, after all, a text that makes copious reference to painfully real events set in a New York City that sounds very much like our own. Moreover, it does so in a way that is at once personal and deeply engaged, such that these developments are more than mere background. Embedded as it is within the larger Return to Nevèrÿon

sequence, however, the novel puts a certain inescapable emphasis on its intermittent elements of heroic derring-do set in an unknowable past. Sections like the Master's narration of his youthful journey through the countryside – a passage replete with descriptions of bandit attacks and the occasional monstrous visitation – evoke the work of authors like R.E. Howard and Fritz Leiber.[64] The "dark, tall" men, endowed with "bravery and fighting skills" one finds here would not be out of place in a pulp fiction Conan story (*Flight* 297). Nor is the world these adventurers occupy – one of blonde barbarians, reptilian beasts called dragons, and mysterious warrior women – so unlike the fantastical Nehwon of Leiber's Farfhrd and the Gray Mouser stories.[65] Yet within the scope of *Plagues and Carnivals* itself, fantasy is more denotative than connotative, pointed out rather than produced, much as it is in Delany's discussion of Baudelaire. What purpose does this pointing serve? First and foremost, it indicates a stage, a space in which other forces and possibilities can interact. As we will see, fantasy works more to set the scene than to perform it.

The structuring function of sword-and-sorcery fantasy in this novel is conditioned in part by the inevitable disappointment of generic expectations. Insofar as genre facilitates reading, it does so by furnishing us with a set of beliefs about what to look for in certain texts, the lists of typological traits the Hirsch suggests we construct over time.[66] Yet, as Delany notes, these preconceptions never fully line up with new readings, even when they follow from old ones: "The catalogue, the lexicon, the conceptual background... is primarily a catalogue, lexicon, or background of the mind. Any given

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[64] Howard and Leiber are the writers most commonly associated with the birth and popularization of "Sword-and-Sorcery" fantasy. Leiber famously coined the term still used to describe the subgenre.

[65] Indeed, the very name of Delany's setting is almost certainly an homage to Leiber. Like Nevèrÿon, a word that can be roughly disassembled to mean "across never," "Newhon" is the mirror image of "no when." Both words suggest the temporal unplaceability of the lands they name.

[66] It bears noting here that Hirsch is explicitly not speaking of genre in the paraliterary sense. Categories like "detective fiction," Hirsch insists, incline us more toward processes of classification than interpretation. In confusing these two operations, we "misapply a very valuable heuristic tool" (Hirsch 116). To this, I would offer two linked responses: First, I am not at all convinced that we ever develop truly intrinsic notions of genre. Second, even the most crass concepts of genre must incline us toward certain patterns and forms of textual functioning. As such, the line between the rarefied cognitive genres that Hirsch pursues and those granted to us by the publishing market and other material conditions may be less than absolute.

sword-and-sorcery text will always be in excess of, or inadequate to it" (*Silent Interviews* 131). On a first pass, this premise seems congruent with the thought of Hirsch who tends to speak of genre as though it were a better substitute for the idea of the whole. Whereas the whole is a sort of static rule against which new perceptions are measured, Hirsch claims that we progressively focus our generic conceptions as we encounter more examples of phenomena that fall under their respective rubrics (Hirsch 71-77). Delany's formulation likewise suggests that genre is useful insofar as it remains mutable, but his approach does not follow from the premise that every revision of its scope is necessarily a constriction. Indeed, the recognition that it can be either excessive *or* inadequate all but rules out the gradual narrowing of Hirsch's approach. To the contrary, conceptions of genre can only expand as readers encounter their as yet unanticipated dimensions. As such, Delany's account of genre falls more fully in line with the Gadamerian definition of the hermeneutic circle, in which the experience of being brought up short results in a subtle expansion of one's horizon. More importantly, Delany's understanding of paraliterary reading practices as expansive suggests that grappling with experiences of inadequacy becomes a means of approaching, if not actually achieving, notions of totality.

The trouble with this line of thought is that it perversely risks draining all genres of their positive content by imbuing them with an absolute excess of ever-increasing significance. What, then, does sword-and-sorcery fantasy offer that another paraliterary mode would not? What, for that matter, is the value of the numerous other generic possibilities with which Delany experiments in *Plagues and Carnivals*? Many critics suggest that Delany turns to sword-and sorcery because the Nevèrÿon stories are narratives that take marginality as their central subject. As a frequently maligned subgenre of an arguably marginal paraliterary genre, sword-and-sorcery is admirably suited to such a project. In

support of this hypothesis, Lewis Call writes, "After all, such a doubly marginal genre is perfect for a discussion of that most marginal of strategies, erotic power exchange. By choosing sword and sorcery, Delany is not merely accepting marginal status. He is insisting upon it" (287). Robert F. Reid-Pharr likewise suggests that sword-and-sorcery narratives are useful insofar as they "are preoccupied with liminality" (349). Yet here it is not insignificant that as many or more scholars have made the case that Delany's earlier works embrace science fiction (rather than fantasy) for similar reasons.[67] Generally speaking, critics tend to agree that Delany aspires to stage the marginal and that his chosen genre only supports this desire. While they are certainly not wrong on the first point, the second claim effectively minimizes Delany's embrace of the paraliterary in any of its forms, functioning more as an apology for the popular tenor of his work than as a true point of critical departure. A syllogism: The marginal is good. Science fiction is marginal. Therefore, science fiction is good.

Further, the formal character of both fragmentary and serial texts belies the suggestion that the Nevèrÿon books, and *Plagues and Carnivals* in particular, take up a given genre in order to evoke lives lived at the limits of the norm. Fragmentary texts almost always present what is immediately at hand as if it were central, final, or absolute. Precisely insofar as they are sundered from all that would otherwise surround them, fragments are worlds unto themselves, totalities writ small. As such, their contents, however marginal they might be in a more complete context, necessarily stand out as foundational. Indeed, the first pleasure of fragmentary literature may be that it continually enables us to tarry with the possibility of certainty. Delany's own remarks about the critical arc of the Nevèrÿon series suggest that he thinks much the same is true for serial compositions: "Its serial form was a direct attempt to allow for the intervention of a changing and developing critical sensitivity, my own

[67] Most notable among those who make such an argument is Samuelson. See also Georgia Johnston, though like some other critics, Johnston seems to describe the Nevèrÿon books as science fiction texts. Sylvia Kelso also makes a case for the self-consciously marginal status of Delany's science fiction qua science fiction, adding only that the Nevèrÿon cycle is more marginal still.

– or others, to the extent I could hear what they said and make it my own" (*Silent Interviews* 142). Seriality formalizes the experience of change over time by at once preserving prior moments and allowing more recent ones to challenge and question those that came before, even as they will be challenged in turn. As with the fragment, the contents of a particular phase in a serial narrative are always formally central on their first appearance and marginal only in retrospect as one moves on to the next fragment or episode.

Fragmenting an almost endless succession of generic modes, *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* continually highlights whatever is most central to the numerous sections that make it up. In and of itself, such a dizzying situation would surely be unsustainable. The back and forth dynamic of genres throughout this novel perpetually defers any sense of a stable whole, threatening to turn the text into an example of what Jonathan Culler calls "non-genre literature" by paradoxical dint of the generic excess it displays. "*Non-genre literature* avoids established relations between *écriture* – production of a surface – and *lecture* – production of sense – and hence, for the reader, is essentially *about* the ways in which he attempts to create order" (Culler 54). That is, a non-genre text provides no indication of how it should be read, forcing the reader to reckon with the process of sense-making instead of embracing one of its existing forms. *Plagues and Carnivals*, by contrast to what Culler would presumably call genre literature, provides too many instructions, destabilizing every attempt to subsume its distinct parts under a single meaningful rubric. As such, it risks merely reinscribing the vertiginous situation it seeks to process. Left to their own devices, Delany's succession of genres would merely echo the simultaneous excess of information and dearth of understanding about AIDS that he describes, making the novel little more than a monument to a particular moment in the social history of the disease.

What this novel needs is some organizing principle, some rule directing the movement from one generic mode to the next, a rule it finds in the paraliterary horizon that gives the text its fundamental frame, sword-and-sorcery fiction. Delany lays out a number of conventional traits of this subgenre in an essay on Joanna Russ' Alyx series. Among other things, he suggests that such stories must take place in "a landscape that is 'on the brink of civilization'" and must feature a hero who is more "Caliban made human" than a noble prince (*Jewel-Hinged* 65-68).[68] More striking, however, is his insistence that sword-and-sorcery narratives are guided by an economic logic, bearing imaginary witness to "the transition from a barter economy to a money economy" (*Jewel-Hinged* 65). This economic climate, he argues elsewhere, tends to put uncommon emphasis on marketplace encounters and other scenes of transaction precisely insofar as these shifts in the mode of exchange remain in the background of all else that happens (*Silent Interviews* 129). We might therefore begin to understand the sword-and-sorcery frame of *Plagues and Carnivals* as one that stresses contact between and exchange of commodities that would otherwise remain separate. Or, to put it another way, sword-and-sorcery is itself a kind of marketplace, a space of surmountable difference for what would otherwise be incommensurable modes of literary and cultural production.

This approach to the novel puts unusual emphasis on an early passage, one that simultaneously takes place within the sword-and-sorcery frame and provides a point of contact for all those other episodes that surround it: "She fled between counters piled with leather, counters piled with cloth, sunlight striking between awnings at her, the news bubbling behind her eyes, bursting her ears from within as the vendors' shouts and halloos battered them from without" (*Flight* 188). The initially unnamed "she" of these lines – later identified as Nari – brings knowledge of a friend's illness, a first indication of the AIDS-like epidemic that has begun to spread through her city. This image might not be so striking were it not the near double of those moments Delany has

[68] For a more complete account of Delany on the conventions of sword-and-sorcery, as well as a cogent argument as to how he subverts them in the first Nevèrÿon volume, *Tales of Nevèrÿon*, see Spencer (64-69).

identified as the primal scene of sword-and-sorcery fiction. Describing the archetypal sword-and-sorcery narrative, he writes, "In the market, once again, hero pursues villain, knocking down counters, overturning stalls, strewing tools, vegetables, baskets, smashing pottery, wreaking havoc, disrupting, violating, over-turning the market" (*Silent Interviews* 132). In upsetting the market, disrupting its flows, hero and villain effectively call attention to all that can take place there. These chase sequences dramatize the otherwise dull work of the trader, the collision of commodities with one another as they fly through the air standing in for the workaday banalities of negotiation and barter. Likewise, the near structural identity of the first two clauses of the passages from *Plagues and Carnivals* cited above – "counters piled with cloth" following closely on the heels of "counters piled with leather" – suggests forms of exchange that the novel never fully shows. Both passages describe a mad flight through the market, a movement at once toward and away from something, a movement, that is, not so unlike that of the circulating commodity.

Jes Battis helpfully identifies the relationship between circulation – economic and otherwise – and desire in an article on the role of the marketplace in Delany's quartet. Describing the complexities of the most significant romantic and sexual bonds that connect the series' characters, Battis observes, "Both [relationships] occur within the logic of a capitalism that is, within Nevèrÿon, moving past the agrarian model and towards a pre-industrial one" (Battis 482). Shifts in the economic order provide a working model for otherwise unworkably and indeterminably sexualized relationships. In the process, the marketplace arguably becomes the privileged topos of many forms of encounter, not just those described by a more conventional commercial order. To visit the marketplace is to visit a space in which needs are met and new ones are created, a space in which desire itself is the currency. The market context that sword-and-sorcery furnishes reveals not only the

possibility of exchange, but also that such exchanges are directed toward supplementing what each fragmentary whole lacks.

Perhaps, then, the novel's constant movement from one genre to the next serves to make speakable that which would otherwise go unsaid in the face of the inadequacy of this or that perspectival representation of AIDS and its conditions of knowledge. In one of the first ostensibly non-fictional episodes of *Plagues and Carnivals*, Delany has an acquaintance, "Joey," remark, "'AIDS, that's where your body stops healing, and even an infection from a little cut, or a cold, can kill you...?' There was the faintest interrogation at the end of his pronouncement that a question mark distorts. Still, he seemed to be waiting for an answer" (*Flight* 186). The novel that surrounds this moment thrives in the tension Delany identifies in Joey's words, each entry suspended between pronouncement and interrogation. Every assertion is destined to trail off, to fall into an ellipsis that does not quite end in a question mark. As long as AIDS remains what it is here – an affirmative question held in common – no single means of representing it, and no one perspective on it, can be adequate to the thing in itself. But genre, as we have already seen, may be best understood as a way of reading. What is transacted, then, in the implied marketplace of *Plagues and Carnivals*' fantastical frame are exchanges between different ways of making sense of the senseless. With a kind of certainty that only fragments can manifest, each new mode calls out the others for what they lack – what they fail to see – even as they are called out in turn by those that come both before and after.

Surprisingly, it is precisely this drama of inadequacy that Delany has in mind when he speaks of the Nevèrÿon stories as "a document of our times" (*Flight* 245). "History," Delany has written elsewhere, "begins only when we do *not* know what happened – when there is disagreement over what happened" (*Silent Interviews* 147). By nature, a document records a particular conjuncture of events and experiences. To speak of a text as documentary is therefore not to lay claim to its ability to tell the whole story. Instead, the document begins and ends as a fragment, the trace of a phase –

or, perhaps, a phrase – in the argument rather than the whole of the dialogue. *Plagues and Carnivals* suggests that a drive to particularization marks the documentary instinct. The most a document can hope to achieve is a more or less accurate representation of a particular set of circumstances. Fittingly, §8.5, in which these speculations appear, ends with an initially unkept promise, the colon that concludes it presiding over the dead space between entries: "Some documentation on Joey:" (*Flight* 245). According to the tenuous logic by which this novel works, the kind of specificity that the text proposes to provide here is unbefitting to the more theoretically speculative mode of §8.5. Only when the text again shifts its generic tone in the following entry, §8.51, back to its more personal documentary style can this promise be realized. That is, §8.51 performs what §8.5 can only describe, the tension between them at once dramatizing and realizing the mutual supplementarity of different generic forms within the whole of the text. Delany's claim that the Nevèrÿon stories are documents of their times therefore speaks not to their ability to provide accurate pictures of their particular moments, but to their inadequacy even within their own context, an inadequacy that the generic plenitude of *Plagues and Carnivals* simultaneously acknowledges and negotiates.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the novel's heady citation of a series of speculative acronyms and hypotheses that circulated around AIDS in its early years. Section 7.3 opens, "CMV, ASFV, HLTV, Hepatitis-B model, retro-viruses, LAV, the multiple agent theory, the 'poppers' theory, the double-virus theory, the genetic disposition theory (the eternal Government Plot theory!), the two-population theory..." (*Flight* 225). Each of these terms refers to a separate cluster of speculative discourses about the origin and cause of AIDS, for which a virus had not yet been identified when

Delany composed this novel in 1984.[69] The relative intelligibility of this entry requires that the reader make contact with the period out of which it emerges. Each of the acronyms it invokes calls up a wide range of discourses at once speculative and scientific, many of which are unlikely to be immediately available to the novel's present readers. Today, this chain of acronyms – each of them a fragment of some larger conversation – reads more like a compensatory gesture of mastery than a real display of knowledge. The sequence of terms attempts to circumscribe the disease and its ambiguities, but ultimately betrays the very uncertainty and fear it attempts to hide. The addition of each new term implicitly acknowledges the inadequacy (though not necessarily the inaccuracy) of those that came before.

On a more general register, *Plagues and Carnivals* attempts to turn the associative play of documentary inadequacy into a resource rather than a curse, as in a pair of entries that describe homophobic encounters. Of these, the first, §8.62, merely alludes to a purportedly real incident: "I don't even *feel* like writing out the ugly incident from a couple of days ago, the model for the opening of the section below... well, since I *don't* feel like it, I'm not: other than to say that when it was over, I felt pretty proud of Our Guys" (*Flight* 250; emphasis original). This passage at once literally emphasizes private feeling and implicates the reader in a form of queer collectivity. The slippage between Delany's strong "I" statements with their stressed verbs to the capitalized "Our" of community invites a sense of indistinction between the first person singular and the possessive first personal plural. In so doing, it suggests that *we* are too close to what happened to really process it – that it is still too emotionally fraught – despite the fact that *we* were not there and therefore lack any real details about what took place.

When the generic mode shifts back to sword-and-sorcery in the entry that follows §8.62, the previously undescribed incident suddenly becomes representable. Here, we are told, a presumably

[69] Though *Flight from Nevèrÿon* was not published until 1985, Delany – following his usual practice – signs the end of the *Plagues and Carnivals* with the location (New York) and date (May 1984) of its initial composition (*Flight* 359).

heterosexual man shouts slurs at a group of tanners, the stereotypically gay profession of Neveryona. By way of response, "Two of the tanners grunted and barked and mimed his hostile gestures back; and two more stepped up when he stepped forward; so, finally, he went on" (*Flight* 251). On an initial reading, these two passages seem to perform the desiring supplementariness of fragments more than they truly model it: that which hits too close to home to be understood grows legible with the distance that another genre grants. This formulation might help to explain why the incident, once described, feels somewhat toothless – it is, no doubt, ugly, but it does not convey the horror that Delany's refusal to describe it in §8.62 would suggest. Nevertheless, more is at stake here than this initial appraisal reveals. The three semicolon separated clauses of the sentence quoted above syntactically extend the formal logic of these two entries. Narratively, each of the clauses is fragmentary, relying on the others to complete its own small story. Within these stories, this supplementarity is repeated at the level of the narrative, with tanners coming forward to take the place of others. Lastly, the actions of the group are themselves parodic, disempowering the homophobe by repeating his actions with a critical difference. This final point may prove the key to the whole, as it suggests that the strategy underlying the fragmentary style of *Plagues and Carnivals* is fundamentally oriented toward generic parody, each entry subtly transforming and troping on others so as to recontextualize them. Ultimately, then, the distinct pieces of this novel have one another as their primary subjects.

Something along these lines is almost certainly going on in the novel's intermittent episodes about a serial killer stalking the homeless of Manhattan. As I have already noted, the novel's first entry works by promulgating generic confusion between its status as early AIDS fiction and this interlaced, and purportedly true, story of urban crime. Recurring as they do throughout the novel, and related as they are to the depredation of a maligned population, these passages sometimes seem to restage AIDS as the basis of an urban thriller. Indeed, the text often encourages the comparison,

as when Joey – who often works the streets as a gay hustler – notes that one of the murderer's first victims was his "competition" (*Flight* 232). It would be difficult here not to read this death of a prostitute as an allegory for the loss of many who belonged to a specifically *sexual* minority, even at a time when the sexually transmitted status of AIDS was not uniformly confirmed. Evoking the sex trade, Delany also helpfully entangles this violent sub-plot with the larger sword-and-sorcery frame and its implications of market exchange. Like AIDS, the killer preys on those who engage in particular forms of interpersonal traffic, proposing, per the repugnant promises of many right-wing politicians and pundits, to restore a more conservative social order through the extermination of those who do not hold to its dictates. As the novel describes them, the official response to these killings also mirrors the real-world history of AIDS: Thus, for example, the police dubiously work to protect the homeless by arresting as many of them as possible on trumped-up charges, taking them out of harm's way by introducing them to the criminal justice system, a development that echoes the official and unofficial attempts to close down bathouses and other sites of public sex (*Flight* 261-262).

In light of all this, the serial killer plot might be read as a kind of perverse consolation. Like conspiracy theory, which, as Frederic Jameson reminds us, provides comfort by locating an agent within the otherwise anonymous movements of capital (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 1-83), identifying AIDS with an actual murderer makes the disease tangible and therefore manageable. Even based as they ostensibly are on real events, one cannot help but wonder of these episodes: Will Joey survive? Will the killer be revealed? Will – most unlikely and most tantalizing of all – Delany somehow involve himself in the apprehension of this vile criminal? Questions like these have the perverse effect of turning a narrative that stands in for a very real and very grim situation into something strangely exciting. The consequence of making AIDS too intelligible might therefore be the loss of some of its force.

Fittingly, then, this extended – or distended – para-allegory ultimately ends bathetically. Near the close of the novel, Delany again runs into Joey who notes in passing that the situation has been resolved. When pressed for details, he explains with the verbal equivalent of a shrug that it was, "Just some guy. Some crazy guy who was goin' around killing people. They said he killed five people. But they caught him… Somebody else killed the other four… Man, I'm on the *street* again. I'm doin' pretty well, too… Now wouldn't you think *I'd* be dead of AIDS by now?" (*Flight* 350; emphasis original). The comfort that what Delany calls his "'Jack the Ripper' account" promised to provide here diffuses in several directions at once. First, there are two killers, making it that much harder to think this story as a way of personifying the scattered syndrome. Second, while Joey survives the serial killer and has not yet died of AIDS, he reminds us that he might yet fall victim to the latter when he disassociates it from the former. As with the announcement in April 1984 that researchers had identified a viral agent behind AIDS,[70] catching a glimpse of death's skeletal face in no way guarantees the stilling of his scythe. The anxious questions that Delany puts into his own mouth in this scene, questions that propel Joey's increasingly apathetic remarks, demonstrate that the text is aware of its own overinvestment in the ultimately disappointed relief this plot was seemingly meant to provide. Ultimately, these linked episodes experiment with strategies of relief, instead of providing it. In the end, the serial killer plot is as inadequate to the experience of AIDS as early descriptions of the disease were to the disease itself, and it is this very inadequacy that the text spotlights and studies. What initially presented itself as a double for the syndrome finally reveals itself as one way among many of coming to terms with it.

Despite its poly-generic cacophony, it would be a mistake to read *Plagues and Carnivals* as a text that takes the production of Bakhtinian heteroglossia as its final goal. Bakhtin argues that novels work by allowing different ways of speaking to intersect with one another, thereby producing

[70] As Delany notes in his first postscript to *Flight from Nevèrÿon*, the majority of *Plagues and Carnivals* was written before this discovery was made public (*Flight* 361).

an arguably stable image of something like the whole of social relations (259-422). At least one critic, Darren J. Danylyshen, has argued that Delany attempts something similar in *Flight from Nevèrÿon*, mobilizing a variety of competing discourses under a single sign so as to enable a kind of totalizing contact between them. For Danylyshen, this grounding symbol is the slave collar worn throughout Delany's quartet by Gorgik and others – now for reasons of social status, now in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Danylyshen writes, "The slave's collar creates a dialogic polyphony of relations and interrelationships in the spirit of Bakhtinian theory, thereby creating a fictional space where theory, practice, fiction, and reality coexist in dynamic simultaneity" (157). The choice of the collar is perhaps more apt than Danylyshen admits. As in Judith Butler's account of the re-appropriation of the epithet "queer," the ability of this device to take on multiple meanings is partially a product of its violent original meaning: It would not be playful if did not first restrict play (Butler, *Bodies* 223-242). Moreover, by suggesting that all of the possible signifieds of this novel come together in a single signifier, Danylyshen concretizes and thereby reconfines the liberative climate that he seeks to describe. Like the spirit of carnival, which temporarily dramatizes the overturning of social order in the service of guaranteeing its long-term stability, the mere identification of heteroglossia risks simply stilling the dynamic and plural movements that it claims to describe.[71] To suggest that the multiple generic threads that intertwine throughout *Plagues and Carnivals* call out the inadequacy of every other should not be to assert that they do so in the service of providing an ultimately complete version of things. Instead, each learns of its lack from every other in a way that whispers to each fragment of things it cannot see and does not show.

Here it is striking to note that the real critical difference between the two versions of the ugly incident discussed above turns around the figure of impaired vision. In the first, purportedly real,

[71] In any case, as Delany himself has noted, from a strictly Bakhtinian perspective, all novels are, by definition, heteroglossiac. To say that a text is both a novel and oriented toward heteroglossia is therefore to say almost nothing (*Shorter Views* 126).

version of the story, the homophobe is described as "a little man with the muscles of a laborer, a beer belly, thinning hair, and glasses" (*Flight* 250). In the following section – set in the more explicitly fictional world of Nevèrÿon – this list of traits is repeated almost verbatim: Here we meet, "a little man with the muscles of a laborer, a beer belly, thinning hair, and weak eyes" (*Flight* 250-251). While the distinction between the two obviously serves as a reminder of the prehistoric state of Delany's imagined world, a setting in which lens grinding will go undiscovered for millennia, more is at stake here. The textual whole of *Plagues and Carnivals* works like a visit to the optometrist, an experiment with different lenses and combinations thereof: Passing from one genre to the next and back again, one imagines the doctor quietly muttering, "Number one or number two? Number three or number four?" The novel does not, however, offer a perscription. To the contrary, as the two passages just above suggest, it tarries with impairments of vision, acknowledging that if we cannot see well, we can at least keep trying to see at all.

Ultimately, *Plagues and Carnivals* may be less interested in working as a novel about AIDS than it is in accounting for some of the countless affects that AIDS engenders. Affect is more than a matter of feeling; it is, from the start, an issue of contact between bodies, contact that sometimes impedes us and sometimes urges us on. But affect is also about our *experience* of these many contacts, a product of the ideas that we form about them.[72] As such, to speak about AIDS, or anything else, through questions of affect is to recognize a kind of feedback loop wherein the affects that AIDS generates lead to new thoughts and hence new forms of experience. As we do so, we must recognize that any account that follows from such an approach is bound to be inadequate, a fact that does not preclude care and rigor. As Spinoza would argue, an adequate understanding of an affect would entail knowledge of all the causal relations that render it both possible and

[72] In this double characterization of affect as both contact and the ideas we form about that contact, I have in mind Spinoza's characterization of the term in the third part of his *Ethics*: "By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (IIID3).

necessary. Because such absolute knowledge would ultimately align with the real totality of Nature – a word that is all but synonymous for Spinoza with God, or even existence as such – we can never expect to fully master affect. We can only struggle to make sense of it within the scope and sphere of our own limited forms of life, forms that we expand through this interrogation of experience. We engage in – indeed, *Plagues and Carnivals* engages in – a cartography of relation, putting experiences of affect into contact with one another and generating new affects in the process, all in the hopes of *approaching* a version of the whole at which we never expect to arrive.

Plagues and Carnivals captures this ethos most fully not when it explicitly rewrites specific experiences in different generic registers, but when it allows particular acts and feelings to echo one another in subtler ways. In one of the Nevèrÿon sections of the text, a man who may or may not be the homophobe with the "muscles of a laborer" attempts publicly and singlehandedly to destroy with a stonemason's hammer the Bridge of Lost Desire, the city's privileged locale for those seeking others of a licentious inclination. When confronted, he responds, "I'm tearing it down, breaking it up – this overground cesspool! This is where you all come! You can be sure, here is where you give it to one another, like a deadly secret you whisper in the dark from this one to that. Can't you see it? This is where it comes from – !" (*Flight* 264). Most striking about this rant is its associative confusion of sensory sentiments. From the smell of a cesspool, it slides seamlessly into the sound of a whispered secret, a sound experienced as visible, seen by all. This synesthetic slippage speaks, on a narrative level, to a failure of affective reflection, evoking this character's inability to process how this bridge, and all that takes place on and around it, make him feel.

The laborer's bafflement speaks to a more profound confusion, the misprision that perversion can and does have a single site, a mistake that resonates throughout the novel's fragments. Like conspiracy theory, the attempt to give desire and pleasure a determinate center is a compensatory fantasy that attempts to master the ambiguous threat of feelings that often sweep

over us without warning. Also like conspiracy theory, this fantasy may be a perverse impediment to the understanding, allowing us to dream organized relations into being rather than encouraging us to meditate on the chaos of real ones. As Spinoza might note, this makes subjects all the more likely to be ruled by their passions, entangling individuals like the laborer in the knots of sensation at precisely the moment when they struggle hardest to avoid the naughty. What makes this incident important, then, is the way that it unveils a more profound sense of inadequacy in similar stories throughout the text. The aforementioned removal of the homeless from the streets or another character's account of the destruction of a New York restroom used for public sex both speak to larger failures of reflection (*Flight* 261-262 and 340-341). Like the garbled laborer's futile attempt to stem the spread of disease by destroying the bridge, these efforts mark a refusal to think fully and carefully about relation and connection, contact and exchange.

The sections of *Plagues and Carnivals* that follow §9.4, the episode on the bridge, push this problem forward, implying that seeing others seeing is the project of this novel. Uncharacteristically, the six fragmentary segments immediately after §9.4 – from §9.41 to §9.442 – remain within the generic frame of the sword-and-sorcery Nevèrÿon setting. Despite this, they describe a back and forth exchange of glances and looks not altogether dissimilar from the optometrical rotation of genres that one finds elsewhere in the text. After the crowd around the maddened laborer disperses, the narrative lingers on two of those who witnessed his outburst, just as their own gazes linger on each other: "Not only did Noyeed and Zadyuk both see the incident, they saw each other – were, indeed, left looking at one another when the mummer and the stoneworker had finally moved off from between them in their different directions" (*Flight* 266). Here it is nothing other than the mutual investigation of a scene of inadequation that puts these two otherwise dissimilar men into unlikely contact with one another. When the object of their mutual concern vanishes, they are left with a moment of still mutual, and still mysterious, relation. Naturally, this uncritical sense of

relatedness too can be a source of confusion and fear, as the next passage finds Zadyuk worrying over what the other man sees in him. The other's gaze is always a source of anxiety, the surveillance of surveillance threatening to produce an epidemic of misrecognition (*Flight* 266).

Even so, there is a real promise to this encounter of the eye, a promise that the novel tries to stage across the generic lenses that are its fragments. This text does not aspire to provide a mimetic image of the effects of the AIDS crisis. In this, it is unlike works such as Shilts' *And the Band Played On*, even as it also challenges the protestations of the fictional anthropologist S.L. Kermit, who shows up near the end of *Plagues and Carnivals* to condemn the novel for its failures of verisimilitude up to that point (*Flight* 335-343).[73] Instead, it tries to model something like a map of real responses that always feel a little threatening precisely because they never quite line up with what they respond to. *Plagues and Carnivals* invites its readers to see these responses from a variety of perspectives – and to see themselves seeing from other perspectives still. In the process, it attempts to ameliorate the danger of inaccurately inadequate perception without ever fully banishing that danger.

Nevertheless, Delany is not unaware that the optically overdetermined climate this novel seeks to produce is far from comforting, a fact that the work acknowledges as it nears its conclusion in a series of unusually long passages where a single voice begins to take over. This speech is that of the Master, the otherwise unnamed philosopher prince whose responses go unheard in "The Mummer's Tale." Though his discourse largely describes a journey he took through Nevèrÿon as a young man, he obsesses throughout over the very problem of mutual perception that worries Zadyuk when he finds himself caught in the field of Noyeed's gaze. In a characteristic remark, the Master acknowledges that his traveling companions surely had a different conception of him than he has of himself: "No doubt the two of them were talking of me now: making monsters!" (*Flight* 310).

[73] Kermit is a recurring figure in the paratexts of the Nevèrÿon sequence, appearing, for example as the supposed author of the postscript to *Tales of Nevèrÿon*. This section of *Plagues and Carnivals* marks his first real appearance within the narrative itself, and its relation to the rest of the novel is deliberately obtuse, a fact that provides a helpful reminder about the way fragmentary styles continually blur the difference between text and paratext.

Etymologically, monstrosity suggests disfigurement. To deem something monstrous is to propose that its parts do not properly cohere, that it was assembled without a complete understanding of cause and effect, or of the logic that should connect a given part to any other. In this sense, it is, as Delany himself might note, the inverse of health, a word that speaks of wholeness or completion (*Flight* 184). But monstrosity also stands in here for inadequation, the failure to account for the ways bodies – and their constituent parts – are connected to one another.

If the Master recognizes that such interpersonal errors are inevitable, he also, as his name suggests, seeks to master them. It is no accident that the two primary sections of the Master's story are the longest unbroken sections of this otherwise erratic and discontinuous novel, running to thirty-two and fourteen pages respectively (*Flight* 282-314 and 314-328).[74] This steady, measured narrative works to reign in the proliferation of misprisions by permitting them to persist under a single rubric. Various voices speak out in his stories, and different perspectives are called up, but the constant presence of the Master as knowing narrator plays down the threat of this plurality. If you can't provide a single answer, these two sections seem to suggest, at least describe the confusion clearly. By connection, even if we can't get our facts about the AIDS epidemic straight we should try to speak of them coherently. This is the sense in which there is nothing especially revolutionary about heteroglossia as such. The very form of the typical novel, a form the text approaches in these sections, keeps the chaos of its contents at bay.

Yet even here – even as it seemingly masters the fragmentary – *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* gives way to its own predilections. Describing his youthful journey to sites displaying the inventions of the primitive genius Belham, the Master notes that he was puzzled to find that they were often accompanied by other marvels bearing the feminine name Venn (*Flight* 302). Here and

[74] These two long sections are interrupted by a speculative authorial note of eight lines in which a voice that seems to be Delany's own wonders about the relationship of "this enterprise" to the science fiction novels (pointedly, not sword-and-sorcery) that inspired it.

elsewhere, full understanding of the story depends on the reader's knowledge of what the text does not contain. The larger scope of the Nevèrÿon sequence shows Venn to be a woman of the Ulvayn isles, a thinker whose genius and ingenuity equals or exceeds that of Belham. In a manner of speaking, then, even the Master's attempt to corral fragmentary inadequacy reveals itself to be a fragment despite its claim to totalizing stability. In the end, this is likewise not a novel that offers a comforting answer to the AIDS epidemic – or to anything else, for that matter. Indeed, *Plagues and Carnivals* does not concern itself with providing answers at all. It interests itself instead in the way competing movements of the understanding find their limits in one another. If this novel stages a kind of AIDS activism it does so not – as Jeffrey Allen Tucker claims of another of Delany's works – through a pragmatic evaluation of what counts as safe sex (230-275). By presenting correspondences and divergences of passions and perspectives, this text provides a ground for thinking about interrelation and meaning precisely at those moments when the possibility of adequate experience is most in doubt.

CHAPTER FIVE

David Markson's Prison-House of Judgment

"He writes only postcards." – Burton Feldman on David Markson (158)

When the experimental novelist David Markson died in June of 2010, he apparently left few material goods to his family. Though eleven of his twelve novels were in print – a rare feat for a writer so rarely read – he had referred to himself as "alone, sick, broke," just a few years before in his semi-autobiographical (and aptly titled) *The Last Novel*. As if by way of testament to the truth of this aphorism – as if, that is, to prove that he really was broke – Markson's will indicated that his survivors should sell off his entire library, a collection of some 2,500 volumes to the Strand bookstore in Manhattan. Reports indicate that fifty cases, each of them containing fifty books, a square pair of numbers whose mystical-sounding symmetry is surely deliberate, were delivered to the Strand, only to have their contents scattered throughout the store's miles of shelves. They were "absorbed into the general merchandise," as one vaguely appalled journalist puts it, their former owner's bookplate frequently covered over by the Strand's sale sticker (Walls).

The discovery of Markson's piecemeal library proved a clarion call to Markson's few, but dedicated, fans, drawing them to the store in search of the departed master's possessions. Many of these treasure hunters took to the Internet to report their finds, contributing images and comments to jointly maintained Facebook pages and Tumblr feeds. From a certain perspective, this labor seems to be a collective act of mourning, an attempt to acknowledge the passing of an artist who simply disappeared one day, just as his books vanished into the secondhand commons. It might,

however, be more accurate to suggest that this effort to reassemble that which had been divided marks something more like denial, less a recognition of Markson's passing than an attempt to bring him back from the dead.

One is reminded of the myth of Osiris, whose brother Set murdered him and divided his body into fourteen parts. In her sorrow and anger, Osiris' sister-wife Isis sought out the scattered fragments of her husband and put him together again, singing him back to life. If Markson's private library takes the place of the scattered divine body, it is surely because he was an author known as much for his copious reading as for anything that he wrote. As I explain below, his final works are little more than fragmented records of a life spent between the sheets of books. Accordingly, this virtual collection of his real reading seems like nothing so much as an image of the man himself, one more complete than any of those that he offered in his own words. Markson's body is a body made of books, a patchwork thing held together by binding thread and saddle stitch staples.

Yet if the story of Osiris' resurrection proves apt, it is more for the particular way in which Isis' labor failed. Though she is said to have recovered the first thirteen parts of her husband's body, the fourteenth eluded her. What was missing was, of course, Osiris' penis, and though Isis crafted a substitute from gold before setting his heart to beat once again, one imagines that he never escaped the feeling that something was missing. This myth might well be read as a story about the queer fragmentary stylistics I have discussed over the course of the past three chapters: *To bring together the shattered pieces of a thing is always to leave something out, an impossible excess that we can only name the truth of our desire.* As I will argue in this chapter, Markson's allusive and elegiac final novels push this formulation to its limits. Though his works will never count among the canons of queer prose, they manifest a profoundly queer orientation in and through their style, a style that derives from the problems of forbidden desire present in his earlier works. In their own fragmentary forms, they demonstrate a species of barred desire, the longing to reach across a gap, a longing Markson seems

unable to reconcile with his sense of self. This longing plays out most clearly in the complex relationship of these works to those of Markson's mentor, Malcolm Lowry, an all but unacknowledged love that, as we will see, retroactively reverberates throughout his entire career. Markson's fragmentary texts circle this longing without ever explicitly embracing it. As such, one can identify something deeply queer in Markson's textual body. While the man himself may have been flamboyantly heterosexual, his works constitute an image of him that is far less so, caught up as it is in desires it cannot countenance.

To understand the complex queerness of this textual Markson, we must detour through the way that his work complicates judgment, and value judgments in particular. As the story of Osiris' resurrection reminds us, when we try to deny that a thing made of fragments *is* a thing made of fragments, we are often forced to look the other way when sex comes into the picture, lest we remember just how unavailable it has become. Deliberately fragmentary works like Samuel R. Delany's *Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, tend to open new forms of relation, activating previously unavailable modalities of desire. In the process, however, they permanently defer all notions of certitude precisely insofar as their expansive approach to totality challenges the foreclosure of its horizon. For Delany, the figure of the Master, whose narrative nearly overcomes the novel's generic play, stands in for the fundamentally conservative desire to recontain the proliferation of relations and values that the formal strategies of that novel propagate. The same moves that allow the Master to organize the heteroglossiac chaos of different discourses under a single narrative rubric also enable the ultimately wrongheaded, but firmly made, claims about the significance of the various objects and ideas he investigates throughout his tale. As Martin Jay notes, at least since Schiller, aesthetic philosophies have often sought "to overcome dissonance and fragmentation" by offering a means of reconciling subjects and their objects (52). The Master's tale does just that, integrating distinct, competing experiences into an organized

framework. Yet, as we saw, this project fails, precisely insofar as its own serial context opens it to its outside, revealing the Master's persistent subjective inadequacy to the objects of his attention.

One might reasonably argue that, by their very nature, deliberately fragmentary texts call attention to the limits of every aesthetic. The movement from one fragment to the next perpetually upsets any claim to the union of subject and object, even as they present totality as a perpetually deferred promise, something always on the horizon, but never quite here. Accordingly, fragmentary works trouble evaluative judgments and claims. Thus, while they may – as in *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* – help us chart a course through otherwise excessive forms of the whole, they tend to refuse us the ability to draw conclusions about the larger relational networks we experience therein. Fragmentary literature therefore generates a crisis in the way we ordinarily produce value judgments – about our world as surely as about ourselves – because it leaves us with too many relations, encouraging us to think about the status of each part so expansively that we soon lose any sense of its place within the whole.

The recent work of David Markson exemplifies fragmentation's ability to undermine judgments of all kinds. If Markson himself seems a compelling figure for such an inquiry, it is surely because he was largely underappreciated in his own lifetime. In an interview he gave a few years before his death he acknowledges this very threat, observing, "One of my friends told me to be careful before I became well known for being unknown" (Rubin). This phrase dwells in the paradoxical gap between knowledge and ignorance. As Markson admits in answer to the same question, his work has often served as a "token" for unrecognized art generally. Staging a slippage between economic significance and aesthetic worth, "token" suggests an illegitimate coin, one whose importance can only be recognized in specific circumstances. Markson's very person, then, speaks to a crisis of value, of values that paradoxically affirm nothing other than a lack of value.

More often than not, descriptions of Markson fixate on his friendships with other better known writers and artists. Joseph Tabbi, for example, begins his 1990 interview with Markson by noting, "People find it interesting that you were friendly with several major writers when you were quite young, long before you had written anything yourself" (Tabbi, "Interview," 104). Such assertions – and the lack of a question mark here is surely deliberate – stage Markson not simply as a writer known for being unknown, but also one *known for intimate ways of knowing*. Tabbi proceeds to inquire into Markson's relationships with William Gaddis, Jack Kerouac, Dylan Thomas, and others, all before Markson's own work enters the conversation in a substantive way. In his *New York Times* obituary for Markson, Bruce Weber similarly notes that Markson "was a novelist well known largely to other novelists. This was partly because he was a central figure in the Village writing scene in the 1960s, a frequenter of literary watering holes like the Lion's Head, but also because he eschewed conventional novelistic forms and tropes" (Weber). Remarks like Weber's are typical in discussions of Markson in that they subsume his formal and stylistic accomplishments under the rubric of literary community as such. Tabbi and Weber, like other critics, position Markson as at once an organizing figure within the sum of Twentieth Century letters and a constitutive exclusion from it.[75] Valued for being undervalued, Markson himself sometimes seems to embody those limits on the proliferation of totality that allow us to make value claims at all. To stand as a known unknown might thus be to serve as an allegory for the very processes of value-making from which Markson himself was frequently excluded.

Markson's final novels, to which I move below, turn this structure on its head, even as they also perform the way that Markson disappeared into his friendships with other writers. As we will see, this disappearance ultimately enables the occlusion of his own desires toward members of that

[75] In another example of this way of treating Markson, Francoise Palleau-Papin builds much of her "Biographical sketch" of Markson in *This is Not a Tragedy* around Markson's relationships with Malcolm Lowry and William Gaddis. Palleau-Papin's clear intention at this juncture in the volume – the first book-length study of Markson's work – is to place Markson within the modernist continuum, as if to justify study of his neglected output (Palleau-Papin xv-xxvii).

larger circle. From the start of his career, Markson made himself available to his reading public as a living manifestation of his own reading. This tendency plays out as early as his 1959 pulp detective novel, *Epitaph for a Tramp*, in which Markson's private eye hero Harry Fannin stumbles into the apartment of a graduate student where his eyes settle on the manuscript of a dissertation chapter about William Gaddis' *Recognitions*, a book that had been published just four years before (Markson, *Tramp* 30). Mirroring Markson's own 1951 master's thesis on *Under the Volcano*, this moment offers an early indication of Markson's tendency to sneak his own reading into everything that he wrote.[76] Increasingly, this impulse came to dominate his prose, to the point that his final four works were little more than records of his encounters with texts of all kinds.

Markson's "novel" tetralogy – which encompasses the volumes *Reader's Block*, *This is Not a Novel*, *Vanishing Point*, and *The Last Novel* – is the sort of literary achievement that inspires one to use words like "unclassifiable," as if to scuttle all voyages toward description before the journey has begun. Written over the course of the past fifteen years, these four books are comprised of elegantly organized, but seemingly unconnected fragments of all kinds: Among their disparate components, one finds the details of artists' deaths, often-unattributed quotations about various cultural concerns, anecdotes about the 20th Century literary scene, and occasional bits of other people's poetry. As Markson himself puts it at various points, these texts are "Nonlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like," yet are bound together by an "interconnective syntax." Though all four texts are largely without either narrative or characters, they toy with the production of a kind of authorial subjectivity through the rhythm of their idiosyncratic preoccupations and stylistic tics. Arguably most important to this project of evasive self-creation, and most consistent throughout the series, are citations of

[76] In his interview with Markson, Joseph Tabbi observes that Markson's thesis – like the graduate student's incomplete manuscript in *Tramp* – appeared "only four years after [*Under the Volcano*] had been published. Isn't that rare, an academic paper on an entirely 'new' writer with no body of criticism to verify his status?" (Tabbi, "Interview" 104). The suggestion seems to be that from the start Markson was concerned with what he would become, a known token of the as yet unknown.

critical opinions by countless artists and scholars of the work of their colleagues past and present. With this tendency in mind, I would like to argue that the form of these texts grounds a meditation on the aporetic temporality of judgment, a question intimately connected to the problems of value introduced above. This will, as we will see, lead the novels to evasively partake of a logic of tragedy, a logic that helps to reveal the frustrated desires of Markson's textual body. Ultimately, Markson's tragedy derives from the way *his style suspends his desiring relations toward others*, lest he be judged for those desires.

If only for the sake of convenience, it is worth asking by way of beginning how we should go about describing these texts. *This is Not a Novel*, a book whose authorial function identifies itself only as "Writer," makes the clearest effort at such a project of definition, though in classic Marksonian form, it does so by way of citation and conditional suggestion. Early in the book, Markson, quoting without quotation marks, writes,

> *This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so.*
> Said Robert Rauschenberg in a telegram to a Paris art gallery. (Markson, *Not a Novel* 17)

What goes unsaid here is that Rauschenberg sent the telegram in question to the Iris Clert Gallery in response to a call for portraits of Clert herself. Today, images of the object emphasize its status as a literal fragment – a wrinkled scrap sliced from a larger scroll of telegraph paper, its lower edge an almost willfully awkward diagonal line. Extracted even from this partial context, this remark of Rauschenberg's might be taken as a defense of the perverse representational potential of abstract or conceptual art, a potential that stands – not insignificantly – as a defense writ small of the value of such art generally. The subjective tautology of the formula, "That shows what I say it shows," here reads as a kind of preparatory sketch for the claim, "This is art if I say it's art." This implicit function is almost certainly the purpose that this remark serves within the larger scope of the

tetralogy – in which, as we will see in passing, questions of what does and does not count as art are always central.

Within the more immediate context of *This is Not a Novel*, however, Markson's evokes Rauschenberg's snooty telegram and/or portrait in the service of a more immediate structuring purpose. On the following page, we find Writer's own rejoinder to a hypothetical public that perhaps takes the text's title too seriously, "This is a novel if Writer or Robert Rauschenberg says so" (*Not a Novel* 18). Strikingly, what Writer takes from Robert Rauschenberg here is not so much the content of the remark as its form, one contextually emptied of its original meeting. What Markson first draws from Rauschenberg, then, is a certain syntactical ambiguity to his own use of "This," a phrase that might refer to the novel – just as Rauschenberg's "This" might refer to the telegram as a whole – but might equally be taken as a statement about the nature of the sentence itself. In many ways, this confusion speaks to the structure of the fragment, a trace that at once functions as a totality unto itself and speaks to a whole that might exist beyond it.

Meanwhile, Markson's "This is a novel if Writer or Robert Rauschenberg say so" hinges more fully on that conditional "if." It is a novel *if* he says so, but he does not say so, he only suggests that he might. A similar deliberate sense of uncertain potential plays out repeatedly over the 170-odd pages that follow, as the Rauschenbergian formula is continually deformed and reformed by a series of substitutions: "Also even a sequence of cantos awaiting numbering, if Writer says so" (*Not a Novel* 23). "This is even a mural of sorts, if Writer says so" (*Not a Novel* 36). "This is also even an autobiography, if Writer says so." (*Not a Novel* 53). A list of additional examples could go on for some time, but what is striking about all of them is that each seems plausible. The mutual possibility of all of these remarks leave this book – and the other three like it – suspended in the conditional, caught between a variety of generic potentialities that it never either denies or fully acknowledges. The authorial voice of these texts is similarly ambiguous, forever caught in the gap

between what it says it might say and its failure to actually speak. This is, as we will see, not unlike the hesitation of a lover who imagines what he might say to his beloved, only to have his voice break when he tries to utter the words.

In its speculative plurality, the tetralogy stands in striking contrast to *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*. Where Delany's novel moves from one genre to the next, refusing to let any of them define the project as a whole for more than a moment, Markson embraces a similarly rich sequence of generic types in a way that suggests each might describe the text as a whole. To put it another way, Delany distinguishes each part from an always greater whole, while Markson perpetually derives the whole anew from each of its parts. Markson inverts expectation, thereby pointing to a fundamental difference in the way these texts conceptualize the project of fragmentary literature. In claiming specific genres as fundamental, Markson's texts betray a longing for certainty, even as they despair about the prospect of realizing that desire.

Given this multiplicity of unconfirmed, if not necessarily unrealized, possibilities, it is all the more striking to find Writer suggesting, in the pre-ante-penultimate deployment of this ritual formula, "Nonetheless this is also in many ways even a classic tragedy, if Writer says so" (*Not a Novel* 171). How, we must ask, could a book with little in the way of character and nothing in the way of plot resemble a tragedy of any kind, much less a classical one? Indeed, if, as we will shortly be reminded, the tragic hero meets his fate by way of definitive, clear statements, how do we reconcile this with the non-presence of a figure like "Writer" who tends to appear only at those moments when he is disappearing back into unrealized possibility of his own utterances?

By way of answering this question – and, in the process, suggesting how all four volumes might be read as tragedies – perhaps even as queer tragedies – I would like to take up the recent work of Christoph Menke. For Menke, tragedy is, simply put, a condition of performative self-condemnation, the invention of a rule that must ultimately be punitively applied to its own inventor

at the cost of his or her very subjectivity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Menke's principal example is the Sophoclean Oedipus who, in announcing that the murderer of Laius must be punished, famously creates the conditions for his own self-castigation. Oedipus' "acts of self-punishment [work] as the expression of a self-judgment in which he has done nothing more than apply consistently to himself a previously established rule" (Menke 30). In this, Menke finds the purest expression of tragedy, a circuit in which a subject invents itself as judge by passing a judgment that will be its own undoing when that judgment inevitably rebounds on its origin.

As I have already suggested, the judgments that first concern Markson's various author functions are not juridical – though it is worth noting that those that trouble Menke ultimately are not always so either – but aesthetic, which is to say that they will ultimately relate to the question of *what we find beautiful and how we recognize it as such*. All four novels betray a profound fascination with past judgments, especially those that might today be considered minority opinions among those in the know. As early as the third page of *This is Not a Novel*, for example, Markson writes,

> George Santayana, reading *Moby Dick*:
> In spite of much skipping, I have got stuck in the middle. (*Not a Novel* 3)

Most such critical citations are as winningly witty as this phrase of Santayana's, but they are also invariably derisive, often of works and writers favorably evoked elsewhere in the series. *Reader's Block* in particular focuses on works that were denied proper recognition in their own time, especially by those who probably should have known better. Thus one fragment has "Reader" observe that while working for a publisher, Andre Gide rejected *Swan's Way*, a fact that, as he reminds us elsewhere, forced Proust to self-publish his masterwork (Markson, *Reader's Block* 12). As *Reader's Block* seems to quietly assume, few would disagree that Gide was on the wrong side of history here. In this case, it is no accident that Markson stages his paradigmatic example of errant judgments in terms of failed

communication between two queer writers. Judgment, Markson suggests, breaks the circuits of desire.

In any case, the consistent suggestion that these judgments were made too hastily implies a second, parajuridical set of critiques – the condemnation of those who judged wrongly. For strategic and structural reasons that I explore below, Markson tends to express these second-level dismissals in the relation *between* fragmentary remarks. Consider, for example, this trio:

> Tolstoy, asked if he had read a recent play by Maurice Maeterlinck:
> Why should I? Have I committed a crime?
>
> *They who write ill, and they who ne'er durst wrote* [sic]*,*
> *Turn critics out of mere revenge and spite.*
>
> -Said Dryden. (Markson, *Not a Novel* 52)[77]

The immediate coupling of Tolstoy's crushing remark with Dryden's similarly scathing account of the critical mind retroactively suggests – but only suggests – that Tolstoy is one of those "who write[s] ill." More telling is the deferred attribution of this couplet on criticism to Dryden. Ordinarily, when Markson bothers to source one of his quotations, he does so within the fragment in which it is first quoted. Setting Dryden himself on his own effectively builds a bridge between these lines and all others about the poet throughout the book. Further, it suggests that the subjectivity of the judge is an effect of judgment and not judgment's precondition, a fact that leaves those who judge open to risk. In particular, it brings to mind an early observation that though Dryden's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* has remained "eternally in print," Dryden apparently did not do the work himself, "but farmed it out" (*Not a Novel* 29). Thus, where the initial juxtaposition *might* suggest that because Tolstoy turns critic he is one who writes ill, Dryden is equally likely to have prepared his own critical *bon mot* precisely because he is one "who ne'er durst" wrote at all. That Dryden did, in fact, write a great deal is hardly the point here. Instead, the novel concerns itself with

[77] The first line of Markson's Dryden quotation should end "write," rather than "wrote."

beating Dryden the critic at his own game – playfully convicting him by inserting him into the structure of his accusations.

It is largely through such *implied* judgments of judgment that the author functions of these books begins to emerge. By carefully juxtaposing remarks and selectively sourcing his facts, Markson gives us what little we have in the way of identifiable subjects. This leaves his work almost strategically open to the arbitrary whims of its eventual readers. Nowhere is this clearer than in Ben Marcus' suggestion that *Reader's Block* "to summarize, catalogs the various ways historical figures have hated whole races of people and/or died by their own hands" (Marcus). While *Reader's Block* references more than its share of genocides and suicides, the specificity of Marcus' description is more than a little odd. This is, after all, also a book that, as we will see, is deeply concerned with both the process of its own composition and with literary creation generally. More to the point, it also makes reference to a dizzying array of other facts and fancies, a detail that Marcus alludes to in the following paragraph when he speaks of Markson's refusal to zero "in on one of his hundreds of characters" (Marcus). In light of all this, the way that Marcus limits the scope of his description might be understood as almost deliberately reductive. It points to the way that the absence of real characters in these texts, not to mention identifiable authorial voices, forces the reader to fill the text up with her own subjective peculiarities, making them a mirror of our own desires and distracting us from those of the texts.

In general, the identities of Markson's primary non-characters – Reader, Author, Writer, and Novelist – are little more than a tease. From the start, these novels present the self-identity of their authorial subjects as a problem. *Reader's Block* opens with a trio of characteristically short paragraphs that literally stage the first person singular as a question:

> Someone nodded hello to me on the street yesterday.
> To me, or to him?
> Someone nodded hello to Reader on the street yesterday. (Markson, *Reader's Block* 9)

With this sequence of remarks, the text stages a critical aspect of its project through a foundational displacement, suggesting that its own voice will necessarily be one that disappears into the act of reading itself. Significantly, it does so around the axis of recognition, as if the very moment of being acknowledged by another is also the moment at which one is no longer fully one's self.

This dissociative experience has long been fundamental to the queer literary tradition where the experience of being recognized (as a homosexual, as an abomination, even as a beautiful body) is almost always staged as a point of crisis. In *De Profundis*, for example, Oscar Wilde describes the passing greeting of a friend at a time when most had abandoned him: "When I was brought down from my prison to the Court of Bankruptcy, between two policemen, Robbie waited in the long dreary corridor that, before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might gravely raise his hat to me, as, handcuffed and with bowed head, I passed him by. Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that" (47). Here, Wilde's unusually tortured syntax contorts around his invocation of Robbie Ross: The crowd's reaction appears before the act itself, even as Wilde's "might" renders the act itself permanently uncertain. The plural "Men" who "have gone to heaven" turns on the confusion of the prior sentence, suggesting as it does that it could be either Wilde, who carries on with great dignity, or Ross, who acts with such generosity, that should be elevated. This greeting, this mutual recognition of humanity, therefore becomes the point at which both men disappear, as if into a mutually suffocating embrace.

Like Wilde, Markson makes the narratorial self disappear at a moment of mutual recognition is no accident. Markson encourages us to imagine that we readers have briefly glimpsed the real presence of the author. And why shouldn't we? After all, the words that will be evoked throughout the quartet must derive from sources with which Markson is familiar, if only *as* quotations. Nevertheless, so long as the four volumes follow a principle of organization – however tenuous, and are not merely the product of some form of quotational logorrhea, the version of Markson we meet

will be – like Delany's formulation of genre – "in excess of, or inadequate to" the man himself (Delany, *Silent Interviews* 131). Recognition of a given subject within a literary text is always immediately misrecognition. As readers, we are cursed to recoil in embarrassment every time we nod hello, confronted by the baffled visages of strangers when we thought we faced our friends.

It bears noting, however, that the "Reader" Markson imposes between "me" and "him" in the third line quoted above has little in common with the actual reader of *Reader's Block*. More than mere affectation, the upper case letter here announces the presence of a proper noun, albeit one that Markson infuses with more than a little strategic ambiguity. This is not, therefore, a "reader" like that of experimental works such as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* that negotiate between the first and third persons by addressing a "you." Where Calvino cheekily narrates the supposed experience of any reader, Markson posits his Reader as a stand-in for the narrative voice that might, in a very different work, offer such information. In staging the decision to replace "me" and "him" with Reader, the text is merely affirming what should already be obvious, that everything that follows belongs to the realm of the *déjà lu* – of the already read. As Barthes has famously suggested, every "text is a fabric of quotations," and it is the task of the reader to relate them to one another (Barthes, *Rustle* 53). In Markson's texts, which lay bare this principle of all writing, reading and writing can never be fully disassociated, playing off of one another from the start.

Indeed, Reader sometimes seems to stand as an all-too-obvious demonstration of that literary critical truism that the writer of a text is little more than its first reader. Throughout *Reader's Block*, he intermittently describes objects in Reader's possession that seem to have been given to him by, or acquired in the company of, fictional women from Markson's own earlier novels. Thus, in one fragment he places a "baseball on Reader's windowsill… hit foul by Ted Williams at Yankee Stadium" while he attended a game with "a girl named Fern Winters" (*Reader's Block* 60). Mere pages later, we find on the same sill "a knotted root… plucked from an eddy at an embankment of the

Ebro" by "a woman named Kate Winter" (*Reader's Block* 67). As Markson slyly notes a few lines later, despite the similar names of these two women, he "knew them decades apart" (*Reader's Block* 67). The women in question are the protagonists of Markson's *Going Down* (1970) and *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988) respectively, such that the "decades" that separate his familiarity with them actually mark the time that separated the publication of these two texts. The suggestion here is a clever one, pointing to the way that excessive overidentification of an author with his or her work typically does more to fictionalize that author than it does to biographize the work. Though Reader may, at certain moments, seem to be a stand-in for Markson, he seems to be so largely because his own life is made up of fragments from Markson's other novels, much as *Reader's Block* as a whole is largely made up of things Markson has read. To borrow the title of a later Markson novel, the point at which writer slips into reader is the "vanishing point" of coherent identity.

Markson stages this disappearing act at another level through the insertion of a second named figure, Protagonist. Though he ultimately comes to stand as the central figure in the novel that Reader is attempting to write – a novel that may or may not be *Reader's Block* itself – Protagonist initially appears on the scene as a double for Reader. Having digressed from initial observations about who nodded hello to whom with three pages of remarks about topics ranging from Dickinson's reclusiveness to Saint Thomas Aquinas' anti-Semitism, he again picks the abandoned thread back up:

> Protagonist?
>
> Perhaps someone from a shop Protagonist had stopped in at, a clerk? Or merely someone in a friendly mood in passing? (Markson, *Reader's Block* 11)

The question in the first of these two lines effectively proposes a structural transposition, by means of which Protagonist will be imposed in the place that Reader tenuously occupied. Despite the interrogative form, the second set of questions treats this proposal as if it were a *fait accompli*, as they

push the minimal story – or at least the story about telling the story, which is much the same thing here – ahead. Yet, as the novel moves along, Markson differentiates these two figures, complicating the structural overlap that arises from their mutual substitutability for the "me" of the novel's first line.[78] Much as Reader is, at best, a partial double for Markson, Protagonist can only ever be a pale copy of Reader.

For all the emphasis that *Reader's Block* puts on these metafictional slippages and false identifications between storytellers and their stories, this novel would be a largely unremarkable accomplishment if it went no further. That authorial identity is elusive has been a going concern in the composition of prose fiction at least since the second part of *Don Quixote*. Ultimately, however, the baffling series of authorial doublings that *Reader's Block* sets up serve as a sort of propaedeutic for the quartet as a whole. The way that Markson strategically troubles our ability to connect him with the things he writes throughout these volumes feeds directly into the way that they confuse our understanding of the judgments these figures will pass. Perpetually uncertain as to who speaks out of these texts, we are left equally unclear about who judges.

This technique of indirect judgment is also supported by the cagey way that Markson uses first person singular in the wake of *Reader's Block*'s initial bait and switch. Consider, for example, two sentences on the first page of *This is Not a Novel* that read, "This morning I walked to the place where the street-cleaners dump their rubbish. My God it was beautiful" (*Not a Novel* 1). In the absence of quotation marks, which appear nowhere in the tetralogy, these sentences might well be initially read as if they described the putatively real sentiments and experiences of either the book's narrator or Markson himself, judgments of a specifically aesthetic bent. This expectation is brought up short when, on the following line, we find the phrase, "Says a Van Gogh letter" (*Not a Novel* 1).

[78] At certain points, it seems that any number of figures could take the place of Reader, Protagonist, or even Markson himself, so long as their connection to one another is predicated primarily on a formally grammatical species of subjectivity. Late in the novel, for example, Markson writes, "Someone nodded hello to Raskolnikov on the street yesterday" (*Reader's Block* 140). Elsewhere, it is Proagonist who does the nodding (*Reader's Block* 63).

Identifiable subjectivity appears only to disappear back into the miasmic cloud of cultural history. Similar citations occasionally allow Author to tarry with the first person singular, just as the use of "I" in a passage at first suggests the author function's self-identity and then strips it away. Significantly, in *This is Not a Novel* Markson almost always provides attribution first when recalling an unkind critical remark, as in the George Santayana quip cited above. It is, for the most part, these that he seeks to differentiate from his author functions, unwilling to implicate them in the kind of hasty speech that might, as we will see, damn them. As such, the author functions of these books ultimately appear as little more than voices that declare, "Those who judge will be judged." Theirs is a subjectivity born largely out of the structural articulation of a tragic rule.

A risk inheres in the very meditation on judgment that Markson's non-novels engage in. These are texts obsessed with the way socio-cultural totality (or at least community) emerges out of the play of judgment – that is, from what artists of all kinds have to say about one another. This has a great deal to do with the way that Markson submits to his impossible status as token of the known unknown. Like a latter-day Lou Andreas-Salome – a brilliant writer in her own right largely known today for the fact that she was either the lover of or loved by Nietzsche, Freud, and Rilke – Markson has come to stand as a vanishing mediator between literary communities that might have had little contact without him, a matchmaker. Through their shared friendship with Markson, if for no other reason, we can imagine communion between the likes William Gaddis and Jack Kerouac.[79] But in vanishing, Markson also suspends his ability to love or be loved in turn.

Given the relation between communal life and the claims of criticism, it becomes inevitable that one should judge in turn, or at least gesture toward judgment, if one wants to participate in the

[79] Of course, the fact that writers are mostly seen discussing one another in an aggressive light in the tetralogy turns this perception upside down. As Palleau-Pain notes, Markson's relationship to his own literary community was often aggressive, and though he would proselytize endlessly for works and authors he admired he would also produce often cruel parodies of those like Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac with whom he was ostensibly friendly (Palleau-Papin, *A Tragedy*, xiii-xxxvi).

experience of the whole. This means that to engage with others is to leave oneself open to being judged in turn. Thus in the midst of *The Last Novel*, for example, we come across remarks by Novelist like this one: "People who actually believe that Christo's tangerine-colored bedsheets [sic] fluttering about in New York's Central Park had something even remotely to do with art" (*Last Novel* 129). In the absence of any suggestion of attribution, it becomes difficult not to read this remark as an opinion of Novelist, if not of Markson himself. Reading across the grain of the work, we find that most of the prior fragments that begin with some version of this "People who…" are indictments of ignorance. Thus, as cagey as it is, this phrase can be read as a judgment passed on *The Gates* by way of an indictment of the idiocy of those who found something striking in it. Put simply, syntactical juxtaposition of this sentence with others like it suggests that it might be rewritten, "Those who think *The Gates* is a work of art are ignorant. Therefore the gates are not art." Once such a suggestion has been made, once judgment appears on the scene, Markson's author functions open themselves to the very opprobrium that he heaps on other too hasty critics. Again, to judge is to subject oneself to judgment.

In this climate, judgment therefore only becomes possible through the willed annulment of temporal difference. Markson's tetralogy proposes that aesthetic judgment effectively constitutes a synchronic whole in which the past is taken into account only insofar as it participates in the total system from which the judgment ostensibly arises. For this to work, judgment must take on a fragmentary structure, leaving something out to stabilize its definite claims. If it wishes to avoid collapse into the tragic, judgment must take place within a fundamentally eschatological horizon that leaves no room for the future. As Menke argues, the performative genesis of a law also generates a subject who gives the law. The moment it is discovered that the law applies to that subject – that the Oedipus who declared the killer of Laius would be punished killed Laius himself – that same subject is immediately annihilated. Oedipus cannot defend himself because the judgment that he

passed has already destroyed him and only awaited his self-recognition in it (Menke 33). The self-judging subject has no future because it effaced that future in the "immemorial past" of self-judgment. Markson's work suggests that the only alternative may be to cut off the future in which one's own future would be cut off, to forgo diachronic movement and instead to dwell in the synchronic whole of the judgment itself.

The authorial semi-subjects of Markson's novels are thereby paralyzed, ultimately flummoxed by the very process from which they are born. Reader, Author, Writer, and Novelist can only pass judgment at the expense of losing their own future. Either they imprison themselves in the moment of judgment, as I suggested earlier, or they will be imprisoned for their judgments – convicted by the very rules they simultaneously made and were made by, that those who judge will be judged in turn. It is, I think, this condition of temporal imprisonment that inspires the grim endings of each of the books, from the eponymous Reader's inability to tell the story of Protagonist as anything more than a series of questions in *Reader's Block* to the suicide of Novelist at the close of *The Last Novel*. Jailed by judgments – their own and those to come – these figures doom themselves to either synchronic isolation or diachronic condemnation, imprisoned either way.

Or are they? The very non-committal character of the judgments they do offer may well be a resource. Confronted with a statement like "People who think [The Gates] has anything to do with art," we must admit that, formally speaking, neither Markson nor his stand-ins truly pass judgment. Yet, precisely because of this judgment itself *does not pass* – that is, judgment does not pass us by. To the contrary, it is held in reserve, in abeyance, imprisoned by both the structure and syntax of these fragmentary texts. There is something about these lines – some guarded ironic distance – that evokes in distorted form the cocked eyebrow and knowing smirk of camp, thanks in no small part to the hypothetical character of Markson's conditional claims. Markson's response to Menke's tragic predicament is to take an eye for an eye, entrapping the very judgments that would

otherwise imprison him. Whether this is a solution or simply a more willfully embraced form of imprisonment is a question that we can only answer by considering *the politics of impossible desire* in Markson's texts.

Within the general scope of Markson's corpus, the tetralogy finds its most obvious antecedent in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. With its choppy paragraphs, its narrative instability, and its commitment to the recollected *bon mot*, the tetralogy bears an overt resemblance to the relatively widely read *Mistress*, which was published in 1988, but had been written almost a decade before. For all its experimental intensity, this earlier text is marked by a clearer commitment to narrative than Markson's final productions. *Mistress* tells the story of Kate, a woman who believes herself to be the last living being on earth. Though she is clearly mad, Kate finds some companionship in half-remembered image of a lost culture. As in *This is Not a Novel* and its fellows, the bits and pieces of her story seem to generate a rich, but hesitant form of community through their intersections, a cumulative effect that at once challenges the story itself and brings it to life.

While this stylistic linkage between *Wittgenstein's Mistress* and its successors is deeply significant, Françoise Palleau-Papin's work on Markson suggests that we should instead look to his 1977 novel *Springer's Progress*. The story of an aging novelist's erotic dalliances with a younger writer, *Springer's Progress* is not an immediately obvious antecedent for the later works. Though its 123 chapters are short, its linear plot, the straight line of which is only occasionally disrupted by leaps into fantasy and shifts of genre, is unlike anything Markson would write later in his career. Yet as Palleau-Papin shows, in its Oulipo-esque playfulness, it takes a solid step in the direction of Markson's late style (143-163). Palleau-Papin calls particular attention to the eponymous Springer's narratorial tendency to logorheically call up long lists of apt quotations. As she notes, this becomes most pronounced when, at the close of the novel, we catch Springer struggling to compose a book that appears to be *Springer's Progress* itself. Here he gleefully appropriates famous opening and closing

sentences of any number of other texts, drawing variously from Dostoyevsky, Charlotte Brontë, and Mickey Spillane (Palleau-Papin 161-162). In these chapters, one finds nothing if not a blueprint for the tetralogy, the four volumes of which are, as we have seen, records of a life spent reading. Joseph Tabbi likewise finds a foundation for *Wittgenstein's Mistress* itself in *Springer's Progress* in the way that familiar facts and phrases play across the surface of the protagonist's narratorial consciousness ("An Introduction" 100). Though this observation dates to six years before the first volume of the tetralogy saw print, it indicates that the book which is most like the final four books in *Mistress* derives in turn from *Springer*.

More striking than the various parallels to which Palleau-Papin and Tabbi point is a single sentence that arrives near the end of the first part of *Springer's Progress*. Frustrated to find that his lover is menstruating and contemplating a spot of her blood on his finger, Springer obsessively begins to recollect facts about famous painters. In the midst of this stream of consciousness sequence he notes, with an odd indexical precision, "Cody, Wyoming, Jackson Pollock was born in" (Markson, *Springer's Progress* 53). With its rapid sequence of commas, those syntactical demands for breath that Stein so loathed, this sentence might at first appear to contain the hyperventilating gasps of a man struggling to maintain his composure. Otherwise, however, it would have surely appeared inconspicuous to the novel's initial readers – an odd diversion, yes, but only one among many.

Yet when one returns to *Springer's Progress* after reading Markson's final novels, this sentence stands out for the way it precisely anticipates his later formulations. *Vanishing Point* in particular revels in the inverted structure of this phrase, the form of which subsumes its subject under the rubric of that which should be its object. Thus, for example, one finds the later Markson observing, "Glen Ellen, California, Jack London died in" (*Vanishing Point* 109). While the passage from birth to death turns what was passive into an active clause, the basic structure is the same insofar as it foregrounds place at the expense of person. Indeed, despite its inconspicuous first appearance, this

grammatical de-formation is critical to Markson's late style, as in a phrase that appears immediately prior to the one quoted just above: "Translator's English, John Wain called Susan Sontag's prose" (Markson, *Vanishing Point* 109). In a manner that should be obvious, there is something of the "translator's English" to this very form, insofar as it appears to slavishly mime some non-existent antecedent. The contorted structure of such phrases shows how Markson pushes his fragmentary style to its limits. Far more so than Burroughs, Delany, or even Stein in her more readable mode, his works literally break apart at the level of the sentence and the clause, not just at the more general register of narrative or idea. More tellingly, however, this inverted quotation is of a piece with Markson's anxiety about subjects that judge, an anxiety that leads him to increasingly subtract them from his work altogether. In this otherwise inauspicious phrase from *Springer's Progress*, then, one finds a first grammatical touchstone of Markson's ultimate project.

What should not go unnoticed is that in its initial instantiation, Markson's inverted form crops up at a moment of erotic frustration. Immediately upon calling Pollock to mind, Springer wonders to himself how these errant thoughts have come into his head. After a few further digressive lines on Holbein's two families, he furnishes his own answer: "Just gazing at her again's what's doing it also, flexure of a lifted calf's enough to spawn grief" (*Springer's Progress* 53). Springer's near fetishistic attention to the partial body of his lover aside, the rapid procession of contractions stand out most in this sentence. Here the copula drops out, one of those odd bits of accidentally erotic linguistic jargon.[80] *The impossibility of coupling in general* preoccupies Springer, not just the immediate inaccessibility of his lover's calf. Much as the quotations cited by Palleau-Papin point to Markson's almost inevitable preoccupation with the composition of fiction within his fictions, his evocation of Pollock here highlights a persistent undercurrent of erotic frustration that cuts across all of his works. From their inverted origin, the peculiar formulations that Markson would make

[80] Insofar as it forms a progressive tense with "doing," the second of the three contractions is a non-copulative form of "to be." The first and third nevertheless set the pattern to the very extent that they embrace their exception.

fundamental to his "private genre" are terms that bespeak desire's defeat. Indeed, it would not be too much to point to the specifically *inverted* structure of these phrases, a structure that quietly evokes the more treacherously obsolete uses of "invert" in a way that I will explore more fully below. What is clear enough at this juncture is that such phrases bespeak a blocked or barred form of desire, a want that cannot be fulfilled.

Rereading *Springer's Progress* with this possibility in mind, one cannot help but notice that the eponymous narrator's recitations of facts may also emerge out of the novel's climate of desire and disappointment. As I noted above, Palleau-Papin suggests that in their often rigorous gamesmanship, these passages resemble the work of Oulipo writers. This may be true enough, but it does little to point to the function they serve within the text as a whole, other than to support what she characterizes as the novel's "purpose," to take the reader on an "adventure… of the writing process" (Palleau-Papin 160). Tabbi gets closer to the heart of the matter when he casually observes that Springer most frequently turns trivial in order "to retreat from rebuff" ("An Introduction" 100). As Tabbi rightly notes here, Springer's convenient quotations allow him to keep his distance from his others, lest he fully suffer the consequences of rejection. This is a form of flight that should be familiar by now, as it sounds suspiciously like the formula on which Markson would later settle, the formula according to which his authorial subjects carefully refrain from judgment, lest they be judged in turn. To put it more simply, his later suspension of judgment should be understood as an abstraction of his earlier flight from disappointed desire, an abstraction in which the problem of desire itself all but disappears.

Where Markson's subjective evasions in the tetralogy bear most clearly on aesthetic community, those in *Springer's Progress* tend to have a more immediately erotic import. As we have already seen, Springer's evocation of Pollock comes on the heels of a moment of sexual disappointment. Much later, the otherwise unmoored phrase "Modigliani died in a pauper's ward"

interrupts an otherwise civil conversation in which Jessica Cornford informs Springer that she cannot see him as she has plans with another of her paramours (*Springer's Progress* 215). Here the sentence is in its proper grammatical order, but the general tenor is obviously the same as the earlier phrase, as is its precipitating context. The sections that preoccupy Palleau-Papin, in which Springer lists artists, athletes, and others in such a way as to form accrosstics of Cornford's name over and over again likewise derive from similar circumstances. Indeed, they always arrive immediately on the heels of Cornford's departures to see other men, moments rife with the threat of rejection and abandonment. The way Springer incorporates extra-textual information into the narrative wards off not just a general threat of danger, but a very specific menace. It is less apotropaic than it is *apotropriapic*. That is, it belongs to that class of actions meant to turn away all that might imperil one's sexual potency, or, to call a penis a penis, all that might lead to the loss of an erection.

As will become clear, the air of sexual desperation that hovers over the citation of the otherwise extraneous in *Springer's Progress* has far reaching consequences for whole of Markson's work. Late in his final novel, Markson seems for a moment to protest the interrelation of his texts when he notes, "Wondering if there is any viable way to convince critics never to use the word *tetralogy* without also adding that each volume can be readily read by itself?" (*The Last Novel* 161). Here one finds Markson bemoaning the commercial fates that he had, according to Tabbi, abandoned with the publication of *Going Down* almost four decades before (Tabbi, "An Introduction" 93). Yet it is no accident that the sentence in question is itself a fragment insofar as Markson fails to name the grammatical subject who does the wondering. He does, however, offer some sense of the absent actor further down the page in a two word paragraph that simply reads, "Readily read?" (*The Last Novel* 161), as when a self-conscious lecturer pauses for a moment to marvel at the oddities of her own extemporaneous discourse. As ever, the late Markson's subjects are ghosts of the in between, forever fleeing the harsh sentences that would jail them.

Markson's novels – much as their impoverished author might have been playfully loathe to admit it – are just as fragmentary as their contents. In aggregate, they prop one another up, each of them teaching us how to read the others more fully. It is precisely this that sentiment that quivers across a critical sequence of paragraphs in *Vanishing Point*:

> A seminonfictional semifiction.
>
> Obstinately cross-referential and of cryptic interconnective syntax.
> Probably by this point more than apparent – or surely for the attentive reader.
>
> As should be Author's experiment to see how little of his own presence he can get away with throughout. (*Vanishing Point* 93)

Quoting these same lines, Palleau-Papin remarks, "Recognizable syntax carries the author's signature in an intimate manner. It includes his dealings with things that sound far removed from his own biography, because the style reminds us of his 'presence' at every moment" (Palleau-Papin 290). That is, Markson's peculiar ways of turning (and turning and turning) a phrase constitutes him more fully across his texts than anything "about" him. Most telling among such patterns in the tetralogy may be the words "interconnective syntax," a pair that recurs repeatedly throughout the four volumes. Such phrases at once speak to the interdependence of moments within these works on each other, as well as the fundamentally fragmentary character of the novels themselves in relation to their others. What's more, as we have already seen, this syntactic intertwining extends beyond the borders of the tetralogy, drawing otherwise distinct texts into that sequence's scriptorial weave. Above all else, "interconnective syntax" pushes back against the non-relational void of Markson's suspended judgments. Only ever tacitly present, this syntax belongs to the glass closet: Here we have a set of bonds and connections that anyone might recognize, but that are never directly named as such. Markson himself may not have been queer, but his relational stylistics partake of the patterns of queer life throughout much of the 20th century.

It should, then, be little surprise to find that *Springer's Progress* – a novel of more explicitly rendered desires – is constituted in and through the same authorial two step that gives shape to many of Markson's other works, especially *Reader's Block*. As Tabbi notes, "In the seven years that passed between *Going Down* and his next novel, *Springer's Progress* (1977), Markson's own life differed little in externals from the life of his character and alter ego, Lucien Springer" ("An Introduction 96). One of Markson's friends similarly provides evidence that the bar at which Springer does much of his drinking can only be The Lion's Head, Markson's own watering hole (Honig 253). With such facts in hand, it is difficult not to be struck by the metafictional twist that arrives near the end of the novel when Springer begins to write *Springer's Progress*, most memorably struggling with how to present the results to his agent who happens– like Markson's own lifelong representative and onetime spouse, Elaine Markson – to be his wife. Just as Reader struggles to tell the story of Protagonist in *Reader's Block*, this turn at once conflates and pulls apart author and authored, thanks in large part to the way it undermines the temporal priority of the text's putative point of origin. As in his other works, Markson arrives in the scene at once too early and too late to be either fully identified with them, or fully dissociated from them. Strikingly, Markson shares this quasi-autobiographical approach with the more explicitly queer authors explored in the prior chapters, for all of whom it either served as or cited a strategy of evasive self-presentation for eras and environs inimical to marginal forms of life.

Far more explicitly than in *Reader's Block* or its companion texts, *Springer's Progress* demonstrates how Markson's authorial protagonists erotically invest themselves in all that transpires in the novels around them. To what extent are they subjects of desire, subjects that desire? On occasions when he spoke of the real origins of *Springer's Progress*, Markson tended only to admit that it had been precipitated by a death, the death of, "An old girlfriend, the one I called Maggie Oldring in the book" (Tabbi, "Interview," 110). Here it is no accident that loss and loss alone, the loss of a

site of contact and pleasure that was and is no longer, informs the bond between author and text. Death serves as a limit here, a break on the machinery of desire. Pressed by Tabbi to identify the antecedents of other characters, Markson declines, observing,

> Anyhow the very nature of the way I work makes the concept of autobiography pretty much meaningless. Even if you do happen to be thinking in such terms, you're already inventing for the sake of structure, for elementary "story," in your earliest draft. And in that particular book every single one of those short chapters was revised endlessly, some as many as thirty times, none surely less than eighteen or twenty. So what sort of "real people" could be left at that point anyhow? (Tabbi, "Interview" 111)

In this response, Markson notably slips from the first person to the second. The clause "Even if you do happen to be thinking in such terms," at first seems to refer to those readers who seek the traces of autobiography in every work of fiction. Yet it becomes clear in what follows that Markson is pushing his own work process off onto his readerly other. Consequently, author and reader once again become endlessly confused with one another. By the third sentence, pronouns have dropped out altogether, replaced by the passive "was revised." This sequence models in miniature the movement of many of Markson's texts, which at first tease the author's presence, only to displace it onto the reader, a displacement that ends in the final disappearance of all authorial agency and with it recognizable subjectivity as such. This is the grammatical equivalent of the goal he set for himself in the passage quoted from *Vanishing Point* above: "Author's experiment to see how little of his own presence he can get away with throughout" (93). Markson himself is left inseprable from, but also irreducible to, the phantasmic reality of his own desire.

It is all the more mysterious, then to catch Markson belatedly dedicating a story to Maggie Oldring, a fictional woman whose fictional death was informed by the death of a real ex-girlfriend. The dedication in question comes in the form of an author's note appended to the beginning of his story "Be All My Sins Remembered," a story that was published for the first time in the same Summer 1990 issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction* that featured the Joseph Tabbi interview quoted

above.[81] The note reads in full, "This story was written in 1955. Had it been in print at that time, it would have been dedicated to Maggie Oldring. Who can long since now never know" ("All My Sins" 145). As we will see, the subject matter of this story make it a strange one for the famously womanizing Markson to gesture toward the muzzy boundary between truth and fiction, though this is precisely the effect that his epigraph generates.

More immediately, however, one cannot help but puzzle at the redundant "now" that sits near the center of the note's fragmentary third sentence. In theory, the sentence should read the same without this evocation of the instant: "Long since" implies "now," such that "Who can long since never know" expresses the same sentiment as "Who can long since now never know." Given that Markson rarely let a noun, much less an adverb, go to waste, the presence of this term of the present is surely no accident. One notes that both of the words flanking it also belong to the vocabulary of temporality and that together they put three distinct ways of thinking about time into sequence: "since now never." Together, these three words entangle the strands of time, binding to form a knot from which there is no escape. Insofar as it calls up the spirit of someone loved, lost, and made fictional, this chain, and the uncalled for "now" in particular, suggest entrapment in the present through the perpetual deferral of desire's satisfaction. If Maggie Oldring can serve as the avatar of this story, it is precisely to the extent that she – whoever she might really be – has become untouchable.

Thanks to the way it connects this early Markson story to the later *Springer's Progress*, this belated dedication further complicates the imbrications of Markson and his authorial protagonists. Near the close of the novel, Springer attempts to calm his wife's ire by explaining that though he has fictionalized his dalliances, he will hew to his original allegiances: "Stop. You know the finished

[81] Half of this issue focused on Markson's work while the other half was dedicated to that of John Barth. Along with Palleau-Papin's *Tragedy*, the contents of this issue count among the very few reliable sources of criticism and/or commentary on Markson and his work.

book will be dedicated to you" (*Springer's Progress* 221). We have good reason to question Springer's honesty here, having made our way through some two hundred pages of his affairs. Indeed, the passive, future register of his promise might well lead the endlessly cuckolded Dana to respond, "Sure. But by whom?" Surprisingly, however, on flipping to the novel's dedication page, one finds on the otherwise blank recto inscribed with the shrug of a man giving ground to compulsion "Elaine. How not?" The Elaine in question can only be Markson's own wife at the time, Elaine Markson, who was agent, a position that she would retain even after their divorce. When Markson evokes Maggie Oldring at the start of "Be All My Sins Remembered," he therefore suggests not just the real woman for who she stands, but also all those like her who haunt Markson's erotic past. Here the name Oldring, with its hints of what Springer himself calls "one of those Dickensian exaggerations," cannot fail to catch one's attention (226). Her very name suggests marriages – legal and common, legitimate and illegitimate – past, of wedding bands wrenched from fingers.

We might return here to the two Winters – Fern and Kate – who make their way into *Reader's Block*. These cameos take on a hint of romantic melancholy in the wake of the way Markson reanimates the fictive Maggie Oldring by anticipatorily putting her in the place his wife once filled. Whether or not either of these women have real precedents – and there is little reason to believe that they do – they both reinforce the manner in which *authorship, for Markson, must be understood as a condition of erotic impossibility*. As their names suggest, his relationship to them is fundamentally frozen, incapable of generating new affects or experiences. They exist as fragments of the old in the new, but in their mutual distance they do not brook the interpenetrative logic by which fragments ordinarily undermine and thereby underwrite one another. Instead, they stack atop one another like the shattered debris that Benjamin's Angel of History perceives. Theirs is a shared past that can only be experienced through the simultaneous intuition of synchronic thought, one that can therefore have no bearing on our movement toward the future.

What makes Markson's dedication of "Be All My Sins Remembered" to Oldring, and the impossible others of his desire for which she stands, all the more remarkable is that the story itself is a narrative of explicitly gay desire. "Be All My Sins Remembered" narrates a single morning in the life of Anthony Becker as he makes a hung-over visit to the apartment of his friend Peter Hoag. Markson litters his prose with references to the queer literary past, as in the second paragraph, which begins, "*De profundis*" ("All My Sins" 145). With its second letter left uncapitalized, these words might well be a reference to Psalm 130, but the attentive cannot fail to arch an eyebrow at the Wildean connotations of the phrase. Nevertheless, for most of the story's length, the actual "sins" suggested by the title go as unspoken as Markson's titular allusion to *Hamlet*. Becker intermittently references some sexual disgrace in his past, but it is not until the final lines of the story that we glimpse with unwavering certainty what troubles him. Only after Becker has made his way out of Hoag's home does he admit, "in the voiceless manner of prayer": "I love you, you beautiful son of a bitch, I—" ("All My Sins" 156). This sentence trails off on the solitary repetition of the first person singular, a move that would be emblematic of the late style Markson adopted half a century later, an approach in which the subject can assert itself only in terms of the non-relation of fragments that sit beside one another, but do not touch, of fragments that can never do more than express conditional possibilities. The subject names itself as "I" by expressing its desire for contact and community, only to fall silent in the face of that same desire's impossibility.

Even before this final break, Markson's style in "Be All My Sins Remembered" resonates with the devices and techniques that would characterize his late work. Most of all, this early story recalls Markson's commitment to the conditional in *This is Not a Novel*. As we saw, following Robert Rauschenberg, Markson proposes a series of possible genres for the tetralogy, even as he refrains from resolving the numerous "if" statements through which he proposes each of these possibilities. In a free indirect formulatin, Becker similarly reflects on the possibility of acknowledging his desire:

"In the periphery of his [Becker's] vision Hoag yawned, weary after all, yet doing even that handsomely. Tony shut his eyes altogether. Christ, he thought. Oh Christ. *If* he could only say it, get things off this artificial basis" ("All My Sins" 146; emphasis added). Catching the object of his attention in a state of exhaustion, Becker closes his eyes *as if* he were sleeping. As if, that is to say, he were sleeping *with* the man to whom he nevertheless remains explicitly marginal at this same moment. The "if" through which he suggests this fantasy is still more reticent than those of *This is Not a Novel*'s Writer, a voice that tells us what might be the case, even *if* it never settles on one option over another. Becker's proposal, by contrast, remains at the level of pure implication until the end of the story, by which point it arrives too late, however powerfully that implication asserts itself. Still, both approaches share common ground insofar as they both foreswear definite utterances in order to resist a future in which others might resist or challenge what has been said. In both cases, insisting on the conditional serves as an emergency brake on the movement of time, leaving the speaker trapped in an often unbearable present in order to avoid the risks of a still more uncertain future.

In "Be All My Sins Remembered," Markson tends to convey this conditional condition through the strategically ambiguous use of often superfluous adjectives. Observing a pair of women's stockings draped over a chair, Becker finds himself speculating about "Hoag's women": "How many girls, young and pretty, without shame – *normal*, he meant – had sat here looking into this same mirror on the back of the same door, casually, creating out of their overnight or weekend visit something of the unconcerned air of domesticity itself, at least of belonging" ("All My Sins" 155). Seen through the mirror, the room in which Becker finds himself becomes a hypothetical elsewhere, a space that he might occupy more intimately than he does now. In its own turn, this specular possibility enables a doubled form of fantasized identification. On the one hand, Becker imagines a woman imagining herself as the co-resident of the room and not just one of its visitors.

Simultaneously, he imagines himself in the place of this woman, a gender crossing that promises to make the very fact of his desires palatable. These reflections on reflection turn around an unlikely hinge, the corrective adjective "normal" that Markson sets off with M-dashes. What, one wonders, does "normal" modify here? It might, on the one hand address the gender of the women themselves, that which would make their putative desire for domesticity acceptable. Yet the word seems to bear more immediately on the women's shamelessness, as if it were their brazenness – which is to say their freedom from *fear of judgment* – and not their genitalia that Becker longs to possess. In this daydream, then, one finds the seed of something that might empower Becker's relationship to his desire, but the very language that introduces that seed buries it too deeply for it to sprout, blossom, and bear fruit.

Unable to bring his desire home, Becker finds himself in a position of exile. Aping in advance the techniques of the tetralogy, Markson expresses Becker's condition through a series of piecemeal quotations from a biography of Spinoza. While recalling the initial collegiate awakening of his feelings, Becker draws a book from the shelf, ostensibly at random, and begins read. He settles on a passage spelling out the terms of Spinoza's excommunication from the Jewish community of Amsterdam: "There shall be no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay under the same roof with him, no man come nigh to him—" ("All My Sins" 150). In this context, the real terms of Spinoza's banishment take on profoundly homoerotic overtones that surely would have been alien to their original authors. Yet it is not only this passage's enticing repetition of "no man" or the suggestion of lost nights spent in the houses of others that makes it work here. The real reasons for Spinoza's banishment remain unknown, as the letter of banishment lists no direct charges, though most commentators suggest it had something to do with his atheism. Nevertheless, this uncertainty twins with Becker's own hesitancy about his own longings. As in so many of the texts discussed in previous chapters, fragmentation serves as a means

of skirting the unspoken and unspeakable. Yet where it offered writers like Stein tools for modifying and acting on their own conditions, in the early Markson it once again serves only to imprison. The excommunication of Spinoza stands as a monument of Becker's exile from the forms of community that our desires promise to produce.

Becker's impaired desire and consequent banishment from the comforts of community may yet provide a heuristic for thinking through the later Markson. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way that "Be All My Sins Remembered" mediates the love of men for men through the love of boys for books. Free associating as he surveys Hoag's apartment, Becker somehow settles on the imperative "every boy should have his girl," a phrase that seems to take on an autonomous subjectivity of its own as it runs "into his mind stupidly" ("All My Sins" 147). Further down the page, Becker transforms the phrase as he attempts to remember which books he had borrowed, or stolen, from Hoag the day before. In its new form it becomes "Every boy should have a book" ("All My Sins" 147).[82] Literature provides a situated antidote to the otherwise irresistible, though "stupid," force of compulsory heterosexuality and its maxims. It is apt, then that between the original and its variant, Markson parenthetically pins a more precise observation about Becker's reading habits: "Moving the Cranley aside he considered a copy of the periodical in which Hoag's latest, and second published story (which Tony had read now some four or five times) had appeared, but did not open it" ("All My Sins" 147). Sandwiched by both parentheses and formulas of erotic possession, this aside marks a kind of tenuous coupling, a longing fulfilled, if only in displaced form. Reading and rereading – and as we have seen, the tetralogy is composed of nothing other than Markson's reading – testify to an eroticism that bucks its own impossibility![83]

[82] The books in question are *Death in Venice* and *The Trial*.

[83] It is likely no accident that the phrase following the "no man" passage from Spinoza's proclamation of excommunication reads roughly, "nor shall [any man] read any treatise composed or written by him." Where reading is the only permissible form of erotic contact, this demand would surely be too much to bear ("The Text of Spinoza's Excommunication").

Understood in this light, "Be All My Sins" might well be read as an obtuse love letter to Markson's own literary mentor, Malcolm Lowry. Markson himself explains that a friend gave him Lowry's seminal *Under the Volcano* "in my last year of college [shortly after the novel's publication in 1947]… It quite simply knocked me out of my chair. Within a couple of years I'd read it probably half a dozen times" (Tabbi, "An Interview" 104). In the years that followed, Markson would befriend Lowry and his wife and would later compose a master's thesis on the novel at Columbia in 1951, shortly before he wrote the long unpublished "Be All My Sins Remembered." Decades later, Markson would rework his thesis, ultimately publishing it as *Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Meaning, and Symbol*. His only volume of pure criticism, this text rigorously traces Lowry's borrowings and allusions. The version of *Under the Volcano* that emerges in the process looks very much like one of Markson's own final novels.

"Be All My Sins Remembered," by contrast, reads a great deal like *Under the Volcano* itself. Indeed, Markson, who had not yet written anything of note often seems to be explicitly imitating Lowry in both substance and style throughout the story. Lowry's masterwork likely stands as the greatest literary account of what it is like to be hung over, a fact most richly demonstrated in the mescal soaked chapters of the novel focalized through the perspective of the consul. Markson sometimes appears to be aspiring to something similar, thanks in large part to the Lowryan free indirect style that he adopts to capture Becker's misery. Likewise, the densely packed allusions that texture almost every paragraph of Markson's prose resemble Lowry's own strategies of citation far more than they do those of his later works.[84] In lovingly rereading Lowry, Markson attempted to grasp his essence, ultimately reproducing him in effigy in "Be All My Sins Remembered." Yet just as Becker fails to speak until it is too late, Markson refused to publish this text until decades after Lowry's death, holding it back until Lowry, like Maggie Oldring, could "long since now never

[84] One might reasonably argue that an attempt to escape Lowry's shadow shapes and determines Markson's sparer late style, much as Beckett famously wrote in French to flee the seductions of Joyce's style.

know." This Hamletian hesitation characterizes the story's relationship to its own desire as surely as it does Markson's link to literary culture throughout his career, a connection that can only be described as a sort of participatory exile.

It would, of course, be untenable to characterize Markson himself as "gay" in any meaningful sense. Those who knew him in his youth describe him as an inveterate womanizer, more like the casually oversexed Hoag than the erotically crippled Becker. In an essay called "Markson's Progress," a title that almost casually conflates Markson and Springer, Donald Honig writes, "Gregory Peck-handsome, Markson was a rakish study in those early premarital days, the only man ever to casually mention that I could size up his most recent date by buying the latest issue of *Playboy* and opening to the centerfold" (250). Even if one attends to the unavoidable air of jocular overcompensation in such anecdotes, the Markson who comes through them clearly cannot and should not be confused with the hesitant subjects who emerge across the body of his work.

The "Markson" that we meet across his fiction, the "Markson" who is little more than an effect of style, is something else altogether, something that we might term an *unconfirmed bachelor*. The confirmed bachelor is, of course, a creature of euphemism, a man who refuses to marry not because he does not love, but because his love is destined to go unnamed. Unconfirmed bachelors, by contrast, are figures who exclude themselves from the bonds they desire thanks to their attempts to overregulate their relations to others. In this, unconfirmed bachelors are no less queer than their cousins.

For all their differences, Stein, Burroughs, and Delany embrace the radical potential of the fragment. For all three of them, fragmentation is powerful because each individual piece or part of the text allows us to tarry with definite truth, to risk a final conclusion, precisely because of the way the surrounding fragments will interrupt and modify the claims of each one that we embrace. In his profound commitment to the conditional, Markson rejects this fundamental precept of the

fragmentary logic explored throughout the prior chapters. His formal anxiety about the judgment that will come to those who judge can and should therefore be understood as a flight from the queer willingness to be modified that we have witnessed over the past three chapters. Fearing the modification of judgment, he entraps himself in a perpetual present from which there can be no exit, meaning that his desire, whatever its nature may be, is bound to remain just that. As such, Markson himself might just be the queerest fragmentary novelist of them all. Queer, that is, not in the sense that that vexed term took on in the nineties: Resistance to politics, resistance to discourse, resistance to what ails you, resistance perhaps even to life. Queer, instead, as the name we give to those circumstances where we find the space between desire and fulfillment barred or blocked.

Markson's work, a faded signpost marking the frontier of the terrain we call the high modernist canon, should therefore be read as a cautionary tale about the limits of fragmentation. When it becomes an exercise in pure style, a matter of interconnective syntax rather than suggestively interwoven content, fragmentary literature threatens to reinscribe the very dilemmas it was first mobilized to resolve. What may be most interesting, however, is that all of this becomes clearest only when his works are read in relation to one another as if they were contemporaries. Their bonds do not arise from the unidirectional flow of progressive development, but from a more subtly filliated kind of mutual influence. Though the putative "Markson" who emerges in and across his works may dread the kinds of modification that Stein, Burroughs and Delany embraced, and may fear the judgments they faced, we can paradoxically only know him as such thanks to the way his works modify one another. His body of work may therefore ultimately offer a solution to the crisis that it generates.

CONCLUSION

Causally Queer

I.

When the pseudonymous "Ralph Werther" first published his *Autobiography of an Androgyne* in 1919, he was able to do so only on the grounds that it appear as a medical document, a self-authored case study by a man whose real experiences were too extreme to be circulated in the wider public sphere. Covering a period from the late 19th century through the early 20th, Werther's *Autobiography* describes his experiences as a well-to-do young man whose passion for cross dressing and passive homosexual activities led him to embrace the often nightmarish life of a "low-class faerie" (Werther 76). For reasons that will become clear below, Werther had long sought a wider audience for his book, going so far as to offer an early draft to the censor Anthony Comstock in order to inquire whether it might be suitable for publication. According to Wether, Comstock damned the volume in no uncertain terms, explaining that "he would have 'destroyed' it but for the fact that [Werther] impressed him 'as a person not having any evil intent'" (qtd. in Werher 33). Tellingly, while Wether records this incident in the final version of his book, he does not explain that he was ultimately able to arrange for its issue under authority of the sexologist Alfred W. Herzog who sold it, "by mail order, to physicians, lawyers, legislators, psychologists, and sociologists" only (qtd. in Herring, Introduction xvii). With its circulation and audience hereby limited, Werther's spirited *Androgyne* became little more than one more document among many in the growing mountain of discourse about modern sexuality, a medical curiosity rather than a document of human suffering and striving.

In the succeeding century, Werther's readers have consistently taken this medical and juridical frame as an interpretative given, even as the fame of the *Autobiography* has grown. Critics

and historians routinely treat it as little more than a demonstrative footnote to the construction of contemporary notions of gender and sexuality, ignoring the novel ways in which Werther attempts to intervene in the reductive causal accounts of queer life that these discourses propagated. Druann Pagliassotti, for example, places *Androgyne* in a direct historical continuity with Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, allowing only that Werther's "descriptions link male cross-dressing to incidents of male bisexuality" (Pagliassotti 488). Pagliassotti's highly medicalizing vocabulary – "link," "incidents," "male bisexuality" – suggests that Werther's value resides in the way that he affirms the popular dissemination of sexological theory rather than in the way that he was subsumed by and reduced to it.[85] Along similar lines, Scott Herring treats Werther's book as a paradigmatic document of gay slumming in his *Queering the Underworld*, arguing that like other such works it overexposes the subcultures and subjects it describes in ways that threaten to constrict and discipline (11-12). Though Herring elsewhere celebrates the book for its modernist aspirations, here his approach, like those of many of Werther's other readers, largely ignores the book's own form (Introduction ix-x). In the process, such readings refuse to recognize that this book could be anything more than an exemplary image of a gloomy moment in the history of homosexuality.[86]

To better understand what is at stake in the *style* of Werther's *Autobiography*, we must look to its deep preoccupation with questions of causation, questions that will prove to be essential to the queer fragmentary stylistics that I have explored over the preceding chapters. Though it was written

[85] Pagliassotti makes just this point earlier in her essay when she proposes that Werther's second memoir merely affirms the popular dissemination of sexological assertions about hermaphroditis (481). With this basically linear account of discursive developments, Pagliassotti repeats a common misunderstanding of Foucaltian discourse theory, a misunderstanding according to which each new development merely pushes the next ahead like runners in a relay race. In Foucault's own subtler system, effects of power instead emerge when competing and contradictory lines of discursive force intersect with one another, creating nodes of meaning and value. As we will see, this misunderstanding finds a double in queer theory's resistance to thinking causation.

[86] Even Christopher Looby, in one of the most sustained and compelling readings of *Androgyne* largely ignores Werther's peculiar literary style despite his claim to address the book's "aesthetic dimension." He instead focuses primarily on the way that Werther's fascination with beautiful bodies is largely detached from any desire for orgasm or release, arguing that this experiences echoes the Kantian model of aesthetic disinterest (Looby 156-173). While Looby's approach at least has the advantage of treating Werter as a writer with something to say on his own behalf, rather than as a mere dupe of power, it still fails to capture the interventionist potentiality of Werther's style.

decades before any of the books I have discussed, its form uncannily anticipates many of the techniques and tricks that animate those later works. In so doing, it suggests a powerful, final linkage between all of them. Like those queer writers who would arise in his wake, Wether's own fragmentary style engenders a vision of expansive causal connections, connections that are paradoxically grander and fuller than could ever be represented in texts with more conventionally coherent forms. As we will see, acknowledging this possibility may help resolve a long standing crisis in queer criticism and theory. In this conclusion, I argue that queer thought's resistance to causation – especially in the expansive mode conceptualized by Baruch Spinoza– has rendered us incapable of fuller reflections on desire and action. Werther's own fragmentary style – like those of Stein, Burroughs, Delany, and even Markson – may well offer us a way out of this longstanding bind, even as it helps sketch a path for future studies.

On the surface, Werther claims that forces beyond his own control govern his life. Throughout his *Autobiography*, he regularly characterizes himself as "irresponsible," as when he describes touching sleeping young men while he too was a boy, of which he notes, "I have no doubt now that I was irresponsible, and any girl-boys ever found guilty of similar conduct should be dealt with compassionately" (57). By this, he means not that he acted irresponsibly when he could have done otherwise, but that he was not responsible for his own actions to the extent that they were caused by forces that he did not and could not will. He holds that on this basis he, and others like him, should be exempted from harsh judgment for their actions. He here positions himself against then contemporary claims of moralists like Comstock who, according to Werther's report, held that homosexuals were not "irresponsible," but "willfully bad, and glory and gloat in their perversion" (33). In embracing this position – and, it must be said, embracing that which he takes to be the stance of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis – Werther anticipates the claims of many contemporary queer rights advocates who seek a genetic cause for homosexuality and thereby attempt to defend it

on grounds of human rights. Ultimately, the structural design of his book complicates and enriches this position, but on first pass it bears noting that he stages his own *apologia* within a causal framework.

Recent theorists have worked to challenge purely genetic accounts of queer meaning. Most memorably, Valery Rohy has questioned all attempts to provide causal explanations of queer life, holding that they propagate, rather than elude, homophobic ideologies. As Rohy notes, modern genetic accounts of homosexuality tend to give way to Darwinian fables about the survival of the species. In its own turn, "survival is *equated* with reproduction, much as reproduction is yoked to heterosexuality" ("Reproduction," 104; emphasis original). With characteristic critical deftness, Rohy hereby argues that claims about being "born gay" almost inevitably collapse into the terms of a basically heteronormative rhetoric, one that privileges a linear reproductive trajectory over and against more variegated understandings of sexual becoming. Surveying a variety of scientific and quasi-scientific etiologies of queerness, Rohy observes, "Scholars have noted the ways various efforts to identify a biological etiology of homosexuality reinforce stereotypes, assume a categorical difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality, implicitly or explicitly dismiss lesbians and bisexuals, conflate gender identity and expression with object choice, naturalize heterosexuality, and overlook the synchronic and diachronic variety of queer experience, omitting the places and times in which same-sex desire has taken markedly different forms" ("Reproduction" 113). As always, the key term in Rohy's list of complaints is that causal accounts "naturalize heterosexuality." Causation, the story goes, belongs to the breeders. Indeed, causation may be indistinguishable from matters of breeding.

While Rohy, whose current project on the topic is still in progress, may be one of the first queer scholars to take a direct stand against causal thinking, her work on the topic makes explicit a standing suspicion in the field. Causation has long been conceptualized according to a unidirectional

and linear model where object A collides with object B, impelling it into motion which it then imparts to object C, and so on – billiard balls in a bowling gutter. Queer skepticism about this oversimplified model derives in no small part from the way it seems to naturalize patriarchal narratives of generation and inheritance as when Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat Jacob. Such stories inevitably seem to celebrate not just heteronormative reproduction – as Rohy suggests – but also masculine prerogatives and sometimes even forms of literally tyrannical governance. A deep distaste for this conjuncture of reductive physics and gendered oppression has almost inevitably led to a largely unreflective distaste for causation more generally.

To a large extent, the desire to escape from this patrilineal model also speaks to gender and sexuality studies' often fraught relationship with psychoanalytic forms of interpretation, many of which remain bound to the order (and orders!) of the father. In a 1981 article, Gore Vidal memorably dismisses any possibility that Freud might facilitate gay rights on the grounds that the good doctor's accounts about the origins of adult homosexuality had been largely dismissed by more recent researchers. This same tendency to throw out the baby with the bathwater – or, perhaps, the doctor with the disease – that Vidal displays when he rejects Freud outright for telling the wrong story about causation is everywhere in evidence when queer theorists turn to causality as such: Because some of the narratives it generates are suspect, all versions of it must be abandoned. Naturally, though, not all queer thinkers have followed Vidal's stead, and many of them have found ways to embrace Freud, along with psychoanalysis more generally, in spite of, if not always in light of, its faults. The intellectual generosity of such critics might well help to model a more generous approach to causal thought, even if many of those who would provide such instruction are themselves among the most willful critics of causation.

The work of Lee Edelman provides a particularly exemplary case, both for its meticulous use of psychoanalytic thought and its implicit dismissal of causal inquiries. In Edelman's much discussed

No Future, the so called cult of the child stands for a societal tendency to endlessly and conservatively reproduce the same political and social conditions in the name of protecting the byproducts of heterosexual coupledom. What we protect when we protect the child as such is not so much some empirical individual as the Lacanian *nom du pere* – the name, law, or "No!" of the father, a system of rules and prohibitions underlying the shared social reality that Lacan calls the Symbolic. By protecting the child, we guarantee the unchanging continuity of this order, ensuring its persistence into a future that will continue to neglect those perverts of all kinds who do not fit its mold. Importantly, just as Edelman's description of this dilemma remains firmly grounded in psychoanalytic theory, his proposed solution also remains within its ambit. Edleman proposes that queers embrace a form of monstrous madness that Lacan, in his seminar on James Joyce, calls the *sinthome*. Knotting the Symbolic order together with the gross material substrate of the Real and the imagistic differentiation of the Imaginary, the *sinthome* provides a shortcut around the *nom du pere* that provides a different access to the pleasure of *jouissance* without sacrificing linguistic meaning. Terming the queer subjects who would embrace such a mode of experience sinthomosexuals, Edelman imagines a form of life that would be free from paternalistic causation. In the process, however, he also effectively abandons any commitment to causality as such. It is surely no accident that Rohy, who has elsewhere expressed a not uncommon hesitancy about *No Future*, favorably quotes Edelman's earlier *Homographesis*, from which many of the later works concerns are carried over, in the process of setting up her critique of the bond between queerness, reproduction, and causation ("Reproduction" 107). It seems, then, that even otherwise distinct theorists tend to equate causation with the structure of the family, dismissing the former in no small part due to their altogether reasonable skepticism about the latter.

Ralph Werther was no stranger to the discontents of family, having spent much of his early life in flight from his family home. Throughout *Androgyne* he routinely suggests that he did so in

order to keep them from learning of his predilections, as when he remarks, "About this time, thoughts came to me of going over to London or Paris, far from my family, where they could never learn of my shame, and passing the remainder of my youth wholly given up to the life of a fille de joie" (Werther 142). While the explicit sense of this sentence points to his desire to protect his parents, his syntax tells an altogether different story. He speaks, first, not of a general shame that might befall his progenitors, but more specifically of "my shame." Shame, as everyone knows, is fundamentally relational in nature, a product of the way that others look on us, or the way that we internalize their gaze. To be free of a climate in which his parents could "learn of" his shame would therefore be to be freed from the experience of shame itself. Excessive proximity characterizes his situation, a fact allegorized by the sequence of four brief comma separated clauses that open the sentence. Only when he imagines his arrival in Europe and the kind of life that he would live there does the sentence open up and breathe at length. It seems, then, that what he desires is freedom from the way that his parents cause him to feel, but not necessarily freedom from causation itself.

This passage on shame, relation, and freedom comes directly under a heading that reads, "Career of Fille de Joie in Paris Meditated," one of over 230 such legends that routinely interrupt the flow of Werther's prose narrative. Most of the sections that sit beneath these labels run to little more than a page, and quite a few of them are a good deal shorter. Significantly, many of these headings allude in one way or another to the general medical horizon of expectation into which Werther's book was released. Here, for example, the word "meditation" apparently serves as a euphemism for fantasy more generally, a possibility confirmed by the sense of speculative desire that haunts the lines that follow. Countless other headings seem still more ready made to provide direct access to specific facts about transsexual life at the turn of the century: "Sex Psychical Rather than Physical" (31), "Inversion Promotes Music (39), "Frequency of Androgynism" (39), and "Hecatontandry" (156), to name but a few. The careless reader who comes to a section like "Career of Fille de Joie in

Paris Meditated" in search of a fuller understanding of how such day dreams shaped Werther's sexual life is, however, bound to be disappointed. Almost as soon as he begins to discuss this topic he breaks off into an altogether different section of his story in which he describes his career as assistant to "a septuagenarian millionaire." The shift is unmarked by a heading, such that this implausible development might seem another fantasy had Werther not alluded to it earlier and if he did not continue to discuss it in the pages that follow. Any movement from fantasy to reality is left incomplete to the extent that it is uncertain. Further, the heading itself proposes a heuristic for reading what follows that inevitably leaves the reader who has been primed by the heading frustrated. Jointly, these facts render "Meditated" a peculiar fragment, a fact further redoubled by the way that the heading itself arbitrarily interrupts the flow on the novel as a whole.

All of *Androgyne*'s hundreds of sections are similarly fragmentary thanks to the way that all of them fail to live up to the promises made by their titles in one way or another. The breaks between sections in *Autobiography of an Androgyne* follow only the vaguest principle of differentiation – when, that is, they follow any at all. It sometimes seems that Werther separates the moments of his narrative from one another to emphasize fragmentation itself. Perhaps more importantly, though, the proliferation of sections, each of which goes under a different rubric quietly contests the juridico-medical usage of the book, even as it seems to passively submit to just such a usage. Neatly divided as they are, the sections seem to present themselves to those who would come to the book looking for this or that piece of information about the lives of "faeries." Yet when read in sequence, they endlessly challenge the totalizing stability of their individual components. This book always says more and less than you want it to say about whatever you want it to talk about. Precisely to the extent that it stages itself as a sequence of fragments, it betrays a fundamental orientation toward excess.

Nowhere is this embrace of superfluity more evident than when the book takes up problems of causality. The section titled "Cause of Inversion" begins promisingly enough, but it quickly takes a turn for the speculatively untenable: "Why am I a sexual invert? I have an explanation perhaps more fanciful than scientific" (Werther 28). Where the unambiguous heading promises singular objective knowledge, Werther's own formulations suggest that his account will have a more subjective character. In this, one finds a paradigmatic example of the way *Androgyne*'s short chapters inevitably collapse into fragmentation to the extent that their contents never live up to the contexts that their titles propose. Here the adjective "fanciful" further structures this immediate sense of incompleteness, shackling it to a desire that is directly opposed to the real facts of the world. That is, this is a desire that things might be otherwise, a desire that might seem to be diametrically opposed to the language of objective causation that open the passage.

Almost as soon as Werther has turned away from any possibility of certainty, he shifts back into a discursive mode through which the truth seems to reassert itself by asking a series of rhetorical questions. He asks, "Is there not a difference between the 'protoplasm' or cellular tissue of males and of females which is the ground of the difference in the physical and psychical development of the sexes? Must there not be in the protoplasm of males a specific male 'germ' or characteristic, and in the protoplasm of females a different germ, which are the ground of the opposite development of the sexes?" (28). Werther's negations leave little room for disagreement, twice insisting that his readers answer in the affirmative. Likewise, the double repetition of "ground" asserts that we find ourselves here on solid empirical footing. Tellingly, these questions also seem designed to negate his earlier *negation* of scientificity, an effect that he achieves in part through his self-conscious quotation of the words "protoplasm" and "germ." In a matter of sentences, then, he has shifted from an admission of fantasy to an assertion of definite truth. Surprisingly, this shift mirrors an understanding of fragmentary forms that dates back at least to the German Romantic era.

As we saw in the first chapter, for Friedrich von Schlegel and his compatriots, to the very extent that an object was incomplete, it pointed to wholes that more complete things could never allow us to grasp. This paradox lives on in the way that Werther builds his absolute affirmations on a foundation of disappointing incompleteness.

Unsurprisingly, Wether's "fanciful" hypothesis about the causes of inversion also takes up fragmentary forms. Having ostensibly affirmed that cellular tissue itself has a basic gender, he imagines a grisly medical procedure that would further confirm his claims: "If through a surgical operation the breast from a male infant could be grafted in the proper place on a female infant, and the breast from a female infant on a male infant the two individuals, as they became adult, would develop physically along the lines of his or her own sex except the grafted breast" (28). What Werther describes in this scenario sounds strikingly like a *fin de siècle* fantasy of a sex change operation, an operation of a kind that would not be possible for decades to come. Though his initial reference to causation suggests that he will deal here with origins, this turn in the argument instead describes a wish that things might be otherwise, in his body as surely as in the world through which it moves. In the process, he imagines a body made up of bodies, each with a character (and a gender) of their own. The breast is one thing, and the brain – as in the succeeding section, "Female Brain in Male Body" – another altogether. So too, one imagines would be the genitals, the face, perhaps even the hairs on one's head. These bodies are nothing if not fragments, incomplete both in and of themselves and in their relation to one another. Simultaneously, each of them seemingly strives to tell the whole story of the greater body in which they participate, as when Werther asks, "How can one explain why a six-year-old boy (the author) should class himself as a girl… except on the assumption that the cells of his brain were identical with the cells of a girl's brain and fundamentally different from those of a normal boy?" (29). Again asking a question that contains its own putative

answer, Werther describes a brain that would speak for the whole of a body to which it is opposed and in relation to which it is fragmentary. Part and whole are hereby cast into irreparable confusion.

Or are they? Fragments may always overstate their own case, but their real value emerges when they are allowed to enter into relations with one another. In Werther's account, his own homosexuality must be understood as a consequence of the way that the gendered part-bodies that make him up challenge and compete with one another. As he puts it in "Female Brain in Male Body," "To constitute a passive invert, the brain, the physical basis of the psychical nature, must be composed of female tissue, must be a 'female brain'" (29). One need not take this pseudo-scientific scenario seriously to recognize what is at stake for Werther here. One fragmentary piece of his body acts on the others, *causing* them to be otherwise than they "should" be. His syntax again performs his larger point: He places "the brain" between commas in a way that isolates it, setting it aside from the sentence that it otherwise shapes and determines. When Werther sets out to explain the causal conditions of his orientations and inclinations, what matters is not his "fanciful" narrative – in which egg and spermatozoon do battle with one another, the one failing to fully "devour" the other, leaving a trace of femininity in the developing male fetus – but the actual interaction of bodies *with* one another. Along similar lines, the hundreds of short, arbitrarily divided, and fragmentary chapters that constitute *Autobiography of an Androgyne* should be read in terms of the way they act on, perhaps even cause, one another, in their always incomplete competition. Werther allegorizes this critical fact in the way his attention shifts from the breast in "Cause of Inversion" to the brain in "Female Brain in Male Body." His brief chapters must be read like the numerous sub-bodies that make up a larger whole. And in the ways that they act on and with one another, a fuller story about causation might begin to emerge.

When one understands the structure of *Androgyne* in terms of its fragmentary plurality, a notion of causation begins to emerge that is altogether distinct from more conventional linear

understandings of the concept. Far from having resolved the question of his causal status in "Cause of Inversion" and "Female Brain in Male Body," Werther repeatedly returns to such questions in subsequent sections, often pointedly staging them *as* questions. "Occasionally Told Story of Life" begins on just such a note: "Question after question was addressed to me: How did I ever get it into my head that I was a girl? Why had I been born that way? Was it because my parents had indulged shortly before I was born, so that *membrum virile concurreret meam faciem* [my father's penis was thrust against my face]?" (126). The passive voice renders the source of these queries ambiguous. If one were to read them out of the context of the preceding sections, they might be taken as questions from one of the many doctors and sexologists that Werther consulted throughout his life. Indeed, many of them closely resemble those in the "Questionnaire on Homosexuality" that Herzog appended to the first edition of the book, a questionnaire addressed at either the reader or "the intelligent homosexualist" (207-210). Importantly, however, they might just as easily be questions that Werther asks himself about his own condition. As it happens, they derive instead from a group of masculine youths with whom he was flirting, but the fragmentary structure of the texts suspends them in a climate of uncertainty that temporarily turns them into general questions freed from the specificity of a single determinate source.

The way this passage entwines the specificity of a single voice with the more abstract potentiality of many speakers may well be in the nature of all fragments, objects that inevitably incline toward the general. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, deliberately fragmentary texts complicate this formulation by repeatedly interrupting and transforming the claims of their fellows. "Occasionally Told Story of Life" and "A Typical Chase," the section that follows it, explicitly model this very tendency. The former ends with a description of a set of experiences that Werther claims often befell him. Speaking of the boys who had queried him, he writes, "Some adolescents – as these four – went to extremes just for the novelty of it… In some cases… they would be moved

to inflict physical pain or temporary disfigurement of the face, which I shrunk from a thousand times more than from pain" (126). Where the voices of the boys were detached from specific speakers at the start of the fragment, only to be subsequently placed in specific desirable bodies, these same bodies are here reduced to more general figures. They become mere exemplars of those who at first entertained Werther's fantasies and then subsequently turned on him. Their violence becomes the violence of all those who have assaulted him, and of all the varied assaults that he suffered.

Despite its title, "A Typical Chase" immediately returns to more particular territory. Werther opens the section by explaining, "After an hour of such treatment as filled me with bliss, a change of attitude began to manifest itself" (127). On a first pass, the phrase "such treatment" seems to refer back to the abuse that he tended to receive at the hands of the adolescents he loved, not, as quickly becomes clear, to the brief spells of pleasure he enjoyed with them. With this shift, the spell of the general breaks, an effect that is further achieved by the precise chronological unit "after an hour." "Occasionally Told Story of Life" had doubly diffused its contents through fragmentary abstraction, but the one that follows it immediately returns us to terra firma. The titles of the two sections further dramatize this dynamic to the extent that they invert it. While "Occasionally Told Story" seems to refer to a specific incident, it instead describes a common pattern. "A Typical Chase," by contrast, suggests exemplarity even as its contents chart a more specific incident. This inverted movement from the particular to the general and the general to the particular characterizes *the basic grammar of fragmentary texts*. Where individual fragments lay paradoxical claim to the true, the whole, or the final, those that succeed them inevitably bring their fellows up short. What had seemed to be universal in one fragment is revealed to be merely particular by its fellows, the scope of its claims modified even as their original force lingers.

To be sure, this is a dynamic that plays out over and over again in the various novels I have examined throughout this project, a dynamic that varies in its consequences, but not in its most basic structure. Werther nevertheless contributes something important to our understanding of this textual drama when he equates individual fragments with the pieces of a larger body. As we have already seen, Werther most clearly dramatizes this connection between textual fragments and body parts in the sections "Cause of Inversion" and "Female Brain" which staged a shift from the primacy of the breast to that of the cerebrum. In these subsequent fragments, the gendered quality of partial organs unsettles the composition of the whole body in which they participate. Textual fragments similarly challenge the assertions of their fellows, perpetually modifying the claims they make for and on the ostensibly whole body. This has powerful consequences for Werther, as it allows him to challenge the definite causal determination of his ostensible biological gender. Though he characterizes this biological plurality as "fanciful," he clearly derives a sense of personal freedom from it. Instead of insisting on the reality of this fantasy, he models it at a different level in the shattered state of his *Autobiography*. In the interruptive form of this text, he creates a practical paradigm in which his willful illusion can be put to work. The numerous sections of his text act on and inform one another, just as the distinct parts of a body would.

Even as its form renders its sections incomplete, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* insists its contents are in their proper place to the extent that they are present at all. Alfred Herzog, Werther's editor and juridico-medical gatekeeper, describes his conflict with Wether over the inclusion of particular elements, especially the songs that Werther composed for many of his favorite "intimates." He writes, "[Werther] fought with all his might against any of his verses being omitted. Every single word that I wanted to change or expunge was of vital importance to him" (Herzog 15). The emphasis here must be on the shift from the whole part (the "verse") to its own component element ("Every single word"). Herzog tacitly acknowledges the scalability of fragmentary relations,

wherein each individual element, however small and incomplete, acts on every other to achieve some effect. It is in their relations that they acquire meaning, relations made possible by the fact that they *are* parts. One is reminded of the Wittgensteinian aphorism, "Only in connection with [a rod] is [a lever] a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing" (Wittgenstein, *Investigations* 4). For Wittgenstein, the relations between partial objects, not their fundamental potentiality or their final configuration, determine the meanings of various parts; so too it must be for fragmented bodies or textual fragments. Or, to proleptically anticipate a Spinozian parable, without the cells that make up blood, there is no blood, and without blood the heart cannot satisfy its desire to beat. These truths are simple enough to risk banality, but they are easily forgotten when we are confronted with the myth of coherent wholes. The fundamental goal of essentially fragmentary texts like Werther's may be to dissolve our false sense of totalizing stability, decomposing our experience into its component parts so as to allow new causal configurations to come into being.

In this way, Werther may well have inaugurated a uniquely queer relationship toward fragmentary literature, even if he did not come to be widely read until that tradition had largely run its course. In his work, one finds a retroactive justification for the stylistic choices of writers like Stein, Burroughs, and Delany. As we have already seen, the novels of these and other similar writers attempt to transform familiar paradigms of interpretation while simultaneously opening new ways of understanding sexuality and its crises. What Werther retroactively contributes is a sense of the causal force that operates throughout these later texts, a force that refuses linear understandings of causality by coming and going in all directions at once. He was, however, not purely *sui generis* in his contribution to fragmentary literature. As I have already suggested, one of Werther's most recent editors, Scott Herring, argues that *Androgyne* should be read as a derivation from the then emergent canon of modernist art. Herring notes that this book emerged almost simultaneously with works like

The Magnificent Ambersons, *My Ántonia*, *Winesburg Ohio*, and "If We Must Die," differing from them primarily in that it went largely neglected for almost a century (Introduction ix). Where the significance of modernist fragmentation has been exhaustively theorized, however, Werther's book seems to share a kinship with more contemporary texts such as Delany's 1984 *Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*. The simultaneously meticulous and arbitrary division of *Androgyne*'s sections does not merely mourn a world in which the whole of experience is no longer immediate; to the contrary, it celebrates the possibility of new worlds and new bodies yet to come. These are worlds and bodies that must be caused into being, caused by reorganizing the connections between those we already know.

II.

The most important theorist of the causal relationships between bodies is Baruch Spinoza, a philosopher for whom a thoroughgoing understanding of causation grounds the very possibility of desire itself. Spinoza's *Ethics* has been widely taken as a book that describes the crystalline closure of an absolutely stable whole, a whole so complete that one is always tempted to write it with a capital W. To be sure, this reading is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. Indeed, the first book of the *Ethics*, "On God," begins with a lengthy proof of the necessity of a completely stable Nature that is inseparable from God. The trouble is that to grasp the whole of God, one would have to be god. From the human perspective, it is only possible to glimpse fragments of Nature, just as we ourselves are only fragments – or "modes," in Spinoza's scholastic vocabulary – of Nature. The remaining four books of the *Ethics* consist of both demonstrations of how this limited perspective creates problems for us and of explanations of how we can, in our partial states, work together. Our collective societal labor, Spinoza suggests, must be epistemological, a joint effort through which we

would move from an intuition of a causally connected whole to a more empowered comprehension of our place in it.

In 1665, before the posthumous publication of the *Ethics*, one of the book's early readers, Henry Oldenburg, wrote to Spinoza, inquiring, "Above all, if you have any light to cast on the difficult question as to how each part of nature accords with its whole, and the manner of its coherence with other parts, please do us the favor of letting us know your views" (Oldenburg 189). The key to Oldenburg's question may well be found in his use of the word "how," a term that suggests there is a specificity to our philosophical intuition of the whole. This implicit expectation unwittingly sets the tone for centuries of subsequent misreadings, many of which would insist that to acknowledge the fact of totality was to suggest that everything was already laid out before us. Spinoza's response is generous, but he does not fail to correct Oldenburg's basic misunderstanding: "As to knowing the manner of this coherence and the agreement of each part with the whole, I made it clear in my previous letter that this is beyond my knowledge. To know this it would be necessary to know the whole of Nature and all its parts" (Spinoza, *Letters* 192). The precondition of Spinozian philosophy is not absolute knowledge, whether in the later Hegelian sense or otherwise, but a basic understanding of the principles of causal relation through which knowledge is possible at all. As such, he goes on to explain to Oldenburg, "By coherence of parts I mean simply this, that the laws or nature of one part adapts itself to the laws or nature of another part in such wise that there is the least possible opposition between them" (*Letters* 192). That is, Spinoza holds that distinct bodies – a term that is not, as we will see shortly, alien to him – must adapt to one another's distinct characters if they are to interact at all. This premise underwrites his use of the geometric method in the *Ethics*, a book that assumes that the parts of the whole must interact with one another in mutually congruent ways, but does not presume to characterize the nature of their correspondences before the fact.

The remainder of Spinoza's response does not, however, take the form of a geometric proof; instead he offers Oldenburg a scientific fable through which he posits a literally microcosmic image of our human situation. He begins by offering a then state of the art account of his understanding of blood, noting that "when the motions of particles of lymph, chyle, etc., adapt themselves to one another… so as to be fully in accordance with one another and to form all together one single fluid, to that extent only are the chyle, lymph, etc. regarded as parts of blood" (*Letters* 193). As with Wittgenstein's example of the brake-lever, this description of knowable (or, at least, hypothetical) parts coming together to form a recognizable whole is largely commonsensical. Absent the movements of chyle particles, a 17th century Wittgenstein might say, lymph-blood is not lymph blood; it could be anything, or nothing. For his own part, Spinoza takes the example one step further. Our ability to perceive blood as a composite substance composed of various particles is largely a question of perspective, he proposes. If our situation were different, so too might be our understanding of this causally conjoined substance. In the following paragraph, he begins his narrative in earnest:

> Now let us imagine, if you please, a tiny worm living in the blood, capable of distinguishing by sight the particles of the blood – lymph, etc. – and of intelligently observing how each particle, on colliding with another, either rebounds or communicates some degree of its motion, and so forth, That worm would be living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe, and it would regard each individual part of the blood as a whole, not a part, and it could have no idea as to how all the parts of the blood are controlled by the overall nature of the blood and compelled to mutual adaptation as the overall nature of the blood requires, so as to agree with one another in a definite way. (Spinoza, *Letters* 193)

This "tiny worm" may well be at once the most horrifying and adorable exemplary figure in all of philosophy, a creature whose profound difference from us is almost overwhelmed by the familiar mixture of confusion and curiosity with which it surveys its world. In a modern queer context, this tiny animal cannot fail to summon up images of invaders like the human immunodeficiency virus, even as its story presages the strategies that writers like Delany have used to confront the confusion

these microorganisms cause. It is also a creature altogether different from those more abstract figures – triangles, tangent lines, and the like – that Spinoza deploys throughout the *Ethics*. It nevertheless does much to clarify the dilemma that Spinoza describes throughout the four books of the *Ethics* that follow "Of God." Much as the little worm strives to understand the world through which it moves, its knowledge of them is bound to remain inadequate, to use another of Spinoza's privileged terms. Because it is, by the laws of its own nature, a creature of the blood, it cannot swim outside the stream to perceive the flowing whole through which it moves. Like the worm, we tend to perceive individual causal relationships, but we fail to comprehend the larger significance of these individual encounters. Accordingly, we perceive the individual components as wholes, failing to understand that we see only fragments of a substance whose real relational laws exceed our own perceptual nature in every way.

As we have seen again and again throughout this project, embracing fragmentation serves as a paradoxical tool by which we can begin to understand forms of relation that might otherwise escape us. Like the particles of the blood that the tiny worm observes, individual fragments convey the illusion of a possible wholeness through the formal claims that they make to totality. Subsequent fragments remind their fellows of what they lack, thereby challenging their claim to stability. This process of repeated modification of one fragment by another reopens such works to their always expanding exterior. In the process, they remind us that there is some surplus of causal possibility, allowing us to avoid the dilemma into which the tiny worm falls. Spinoza writes,

> For if we imagine that there are no causes external to the blood which would communicate new motions to the blood, nor any space external to the blood, nor any other bodies to which the parts of the blood could transfer their motions, it is beyond doubt that the blood would remain indefinitely in its present state and that its particles would undergo no changes other than those which can be conceived as resulting from the existing relation between the motion of the blood and of the lymph, chyle, etc." (*Letters* 193)

That is, Spinoza argues that there must be a causal whole greater than we can perceive, such that we can only rationally intuit it. If this were not the case, nothing would move at all, as it would be stultified by its own internal finitude. Accordingly, we must acknowledge that every apparent whole is only a part of something larger than itself, that our knowledge, our form of life, our whole world, is always fragmentary.

In strange agreement with Werther, Spinoza likens these fragments to bodies. Indeed, all bodies are partial for Spinoza to the extent that their own movements are conditioned by those of other bodies, making them part of a still larger corporeality. He writes to Oldenburg, "Now all the bodies in Nature can and should be conceived in the same way as we have here conceived the blood; for all bodies are surrounded by others and are reciprocally determined to exist in a fixed and determinate way…" (*Letters* 194). Because Spinoza understands Nature to be necessarily infinite, all bodies are caught up in an endless matrix of causal relations that exceeds them in every way. This is not, however, a grim model of determinism. To the contrary, it is form of causal contact between bodies that breathes life into each of them. For Spinoza, bodies are spurred to movement through their contact with other bodies, enabling to act according to their nature. Fragmentary texts like Werther's model the play of bodies against one another, each fragment revitalizing its fellows to the very extent that it undermines their claims to be sufficient unto themselves. What Spinoza contributes to this picture is a reminder that the interaction between our always partial bodies is necessarily causal. When bodies – whether those of lovers or those of textual fragments – come into contact they move one another in new and strange ways. To deny the importance of causality might therefore be to deny the importance of bodily relationships as such.

It is dispiriting, then, to find that the academic discipline best adapted to chart the meanings of bodily contact has largely fled from any consideration of causality. As we have already begun to see, when queer theorists celebrate disruption and unintelligibility, they often devalue causation in

the process. As Spinoza teaches us, this may also mean that they unwittingly neglect the real bonds between bodies, bonds that their field takes as its foundational object of study. No wonder, then, that queer studies seems to be about anything other than sexuality today, such that the word "queer" itself often serves as little more than an abstract synonym for the non-normative or the troubling. If the field is to find a new ground, it must ask what it would mean to be causally queer. It should, however, already be clear that real causal criticism shares nothing with the kind of conservative and linear trajectories that so many queer scholars rightly distrust. The Spinozian approach is one of limitless plurality, a plurality that encourages us to rethink the notorious "rigor" of queer scholarship. In what follows, I briefly examine a fragmentary history of queer studies with an eye toward the problem of its "rigor." On this basis I outline a case for causal criticism, a form of criticism that would be as attentive to the fragmentary quality of everyday life as it is to as yet unthought possibilities of the whole.

III.

Queer theory has always been hard. Yes, queer theory has always been hard, but to put it in language that the discipline has itself embraced, queer theory has always been rigorous. Two of the three blurbs on the back of my copy of *Bodies that Matter* pointedly stage their praise for Judith Butler's second major book with this very term. Drucilla Cornell pointedly observes that "Butler's argumentation is rigorous and her insights always new and challenging." Elizabeth Grosz likewise writes, "With rare intellectual rigor and great style, Butler upsets many accepted presumptions about sexuality and subversion." To an extent, such language seeks to anticipate and combat the threatening possibility that readers might treat queer scholarship as frivolous or glib. But what is this shared insistence on *rigor* if not a tacit suggestion of a certain stiffness, the rigidity of a cold corpse, of something hard that haunts this difficult text. If rigor is ghostly, however, it is not insubstantial,

but firm. To be clear, Butler's supporters are not merely suggesting that her work promises a certain phallic mastery, they are also promising that the phallus in question will be engorged.

The point here is emphatically not that Butler's thought (or the entirely justified praise of Cornell and Grosz) falls prey to a logic it seeks to deflate. To the contrary, the ambivalent polyvalence of "rigor" has long haunted queer critics of all stripes. Most notably, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner make rigor the pivot point around which queer theory swung as it embraced a range of discursive possibilities at the end of the 20th century. In their 1995 survey of the field, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" they gesture to the early appearance of the term, writing, "Narrating the emergence of queer theory was a way to legitimate many experiments, relatively few of which still looked like theory in the sense of rigorous, abstract, metadisciplinary debate" (Berlant and Warner 343). According to this formulation, rigor would be the badge of theory in general. Insofar as much of what had come to fall under the rubric of "queer theory" failed to meet this qualification, they suggest they prefer the term "queer commentary." Yet as they puzzlingly go on to suggest, queer commentary should also embrace rigor: "We would like to cultivate a rigorous and intellectually generous critical culture without narrowing its field" (344). Whatever queer commentary was supposed to be, then, it would have to share a certain methodological rigidity with queer theory, even if its borders also remained open to penetration.

Berlant and Warner's twin uses of the term rigor – first to describe what queer theory fails to do, presumably to its advantage, and second what queer commentary must do if it is to thrive – speak to a sense of fraught uncertainty not unlike that which one might identify in the double meanings of Cornell and Grosz's blurbs for Butler. Everyone seems to agree that queer scholarship should be hard in one way or another, but no one seems altogether sure who it is supposed to get hard for, or even what it is supposed to do once it gets that way. Given how long queer theory has been rigorous to so little obvious end, one is tempted, to paraphrase the cautionary closing words of

a familiar advertisement, advising the field, "If you are rigorous for more than twenty years, seek immediate medical help to avoid long-term injury." Indeed, in the current intellectual climate – one that finds Michael Warner not contemplating the birth of a new field, but memorializing the end of Duke University Press' Series Q ("Queer and Then") -- it might be reasonable to worry that the association of rigor with rigor mortis grows all too apt. If queer theory is to survive, it might be time to think through what these calls to rigor entail. What we may find in the process is that queer theory's obligation is not to rigor, but to a kind of thoroughness in our attempts to describe causal bonds and the relations of desire that arise in and through them.

The difficulties of such an endeavor almost inevitably begin with the word "queer" itself. More often than not, one struggles to determine what part of speech it performs in a given phrase. In "queer theory," for example, it seems on first pass to function adjectivally inasmuch as it delimits a particular set of the activities that "theory" writ large embraces. But how and in what ways, then, does queer theory queer theory? It is difficult to say here how "queer" shapes "theory," especially when it is the latter that typically seeks to clarify or contextualize the former. As such, one is tempted to think "queer" nominatively, but to do so is to run up against the ways in which the word has been used to resist the fixative force of ostensibly more conventional identitarian terms like "gay" and "lesbian." Tellingly, these ambiguities of usage almost certainly derive from the origins of the term in homophobic insult. To be interpolated by monosyllabic epithet "Queer!" is at once to be told something about *what* one is ("a" queer) and *how* one is (a queer person). Through its uncertain application, the insult doubles its potential violence, a fact that should provide sufficient demonstration that linguistic play is never necessarily liberative.

Over the course of "What Can Queer Theory Teach Us About X?", which originally appeared as an editorial in *PMLA*, Berlant and Warner name few names of their fellow scholars, preferring instead to describe the diverse states of the field. Almost in passing, they mention Judith

Butler, placing her in the company of Eve Sedgwick as a thinker whose corpus "is commonly made a metonym for queer theory or queer culture building itself" (345). Elsewhere, however, Butler's work persists in the article as received fact, most pointedly when they turn to the term "queer." Shortly after their one mention of Butler, Berlant and Warner write, "Part of the point of using the word *queer* in the first place was the wrenching sense of recontextualization it gave, and queer commentary has tried hard to sustain an awareness of diverse context boundaries" (345). With this remark, they seem to gesture back to Butler's seminal seminal 1993 essay "Critically Queer," which originally saw print in *GLQ* and appeared shortly thereafter in *Bodies that Matter*. As Butler famously argues in this essay, "queer" is powerful precisely because it has been used to hurt, to name an abject subject that is abjected by the act of naming itself. The very force of the original term lends it a power that continues to reverberate in its more affirmative deployments (*Bodies* 223-242). Despite their implicit reference to this argument and its temporal proximity to their own contributions, Berlant and Warner's use of the past tense ("was," "gave") at the start of the sentence places Butler's work squarely in the rear view mirror. Simultaneously, the second clause shifts to the present perfect, suggesting that what persists is a commitment to recontextualization. Queer hereby comes to describe a labor of modification, a generative attempt to denature the norms and patterns that structure everyday life.

Ultimately, Berlant and Warner embrace what might be termed a false neutral to sum up the various efforts that fall under the rubric of what they call "queer commentary." They explain that queer commentary "aspires to create publics, publics that can afford sex and intimacy in sustained and chastening ways; publics that can comprehend their own differences of privilege and struggle; publics whose abstract spaces can also be lived in, remembered, hoped for" (344). This language should be familiar to anyone who has read their work of the period, especially "Sex in Public," their co-written chapter in Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*. The work of Jurgen Habermas fills up the

background of this account, organizing all of queer studies under the framework of public sphere theory, despite the fact that, as Berlant and Warner freely admit, "[A] lot of work in queer studies has no interest in making publics" (347). To their great credit, they evidently organize their claims around the public sphere for the way that it encourages polyvalent debate and disagreement. This is an environment that does, if one accepts its central terms, provide ample ground for the ongoing torsion of meanings that accrue to "queer" and the other central terms of the field. Hence, one imagines, the expansive temporal note on which they end their description of queer commentary ("lived in, remembered, hoped for") which moves from the present, pulls us back into the past, and then projects us into an uncertain future. Despite its contentious, but implicit, guiding principles, their version of queer commentary is sufficiently expansive to embrace even those who might contest its value.

Nevertheless, Butler's "Critically Queer" should probably not be set aside so hastily. To the extent the word "critical" in "Critically Queer" has its origins in the German Romantic traditions that Butler studied as a graduate student, it serves as an invitation to investigate the conditions by which "queer" appears to us as a usable term in the first place. Nevertheless, in Butler's wake, "queer" has come to serve as a synonym for the unconditioned *or uncaused*, evoking the radical negation of all meaning and relation. Opposing this trend before the fact, Butler writes, "If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (*Bodies* 228). Like that of Berlant and Warner, Butler's language is temporally expansive. She calls on her readers to locate previously unrecognized differences in the past and future alike, differences that must be predicated on present experience. Most compelling, however, may be her almost tautological use of "queer" when she holds that it

must itself be "*queered* from a prior usage." "Queer" seems here to have always already contained the power to trouble meanings and values, metonymically anticipating the work to which it would subsequently be put. The chronological progression of her argument doubles back on itself in a way that can only be deliberate. We appear to end, then, with an apparent confusion of cause and effect, in which the original source of the term's capacity for injury and shame is retroactively, impossibly, overwritten by its subsequent usages.

Butler's profound commitment to action salvages her claims, especially in regards to the ongoing drama of cause and effect. Butler's longstanding interest in speech act theory, especially in Derrida's reformulation of J.L. Austin's is sufficiently familiar that it need not be revisited here. Notice, however, the way that she first negates the dull fact of possession when she explains that "queer" is "never fully owned," only to enter a more dynamic terrain when she proposes that it is "only redeployed, twisted, [and, of course,] queered." To queer something is to act upon it in a way that can only ever modify it, not remake it altogether. If "queer" can be "queered" it is not because it possessed some original magical potency, but because it too is subject to such modifications. Queer is not the cause of modification except when we make its old forms the subject of new ones as we strive to generate as yet unseen contexts for the future. The use of queer as a verb – as an action – is precisely what makes queer useful as an adjective, as a modification of what has been, and it is this *modification* that opens up the possibility of temporal difference. What Butler limns here, is thus a causal relationship in the classical sense. When one billiard ball collides with another, it imparts movement to the second, but it does so in a way that is predicated on the relative motion, mass, and so on, of the second ball, factors which will affect the first ball as its own do the second. Likewise, when a new meaning of queer touches on an older one, both are subject to change in the present. If we hope, in the words of an Adam Philips commentary on Butler's work, to "keep it moving," we must begin to chart the ongoing polydirectionality of cause and effect alike. "Recontextualization" of

the sort that Berlant and Warner privilege can never be unidirectional; it is an explosion of movement that rushes out of and intrudes on every site of action.

At the risk of treating Butler as a metonym for queer theory, it bears noting that every affirmative use of this term obeys a similar logic of causal modification. Despite this, a too casual – shall we say, insufficiently rigorous? – uptake of causal thought always threatens to collapse into its opposite, especially where queer life is concerned. In particular, we go wrong when we make the discovery of *a* cause (just one!) the beginning and end of our inquiries, refusing to acknowledge its place in an ongoing process of modification. No one has demonstrated this risk more clearly than Valerie Rohy. As we have already seen, in "On Homosexual Reproduction," Rohy elegantly demonstrates that those who would defend homosexuality by embracing its ostensibly natural etiology become the dupes of homophobic discourse insofar as they continue to embrace a language of fertility and sterility, of paternity and infantilism. She productively claims that scientifistic attempts to explain the source of homosexuality – whether they are memetic or genetic in tone – tend to "naturalize cultural formulations, rendering them immutable and ethically irreproachable" (111). Thus, for example, we are told that not only is erotic object choice genetic, but so too are the mannerisms of male homosexual signification, such that the limp wrist can be identified in even a pre-sexual infant. In the process of disassembling such claims, however, she notes almost in passing that *one* of the pernicious effects of such rhetoric is that it leads us to focus "on discrete units of signification, precluding the study of their systemiticity" (111). This same premise achieves a different kind of clarity near the end of the article when she notes that "born gay" discourse ends in a denial of causal thinking insofar as it allows subjects to proclaim "nothing made me gay, there was no cause" (112).

We find, then, that causal explanations of queerness tend to paradoxically and perversely disable our ability to think about causation more broadly. Against Rohy's central thesis, it might not

be causal thinking as such is the problem, but causal thinking made so simple as to undo itself. This dilemma plays out in "On Homosexual Reproduction" through a general equation of causation and etiology. Etiology, of course, claims to be a science of causes, but it is also a science of origins. To speak of etiology may always be to operate on the terrain of natality, and thus may too be underwritten by a kind of heteronormative hegemony. Rohy's article is entirely correct, but only as far as it goes. What would it mean to think about causality in ways that refuse to reduce it to etiological presumption? Is it possible to engage in what she calls "A Science of Causes" ("Reproduction" 111) in a way that would allow us to "study [the] systemiticity" of "naturalize[d] cultural formations"? Or does any embrace of causal queerness collapse back into the phobic rhetorics it ostensibly opposes?

I would like to argue that it does not. Indeed, I would hold that the fragmentary novels I have discussed over the course of this project have all been engaged in sly forms of causal inquiry and action unlike anything available in queer debates today. To this end, I will turn once again by way of conclusion to Spinoza and his readers to show how causal inquiry might embolden new understandings of desire, and perhaps of the meanings of queerness itself. For Spinoza, actionable desire is impossible, inaccessible, even unlivable without a thoroughgoing understanding of our causal situation. Insofar as all queer studies worthy of the adjective queer must take the operations of desire as their most basic object, such reflections will surely prove invaluable. Before I do so, however, I would like to offer four premises about causation that I take to be fundamental. In the spirit of recent queer theory, I formulate them in the negative:

1.) Causation is not synonymous with reproduction – When one entity "causes" another, the second entity does not merely duplicate the first; instead, it is simply impelled to move in ways that it might not have otherwise moved
2.) Causation is not singular – We are never caused in only one way; instead, causation, like the Freudian dream work, must always be understood as a force that operates within an overdetermined world

3.) Causation is not reducible to etiology – To the extent that we are caused from many directions at once, we can never speak of a pure origin within a causal horizon; instead, a vital science of causation would contest every claim to origination
4.) Causation is not unidirectional – One entity is never merely caused by another; instead, causation entails lines of force, lines which inevitably meet with a resistance that modifies their original source

In these four premises, one may catch glimpses of various thinkers and systems that have shaped queer studies in profound and far reaching ways: psychoanalysis, Nietschean genealogy, Foucault's theories of power. Though the thought of Spinoza informs my own claims, he need not be the only point of appeal for those who would take causation seriously. Similarly, we need not take the work of this 18th century ontology at its word to learn from it. We need only take care to understand how these distinct discourses touch on one another in and through their own systemic peculiarities, giving them the space to disagree. Causality has always been in the background. The point is to bring it forward.

IV.

Spinoza defines desire as a being's consciousness of the way it strives to preserve according to its own nature. Further, this effort of self-preservation is, according to Spinoza, the essence of man. Thus, desire is nothing other than a being's consciousness, a consciousness that can be flawed, of its own constitution (Spinoza, *Ethics* 160). On first pass, this may seem to be a fundamentally conservative notion, one that appears to posit desire as an orientation toward stable sameness rather than relational difference. Further reading, however, reveals that this notion is relational from the start. It is in our nature, Spinoza says, to act in certain ways. We take joy in those things that increase our ability to act and it is these joy things that we desire (IIIP11D [160-1610]). Desire must therefore be understood as our awareness of that which impels us to action, along with our striving to remain in contact with those things that allow us to act. Because psychoanalytic thought has taught us for so long to understand desire as a relationship to lack, this conceit has an almost revelatory force today.

Spinoza's desire is a desire that brings us into relation with others who make us more able to be ourselves, not the stultifying force of containment that it first seems to be. In a manner of speaking, all desire is homophilic in this model, to the extent that it represents a longing for relationships that make visible what we love in ourselves.

Importantly, managing our desire entails understanding how bodies touch, caress, and push one another. Never a stable state, it is always made anew with each new contact, as each new contact generates different experiences of "joy, sadness, love, and the like," depending on the degree to which it encourages or impedes our ability to act. As Spinoza explains, "Therefore, there are as many species of desire… as there are objects by which we are affected" (IIIP56D [184]). By affect, Spinoza means the push and pull of contact, those bodily feelings that impel us to motion and rest. Each object that we encounter affects us in different ways and therefore each of them inflects our desire in different ways. As we will see, this notion of affect differs profoundly from many of those that derive from it in contemporary theory, most of which take it to mean something along the lines of unthought feeling. Because affect regulates desire for Spinoza, and because he understands desire to be conscious, he must treat affect as a property of the mind and body at one and the same time. Instead of being unthought, it is the internal engine by which we are knowingly made and remade, oriented and reoriented, through each encounter with another body.

Insofar as Spinoza defines affect as our experience of the way other bodies move us to action or still our movement it is fundamentally causal. Introducing a critical term, Spinoza explains that we call a cause "adequate" when its "effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it" (IIIDf1 [153]). To act is to be the adequate cause of an effect, meaning that if we are to act – if we are to be ourselves – we must understand our reasons for doing so (IIIDf3 [154]). From this it follows that to truly act we must acquire adequate knowledge of how we are acted upon, which is to say knowledge of the multifarious ways in which others cause us to be as we are. In the absence of

such adequate knowledge, we merely move rather than act, governed by those complexes of brute, insensate feelings that Spinoza terms passions. In this state, our movements are not properly our own, and, as such, we experience our desire as something alien to us. There is something counterintuitive about Spinoza's formulation here: He effectively argues that only when we understand the ways that we are caused are we free to be ourselves. Accordingly, real access to our desire would entail a constant labor of causal adequation that would position us not just within networks of meaning, but also networks of action and reaction.

If one follows Spinoza to the letter, neglecting the causal frameworks that shape and structure us might mean foreclosing any consideration of the truth of our desire. To be clear, desire itself would not be lost in such an intellectual climate, but we would lose any sense of personal potential that might derive from it. To return to the example of Werther's *Autobiography*, this would be akin to accepting the accounts of a sexologist like Krafft-Ebing as the final and definitive explanation of one's object choices. While Werther sometimes tarries with these accounts in one fragmentary chapter or another, the overall structure of his text perpetually contests and complicates their claims. It may be for this reason, if for no other, that so many queer writers embraced fragmentary styles throughout the 20th century. The self-reflexive form of these texts allowed them to continually reopen the question of their causal situation without abandoning them to tacit mastery by a single cause. Further, it helps to explain the almost hysterical resistance that queer writers such as Vidal have expressed toward explanatory discourses like psychoanalysis that propose to tell the whole story once and for all.

Queer theory's general refusal to think in causal terms comes into sharp relief here, as for all its internal differences, it is a field that has always taken desire as its central concern. Indeed, I would argue that in all their distinct methods and strategies, queer scholars share a single goal: As one, queer theorists have worked for decades to clear blockages of desire, to open paths that would allow

us to express it and access it more fully. It is this project, above all else, that marks its difference from gay, lesbian, bisexuality, and transgender studies, which tend to take identity categories as a given, even if they debate their meanings. Queer studies, by contrast, grapples with problems like those that I presented in my chapter on David Markson, whose loves remain as, if not more, unnamable than they were in Oscar Wilde's day. Despite their superficial resemblances to the other novels I study in this project, Markson's final tetralogy stages a sense of impaired action that derives, as I argued, from his largely unacknowledged stylistic devotion to Malcolm Lowry. By mobilizing fragmentation as a means to block the possibility that he might be judged, he ends in a condition of impaired desire, entangled in a prison of his own impotence. So long as queer theory refuses to countenance the importance of causation, it likewise risks merely reinscribing the very problem it sets out to correct. Causal thinking allows us to pluralize our experience of desire and the actions that arise from it, rejecting any and all attempts to stultify the endless horizon of our own vital potentiality.

If we hope to escape this bind, we must first recognize that our causal conditions are always greater than we can experience through this or that mode of inquiry. Consider, for example, the case of the most ill-treated of all experimental animals, the *Drosophila melanogaster* or common fruit fly. In a widely reported set of experiments, scientists have shown that small modifications in the genome of these little creatures can inspire males of the species to attempt to mate with other males. Those who seek to naturalize human homosexuality by providing it with a genetic basis frequently cite such studies as evidence. Spinoza, whose correspondence with Oldenburg, Robert Boyle, and other members of the Royal Society show him to be as much as a scientist as a philosopher, would surely be puzzled by such claims if he were alive today. *Drosophilidae*, like virtually all other "gay animals" from the microscopic worm *C. elegans* to the bonobo ape, have a vastly different brain structure than we do. Perhaps most importantly, they lack a prefrontal cortex, that part of our cognitive apparatus

that governs abstract thought and regulates social interactions. Give a fruit fly a copy of *Psychopathia Sexualis* and he will go right on mating with whomever he was mating with before. Let him read *Autobiography of an Androgyne* and he will never be turned on, no matter how racy things get. Humans, as should be obvious, are a good deal more complex. If we hope to do any justice to our desires, our accounts of queer causation must become equally sophisticated.

As queer theorists, we need not flee from the stories that scientists tell any more than we should from those offered by Krafft-Ebing or Freud. Instead, we should work to remind these masters of the laboratory and the couch that they are only ever offering us fragments of causation, that the real mechanics of our desires exceed every attempt at capture. In *The Savage Anomaly*, one of his first major works, Antonio Negri argued that Spinoza's most important lesson was that Nature is always excessive. This was as true of his intervention into the Dutch politics of his own historical moment as it is for his enduring influence on philosophy today. Negri writes, "Therefore, the rational measure that constitutes the revolutionary content of Spinoza's discourse is presented when contrasted with the concrete historical facts. The measure and excess of Spinoza's effort: Political theory has absorbed and projected this anomaly into metaphysical thought" (Negri 122). In other words, for Spinoza any attempt to describe ethical responsibility, good governance, or action endlessly expands outward to embrace the infinite sum of all causal relations. From a theoretical perspective, this entails knowledge of the absolute that remains forever inaccessible. But at a more practical level, Spinoza argues that we must strive to approach it, if only asymptotically, by elaborating more and more of the causal conditions that make and remake us every day.

Negri describes this pursuit of causal excess as a species of savagery thanks to way it challenges every existing constituted regime of knowledge and power. As he puts it, "Spinozian philosophy is an anomaly in its century and is savage to the eyes of the dominant culture" (122). By insisting on the importance of totalities – call them ontological if you must – greater than every

necessarily inadequate attempt to articulate our lives and situations, Spinoza unsettles every effort to regulate, rule, or otherwise guide our action: Every effort, that is, except those that would remain open to the way individual bodies endlessly cause one another in new and different ways. This principle underwrites Negri's later attempt to lay out a model of radical global democracy in his subsequent work with Michael Hardt. It remains still more locally useful to queer theory, however, to the extent that queer scholars seek to undo the bonds that restrict the realities of bodily desire – or, to rephrase a familiar Foucauldian maxim in a Spinozian spirit, bodies and joys.

Recent work in queer theory has gradually begun to swing away from the productive and relentless negativity of Edelman and his ilk toward a still more generative interest in totality. The exemplar of this new modality is almost certainly Kevin Floyd, who argues in the *Reification of Desire* that queer theorists must embrace Marxist models of economic analysis to understand how desire is produced, commoditized and regulated. Along similar lines, Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo have argued against the equation of "totality-thinking" with universalism. They rightly observe, "Yet this equation leans more on a commonsensical view of the "total-ness" of totality than it does on the richer theoretical heritage linking a world of uneven, contradictory particulars and uncovering the violence veiled by the patina of self-evident value attributed to commodities, regulatory ideals, and the state itself under capitalism" (7-8). To be sure, capitalism has played as powerful a role in the construction of modern models of desire as it has in their constriction. As such, Marxist inquiry and other such forms of economic analysis must play a critical role in whatever comes next. But so too must an encounter with scientific discourse and an attention to literary form, among countless other possibilities. Spinoza teaches us that we are always engaged in a cartography of the whole, even when we are not charting explicitly enormous systems. Indeed, we may never be more fully oriented toward the whole than when we seek to understand the glances of strangers across a darkened bar or

the play of queer fragments with one another in a little read novel. We are caught up in the dynamics of totalization the moment we begin to think about the way one body caresses another.

And there are always more bodies. And there are always more fragments. And there are always more causes. The sooner we begin to *act* accordingly, the better.

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